



Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

Plymouth College of Art

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Preface

The mission of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continual improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. As part of this mission, QAA undertakes reviews of higher education provision delivered in further education colleges. This process is known as Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER).

Purpose of IQER

Higher education programmes delivered by further education colleges (colleges) lead to awards made by higher education institutions or Edexcel. The awarding bodies retain ultimate responsibility for maintaining the academic standards of their awards and assuring the quality of the students' learning opportunities. The purpose of IQER is, therefore, to safeguard the public interest in the academic standards and quality of higher education delivered in colleges. It achieves this by providing objective and independent information about the way in which colleges discharge their responsibilities within the context of their partnership agreements with awarding bodies. IQER focuses on three core themes: academic standards, quality of learning opportunities and public information.

The IQER process

IQER is a peer review process. It is divided into two complementary stages: Developmental engagement and Summative review. In accordance with the published method, colleges with less than 100 full-time equivalent students funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), may elect not to take part in Developmental engagements, but all HEFCE-funded colleges will take part in Summative review.

Developmental engagement

Developmental engagements explore in an open and collegial way the challenges colleges face in specific areas of higher education provision. Each college's first, and often their only, Developmental engagement focuses on student assessment.

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

- a self-evaluation by the college
- an optional written submission by the student body
- a preparatory meeting between the college and the IQER coordinator several weeks before the Developmental engagement visit
- the Developmental engagement visit, which normally lasts two days
- the evaluation of the extent to which the college manages effectively its responsibilities for the delivery of academic standards and the quality of its higher education provision, plus the arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information it is responsible for publishing about its higher education
- the production of a written report of the team's findings.

To promote a collegial approach, Developmental engagement teams include up to two members of staff from the further education college under review. They are known as nominees for this process.

Summative review

Summative review addresses all aspects of a college's HEFCE-funded higher education provision and provides judgements on the management and delivery of this provision against core themes one and two, and a conclusion against core theme three.

Summative review shares the main elements of Developmental engagement described above. Summative review teams however, are composed of the IQER coordinator and QAA reviewers. They do not include nominees.

Evidence

In order to obtain evidence for the review, IQER teams carry out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the college's self-evaluation and its internal procedures and documents
- reviewing the optional written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff
- talking to students about their experiences.

IQER teams' expectations of colleges are guided by a nationally agreed set of reference points, known as the Academic Infrastructure. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, which includes descriptions of different higher education qualifications
- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- guidelines for preparing programme specifications which are descriptions of what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study
- award benchmark statements which describe the generic characteristics of an award, for example Foundation Degrees.

In addition, Developmental engagement teams gather evidence by focusing on particular aspects of the theme under review. These are known as 'lines of enquiry'.

Outcomes of IQER

Each Developmental engagement and Summative review results in a written report:

- Developmental engagement reports set out good practice and recommendations and implications for the college and its awarding bodies, but do not contain judgements. Recommendations will be at one of three levels – **essential**, **advisable** and **desirable**. To promote an open and collegial approach to Developmental engagements, the reports are not published.
- Summative review reports identify good practice and contain judgements about whether the college is discharging its responsibilities effectively against core themes one and two above. The judgements are **confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence**. There is no judgement for the third core theme, instead the report will provide evaluation and a conclusion. Summative review reports are published. Differentiated judgements can be made where a team judges a college's

management of the standards and/or quality of the awards made by one awarding body to be different from those made by another.

Colleges are required to develop an action plan to address any recommendations arising from IQER. Progress against these action plans is monitored by QAA in conjunction with HEFCE and/or the college's awarding body(ies) as appropriate. The college's action plan in response to the conclusions of the Summative review will be published as part of the report.

Executive summary

The Summative review of Plymouth College of Art carried out in March 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:

- further review and support of student progress is now available through the recently introduced Interim Award Boards
- staff are provided with comprehensive data as a basis for conducting annual module evaluations
- the systematic arrangements for monitoring and reporting the outcomes from management processes ensure standards in the provision meet validated requirements
- the College engages fully with, and responds promptly to, the Open University's Annual Institutional Overview findings
- an integrated review and development process has been followed to produce a coherent set of newly drafted work-based learning handbooks which are being introduced to benefit employers, students and tutors
- the comprehensive and accessible student handbooks are tailored to the individual, and available electronically through the student portal
- the effective management of the input of visiting artists, local employers and other practitioners who contribute strongly to enthusiastic and highly effective teaching and learning
- the contribution made by the College's associate organisations to professional teaching and learning, enhanced networking and work opportunities is highly valuable
- the college website gives an overview of all available higher education provision with a front web page which is clearly laid out, easy to follow and includes good illustrations of the portfolio of work
- the College's diary and handbook is very stylish, clearly laid out and includes the work of past students, which acts as an aspirational tool for student progression.

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:

- review its approach to the monitoring and amending of its regulatory framework with a view to setting up a more transparent and inclusive process of consultation and deliberation
- strengthen arrangements for reviewing the effectiveness of the main processes for managing academic standards and quality of learning opportunities and consider incorporating this into revised terms of reference of relevant boards and committees
- revisit the historical retention data for Foundation Degree programmes to determine the underlying causes of low completion rates and address any associated issues in the area of student support.

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

- introduce training for relevant tutors in the application and more active promotion of prior certificated and experiential learning for entry purposes
- strengthen arrangements for the local induction of external examiners
- consider the extent to which generic staff development activities in relation to academic standards in higher education fully cover the needs of all staff and how the overall effectiveness of such development should be evaluated
- raise the general level of staff understanding of how the Academic Infrastructure can be used to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities
- enhance the understanding of individual external contributors to the teaching and learning process of how the delivery of curricula and assessment criteria can address the intended learning outcomes
- implement and monitor the effectiveness of the planned mechanism to fully ensure the accuracy, accessibility and inclusivity of public information provided on the website in the higher education prospectus and other promotional materials.

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 Plymouth College of Art (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 Open University. The review was carried out by Mr Lawrie Walker, Mr Paul Monroe and Ms Angela Maguire (reviewers) and Dr Gordon Edwards (coordinator).

2 The Summative review team (the team) conducted the review in March 2011. 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 body, meetings with staff, students, employers and the partner institution and reports of reviews by QAA. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagements in assessment and work-based learning. A summary of findings from the Developmental engagements 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 Plymouth College of Art is a well established independent specialist art college which has flourished in Plymouth for 154 years. In 2010-2011, the enrolment on higher education programmes at the start of the academic year consisted of 778 full-time and 74 part-time students, giving a total of 804 full-time equivalent higher education students. At the time of the visit, 777.5 full-time equivalent students were enrolled.

5 The College is an Associated Institution of the Open University and provides all its higher education programmes through the Open University Validation Service. The following programmes are currently running at the College. Full-time equivalent students currently enrolled on each programme are indicated in parentheses.

- MA Entrepreneurship for Creative Practice (7.5)
- BA (Hons) (Top Up) Applied Arts (27)
- FD Applied Arts: Ceramics, Glass, Metals (55)
- FD Level 0 Applied Arts: Ceramics, Glass, Metals (12)
- BA (Hons) (Top Up) Spatial Design (5)
- FD Spatial Design (9)
- BA (Hons) Fine Art (16)
- BA (Hons) (Top Up) Fine Art Practices (21)
- FD Fine Art Practices (41)
- FD Level 0 Fine Art Practices (17)
- BA (Hons) (Top Up) Fashion (19)
- FD Fashion (49)

- FD Level 0 Fashion (7)
- BA (Hons) Design for Games (6)
- BA (Hons) (Top Up) Design for Games (26)
- FD Design for Games (43)
- FD Level 0 Design for Games (4)
- BA (Hons) Graphic Design (10)
- BA (Hons) (Top Up) Graphic Design (26)
- FD Graphic Design (58)
- FD Level 0 Graphic Design (4)
- BA (Hons) (Top Up) Film Arts (17)
- FD Film Arts (53)
- FD Level 0 Film Arts (3)
- BA (Hons) (Top Up) Animation Arts (12)
- FD Animation Arts (9)
- FD Level 0 Animation Arts (2)
- BA (Hons) (Top Up) Underwater and Surface-based Imaging (2)
- BA (Hons) (Top Up) Photography (23)
- FD Photography (89)
- FD Level 0 Photography (27)
- BA (Hons) 3 Year Illustration (12)
- BA (Hons) (Top Up) Illustration (12)
- FD Illustration (45)
- FD Level 0 Illustration (9)

Partnership agreements with the awarding body

6 The responsibilities of the College in the partnership with the Open University are outlined in the Associated Institution Agreement. This Agreement places responsibility on the College for implementing and managing all academic regulations pertaining to the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, and the Academic Infrastructure. Full responsibility for all aspects of student assessment is also placed on the College. A great deal of autonomy is therefore afforded the College in all aspects of the management of academic standards as well as the quality of learning opportunities and public information. The primary point of contact for the College on all matters is the Open University's Quality and Partnership Manager whose duties include monitoring assessment and academic boards and providing a communication conduit for all validation and annual programme evaluation activity.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

7 The College is currently developing a new higher education strategy and some key aspects were shared with the team on the visit. The new strategy will represent a significant shift in direction in relation to postgraduate provision, the research agenda, internationalisation and partnership activity with various arts-related bodies. This development is recent and was not addressed in the College's self-evaluation.

8 At the time of the review, the College had recently been subject to an Institutional Review by the Open University. As a result of this, the College has been offered a change of status from an Associated Institution to a Partner Institution of the Open University, subject to some conditions being met. The designation of Partner Institution would confer further delegated powers to the College for the management of academic standards, in particular responsibility for external examiners and running assessment boards, and college committees without an Open University presence.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

9 A student written submission was made available to the team before the visit. During the visit the team met a representative range of students. The meeting with students proved very useful in exploring and corroborating the material in the student written submission and discussing a number of other aspects of the student experience.

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 A great deal of autonomy is afforded the College in the management of academic standards in its higher education provision. In this, the work of the Quality and Standards Office is critical. Alongside the Academic Director of Higher Education, the Head of Quality and Standards and the Quality and Standards Officer design, control, monitor and report on the outcomes of the College's quality assurance processes for higher education. They do this very effectively, but considerable responsibility rests on the specialist knowledge of this small team. As part of its emerging strategy the College intends to strengthen its line management structure for higher education, spreading the responsibilities for quality assurance more widely. The team welcomes this plan.

11 The ultimate authority for maintaining academic standards is the College's Academic Board. The Higher Education Board of Studies functions effectively and receives useful information and overview reports on a regular basis. Programme committees operate in line with the required standard agendas. A Quality Steering Group has an essentially operational role. Overall, the college committee arrangements for managing higher education are fit for purpose and meetings are well conducted in line with their terms of reference.

12 The Higher Education Assessment Tracker is a well organised and useful information management system linking data for coursework receipting, a record of student submissions, details of students with extenuating circumstances, assessment grading and feedback and module grades. This data is provided for interim and award boards and the generation of Diploma Supplements and transcripts. The system also provides performance indicators for annual programme evaluations, the Annual Institutional Overview and the Annual Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan. In general, the College's use of data to inform self-evaluations and monitoring reports is effective.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

13 The College's academic policies, procedures and guidelines are reviewed annually. The College has a useful online system for monitoring the development and updating of key policies and processes, ensuring authorship and version control. The College maps its provision against those sections of the *Code of practice* related to the management of academic standards. Its quality assurance processes are aligned with the precepts of the *Code of practice*: for example, in relation to admissions, the assessment of students, work-based learning and external examining.

14 The validation process includes formal requirements for engaging with the Academic Infrastructure. It is clear from outcomes, including the College's management of the preliminary validation process, that the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure are fully considered, including the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. Programme handbooks are also developed with reference to QAA guidance on programme specifications, subject benchmarks, the FHEQ and, where relevant, the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*.

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 partner and awarding body?

15 In order to initiate a new programme validation activity, the Director for Higher Education approves the creation of an online course concept note, which is reviewed by the Senior Management Team. Preliminary validation is conducted internally by the College and makes recommendations in preparation for the final validation using the awarding body validation guidelines. Final validation is organised by the Open University and coordinated within the College by the Quality and Standards team. The preliminary validation process is well managed, and external expertise is used effectively. The College's wide range of partnerships and professional networks inform curriculum development and ensure the continuing relevance of its academic programmes to professional practice. The College's growing research and scholarship activity also contributes positively to the design of curriculum in some areas, for example in the recently designed MA in Entrepreneurship for Creative Practice.

16 The College develops and manages its own academic regulations. Changes to regulations are discussed internally among senior managers and the Quality and Standards Unit and are subsequently approved by Academic Board. The self-evaluation states that regulations are reviewed against the Academic Infrastructure, but the reviewers could not determine how the overall suite of regulations is monitored systematically, or how the College scans the external higher education environment to benchmark its regulations against developing practice. The College is advised to review its approach to the monitoring and amending of its regulatory framework with a view to a more transparent and inclusive process of consultation and deliberation prior to approval of any regulatory changes.

17 There is guidance but no formal training for staff involved in the accreditation of prior experiential and certificated learning, advising students on this and reaching decisions on acceptability for entry. The number of students admitted through such procedures is low. The ability of the College to make decisions in this area under its own regulations is an important element of maintaining academic standards. It is therefore desirable for the College to introduce formal training for relevant tutors. This is to ensure they have a common basis for making informed and correct decisions when applying the process and also to aid in its more active promotion to assist a wide variety of learners to enter Foundation Degree programmes. This would align college practices more fully with the guidelines in the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*.

18 The team confirms the findings of the first Developmental engagement that assessment practice is well conducted and monitored. Examples illustrating this include the detailed mapping of assessment processes against the *Code of practice*, the grading matrix, guidance to students about the criteria for assessing learning tasks and their relation to intended learning outcomes, and the process for marking and moderation. The higher education assessment and moderation guidelines have been improved, following the Developmental engagements.

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19 The College plans and coordinates the activities of external examiners. Their reports are generally very positive and college responses are full, timely and appropriate. The use of external examiners to monitor standards is in good order. External examiners are invited to an induction by the awarding body, who appoints them. The College's own induction arrangements, other than a 'training pack', are informal. Given the importance of external examiners' understanding of the College's quality assurance processes, regulatory framework and assessment boards, it is desirable that the College strengthen its arrangements for the local induction of external examiners.

20 A sample of Award Assessment Board minutes indicates that these boards are well managed and quorate, with evidence of genuine discussion. The College has recently introduced interim award assessment boards which further review and support student progress and which is good practice.

21 Internal review arrangements include termly programme committee meetings, annual programme evaluation reports, an annual higher education academic overview report from the Director Higher Education, a higher education self-evaluation, an annual report from the Head of Quality and Standards and the annual higher education quality improvement plan with a subsequent termly monitoring report. When added to those required by the awarding body, the total set of internal review mechanisms and reports is sufficient and informative, containing systematic scrutiny of the relevant information and data.

22 Staff evaluate all modules annually. The sample of module evaluations seen by the team indicates a reasonable level of evaluation based on evidence of student performance and views and, where appropriate, external examiner comments. For the benefit of staff evaluating a module, the module evaluation report template comes with comprehensive quantitative and longitudinal data, which is good practice. The annual programme evaluation report to the awarding body is generally a thoughtful commentary on evidence relating to the management of academic standards, including a good use of a range of data relating to student demography and performance.

23 Overall, there is clear evidence of the College's systematic arrangements to monitor the outcomes from its management processes, to ensure standards of the provision meet validated requirements. Arrangements are in place to track actions and recommendations and to report progress to major committees and the awarding body. This is good practice. There is, however, less evidence of the College evaluating the processes themselves and the associated management structures, and being able to articulate a view on their overall effectiveness and efficiency. Examples include overall higher education governance, programme design and validation, management of changes to regulations, external examiner coordination, internal review and award assessment boards and accreditation of prior learning. It is advisable that the College strengthen its arrangements for evaluating and reporting on the effectiveness of its main processes for managing standards and quality. The College may wish to incorporate reports on the effectiveness of its processes into any revised terms of reference for Academic Board and its higher education committees.

24 The College has experienced many Open University validations and revalidations in a relatively short timescale and has made effective arrangements to satisfy conditions and recommendations in the timescales required. The College is also diligent in meeting the awarding body's requirements for annual reports. The action plan monitoring reports from the two Developmental engagements indicate that all recommendations have been or are being addressed.

25 The proposed change of college status to a Partner Institution of the Open University, together with the significant shift in direction implied by the new Higher Education

Strategy, require very careful management in order to protect the College's ability to manage academic standards in the future. The College's intention is to undertake a careful due diligence review of its management structure and processes before any formal decision is made. In the light of this, the team has no reason to be concerned about the College's ability to manage academic standards appropriately in the near future and they welcome the planned approach.

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

26 The College arranges a number of staff development activities relating to academic standards. The scheme for peer observation of teaching is well managed and reported. There is a quality systems induction for new staff, and presentations on the Academic Infrastructure and assessment. However, the overall effectiveness of these events is not evaluated systematically. It is desirable for the College to consider the extent to which these generic staff development activities in relation to academic standards in higher education fully cover the needs of all staff and how the overall effectiveness of such development should be evaluated.

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?

27 Responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities are delegated in broadly the same way as for academic standards as outlined in paragraphs 10, 11 and 12. The list of improvements undertaken in the higher education provision over the past five years, the annual programme evaluations and the student written submission demonstrate that these mechanisms are effective in managing 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?

28 Arrangements for the quality management of the quality of learning opportunities are supervised by a representative from the Open University Validation Service, who attends the College regularly. Each programme area completes an annual programme evaluation and responds to annual external examiner reports. These are validated with Programme Leaders by the Academic Director of Higher Education and the Head of Quality and Standards and are then collated into the Annual Institutional Overview for the awarding body, which also takes account of student satisfaction surveys. Good practice is evident in the College's full engagement with, and prompt response to, the Annual Institutional Overview findings in terms of the quality of learning opportunities.

29 Newly drafted work-based learning handbooks are being made available for the benefit of employers, students and tutors. These new handbooks exceed the recommendations made in the Developmental engagement on work-based learning and give comprehensive information to help ensure appropriate opportunities for students to learn from work. Good practice is evident in the integrated development and coherence of this suite of handbooks and the comprehensive review of work-based learning that involved all parties, including students.

30 There are effective committees and mechanisms in place for the College to assure itself that good practices in the provision of learning opportunities are shared across the provision. Relevant committees include the Pedagogic Development and Research Committee, the Higher Education Board of Studies, The Learning and Teaching Committee and the Learning Technologies Committee. Good practice has been shared between programme areas through the Higher Education Board of Studies, the Annual Academic Overview and the Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

31 The College makes effective use of the Academic Infrastructure during curriculum development and validation, and produces clear programme specifications that explain the teaching and learning strategies that will be employed. The programme specifications are included in student handbooks, which are comprehensive, accessible, targeted to particular programmes and tailored to individual needs through links to the management information system. They are available electronically through the student portal and are an example of good practice in the context of the College's provision. The level of understanding of the Academic Infrastructure by senior staff and programme leaders is high, but that of the module tutors, employers, external contributors and students is less so. For example, there is a general lack of clarity about the coherence of the College's work-based learning arrangements with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* and the contribution of these arrangements to the quality of learning opportunities and achievement of the intended programme learning outcomes. It is desirable that the College raises the general level of staff understanding of how the Academic Infrastructure can be used to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities. It is also desirable to enhance the understanding of individual external contributors to the teaching and learning process of how the delivery of curricula and assessment criteria can address the intended learning outcomes.

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

32 Module tutors demonstrate a high level of understanding of the teaching and learning approaches used to deliver the academic programmes, although there is no dedicated teaching and learning policy or strategy for higher education to inform this.

33 There is a well-documented formal system of peer observation of teaching. This is monitored effectively and useful data is collected from both observers and observees. Programme leaders also undertake probationary observations of all new teaching staff as part of the process. The peer observation scheme does not generate quantitative grades but the qualitative report is shared with line managers and senior staff. Any issues that require further action are fed to the Head of Quality and Standards, the Quality and Standards Officer and the Academic Director for Higher Education for consideration and action, as and when necessary. Peer observation generates a great deal of data, which highlights the important issues and clearly links to the in-house staff development programme. Examples

include the identification of the need for training in time management, stress management and the provision of a series of events dedicated to teaching and learning.

34 Students demonstrate a high level of enthusiasm for the teaching and learning provision made for them. This is reinforced by the student written submission, National Student Survey data and the results of student satisfaction surveys. Students cite examples of concerns that have been acted upon by the College, for example in improving module feedback in applied arts programmes and navigation of the student portal.

35 College staff are well-qualified, with appropriate levels of experience, and are clearly committed to creative, interesting and high-quality teaching and learning. The college policy on staff recruitment addresses the particular issues associated with staffing a specialist arts college in a sensible and focused manner. There is evidence of good practice in the effective management of the input of visiting artists, local employers and other practitioners, who contribute strongly to enthusiastic and highly effective teaching and learning. Also, the contribution made by the College's associate organisations to professional teaching and learning, enhanced networking and work opportunities is highly valuable. At present, the College does not use the peer observation scheme to monitor the contribution made by external practitioners. External practitioners are, however, always supported in the learning environment by experienced college staff.

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

36 Technical, academic, pastoral and learning support is very effective and valued highly by the students in terms of information, advice and guidance, tutorials, access to additional learning support and work-placements. College policy is that all students should complete a period of work placement. Students are required to arrange this themselves. Students consider that they are well-supported by the College in this process, and appreciate the experience gained will be of considerable benefit to them when they are employed. Students' use of inappropriate communications and email addresses when contacting employers, identified in the second Developmental engagement, has been addressed and there have been no criticisms by employers in the last year.

37 Low retention on Foundation Degrees has consistently depressed completion rates on these programmes over the last three years. Senior staff and management are aware of this and the College has implemented a number of actions to change staffing or to improve performance management on low retention courses. But so far, there is little evidence that historical retention and completion data has been formally analysed to fully explore all possible underlying causes and identify any necessary improvements to student support mechanisms. It is advisable that the College revisit the historical retention data for Foundation Degree programmes to determine the underlying causes of low retention and address any associated issues in the area of student support.

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

38 A comprehensive staff development policy addresses both generic higher education topics and more specific matters of interest to specialist art colleges, such as exhibition set-up and drawing. An in-house staff development programme is published on a monthly basis and circulated to all staff. The College's annual Performance Development Review is effective in setting objectives and tracking professional development and a high level of imagination is evident in what is currently being undertaken. Although the College is not funded to undertake research, there is a robust and supportive research infrastructure and an ambitious agenda for research and scholarship, controlled by the Research

Sub-Committee. A range of such activity is currently supported, such as that undertaken into the structure, techniques and use of glass. This has led to interesting new developments in glass-making techniques. In the jewellery area, papers relating to ethical mining in Bolivia following a field visit have also been produced.

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?

39 The College manages resources by specifying initial resource requirements at the validation stage for all programmes. The efficacy and sufficiency of resources is monitored through annual programme evaluation and student surveys. The quality of resources is subsequently maintained through a bidding system that focuses primarily on curriculum demand.

40 The College has made a considerable investment in the resources and facilities needed to deliver the programmes and these are deemed to be of a high standard. Students commend the level of resource available to them and both students and employers indicate that the quality of the resources within the College generally exceeds that available in industry, and is often more up to date.

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?

41 The College takes direct responsibility for publishing information on its higher education provision. The Open University monitors information that is given out in its name through an approval process.

42 The College is responsible for the publication of all information for applicants, including the higher education prospectus, course fee details, programme and module outlines, admissions procedures and student support. Information is available both as hard copy and through the College's website and is provided in other formats to meet particular additional needs. The College's website gives an overview of all available higher education provision with the front web page being clearly laid out and easy to follow with good illustrations of the College's portfolio of work. The team considers this to be good practice and students are also very positive about the benefits of the website.

43 The provision is marketed separately from the further education portfolio and the language and tone of the materials is appropriate for higher education. The marketing information includes outline course content, career options, and financial advice. The information services team operates an information point, supported by the student hub, as a one-stop-shop for access to information, advice and guidance.

44 Once enrolled, the students have access to the College's intranet, known as the Student Portal. Information such as the College's academic regulations, sources of advice and guidance and access to disability and learning support are available on this portal

together with relevant college strategies, policies and guidelines. The portal also gives the students direct access to the College's virtual learning environment where they can obtain their programme information, such as programme specifications and course and module handbooks. Further to the Developmental engagements, the College is developing a system for disseminating and promoting good practice on the portal. Students consider the portal to be a very comprehensive resource and utilise the full breadth of its facilities for information-sharing, networking and potential employer contacts. They also have additional ideas for innovative and creative approaches to the further development of the portal, which are being discussed with the College.

45 Enrolled students are issued with the College diary and handbook which is very stylish and laid out clearly. Students are particularly appreciative of the art work from past students, together with cases of previous students' achievements, which they find to be an aspirational tool for progression. The review team considers this to be good practice.

46 Students are very positive overall about the quality of published information they receive, confirming its value in providing them with realistic expectations about the content, delivery and assessment of their course. In their opinion, the advertising of college events is now much improved with the use of plasma screens throughout the college, the portal, text messages and emails.

**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?**

47 The College aims to ensure the effectiveness of the mechanisms for quality assurance of all published information. Scrutiny of publications generally shows the information to be current and consistent. In particular, the professional standard, and comprehensive nature, of the information contained in the prospectus clearly profiles the College as a specialist art facility. The marketing department is responsible for publishing and maintaining the currency of information available in the Prospectus and on the website. This information is then sent to the Open University, who monitor any information relevant to themselves. The Open University have sight of both the website and prospectus and since 2010 have formally checked these for accuracy and completeness.

48 The current quality assurance system has failed to identify errors within the current prospectus in relation to the stated academic level of some programmes. In these cases, the stated levels are not in accordance with the FHEQ. The College is developing an improved mechanism for the management of public information, including the further development and formalising of robust procedures to ensure its accuracy, accessibility and inclusivity. This will cover material on its website, in the higher education prospectus and other promotional materials. In view of the errors in the Prospectus, the team considers it to be desirable that the College fully implement and monitor the overall effectiveness of this planned mechanism.

49 All strategies, policies and procedures are held by the Deputy Principal within a central register, with the allocated owners having responsibility for currency. Accuracy and completeness of these documents are covered as part of the review cycle with final approval being given by the Academic Board. Further to the recent appointment of a new Principal, the College is in the process of updating and rewriting the higher education strategy in line with a new strategic direction.

50 Following the Developmental engagements, the quality and standards department has refined the College's programme handbook format into a standard template ensuring

consistency and parity for all cohorts. The template is in two parts, a programme-specific part with content unique to each programme and a college-wide part, with generic content relevant to all students. The Quality and Standards Officer has responsibility for evaluating the programme-specific content of each programme handbook, also ensuring its generation for newly validated programmes.

51 For current students, the chief source of information produced by the College is the online personal handbook which includes the programme specification and programme handbook. The content owners of the individual parts of this handbook are responsible for their own pages and use a checklist to ensure accuracy and completeness. In addition, there is a termly audit of the handbook pages. The students are appreciative of the information made available to them in the personal handbook.

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 engagements in assessment and work-based learning

52 The first Developmental engagement in assessment took place in November 2008. Good practice identified included the detailed mapping of assessment processes against the *Code of practice*, regular staff development events, robust assessment and practices with high quality feedback and a well developed personal development planning process for students. The College was advised to improve descriptors in its higher education grading matrix and review the overall moderation system with a view to its simplification and introduction of additional programme level moderation. Desirable recommendations included enhancing the external examiner summary report, promoting more widespread good practice on the virtual learning environment and a more active understanding of assessment regulations among students.

53 The second Development engagement took place in January 2010. This, at the choice of the College, focused on the provision of work-based and work-related learning and professional practice. Good practice identified included the transferable and employability skills provided in dedicated work-based learning modules, a well-established range of module guides, the real life view provided by visiting lecturers and the general level of employer engagement throughout the curriculum. The College received advisable recommendations in relation to formally monitoring the volume of work-based and work-related learning, implementing the plan for a creative network and more systematic collection of employer views on students' responsiveness to industry requirements. Desirable recommendations included the provision of more multidiscipline working opportunities for students, encouraging a more professional approach when students seek placements and developing an overview of employer and practitioner activities across the programmes for sharing good practice and external promotional requirements.

D Foundation Degrees

54 The College offers the following Foundation Degrees in conjunction with its awarding body. Current full-time equivalent student numbers in each case are indicated in parenthesis:

- FD Applied Arts: Ceramics, Glass, Metals (55)
- FD Spatial Design (9)
- FD Fine Art Practices (41)
- FD Fashion (49)
- FD Design for Games (43)
- FD Graphic Design (58)
- FD Film Arts (53)
- FD Animation Arts (9)
- FD Photography (89)
- FD Illustration (45).

55 All conclusions and summaries of judgements in section E relate to the Foundation Degree provision.

E Conclusions and summary of judgements

56 The Summative review team has identified a number of areas of good practice in the College's management of its responsibilities for academic standards and for the quality of learning opportunities of the awards it 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 Open University.

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

- further review and support of student progress is now available through the recently introduced Interim Award Boards (paragraph 20)
- staff are provided with comprehensive data as a basis for conducting annual module evaluations (paragraph 22)
- the systematic arrangements for monitoring and reporting the outcomes from management processes ensure standards in the provision meet validated requirements (paragraph 23)
- the College engages fully with, and responds promptly to, the Open University's Annual Institutional Overview findings (paragraph 28)
- an integrated review and development process has been followed to produce a coherent set of newly drafted work-based learning handbooks which are being introduced to benefit employers, students and tutors (paragraph 29)
- the comprehensive and accessible student handbooks are tailored to the individual and available electronically through the student portal (paragraph 31)
- the effective management of the input of visiting artists, local employers and other practitioners who contribute strongly to enthusiastic and highly effective teaching and learning (paragraph 35)
- the contribution made by the College's associate organisations to professional teaching and learning, enhanced networking and work opportunities is highly valuable (paragraph 35)
- the college website gives an overview of all available higher education provision with a front web page which is clearly laid out, easy to follow and includes good illustrations of the portfolio of work (paragraph 42)
- the College's diary and handbook is very stylish, clearly laid out and includes the work of past students, which acts as an aspirational tool for student progression (paragraph 45).

Integrated quality and enhancement review

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:

- review its approach to the monitoring and amending of its regulatory framework with a view to setting up a more transparent and inclusive process of consultation and deliberation (paragraph 16)
- strengthen arrangements for reviewing the effectiveness of the main processes for managing academic standards and quality of learning opportunities and consider incorporating this into revised terms of reference of relevant boards and committees (paragraph 23)
- revisit the historical retention data for Foundation Degree programmes to determine the underlying causes of low completion rates and address any associated issues in the area of student support (paragraph 37).

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

- introduce training for relevant tutors in the application and more active promotion of prior certificated and experiential learning for entry purposes (paragraph 17)
- strengthen arrangements for the local induction of external examiners (paragraph 19)
- consider the extent to which generic staff development activities in relation to academic standards in higher education fully cover the needs of all staff and how the overall effectiveness of such development should be evaluated (paragraph 26)
- raise the general level of staff understanding of how the Academic Infrastructure can be used to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities (paragraph 31)
- enhance the understanding of individual external contributors to the teaching and learning process of how the delivery of curricula and assessment criteria can address the intended learning outcomes (paragraph 31)
- implement and monitor the effectiveness of the planned mechanism to fully ensure the accuracy, accessibility and inclusivity of public information provided on the website in the higher education prospectus and other promotional materials (paragraph 48).

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 courses it delivers.

Plymouth College of Art action plan relating to the summative review: March 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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> further review and support of student progress is now available through the recently introduced Interim Award Boards (paragraph 20) 	Maintain the successful interim board to track and review student and cohort progress	Annually in February	Academic Director	College data on cohort and student module performance is accurately maintained monthly	Academic Director via Higher Education Board of Studies	Programme retention and achievement rates data presented to Academic Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> staff are provided with comprehensive data as a basis for conducting annual module evaluations (paragraph 22) 	Provide termly module survey feedback and indicative grades analysis to ensure staff undertake Module evaluation and report findings to Programme Committee meetings	Annually by October	Head of Quality and Standards	All identified modules have timely Evaluation Reports in place for each termly programme Committee meeting to support the generation of each Annual Programme Evaluation	Programme Leader via Programme Committee Meetings	Annual Programme Evaluation presented by Programme Leader in validation meeting with Head of Quality and Standards and Academic Director
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the systematic arrangements for monitoring and reporting the 	Systematic processes will continue to rigorously monitor	Termly	Head of Quality and Standards	Required action from the college systematic processes will continue to rigorously monitor and	Academic Director via HE Board of Studies	Head of Quality and Standards Action plan

outcomes from management processes ensure standards in the provision meet validated requirements (paragraph 23)	the outcomes of quality processes which track and report actions and recommendation			report on actions and recommendations on a termly basis via meeting papers and the Annual HE Quality Improvement Plan Monitoring Report		monitoring reports to termly Academic Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College engages fully with, and responds promptly to, the Open University's Annual Institutional Overview findings (paragraph 28) 	The College will maintain its usual prompt response to its awarding body findings following reviews of the College's Annual Institutional Review	Annually in April each year	Academic Director	Awarding body annual Institutional Overview findings are all acted on and close-out promptly and effectively by April in each academic year	Academic Director via HE Board of Studies	Academic Directors Report on action close out to Academic Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an integrated review and development process has been followed to produce a coherent set of newly drafted work-based learning handbooks which are being introduced to benefit employers, students and tutors (paragraph 29) 	New revised handbooks issued and used by tutors, students and employers	September 2011	Employer Engagement Officer	Work-based learning handbooks and approach suit stakeholder needs in annual employer and student surveys	Academic Director via HE Board of Studies	Work-based learning working group report to Academic Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the comprehensive and accessible student handbooks are tailored to the individual and available electronically through 	Student handbooks will continue to be reviewed annually via the College's Public Information processes	Annually in August	Head of Quality and Standards	Student handbooks issued every September will reflect the relevant validated programme specification and reference the range of college support services	Public Information Review Group	Public Information Review Group report to Academic Board

the student portal (paragraph 31)				accurately and completely		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the effective management of the input of visiting artists, local employers and other practitioners who contribute strongly to enthusiastic and highly effective teaching and learning (paragraph 35) 	Our effective and developing relationship with visiting employers, visiting lecturers and practitioners will be used to ensure highly effective teaching and learning	Annually undertaken and reviewed in September each year	<p>Generic visiting lecturer activities: Exhibitions Officer</p> <p>Specific programme related visiting lecturer activities: programme leaders</p> <p>Generic employer activities: Employer Engagement Officer</p>	Students teaching and learning will continue to be enhanced by external artists, employers and practitioners	Academic Director via Teaching and Learning Committee	Teaching and Learning meeting reports to Academic Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the contribution made by the College's associate organisations to professional teaching and learning, enhanced networking and work opportunities is highly valuable (paragraph 35) 	Develop increasingly significant working relationships with employers and other institutions to continue to enhance students' teaching and learning in networking events and work placement	Termly network events	Associate Director Development, Employer Engagement Officer and programme leaders	Students' teaching and learning will continue to be enhanced by termly external networking and placement opportunities	Academic Director via Teaching and Learning Committee	Teaching and Learning meeting reports to Academic Board

	opportunities					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the college website gives an overview of all available higher education provision with a front web page which is clearly laid out, easy to follow and includes good illustrations of the portfolio of work (paragraph 42) 	Review the college website through the College Public Information process to ensure it remains accurate and complete in terms of the higher education information provided and the portfolio of work used to demonstrate the student experiences	Termly	Head of Marketing and programme leaders	The college website reflects current provision and student experience accurately and completely	Public Information Review Group	Public Information Review Group report to Academic Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College's diary and handbook is very stylish, clearly laid out and includes the work of past students, which acts as an aspirational tool for student progression (paragraph 45). 	Continue to develop and provide the student-focused Handbook and Diary to students to stimulate their interest and studentship	Annually in September	Academic Director supported by Head of Marketing	The Student Handbook and Diary issued every September remains a useful stimulating document for students	Academic Director via HE Board of Studies	HE Board of Studies report to Academic Board
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team agreed a number of areas where the College should be advised to take action:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review its approach to the monitoring and 	Develop a simple annual regulation	Annually starting July	Head of Quality and Standards	Regulation review process in place	Principal via Academic Board	Head of Quality and

<p>amending of its regulatory framework with a view to setting up a more transparent and inclusive process of consultation and deliberation (paragraph 16)</p>	<p>review process to ensure it is very clear that research and subsequent changes and improvements to regulations involves consultation with pertinent staff and student representatives before approval by the summer term Academic Board</p>	<p>2011</p>		<p>Capping papers and minutes of Academic Board evidence that potential updates to regulations and the reasons for change have been circulated to a sample of programme leaders and student representation for comment</p> <p>Summer term Academic Board terms of reference updated to ensure account is taken of the annual review of the College's Higher Education Academic Regulations before approval is confirmed</p>		<p>Standards capping paper and report on Regulations Review to Academic Board</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strengthen arrangements for reviewing the effectiveness of the main processes for managing academic standards and quality of learning opportunities and consider incorporating this into revised terms of reference of relevant 	<p>Develop a simple annual review system which annually monitors the effectiveness of the College's key management processes supporting Academic Standards and the Quality of Learning opportunities</p>	<p>September 2011</p>	<p>Head of Quality and Standards</p>	<p>Documented review of the effectiveness of each key named management process presented to Academic Board annually for consideration and support relevant improvements</p>	<p>Principal via Academic Board</p>	<p>Head of Quality and Standards capping paper and report on Key Management Systems Review to Academic Board</p>

boards and committees (paragraph 23)	Update the September Academic Board terms of reference to ensure it receives the findings and recommendations of the annual review and makes necessary decisions and approvals	September 2011	Head of Quality and Standards	September Academic Board terms of reference and actions plans show consideration undertaken and acted upon		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> revisit the historical retention data for Foundation Degree programmes to determine the underlying causes of low completion rates and address any associated issues in the area of student support (paragraph 37). 	Purchase and use the newly developed higher education version of monitoring software to provide termly online retention reports for Programme Committee Meetings to consider	June 2011	Head of Quality and Standards	Accurate data reported to Programme Committee meetings and HE Board of Study	Academic Director via HE Board of Studies	Overall trends data on programme retention and achievement rates presented to Academic Board
	Undertake a retention review with FD programme leaders and other relevant staff to determine any underlying issues and develop and	October 2011	Academic Director and programme leaders	Strategy and Key Performance Indicators on retention and achievement in place and owned by programme leaders which is evident in Annual Programme Evaluation documentation	Principal via Academic Board	

	implement a retention improvement strategy			Foundation Degree retention improves by 10% on all programmes.		
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team agreed the following areas where it would be desirable to take action:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> introduce training for relevant tutors in the application and more active promotion of prior certificated and experiential learning for entry purposes (paragraph 17) 	Provide APEL/APCL (on entry) training sessions for all programme leaders and relevant interview staff in their teams	September 2011	Academic Director	<p>Students will have an enhanced awareness of the college APEL/ACEL regulations on entry to all college HE programmes during their initial interview</p> <p>Student surveys will report positively on their understanding of APEL/ACEL</p>	Academic Director via HE Board of Studies	HE Board of Studies minutes to Academic Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strengthen arrangements for the local induction of external examiners (paragraph 19) 	Review current arrangements for coordinating external examiners and develop a local induction process	Annually starting September 2011	Head of Quality and Standards	<p>Annual review of key management processes reported to Academic Board will indicate research and changes made to the external examiners' process in relation to local induction</p> <p>All new external examiners are fully conversant with College processes and expectations of their role</p>	Academic Director via HE Board of Studies	HE Board of Studies minutes to Academic Board

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider the extent to which generic staff development activities in relation to academic standards in higher education fully cover the needs of all staff and how the overall effectiveness of such development should be evaluated (paragraph 26) 	<p>Plan further staff development sessions for new and existing staff to focus on the scope of roles in relation to the College's Academic standards i.e. for programme leaders, module tutors, administrators, and support staff</p> <p>Use the College's existing systematic staff development evaluation system to review effectiveness of such development</p>	September 2011	Head of Quality and Standards	<p>A range of tailored staff development sessions are provided to the various staff groups to meet their role needs for academic standards</p> <p>College systematic evaluation confirms the significant impact of such development sessions</p> <p>Annual management systems evaluation shows positive impact of staff activity on the College's academic standards</p>	Principal via Academic Board	<p>Head of Quality and Standards capping paper and report on Academic Standards</p> <p>Staff Development Evaluation to Academic Board</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> raise the general level of staff understanding of how the Academic Infrastructure can be used to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities (paragraph 31) 	Provide further sessions on the Academic Infrastructure and its potential positive impact on students learning to a wider range of staff in a core day event	January 2012	Academic Director	College systematic evaluation confirms that all staff have a basic understanding of how, within their own roles, they can use elements of the Academic Infrastructure to enhance student learning opportunities	Principal via Academic Board	Head of Quality and Standards capping paper and report to Academic Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> enhance the understanding of individual external contributors to the 	Redesign external contributors' commissioning forms to ensure	January 2012	Programme Leader/Employer Engagement Officer	Session evaluation indicates that external contributors are clear about how they can impact	Teaching and Learning Committee	Academic Director capping paper and report to

<p>teaching and learning process of how the delivery of curricula and assessment criteria can address the intended learning outcomes (paragraph 31)</p>	<p>that programme leaders, Exhibitions Officer and Employer Engagement Officer share via the formal commissioning letter relevant Definitive Module Records and relevant assignment briefs with external contributors to help them understand how to contextualise their contributions to benefit students learning outcomes</p>			<p>on assessment criteria and learning outcomes for students</p> <p>Student feedback in exit surveys is positive about their external lecturer presentation and the benefits on their learning</p>		<p>Academic Board</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implement and monitor the effectiveness of the planned mechanism to fully ensure the accuracy, accessibility and inclusivity of public information provided on the website in the higher education prospectus and other promotional materials (paragraph 48). 	<p>Implement the College's new public information process and termly reviews and audit of the college website, prospectus and other promotional materials</p>	<p>Annually each September</p>	<p>Public Information Review Group</p>	<p>The college website, prospectus and other promotional materials remain accurate and complete</p> <p>Audit records of public information sources review are on file</p>	<p>Public Information Review Group</p>	<p>Public Information Review Group report to Academic Board</p>

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