

## **Integrated quality and enhancement review**

**Summative review**

March 2010

South Downs College

SR68/2009

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2010

ISBN 978 1 84979 120 5

All QAA's publications are available on our website [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

## **Preface**

The mission of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continual improvement in the management of the quality of higher education.

As part of this mission, QAA undertakes reviews of higher education provision delivered in further education colleges. This process is known as Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER).

## **Purpose of IQER**

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

## **The IQER process**

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

## **Developmental engagement**

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

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

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

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

## Summative review

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

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

## Evidence

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

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

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

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

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

## Outcomes of IQER

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

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

Differentiated judgements can be made where a team judges a college's management of the standards and/or quality of the awards made by one awarding body to be different from those made by another.

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



## Executive summary

### The Summative review of South Downs College carried out in March 2010

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 agreements, for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding bodies. The team also considers that there can be **confidence** in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreements, 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:

- there is a close and effective working relationship with the awarding bodies at all levels of the management of the provision
- the Higher Education Quality Review Group is making a significant contribution to the maintenance of academic standards and the enhancement of learning opportunities
- ILT (Information Learning Technology) Champions are used to promote and disseminate innovative learning and teaching
- the Learning Resources Centre plays an effective role in supporting and promoting learning, including the use of electronic media and well-designed documentary material
- there is effective management of an extensive range of high-quality resources
- the virtual learning environment supports teaching and learning, the management of the provision and staff development
- the College makes effective use of its website to provide comprehensive information for students.

### 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 **desirable** for the College to:

- review and evaluate the new structure for the management and quality assurance of the higher education provision
- continue to progress the action plan arising from the Developmental engagement
- monitor and evaluate the uptake of higher education staff development in order to ensure its continued effectiveness
- review its use of course profiles on the UCAS website in order to enhance public information
- continue to improve the consistency of programme handbooks and module/unit guides
- ensure that there is clear communication to students of the process relating to the confirmation of academic results.





## 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 South Downs 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 Edexcel, the University of Portsmouth and the University of Southampton. The review was carried out by Dr Hayley Randle, Mr Clive Turner and Dr Amanda Wilcox (reviewers) and Dr Richard Wheeler (coordinator).

2 The Summative review team (the team) conducted the review in agreement with the College and in accordance with *The handbook for Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (the handbook)*, published by QAA. Evidence in support of the Summative review included documentation supplied by the College and awarding bodies, meetings with staff and students, reports of reviews by QAA and from inspections by Ofsted. In particular, the team drew on the findings and recommendations of the Developmental engagement in assessment. A summary of findings from the Developmental engagement is provided in Section C of this report. The review also considered the College's use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of higher education providers, with reference to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, subject and award benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)* and programme specifications.

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

4 The College was established in 1974 and has grown substantially since incorporation. It is the largest further education college in Hampshire and occupies a single-site campus between Waterlooville and Havant, just outside the northern boundary of Portsmouth. The ethos of South Downs is that of a comprehensive community college that promotes social and educational inclusion. The pursuit of excellence and parity of esteem between all types of provision are fundamental values. Currently there are 5,595 full-time students and some 5,592 part-time enrolments on courses ranging from basic skills to professional qualifications at NVQ level 4 or equivalent, including a substantial number of GCE A-Level students.

5 The higher education programmes represent a significant but relatively small proportion of the overall provision. Currently, there are 84 full-time and 226 part-time students on HEFCE-funded programmes, totalling 181 full-time equivalent enrolments. These programmes are managed and delivered in five curriculum areas located in two faculties. The higher education provision is the responsibility of the relevant curriculum and faculty heads. The quality of the provision is monitored and enhanced by a Higher Education Quality Coordinator, who reports to the College Quality Manager.

6 The College offers the following higher education programmes, funded by HEFCE, in conjunction with Edexcel and two local universities:

<b>Edexcel</b>	<b>Students (FTE)</b>
● HND Mechanical Engineering	full-time (14)
● HND Music Performance	full-time (31)
● HND Sport and Exercise Sciences	full-time (8)
● HND Electrical and Electronic Engineering	part-time (6)
● HNC Electrical and Electronic Engineering	part-time (13.5)
● HNC Mechanical and Production Engineering	part-time (19.33)

#### **University of Portsmouth**

● HND Business	full-time (41)
● FdA Business and Management	part-time (14.8)
● Certificate in Education (CertEd)	part-time*
● Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Post Compulsory Education Professional	part-time*
● PGCE Post Compulsory Education Postgraduate	part-time*

\* These programmes are taught together and have a single figure for FTE: (26.5)

#### **University of Southampton**

● FdA Working with Children	part-time (7)
-----------------------------	---------------

#### **Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies**

7 The partnership agreement with Edexcel operates in the context of the Edexcel Standard Note for centres involved in IQER (Version 2: November 2008). Edexcel does not have partnership agreements with further education colleges in the manner of higher education institutions. A BTEC Regional Quality Manager (the Edexcel representative) is allocated to each Edexcel centre participating in the IQER process, in order to monitor and support institutions and programmes with reference to matters of quality assurance of Edexcel higher education provision.

8 The partnership agreement with the University of Portsmouth dates from August 2006. It refers to the FdA in Business and Management, the HND Business and the CertEd/PGCE programmes. The agreement states that the University is responsible for the academic standards of all awards granted in its name and for the oversight and maintenance of all aspects of finance, administration and equality relating to students. It is committed to providing the College with guidance on the maintenance of academic standards and quality through its Quality Assurance Committee while using the management, quality and assessment systems of the College to assist those processes.

9 The partnership with the University of Southampton is more recent, dating from 2008. It refers only to the first year of a single programme, the FdA Working with Children. Those students who complete the programme of studies to the satisfaction of the University and

the partner institution are eligible for an award of a CertHE, or to proceed to level 2 of the programme of study, taught at the University. According to the partnership agreement, the maintenance of the academic standards of level 1 of the programme taught at the partner institution is the responsibility of the partner and is monitored by the University.

### **Recent developments in higher education at the College**

10 Some staffing changes have occurred at the College since the Developmental engagement. New programme managers have been appointed for the HND Sport and Exercise Sciences and for the CertEd/PGCE. Both members of staff previously taught on these programmes. Since the Developmental engagement, the Assistant Principal (Quality) has retired and that role has been subsumed into the Quality Manager's role. The previous Quality Manager has also retired. The College has appointed a new Quality Manager, and a new post of Higher Education Quality Coordinator has been created. The consequent changes to responsibilities in the Developmental engagement action plan were communicated to QAA. A recent change affecting the higher education provision was a decision not to offer a year one of the HND Sport and Exercise Sciences in 2009-10, owing to funding changes.

### **Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission**

11 Students studying on higher education programmes were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. They took part in the College's November 2009 Higher Education Student Survey. The results of this survey form an important part of the established quality assurance process. Members of the Higher Education Student Quality Review Group wrote the student written submission in December 2009. In order to do this, they were provided with a summary of the results from the November 2009 Higher Education Student Survey conducted by staff, and they were given initial guidance by the Higher Education Quality Coordinator. The students wrote the submission, and it was not edited or amended by staff. The coordinator met student representatives at the preparatory meeting. The team met a larger group of students during the visit, including some who had been involved in the preparation of the student written submission. The team found the submission to be a valuable source of evidence.

## **B Evaluation of the management of HEFCE-funded higher education**

### **Core theme 1: Academic standards**

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

12 The new management structure for the higher education provision, including the key roles of Quality Manager and Higher Education Quality Coordinator, is set out in the self-evaluation. The roles and responsibilities of staff at all levels, the processes for the consideration of external examiners' reports, the function of the Higher Education Quality Review Group and the Higher Education Student Quality Review Group are clearly stated. The terms of reference and minutes of the Quality Review Group, the meetings with staff and students, and the job description of the Higher Education Quality Coordinator are evidence that these arrangements are widely understood and that issues raised at the Developmental engagement have been addressed.

13 The team explored the relationship between the Quality Manager and the senior management team in order to ascertain that decisions made at the highest level are informed by the quality managers and heads of curriculum. A meeting with heads of faculty confirmed that these arrangements are effective, including good communication at all levels and clear lines of reporting and decision-making. The early signs are that the new management system is working well. A review of its effectiveness is scheduled for the end of the current academic year. The team confirms that it would be desirable to review and evaluate the new structure for the management and quality assurance of the higher education provision.

14 The Higher Education Quality Review Group constitutes an emerging example of good practice. It makes an important contribution to the maintenance of academic standards by providing a forum for the discussion of cross-College issues and it facilitates the dissemination of good practice. Representatives of the three awarding bodies are invited to its meetings and they receive copies of minutes for information and comment. The implementation of the Developmental engagement action plan indicates a positive response to management issues, with particular reference to the growing use of the virtual learning environment for management purposes, communication with staff and students, and reporting mechanisms.

#### **What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?**

15 The active engagement of the College with the Academic Infrastructure was identified as an example of good practice in the Developmental engagement report. The team was presented with further evidence that the College continues to promote awareness of the Academic Infrastructure by way of induction, focused staff development and by the attachment of links to the documentation through the virtual learning environment. The College is well supported by its awarding bodies in a range of developmental opportunities. One event is concerned specifically with the Academic Infrastructure. In this and other respects, it would be desirable for the College to continue to progress the action plan arising from the Developmental engagement.

#### **How does the College assure itself that it is fulfilling its obligations to ensure that the standards of higher education provision meet the requirements of validating partners and awarding bodies?**

16 The College has close and effective relationships with its higher education partners. The University of Portsmouth takes responsibility for internal verification and moderation processes, for the operation of assessment and award boards, and for academic appeals and disciplinary procedures. It monitors the College quality systems to ensure that they are appropriate. The College enjoys a close and supportive relationship with both universities at programme level, which is reflected in the quality of teaching and high levels of student achievement. The College staff contribute to curriculum review and are able to initiate modifications to programmes where student and employer feedback suggest that it is desirable. The College engages effectively with the Edexcel external examiners to ensure that academic standards on its programmes are maintained.

17 The College monitors retention and achievement statistics, which inform the programme-based annual self-assessment reports. These are then used to report internally on matters of standards and quality. With respect to the Edexcel provision, the College has developed procedures that are published through the virtual learning environment and are included in the revised higher education student handbook.

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

18 The College has allocated funding to support higher education-specific staff development. This funding is used to enhance awareness of higher education matters and to support industrial updating, attendance at conferences, the internal dissemination of good practice and the development of subject specialist knowledge. When requests are made, professional body membership is often supported out of departmental funds. Staff development to support pedagogy is informed by a College management observation and appraisal process. The Higher Education Quality Review Group has recommended the introduction of peer review in order to enhance the delivery of higher education. Staff teaching on higher education programmes are required to have teacher training qualifications and are supported to achieve higher level academic qualifications. Both university partners provide opportunities for staff to access their staff development programmes. Attendance by staff at examination boards and other assessment meetings contributes directly to the maintenance of academic standards. The team recommends that it would be desirable for the College to monitor and evaluate the uptake of higher education staff development in order to ensure its continued effectiveness.

**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 bodies.**

**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?**

19 The arrangements described in paragraphs 12 and 13 also apply to the College's management of the quality of learning opportunities. The devolved structure within the College gives significant responsibility to the course managers, who have well-understood responsibilities for monitoring quality, including student attendance and retention, the management of the assessment process and internal verification. Their reports to the heads of curriculum are reflected in annual curriculum self-assessment documents and resulting action plans. The Quality Manager and the Higher Education Quality Coordinator work closely with course managers, heads of curriculum and heads of faculty in managing the quality of learning opportunities. Teaching staff, managers and awarding body representatives confirm that these arrangements are effective.

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

20 The scrutiny of partnership agreements confirms that the College has substantial delegated responsibility for the delivery and quality assurance of learning opportunities on its higher education programmes. There are clear reporting mechanisms between the College at programme level and each awarding body. Additionally, the university partners are able to scrutinise student performance through assessment moderation events and attendance at programme meetings. The Developmental engagement report identified the effective conduct of assessment, based on careful attention to the prescribed regulations of the awarding bodies, as an area of good practice.

21 The Higher Education Strategic Plan 2009-12 commits the College to the improvement of the quality of the students' learning experiences by enhancing the importance of good and effective teaching and learning. External examiner reports are scrutinised by the Higher Education Quality Coordinator and feedback on students' experiences is sought regularly through student surveys and their attendance at Higher Education Student Quality Review Group meetings.

#### **What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?**

22 University representatives confirmed that all higher education programmes are subject to their approval procedures in order to check alignment with the Academic Infrastructure. As reported in paragraph 15, there are a number of events focusing on the Academic Infrastructure attended by course managers and heads of curriculum. All programmes are underpinned by approved programme specifications, which for university-franchised provision are produced by the respective universities. Programme specifications are made available to students through programme handbooks and the respective university intranet systems. For Edexcel provision, programme documentation is contextualised and reproduced in a student-friendly format in programme handbooks.

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

23 The quality of teaching and learning is reviewed and assured through a system of staff observation and appraisal. In addition to the lesson observation process, the College has recently instigated a pilot project for a Higher Education Peer Observation Scheme. Good practice is identified through the peer observation of teaching and through the actions of the Higher Education Quality Review Group. Areas for development and training needs are identified through the lesson observation process and picked up through individual staff appraisals. These development requirements can then be supported through staff development. External examiners' comments, and feedback from awarding bodies and students, indicate satisfaction with the standard of teaching on the programmes.

24 As stated in paragraph 18, university awarding bodies offer generic higher education and subject-specific development opportunities, which are open to College staff teaching on their franchised programmes. Staff provided examples in all curriculum areas of interaction with employers and industry that contributed to an enhancement of subject knowledge and fed into the student learning experience.

25 In each curriculum area, the College has identified ILT (Information Learning Technology) Champions whose responsibility is to inform and support the development and dissemination of learning and teaching. This arrangement has been influential in the development of the virtual learning environment, for example through the use of new software for the enhancement of learning opportunities for higher education students and in the acquisition of new skills by staff. The team considers this to be an example of good practice.

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

26 There is a comprehensive range of student support mechanisms at curriculum and college levels. Students on university-franchised programmes have access to university resources. Course managers work closely with students and the providers of support services to ensure that individual needs are met. Students with additional learning needs

are counselled prior to the start of their programmes by course managers, supported by additional information provided by the Learning Resource Centre. Students have access to the additional support team, including learning support assistants. Staff training on various learning difficulties/disabilities is provided for teaching and support staff.

27 An effective tutoring system embraces both academic and pastoral support. Students have regular opportunities to discuss academic and personal progress with personal tutors and module leaders in both one-to-one and group sessions. Students were unanimous in their appreciation of the level and effectiveness of the support available to them.

28 The Developmental engagement team recommended that it would be desirable for the College to clarify the procedures for student appeals and for dealing with academic malpractice. Action has been taken on both issues and these are communicated clearly to students at induction and through programme booklets. Programme assessment regulations for all awarding bodies are available to students on the virtual learning environment. Students confirmed the finding of the Developmental engagement team concerning the high quality and timeliness of feedback in writing, orally and electronically.

29 The College has a number of mechanisms for student feedback to staff on their learning experience. These include the annual student survey and meetings of the Higher Education Student Quality Review Group. Student representation on the staff Higher Education Quality Review Group is currently being considered. Students who met the team confirmed that their voice is heard: they provided a number of examples of action being taken as a result of their feedback to course managers.

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

30 As stated in paragraph 18, a specific budget has recently been identified to support higher education staff development. Staff development opportunities are also provided by the awarding bodies: these are appreciated by the staff and acted upon. Staff also cited the opportunity to engage with employers as being a valuable developmental opportunity, for example through employer forums, staff work experience, workplace visits and membership of professional organisations. In addition to keeping up-to-date staff records, it would be desirable for the College, as recommended in paragraph 18, to monitor and evaluate the uptake of higher education staff development in order to ensure its continued effectiveness.

**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?**

31 The Developmental engagement identified the extensive range of high-quality resources, both specialist and general, to support assessment, including the proactive role of the Learning Resource Centre, as an area of good practice. The team would concur with this conclusion. The Learning Resource Centre is small but well equipped. It provides physical and online resources. The Learning Resource Centre Manager works closely with course managers to ensure that reading lists are reflected in the stock available to students. The College is seeking to develop electronic learning resources such as electronic books and music software. Leaflets produced by the Learning Resource Centre, for example those dealing with plagiarism and student support, represent examples of good practice.

32 Curriculum areas are well resourced and based on sound and steady investment. There is effective management of an extensive range of high-quality resources. Mechanisms for checking the appropriateness of resources are evident through the annual self-assessment

carried out by course managers, self-assessment carried out by heads of curriculum, and periodic review carried out by awarding universities: this constitutes good practice.

33 The College has computer clusters in different parts of the campus. At certain times of the day these are subject to heavy demand. The College has developed some innovative ways of managing their availability. These include removing access to social networking sites during core hours and allowing students to access computers in classrooms that are being used by other groups under a guest policy. Since the Developmental engagement, the College has made considerable progress with the development of the virtual learning environment, which constitutes good practice. The team noted the comprehensive coverage of course materials and supporting information on the site and access to relevant links, including those of awarding bodies. The University of Portsmouth has supported the College in introducing online assessment techniques, as demonstrated by the FdA in Business and Management.

**The team concludes that it has confidence in the College's management of its responsibilities for the quality of the learning opportunities as required by the awarding bodies to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.**

### **Core theme 3: Public information**

#### **What information is the College responsible for publishing about its HEFCE-funded higher education?**

34 The College has an appropriate range of higher education publications, which is available to current and prospective students in hard copy and electronic formats. Additional printed course information is supplied to all students. The College makes good use of the virtual learning environment for information purposes. It has developed an effective dedicated higher education home page, which has clear links to the home pages of the awarding bodies. Emphasis is placed on the relevant sections of the academic regulations located on the websites of the awarding bodies. The layout of the information presented on the higher education home pages is clear and is effective in informing the students of the requirements of study at this level. The effective use of the College website constitutes good practice.

35 Applicants to the University of Portsmouth who have failed to achieve the required number of Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) points (or equivalent) may be redirected to the higher education business programmes at the College. These students are provided with appropriate information and documentation by the University, prior to enrolment. Students progressing from further education programmes at the College are provided with UCAS application packs by the Advice and Guidance Team, and they are assisted in making applications online. While it is acknowledged by staff that a relatively low proportion of applications are made to the College directly through UCAS, the team recommends that it would be desirable for the College to review its use of course profiles on the UCAS website in order to enhance public information.

36 Staff delivering higher education programmes are provided with a curriculum quality manual, which contains details of the assessment framework, examination and assessment boards, and procedures for ensuring a high quality of assessment practice. The manual is supported by links to externally produced documents relating to quality, lodged on the College website.



37 Information regarding the academic regulation of programmes is available to students through the generic student handbook and diary, programme handbooks and unit guides, both electronically and in hard copy. The College is reviewing the content of student handbooks in the light of the limited guidance on content given to staff in some cases. The team recommends that it would be desirable for the College to continue to improve the consistency of programme handbooks and module/unit guides. Students have provided valuable input on the development of the new student handbook, working alongside the Higher Education Quality Coordinator. The best current programme handbooks incorporate useful timetabling information, academic regulations and procedures, intended learning outcomes, assessment performance-related criteria, referencing guidance, accreditation of prior learning procedures, extenuating circumstances and appeals procedures. Additional programme-specific referencing guidance leaflets have also been developed. Comprehensive and realistic guidance is also given on balancing the academic expectations of the programme and outside work/employment.

38 In the case of the University of Portsmouth provision, student marks are made available through the University's virtual learning environment. Students who met the team had a clear understanding of when the marks are moderated by staff at the University. However, it was not clear from the documentation provided if students are made aware that grades released throughout the academic year are 'subject to ratification' at the end-of-year assessment panels and board. Students did not appear to understand that this could happen after moderation by the awarding body. The College confirmed that steps are being taken to ensure that students understand that the marks issued during the programme are not finalised until ratified by the external examiner at the end of each academic year. The team recommends that it would be desirable for the College to clarify this in the documentation in order to ensure that there is clear communication to students of the process relating to the confirmation of academic results.

**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?**

39 The College ensures that its published materials adhere to the guidelines issued by the awarding bodies and that they are agreed jointly by appropriate representatives of both the awarding bodies and the College. The material produced for Edexcel programmes must comply with College procedures. Course managers are responsible for the development and subsequent monitoring of the content of higher education publications, which are reviewed with the heads of curriculum prior to publication. All curriculum areas benefit from subject-focused marketing coordinators. Materials are reviewed on an annual basis, and for the University of Portsmouth programmes are subject to a twice-yearly scrutiny. All marketing material produced by the College, irrespective of the awarding body, is signed off by the Head of Student Services and Marketing, who is a member of the senior management team. The material published by the College is in line with the QAA guidance on public information.

**The team considers that reliance can be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.**

## **C Summary of findings from the Developmental engagement in assessment**

40 The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in November 2008. Three lines of enquiry were agreed with the College: the appropriateness of assessment strategies and the conduct of assessment; the effectiveness of assessment feedback to promote learning; and the scope and use of information and learning resources available to support assessment.

41 The Developmental engagement team identified areas of good practice that included the effective conduct of assessment, based on careful attention to the prescribed regulations of the awarding bodies and the active engagement of staff with the Academic Infrastructure. The Developmental engagement team noted the variety of appropriate assessment methods, confirmed by external examiners, which contribute to high levels of student achievement, the robust processes of internal verification and the efficient and effective quality assurance programmes that involve both staff and students. The quality of student learning is enhanced by assessment strategies that develop skills and knowledge closely related to vocational requirements. The reviewers also noted the high quality and timeliness of feedback on student work, the availability online of materials for teaching and learning, strong support for students and an extensive range of high-quality resources.

42 The Developmental engagement team recommended that it would be desirable to clarify the procedures for student appeals and for dealing with academic malpractice on the collaborative provision. The team concluded that it would be desirable for the College to continue to explore opportunities for online feedback on assessment, particularly for part-time students, develop further the mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice in assessment and monitor the quality and comprehensiveness of information governing assessment in all student handbooks.

## **D Foundation Degrees**

43 The College provides an FdA Business and Management (part-time), validated by the University of Portsmouth, and the first year of an FdA Working with Children, validated by the University of Southampton. The team was informed that, at the time of the review, the University was reviewing the future of the programme and, if discontinued, the provision would cease at South Downs College.

44 Both programmes benefit from close collaboration between the College and the universities in the delivery of the programmes. Staff participate in developmental activities provided by the awarding bodies. The team met students who testified to the importance of the provision in widening participation in higher education, providing a ladder of opportunity to further study and meeting local demand. The team noted innovation in teaching and learning on both programmes. For example, since the Developmental engagement, the College has made considerable progress in the development of the virtual learning environment, and the University of Portsmouth has supported the College in introducing online assessment techniques on the FdA in Business and Management.

45 In the course of the review, the team identified the areas of good practice and the areas where it would be desirable for the College to take action. For the FdAs these correspond to those listed in Section E, paragraphs 47 and 48, which apply to the provision as a whole.

## E Conclusions and summary of judgements

46 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in South Downs College's management of its responsibilities for academic standards and for the quality of learning opportunities of the awards the College offers on behalf of its awarding bodies. This was based upon discussion with staff and students and scrutiny of evidence provided by the College and its awarding bodies, namely Edexcel, the University of Portsmouth and the University of Southampton.

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

- there is a close and effective working relationship with the awarding bodies at all levels of the management of the provision (paragraphs 12, 14 to 16, 20)
- the Higher Education Quality Review Group is making a significant contribution to the maintenance of academic standards and the enhancement of learning opportunities (paragraph 14)
- ILT (Information Learning Technology) Champions are used to promote and disseminate innovative learning and teaching (paragraph 25)
- the Learning Resource Centre plays an effective role in supporting and promoting learning, including the use of electronic media and well-designed documentary material (paragraph 31)
- there is effective management of an extensive range of high quality resources (paragraph 32)
- the virtual learning environment supports teaching and learning, the management of the provision and staff development (paragraphs 33 to 34)
- the College makes effective use of its website to provide comprehensive information for students (paragraph 34).

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

The team agreed the following areas where it would be **desirable** for the College to take action:

- review and evaluate the new structure for the management and quality assurance of the higher education provision (paragraph 13)
- continue to progress the action plan arising from the Developmental engagement (paragraph 15)
- monitor and evaluate the uptake of higher education staff development in order to ensure its continued effectiveness (paragraphs 18, 30)
- review its use of course profiles on the UCAS website in order to enhance public information (paragraph 35)
- continue to improve the consistency of programme handbooks and module/unit guides (paragraph 37)

- ensure that there is clear communication to students of the process relating to the confirmation of academic results (paragraph 38).

49 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 bodies.

50 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.

51 Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, and other documentary evidence and from its meetings with staff and students, the team concludes that, in the context of this Summative review, reliance **can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

South Downs College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010						
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 <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>there is a close and effective working relationship with the awarding bodies at all levels of the management of the provision (paragraphs 12, 14 to 16, 20)</li> </ul>	Continue to invite awarding body representatives to HEQRG meetings & any related training	December 2010	Higher Education Quality Coordinator	Record of attendance and communication	Quality Manager	HEQRG review of 2010-11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Higher Education Quality Review Group is making a significant contribution to the maintenance of academic standards and the enhancement of learning opportunities (paragraph 14)</li> </ul>	Review of 2009-10 to influence scheduling of regular meetings of HEQRG which continue to focus on relevant issues during 2010-11	August 2010	Higher Education Quality Coordinator	Scheduling of meetings and topics	Quality Manager	HEQRG review of 2010-11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the 'ILT (Information Learning Technology) Champions' are used to promote and disseminate innovative learning and teaching (paragraph 25)</li> </ul>	Ensure effective liaison between ILT Champions and HE course teams to ensure further developments in learning and teaching	December 2010	Senior Lecturer (e-learning)	Delivery of and attendance at ILT staff development by members of HE course teams	Higher Education Quality Coordinator	Evaluation of staff development

South Downs College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Learning Resources Centre plays an effective role in supporting and promoting learning, including the use of electronic media and well designed documentary material (paragraph 31)</li> </ul>	Effective liaison between LRC Manager and HE Course Managers to further develop and update LRC resources, including electronic media	November 2010	LRC Manager	HE students' awareness of existing and new resources, and their effective use by students	Higher Education Quality Coordinator	Students' views Usage statistics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>there is effective management of an extensive range of high quality resources (paragraph 32)</li> </ul>	Review content of EE reports pertaining to resources	September 2010	Higher Education Quality Coordinator	HEQRG discussion of references to resources in 2009-10 EE reports	Quality Manager	Achievement of any action points resulting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the virtual learning environment supports teaching and learning, the management of the provision and staff development (paragraphs 33 to 34)</li> </ul>	Further development of information, resources & interactive learning opportunities Continue to investigate opportunities for online assessment	October 2010	Senior Lecturer (e-learning) HE Course Managers	Expansion of VLE content	Higher Education Quality Coordinator	Students' views Usage statistics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the College makes effective use of the its website to provide comprehensive information for students (paragraph 34)</li> </ul>	Review currency and content of HE section of College website	September 2010	New Media Designer HE Course Managers	Current and useful information on the College website	Higher Education Quality Coordinator	Students' views

South Downs College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010						
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team agreed the following areas where it would be <b>desirable</b> to take action:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review and evaluate the new structure for the management and quality assurance of the higher education provision (paragraph 13)</li> </ul>	HE Quality Coordinator to produce a report evaluating the work of the HE quality structure	August 2010	Higher Education Quality Coordinator	Production of action plan for 2010-11	Quality Manager	Content & success of report & action plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continue to progress the action plan arising from the Developmental engagement (paragraph 15)</li> </ul>	Disseminate Academic Infrastructure developments Expand online HE resources Review terms of reference for extenuating/mitigating circumstances committee	October 2010	Higher Education Quality Coordinator Senior Lecturer (e-learning) Quality Manager	Attendance at staff development Increased online resources New terms of reference	Quality Manager	Evaluation of staff development Students' views Clarity of terms of reference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>monitor and evaluate the uptake of higher education staff development, in order to ensure its continued effectiveness (paragraphs 18, 30)</li> </ul>	System of regular reports of HE staff development	December 2010	Higher Education Quality Coordinator	Effective utilisation of budget	Quality Manager	Evaluation of staff development

South Downs College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2010						
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review its use of Course Profiles on the UCAS website in order to enhance public information (paragraph 35)</li> </ul>	Review of all relevant course profiles	October 2010	Higher Education Quality Coordinator	Updated course profiles	Quality Manager	Students' views
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continue to improve the consistency of programme handbooks and module/unit guides (paragraph 37)</li> </ul>	Review by HEQRG	October 2010	Higher Education Quality Coordinator	Achievement of agreed level of consistency	Quality Manager	Students' views
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure that there is clear communication to students of the process relating to the confirmation of academic results (paragraph 38)</li> </ul>	Clear information describing the confirmation process to be available to students in programme handbooks and on the HE VLE	October 2010	HE Course Managers Senior Lecturer (e-learning)	Information in 2010-11 programme handbooks Information on HE VLE for use during induction of new HE students	Higher Education Quality Coordinator	Students' views



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

Tel 01452 557000  
Fax 01452 557070  
Email [comms@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@qaa.ac.uk)  
Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

RG 597 05/10