# Supplementary guidance on writing the self-evaluation document for Higher Education Review

The purpose of this document is to help providers write a suitable self-evaluation document (SED) for Higher Education Review. It should be read in conjunction with *Higher Education Review: A handbook for providers* [1] and particularly Annex 3 of that handbook, which describes the role of the SED, how it is used during review, what it should cover, and how it ought to be structured. *Higher Education Review: Themes for 2015-16*[2] provides further guidance on what the SED should cover in relation to the thematic element.

Annex 1 to this document provides extracts from an exemplar SED to exemplify the effective approach to writing described below and demonstrate how evidence should be referenced and numbered.

## An effective approach to writing the self-evaluation document

An effective approach to writing the SED is to provide an opening statement containing an evaluation, then qualify it with supporting evidence, for example:

> There is a comprehensive staff development policy (1 Policies: doc 1i) and the College offers a wide range of staff development activities which are systematically recorded (4 Staff development and training: doc 4ii). Although higher education and further education activities are planned in accordance with the differentiated requirements of both sets of staff, the analysis of the impact of higher education developmental activities on academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities is underdeveloped.

Such a statement would typically be followed by a clear indication of what is being done to address an area identified for development, for example:

> The College's Director of Quality and Human Resources Manager are currently reviewing the staff development policy. It will be strengthened by requiring Higher Education Programme Managers to conduct an annual evaluation of the impact of staff development and training on the standard and quality of higher education provision. This will serve to improve the planning and sharpen the focus of future events. The revised policy (2 Draft Policies: doc 2i) will be available from the start of the new academic year, supported by training for Programme Managers and briefings for staff (Minutes, Higher Education Development team meeting, 23 July 2009, paragraph 2).

Extracts from an exemplar SED are at Annex 1.

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[1] http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/HER-handbook-15.pdf

[2] http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/HER-Themes-Guidance-15-16.pdf

## Drafting

Circulating the draft SED to higher education students, staff and (if appropriate) awarding body representatives for comment widens the perspective and helps to keep colleagues informed and engaged in the process. Ideally, the document should be owned by many, but read as one voice.

## Paragraphs

It is important to make the SED as easily navigable as possible as it is used by the review team throughout the review. To help in this we ask that providers number each paragraph sequentially.

## Referencing evidence

It is vital that the SED identifies the evidence that illustrates or substantiates the narrative.

In order for the review team to be able to operate efficiently, both in advance and during the review visit, it is important to ensure that all evidence documents are clearly labelled and numbered.

It is equally important to ensure that each evidence document is clearly referenced to the appropriate text in the commentary using the same labelling and numbering system and providing paragraph numbers and dates of minutes as appropriate.

We therefore ask that providers:

- use the same terminology and file names throughout the SED and evidence. For instance, it is confusing when the HE Standards Handbook is also referred to as the Handbook for HE standards, or the Higher Education standards handbook
- include page and paragraph numbers in your self-evaluation (SE) document
- use separate files for your evidence documentation and not collated them into a single PDF document
- number files in a three-digit, linear sequence, starting with 001 for the SE and 002 for the student submission (SS)
- submit evidence in a flat structure (that is, all files together, with **no subfolders or zipped files**) with documents clearly labelled
- only use alphanumeric characters (a-z and 0-9) and spaces in file names. No other punctuation marks are allowed.
- keep file names as short as possible (128 characters maximum).

# Annex 1

## Extracts from an exemplar SED

This annex contains two extracts from an exemplar SED. It is meant to exemplify in greater depth the effective approach to writing described above and to demonstrate how evidence should be referenced and numbered.

### Extract 1: Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners

1    The College's Quality Assurance Handbook states the role of external examiner[3] and the process for nomination of new external examiners.[4] The College values highly the role of the external examiner as a 'critical' friend in not only assuring the standards of the College's courses but also providing advice and feedback, allowing the College continually to enhance the provision that it offers.

2    All new external examiners are offered a meeting with the Vice Academic Registrar to brief them on their role. When there are sufficient numbers of new external examiners the College provides a larger briefing session prior to an annual external examiner lunch. All new external examiners are sent information on their role together with course specifications and the Academic Regulation Handbook.[5] External examiners can also have access to the virtual learning environment for their course if they so wish.

3    Via their annual reports, external examiners comment on whether standards are appropriate and whether the assessment process is rigorous, equitable, fair and good practice.[6] The reports are then scrutinised at both a course and Collegial level and issues are addressed as appropriate.

4    Reports are used by the College in a number of ways. Reports are sent by external examiners to the Vice Academic Registrar who highlights areas requiring a response before forwarding them to the Course Leader and Deputy Principal (Programmes). The reports are used by the course teams in developing their courses. The reports are then also received and discussed at the College's Faculty Board[7,8 9] (which includes student representation) to create an overview of External Examining across the College. Comments in the reports can inform developments at course level but also at Collegial level, such as the creation of guidance for the marking of group work, which resulted directly from suggestions made in an external examiner report.[10] The reports then also form part of the evidence used by course teams in annual monitoring submissions[11] as well as in developing their self-evaluation documents for the five-yearly periodic review.[12] External examiner reports are available to students and are received at the relevant course committee[13 14 15]for discussion between the course team and student

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[3] 007: QA Handbook, pg 88
[4] 007: QA Handbook, pg 95, 6.8
[5] 021: Standard pack of information sent to new external examiners
[6] 074: External examiner Report Template (word version)
[7] 044: Faculty Board 2012-2013 November, minute 1.6.2
[8] 044: Faculty Board 2011-2012 December, minute 1.6.2
[9] 044: Faculty Board 2010-2011 December, minutes 1.5.2-1.5.3
[10] 046: ASEC minutes 2009-2010, February 2010, minute 7
[11] 007: QA Handbook, 3.2.19 pg 38
[12] 007: QA Handbook, 3.3.40,  pg 44
[13] 075-083: Course Committee Minutes 2012-2013; e.g. BA Graphics course committee minute 1.7
[14] 075-083: Course Committee Minutes 2011-2012; e.g. BA Fine Art course committee minute 1.7.1

representatives. Comments made by external examiners verbally at the Examination Board are now minuted and received at the Academic Board[16] [17]and a summary[18] is provided to the Faculty Board.[19]

5        The reports form part of an overall Quality Assurance Report[20] made annually to the College's Academic Board.[21] [22] Summarising the results of quality assurance processes and the themes that have arisen, this report provides the assurance and confidence to the College's senior academic body of the quality of its provision.

6        A response to the report is made by the College to the external examiners. Previously this has been undertaken at course level between the course teams and the Examiners. However from July 2012 onwards, the Academic Registrar's Office now responds on behalf of the College, having liaised with, and collated responses from the, course team and Deputy Principal (Programmes) Office.

7        External examiners are appointed by the Faculty Board for a maximum of four years. The Faculty Board receives a nomination form[23] for approval and monitors tenure. [24] [25] External examiners are appointed to entire courses, or pairs of courses, or, as in the case of the Creative Research Unit, to shared units across a level of provision.

8        An annual postgraduate examiner lunch preceding the main postgraduate examination board in November allows examiners to meet not only with the relevant course team but also course teams and examiners from across the College's provision as well as senior staff.  A similar event for undergraduate examiners is planned to precede the main undergraduate examination Board in July 2013. Overall, the College believes the external examiner system functions well and the recent formalisation of responses to reports has benefitted the system.

**Extract 2: Higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy**

9        The College takes seriously the provision of information that is accurate, accessible and fit for purpose to both current and prospective students. The College's mission, values and strategies are all available via the College's website and virtual learning environment (VLE) and are frequently cited and referenced in a range of documents.

10       The College ensures that the current course specification for each course is available to prospective students on its website. The course specification then remains available to students via the College's VLE for the duration of their studies. Applicants can also easily access information on the application process via the College's website.

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[15] 075-083: Course Committee Minutes 2010-2011; e.g. PG Applied Practices course committee minute 2.7.1
[16] 043: Academic Board minutes December 2012, minute 2.10.2
[17] 043: Academic Board Papers December 2012, AB/1213/2/10
[18] 044: Faculty Board papers - November 2013 - Summary of external examiner comments
[19] 044: Faculty Board minutes 2012-2013 December, minute 1.10.2
[20] 043: Academic Board papers, Annual Quality Assurance Report 2010-2011; 2009-2010
[21] 043: Academic Board minutes 2011-2012 June, minute 4.6.8
[22] 043: Academic Board minutes 2010-2011 June, minute 4.7.8
[23] 084: External examiner nomination form
[24] 044: Faculty Board 2011-2012, June, minutes 3.6.1-3.6.2
[25] 044: Faculty Board 2010-2011 October minute 1.5.1

11    As stated above, the College has developed and published a Student Charter which articulates what students can expect from the College and what the College expects from its students. This document outlines those principles and links to other more detailed supporting documents. It is available on the website and on every course's individual VLE and is highlighted as part of the induction to students. Much information is available to students through the Student Handbook[26], providing a range of information including processes for making appeals and complaints. Over the past few years, the College has been in the process of redesigning its website. After an initial unsuccessful redesign and launch coupled with staffing problems in the Department of Initiatives and External Development (DIaED), the website is currently due to be re-launched during 2014-2015. A project board is overseeing the development of the new website.[27] Following a successful re-launch of the external website, an internal portal will be developed to replace the now dated intranet. In the interim, information that would have been placed on a portal is held on the VLE to ensure that information relating to current students is held in one place. The College acknowledges that development of the external website and portal has not proceeded to plan but the effect on the provision of information to current students has been mitigated by the development of the VLE.

12    At the end of their studies all students receive an official transcript from the College providing their final unit marks and course result. A diploma certificate is provided separately by the validating university. The College is currently investigating systems to record further information in line with those recommended in the Higher Education Academic Review and for them to be provided on an enhanced transcript.

13    The College publishes annually a prospectus[28] for the forthcoming recruitment round which articulates the experience that the College offers. The prospectus is developed by the DIaED in conjunction with the Deputy Principal (Programmes) Office as well as other departments of the College.

14    Responsibility for the provision of a large proportion of information rests with the Registrar's Office, which oversees transcript production and course specification approval as well assisting in the development of academic policy. The office is also responsible for the Key Information Sets (KIS). The College submitted a KIS for each of the three undergraduate courses for the KIS launch in 2013[29] and the KIS was included as part of an internal audit on data quality.[30] It is planned that the 2014-2015 survey for new students (held in the winter term) will include a question on the importance and use of the KIS by those enrolling at the College.

15    The College recognises that it is essential to student attainment and retention that students are accurately informed what to expect of the courses and the student experience it offers. This is true in all HEIs, but in the College's specialist environment, where many of its subjects are loaded with particular cultural preconceptions (attached to the archetypal 'art College'), it is a matter of particular importance. The College uses, among other things, Open Events and Course Information days, outreach activities and portfolio workshops, the format of portfolio and interview days, Collegial social media outputs, VLE fora and personal contact with course teams as mechanisms to ensure accurate expectations of its courses.

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[26] 085: Student Handbook 2012-2013
[27] 158: Website Project Board minutes
[28] 013: Prospectus
[29] 001 BA Fine Art Key Information Set, 002 BA Graphic Design Key Information Set, 003 BA Applied Practices Key Information Set
[30] 150: Internal audit on Data Quality

16      The Deputy Principal (Programmes) is responsible for ensuring that Open Days and admissions activities accurately represent the 'College Experience', and, with the Faculty leaders and the Programme area leaders, ensure that prospectus and web copy are reviewed annually. Staff are vigilant to ensure that students do not expect that which is unrealistic nor misinterpret what the College offers through course information and briefing papers, and through personal contact. Feedback from students via course committees and student surveys as well as information from the complaints and appeals processes contribute to a continuing updating of College documentation.