Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

Macclesfield College

April 2011

SR 51/2010

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2011

ISBN 978 1 84979 309 4

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

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 Macclesfield College carried out in April 2011

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

Good practice

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

- the Academic Infrastructure has been used effectively to inform the development of a top-up degree within the College
- there is a well-organised model of student support from pre-course guidance, through on-course support to advise on progression
- a helpful handbook on academic writing for higher education is used in an integrated way across programmes.

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:

- address the management of higher education programmes to provide a more explicit and coherent overview of academic standards and quality assurance
- ensure that inconsistencies in the website and proofing errors in printed materials are identified and corrected before publication.

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

- continue to look at ways of achieving greater parity in the timing of feedback
- develop more formal processes to undertake a generic review of external examiner reports across higher education programmes
- continue and extend staff development activities to create a more distinctive community of higher education practitioners
- expand and consolidate the development of peer observation of teaching
- discuss with the University ways in which student access to electronic journals can be improved
- use the virtual learning environment more effectively to address student perceptions of resource shortages.

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 Macclesfield 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 Manchester Metropolitan University. The review was carried out by Mr Graham Brotherton, Miss Maxina Butler-Holmes and Mrs Trudy Stiles (reviewers) and Dr John Hurley (coordinator).

2 The Summative review team (the team) conducted the review in agreement with the College and in accordance with *The handbook for Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review* (the handbook), published by QAA. Evidence in support of the Summative review included documentation supplied by the College and awarding bodies, meetings with staff, students, employers and partner institutions, reports of reviews by QAA and from inspections 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 Macclesfield College is a medium-sized general further education college, which serves the boroughs of Macclesfield and Congleton in east Cheshire and draws students from south Manchester and further afield for specialist subjects. It is a long-established provider of higher education and initiated the formation of a higher education consortium of Cheshire colleges with Manchester Metropolitan University, which included two other colleges. As part of the Macclesfield Learning Zone, the College shares its campus with Macclesfield High School and Park Lane Special School, together with which it manages The Learning Zone Sixth Form College (LZ6). The College mission states: 'With our partners in the Macclesfield Learning Zone, Macclesfield College and LZ6 will raise aspirations and provide the outstanding, responsive service needed to ensure young people achieve their potential, the workforce is suitably skilled and community life enriched'. A formal consultation is currently underway with a view to the College sponsoring an Academy on the site of Macclesfield High School.

5 In January 2011 there were 3,080 students at the College, of which 1,606 were full-time 16-18 year-olds. Of the remainder, 122 full-time and 74 part-time students are currently on higher education programmes, constituting 189 full-time equivalent students. They are taught by 21 full-time staff and 10 fractional staff. In 2010-11 the following provision is being offered by the College in partnership with:

Manchester Metropolitan University

- FdA Business Management
- FdA Creative Arts For Employment (Year 2 only)
- FdA Early Years Practice

- FdA Graphics and Digital Media
- FdA Public and Community Services
- FdA Sport, Coaching and Fitness
- FdA Supporting Teaching & Learning
- FdEng Aircraft Maintenance Engineering
- FdEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering
- FdEng Mechanical Engineering
- BSc Top-up Aircraft Maintenance
- Certificate in Education
- Professional Certificate in Education

Partnership agreements with the awarding body

6 The agreement with Manchester Metropolitan University is for collaboration and specifically states that it is not a partnership. The University retains responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards. The College is required to implement procedures to ensure compliance with the standards established by the University. External examiners are appointed by the University. The College is responsible for the operation of the programme as outlined in the definitive document for each programme which is established at validation. These differ slightly according to the status of a programme: whether it is unique to the College; run by two or more colleges in the consortium; or franchised from the University. In particular, this influences the degree of responsibility, in the College, for curriculum development, writing and moderating assignments.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

7 There have been minor changes in the course portfolio with the introduction of the top-up BSc in Aircraft Maintenance, while the FdA Creative Arts for Employment is in the last year of its delivery. Higher education student numbers have remained steady overall. The College is proposing a reorganisation of its structure which will give higher education a more coherent identity. A new senior manager has been appointed with overall responsibility for higher education.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

8 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. The submission was written by a business management student based upon a questionnaire, focus groups and student satisfaction data. The report is structured around key questions relating to each core theme and makes reference to the Developmental engagement submission which was produced by a previous student. The report was conducted as an independent activity, supported by the Higher Education Manager who provided access to College data where required. The report contains a considered, balanced and appropriately evidenced account of student experience in the College.

9 Students met reviewers during the course of the visit. Most students at the meeting confirmed that they had contributed to the written submission. The views that the students expressed confirmed the evidence in the written submission and have informed the review report.

B Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education

Core theme 1: Academic standards

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

10 The College's responsibilities for ensuring the standards of its higher education provision are specified in the agreement with Manchester Metropolitan University. In 2009 an Associate College Agreement was signed, part of which sought to achieve better alignment of procedures and protocols. The relationship with the awarding body is strong, and link tutors support programme teams to assure academic standards. The agreement requires appropriate structures to maintain academic standards to the University's requirements. The self-evaluation claims that standards are assured through compliance with awarding body policies and procedures. Programme teams report directly to the University through annual reviews and agree a quality action plan, which together with external examiner reports ensure that academic standards are adequately maintained at programme level.

11 The self-evaluation claims that there are clear structures for managing higher education. The Deputy Principal holds overall responsibility for higher education. The Higher Education Unit Manager has a coordinating role and acts as the communication link between the College, awarding body and the Cheshire Higher Education Consortium. Heads of School have operational responsibility for the management of delivery, standards and the quality of higher education programmes. Programme area coordinators are responsible for the oversight of programmes in a subject area, with course leaders and members of the teaching teams undertaking operational activities including liaison with the awarding body through link tutors.

12 The College has recently revised its committee structures. The Deputy Principal holds termly Performance Monitoring review meetings for each of the schools with the Quality Manager and programme coordinators in attendance. Although performance aspects of any higher education programme within each school are discussed, there is currently no college-wide committee nor review structure that has specific responsibility for managing academic standards across the higher education provision, prior to reporting to the College Quality Assurance Committee which covers all provision. There is a Higher Education Forum, which involves course leaders, but this is primarily a discussion group. It does not currently have a clear remit for the maintenance of academic standards.

13 Reporting within the College is conducted through a well-constructed review process with three stages, each of which considers different aspects of provision defined in a procedures manual. This is largely based on common approaches towards further and higher education. Each programme produces an annual course review, which is agreed within the department and completes an action plan template. This is incorporated into a subject sector self-assessment report, which informs a College quality improvement plan. The process of annual course review is thorough and several examples were seen to demonstrate the updating at each of the formal review points. The quality action plan produced by the university faculty is now included with the course review document. This follows a recommendation from the Developmental engagement. The quality action plans are overseen by the Higher Education Unit Manager. The current structures do not demonstrate, however, how the College meets its obligations to ensure consistency across the entire higher education portfolio.

14 The College Quality Assurance Committee is chaired by the Principal. There is a focus on performance and continuous improvement; however there is little explicit consideration of higher education. Despite a recommendation from the Developmental engagement, the College does not differentiate approaches towards higher education for reflection in college-wide documents, such as the self-assessment report. It is advisable that the College addresses the management of higher education programmes to provide a more explicit and coherent overview of academic standards and quality assurance.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

15 The awarding body documentation for the approval of programmes, their assessment and quality assurance all ensure appropriate referencing to the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice*. Reviewers confirm, from the self-evaluation, that the Academic Infrastructure has informed the development of new programmes. Staff demonstrated familiarity with the Academic Infrastructure in their meetings with the team. Experience in using the Academic Infrastructure was articulated enthusiastically by the subject team responsible for the recently validated BSc Aircraft Maintenance top-up degree. Such informed development of a programme at this level constitutes good practice in the use of the Academic Infrastructure.

16 Definitive documents are in place for all programmes which express the aims, learning outcomes and assessment approaches. The intended learning outcomes are matched to subject benchmark statements and to the level of study. The work-based learning units adequately fulfil the requirements of the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* and the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* and good practice in this area was noted in the Developmental engagement.

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?

17 Depending on the status of a programme, outlined in paragraph 6, the College may be involved in curriculum development and assessment design. In all cases it is responsible for first-marking and internal verification and the quality assurance of programmes. The Cheshire Higher Education Consortium plays a coordinating role enabling staff from across the network of colleges to share practices, including validation, planning and approval processes. College staff have been closely involved in the development of Foundation Degrees, supported by link tutors appointed by the relevant university faculty. This has involved developing modules and assessments and contributing to validation. There are curriculum groups within the consortium which are effective in providing assessment moderation and discussion across the colleges. Subject staff attend regular meetings which enable the maintenance of requirements for academic standards to be met. This was an area of good practice identified in the Developmental engagement.

18 The College has developed strong relationships with its awarding body at the subject level, with significant benefit for the maintenance of standards. There are differing arrangements for second-marking, moderation and internal verification depending on the status of programmes. Sound approaches are adopted and ensure that the processes are followed. A desirable recommendation from the Developmental engagement to ensure timely feedback to students has been partially addressed. The revised arrangement has not been consistently applied and the review team identified instances where students still experience delays in receiving detailed feedback.

19 External examiners are appointed by the awarding body and their reports, which are received at the programme level, confirm the achievement of academic standards and comment on practices across partner colleges where appropriate. Where necessary, external examiner comments lead to rigorous action. This is evident in the carefully planned response to criticisms in the FD Creative Arts. There is, however, no coordinated collective and comparative consideration of external examiner reports across the higher education provision. Planned changes to the University quality assurance processes will require the College to exercise a higher degree of responsibility for ensuring that standards are met. It is desirable that the College develops more formal processes to undertake a generic review of external examiner reports across higher education programmes.

20 A higher education forum, chaired by the Higher Education Manager, meets termly. This presents the opportunity for discussion and dissemination of good practice among staff involved in higher education but it has no management responsibility or decision-making powers. Many of the actions contained within the Developmental engagement action plan show reporting lines to the forum, which illustrates the need for a more formally constituted decision-making structure for higher education.

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

21 Staff development needs are evaluated during the individual appraisal process and all activities are reported to a Staff Development Committee. The staff development policy for 2010-11 includes clear priorities for professional development and provides a directory of College staff development activities. An annual higher education staff development day involves the College link governor. It has been used to provide a response to a recommendation of the Developmental engagement to review the consistency of assessment practices across the higher education provision. This practice is encouraged, and it desirable that it is continued and extended to help create a more distinctive community of higher education practitioners.

22 Staff development also allows for individual professional development and subject updating for higher education teachers through attendance at external training events. Staff attend training events offered by the University and a number are undertaking higher degrees. Activities relating to the Academic Infrastructure and assessment have recently been provided within the consortium. Staff report that professional reflection and learning takes place through attendance at moderation and programme assessment boards.

23 The Associate College status with the awarding body provides enhanced staff development opportunities. A newly constituted research network supports a developmental approach towards pedagogical activities and a research champion has been identified within the College to lead this development. In engineering there is collaborative research and development taking place with Manchester Metropolitan University. Most full-time staff are appropriately involved in maintaining subject currency and most part-time staff are current practitioners in their field.

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 body.

Core theme 2: Quality of learning opportunities

How are responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities for higher education programmes delegated within the management structure and what reporting arrangements are in place?

24 The general arrangements for the management of the College's higher education are set out in paragraphs 10 to 14. There is a system of course review at the level of individual programmes which pays particular emphasis to the quality of learning opportunities. Some elements of the reviews could usefully be related more clearly to higher education. The review takes account of Manchester Metropolitan University's quality action plan at faculty level. At present there is no system to look strategically at a College level at the outcomes of action plans associated with these two quality processes in a specifically higher education context.

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

25 The course review process has, at each stage, specific topics for evaluation which systematically address the quality of learning opportunities. These processes also require the inclusion of the student voice through perception data and direct input from course groups through student representatives. The course review and teaching observation process, described in paragraphs 28 to 30, ensure that quality issues can be addressed adequately at course level.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

26 College policies for admissions and student information, advice and guidance show an engagement with the *Code of practice*. A clear understanding of the Academic Infrastructure is exemplified by the College's use of the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. Students in work or undertaking a work placement are supported by a College tutor and by a workplace mentor. The workplace mentor generally provides informal formative feedback to students, with some providing more formal formative feedback, when the tutor assesses the work-based assessments. Following the Developmental engagement, communication with mentors has been improved to include mentor presentations and a leaflet to raise awareness of the role. Practice in the early years area is particularly well developed.

27 There are links between programme teams and employers, which provide work-based learning and assessment opportunities. The good practice in sports coaching and fitness and engineering identified in the Developmental engagement has been shared across programme teams. On the part-time Foundation Degree programmes, employer-based learning is integral to assessment, with the employed students using their workplace as the basis for assignments. Live briefs from local industry and those published for national competitions enhance assessment opportunities, particularly for full-time students in the art and design areas.

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

28 The College maintains an approach to teaching and learning which crosses further and higher education. All staff teaching on higher education courses, however, are given a specific teaching induction. They are appropriately qualified and many hold, or are studying

for, master's qualifications. There is a judicious use of part-time staff with current practitioner experience.

29 The College has a clear strategy for the observation of teaching and learning. All staff are observed at least once during an academic year. Following the Developmental engagement, staff teaching on higher education programmes are observed by members of the observation team with higher education experience. Areas for improvement and good practice are identified with specific reference to the level of teaching. This includes the promotion of reflective learning, formative assessment feedback and use of learning technology. Outcomes of teaching observations are included in staff review processes and help to determine staff development priorities.

30 There is also a recently introduced system of peer observation for staff teaching on higher education programmes which those participating find valuable. The College concedes that it has only been partially implemented. The team considers it desirable to expand and consolidate this development. The College is also involved in a new project with other colleges in the region and Manchester Metropolitan University to support the development of pedagogical research within colleges.

31 Information from student perception data at programme and module level feeds back in to the staff review system. It is considered, where necessary, alongside the outcomes of teaching observation. These measures adequately maintain and enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

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

32 There is a well-structured approach to student support which commences with pre-entry guidance. Students stated that the majority had found their course with the assistance of the College's initial guidance systems and all had been interviewed. Students are given the opportunity to attend an induction event at the University. They also receive a general College induction and more detailed subject-specific induction with the course team. These incorporate further guidance on assessment, course requirements and available Learning Resource Centre facilities, including study skills and referencing.

33 Students on higher education programmes are well supported academically and pastorally. There is a systematic approach to supporting assessment and work-based learning through the provision of structured tutorial sessions for both full-time and part-time students, and tutors respond rapidly to informal queries. Students are supported in gaining additional vocational qualifications, for example through volunteering in sports studies. Guidance for progression from Foundation Degrees is available through customer services. Students value the support provision highly. The well-organised model of student support from pre-course guidance, through on-course support to advice on progression is an area of good practice.

34 The College offers structured opportunities for learners to have direct involvement in shaping their own learning experience through student surveys and the inclusion of course representatives at all course team meetings. Students reported that they felt consulted and valued. On the FD in Early Years a video recording of the end of course review is used during the induction programme for new starters.

35 Some students report concerns with regard to the return of annotated scripts in time to support future assessment. This was raised in the Developmental engagement and some progress has been made. It is acknowledged, however, that there continue to be differences between curriculum areas in the processes for providing written feedback. It is therefore

desirable that the College continues to look at ways of achieving greater parity in the timing of feedback.

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

36 The general approach to staff development is outlined in paragraphs 21 to 23. There is a well-established staff development programme within the College and staff have access to staff development at Manchester Metropolitan University. A number of staff are undertaking postgraduate courses and there is support for staff who wish to undertake industrial updating. This is coordinated through the appraisal process, which is in turn informed by teaching observation and feedback from students.

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?

37 The College resource management strategy does not differentiate between further and higher education, but meets needs as they are identified. In the current academic year, capital investment has resulted in the development of a higher education study area within the Learning Resource Centre providing quiet study facilities. The area is also used to deliver small group study skills sessions to higher education learners.

38 The staff of the Learning Resource Centre work closely with programme teams to ensure resources are available to students, although some students report difficulties with access to key texts. Students have some borrowing rights at the University libraries in Crewe and Manchester but limited electronic access to journals. It is desirable that the College discuss with the University ways in which this access can be improved.

39 The Learning Resource Centre staff have produced a number of useful guides which support students in finding appropriate resources. Consideration might usefully be given to producing versions of these that are specific to higher education. The College has also produced a helpful handbook on academic writing for higher education which is valued by staff and students. This handbook and its integrated use across programmes is an example of good practice.

40 Course teams and the Learning Resource Centre use the College's virtual learning environment to support the student learning experience. All course areas have a repository of key documents and resources. However, there are inconsistencies in the way this is presented and in the amount of material provided, with the early years area providing significantly more depth than other areas. There is very limited use of the interactive possibilities of the virtual learning environment to support learning, although the College has appointed a new e-learning manager to help address this. It is desirable to use the virtual learning environment more effectively to address student perceptions of resource shortages. This might be achieved through improved links from the virtual learning environment to appropriate resources, for example electronic books and journals.

41 The College building is of recent construction and provides suitable resource areas. The College has identified an opportunity to create a new Higher Education Centre in adjacent redundant premises, but this is still at the early planning stage. Resources in the teaching areas are shared with further education courses but are up-to-date. Resource management provides continuing capital investment to meet changing demands, including, for example, modern engineering machinery.

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?

42 The College publishes a higher education prospectus for marketing its provision. This is being supplanted by a shorter higher education course guide to include a descriptive paragraph on each course. The guide is supplemented by course information leaflets, available in printed form and from the College website, providing further information to potential learners. A student handbook that provides general information for all College students can be viewed or downloaded from the website. The higher education page has a link to staff profiles, which demonstrate the industrial and academic experience of some of the higher education tutors. Students stated that the College information is helpful when choosing a course. Customer services provide initial information and also refer enquirers to the Student Guidance Manager or relevant programme leader for further information.

43 The College publishes information for enrolled students in hard copy and online. The information includes programme specifications (definitive documents), handbooks, and supplementary guidance. Detailed course handbooks provide students with essential information about their course. This includes unit content, assessment strategies and schedules, reading lists, submission policies, codes of conduct, student absence policies and other key information. Since the Developmental engagement, course teams have reviewed handbook information to ensure parity of content rather than absolute consistency across programmes. Definitive documents are made available to students through the virtual learning environment. Students appreciate the virtual learning environment which contains a number of learning resources accessible from the College and externally, though some have experienced difficulties accessing it. The breadth of content varies between programmes.

44 Customer Services provide public information in Braille, audio compact disc and large print versions on request. Once a student is assessed as needing special format documents, such as coloured background for dyslexia, material is produced in an appropriate form throughout the course.

45 The College publishes a number of support materials. A mentoring leaflet is being produced for employers that gives an overview of Foundation Degrees and introduces the role and purpose of a mentor while students are in the workplace. An accessible guidance booklet on good academic practice and writing skills, identified as good practice in the Developmental engagement, is now available electronically to all higher education students.

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?

46 The College publishes course information and programme handbooks with shared branding. The awarding body publishes detailed guidelines on the production of marketing material which provide for consistency and accuracy in published information. The College's

adherence to these requirements is implemented through the College Quality Procedures Manual. This details the process for producing public information to ensure that it is accurate. All College publicity material, including advertising, is produced centrally through the Marketing and External Relations Unit, and managed by the Senior Marketing Officer.

47 Programme teams use the definitive document and additional College material as appropriate to complete the templates provided by the Marketing and External Relations Unit. Heads of school are responsible for originating and ensuring the accuracy of programme marketing materials. This information is checked for consistency with other colleges and the awarding body through link tutors. Other course information is compiled by the College's Management Information Unit and managed by the Deputy Management Information Manager. The Senior Management Team maintains a strategic overview of the process.

48 The College has built on the strengths and recommendations identified in the Developmental engagement in respect of marketing and on-course information for higher education programmes. The virtual learning environment is becoming a definitive source of course information and support materials. The team considers that these materials are both accurate and complete.

49 The website course leaflet pages contain redundant and potentially misleading sections on fees and enrolment methods. This is in part because the structure does not differentiate between further and higher education provision. The leaflet on mentoring for employers also contains a number of proofing errors. It is advisable that such errors are identified and corrected before publication. In future the Senior Marketing Officer will manage the College's websites and will proofread all information, including updates, prior to being incorporated.

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

50 A Developmental engagement in assessment was held at the College in February 2010. The lines of enquiry were:

Line of enquiry 1: How effective are the quality assurance policies and processes in ensuring consistency in academic standards across all programmes?

Line of enquiry 2: To what extent are students supported to enable them to generate work-related evidence for assessment?

Line of enquiry 3: To what extent is public information on assessment complete, accurate and meeting the needs of learners, staff and other stakeholders?

Through these open lines of enquiry the College invited a wide-ranging review of its management of assessment and related issues in order to develop its management of higher education and prepare itself more fully for the Summative review.

51 A range of good practice in the College's approach to assessment is noted in the report. This includes a framework of inter-college support for standards through the consortium. Students are provided with particularly helpful written feedback, and in some programmes support for good academic practice. The report confirms that work-based learning is well supported and employers are closely involved in mentoring and supporting assessment activities in a number of programmes. Information about assessment is well-managed and accessible.

52 The report includes a number of recommendations. The College is encouraged to ensure greater parity between programmes in the information they provide and also make available more information in electronic form. It encourages the College to review the consistency of its assessment practices, to spread more effective practices and ensure that all students receive feedback on their assignments in time to help them improve. A significant recommendation is to consolidate the integration of College and awarding body quality assurance systems. It is reported that this could be achieved by incorporating the annual reporting requirements of the awarding body fully within the College annual course review for higher education programmes and by providing a specific focus on higher education in relevant college-wide documents.

D Foundation Degrees

53 The College currently offers 10 Foundation Degrees, of which three are in specialised engineering areas. Others cover a range of vocations including art and design, business, early years, learner support, public services and sports coaching. The portfolio is well established and enjoys stable recruitment. One programme in the art and design area is currently being phased out. Only a newly-introduced BSc top-up in engineering and teaching qualifications are outside the Foundation Degree portfolio.

54 The team is able to confirm the strengths noted during the Developmental engagement, particularly the high level of conformity with the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* in the design and delivery of the programmes. In particular, strengths in the approach to work-based learning are again evident. The College has not made as much progress as anticipated in sharing the best practice observed in the Developmental engagement across the provision, but overall it continues to provide strong vocationally relevant programmes sustained by committed staff teams. Greater managerial oversight is judged to be advisable to ensure the continued success of the programmes in an uncertain and challenging future.

55 All the conclusions detailed below apply to the Foundation Degrees.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

56 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Macclesfield 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 body. This was based upon discussion with staff and students and scrutiny of evidence provided by the College and its awarding body Manchester Metropolitan University.

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

- the Academic Infrastructure has been used effectively to inform the development of a top-up degree within the College (paragraph 15)

- there is a well-organised model of student support from pre-course guidance, through on-course support to advice on progression (paragraph 33)
- a helpful handbook on academic writing for higher education is used in an integrated way across programmes (paragraphs 39 and 45).

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

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

- address the management of higher education programmes to provide a more explicit and coherent overview of academic standards and quality assurance (paragraphs 14, 20 and 24)
- ensure that inconsistencies in the website and proofing errors in printed materials are identified and corrected before publication (paragraph 49).

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

- continue to look at ways of achieving greater parity in the timing of feedback (paragraphs 18 and 35)
- develop more formal processes to undertake a generic review of external examiner reports across higher education programmes (paragraph 19)
- continue and extend staff development activities to create a more distinctive community of higher education practitioners (paragraph 21)
- expand and consolidate the development of peer observation of teaching (paragraph 30)
- discuss with the University ways in which student access to electronic journals can be improved (paragraph 38)
- use the virtual learning environment more effectively to address student perceptions of resource shortages (paragraphs 40 and 43).

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

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 quality of learning opportunities to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

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, 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.

Macclesfield College action plan relating to the Summative review: April 2011

Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
In the course of the Summative review the team identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
• the Academic Infrastructure has been used effectively to inform the development of a top-up degree within the College (paragraph 15)	Disseminate good practice identified in relation to the BSc top-up across all curriculum areas involved in the development of new programmes including Enhancing quality and assessment for learning revalidations	July 2012	Head of Engineering, construction and technology Higher Education Unit (HEU) Manager	Academic infrastructure fully embedded into the validation of all higher education provision	Deputy Principal	Review of validation documentation
• there is a well-organised model of student support from pre-course guidance, through on-course support to advice on progression (paragraph 33)	Disseminate identified good practice across all programmes	July 2012	HEU Manager Student Guidance Manager	Positive student feedback on support and guidance	Deputy Principal	Student Survey Results NSS Survey Course Reviews
• a helpful handbook on academic writing	Disseminate good practice in the use of the Academic Writing	July 2011	Course leaders	Student assessment practice is	HEU Manager	Student feedback Course Reviews

for higher education is used in an integrated way across programmes (paragraphs 39, 45).	Handbook Ensure Academic Writing Handbook is made available to all students during the induction process and integrated into study skills delivery	October 2011		improved through the support of the Academic Writing Handbook		
Advisable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team considers that it is **advisable** for the College to:						
• address the management of higher education programmes to provide a more explicit and coherent overview of academic standards and quality assurance (paragraphs 14, 20, 24)	Formal reporting of higher education performance to be included in the College Self Assessment report. Formal reporting of higher education performance to the Corporation Teaching and Learning Standards Committee	September 2011 January 2012	Quality Assurance Manager/HEU Manager Deputy Principal	Monitoring of strengths and areas for improvement in higher education provision through the annual self-assessment and action-planning processes	Deputy Principal Corporation Teaching and Learning Standards Committee	Higher education performance identified in the College Self Assessment Report Report
• ensure that inconsistencies in the website and proofing errors in	Check public information in line with College procedures.	July 2012	Heads of School Senior Marketing Officer	No inconsistencies or proofing errors identified	HE Forum	Sampling of information

printed materials are identified and corrected before publication (paragraph 49).						
Desirable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team considers that it is **desirable** for the College to:						
- continue to look at ways of achieving greater parity in the timing of feedback (paragraphs 18, 35)	Review College feedback schedule to bring in line with Manchester Metropolitan University Ensure all assessments are returned to students within the agreed timeframe. Feedback to be monitored through the internal verification process	September 2011 June 2012 June 2012	HEU Manager Course leaders	Feedback schedule in line with Manchester Metropolitan University policy Students receive feedback within the agreed timeframe Internal verification reports indicate compliance	Deputy Principal HEU Manager QA Manager	Student feedback Sampling by course leaders Internal verification documentation
- develop more formal processes to undertake a generic review of external examiner reports across higher education	HEU report on external examiner reports to be submitted to the College QA Committee January 2012	January 2012	HEU Manager	College Management team aware of the key issues relating to higher education provision identified by external	QA Committee	HEU Performance Monitoring

programmes (paragraph 19)				examiners		
• continue and extend staff development activities to create a more distinctive community of higher education practitioners (paragraph 21)	Provide opportunities for, and disseminate the outcomes of, higher education in further education specific training sessions through Staff Development Week, Principals' Training Hours and HEI Conferences	July 2012	HEU Manager	Staff teaching on higher education programmes have the skills, knowledge and expertise to deliver a distinctive higher education in further education experience	Report to Staff Development Committee	HEU Performance Monitoring meeting
• expand and consolidate the development of peer observation of teaching (paragraph 30)	Ensure all staff teaching on higher education programmes undertake at least two peer observations per academic year	April 2012	QA Manager	Staff teaching on higher education programmes have an opportunity to observe and share ideas about learning, teaching and assessment with peers	QA Committee	Self Assessment Report
• discuss with the University ways in which student access to electronic journals can be improved (paragraph 38)	Work with Consortium Library and Information Literacy group to identify opportunities to further access	April 2012	Consortium HE Development Manager	Report to Management and Resources Committee	Deputy Principal	Course reviews

- use the virtual learning environment more effectively to address student perceptions of resource shortages (paragraphs 40, 43).	Further develop course Virtual Learning Environment resources to support student learning	June 2012	Course leaders	Student feedback	HE Forum	Student questionnaires Self Assessment Reports
	Share good practice in the use of the virtual learning environment	July 2012	E Learning and IT Manager	Sharing good practice through staff development events	Staff Development Committee	Staff development records

RG 743 07/11

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
Email comms@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk