



Review for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Schumacher College (The Dartington Hall Trust), December 2014

Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Schumacher College (The Dartington Hall Trust) has made commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since [the previous monitoring visit](#) in December 2013.

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 At the time of the review, 41 postgraduate students were enrolled at the College. In January 2015, 11 further students are expected to enrol on a new MA programme in Ecological Design Thinking.

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The College has continued to build on the good practice identified in the Review for Educational Oversight (REO) report of December 2012. Its meticulously presented documentation reflects the care and clarity of its developmental approach to quality assurance. In line with this, some of its action points are very demanding and will take some years to achieve and fully evaluate. As part of this approach, it has integrated its internal monitoring with its original action plan.

4 The mutually supportive partnership with Plymouth University (the University) has been further developed. The University link tutor maintains a close relationship with the College to facilitate this partnership and ensure quality. The provision of support by the University for those whose first language is not English, as well as effective online access to the University library, is particularly appreciated by students. As a sign of the College's maturity, there has been a significant increase in the number of students opting for College or third party supervisors, as opposed to those from the University. Half of the most recent cohort of College students obtained their master's degree with distinction.

5 Students enthusiastically attest to the innovative and imaginative nature of the curriculum, which they describe as being cutting edge. Having successfully launched the Ecological Design Thinking programme, the College plans to introduce an MPhil/PhD programme in September 2015 and a ResM programme in September 2016. The link tutor confirmed that everything is on course for approval by those dates.

6 Students praise the coherent methods of teaching, which are particularly appropriate to the subject matter and contribute to the College's holistic learning environment. Staff appreciate the Teaching and Learning Forum. They find its informal style very supportive and conducive to a creative exchange of ideas. It is distinct from the recently established Teaching, Learning and Research Group but will be linked to it by a clear pathway.

7 The College makes extensive use of well-qualified and experienced external speakers to strengthen the curriculum and challenge thinking. Students particularly appreciate the ready accessibility of visiting lecturers outside classes. Staff and student feedback is used effectively to improve the quality and variety of these speakers.

8 Students praise the staff's positive responses to any issues they raise, especially on an oral basis, either informally or as part of a structured meeting. However, the team noted a difference between the format and effectiveness of questionnaires from different programmes. The College agrees that standardisation of best practice would be sensible, as would carefully structured questions to elicit the views of students about innovations in the curriculum or educational practice.

9 Student peer-to-peer formative assessment has been trialled and evaluated. Full implementation has been delayed because of new University regulations. The College has taken this opportunity to review and improve the process.

10 A new version of the website has recently been produced, in conjunction with students, to reflect the current programmes and the College ethos. Rapid progress has been made in developing the virtual learning environment, which students find extremely helpful in reinforcing learning and facilitating discussion.

11 The College has continued to make progress in addressing the advisable recommendation in the 2012 REO report. For example, staff development is now carefully recorded and evaluated. Further progress could be made on College-wide staff development activities; the accreditation of a member of staff by the Higher Education Academy; and the participation of staff in the staff development activities offered by Plymouth University. The College plans to take appropriate action on these points.

Section 4: Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

12 The College has continued to make progress in working with relevant external reference points. Policies and procedures have been mapped against Part B of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, while mapping against Parts A and C is in progress, with a view to integrating identified actions with the overall College action plan. The mapping document is comprehensive but requires further development to highlight any anomalies to be addressed. The recently appointed Postgraduate Quality Coordinator is responsible for driving this forward.

13 College staff ensure adherence to University regulations through regular contact with the link tutor, other appropriate staff and formal University bodies. This has been particularly relevant to the development of the new Ecological Design Thinking programme and in progressing towards the introduction of the MPhil/PhD programme and the establishment of the College as a Research Node of the University.

Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit

14 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

15 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Robert Jones (Coordinator) and Mr Mike Coulson (Reviewer) on 9 December 2014.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Email enquiries@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk

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