



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of West Dean College - The Edward James Foundation, March 2019

### Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that the West Dean College - The Edward James Foundation (the College) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [March 2017 monitoring visit](#).

### Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 There are currently just over 80 higher education students studying at West Dean College. There are 37 members of academic and administrative staff who work full or part time on the College's higher education provision. Students study on a range of specialised programmes, all of which are validated by the University of Sussex (the University). The College undertook a revalidation process with the University which was successfully concluded in February 2019. There have been minimal changes to the higher education programmes offered since the last visit. The College has introduced a new metalwork pathway to the FdA Historic Craft Practices programme. The College has also introduced a non-validated Diploma in Art and Contemporary Crafts. Due to a commendable judgement in the 2017 visit, there was no annual monitoring visit in 2018.

### Findings from the monitoring visit

3 Since the last QAA Educational Oversight visit in 2017, West Dean College has developed an action plan that identifies and implements actions to maintain and enhance the academic standards and quality of higher education provision delivered at the College. (paragraphs 4, 5 and 6). The College has a robust approach to admission's that was positively commented on by students (paragraph 7). Assessment processes at the College are effective. Issues that have been identified by staff and students, including around feedback and the quality of text-based assignments, are being identified and worked on through the action plan (paragraphs 8, 9 and 10). The College continues to engage fully with external reference points (paragraph 12).

4 The College has a clear and comprehensive action plan. The visit confirmed that the action plan identifies the key issues and themes arising from students and staff at the College, and the detailed progress and evaluation recorded by the College demonstrates that continuous improvement is achieved by the College. Items on the action plan include areas for development such as staff and student understanding of assessment criteria, improving student assessment feedback, and the introduction of a new student intranet learning resource. The action plan also looks to build on previously identified good practice, including for example delivery of work placements, learning resources and the enhancement of teaching informed by research.

5 Good practice in the use of a range of resources continues to support and enhance the quality of teaching and the wider learning experience. Since the last visit the College has provided opportunities for students to engage and work with the valuable West Dean

Collection providing students with a rich and immersive learning experience. The College continues to develop its Strategic Plan and has revised its Teaching and Learning Strategy which is more closely aligned with research and innovation activity and world class curatorial activity.

6 Good practice is evident in relation to assuring a robust student learning experience. This ranges from initial advice, guidance and information, during and after the admissions process. This continues along the student learning experience through to completion and progression into employment, which students confirmed is a key strength of the College. Students' personal and professional identity remains paramount throughout their studies and is evidenced through the strong alumni ties and networking opportunities with artists, curators, and visiting expert speakers.

7 The College has developed and maintained a robust approach to the admission of students to its programmes. This includes a transparent dialogue from initial enquiry through to confirmation of acceptance and induction. The College has a clear focus on ensuring that students will be admitted to an appropriate programme. The College successfully identifies additional learning support needs. There is a commitment to inclusion and recognition of prior learning (RPL) and attainment. Details of entry requirements, admissions, RPL and work portfolio requirements, together with appeals processes are available on the website. Additional information and guidance is clearly provided at 'Open Days' at which current and former students play a significant role. A number of students progress on to higher education programmes as a result of engaging with the short courses that the College offers across the range of specialist disciplines. Overseas students studying via the Tier 4 route were particularly complimentary about the accessibility and supportive nature of the admissions process.

8 Assessment processes adhere to the College's assessment policy and conform to the University of Sussex academic regulations. The college is responsible for designing assessment tasks and marking. Students are informed of assessment points at the start of the academic year. Details of assessment are contained in module guides. Formative feedback is given verbally and in writing through the process of critiquing students' emerging work products and this is supported by comprehensive written feedback within two weeks which serve as an integral part of each student's reflective practice.

9 Staff and students had identified some issues around the quality of feedback given to students, as well as staff and student understanding of assessment briefs. The College has identified these issues at an institutional level and has recorded these on its action plan. To improve feedback, actions include training and sharing of good practice. Meetings with students, and results from recent surveys suggest the College's actions have resulted in a positive impact. Likewise, clarity and improvements to assessment criteria and matrices, in particular for text-based assignments, demonstrate some improvements in the understanding of assessment briefs.

10 Further to this, external examiners comment positively on the standard and appropriateness of assessment. Students commented very favourably on the range and appropriateness of assessment, which is performance based, and the usefulness of continuous feedback given by tutors on individual emerging work products and artistic creations. In addition, the College has clear and transparent guidance in place regarding academic good practice and the avoidance of academic misconduct and plagiarism. Students reported on the value of this support.

11 The College provided a detailed breakdown of student performance data. Enrolments for 2018-19 are 83 students, which represents an approximate 30 per cent increase on the previous two years. Of the 125 students who enrolled in 2016-17 and

2017-18, 10 students discontinued their studies, representing 8 per cent. Of those who continued, all students are either continuing their course or have passed the qualification. The College has implemented actions within the School of Conservation where the number of non-completions at postgraduate level had increased.

## **Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education**

12 The College designs its own programmes which are validated by the University. As such they ensure alignment with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Staff are aware of the revised Quality Code soon to be published. The College is now on the OfS register having prepared itself for the new regulatory requirements in England. The College also make reference to the Institute of Conservation's professional standards. All academic staff are also current industry practitioners and bring their continuing professional experience to their teaching. Students value the considerable skills and expertise their faculty members bring to the programmes. Staff are actively encouraged to achieve Fellowship and Senior Fellowship status of Advance HE, previously the Higher Education Academy, with some staff members having already achieved this.

## **Background to the monitoring visit**

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

14 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr David J. Malachi, Reviewer, and Mr Rafe Smallman, QAA Officer, on 26 March 2019.

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