QAA

Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

April 2009

West Herts College

SR26/2009

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 West Herts College carried out in April 2009

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 College has established effective internal structures and processes for the management and quality assurance of academic standards and learning opportunities

- the College management of higher education is enhanced by the support of strong consortium arrangements with the University of Hertfordshire

- there are examples of well organised and effectively supported work-based learning in Foundation Degree courses which take full account of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*

- part-time staff teaching on higher education programmes are involved extensively in College staff development activities

- College staff, in a number of areas, are making effective use of the University of Hertfordshire's virtual learning environment to devise interactive learning and assessment activities

- College handbooks contain comprehensive student information.

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:

- raise with the University of Hertfordshire the need to audit all sources of online information provided by the University that carry public information about programmes run by the College, to ensure their accuracy.

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

- build upon existing examples of scholarly activity to ensure that there is a systematic approach to subject updating in the College

- continue to develop current initiatives to improve attendance, retention and progression in higher education courses

- improve the return time for written feedback on assignments to students so that the shortest current time of three weeks becomes the target.

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 West Herts College (the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the College discharges its responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes which the College delivers on behalf of the University of Hertfordshire, University of Greenwich, University of Sunderland and Edexcel. The review was carried out by Dr Patsy Campbell, Mr John Hawthorn and Mr Simon Ives (reviewers), and Dr John Hurley (coordinator).

2   The Summative review team (the team) conducted the review in agreement with the College and in accordance with *The handbook for Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review* (the handbook), published by QAA. Evidence in support of the Summative review included documentation supplied by the College and awarding bodies, meetings with staff, students, employers and representatives of the University of Hertfordshire, reports of reviews by QAA and from the most recent inspection by Ofsted. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment. A summary of findings from this Developmental engagement is provided in Section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers, with reference to the *Code of practice 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 programmes delivered at the College.

4   West Herts College is a general further education college located in the south-west of Hertfordshire. Based on the merger of three colleges in 1991, it currently has four campuses: two in Watford, Cassio and Hempstead Road; one in Kings Langley; and one in Hemel Hempstead, Dacorum Campus. Most higher education programmes are situated at the Cassio and Hempstead Road sites. The College vision is currently being reviewed but will include five strategic aims:

- to be an outstanding College that transforms lives through learning

- to maximise opportunities for business advantage and lead partnerships for learning

- to maximise the talent and expertise of people who work at West Herts College

- to maximise the potential of the College's built and virtual environment

- to continue the financial investment required to sustain an outstanding College.

5   The College has been involved in higher education for more than 20 years, offering Higher National and BA/BSc qualifications. The current emphasis is on the provision of FDs. In the current academic year the College has enrolled a total of 10,046 learners, including 3,794 full-time and 3,314 part-time learners funded by the Learning and Skills Council. Higher education students comprise 339 full-time and 172 part-time learners, thus representing approximately 5 per cent of total numbers. Planned expansion will increase

higher education provision to around 550 full-time equivalents, mainly through progression from level 3 provision.

6   The higher education courses that are funded by HEFCE are as follows, listed by awarding body.

University of Hertfordshire

Full-time

Modular Extended Degree (year 0)

Foundation Degrees in:

Business & Computing pathways available:

- IT for the Internet (not currently running)

- IT for Multimedia

- IT and Business

- Business

- Business with Finance

- Business with Human Resources

- Business with Advertising

- Business with Travel and Tourism (year 2 only)

- Business with Marketing (not currently running)

- Business with Public Relations (not currently running)

Creative Enterprise - 7 named pathway awards

- 3D Design

- Fashion and Textiles

- Graphic Design

- Illustration

- Media Production

- Photography

- Performing Arts (year 1 only)

Sports Studies

Advanced Practice in Beauty Therapy

Public Services (Uniformed) (year 2 only)

BA (Hons) top-up in Advertising and Marketing Communications

Part-time

- FD Business & Computing

- FD Early Years

- Postgraduate Diploma in Management Studies (year 2 only)

University of Greenwich

Part-time

- Diploma in Teaching (DTLLS)

University of Sunderland

Full-time

- BSc (top-up) Computer Applications

Edexcel

Full-time

- HND Performance (Performing Arts) (year 2 only)

Part-time

- HNC Advanced Practice in Work with Children and Families.

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

7   The majority of this provision is delivered through a partnership with the University of Hertfordshire and in collaboration with three other further education colleges in Hertfordshire. The arrangements are funded indirectly and operate as a consortium of the University and colleges. While the partnership agreement between the University and the College assigns overall responsibility for standards to the University, the consortium agreement effectively devolves these to the joint management structures of the consortium overseen by the University. The agreement with the University of Greenwich is to provide teaching, learning resources, marking, internal moderation and day-to-day management of the University originated programme. The University of Sunderland programme is in the final year of operation. The College provides teaching, accommodation and computers, while the University takes responsibility for learning materials and overall programme management.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

8   It is planned to locate the majority of higher education students in a redeveloped single Watford Campus which is currently under construction at Hempstead Road and will provide substantially enhanced resources for higher education. Restrictions to funding have caused the expansion of target numbers to be scaled down, with increases primarily planned within existing programmes by improving progression from level 3 college courses.

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. Preliminary evidence was gathered through focus groups held in tutorial sessions, supported by the College. It was intended to make this material available to a conference of higher education students from which the submission would be produced. Unfortunately, heavy snows disrupted the planned conference which was rescheduled for shortly before the visit. While the intended submission was not available, the outcome of the focus groups and further students' comments on it were made available to the team. The team found this information useful in their preparation for meetings with staff and 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?

10   The self-evaluation states that, although ultimate responsibility for academic standards rests with the awarding bodies, the College has effective mechanisms to ensure these requirements are met and that academic standards are maintained across all its higher education provision. There are well developed internal management and committee structures, and effective processes for the maintenance of standards. These are set within the robust external framework of the consortium arrangements with the University of Hertfordshire, who validate the majority of provision.

11   Strategic senior management responsibility for the higher education provision rests with the college's Director of Higher Education. The Director of Higher Education is a member of the College Leadership Group, sits on all College committees to which higher education matters are reported and chairs the College Higher Education Quality and Curriculum Committee. There is a clear vision for future development identified in the College Higher Education Strategy and strategic consideration of higher education in other College documents, notably the Educational Case 2007-2011.

12   Responsibilities for the management of the College's higher education provision are clearly articulated. The College curriculum areas, overseen by the heads of schools provide day-to-day management. The operational management of higher education follows the same reporting lines as for further education and is subject to the same levels of scrutiny at course and curriculum area levels. Course leaders, supported by course teams, have the principal role in delivering and managing programmes and reporting through the College management, higher education quality and consortium systems. These roles are discharged effectively.

13   The College is an active partner in the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium (the consortium), which consists of the University of Hertfordshire and four further education college partners. The management of academic standards is primarily through the structures of the consortium, to which all University of Hertfordshire programmes report. The Director of Higher Education is a member of the University of Hertfordshire senior consortium committees, including the Consortium Executive Group, the Consortium Management Committee and the Consortium Quality Committee.

14   The College has established effective internal systems through its Higher Education Quality and Curriculum Committee for the management of standards and reporting. These encompass all programmes irrespective of validating partners. The effective internal systems allow College ownership of standards and development. The consortium framework provides an opportunity for external engagement and review, which enhances the ability of the College to manage the quality of the provision.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

15   The College is fully engaged with the Academic Infrastructure, and this is reflected in the policies and procedures of the College and its various validating partners. Reference to subject benchmarks and the FHEQ is evident in validation documents and programme specifications. Guidance from the *Code of practice* is embedded in the programme documentation and assessment structures.

16   The consortium and College quality assurance structures demonstrate a clear understanding of the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure. Validation reports offer evidence that programme development is informed by the use of appropriate external reference points. These references include subject and qualification benchmark statements, and the FHEQ. College staff have been given clear guidance through staff development activities, specifically on the *Code of practice*, the use of programme specifications, subject benchmark statements and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*.

17   The management of work-based learning aligns clearly with the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*, and is supported by comprehensive subject specific handbooks. Practice in the College is supported by a coordinator, who is assigned to the consortium partnership. There are good examples of work-based learning in some FD courses, particularly in the FdSc Sports Studies and FdA Early Years. These clearly reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice.*

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 self-evaluation states that quality assurance is focused around two committees; the Consortium Quality Committee and the College's Higher Education Quality and Curriculum Committee. These report to the University of Hertfordshire Academic Quality Enhancement Committee and the College Academic Board respectively. Both of these committees oversee mature and robust systems for the design, validation, monitoring, evaluation and quality enhancement of higher education programmes, and provide a consistent approach to quality assurance. The small proportion of programmes validated by the University of Greenwich, the University of Sunderland and Edexcel are also effectively reviewed through the College quality framework.

19   The College's Quality Manual provides a comprehensive process for the quality management of all further education and higher education programmes. This includes specific information on the quality systems for higher education courses, along with information on the role of examination boards, the annual monitoring and evaluation process and the Higher Education Quality Committee. The process ensures that a robust annual monitoring and evaluation process takes place at programme level and that this is monitored through a quality audit process.

20   In addition to annual monitoring reports that are submitted to the College and the University of Hertfordshire, there is a thorough internal system for reporting on course progress. This employs a sequence of monitoring and evaluation reports throughout a course. The first, after the first week of the course, reports on schemes of work, confirms that all assessment briefs have been moderated and that student files have been started. The process includes regular quality reviews at the end of each semester, which identify actions against an annual quality improvement action plan. The reports provide clear evidence of the ability of the College to identify areas for improvement and its capacity to improve.

21   Clear responsibilities for assessment are set out in the partnership agreements with the awarding bodies. These include the process for the setting and moderation of assignments and the responsibilities of the examination boards. All assessment briefs are moderated prior to issue to students and marked assignments are sampled for internal moderation. External moderation takes place for University of Hertfordshire programmes through the consortium structure and for the University of Greenwich programme through university processes. Assessment of Edexcel programmes is undertaken as required by the College Quality Manual. The internal systems ensure that assessment and academic standards are maintained effectively and independently to meet the awarding body requirements.

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

22   Clear expectations of staff are outlined in the Learning and Development policy and a wide range of staff development activities are undertaken. Some of these are specifically focused around the requirements of higher education, providing opportunities for both full and part-time staff. The team considers the College's involvement of part-time staff in staff development to be good practice. More individually focused staff development is identified through the appraisal process and the work of the Learning and Development Officer. The validation process for new programmes explicitly identifies staff development requirements. Where there is no history of higher education delivery in a curriculum area, a mentoring system is in place for staff.

23   Staff development events are held through the consortium to support academic standards. These include the dissemination of good practice on assessment and familiarity with the Academic Infrastructure. The College has held developmental sessions for higher education staff with Foundation Degree Forward, focused on employer engagement. Overall, College and consortium staff development provision helps to maintain academic standards.

24   The College has no systematic approach to ensuring that subject updating or scholarship is undertaken by all staff who teach on higher education programmes. There are some good individual examples of scholarly activity. These include study for higher qualifications or acting as external examiners, while a few have attended or made presentations to conferences. In some curriculum areas, part-time staff are engaged with scholarly activity and subject updating through their work as current practitioners. Staff are given the opportunity to bid for five days' study time, and some ensure currency of their knowledge through the staff development requirements of professional bodies. There remains scope to extend these types of participation to all staff engaged in higher education provision.

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?

25 The general arrangements for managing the quality of learning opportunities are set out in paragraphs 11 and 12. There is a thorough system for reporting on course progress, using the monitoring and evaluation reports at regular intervals through the programme. The reports provide a particular focus on student retention and progression.

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

26 The general arrangements are set out in paragraphs 18 to 21. In addition, higher education students are represented on course teams, contribute to module evaluations and make contributions to student representative meetings. There is student representation on consortium committees; the attendance and contributions of West Herts students is evident in the minutes.

27 The College has identified issues of student withdrawal, especially in the first year of courses, and has put in place a strategy for monitoring student progress through regular reviews of student attendance and retention. The College management information system provides data on student attendance. This is monitored on a weekly basis by course leaders, who take appropriate steps through the tutorial system. A higher education progress review, which is completed for each module, reports on each student's attendance, participation and progress. There is not yet sufficient evidence to comment on the effectiveness of this strategy in increasing retention. However, it illustrates the ability of the College, through its management and quality assurance systems, to identify issues and take relevant steps to ensure the quality of learning opportunities.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

28 The Academic Infrastructure is embedded in all University of Hertfordshire policies and procedures and thus forms part of the management and quality assurance of higher education programmes at the College. Course leaders are aware of the significance of the *Code of practice* and the impact of its various sections on the quality of learning opportunities. For University of Hertfordshire programmes, link tutors provide support to programme teams. Some also have specialist roles to promote engagement with the Academic Infrastructure for all colleges in the consortium. This work includes, for example, encouraging and disseminating good practice in work-based learning.

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

29 Where possible, experienced higher education teachers, in the form of Senior Practitioners, act as mentors to new members of the teaching staff. Every new member of staff is mentored for at least the first six weeks of being employed by the College. Mentor support is completed by a graded lesson observation by a member of the Quality Office and can be extended further if required. In addition, all new teachers attend an induction and are expected to undertake formal teacher training.

30   The teaching of staff is observed at least annually and this, through the appraisal system, assists in the identification of training and development needs. Where teaching is judged to be only 'satisfactory', staff are provided with mentoring and coaching support to help them develop their teaching practice. Higher education lessons are graded using the same criteria as any other lesson observation, although observers also teach higher education and are aware of the requirements at this level.

31   Most staff teach across further and higher education, but are clear about the differences in approach needed for each. Higher education students are encouraged to develop higher-level academic skills, and be more evaluative and reflective. The delivery of some programmes is supported by teaching from University of Hertfordshire staff. Sports studies, and business and computing students benefit from up to one day a week of teaching at the University, which also involves students from the other consortium colleges. Teacher training tutors attend University of Greenwich network college training days and take up opportunities to attend internal and external training.

32   The work-based learning in sports studies and early years is well organised, with good support for employers and workplace mentors. Assignments are designed to reinforce workplace learning and teamwork. The employers stated that they value their involvement. Most programmes use part-time teachers who are also practitioners, and students confirm that this enriches the teaching. There is a considerable investment of staff time in developing learning materials for the University of Hertfordshire's virtual learning environment. There are some examples of the interactive facilities being effectively used. The team concludes that there are appropriate mechanisms to maintain and enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

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

33   The College claims that higher education students are well supported. The support process begins with an initial assessment. This results in a personalised support programme and specific guidance to tutors on individual learner needs where required. Weak literacy and study skills were identified in one group of students. Tailored student skills sessions, delivered by learning resource centre staff, were embedded into the first four weeks of the course to address the issue. This exemplifies the responsive and coordinated approach to support taken by the College.

34   The Additional Learning Needs Senior Practitioner has responsibility for supporting higher education students and provides guidance for tutors. Students have access to a range of support. The learning resource centres provide extensive academic and study skills support on topics such as plagiarism, writing and structuring reports, referencing and critical thinking. These sessions can be accessed by groups and individuals through self or tutor referrals. Students who have used the additional support confirm that the provision has met their needs. Online study support for students is also made available by the university partners.

35   Academic guidance on higher education programmes is provided flexibly. In public services it is through weekly 45-minute group tutorials and personal tutorials once a semester. Other programmes have formal systems of progress reviews, or systems of studio tutoring. Dissertation support is provided for BA (Hons) degree students. Course leaders can review the attendance and progress of students weekly, which helps them to allocate appropriate tutorial or other support, and set targets to help students manage their learning.

36 Feedback to students, following assignment submission, shows full helpful and supporting comments of a constructive nature. However, the students stated that this feedback takes between three and six weeks before students see it. The delay is caused by external moderation although some students were given provisional feedback. The six-week delay is too long for some students to benefit fully from formative comments and three weeks constitutes an achievable target.

37 The College provides a comprehensive range of provision which ensures that appropriate support is available to students. The tutorial review system allows student progress to be monitored and support requirements to be coordinated.

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

38 Staff development for improving teaching and learning is driven by College priorities, for example ensuring that staff are adequately qualified to become members of the Institute of Learning and Teaching. A wide range of relevant staff development provision is provided by the College, with further opportunities offered by the University of Hertfordshire. An analysis of staff curricula vitae shows a high level of participation in relevant development events. This is also evident among part-time practitioner tutors, which the team considers to be good practice.

39 The emphasis on staff development is currently being placed on the capacity of higher education staff to use the University of Hertfordshire's online learning environment. The College is taking a leading role in its development, particularly in the use of interactive facilities. The College has disseminated its experience of using blended learning and of developing online assessment and feedback within the consortium. Staff development activity is motivating strong participation and innovative developments to secure and enhance learning opportunities.

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

40 There is strong strategic management of resources which ensures good provision for higher education. The new building scheduled for opening in September 2010 will provide the majority of higher education students with improved facilities and new capital equipment. Programme files provide confirmation that resource commitments are integrated into the validation process.

41 All higher education groups have a base or tutorial room. Dedicated resources for higher education students include computers, both IBM compatibles and Macintosh computers. These provide excellent access to online resources via the university partners' virtual environments. Teaching rooms are well equipped, with many specialist resources being shared with further education students. Nevertheless, the resources are more than adequate to meet higher education needs. There are good specialist higher education facilities in a number of areas, for example in sports studies, public services and beauty therapy. The team confirms staff claims that some media resources are in advance of the industry standard.

42 Access to book, journal and electronic resources is sufficient to sustain higher education. Learning resource centre opening hours generally allow appropriate access for higher education students, including part-time students. Late opening of the centre on a Wednesday morning due to staff meetings caused difficulty for some students, but does not

appear to be a widespread problem. Easy access to University resources and shared practice between colleges in the consortium supports the higher education ethos for University of Hertfordshire students.

43 With most staff teaching across both further and higher education, the higher education teaching year is timetabled in such a way that staff have sufficient time to prepare and mark at this level. Higher education students have a reading week in the middle of each term, but the constraints of the academic year preclude a gap between the two semesters. Strategies used in various programmes include an 'eLearning' week for students, guest speakers and the use of hourly paid staff for exam invigilation to enable tutors to complete marking and moderation to time. This is indicative of the well-organised and efficient approach to resource management.

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?

44 The College self-evaluation makes clear that partner university bodies are ultimately responsible for the production of the information about courses, content and assessment. Much of this material appears on partner university websites which are regarded as the definitive information sources. The Universities of Sunderland and Greenwich provide course information and handbooks. For the University of Hertfordshire consortium provision, the College re-publishes course information, programme handbooks and other materials with shared branding. It also contributes to the content of public information and thus takes a shared responsibility for the material.

45 The higher education prospectus for the consortium, and related recruitment information, is the responsibility of a marketing executive within the University Faculty of Interdisciplinary studies. A new marketing campaign has recently been launched which has provided a comprehensive and attractive range of materials including the prospectus. The campaign was developed with the participation of marketing officers from each of the colleges. Furthermore, staff in the College are involved in supplying information to the consortium and checking the accuracy of the information provided. Other useful consortium publications, originated jointly, include succinct but comprehensive work-based learning handbooks. These are provided for students and employers and are tailored for each vocational area.

46 In addition to the student information and handbooks provided by the universities, the College produces its own student information, to a standard checklist, which covers College facilities and support services. Handbooks typically include: introductory guides to the course and staff; the course calendar; details of college support services; progress review; college policies and procedures; guidelines on referencing; bibliography; plagiarism and good academic practice; and student representation. This is made available to students as an additional publication or incorporated in the main handbook for some consortium programmes. Students on Edexcel programmes are furnished with College-originated programme handbooks which are similar to those given to other students, including programme specifications, assessment information and regulations. The handbook for the

Edexcel HNC Advanced Practice in Work with Children and Families was considered to be particularly clear and helpful. Additional college publications include study skills guides. Other college-specific information is available on its website.

47 The Developmental engagement identified student information as an area of good practice. There has been a marked development in the completeness of information and consistency of contents across subject areas since then. This is especially true of the work-based learning handbooks for students and employers. The College publishes a comprehensive range of high quality public and student information for which it has sole or shared responsibilities. The team confirms that the quality of College and course handbooks is an area of good practice.

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?

48 The College claims that there are good systems and processes in place to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information for which it is directly responsible. The Director of Higher Education is directly involved in approving publications, the Director of Marketing takes responsibility for information published on the College website. There is a process in which course leaders check the accuracy of information and it is cross-checked against the definitive information produced by the universities.

49 There are systems in place to ensure continual improvement in the provision of student information. College handbooks for the current year were developed using a checklist established from a review of all the additional college-specific higher education information provided to students. This identified and incorporated best practice. It is planned to conduct a further review to identify model sections from these handbooks. This will enable the production of a template to give a standard set of College information to be incorporated. Students confirm that they find the information helpful, accessible and comprehensive. The team concludes that the College has put in place effective and robust systems for ensuring that information which it is solely responsible for publishing is both complete and accurate.

50 Within the consortium there are similar systems for assuring the accuracy of paper-based information. The University of Hertfordshire's marketing executive liaises with college marketing units and staff from the colleges are involved in checking the accuracy of material within their sphere of responsibility. The University of Hertfordshire virtual learning environment carries a large amount of student information, both general and specific to programmes and particular college cohorts. It is subject to the same processes of internal quality control. Any identified inaccuracies in online information are fed back through the University link tutors for action.

51 While the consortium systems are generally robust they are not wholly infallible. More than one student, including a first year student from the FdA Early Years, has accessed a misleading page on the University website during the application process. The page offered a free laptop to students on the programme, although the scheme which funded this had been superseded several years previously, a serious error of fact. The College followed the proper procedures and efforts were made by staff to rectify the situation. The course leader raised the matter in October and November 2008 and the University link tutor was informed. The problem, however, was only tracked down by the University during the team visit to the College. While the main course information page was correct, a site search using a key word linked to an archival page that was inaccurate.

52 The College takes all necessary steps to ensure the accuracy and completeness of information for which it is directly responsible. It participates actively in ensuring the accuracy of information where it has shared responsibilities within the consortium. The team understands that the problem that arose was an isolated technical matter outside the College's direct control. The College is nevertheless advised to raise the need to audit all sources of information thoroughly to ensure their accuracy with the University.

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

53 The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in May 2008. The lines of enquiry allowed a thorough consideration of the maintenance of the standards of assessment, its contribution to learning, and the information supplied to students. The lines of enquiry were as follows.

Line of enquiry 1: The consistency of implementation of University of Hertfordshire systems and processes with regard to the setting, marking and moderation of learner assessments

Line of enquiry 2: The consistency in the provision of student information about assessment and attainment and feedback provided to learners in written and oral form, including through the process of tutorial review

Line of enquiry 3: How the College supports the development of formative and summative assessments utilising blended learning tools

54 A wide range of good practice was reported, including strong College systems for maintaining the standards of assessment. The high quality of College-originated student information, the assessment of work-based learning, staff development support for assessment practice and the effective use of formative feedback was also recognised. Further good practice was evident in the use of reflective logs and online journals, tutorial review systems and additional learning support.

55 Recommendations from the Developmental engagement centred largely on extending existing practices more consistently across the provision. This included the more explicit linking of marking and feedback to learning outcomes and the use of internal moderation of marking in all programmes. There was encouragement to develop the use of the University of Hertfordshire's virtual learning environment for assessment and improve the mechanisms for online feedback. There was also encouragement to ensure the College website gave more consistent information on work-based learning. All these matters were satisfactorily addressed through the Developmental engagement action plan.

D Foundation Degrees

56 The College has expanded its FD provision so that this now forms the critical mass of provision including extensive provisions in business and computing and creative enterprise subjects. Other areas include early years, sports studies, beauty and uniformed public services. The University of Hertfordshire is the sole partner for FD. The College intends to concentrate its expansion of higher education within existing FD programmes by encouraging progression from its level 3 programmes and by making more opportunities to study programmes part-time.

57 The review found that programme design takes adequate account of the *Foundation Degree qualifications benchmark* and that there is well-developed work-based learning in FD programmes, in particular the early years sector endorsed and sports studies programmes. Employer involvement in and support for these programmes is encouraging. FDs benefit from good strategic and operational management of higher education with internal measures to ensure standards and the quality of learning opportunities. These are set within a framework of effective collaborative management with its university and college partners.

58 The conclusions listed in Section E apply to all of the higher education provision, including FDs.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

59 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in West Herts 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: University of Hertfordshire; University of Greenwich; University of Sunderland; and Edexcel.

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

- the College has established effective internal structures and processes for the management and quality assurance of academic standards and learning opportunities (paragraphs 10 to 12, 14, 18 to 20, 27)

- the College management of higher education is enhanced by the support of strong consortium arrangements with the University of Hertfordshire (paragraphs 13,14)

- there are examples of well organised and effectively supported work-based learning in FD courses which take full account of the *Code of practice* (paragraphs 17, 32)

- part-time staff teaching on higher education programmes are involved extensively in College staff development activities (paragraphs 22, 38)

- College staff, in a number of areas, are making effective use of the University of Hertfordshire's virtual learning environment to devise interactive learning and assessment activities (paragraphs 32, 39)

- College handbooks contain comprehensive student information (paragraph 47).

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

The team agreed an area where the College is advised to take action:

- raise with the University of Hertfordshire the need to audit all sources of online information provided by the University that carry public information about programmes run by the College, to ensure their accuracy (paragraphs 51, 52).

The team also agreed the following areas where it would be desirable for the College to take action:

- build upon existing examples of scholarly activity to ensure that there is a systematic approach to subject updating in the College (paragraph 24)

- continue to develop current initiatives to improve attendance, retention and progression in higher education courses (paragraphs 27, 35)

- improve the return time for written feedback on assignments to students so that the shortest current time of three weeks becomes the target (paragraph 36).

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 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.

63   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.

64   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/or completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

West Herts College action plan relating to the Summative review: April 2009

Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
In the course of the Summative review the team identified the following areas of good practice that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
• the College has established effective internal structures and processes for the management and quality assurance of academic standards and learning opportunities (paragraphs 10 to 12, 14, 18 to 20, 27)	Structure and membership of HE Committee to be reviewed with a view to setting up strategic and operational committee meetings	Sept 09	Dir of HE	HE Committees deal with strategic and operational issues effectively and efficiently with appropriate membership	Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality	Reported to and monitored by College Leadership Group meetings
	Student involvement in management of HE	Oct 09	HE Dev coordinator	Student representative attends HE committee meetings	Dir of HE	Reviewed and evaluated at HE committee meetings
	Module Evaluation Forms (MEFS) and AMERs	June 10	HE Course leaders	Quality assurance mechanisms fully embedded	Dir of HE	

West Herts College action plan relating to the Summative review: April 2009						
Good practice	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
	completed and used as effective monitoring and evaluation process for all HE programmes			in all HE courses; quality evidenced through internal inspections and Key Performance Indicators		
• the College management of higher education is enhanced by the support of strong consortium arrangements with the University of Hertfordshire (paragraphs 13,14)	Senior managers continue to represent the College on key consortium committees (CEG, CQC and CMC)	Ongoing	Dir of HE	Consortium continues to add strength to local management of HE and supports the college's HE strategy	Principal	Through one to ones between the Dir of HE and the Principal
	Annual Activity Visits agreed with all link tutors	Oct 09	HE Course leaders	The consortium support mechanisms are effective at course level	HE committee	Reviewed and evaluated at HE committee meetings
	Programme committees take place for all HE provision	Ongoing	HE course leaders	Operational matters dealt with effectively and efficiently	HE committee	

West Herts College action plan relating to the Summative review: April 2009

Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
• there are examples of well organised and effectively supported work-based learning which take full account of the Code of practice (paragraphs 17, 32)	Review work based learning assessment practices in all programmes; share best practice and review Code of practice at HE staff development day	Dec 09	FD Sports and Early Years course leaders	Learner feedback indicates good support for work based assessment.	HE committee	Through student feedback at HE student conference and student feedback questionnaires (SFQs)
• part-time staff teaching on higher education programmes are involved extensively in College staff development activities (paragraphs 22, 38)	Publicise staff development opportunities to all staff, including hourly paid; facilitate attendance at key staff development activities	Ongoing	HR / HE Course leaders	Staff development records evidence that part-time staff have taken up opportunities to engage in appropriate and relevant staff development	HE committee	HR staff development audit reported to HE committee / IfL CPD registration by part-time staff meets statutory requirements

West Herts College action plan relating to the Summative review: April 2009

Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
• College staff, in a number of areas, are making effective use of the University of Hertfordshire's virtual learning environment to devise interactive learning and assessment activities (paragraphs 32, 39)	ELearning staff development days disseminate best practice; Blended learning champion targets set to up-skill staff and ensure effective support provided and best practice disseminated	Sept 09 - July 10	Blended Learning Champion	Innovative use of the University's Virtual Learning Environment supports student learning and helps improve retention and achievement	HE committee	One to ones with Blended Learning Champion; impact monitored through HE committee
	HE tutors attend the University's Blended Learning conference and staff development activities	July 09 - June 10	HE tutors	Staff development records show staff across all curriculum areas engage with blended learning staff development opportunities	Dir of HE	Reviewed and evaluated at HE committee meetings

West Herts College action plan relating to the Summative review: April 2009

Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
• College handbooks contain comprehensive student information (paragraph 47).	Student handbooks published for all courses; template containing common information and building on existing good practice from current handbooks developed and used for all HE programmes	Sept 09	HE administrator and HE course leaders	Consistency and quality of student handbooks increases further; evidenced through student feedback and internal inspections	HE committee	Reviewed at HE committee in October

West Herts College action plan relating to the Summative review: April 2009

Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team agreed an area where the College should be **advised** to take action:						
● raise with the University of Hertfordshire the need to audit all sources of online information provided by the University that carry public information about programmes run by the College, to ensure their accuracy (paragraphs 51, 52).	Raise at Consortium Management Committee	Oct 09	Dir of HE	The University reports that an audit has taken place and students report no erroneous data on the University's website	Consortium Management Committee	Reviewed at HE committee

West Herts College action plan relating to the Summative review: April 2009

Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team agreed the following areas where it would be **desired** to take action:						
● build upon existing examples of scholarly activity to ensure that there is a systematic approach to subject updating in the College (paragraph 24)	HE staff development day focuses on scholarly activity and includes guest speaker from HE Academy	Aug 09	HE administrator	Staff aware of opportunities to engage in broad range of scholarly activity through engagement with HE Academy and other external bodies	HE committee	Reviewed at HE committee meetings
	Monitor uptake of additional days to undertake scholarly activity	June 10	HR	Staff are supported to engage in appropriate scholarly activity	Dir of HR	Reviewed at College Leadership Group meetings
	Review staff subject updating and training and development	June 10	Curriculum managers	Staff are up to date in subject area and able to deliver at appropriate	Dir of HE	Reviewed and evaluated at HE committee meetings

West Herts College action plan relating to the Summative review: April 2009

Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
	needs through appraisal system			level as evidenced through student feedback		
	Continue to support staff in achieving higher level qualifications	ongoing	HR Staff Development Officer	Uptake of long 'higher-level' qualifications continues to be strong	Dir of HR	Reviewed at College Leadership Group meetings
• continue to develop current initiatives to improve attendance, retention and progression in higher education courses (paragraphs 27, 35)	Literacy and numeracy support provided early in academic year to support weak skills as identified by diagnostic testing	Oct 09	HE course leaders	Retention rates improve	HE committee	Reviewed and evaluated at HE committee meetings
	Weekly KPI meetings focus on HE attendance and retention and appropriate	Ongoing	Heads of Schools	Attendance and retention rates improve and consistently meet college targets	Dir of HE	Reviewed at College Leadership Group meetings

West Herts College action plan relating to the Summative review: April 2009

Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
	interventions actioned quickly					
	At risk learners identified and supported to pass their first year	June 10	HE course leaders	Progression to second year of Foundation Degrees improves	HE committee	Reviewed at College Leadership Group meetings
• improve the return time for written feedback on assignments to students so that the shortest current time of three weeks becomes the target (paragraph 36).	Work with the University to ensure the three-week turnaround can be met in all curriculum areas; reduce size of assessments and timing to minimise bunching at end of semesters	Dec 09	HE course leaders and link tutors	Student feedback indicates three week turnaround being met in all curriculum areas	HE committee	Reviewed and evaluated at HE committee meetings