



QAA

Integrated quality and enhancement review
Summative review
February 2010

Wirral Metropolitan College

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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 Wirral Metropolitan College carried out in February 2010

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/or 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:

- an HE Quality Manual successfully supports the different quality assurance requirements of seven higher education partners and Edexcel
- internal moderation and verification systems are generally effective and consistent
- the College holds annual development days and reflective days for staff, which feed into the annual programme self-assessment and action reports
- the College has good reciprocal relationships with local and regional employers in the development of vocationally relevant higher education programmes
- thorough initial advice, guidance and interview procedures are provided for students enrolling on all higher education programmes; these are particularly effective in supporting mature students returning to study
- higher education staff are very supportive of students in all aspects of the programme; they are approachable, friendly and readily available
- the Higher Education Prospectus is clear, informative and user-friendly
- the good working relationships which exist between the college and its higher education partners help to maintain accurate and comprehensive 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:

- develop a more consistent approach to the use of a range of e-learning methods to enhance the learning opportunities of students across all higher education programmes.

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

- consolidate the use of standard documentation and formats for all assignment briefs, feedback and assessment decisions for HNC programmes

- ensure that actions taken to address issues raised in student satisfaction feedback forms are communicated to the students on a formal basis
- develop and clarify the role of the Higher Education Forum as a mechanism for the sharing of good practice
- review both paper and electronic sources of information to ensure consistency and currency and to facilitate easier understanding by prospective students
- consider further development of the website to give clear and distinct information to prospective higher education students about programme availability and finance.

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 Wirral Metropolitan 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 Edexcel; the Universities of Central Lancashire, Chester and Liverpool; and Liverpool Hope, Liverpool John Moores and The Manchester Metropolitan Universities. The review was carried out by Mr Wayne Isaac, Mr Kevin Kendall and Mr Paul Monroe (reviewers) and Dr Marion Shaw (coordinator).

2 The Summative review team (the team) conducted the review in agreement with the College and in accordance with *The handbook for an Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review* (the handbook), published by QAA. Evidence in support of the Summative review included documentation supplied by the College and the awarding bodies, meetings with staff, students and representatives of the awarding bodies, and reports from Ofsted inspections and QAA reviews. 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 The College was formed in 1982 by the amalgamation of all further education establishments in the Wirral authority. It is a medium-sized general further education college located in the Wirral peninsula, in the north-west of England. It operates from three main campuses: Carlett Park in Eastham, Conway Park in Birkenhead and its newest campus of Twelve Quays in the heritage docklands of Birkenhead. It is the only further education college on the peninsula and serves a wide range of students from a region that is divided by the M53 into an area of deprivation on one side and of considerable prosperity on the other. There is a large selective school system in the borough, a sixth-form college and sixth-form provision in a number of schools. The College has a high widening participation factor, with many adult returners. Its mission is to 'enhance the economic prosperity of young people, adults and employers through high-quality work-related education and training'. Its higher education strategy is to broaden access, encourage the acquisition of higher-level skills and provide progression routes and pathways for non-traditional entrants.

5 The College has 2,173 full-time and 7,157 part-time further education students. Its higher education population for 2008-09 was 201 full-time and 267 part-time students directly-funded by HEFCE, with 18 full-time indirectly-funded students. This equates to 366 full-time equivalent HEFCE-funded students. For 2009-10 the total number of full-time equivalent students is 444. Provision for students is spread across all three campuses, although most students are taught at the two Birkenhead campuses. The Learner Services Team is located at the Conway Park Campus, and the learning resource centres at the

Twelve Quays and Carlett Park campuses. A higher education secretariat, based in the higher education mall at the Conway Park campus, provides administrative support for the provision and a contact point for awarding body partners.

6 The College offers the following programmes, with full-time equivalent numbers:

University of Central Lancashire

- FdSC Forensic Science (11)

University of Chester

- BA Illustration with Animation (8)
- FdA Information, Advice and Guidance (17)
- FdSc Information Communication Technology (17)

Edge Hill University

- FdSc Complementary Therapies (30)

University of Liverpool

- BSc Psychology (2 plus 2) (28)

Liverpool Hope University

- BA Media Studies (35)
- BA Cultural Studies (29)

Liverpool John Moores University

- BA Fine Art (48)
- FdA Working with Children and Young People (28)
- FdA Early Years Senior Practitioner (13)
- FdA Leisure and Tourism (18)
- FdEng Process Plant Engineering (6)
- FdSc Construction (0)

The Manchester Metropolitan University

- Certificate in Education/PGCE (post-compulsory) (52)

Edexcel

- HNC/D Business Studies (49)
- HNC Construction (12)
- HNC/D Applied Chemistry (5)

- HNC/D Applied Biology (1)
- HNC Hospitality Management (6)
- HNC Operations Engineering (20)
- HNC/D Public Services (11).

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

7 The College has formal partnerships with seven higher education institutions. The terms of these partnerships vary according to each institution's regulations. The responsibilities for each of the partners and the College are clearly defined, as are the governance and the financial arrangements. The College manages its responsibilities effectively and a good relationship exists between the higher education institutions and the College, facilitated through the appointment of link tutors. The BSc Psychology, jointly delivered by the College and the University of Liverpool, is a successful innovation, with students studying years zero and one at the College and then completing years two and three at the University.

8 The College has a long-standing arrangement with Edexcel; it operates under a standard agreement to offer Higher National awards, which are delivered in line with Edexcel requirements. HNC Hospitality and HNC/D Public Services will be phased out at the end of this academic year, due to falling recruitment.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

9 From September 2009 the College introduced a BA Illustration with Animation and FdEng Process and Plant Engineering with Liverpool John Moores University, and an FdA Early Years Senior Practitioner and FdSc Information Communication Technology with the University of Chester. The FdA in Leisure and Tourism will be phased out at the end of this academic year and the FdSc Complementary Therapies will be suspended in 2010-11, to be reintroduced in 2011-12 with the University of Chester as its awarding body. The College plans to introduce an FdA Neighbourhood Management and FdA Enterprise and Entrepreneurship with the University of Chester, possibly in 2010. This is part of a strategic aim to develop its Foundation Degree portfolio. Among other higher education initiatives, the College also aims to acquire University of Chester Associate College Status, to attain phase two of the New University Challenge, to develop a higher education research centre and to establish a University Academy Birkenhead. The application for University Challenge, submitted jointly with the University of Chester, to provide a dedicated higher education facility as part of both institutions' accommodation strategy, has been short-listed to go forward to HEFCE Council review in March 2010.

10 In conjunction with the University of Chester, the College is working with the local authority to set up an academy to be known as the University Academy Birkenhead. The College, in conjunction with other partners, will be particularly concerned with the academy for Wirral North, which will specialise in Science, Technology, Enterprise and Applied Learning, with Health and Social Care as a further strand. The academy, which will draw from a merger of three local schools, is planned for introduction in 2010, with full integration in 2012. It will provide a curriculum that allows for progression onto academic and vocational pathways into higher education.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

11 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. The submission was compiled by the College Curriculum Development Leader in November 2009, as a summary of the responses to a student questionnaire conducted during October 2009. Student representatives from 13 programmes responded to the questionnaire, totalling 146 students. The reviewers met students during the review visit, some of whom had been involved in answering the questionnaire. Those who had not been involved did not seem to know of the submission and it was not clear to the team to what extent they had been consulted by their representatives. The responses in the submission are generally very positive, particularly in regard to academic and personal support from tutors, including the marking and feedback of assignments. Some concerns about specific programmes will be referred to programme tutors, and those relating to the overall running of the College, such as information technology (IT) provision, will be followed up by the Higher Education (HE) Manager.

B Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education

Core theme 1: Academic standards

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

12 The College's claims in its self-evaluation for the rigour and thoroughness of its management processes are confirmed by the evidence provided for the team. The College has effective systems in place for the management and delivery of academic standards in each of its higher education programmes. The format of these systems varies from programme to programme, depending on which of the higher education institutions is the validating partner. Each partner prescribes an effective system that is consistently applied to all of the programmes validated for the College by that partner. However, the various systems in place take a similar approach to the assurance of academic standards and the College is therefore able to manage a consistent, rigorous and effective approach, in line with the regulatory requirements of the individual awarding bodies and the formal partnership agreements.

13 The overall responsibility for managing standards in higher education lies with the Assistant Principal for Curriculum, supported by the Higher Education Manager. Individual programme teams have the day-to-day responsibility for the management and quality assurance of the programmes, and the programme team managers and leaders report to the Higher Education Manager, who reports in turn to the Assistant Principal for Curriculum.

14 These reporting arrangements follow the procedures laid out in the HE Quality Manual, which is a clear, comprehensive and accessible document. There is a formal committee structure to support higher education quality processes, comprising an Academic Panel, a Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee and a Curriculum and Development Committee. The Manual details the reporting and action relationships between the committees and successfully supports the different quality assurance requirements of seven higher education partners and Edexcel. It represents good practice.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

15 The Academic Infrastructure is taken into account at every stage of the development of each higher education programme. This is done centrally by Edexcel for HNC and HND programmes, and by the higher education validating partners and the College, acting jointly, for Foundation Degrees and honours degrees. The level of staff understanding of the FHEQ, *Code of practice*, (especially *Section 6: Assessment of students: 2006*) and the relevant subject benchmark statements is good and each programme is supported by an effective programme specification. The HE Quality Manual contains a higher education marking and grading policy that ensures that appropriate mechanisms are in place to comply with 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?

16 A comprehensive and well-documented College committee structure is used to assure academic standards meet the requirements of the validating partners (see paragraphs 13 and 14). The HE Quality Manual provides the protocols and procedures used to support the committee structure. Templates are available for programme teams to use when reporting to the various committees and panels.

17 Regular programme team meetings are held in the College for each programme and link tutors from the higher education validating partners are invited to attend. Members of individual programme teams are also invited, along with representatives of programme teams delivering the same programmes in other institutions, to meetings at the validating higher education institutions, and this contributes to enhanced standardisation of delivery and assessment. Arrangements for student representation at these meetings are in place at the University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University. Formal module and programme assessment boards are held at the relevant higher education institutions for Foundation Degree and honours degree programmes and in the College for Edexcel programmes.

18 Internal moderation and verification systems are effective and consistent, and constitute an example of good practice. Assignment briefs are internally verified and assessment decisions are sampled. The BSc Psychology (2+2) undertakes cross-marking and regular benchmarking of the first two years of the College cohort against the corresponding cohort at the University of Liverpool. This is a particularly effective example of standardising approaches to teaching, learning and assessment and helps prepare students for the final two years of study undertaken at the University. HNC assignment briefs are much improved since the Developmental engagement, but progress has varied from programme area to programme area. In general, the assignment briefs for Applied Biology, Applied Chemistry, Construction, Public Services and (especially) Hospitality Management are good and demonstrate a welcome consistency of approach. The team recommends that the College should consolidate the use of standard documentation and formats for all assignment briefs, feedback and assessment decisions for HNC programmes.

19 There is also an effective procedure in place to monitor and evaluate external examiner reports. Reports for Foundation Degree and honours degree programmes go to the validating higher education institution and are then shared with the College. Edexcel reports go directly to the College Higher Education Manager. In both cases the reports are analysed and acted upon, and the actions taken are fed back both to the external

examiners and internally to programme teams and students. External examiners are appointed by the higher education validating partners and the same examiner is appointed to all centres offering the programme. This assures a standardised approach between centres. Programme review meetings are held annually, and whenever there is a major change to a programme. Retention, achievement and success rates are discussed and analysed. The outcomes of these meetings are used to inform annual programme self-assessment and action reports.

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

20 Members of individual programme teams have undergone dedicated training and development in the principles, practices and benefits of the Academic Infrastructure. An example of good practice is the College's commitment to holding annual development days and reflective days, which feed into the annual programme self-assessment and action reports. The College also supports staff development relating to research and scholarly activity. The programme leader for BA Cultural Studies, for example, presented a research paper at an academic conference this year, which was subsequently published in an online journal devoted to the field of reception studies. There is also a cross-discipline Higher Education (HE) Forum, which offers a chance for staff to network across subject boundaries and share good practice. This has been unable to meet on the last two occasions because of staffing commitments (see paragraph 30).

21 Art and design staff have received training, from the relevant higher education partner, on the chairing of Board of Studies meetings. New College staff have also received pedagogic training from partner institutions, and the programme leader for the FdSc in Complementary Therapies has attended liaison meetings with Trafford College and King George V College Southport to help standardise the delivery of teaching and improve cross-college moderation processes. Training has taken place to standardise the documentation used on HNC/D programmes, but consolidation is needed in some programmes.

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?

22 For overall management of the provision, please see paragraphs 12 and 16. At programme level the team managers monitor the delivery of programmes through regular team meetings at which programme progress is reviewed, as well as curriculum development and student progress. Students are sometimes represented and student feedback is considered and actioned at these meetings; examples include a change in assessment arrangements and an improvement in the provision in the learning resource centre. All higher education programmes produce an annual report, although the format and title may vary depending on the requirements of the partner university. The annual reports contain information on teaching and learning evaluation, examination board outcomes, external examiner and external moderation feedback and staff/student modular evaluation.

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

23 For information about the College's structures to ensure that the provision meets the requirements of the validating bodies, please see paragraphs 16 to 19. On enrolment students are issued with a programme handbook that provides information on programme aims and outcomes, administration and assessment regulations and progression opportunities. The content and depth of the programme handbooks varies from one programme to another in line with the requirements of the relevant awarding partner. The students commented positively on their usefulness. All students have access in the handbook and/or on the virtual learning environment to relevant policies relating to appeals, academic misconduct and extenuating circumstances. There are clear procedures on assessment deadlines and submission of assessed work. In line with HE partners' requirements, some programme handbooks give detailed information on feedback and marking of assessed work, indicating how long students have to wait to receive formal feedback. Other handbooks make no reference to a set time, but most staff strive to return work within 15 working days and often sooner. Students consider the quality of assignments and feedback to be professional, constructive and delivered in a range of formats to suit different learning styles. Where appropriate, assignments are directed towards employability; the external examiner for HNC Construction, for example, commented that the assignments are vocationally relevant, set at an appropriate level and meet the learning outcomes of the units.

24 The College responds well to the needs of the local and regional economy and employers in developing vocationally relevant higher education programmes, in line with the College mission statement to 'enhance the economic prosperity of young people, adults and employers through high quality, work-related education and training'. All Foundation Degree and Edexcel Higher National award programmes include work-based learning modules, sometimes adapted to meet the requirements of part-time students who are sponsored by employers. Other programmes also link well with employers or industry. The BA Fine Art programme enjoys effective links with the Municipal Williamson Gallery, which has been used as the venue for its final Degree Show since its start in 1996. The College's good reciprocal relationships with employers and its response to the needs of the local and regional economy constitute good practice.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

25 Higher education staff demonstrate a good awareness of the Academic Infrastructure. The focus on the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*, in the Developmental engagement has now been embedded in the College's procedures. College staff work closely with colleagues in the respective universities and use the Academic Infrastructure to inform changes to programmes and procedures, especially through formal validation events. This includes ensuring that tutors have the appropriate experience and qualifications to deliver the programme, that strategies for teaching and learning are in place and that an appropriate environment and suitable resources are provided.

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

26 The College has comprehensive systems in place to ensure that the quality of teaching is maintained and enhanced. Curriculum leaders and programme managers are clear in their roles and responsibilities in respect of the provision of a high-quality learning

experience. The quality of teaching and learning is formally monitored through the annual observation of all staff. The observation policy strives to ensure that teaching and learning is graded as good or better (Ofsted grade 1 or 2). Observations where grades awarded fall below 'good' require action plans to be prepared with the help of the link Learning and Teaching Champion, and re-observation to help ensure improvement.

27 In line with the regulations of the validating partners, staff teaching on higher education programmes are well qualified, with many of them having obtained or in the process of obtaining higher degree qualifications. Many staff maintain current industry links and specialist vocational expertise. All teaching staff are teacher-trained or working towards this qualification. Students value the variety and quality of teaching and assessment methods used, which helps to accommodate different learning styles and vocational areas.

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

28 The thorough initial advice, guidance and interview procedures for all students enrolling on higher education programmes, which are particularly effective at supporting mature students returning to study, are good practice. Group and individual tutorials are incorporated into all programmes, with opportunities for additional meetings if appropriate. Alternative arrangements are put in place to meet the needs of particular programmes or students. For example, in one of the modules on the FdA Working with Children and Young People, tutorials take place in the workplace, where students and their mentors meet with the module tutor to discuss progress and action planning. Students on the BA Fine Art and the BSc Psychology commented that they had been encouraged by staff to meet second or third-year students as part of their induction process. Higher education staff are very supportive of the students in all aspects of the programme; they are approachable, friendly and readily available. This impressive approach to student welfare constitutes good practice. Students' confidence in their ability to achieve learning outcomes assures the College that staff support for students is highly effective. This assurance is obtained through the formal and informal collection of student views, through lesson observations and also on the evidence of high attainment grades in programmes.

29 A variety of methods is used to collect students' views on the quality of their learning experience. The commonest methods involve the use of tri-annual student feedback forms. This system is used for both further and higher education students in the College. Many tutors also hold informal reviews with students on their learning experience. The actions taken to address student concerns are generally communicated to students, but there are isolated examples where this is not done. It would be desirable for the College to ensure that actions taken to address issues raised in student satisfaction feedback forms are communicated to the students on a formal basis.

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

30 The College has a staff development policy in place, which is common to both further and higher education. All full-time academic staff undertake a minimum of 30 hours continuous professional development annually, in line with the Institute for Learning membership guidelines. A range of in-house staff development activities are available for all staff. However, little of this training relates specifically to higher education. The College on occasions has used the HE Forum as the platform to introduce a range of higher education-specific staff development activities. To date the Forum has operated in a rather ad hoc way and it is recommended that the College develops and clarifies the role of the HE Forum as a mechanism for the sharing of good practice.

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?

31 The majority of the higher education programmes are operated across three of the main College sites - Carlett Park Campus, Twelve Quays, a new campus in the heart of the Wirral waterfront development, and Conway Park campus in Birkenhead town centre. Learning resource centres are situated on the Twelve Quays and Carlett Park campuses. Different curriculum areas have adopted a variety of systems to meet the requirements of their students and subject areas. These additional facilities include recording studios, media suites, computing/IT suites, science laboratories and leisure, travel and tourism facilities. There is inconsistency in the provision of e-learning facilities. The College is advised to develop a more consistent approach to the use of a range of e-learning methods to enhance the learning opportunities of students across all higher education programmes. The College recognises the need for this; the College e-Learning Resource Manager is leading the development, working with a number of higher education tutors who already use e-learning to enhance teaching and learning. There is very good liaison between programme managers and learning resource centre staff to ensure that adequate levels of central resources are available to support programmes. Higher education students make good use of areas of the College dedicated to their use, including the HE Mall on the Conway Park Campus.

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?

32 The College Vision and Mission statements appear on published literature. Clear strategic objectives are stated in the Higher Education Prospectus; these are extracted from the Higher Education Strategic Objectives 2009-2014 document. The Prospectus is user-friendly, clear and informative and is considered by the team to be good practice. The College is responsible for the publication of newspaper articles, programme flyers, programme guides, the Higher Education Prospectus, course catalogue, student handbook, programme specifications and programme handbooks. The College is able to use templates and other information from its higher education partners to assist in this. Electronic information includes the College website, which contains details of higher education programmes, and the virtual learning environment, which contains assessment briefs, some lecture materials and discussion groups.

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?

33 Programme and module information including entry requirements are agreed at validation by the universities and this is then entered on a central database. The good working relationships between the College and its higher education partners help to ensure informative, accurate and complete information. Marketing information is monitored regularly and link tutors are particularly important in checking the content of programme handbooks and assessments. This is considered by the team to be good practice.

All programme information is on the central database and marketing materials are produced by the Marketing Department using this information and that provided by programme leaders. These are then signed off as accurate by programme leaders before publication. There is an ongoing dialogue between Learner Services and programme leaders, which works well in maintaining the currency of this information.

34 The College Higher Education Student Handbook contains all the generic information required by students and this is approved by senior management prior to publication. There is a checklist for material that should be included in the programme handbooks; accuracy is the responsibility of the programme leaders and is checked by the line managers. In some cases, the minimum requirements of the checklist are exceeded, for example, by staff on the BA Fine Art and HNC Construction, where programme teams take a greater responsibility for the production of the handbook.

35 The Marketing Department has responsibility for the content of the website. Updating it is carried out by Learner Services and the Marketing Unit. There is some inconsistency between website material and the information in the Higher Education Prospectus and the College should ensure that there is no discrepancy between the website and other sources of its information. It would be desirable for the College to review both paper and electronic sources of information to ensure consistency and currency and to facilitate easier understanding by prospective students. It would also be desirable for the College to consider further development of the website to ensure it gives clear and distinct information to prospective students on programme availability and finance, in particular tuition fees.

36 The e-Resource Development Manager tries to ensure a minimum level of content on the virtual learning environment, including programme handbooks, module details and assessments. In some curriculum areas, for example for the HNC Business Studies and HNC Construction, everything that goes on to the virtual learning environment has been internally verified previously. Much of this is informative, but not sufficiently interactive and there is a need to continue to develop the virtual learning environment by sharing best practice among tutors and encouraging greater use by students. Training in its use is inconsistent but there is very good informal sharing of good practice, supported by the e-Resource Development Manager and IT Champions.

37 Students agree that the published information they receive is accurate, complete and fit for purpose. In addition, many students who have progressed from Level 3 at the College rely on information given to them orally by tutors. Students confirm that the College handbook and programme handbooks give useful and accurate information, and that timetables and assessment schedules are reliably adhered to. The virtual learning environment is accessible off-site for lecture presentations, assessment briefs and discussion groups, and is a useful back-up to lectures.

38 A plagiarism policy is embedded in the programme handbooks. Plagiarism software has been used since 2008 and, although its use is in the early stages, students are very aware of the meaning of plagiarism and the importance of correct referencing.

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

39 The developmental engagement visit took place on 10-11 December 2008. The lines of enquiry were:

Line of enquiry 1: How does the College manage, and respond to, external examiner reports?

Line of enquiry 2: How does the College ensure student feedback facilitates opportunities for learning and progression?

Line of enquiry 3: Is information and guidance on assessment process and policy overtly brought to the attention of students in a clear and accurate manner?

40 The Developmental engagement team identified 11 points of good practice, including the appointment of a higher education manager; the provision of a higher education mall with dedicated higher education facilities; the collaborative cross-college approach to moderation to ensure parity of standards for the awarding bodies; and the appointment of a student governor, who has full voting rights on the governing body. Also identified as good practice at programme level were the 2+2 Psychology degree with the University of Liverpool; graduated team-marking on the BA Fine Art degree, along with a competition for students on this degree to enter for a commercial display; an off-site reflective day for the teaching staff on the BA Cultural Studies programme after external examiner reports have been received; and the opportunity in some programmes for students to comment on staff feedback on assignments. With regard to learning resources, a well-developed virtual learning environment in some programmes and a College-derived dedicated handbook for all higher education students were identified as good practice. The College's update of its good practices indicates that all have been continued and where appropriate have been extended to other areas of the provision. Staff development schedules have incorporated good practice issues into their programmes.

41 There were two advisable recommendations; namely that the College should review assignment briefs for HNC programmes to ensure grading criteria and intended learning outcomes conform to Edexcel specifications, and develop programme specifications for HNC programmes. The College has responded by introducing programme specifications for all HNC/D programmes consistent with Edexcel requirements. In addition, HNC/D assignment briefs now include learning outcomes, assessment criteria and generic grade descriptors. There were eight desirable recommendations, two of which were concerned with the student voice by means of regular staff-student liaison meetings and the opportunity for students to comment on tutors' feedback in all programmes. Also recommended as desirable were the production of action plans to address issues raised by Edexcel and communicated to subsequent examiners on appointment; the inclusion of learning outcomes on both degree and HNC feedback sheets; and a review of HNC handbooks to ensure consistency of information. Further desirable recommendations were to continue the development of the virtual learning environment, to review handbooks for degree students to ensure that their content is understood by mature students, and to encourage external examiners for degree programmes to engage actively with students during their visits to the College. The College has responded to all these recommendations and has either implemented change or is in the process of doing so. The move of the then Higher Education Manager caused some delay in full implementation. A replacement has now been appointed. The action plan arising out of the Developmental engagement

addresses each of the advisable and desirable recommendations. There has been a great deal of progress made and, where that progress is still ongoing and where the actions remain 'work in progress', the College has indicated why this is so and how they intend to progress their actions, in a transparent and evaluative manner.

D Foundation Degrees

42 The College offers eight Foundation Degrees, as follows:

Liverpool John Moores University

- FdA Working with Children and Young People
- FdA Early Years Senior Practitioner
- FdA Leisure and Tourism
- FdEng Process and Plant Engineering

University of Chester

- FdA Information, Advice and Guidance
- FdSc Information Communication Technology

University of Central Lancashire

- FdSc Forensic Science

Edge Hill University

- FdSc Complementary Therapies.

43 One Foundation Degree (FdSc in Integrated Science) has been removed from the higher education curriculum on offer since the Developmental engagement last year. In September 2009, the College introduced an FdEng Process and Plant Engineering with Liverpool John Moores University, and an FdA Early Years Senior Practitioner and FdSc Information Communication Technology with the University of Chester. The FdA Leisure and Tourism will be phased out at the end of the academic year 2009-10, and the FdSc Complementary Therapies will be suspended in 2010 -11, to be reintroduced in 2011-12 with the University of Chester as its awarding body. The College plans to introduce an FdA Neighbourhood Management and FdA Enterprise and Entrepreneurship with the University of Chester, possibly in 2010. This is part of a strategic aim to develop its Foundation Degree portfolio.

44 In the course of the review of Foundation Degrees, the team identified the following areas of **good practice**:

- a Higher Education Quality Manual successfully supports the different quality assurance requirements of seven higher education partners and Edexcel (paragraph 14)
- internal moderation and verification systems are generally effective and consistent (paragraph 18)
- the College holds annual development days and reflective days for staff, which feed into the annual programme self-assessment and action reports (paragraph 20)

- the College has good reciprocal relationships with local and regional employers in the development of vocationally relevant higher education programmes (paragraph 24)
- thorough initial advice, guidance and interview procedures are provided for students enrolling on all higher education programmes; these are particularly effective in supporting mature students returning to study (paragraph 28)
- higher education staff are very supportive of students in all aspects of the programme; they are approachable, friendly and readily available (paragraph 28)
- the Higher Education Prospectus is clear, informative and user-friendly (paragraph 32)
- the good working relationships which exist between the College and its higher education partners help to maintain accurate and comprehensive information (paragraph 33).

45 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:

- develop a more consistent approach to the use of a range of e-learning methods to enhance the learning opportunities of students across all higher education programmes (paragraph 31).

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

- ensure that actions taken to address issues raised in student satisfaction feedback forms are communicated to the students on a formal basis (paragraph 29)
- develop and clarify the role of the Higher Education Forum as a mechanism for the sharing of good practice (paragraph 30)
- review both paper and electronic sources of information to ensure consistency and currency and to facilitate easier understanding by prospective students (paragraph 35)
- consider further development of the website to give clear and distinct information to prospective higher education students about programme availability and finance (paragraph 35).

46 Recruitment to the Foundation Degrees is reasonably healthy. Some recently introduced degrees, such as the FdEng Process and Plant Engineering, have yet to show their recruitment strength. The College responds well to the needs of the local and regional economy, in line with its mission statement to 'enhance the economic prosperity of young people, adults and employers through high quality, work-related education and training'.

47 The standard of student work for the Foundation Degrees is high and students confirmed their satisfaction with the provision and believe it will enhance their employability. The College has established good relationships with local employers and businesses and all Foundation Degrees include work-based modules. Students on placement are well supported by College staff, who have flexible working arrangements to meet the needs of part-time students sponsored by employers. For example, tutorials for students on the FdA Working with Children and Young People take place in the workplace; students and their mentors are able to meet the module tutors to discuss progress and action planning. Assignments for the Foundation Degrees are constructed in consultation

with workplace mentors, and employers are generally involved in curriculum design and development. Overall, the team has confidence in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreements with awarding bodies, with regard to academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities for Foundation Degrees. The team also considers that reliance can be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information the College publishes.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

48 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in the 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: Edexcel; the Universities of Central Lancashire, Chester and Liverpool; and Liverpool Hope, Liverpool John Moores and the Manchester Metropolitan Universities.

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

- a Higher Education Quality Manual successfully supports the different quality assurance requirements of seven higher education partners and Edexcel (paragraph 14)
- internal moderation and verification systems are generally effective and consistent (paragraph 18)
- the College holds annual development days and reflective days for staff, which feed into the annual programme self-assessment and action reports (paragraph 20)
- the College has good reciprocal relationships with local and regional employers in the development of vocationally relevant higher education programmes (paragraph 24)
- thorough initial advice, guidance and interview procedures are provided for students enrolling on all higher education programmes; these are particularly effective in supporting mature students returning to study (paragraph 28)
- higher education staff are very supportive of students in all aspects of the programme; they are approachable, friendly and readily available (paragraph 28)
- the Higher Education Prospectus is clear, informative and user-friendly (paragraph 32)
- the good working relationships which exist between the College and its higher education partners help to maintain accurate and comprehensive information (paragraph 33).

50 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:

- develop a more consistent approach to the use of a range of e-learning methods to enhance the learning opportunities of students across all higher education programmes (paragraph 31).

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

- consolidate the use of standard documentation and formats for all assignment briefs, feedback and assessment decisions for HNC programmes (paragraph 18)
- ensure that actions taken to address issues raised in student satisfaction feedback forms are communicated to the students on a formal basis (paragraph 29)
- develop and clarify the role of the Higher Education Forum as a mechanism for the sharing of good practice (paragraph 30)
- review both paper and electronic sources of information to ensure consistency and currency and to facilitate easier understanding by prospective students (paragraph 35)
- consider further development of the website to give clear and distinct information to prospective higher education students about programme availability and finance (paragraph 35).

51 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 agreements for the management of the standards of the awards of its awarding bodies.

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

53 Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation and other documentary evidence, and from its meetings with staff and students, the team concludes that, 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.

Wirral Metropolitan College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2010							
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:							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an HE Quality Manual successfully supports the different quality assurance requirements of seven higher education partners and Edexcel (paragraph 14) 	Continued reference to HE Quality Manual to support HE quality processes	On going	All HE staff	Quality procedures are followed as outlined in the HE Quality Manual	Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee	Ongoing review by Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> internal moderation and verification systems are generally effective and consistent (paragraph 18) 	Internal moderation and verification processes to be shared in HE Forum	December 2010	CL HE to organise forum	Continued effective internal moderation and verification	Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee	Review by Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee External examiner reports	

Wirral Metropolitan College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2010							
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College holds annual development days and reflective days which feed into the annual programme self-assessment and action reports (paragraph 20) 	<p>Course team reviews to continue. Minutes specific to HE matters to be produced</p>	September 2010	Course teams	Minutes of HE matters from course team reviews actioned the following year	Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee	Course team review minutes and follow up actions in next year returned to Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College has good reciprocal relationships with local and regional employers in the development of vocationally relevant higher education programmes (paragraph 24) 	Continue to build employer relations	On going	Course teams. College Employer Services Team	Continued development of employer relevant HE courses	Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee	Review of course portfolio	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> thorough initial advice, guidance and interview procedures are provided for students enrolling on all higher education programmes; these are particularly effective in supporting mature students returning to study (paragraph 28) 	Formalise admissions policy to support current good practice	September 2010	CL HE and admissions team	Formal admissions policy documented and implemented	Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee	Monitoring of admissions procedures	

Wirral Metropolitan College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2010							
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> higher education staff are very supportive of students in all aspects of the programme; they are approachable, friendly and readily available (paragraph 28) 	HE Forum to disseminate different approaches to student support	December 2010	CL HE to arrange forum. HE staff to contribute approaches from their areas.	Continued support for HE students	Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee	On going evaluation via student feedback	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Higher Education Prospectus is clear, informative and user-friendly (paragraph 32) 	Annual update of prospectus in consultation with HE staff, marketing and partner HEIs	On going - Annually	CL HE to coordinate with HE course leaders, marketing and partner HEIs	Continued high quality of HE Prospectus	Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee	Review of prospectus by CL HE, marketing, course teams and partner HEIs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the good working relationships which exist between the College and its higher education partners help to maintain accurate and comprehensive information (paragraph 33). 	CL HE to continue to liaise with partner HEIs to ensure that published information is correct and appropriate	On going	CL HE with HEI partnership offices	Published information continues to be clear and accurate and meets the requirements of the partner HEIs Success indicators	Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee	Partner HEI approval of published materials Evaluation	

Wirral Metropolitan College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2010						
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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College should develop a more consistent approach to the use of a range of e-learning methods to enhance the learning opportunities of students across all higher education programmes (paragraph 31). 	<p>Guideline minimum VLE – to include course documentation and L&T</p> <p>HE Forum focusing on VLE</p> <p>Develop VLE with individual teams</p> <p>Monitor and review VLE developments</p>	<p>June 2010</p> <p>June 2010</p> <p>For start of delivery of courses</p> <p>Course documentation by Sept 2010</p> <p>L&T for start of unit</p>	<p>CL HE & e-Resource Development Manager</p> <p>CL HE</p> <p>e-Resource Development Manager & course teams</p> <p>CL HE & e-Resource Development Manager</p>	<p>Guideline document and example VLE pages</p> <p>HE Forum takes place covering VLE & results in improved VLE</p> <p>Each programme having a full set of up to date course documentation on VLE.</p> <p>Each programme having coherently organised L&T</p>	<p>Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee</p>	<p>Guidelines being followed by courses</p> <p>HE Forum feedback</p> <p>Review of each programme's VLE by e-Resource Development Manager and CL HE</p> <p>Continued monitoring of each programme's VLE</p>

Wirral Metropolitan College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2010						
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
				materials on VLE Each programme making use of interactive VLE facilities as part of an overall learning and teaching package		by e-Resource Development Manager and CL HE

Wirral Metropolitan College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2010						
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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to consolidate the use of standard documentation and formats for all assignment briefs, feedback and assessment decisions for HNC programmes (paragraph 18) 	Revise all HNC/D assessment documentation to ensure that it is in standard format.	September 2010	Course teams with CL HE reviewing	All HNC/D assessment documentation is in standard format	Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee	All HNC/D assessment documentation to be checked against standard format
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to ensure that actions taken to address issues raised in student satisfaction feedback forms are communicated to the students on a formal basis (paragraph 29) 	Formal process of feeding back actions resulting from student evaluation to be devised and implemented Student feedback to be standing item on Academic Panel templates and to include reporting on	September 2010 May 2010	CL HE – devise procedure Course teams – implement Template modified by CL HE Course teams fill in template	Actions resulting from student evaluations fed back to students	Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee	Monitoring of student evaluation loop via Academic Panel reports

Wirral Metropolitan College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2010						
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to consider action to develop and clarify the role of the HE Forum as a mechanism for sharing good practice (paragraph 30) 	<p>communication back to students</p> <p>Devise, publish & implement a calendar of HE Forums</p> <p>First to cover IQER results and VLE</p>	<p>May 2010</p> <p>First to be held June 2010</p>	<p>CL HE</p> <p>CL HE – planning</p> <p>All HE deliverers participating</p>	<p>Holding of HE forums regularly.</p> <p>Good practice disseminating throughout HE provision</p>	<p>Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee</p>	<p>HE Forum Calendar.</p> <p>Follow up monitoring of roll out of good practice.</p> <p>Feedback from staff on HE forum activity.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to review both paper and electronic sources of information to ensure consistency and currency and to facilitate easier understanding by prospective students (paragraph 35) 	<p>Review all course information on paper (prospectus etc.) to ensure that it is up to date and clear.</p> <p>Review all electronic course</p>	<p>September 2010</p>	<p>Course teams with CL HE for content</p> <p>Marketing team for prospectus and course leaflet design and presentation</p> <p>CIS and Web team for on line presentation of</p>	<p>Having up to date, relevant and appropriate course information available to prospective students both on line and on paper for Sept 2010</p>	<p>Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee</p>	<p>Factual checking of electronic material.</p> <p>Evaluation of usability of website for prospective students.</p> <p>Review of printed materials (prospectus and course leaflets).</p>

Wirral Metropolitan College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2010						
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
	information to ensure that it is up to date and clear, and matches the printed material.		material			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to consider further development of the website to give clear and distinct information to prospective higher education students about programme availability and finance (paragraph 35). 	Review and revise web based course information to make it more user friendly for prospective students	September 2010	Course teams with CL HE for content CIS and Web team for on line presentation of material	Having up to date, relevant and appropriate course information available to prospective students on the college web site's HE pages for Sept 2010	Higher Education Quality and Achievement Committee	Evaluation of content and usability of web site for prospective students.

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