Periodic Review Report: 
Education Foundation Degrees

Introduction

1. An internal review of the Institute of Education’s Foundation Degrees in Supporting Children’s Development and Learning (with Newbury College) and in Early Years Development and Learning (with Berkshire College of Agriculture (BCA) and Bracknell & Wokingham College (BWC)) was held on Tuesday 15 February 2011.

An internal review of all other programmes in the Institute of Education will take place in 2012-13; the Foundation Degrees have been reviewed separately in the light of the expiry of the current contracts with partnership colleges in January 2012 and other programme developments, which will result in a proposal for the replacement of the existing programmes with a sole programme.

As a result of the separation of this review process from the main review of other Institute of Education programmes, the Foundation Degree programmes were not subject to the Pathfinder Process.

2. The members of the Panel were:

- Dr M-M. Kleinhans: Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning, Social Sciences (Chair)
- Professor A.R. Bell: ICMA Centre
- Dr L.V. Purse: School of Arts and Communication Design
- Ms V. Bennett: Bath Spa University
- Ms M. McWade: Bracknell Forest Council
- Mrs V.A. Howard: Senior Quality Support Officer (Secretary)

3. The Panel met the following staff of the University:

- Professor A.C. Goodwyn: Head of Institute of Education
- Ms J. Elsey: Head of Early Years / Director of Early Years Professional Programmes
- Mr D. Kempton: BA CDL/EYPS Administrator
- Mrs G.S. Lovett: Programme Advisor, BA Children’s Development and Learning
- Mrs A. Mason: Co-ordinator for EY programmes
- Ms E.M. McCrum: School Director of Teaching and Learning
- Ms S. McFeely: Quality Assurance Administrator
- Dr G. Taggart: Programme Director, BA Children’s Development and Learning
- Ms T. Wilson: Programme Director, Foundation Degrees

4. The Panel met three students who represented the BA Children’s Development and Learning programme. These students had completed the Foundation Degree at BCA, Newbury College and BWC.
The Periodic Review also consisted of partnership reviews of BWC, Newbury College and BCA. As part of that process, a sub-group consisting of the Chair and Secretary of the Panel met with a variety of staff and students at each of the colleges.

General observations

The Panel is grateful for the efficient and helpful way in which staff from the Institute of Education and from the partner colleges assisted with the Periodic Review process and site visits. The Panel was aware that the programme team had been involved in reviews by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) as part of its Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) process at each of the three colleges during this academic year and that Newbury College was undergoing an inspection by the Training & Development Agency for Schools (TDA) as part of the Foundation Degree programme’s application for sector endorsement from the TDA at the same time as this Review process.

The documentation provided for the Review was comprehensive, much of the required information was provided via Blackboard.

The Panel was cognizant of the complex context in which these programmes operated and commended the way in which the programmes and their team achieved so much and provided so many examples of good practice. The Panel also noted and commended:

- the teaching and learning on the programme;
- the strong team ethos which underpins the partnership and which contributes to the exceptional support (both pastoral and academic) offered to students (the team includes Reading staff, teaching and learning support staff at the colleges, students, mentors, employers, and local authorities);
- examples of good practice at each of the Colleges identified in this document and in the partner visit reports (the Panel hopes that many of these examples will be rolled out across all the Colleges); and,
- the strong commitment to the University of Reading demonstrated by each of the partner colleges.

Areas for further development include:

- the need to tighten quality assurance processes;
- the imperative of addressing learning resource issues; and,
- the importance of developing a University of Reading identity amongst students.

Academic standards of the programmes

Educational aims of the provision and the learning outcomes

The Panel considers the aims and learning outcomes to be clear and appropriate, communicated well and understood by students, staff and examiners. A Subject Benchmarking Statement does not exist for this qualification.

There is recognition in the aims and outcomes that the programme is about both an academic and professional journey and that this is ongoing and based on reflective practice. The programme has developed over time to reflect current practice, policy and legislation. The Panel expressed a desire to see this emphasis maintained in the new programme and believes that the new module on Professionalism will reinforce reflective practice and personal development planning.
The programme rewrite will need to build upon existing strengths, of which there are many, to allow for sufficient flexibility to reflect latest government policy in the current changing educational and social economic context: changes which affect early years education, children’s workforce, early intervention, focus on the most disadvantaged children, parental partnership, Munro and social work, national curriculum, ITT and HE. It is crucial that students are able to understand these changes and the implications for their own practice whilst also maintaining a reflective stance that enables them to see these changes in a broader context. The current aims and objectives of the programme and module specific aims are appropriate in this respect.

Teaching, learning and assessment strategies are clear and students indicate that they understand these strategies. Students speaking to the Panel confirmed that the handbooks were clear and that they were given sufficient support regarding assessment requirements.

Curricula and assessment

Curricula

Students are required to be in at least part-time employment to undertake this programme and most work full-time. Students attend college for one day per week, usually from early afternoon through until the evening. They are taught in a classroom setting.

The programme is endorsed by six local authorities. The programme is also sector endorsed through the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) (BWC/BCA only) and the Training and Development Agency (TDA) (all colleges).

The Panel commends the degree programme’s coherence, breadth and scope. The modules cover a range of both generic and specialist areas appropriate to the student base. The breadth of module provision is evidenced by documentation reviewed as well as students’ positive comments on the delivery of a combination of subject specific knowledge and the understanding of how children learn and develop.

Students take theoretical learning from the classroom and apply the theory to their work settings. They then discuss and reflect upon their practice in the classroom and with their mentor. This represents an excellent way for students to review their practice immediately and is greatly appreciated by employers and students. The TDA endorsement report highlights two related examples of good practice and innovation:

- The approaches to work-based learning embedded in the programme encourage learners to become reflective practitioners, developing their role in school with the knowledge and understanding gained on the programme.
- There were clear examples of students’ learning from the course and from work-based assignments impacting upon practices and procedures in schools to improve the quality of learning for school children.

Reflection is both pervasive and delivered via stand-alone modules in Parts 1 and 2 (Reflective Practice and Reflective Practice in Learning and Development). In reports to the University, the External Examiner has commented positively on the levels of reflective practice in the programme.

The Panel noted the recent introduction of a blended learning module. The blended learning approach has offered students an alternative approach to managing their learning and to accessing teaching. The Panel was pleased with the variety of teaching styles offered, of which blended learning was but one, but was cautious about the use of blended learning in a programme of this nature.
The Panel believes that the curriculum provides all students with the opportunity to achieve, and to demonstrate achievement of, the intended learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and understanding, intellectual skills, practical skills, and transferable skills. It noted that students in all types of work settings received excellent support. The Self-Evaluation Document recognises the range of ICT skills that students entering the programme possess:

*Early years practitioners have less access to electronic technology due to their practitioner role. This addition to their skills set is particularly welcome, though often needs intensive support. It is also a way that more experienced students are able to support their peers.*

Students further benefit from learning about other work settings through mutual visits, opportunities to discuss and share good practice with their peers and mentors, and through the involvement of external speakers in the programme.

The Panel believes that the curriculum and its delivery are appropriate to the programme and its students. This is evident in the work-based learning nature of the programme, tutorial and mentor support, the choice of pathways, reflective modules and the Research Methods for Developing Professional Practice module in Part 2. Students feel that the programme helps them to develop skills and abilities to lead on children’s learning in the workplace. They told the Panel that they felt confident to offer advice to other colleagues and challenge opinions because of the knowledge gained in the programme.

**Assessment**

The Panel finds that the assessment design and processes enable students to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes, evident in the module descriptions and programme specification. The External Examiner’s report 2009-10 highlighted this finding:

The module content and assessment tasks are generally well-matched, and both are quite in keeping with the aims and objectives of the Foundation Degree overall.

The Panel commended the variety of assessment methods as these were appropriate to both the content and learning outcomes of the programmes. This is supported by:

- Positive comments of the most recent External Examiner’s report
- The TDA sector endorsement report which cites this variety as an example of innovation and good practice:
  
  *The use of a variety of learning and assessment approaches (including work-based assignments, guided professional discussions, e-learning, external speakers, workplace visits) caters to a range of learning styles.*

The Panel noted that in addition to the examples cited in the TDA report, assessment included a mixture of traditional and non-traditional forms, including presentations, displays, leaflets, essays, portfolios and the Part 2 Research module.

The External Examiner has commented favourably on how the assessment regime supports effective student learning. Specific reference was made to the materials provided to mentors, the e-learning portfolios, and the Part 2 research project, which is considered to be good preparation for the transition to the BA CDL. External Examiner reports have also commented favourably on assessment criteria and processes and these comments have been taken on board by the programme team and fed into programme revisions.

Evidence of student achievement included the following:

- External Examiner’s reports confirm good levels of achievement, which are ‘at least in keeping with the national picture and possibly stronger’;
the TDA sector endorsement report finding that:

- *The progression rates from the Foundation Degree to the BA are very high and testify to the care the programme team take in their selection processes and in their pastoral and learning support for students.*
- degree classifications indicate academic success of students;
- destination data indicates extremely high levels of student employment; and,
- students also go on to undertake Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) and Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) training routes at Reading and beyond (EYP takes 15 months and can be done at the same time as the BA).

Plagiarism detection tools are not used on the programme and are not available at the Colleges. Tutors stated that they were aware of the risk of plagiarism. Given the seriousness of cheating and the disciplinary actions arising from it, the panel suggests that the introduction of Turnitin, the ‘originality checking’ tool licensed for use at the University, be considered. [Desirable recommendation (a)] Furthermore, the use of Turnitin would support the programme team to address the recommendation of the External Examiner that:

 leurs of plagiarism are formally investigated for academic malpractice. This would help the programme show that academic malpractice is not acceptable and will always be taken seriously.

The Annual Programme Report (2009-10) addresses some of the issues the programme team face in relation to delivering a full-time assessment regime for students in full-time employment:

- *The assessment programme has been modified to reflect these challenges, by spacing tasks as evenly as possible and by considering a variety of assessment methods to maintain the relevance of the programme to the workplace.*

Students that the sub-group of the Panel met as part of the partner review process:

- re-iterated their wish for the timing of assessments to be continually reviewed so that deadlines for modules did not clash;
- expressed a wish to receive their assignment schedule at the start of the year; and,
- asked that the timing of ICT training and related assignments be reviewed.

The Panel trusts that the programme team will continue to monitor these issues.

The Panel noted wide support from students and staff for the discontinuation of the pass/fail marking/classification system for the Foundation Degree. Students indicated a preference for receiving clear recognition for their work through the award of grades and a classified degree; they stated that they were less likely to ‘push’ themselves for modules which did not receive a grade and were pass/fail only. Students also see added value in this Foundation Degree being a classified qualification in the particular instance of them not progressing to the BA. The Panel agreed that it would be advisable that module marks and the final award be classified, rather than be awarded on pass/fail basis. [Advisable recommendation (a)]

**Use of student management information**

10 Internal arrangements for monitoring, evaluating and enhancing academic standards appear effective on the whole. The combination of regular Management Meetings, termly Boards of Studies and twice yearly Steering Committee Meetings provides many opportunities for dialogue between the University, FE partners and relative stakeholders, as well as robust oversight. The Self-Evaluation Document, Annual
Programme Reports (APRs) and meeting proceedings evidence a highly reflective and responsive programme team working collaboratively to ensure the quality of provision. External Examiner reports clearly feed into action planning, which is monitored via QME2 and documented via APRs; this process appears to be working very effectively. Recommendations in relation to mapping University and College quality assurance processes are included in the relevant partner reports.

Engagement with employers and professional bodies is frequent, structured and robust; a number of forums are provided for the sharing of views and knowledge about a fast-changing practitioner context. Formal engagement takes place in a variety of settings, including: Board of Studies, Steering Group, Partnership for Early Years Professional Status (PEYPS) and Partnership for Employment-Based Programme Development meetings. Substantial informal engagement with employers and professional bodies/local authorities is also evident throughout the documentation reviewed and in conversations with mentors and students alike.

The programme team is responsive and sensitive to student needs: student feedback is taken on board and actions are often taken quickly to resolve specific issues or problems. Student representation on the Board of Studies creates a positive forum for nuanced engagement with student feedback, in addition to the informal feedback reported through link tutors. The Panel commended the Newbury model of holding a formally minuted Student/Management meeting, following Board of Studies meetings and suggests that this practice be rolled out across all colleges. [Good practice (a)]

Student evaluation forms are collected, and seem to feed into enhancement of provision, but a formal audit trail which evidences the ways in which such evaluation forms drive enhancement is not currently in place. In addition, while the actions arising from student feedback seem to be communicated to students on an informal level through tutor engagement, no formal communication back to students is currently in place. Given the variable levels/styles of feedback structures in place across the three colleges and some students’ belief that they were not always kept ‘in the loop’, the Panel recommends that all partner college formalize student evaluation processes. It also recommends that University of Reading staff establish methods by which students can contact them directly if there are issues at colleges that they cannot resolve locally. It is advisable to ensure that an audit trail of student evaluation is maintained and to close the loop on all processes. [Advisable recommendation (b)]

The audit trail evidencing how NSS data is addressed at QME2 is not currently visible. If NSS data is not currently engaged with at Boards of Studies and relevant management meetings, the programme team is encouraged to do so. [Advisable recommendation (c)]

Quality of learning opportunities offered by the programmes

Teaching and learning

Programme managers and dedicated support staff in each college oversee and facilitate smooth running of the programme. Staff are peer reviewed through each college’s own peer review or staff observation process, which differ between colleges. There may be a case for considering bringing these processes more in line with the University peer review guidelines.

New staff are observed by the Programme Director and benefit from the support network provided by the regular Management meetings, which are attended by programme managers from the Colleges and staff from Reading. These meetings
provide an opportunity for staff to moderate student work from other colleges and allow more experienced members of staff to share knowledge and good practice. All staff can access the University staff development resources. While they can also access college staff development resources, the Panel is concerned that FE level training may not always be suitable for tutors teaching in an HE context and that college staff might not always be able to undertake required training, due to the nature of their contracts at Colleges, whereby they are only paid for teaching time.

Staff training needs are identified annually by the University, and are driven by both individual training needs and changes in the practitioner context. The Panel is pleased to learn that a Professional Development Action Plan is being put in place to further structure the formal identification of individual staff development needs going forward. The Panel is aware that the University is upgrading to the next version of Blackboard in summer 2011 and suggests that the programme team consider the provision of additional staff training for the revised software. [Desirable recommendation (b)]

The Panel also suggests that further consideration be given to ensuring College tutors are able to dedicate sufficient time beyond their teaching hours to the range of essential commitments required by the University in order to maintain the high quality of the programme. This includes link visits to the students and all meetings relevant to the programme. [Advisable recommendation (d)]

While students are very positive about the supportive, detailed nature of feedback, the timeliness of feedback appears to be a persistent challenge, with work usually being returned between four to six weeks after submission. The Panel recognises that this challenge arises from the shared moderation process, whereby tutors from all of the Colleges check marked work for consistency and parity of assessment, and that this has been identified as an example of excellent practice in the External Examiner’s Reports and the TDA Endorsement Report. However, the situation commonly arises that students do not receive feedback on one assessment before they have to submit the next; thus, the formative opportunity for students to learn from their feedback and enhance their approach is lost in these instances. The Panel also noted that students did not appear to recognise the various types of feedback they might receive (i.e. written, verbal, group).

The Panel suggests that the moderation process be reviewed in order to ensure that students receive timely feedback on their work. [Advisable recommendation (e)] It also suggests that the programme team develop standard wording for inclusion in the Assessment Brief so that students are aware in advance when they should expect work to be returned to them and to state that students can seek informal feedback at any point. [Advisable recommendation (f)]

Noting the probable impact of staff shortages at one of the Colleges, the Panel acknowledged that negative comments were received in the National Student Survey, with ‘assessment and feedback’, having gained in satisfaction levels in 2009, declining again in 2010.

Engagement and participation in the programme is generally well evidenced in the documentation provided to the Panel, however engagement with the Blackboard VLE seems less consistent both between and across colleges and between parts. Given the increasing emphasis on ICT, e- and blended learning delivery patterns and the proposed introduction of e-portfolios into the Foundation Degree as a compulsory component, the provision of ICT training and the management of student expectations about the level of ICT engagement at each transition point including entry should be reflected upon further. [Advisable recommendation (g)] This might
be done by enhancing links between IT/Library services at the University and at the Colleges to ensure both students and staff receive local support and training. [see Desirable recommendation (h) below]

The Panel noted that students did not feel like they were part of the University community until they came onto the BA CDL at the University. The Panel suggests that enhancing various aspects of teaching and learning could support a better inculcation of a ‘Reading Identity’ amongst students. This might be done through more induction or transition events at the Colleges (involving Reading staff and BA CDL students) and through organized visits by students and College staff to the University in Parts 1 and 2, bringing students and staff from all the Colleges together and cultivating the shared identity from the outset. The Colleges have variously developed a variety of exercises and tasks as part of these events and would benefit from sharing examples of good practice (e.g. introduction from Part 2 Board of Studies Representative to new Part 1 students at BCA, introductory session on Research Training module at Part 2 at BCA, advanced signposting to Study Advice website by Newbury and BWC, programme handbook quiz at Newbury). [Desirable recommendation (c)] Such events might also be an opportunity to ensure students have the correct access to Blackboard, redirected University email and explain about other opportunities, such as ERASMUS schemes, which might be available to them.

The wide variety of assessment methods identified above is supported by an excellent range of teaching methods and student learning opportunities, and students praised the teaching they received and the opportunities they had, including field trips and guest speakers. As specified in ‘Curricula’ above, the Panel was pleased with the variety of teaching styles offered, but was cautious that blended learning should support teaching and learning, rather than be a replacement for it. Students also commented that the articulation of the timing of certain modules and training pre-required for those modules might be reviewed. One student commented that students would be better equipped for the teaching methods used in Part 3 and the increased use of Blackboard, if such methods were introduced from the outset of the Foundation Degree.

The Panel commended innovative practice at Newbury College in relation to their preparation of the student written submission to IQER. Supported by their Student Communications Officer/ILT, students produced their submission to IQER via a wiki and have subsequently been encouraged to record their work on their e-portfolio. [Good practice (b)]

The Panel also noted strong support from students for teaching to be delivered during the day time, so that they might have more time for private study or group work and would not be excessively tired in the final sessions of the day. Students felt that this would not adversely affect their ability to leave their work settings and, indeed, volunteered that it is often more difficult to leave mid-day than not to be at work at all. It is desirable that feasibility of teaching during the day-time be explored further. [Desirable recommendation (d)]

### Student admission and progression

The Annual Programme Reports provide data on performance by Part but it can be tricky to follow the progression of a cohort (i.e. Part 1 2007, Part 2 2008, Part 3 2009) and the Panel recommends that year-on-year cohort statistics be maintained. [Advisable recommendation (h)] The collection of such data would allow the programme team to look for trends in progression over time and across the transitions; it would also allow a nuanced view of cohort movement rather than of
discrete yearly events. In addition, it would be informative to compare performance by classification per Part to see development of performance over the programme. Finally, comparisons of performance at Part 3 with other UG programmes would allow benchmarking to take place for quality assurance and also for marketing purposes.

The rates of retention appear very high and should be commended. In addition, the pass rate is also very high on the Foundation Degrees and reflects the teaching and support systems as well as the hard work put into the programme by its committed students.

Admissions data is not immediately available to reflect upon. Again the programme team would benefit from figures on: applications received/applicants invited to interview/declined those offered a place/acceptances [Desirable recommendation (e)]. This would enable analysis over time to be undertaken and to look at trends and allow risk management in the changing climate regarding student fees. The Panel identified the need to sell the programme and provide ‘real’ explanation and details of the impact of fees increase and loan repayments. The programme team should consult Reading Student Financial Support for further support and guidance.

The Panel noted that marketing material was not routinely shared or moderated and following a review of some materials, identified a lack clarity in relation to the level of qualifications required at entry (i.e. are GCSE Maths and English required, or normally required?). It is necessary to ensure the accuracy, consistency and branding of information within and across documentation (including reference to admission requirements). [Necessary recommendation (a)] (see also desirable recommendation (f) below).

During meetings between the subset of the Panel and staff at Colleges, tutors were asked to comment upon the entrance requirements of the programme. Some staff cited the benefits of students having already achieved the required admission level for the BA before they undertake the Foundation Degree – namely that students were better able to cope with the demands of the programme and could concentrate on the Foundation Degree, when not undertaking GCSEs in parallel.

The Panel suggests that the programme team review the admission requirements of the programme. [Desirable recommendation (f)]

The Panel recommends that students are informed about their eligibility for a Certificate of Higher Education if they withdraw at the end of Part 1 and for applicants to be aware of the possibility of entering Part 2 if they have obtained a relevant Certificate of Higher Education elsewhere. [Advisable recommendation (i)]

The Colleges undertake an interview process for all applicants. The criteria for admission that are assessed at interview include an understanding of reflective practice and a commitment to learning. The interview process is seen to be both a recruitment and selection process – with lots of information being given, as well as received, during such interviews. It may be that the programme team need to think about having a presence on such interview panels and also to consider how the local authorities could be involved in this process. [Desirable recommendation (g)] This may help reinforce the Reading presence at a very early stage of the programme.

Whilst the Panel noted that links to the BA CDL are being developed more and more to make progression more fluid and that tutors from Colleges are often Personal Tutors/Special Study Tutors on the BA, student feedback indicates that the transition from Part 2 for Part 3 is still exponentially difficult when compared with that between Part 1 and Part 2. The Panel recommends a further review of the nature of the
delivery of Parts 1 and 2 to establish what can be done to better prepare students for this jump. [Advisable recommendation (j)]

As specified in ‘Teaching and Learning’ (above) and developed further in ‘Learning Resources’ (below), the Panel believes that further consideration of the standard academic and study support offered both at the partner Colleges and directly by the University will support the development of the ‘Reading student identity’. Whilst the Panel saw evidence of the excellent academic and pastoral care provided to students, on a one-to-one and group basis, clarifying the extra support available from the University to students would enhance the student experience yet further. As reported in the reviews of the partner Colleges, there were a number of inaccuracies in the programme handbooks and in staff/student understanding of some services (e.g. dyslexia assessment) and policies (e.g. extenuating circumstances, late submission policy, anonymous marking). A review of the templates used, including a standardisation of information and greater emphasis on the role of the University, should also contribute towards enhancing the student experience and, in particular, the ‘Reading identity’. The Panel was pleased to note that an addendum to the programme handbook, correcting any errors, had been circulated to students after the College visits.

Learning resources

The Panel believes that the collective expertise of the academic staff is suitable for effective delivery of the curricula and for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The Panel noted high levels of satisfaction as a result of the excellent support offered by both categories of staff. It noted the benefits derived by students when they could draw on the support of IT or Library support staff at their respective colleges and suggested that the links between these staff be developed further. [Desirable recommendation (h)]

The access to the University libraries for students has been described by many as ‘troublesome’. Feedback from students confirmed that they had found it hard to access the library at Bulmershe (the reduced opening hours of this library were in no way suited to students who work full-time off campus). The Panel trusts that this issue will be resolved with the move to Whiteknights / London Road (when all library resources will be available at the Whiteknights campus, with much more amenable opening hours) but it notes the importance of managing student expectations more widely.

Students found the status of ‘External User’ difficult to comprehend (especially if we are selling that they are University students).

Students reported that access to Blackboard and usage of this and Reading email had only begun to be used in earnest during Part 3 (i.e. on the BA CDL). This is clearly not the intention of the programme and students felt that some of the difficulties of adjusting to Part 3 would have been overcome with earlier trialling and usage of these facilities. In addition, linked access to e-journals at an earlier stage would help with the above problem regarding the library access issues, particularly in the instance where students are penalised for not referencing journals as a result of access difficulties. It is necessary to ensure that students have access to Blackboard, e-journals and their Reading email at the start of the programme. [Necessary recommendation (b)]

More ICT training of tutors is probably required here and even more so with the move to the new Blackboard platform during 2011. [see desirable recommendation (b) above]
Students were generally unaware of the array of academic, study support facilities and extra-curricular activities available at the University and the Panel felt that students might identify more with the Reading identity if they had better awareness of these services and mechanisms (see ‘Teaching and Learning’, above). Regular, scheduled visits to the University during Parts 1 and 2 would provide an opportunity for such information to be shared with students.

It was not clear whether the use of MediaSite was seen as beneficial or more of an ‘OU-type thing’. Also blended learning had received mixed feedback. It may be that the students thrive in the face-to-face environment and such electronic tools should only be used as a support mechanism rather than a replacement for traditional methods of engagement (as stated in Curricula and Assessment above).

The Panel supports the recommendation of the IQER Summative Review of BWC, which states that the College should ‘develop a higher education ethos and culture within the College, including the provision of a dedicated higher education study area’ and considers that such provision should be available at each of the Colleges. [Advisable recommendation (k)]. It noted the recent introduction of such a space at BCA and that a group study area could be reserved at Newbury. It also identified the need for the Colleges to undertake an audit of their current library stocks.

Employer engagement

Engagement with employers is very strong, as one would expect for a work-based programme, but it extends beyond most traditional boundaries with work-based mentors, employers and local authorities actively contributing to the success of the programme. Students are required to be in at least part-time employment before commencing the programme and it was clear to the Panel that students were well-prepared to return to their setting on a full-time basis, should they wish to do so, or progress to the BA CDL at the University, upon completion of the Foundation Degree.

All students are required to have a mentor and mentors play an important role within the support, delivery and assessment of the programmes. The Colleges offer drop-in sessions for mentors and College staff also conduct visits to settings to support the student/mentor relationship and guide the assessment process. The Panel commended:

- the mentor handbook and DVD which is professionally produced and delivers an important message to the mentor regarding the importance and key role they play [Good practice (c)];
- mentors conduct some of the assessment in the GDP [Good practice (d)]; and,
- the mentor newsletters published by some of the Colleges. [Good practice (e)]

The Panel noted the importance of establishing a good relationship between the student and mentor and identified the negative impact on the student experience when this relationship was not effective. It was important that students were aware of the measures that could be taken by the programme team if the relationship did not work. The Panel suggests that students receive clear and timely guidance on how to choose a mentor (prior to the commencement of the programme). [Desirable recommendation (i)]

The Panel also noted the need to sustain mentor engagement in the programme, given the level of commitment expected from them. It noted that whilst the Colleges delivered support sessions specifically for mentors, attendance at such events was variable. In addition to regular newsletters, the Panel identified further ways to incentivise participation and increase engagement of mentors, such as reimbursing...
travel expenses for training events or drop-in sessions, or accrediting mentor time in some way. The Panel suggests the programme team and Colleges review the process for crediting and compensating mentors. [Desirable recommendation (j)]

Following comments from mentors and students, the Panel further considered whether alumni might be more routinely approached to undertake this role. Students were obviously willing to be involved in the programme after graduation and reiterated the benefits that would be derived, such as greater awareness of the work, study and personal demands placed on students. The Panel suggests that the programme team consider whether a pool of ‘allocatable’ mentors should/could be made available to those students who have difficulties identifying a suitable mentor. This would include the possibility of recruiting alumni. [Desirable recommendation (k)]

The Panel commended the involvement of local authorities in the programme. [Good practice (f)]. Support was provided through:

- recruitment of students;
- student support;
- engagement in Steering Group and Partnership Groups; and,
- programme enhancement.

The Panel identified the importance of employers, who permit their employees to participate in the programme whilst in employment. It identified as an example of good practice the dissemination of the Employer Information leaflet, which provides comprehensive information about the programme and the demands on students.

Enhancement of quality and academic provision

As stated above, the Foundation Degree programmes were not subject to the Pathfinder Process prior to this Periodic Review.

The Panel commends the remarkable team ethos of the programme team, and the strong community of stakeholders who are engaged in a number of highly productive ways. The Panel commends the exceptional student support evidenced for the Review.

The programme team is highly responsive to student feedback and to stakeholders, and disseminates good practice through committee structures but also staff training sessions. The Mentor Handbook provides a good example of how examples of effective practice have been used to generate training materials and institute good practice.

The programme team is also commended for swiftly issuing an addendum to the programme handbook following the visits to the partner colleges, in which deviations to current University policies, inconsistent use of terminology and reference to College policies not applicable to this programme were identified.

There is a structured hierarchy of forums for sharing and disseminating good practice in formal (Management Meetings, QME2, Steering) and less formal settings (drop-ins, training sessions). Given the different forms of innovative practice evidenced by the site visits (e.g. BWC’s research project timeline; BCA’s marketing strategies; Newbury College’s student written submission to IQER (see Good Practice (b) above)), there may be scope for further sharing of good practice and innovation and instituting these across all three sites.

The forward-looking development plan for the next three years seems appropriate to a challengingly uncertain context, however there may be opportunities to consider further the impact of the fee increases, other practitioner context changes, and the
programme’s own widening participation agenda on how the programme is marketed in future, a point that might be better be considered in the first year of the plan rather than later.

Having a Programme Director in post will allow the Institute of Education to focus on ensuring quality assurance processes are in line with the University and disseminated appropriately to colleges and to implement the recommendations and enhancements identified in this report. It would also provide an opportunity for the University and Colleges to map their Quality Assurance processes and remove any duplication of effort or contradictory policies/codes. They could also review mechanisms to ensure that relevant information, including formal and informal evaluation, was disseminated as a matter of course between the University and Colleges.

Main characteristics of the programmes under review

16 The Panel considers the aims and learning outcomes to be clear and appropriate. It commends the degree programmes’ coherence, breadth and scope. The modules cover a range of both generic and specialist areas appropriate to the student base. The Panel agreed that the programmes under review helped students to develop the academic and professional skills required to succeed both on the programme and in their work setting.

Students benefit from a high quality learning experience and the panel observed a number of examples of innovation and good practice. In particular, the Panel commends the teaching and learning on the programme; the strong team ethos (which includes a number of stakeholders, such as employers and local authorities); the exceptional pastoral and academic support offered to students; and the strong commitment of the partner colleges to the University. The programme operates in a complex context and it was clear that the programme team responded swiftly to changes in context to ensure that programme content remained current and relevant.

Conclusions on innovation and good practice

17 The Panel commends the following as areas where the programmes have particular strengths:

(a) The Newbury model of holding a formally minuted Student/ Management meeting, following Board of Studies meetings;

(b) Newbury College in relation to their preparation of the student written submission to IQER. Supported by their Student Communications Officer/ILT, students produced their submission to IQER via a wiki and have subsequently been encouraged to record their work on their e-portfolio;

(c) The mentor handbook and DVD which is professionally produced and delivers an important message to the mentor regarding the importance and key role they play;

(d) Mentors conduct some of the assessment in the GDP;

(e) The mentor newsletters published by some of the Colleges; and

(f) The involvement of local authorities in the programme.
Conclusions on quality and standards
18 The Panel is assured of the quality and standards of the programmes that have been reviewed, that the intended learning outcomes of the programmes are being achieved by students and that the programmes specifications are appropriate.

Conclusions on new degree programme proposals
19 The Panel noted that a new programme, which merged and replaced the existing Foundation Degree programmes, was under development. A new programme specification was being devised and would also be submitted to the Faculty Board for approval. It would be effective from 2011-12. The Panel supports the roll-out of one programme across the three partnership Colleges and observed the obvious support of staff and students for the revised programme. It widens the appeal of the programme to a broader work-force (e.g. child minders, foster carers) and should serve to breakdown age-group barriers within the sector.

Recommendations
20 The Panel recommends to the Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning in Social Sciences that the following degree programmes be re-approved to run for a further six years:
- Supporting Children’s Development and Learning (with Newbury College)
- Early Years Development and Learning (with BCA and Bracknell & Wokingham College)

21 The Panel considers that the following recommendations must be addressed as a condition of re-approval.

Necessary
(a) The programme team must ensure the accuracy, consistency and branding of information within and across documentation (including reference to admission requirements); and

(b) The programme team must ensure that students have access to Blackboard, e-journals and their Reading email at the start of the programme.

The Panel makes the following ‘advisable’ recommendations:

Advisable
(a) The programme team should consider making module marks and the final award classified, rather than ‘pass/fail’;

(b) The programme team should ensure that an audit trail of student evaluation is maintained and close the loop on all processes;

(c) If NSS data is not currently engaged with at Boards of Studies and relevant management meetings, the programme team is encouraged to do so;

(d) The programme team should give further consideration to ensuring College tutors are able to dedicate sufficient time beyond their teaching hours to training and development required by the University;
(e) The programme team should review the moderation process in order to ensure that students receive timely feedback on their work;

(f) The programme team should develop standard wording for inclusion in the Assessment Brief so that students are aware in advance when they should expect work to be returned to them and to state that students can seek informal feedback at any point;

(g) Given the increasing emphasis on ICT, e- and blended learning delivery patterns and the proposed introduction of e-portfolios into the Foundation Degree as a compulsory component, the provision of ICT training and the management of student expectations about the level of ICT engagement at each transition point including entry should be reflected upon further;

(h) The programme team should maintain year-on-year cohort statistics;

(i) The programme team should ensure that students are informed about their eligibility for a Certificate of Higher Education if they withdraw at the end of Part 1. Applicants should be aware of the possibility of entering Part 2 if they have obtained a relevant Certificate of Higher Education elsewhere;

(j) The programme team should conduct a further review of the nature of the delivery of Parts 1 and 2 to establish what can be done to better prepare students for the jump to Part 3;

(k) The Panel supports the recommendation of the IQER Summative Review of BWC, which states that the College should ‘develop a higher education ethos and culture within the College, including the provision of a dedicated higher education study area’ and considers that such provision should be available at each of the Colleges.

The Panel makes the following ‘desirable’ recommendations:

**Desirable**

(a) The programme team should consider use of Turnitin, the ‘originality checking’ tool;

(b) The programme team should consider the provision of additional staff training for the next version of Blackboard;

(c) The programme team should consider how the Colleges can share examples of good practice in relation to induction and transition events;

(d) The programme team should consider the feasibility of teaching during the day-time;

(e) The programme team should collect and review figures on: applications received/applicants invited to interview / those offered a place / acceptances;

(f) The programme team should review the admission requirements of the programme;
(g) The programme team should consider having a presence on interview panels at Colleges and how the local authorities could be involved in this process;

(h) The programme team should consider how to develop links between IT and Library support staff at the respective Colleges;

(i) The programme team should ensure that students receive clear and timely guidance on how to choose a mentor prior to the commencement of the programme;

(j) The programme team and Colleges should review the process for crediting and compensating mentors; and

(k) The programme team consider whether a pool of ‘allocatable’ mentors should/could be made available to those students who have difficulties identifying a suitable mentor. This would include the possibility of recruiting alumni.

22 The Panel recommends that the Faculty Board considers approval of the proposal to replace the existing Foundation Degrees in Education with a sole programme.