



Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

Sussex Downs 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 (FHEQ)*, which includes descriptions of different higher education qualifications
- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*
- 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 Sussex Downs College carried out in February 2012

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:

- student representatives are actively involved in quality processes by their attendance at course boards and their scrutiny of external examiner reports on behalf of their peers
- students are well supported, both formally and informally, throughout their studies at the College
- the successful introduction of the peer assisted study support (PASS) arrangement in one programme has benefited both new students and student mentors
- the College's use of links with industry professionals has enhanced teaching and learning on Foundation Degrees.

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

- take steps to align its procedures more closely to the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*
- further embed knowledge and use of the Academic Infrastructure
- undertake a detailed review of the systems and processes relating to work-based and placement learning in order to ensure consistency in academic standards
- work towards establishing a standardised use of the virtual learning environment so that it holds consistent course information across the provision and offers a genuinely interactive learning resource
- ensure that standard format handbooks and calendars of assessment are freely available to all students
- give closer attention to the checking of public information so as to ensure its accuracy before publication
- commission standard templates so as to ensure coverage of all key issues in documentation relating to work-based and placement learning.

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

- take steps to ensure consistency in the planning and delivery of assessments
- develop and publish a higher education teaching and learning strategy, to further enhance the higher education ethos within the student body and ensure the

differentiation of higher education teaching and delivery from that of further education

- adopt a consistent cross-college approach to presentation, font, titling, dating, and version control of all public documents.

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 Sussex Downs College (the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the College discharges its responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes which the College delivers on behalf of the University of Brighton. The review was carried out by Mr Jonathan Baker, Ms Helen Corkill, Mr Seth Crofts (reviewers) and Mr Ian Fleming (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 its awarding body, and meetings with staff, students, employers, and the partner institution. 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*, subject and award benchmark statements, the FHEQ, and programme specifications.

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

4 Sussex Downs College is a large general further education college located on two main campuses in Eastbourne and Lewes and with subsidiary centres in Newhaven, Uckfield and Hailsham. Higher education provision consists of eight Foundation Degrees and two top-up degrees plus two education certificate programmes awarded by the University of Brighton. The College is a member of the 157 Group, is a Beacon College and has Matrix and Investors in People accreditation. It has also achieved Training Quality Status (TQS). In 2010-11 the College had 393 full-time equivalent (FTE) higher education students.

Higher education provision at the college

5 The HEFCE-funded higher education provision currently delivered by the College comprises the following programmes, validated by the University of Brighton, with FTE numbers in brackets:

- Foundation Degree Complementary Healthcare (23)
- Foundation Degree Contemporary Dance (15)
- Foundation Degree Public and Emergency Service Management (23)
- Foundation Degree Digital Media Design (40)
- Foundation Degree Music Production and Creative Recording (55)
- Foundation Degree Sport Coaching and Development (85)
- Foundation Degree Computer Games Development (13)
- Foundation Degree Person-Centred Counselling (41)
- BA (Hons) Digital Media Design (11)
- BA (Hons) Music Production and Creative Recording (12)

- Certificate in Education (31)
- Postgraduate Certificate in Education (22)

Partnership agreements with the awarding body

6 The College works closely with its sole partner, the University of Brighton, with which there is a strong sense of partnership. A formal partnership agreement defines the University's relationships with the College and sets out expectations and objectives.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

7 The College had until recently an ambitious strategy for the expansion of higher education, with a vision for the delivery of a broader portfolio of Foundation Degrees and a target number of 500 higher education students. Changes in higher education funding have now made this strategy impracticable and the intention is to focus on key strategic objectives, which include quality enhancement, widening participation from non-traditional applicants, developing employer links, and encouraging research and scholarly activity.

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 team. Following a focus group meeting, 17 course representatives contributed to the written submission. This provided useful evidence for the team. In addition, the team met two groups of students during the review; one group from Eastbourne and one from Lewes.

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?

9 The College has a record of delivering effective higher education which focuses upon the needs of local students. This provision has been enhanced through links with a range of professionals who are functioning at a high level in the fields where the students aspire to obtain graduate employment. A strategic plan for the progressive development of higher education has been set out and has guided the expansion of higher education activities over the last five years. However, due to major changes in funding arrangements, the College has been forced to respond rapidly to an altered external environment and has taken steps to ensure that strategic and operational issues are effectively managed.

10 The College benefits from a long established and productive partnership with the University of Brighton. There is effective collaboration between the College and the University to ensure programme delivery and the management of academic standards. Link tutors appointed by the University play a significant role in ensuring parity of academic standards between provision at the College and that delivered by the University and other collaborative partners.

11 The strategic leadership team includes a deputy principal with specific accountability for higher education provision. A higher education learner development manager focuses upon strategic issues, operational delivery and enhancing higher education student experience. The College operates a system of 'learning brands' and higher education is delivered across two of these brands. Responsibilities for higher education delivery are allocated to several senior managers and curriculum heads across the College.

12 Although the management of higher education provision is directed by a complex matrix structure, staff at all levels are fully conversant with their responsibilities for managing academic standards and all aspects of the student experience. Programme level staff are aware of the key responsibilities of individual managers involved in higher education provision and the current management arrangements are effective. There are clear lines of accountability between staff involved in operational delivery and the College's senior leadership team, which ensure an appropriate higher education experience for students.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

13 Elements of the Academic Infrastructure have been used to inform the design of programmes. There is a good understanding of the role of subject benchmark statements used as reference points during curriculum development. Staff demonstrated awareness of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*, which has been used to refine assessment processes and student feedback.

14 The College has developed an assessment policy to support higher education provision which takes account of the provisions of the Academic Infrastructure. However, there is a limited understanding of how the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* might inform policy and practice on work-based learning. This forms an important reference point for the Foundation Degree provision, which has significant placement learning. Foundation Degree programmes are broadly aligned to the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, although there is variability across the provision about the provision of work-based and placement learning. The team considers it advisable that the College should take steps to align its procedures more closely to precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*.

15 The College has undertaken staff development activities to raise awareness of the Academic Infrastructure and recent events have provided briefing upon the development of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Some awareness of the Academic Infrastructure among staff was evident in terms of assessment practice and standards, but the breadth of the provisions and expectations, particularly those set out in the *Code of practice*, are not widely understood. The team consider it advisable for the College to take steps further to embed knowledge and use of Academic Infrastructure.

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 its validating partner and awarding body?

16 The College has a comprehensive set of monitoring processes which feed into the academic partnership committee hosted by the University. This committee ensures that higher education provision delivered by collaborative partners is carefully scrutinised. The College liaises effectively with the University in order to ensure consistency of academic standards. The link tutor role operated by the University provides a mechanism for liaison

between College and University, facilitates debate about academic standards, and ensures review and discussion about external examiner feedback and other issues linked to assessment.

17 The College operates comprehensive review processes that ensure effective monitoring of its provision. Academic health reports and institutional level reports are produced annually. These provide detailed information about student performance and also consider student feedback. The academic health reports include recommendations about programme enhancement. These reports are considered by the College quality forum and are reviewed by senior managers. A comprehensive periodic review process is operated jointly by the College and the University hosting school. This is a detailed and robust process which takes account of student feedback and demonstrates effective collaboration between the University and the College.

18 There are effective systems for course management, linked to a set of deliberative forums within the College. These place emphasis on the monitoring and review of student performance and wider issues in relation to academic standards. Course board meetings are attended by student representatives. The higher education forums also consider academic standards and programme performance across the provision. The outcomes of these deliberative structures are ultimately considered by the College quality forum and adult learning board.

19 External examiners have established strong links with the provision and are highly visible to students. In some cases external examiners visit during practical assessments and performances and observe students being assessed in core practice skills. External examiners' reports are highly complimentary about standards, student performance and the overall learning experience. External examiner feedback is systematically recorded, is central to the annual monitoring process and is carefully managed by operational managers and deliberative forums with responsibility for maintaining the academic standards of the provision. Student representatives are engaged in considering this feedback and ultimately this is used to inform periodic reviews of the various programmes.

20 There are concerns about student retention in some areas of the provision, but these have been carefully considered by the College and significant attempts have been made to address the challenges. A specific effort has been made to provide higher education-specific facilities, and to improve the higher education environment of the College through the development of focused approaches to teaching and learning. Some of these strategies are beginning to impact favourably upon student retention.

21 Within the provision there are programmes with significant practice-based learning, which attracts academic credit. Preparation for these placement experiences is variable and the preparation of mentors, supervisors and assessors is inconsistent across the provision. In addition, handbooks developed to support and guide work-based and placement learning are of variable quality and not always fit for purpose. The team considers it advisable that the College undertakes a detailed review of the systems and processes relating to work-based and placement learning in order to ensure consistency in academic standards.

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

22 The College has a staff development strategy which seeks to enhance the skills of higher education staff. A systematic approach is taken to the allocation of time and funding to support staff development. When bidding for staff development, a relationship between the proposed activity and the enhancement of the student learning experience has to be

demonstrated. In-house workshops have been provided to address issues relating to the maintenance of academic standards within the provision.

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

23 The arrangements outlined in paragraphs 9 to 12 are also relevant in supporting the College's management of the quality of learning opportunities.

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

24 The arrangements outlined in paragraphs 16 to 21 are also relevant in this context.

25 The College uses the University's assessment policy and processes together with its own assessment policy which is aligned to that of the University. An assessment coordinator has recently been appointed to oversee assessment practice and standardise paperwork, including the sampling of assessed work across Foundation Degrees. While new standardised paperwork has been introduced for assignment briefs, this has not yet been adopted by all programmes. External examiner reports confirm that academic standards are appropriate for programme levels and that student work is of a comparable standard to that in other institutions delivering similar provision.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

26 The arrangements noted in paragraphs 13 to 15 are also relevant to the management of the quality of learning opportunities. Some engagement with the Academic Infrastructure is evident in the approval process for new programmes. Programme specifications and module descriptors are included in student handbooks.

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

27 Student views are collected through a number of methods. Each programme has its own student representative, who attends course board meetings, together with student forums. Students acknowledge that the course board system is working well and that their feedback is taken into account. Students are fully aware of programme specifications and learning outcomes. Student representatives are able to scrutinise external examiner reports, on behalf of their peers, and feel that they have a strong voice in relation to academic standards as a result of their engagement in course boards. The team considers that this active involvement of students in quality processes represents good practice.

28 The College delivers consistent high quality teaching and learning from talented and dedicated staff. This is confirmed by students, who are appreciative of the standard of

teaching they receive. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored through a clear observation policy that requires annual teaching observations, together with a peer review process. This has been recently introduced and agreed with partner colleges to ensure sharing of good practice.

29 The peer observation scheme is designed to view the effectiveness of lesson planning, the overall effectiveness of teaching and learning, and the maintenance of a learning environment and use of appropriate technologies. The scheme is specific to higher education and has been welcomed by staff, who consider it developmental. 'Learning walks' are also undertaken by heads of curriculum as an informal 'drop in' on teaching. No grading is involved, but feedback is given to those observed. The College Centre for Work and Learning has also developed a module that explores the difference between further and higher education teaching and delivery. The impact of teaching and learning is assessed through student feedback, which includes module surveys and student discussion.

30 In most programmes, assessment is well planned and effective, but in the case of Foundation Degree Counselling, students indicated problems with assessment timing and changes in release and completion dates. Information on assessment timing varies across programmes. The team consider it desirable that the College should take steps to ensure consistency of planning and delivery of assessments across the provision.

31 Whereas there is now a policy setting out the rationale for assessment across College provision, there is no clearly articulated strategy for teaching and learning in higher education. The team consider it desirable for the College to develop and publish a strategy, which would further enhance the higher education ethos within the student body, and ensure the differentiation of higher education teaching and delivery from that of further education.

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

32 Students feel very well supported by the College and comment favourably about access to support mechanisms and teaching staff. The College has appointed a higher education welfare officer to work closely with staff and students, and deal with issues such as student disabilities and financial problems. There is also support available from the University in the form of study skills sessions and dyslexia screening. The College website provides information on student welfare, including counselling, personal tutor support, money matters, equality and diversity, and harassment. The College and the University provide access to accommodation, including halls of residence and University-managed housing. Students have access to on site library facilities at both Eastbourne and Lewes and can also take advantage of the University's library and computing facilities. The level of formal and informal support provided for students is considered by the team to represent good practice.

33 The use made of the virtual learning environment as a means of enhancing learning opportunities is inconsistent. Some programmes are supplied with student, course and learning information, but this is variable. Students on the Foundation Degree Sports Coaching and Development and the Foundation Degree Public and Emergency Services report good use of the virtual learning environment but other programmes do not use it at all. There is little evidence that the virtual learning environment is used as an interactive teaching and learning resource rather than a repository for information. The team considers it advisable that the College should work towards establishing a standardised use of the virtual learning environment so that it holds consistent course information across the provision and offers a genuinely interactive learning resource.

34 Assessments are linked to learning outcomes, which are clearly stated, and feedback is both informative and supportive, with guidance on how to improve performance. A self-assessment form allows students to state the main areas of the assessment upon which they would like feedback. Students identified a variety of formal and informal approaches to assessment and informal verbal feedback is welcomed. Tutorial support for students is provided individually and in groups, with at least one individual tutorial per term, and group sessions are held weekly.

35 The College monitors student retention and achievement on an annual basis. Three Foundation Degrees (Computer Games Development, Complementary Healthcare and Sports Coaching and Development) have reported below average retention figures. Measures to counter this include the creation of a higher education welfare officer role, a peer mentoring system for tutors, and more opportunities for student feedback. Student retention figures are now improving. The College organises an internal student survey for all first-year students, supplementing the National Student Survey for final year students. In addition to this, a new campus representative position has recently been appointed, together with a student common room committee. Students appreciate the new higher education common rooms and these are in active use. On the Foundation Degree Complementary Healthcare programme, the College has introduced peer assisted study support. This arrangement uses second-year students to mentor and support new students, with training provided by the University. The system is appreciated by the first-year students who have found it supportive and helpful. The team consider this to be an area of good practice and would encourage the College to promote this to other programmes.

36 There are strong links with industry professionals, which enhance programmes and the student learning experience. The Foundation Degree Public and Emergency Services Management offers students an opportunity for contacts within the police and ambulance services. The Foundation Degree Music Production and Creative Recording makes good use of contact with a wide range of industry professionals who come in to the College to work on specific activities, and students are sometimes offered the opportunity to gain further experience by working for these contacts on specific extra-curricular activities outside the College. Digital Media Design programmes are enhanced by close links with well known industry professionals who come in to the College to lecture on specific topics, and also by utilising media links generated by professional activities in Brighton. The Foundation Degree Contemporary Dance has strong links with professional dance companies, which have been noted as making a strong contribution to learning and teaching. The team considers that the use made by the College of the links with industry professionals to enhance the provision of Foundation Degrees represents good practice.

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

37 Staff participate in a range of development activities including research and scholarly activity. Staff development days are used to enhance teaching and learning practice and develop other skills. There is a College process of bidding for development opportunities on an annual basis. Bids are reviewed by senior management and emphasis is placed on the impact of training and research on the student experience. The University remits course fees for staff teaching on their degree level programmes to assist in development. There is also a University mentoring process and mentoring is available from experienced higher education staff from another College. Students feel their lecturers are up to date and have good industrial contacts that inform their teaching. There is commendable support for scholarly activity. A range of activities are taking place and these are formally logged so that their impact can be evaluated.

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

38 Students have access to a variety of learning resources, both in hard copy and online, at the College and the University. However, students state that access to the University library is restricted by car parking problems, while Lewes students also report problems in accessing University loan texts. The recent National Student Survey results suggested a need to improve learning resources in some Foundation Degrees. The College's internal survey listed improvement requests by students, including more computer availability, a better common room, improved resources at the learning resource centre, and better integration with the University. The College has now provided higher education common rooms on the Eastbourne and Lewes campuses; these are well used and appreciated by students. The learning resource centre at Eastbourne has set out a silent working zone primarily for higher education students and has made efforts to ensure that there are sufficient copies of key texts related to studies in response to student survey results and feedback.

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 body 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?

39 The College and the University are jointly responsible for recruiting students. The University produces guidelines for marketing and publicity functions for its partner colleges. The College provides a higher education prospectus, an international prospectus, and a frequently asked questions leaflet for prospective applicants. These are produced in hard copy and all are also available through the College website.

40 The College website has a section entitled University. In addition to links to electronic versions of the publications listed in paragraph 39, there are also links to general information for applicants to higher education courses. Information on course fees for prospective higher education applicants is unclear and information on course arrangements and fees for part-time students is unavailable. At the time of the visit, the 'How to apply' function on the website was not operational. Students and staff confirm that the main sources of information pre-entry are the UCAS and University websites, and that the higher education section of the College website is little used.

41 The College produces a range of information for students, including complaints and appeals procedures. The student voice is promoted through the publication of survey results to staff, who then disseminate results to students. Some useful individual information sheets on support for new higher education students, tailored to individual campuses, are also produced.

42 The University publishes a student handbook, both in hard copy and electronically on the University virtual learning environment. The University is responsible for programme and module specifications, details of validation and accreditation processes, and arrangements for assessments and external examinations. Students in year one have been

provided with a new three-part student handbook, produced to a consistent template and made available both in hard copy and on the virtual learning environment. Electronic provision of the handbooks is not consistent across all higher education programmes. Students in year two or above have been provided with separate student and course handbooks. Some confusion of terminology about the handbooks and inconsistency over provision of assessment calendars was evident, both in discussion with students and staff, and in written format. Foundation Degree Complementary Healthcare has produced a detailed module guide, but this is not consistent practice across the provision. The team considers it advisable that standard format handbooks and calendars of assessment should be made freely available to all students.

43 The use of the virtual learning environment, as a repository of public information for students, is inconsistent. While some programmes are systematically provided with student, course and additional study information, this varies between programmes. Students on the Foundation Degree Sports Coaching and Development report good use of information on the virtual learning environment, but others do not use it at all. In addition there is evidence of additional web and social networking sites being used by students as a substitute for or in addition to the virtual learning environment. A College information technology strategy group is currently reviewing the coherency of virtual activity.

44 The College maintains a growing range of official pages on a social networking site, including a higher education site page which is used as an information tool by the higher education administrator. The College's pages also cover marketing and recruitment functions, student support, and information for higher education students from the College and the University. The Digital Media programmes make separate and different uses of social networking for mentoring, learning and communication activities.

What arrangements does the College have in place to assure the accuracy and completeness of information the College has responsibility for publishing? How does the College know that these arrangements are effective?

45 The College has policies for the production and sign-off of printed marketing materials. A new higher education prospectus was produced in 2011. The contents were scrutinised by course leaders, the College leadership team, the marketing working group, and representatives from the University including its marketing team. The document was signed off by the member of the senior management team responsible for higher education.

46 In its self-evaluation, the College reported a need to establish clearer procedures to ensure the continued accuracy of published information. The team noted some significant inaccuracies, both in the higher education prospectus and the frequently asked questions leaflet. A lack of information and guidance for part-time higher education applicants was also noted. Students expressed concern about the accuracy of information provided on delivery, location and opportunities for work placements. Students on Foundation Degree Contemporary Dance have reservations about the accuracy of information on career opportunities and the location of appropriate progression, which is not provided by the University. The College is responsible for public information published on its website, which is checked twice yearly, with the higher education administrator and marketing team taking a leading role. The higher education section is given a total overview every two years. The team considers it advisable for the College to give closer attention to the checking of public information so as to ensure its accuracy before publication.

47 The College migrated to the University virtual learning environment in January 2012 to allow for enhanced use of this medium, both as an information repository and to support teaching and learning activities. Teaching and learning materials on the virtual learning

environment are the responsibility of the course leaders and are sampled for accuracy by the higher education learner development manager. The team noted significant inconsistency of practice in relation to the posting of materials and the use of the virtual learning environment.

48 The College has developed a clear policy for the personal use of social networking platforms and third party websites. Digital Media programmes utilise external websites and other software platforms, rather than the virtual learning environment. Foundation Degree and BA Music Production and Creative Recording use a social networking site as an information resource for present and former students. Foundation Degree Public and Emergency Services Management use a social networking site to run a mentoring activity. Music students use Facebook as a communications and educational tool and lecturers use it for posting interesting articles/news and also potential employment opportunities.

49 Most programmes include periods of workplace-related activity. There are inconsistencies in the approach to providing information and materials to support this. Not all programmes provide information on work-based and placement learning for students or allied information sources for other interested parties, such as mentors, employers or workplace supervisors. There is a lack of consistency in provision of templates to cover areas such as workplace risk assessment, service level agreements and learning agreements, as set out in the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. The team considers it advisable for the College to commission standard templates to ensure coverage of all key issues in this area.

50 The College does not produce standardised templates, which programme teams could customise, for the management, delivery and assessment of work-based and placement learning, in alignment with the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. The team considers that a consistent cross-college approach to presentation, font, titling, dating, and version control of all public documents would be desirable.

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

51 The Developmental engagement in assessment at the College took place in February 2011. The review team included two institutional nominees. The lines of enquiry agreed with the College were as follows.

Line of enquiry 1: How effectively does the College manage the expectations for assessment specified by its awarding partner in order to maintain academic standards?

Line of enquiry 2: In what ways does feedback to students support their learning and their achievement of learning outcomes?

Line of enquiry 3: How does the College's published information inform students, the awarding partner and course teams about assessment and contribute to consistency of higher education provision?

52 The Developmental engagement team identified two areas of good practice. College support for scholarly activity is widespread and there is a wide variety of applications of formative feedback.

53 The Developmental engagement team considered that it would be advisable for the College to raise awareness of the Academic Infrastructure and to embed its expectations within provision; to give more attention to work-focused learning for Foundation Degree students; to ensure that feedback is always given against learning outcomes; and to develop further the use of technology-enhanced learning.

54 The Developmental engagement team suggested that the College might consider a college-wide approach to academic misconduct; might give thought to the enhancement of facilities for higher education students; could develop more consistent cross-college arrangements for the submission of assessed work; should ensure that all students are made aware of the role and significance of the external examiner; and might consider a more coherent cross-college approach to generic and programme induction.

D Foundation Degrees

55 The College offers eight Foundation Degrees, all validated by the University of Brighton. In 2010-11, five of the Foundation Degrees were reviewed successfully, subject only to minor changes. A further three programmes will be reviewed during 2011-12. The eight Foundation Degree subject areas all form part of vocational pathways which enable progression from further to higher education within the College. The College intends to maintain priority full-time provision in existing subject areas, and additional part-time awards will be developed to meet the needs of students and local employers where they can be funded.

56 The College has been working with the Sussex Learning Network's Centre for Work and Learning, which supports partner institutions to build capacity to deliver employer- responsive higher education. This has facilitated research with employers to gauge the need for skills development focused on current Foundation Degree provision. As a result, the College is expanding its provision of flexible, short courses and professional development. Of seven modules running currently, those in Complementary Healthcare and Sports Development are linked to Foundation Degree provision.

57 The Developmental engagement report recommended that attention be paid to work-focused learning opportunities for Foundation Degree students. This was also indicated in the University reviews of provision and in external examiner reports. The team identified variable approaches to links with the workplace and employers across the provision. However, there is evidence of strong links with industry professionals which enhances programmes and the learning experience of students. The Foundation Degree provision is integrated with the other higher education programmes by means of common quality assurance processes, and all areas of good practice and recommendations apply to Foundation Degrees.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

58 The 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 body. This was based upon discussion with staff and students and scrutiny of evidence provided by the College and its awarding body, the University of Brighton.

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

- student representatives are actively involved in quality processes by their attendance at course boards and their scrutiny of external examiner reports on behalf of their peers (paragraph 27)
- students are well supported, both formally and informally, throughout their studies at the College (paragraph 32)
- the successful introduction of the peer assisted study support (PASS) arrangement in one programme has benefited both new students and student mentors (paragraph 35)
- the College's use of links with industry professionals has enhanced teaching and learning on Foundation Degrees (paragraph 36).

60 The team also makes some recommendations for consideration by the College and its awarding body.

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

- take steps to align its procedures more closely to the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* (paragraph 14)
- further embed knowledge and use of the Academic Infrastructure (paragraph 15)
- undertake a detailed review of the systems and processes relating to work-based and placement learning in order to ensure consistency in academic standards (paragraph 21)
- work towards establishing a standardised use of the virtual learning environment so that it holds consistent course information across the provision and offers a genuinely interactive learning resource (paragraph 33)
- ensure that standard format handbooks and calendars of assessment are freely available to all students (paragraph 42)
- give closer attention to the checking of public information so as to ensure its accuracy before publication (paragraph 46)
- commission standard templates so as to ensure coverage of all key issues in documentation relating to work-based and placement learning (paragraph 49).

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

- take steps to ensure consistency in the planning and delivery of assessments (paragraph 30)
- develop and publish a teaching and learning strategy, to further enhance the higher education ethos within the student body and ensure the differentiation of higher education teaching and delivery from that of further education (paragraph 31)
- adopt a consistent cross-college approach to presentation, font, titling, dating and version control of all public documents (paragraph 50).

63 Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, 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.

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

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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.

65 Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, 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.

Sussex Downs College action plan relating to the Summative review: February 2012						
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"> student representatives are actively involved in quality processes by their attendance at course boards and their scrutiny of external examiner reports on behalf of their peers (paragraph 27) 	Ensure Course Reps are continued to be elected for each foundation degree and that they receive training from the Students' Union on their expected duties	November 2012	Higher education course leaders and course co-ordinators University of Brighton Students' Union	Student attendance at Course Boards and training events	Higher Education Learner Development Manager	Course Board minutes Student focus groups National Student Survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> students are well supported, both formally and informally, throughout their studies at the College (paragraph 32) 	Maintain and build upon the positive work achieved by both teaching and support staff through continual improvement of resources and training	December 2012	College Heads and Higher Education Welfare Officer	Internal student satisfaction surveys, focus groups and retention statistics	Head of Park College	External Examiner reports National Student Survey Student focus groups

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the successful introduction of the peer assisted study support (PASS) arrangement in one programme has benefited both new students and student mentors (paragraph 35) 	Continue PASS in Complementary Healthcare and also introduce to Sports Coaching & Development	November 2012	Course leaders in both areas University of Brighton mentor team	Successful recruitment and training of new PASS mentors in both courses	Higher Education Welfare Officer	Attendance at PASS sessions Student questionnaires
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College's use of links with industry professionals has enhanced teaching and learning on Foundation Degrees (paragraph 36). 	Review links with industry professionals and develop alumni links Share good practice amongst teams Programmes of study to include links to learning outcomes where applicable	January 2013	Higher Education Learner Development Manager	Increase the number of students participating in industry linked projects/placements	Head of Park College	National Student Survey Increased participation
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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> take steps to align its procedures more closely to the 	Ensure procedures adopted are mapped against the <i>Code of practice, Section 9:</i>	September 2012	Higher Education Learner Development Manager	Staff Development-evaluations	Head of Park College	Consistent procedures clearly understood and carried out

precepts of the <i>Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning</i> (paragraph 14)	<i>Work-based and placement learning</i>					effectively by staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> further embed knowledge and use of the Academic Infrastructure (paragraph 15) 	Provide staff development on the UK Quality Code for Higher Education	July 2012	University of Brighton staff development team	Comprehensive staff understanding Mapping of the Quality Code through future Periodic Reviews	Higher Education Learner Development Manager	Ensure handbooks reflect the key precepts of the <i>Code of practice</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> undertake a detailed review of the systems and processes relating to work-based and placement learning in order to ensure consistency in academic standards (paragraph 21) 	Review current practice and introduce new and consistent paperwork Link into our Assessment Code of Practice	September 2012	Higher Education Assessment Co-ordinator	Standardised processes and paperwork introduced Ensure appropriate learning outcomes achieved	Higher Education Learner Development Manager	The Higher Education Review Group will monitor the process for consistency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> work towards establishing a standardised use of the virtual learning 	Ensure that course leaders and course co-ordinators update course information to include key details and	September 2012	CL's and course co-ordinators	Number of student 'hits' Schemes of Work	College managers with higher education responsibilities and Employee	Student Voice

environment so that it holds consistent course information across the provision and offers a genuinely interactive learning resource (paragraph 33)	that staff use the Virtual Learning Environment as a learning resource				Development Manager	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that standard format handbooks and calendars of assessment are freely available to all students (paragraph 42) 	Issue clear guidance, based on good practice, to course leaders when preparing their handbooks	September 2012	Course leaders and course co-ordinators	Student handbooks	Higher Education Assessment Co-ordinator	Student Voice Assessments more evenly spaced out
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> give closer attention to the checking of public information so as to ensure its accuracy before publication (paragraph 46) 	All higher education public documents to be checked by the Higher Education Learner Development Manager before publication	Ongoing	Course leaders and course co-ordinators Higher Education Learner Development Manager	Accuracy and consistency	Higher Education Forum	To be signed off by the Higher Education Forum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> commission standard templates so as to ensure coverage of all key issues in 	Standard templates mapped against the Code of Practice designed and issued to course leaders	October 2012	Higher Education Learner Development Manager	All templates in place and used consistently	Higher Education Forum	Quality Improvement Plan

documentation relating to work-based and placement learning (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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> take steps to ensure consistency in the planning and delivery of assessments (paragraph 30) 	A higher education assessment calendar to be produced and circulated to all higher education course leaders and course co-ordinators	July 2012	Assessment co-ordinator	Assessment 'hand-in' dates enable students to manage their workload throughout the year	Higher Education Learner Development Manager	National Student Survey Student Voice External Examiner reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop and publish a teaching and learning strategy, to further enhance the higher education ethos within the student body and ensure the differentiation of higher education teaching and delivery from that of further 	Higher education teaching and learning strategy - in consultation with staff and students - developed and published	September 2012	Higher Education Learner Development Manager/Head of Quality and Learning Services	Evidence of high quality teaching and learning for higher education students	Head of Park College	National Student Survey Student Voice/peer observation schedule

education (paragraph 31)						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adopt a consistent cross-college approach to presentation, font, titling, dating and version control of all public documents (paragraph 50). 	The College will develop branding guidelines for whole College and the higher education provision	September 2012	Business Development Manager	Whole College will be using new templates and branding guidelines.	College Leadership Team	Quality Forum and Quality Improvement Plan

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