



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of West Dean College - The Edward James Foundation, March 2017

1 Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that West Dean College - The Edward James Foundation (the College) made commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the March 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 The College continues to offer programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level, including foundation degrees, graduate diplomas, postgraduate diplomas and master's degrees validated by the University of Sussex. Provision is delivered through the School of Creative Arts, and the School of Conservation. In 2016, a new part-time master's in Collections Care and Conservation Management was introduced. The College currently has 78 students studying on full and part-time higher education programmes, which represents 69.6 full-time equivalent numbers, a small increase on the previous year's 66.5 full-time equivalent. The College also continues to offer a programme of specialist non-accredited short course in subjects ranging from ceramics and sculpture to drawing, music, gardening, jewellery making and textiles.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The College has worked to address all areas of the action plan related to the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of 2016, which did not include any recommendations. It continues to consolidate the good practice identified, and affirmation made (paragraphs 4-10). In some instances, quantitative indicators against progress are not yet available. The College updates its Institutional Action Plan and progress is reported to its academic committees.

4 Quantitative success indicators for assessment and feedback are not yet available but meetings with students, and examination of the resources the College provides to enhance students' understanding of feedback on assessments, demonstrate that the College has continued to put in place initiatives to support the provision of timely and informative feedback. Appropriate structures and procedures are in place for programme monitoring, with student engagement included in the College's governance structure (paragraph 12). Admissions processes are rigorous in their application and also in the way in which they identify a suitable skills base and motivation for further study (paragraph 13). The College has made effective progress in the enhancement of processes and policies, and progress with the monitoring and review of its higher education provision (paragraph 15).

5 Academic staff have allocated time for research and scholarly activities as part of their revised employment contracts, and staff development events are held in-house to support teaching, assessment and practice-based learning. The planning of these events is informed by the outcomes of appraisal, the Teaching and Learning Strategy and external

examiner recommendations, as well as student feedback. The quality of teaching is also assured through peer observation of teaching.

6 Academic staff are supported to gain teaching qualifications, including through Associate Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. The University of Sussex offers its partner college staff access to its Postgraduate Certificate in Education free of charge, and staff are encouraged to access this resource.

7 The Research Action Plan is detailed. Implementation and monitoring is the responsibility of the Research Committee, and there is evidence of progress towards the development of externally funded research in the form of a joint bid for funds with Sussex University and a developing relationship with the CASS Sculpture Foundation. Externally facing symposia have been hosted and a number of further initiatives discussed by the Research Committee. The impact of research projects is evaluated by the Research Committee in line with the College's Research Strategy and Action Plan. The team heard that students are regularly involved in research projects and in planning and running events.

8 The good practice in the use of resources continues to support the quality of teaching and learning, and the role and location of the West Dean Collection has been reviewed to consider its rehousing and its accessibility to students and to other interested parties. The College has developed a 10-year Strategic Plan and is revising its Teaching and Learning Strategy, with a working group leading on the evaluation and use of the archive and Collection to support teaching and research.

9 The College has continued to make progress with incorporating short courses into higher education programmes to offer enhancement to the student learning experience. Students confirmed that they access short courses free of charge and that they are directed to appropriate provision. Quantitative indicators of success against the Institutional Action Plan targets are not yet available.

10 The introduction of a new Work Placement Policy has served to formalise the support for placements for foundation degree and postgraduate programmes, and the additional guidance for students and placement providers is comprehensive. Positive verbal and written feedback has been gathered from placement providers in relation to the first set of placements in 2016-2017. The feedback has been reviewed by the Teaching and Learning Forum as part of the ongoing monitoring of the work placement strategy and guidance.

11 To support ongoing improvements in the timing and quality of summative feedback, a comprehensive range of actions, including staff development and the provision of guidance to students, are being undertaken. Students indicated that they valued the guidance provided at the start of the academic year. Although data to evidence the success of these actions for 2016-17 is not yet available, monitoring and forward planning to ensure ongoing improvements to the timing and quality of feedback is reported in the Teaching and Learning Forum. Further initiatives under investigation include the integration of the processes of assessment and feedback with the virtual learning environment (VLE), and the use of the VLE to provide information relating to assessments to external examiners. While in the early stages of development, access to assessments through the VLE has been well received.

12 The College has a well established system of identifying key development priorities and bringing these together in an Institutional Action Plan, which is kept under review by key College committees. This ongoing feature of the evaluation of provision brings together feedback from students, external examiners, course tutors and other stakeholders, and supports course enhancement.

13 Clear and robust systems are in place for the admission of students. Minimum English Language requirements for admission are detailed on the College website, with Programme Specifications for each programme setting out specific requirements above the minimum level. Questions on the application form test students' motivation, aspirations, and broader knowledge and understanding of the way in which their chosen subject features in historical and contemporary cultural heritage. Subject knowledge and the skills requirements for the proposed programme of study are also tested through practical exercises set prior to interview.

14 Following an initial check of applications, all students are interviewed and a further assessment of their language skills is undertaken. The interview process is personalised and in-depth, and guidance is provided to support interview panels. In addition to intellectual capability, open-ended questions test students' motivation and transferable skills. Clarification of the students' understanding of the collegiate aspects of living and studying at West Dean is also part of the interview. The team noted that the College is rigorous in its selection of students who are likely to benefit from its courses. The sampling by the team of admissions folders indicated that the College provides clear rationales for decisions to reject applications.

15 The College follows the University's processes for monitoring and reviewing programmes. Examination of documentation indicated that annual monitoring is reflective, detailed and identifies how strategic aims are being realised at an operational level. The College's governance structure is clear, and evolving management structures have added an additional higher level of school, as well as subject-level monitoring, to enable a more strategic perspective to outcomes and proposed actions. Meeting minutes indicate engagement with the process of annual monitoring within this structure, which starts at programme level and receives final sign-off by Academic Board. Action planning is clearly evidenced from programme level to College level, and reflects the expectation that progress needs to be quantifiable, with clear success indicators which are benchmarked. Regular updates to action plans are evidenced throughout the year, including to the Institutional Action Plan.

16 The College recruits very small numbers of students to individual programmes, with intakes ranging from 10 students on the newly introduced FdA Historic Craft Practices to two students for the Graduate Diploma in Conservation of Clocks. The data presented as percentages is therefore liable to significant fluctuations. The small cohort sizes mean that staff have detailed knowledge of the progress of individual students, and progression and achievement rates are good across all areas of study. Retention rates are very high, with most programmes retaining 100 per cent of students. Achievement on programmes for the last three years ranges from 89 per cent for the MA in Conservation Studies, where eight students achieved and one student failed, to 100 per cent of the 30 students on the undergraduate and postgraduate diplomas in 2014-15 and 2015-16 achieving a pass or pass with distinction.

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

17 The College makes use of Subject Benchmark Statements, which are referenced in annual programme monitoring reports, and external examiner feedback acknowledges alignment with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and professional body standards. Reference to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) is informing the ongoing review of policies and the development of the new regulatory framework to replace the College's 'Generic Document' handbook.

18 The College continues to review and report actions in response to external examiners' feedback at School Boards, Academic Quality Committee and Academic Board. The annual monitoring process and the regular provision of a Reflective and Evaluative Review to the University ensures that the University's validation requirements are met. The College is increasingly engaging students with quality assurance through a regular cycle of questionnaires and qualitative feedback from student forums. Feedback is reviewed and actioned through the College's committee structure and by inclusion of the Student Vice-President on the Academic Quality Committee, which ensures that the student voice informs developments.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

19 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.

20 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Elizabeth Smith, Reviewer, and Mrs Mandy Hobart, Coordinator, on 21 March 2017.

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