



# Integrated quality and enhancement review

## Summative review

March 2009

North Hertfordshire College

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## **Preface**

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

### **Purpose of IQER**

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

### **The IQER process**

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

### **Developmental engagement**

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

The main elements of a Developmental engagement are:

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

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

## Summative review

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

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

## Evidence

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

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

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

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

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

## Outcomes of IQER

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

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

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

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



## Executive summary

### The Summative review of North Hertfordshire College carried out in March 2009

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:

- the standard templates for the production of programme documentation, which are supported by handbooks, ensure consistency across the provision
- the Consortium work-based learning coordinator ensures effective design and delivery of the work-based learning elements on all programmes
- the joint production of learning materials and assignments is supported by peer networks and scholarship across the Consortium and College academies
- activities that support higher education, such as the engagement of College staff on University programmes, and the promotion of a strong student voice organised by the Students' Union
- the effective learning support provided by the virtual learning environment and blended learning approaches
- the investment in equipment and infrastructure that enhances learning.

### Recommendations

The team has also identified a number of recommendations for the enhancement of the higher education provision:

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

- develop and implement measures to ensure that information for applicants to all programmes is accurate and available each year.

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

- review the large number of committees and groups across the College, Consortium and University that has the potential for duplication of activities, and streamline committee structures
- make further improvements to the monitoring of staff development to ensure that all staff acquire appropriate knowledge and skills to support the programmes
- seek further measures to interrogate the information available from the National Student Survey on learning resources.





## 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 North Hertfordshire College (the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the College discharges its responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes which the College delivers on behalf of the University of Hertfordshire and Middlesex University. The review was carried out by Dr Elaine Crosthwaite, Mr John Holloway and Dr Roger New (reviewers), and Mr Nigel Hall (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, students, employers and partner institutions, 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 this 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 North Hertfordshire College is a medium-sized general further education college operating predominantly in North Hertfordshire and Stevenage. It has five main sites, two located in Stevenage, one in Letchworth and two in Hitchin. The College mission is to be recognised for outstanding teaching and exceptional customer service. It delivers further and higher education programmes in most of the sector-skills areas. The growth in higher education is planned to serve the needs of students and the economy, with flexible study opportunities to widen participation and engage employers to develop the skills of the workforce. In the academic year 2007-08, there were 21,900 full and part-time student enrolments. Of these, there were 216 full-time and 119 part-time students enrolled on higher education programmes. They were taught by 37 full-time and 31 part-time staff.

5 The College is organised into six academies: Creative and Cultural Industries; Community and Health Services; Employment Services; Sixth Form; Sports, Health and Public Services; and Technology Services. Higher education programmes are provided within, and indirectly funded through, the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium (the Consortium). Each academy has a programme manager and the Director of the Higher Education and Technology Services provides central coordination, guidance and focus for all higher education provision. HEFCE-funded provision at the time of the review was as follows:

### **University of Hertfordshire**

- BA/BSc Honours Modular Extended Degree (initial year)
- BSc Honours Extended Degree in Science (initial year)
- FD Computing and Business (Business, IT for the Internet, IT for Multimedia, IT and Business)
- FD Early Years
- FD Health and Social Care Practice
- FD Sports Studies
- FD Creative Enterprise (Performing Arts, Fashion and Textiles)
- FD Beauty Therapy Management
- Postgraduate Diploma Management Studies

### **Middlesex University**

- BA Honours Theatre with Performing Arts (top-up year)
- BA Honours Dance with Performing Arts (top-up year)
- BA Honours Music Performance with Performing Arts (top-up year).

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

6 The University of Hertfordshire and Middlesex University validate the current provision, but in future the University of Hertfordshire will validate all higher education provision. Middlesex University top-up degrees are being phased out and will be replaced by University of Hertfordshire programmes to provide a progression route for the Foundation Degree in Creative Enterprise - Performing Arts. The University of Hertfordshire has established support structures for the Consortium including a Consortium Quality Committee, a Consortium Management Committee, and a Consortium Executive Group. Management of the Consortium is undertaken within the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies at the University.

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

7 The academy structure was introduced in 2006 in response to the challenges of the Foster review, *Realising the Potential - A review of the future role of further education colleges* (2005), and the *Leitch Review of Skills* (2006). The College's higher education strategy was reviewed to fit with these developments. The following programmes are being revalidated for a September 2009 start: BSc Honours Extended Degree in Science (initial year); BA/BSc Honours Modular Extended Degree (initial year); FD Sports Studies, and the Postgraduate Diploma in Management Studies. The new BA Honours Performing Arts provision will also commence in 2009.

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

8 Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a written submission to the team. The College supported the students in preparing their submission and valuable comments were received from all programme areas. A representative group of students met with the team during the Summative review and expanded on the comments in the written submission. They provided valuable evidence on the quality of the provision with examples of good practice in a number of areas.

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

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

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

9 The College's responsibilities for managing and delivering academic standards are specified in the Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Hertfordshire, dated 2005, and the Memorandum of Cooperation with Middlesex University, 2004. Awards from the University of Hertfordshire are provided within the Consortium. The Consortium Quality Handbook, 2008-09, details the framework with its committees and reporting structures. Within the College, the Higher Education Committee is the key forum for discussions on quality assurance, curriculum provision and for identifying and disseminating good practice. It is chaired by the Director of Higher Education and reports to the College Academic Board. It is responsible to a Consortium Quality Committee for the implementation of policies and procedures for the design, validation, monitoring, evaluation and enhancement of the provision. The Director of Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement at the University chairs the Consortium Quality Committee, which is also a subcommittee of the University's Quality and Enhancement Committee.

10 The Consortium management structure includes a Consortium Executive Group with representation that includes the Principal and Deputy Principal (or equivalent) from each of the four further education colleges and the Chair of the Consortium Quality Committee. There is also a Consortium Management Committee, which is chaired by a Pro-Vice-Chancellor from the University of Hertfordshire, with representation from senior staff from the four partner colleges. The Consortium Management Committee meets six times each year to consider new developments and reports to the Consortium Executive Group. These minutes are also considered by the meeting of the College Higher Education Committee which is usually held in the following week. There is a University of Hertfordshire Collaborative Working Practice Handbook and a Consortium Quality Handbook which prescribe the quality management procedures to be implemented at programme level, and define the roles of link tutor and key account manager.

11 Responsibilities for Middlesex University awards are detailed in the Memorandum of Cooperation, and in the Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook. These involve a link tutor who reports to the relevant board of studies at the University.

12 Within the College the Deputy Principal is responsible for the higher education strategy. Implementation of the strategy is delegated to the Director of the Higher Education and Technology Services Academy who coordinates the higher education provision. The College appoints programme managers who work with link tutors from the awarding bodies to maintain academic standards.

13 The College and its awarding bodies receive information on the quality and standards of each programme through an annual monitoring and evaluation report. There is a standard template for the report that ensures consistency across the provision. Reports are considered by the College's Higher Education Committee and forwarded to the relevant university. Actions are grouped according to themes and provide a valuable record of issues arising at programme level. However, it is not clear how the College addresses issues that

arise in more than one report, and the team noted scope for further measures to identify and address such generic issues.

14 Annual monitoring and evaluation reports go to the appropriate faculty quality and enhancement committee at the University, and Middlesex University reports are taken to the appropriate school board by the link tutor. In addition, the Head of Consortium Programmes, the designated key account manager, produces a summary report for the Consortium Quality Committee.

15 There are productive working relationships with validating partners to support programme development. Link tutors and academy staff form effective development teams. However, the large number of committees and groups across the College, the Consortium and the University of Hertfordshire, has the potential for duplication of activities. As the portfolio of validated programmes grows, the team recommends that the College streamlines committee structures.

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

16 The Academic Infrastructure is embedded into procedures for design and validation, and is clearly articulated in the Programme Developer's/Reviewer's Handbook. Templates are used in the construction of definitive module documents and benchmarks guide the design of assessments. Programme teams make effective use of the templates and the handbook when designing new programmes. The value of external examiner comment is recognised and there are clear procedures for appropriate scrutiny of their reports as part of annual monitoring. The Director of Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement receives University of Hertfordshire reports for scrutiny, and forwards them to the relevant university faculty and to the College Principal. The Director of Higher Education and programme managers consider the reports and respond to external examiner comments in the annual monitoring and evaluation reports. The Chair of the Examination Board formally responds to the external examiner. Middlesex University reports are considered at programme team meetings and a formal response is made in writing.

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

17 Partnership agreements, regulations and handbooks set out the systems and procedures for validation, delivery and review of programmes. Programme teams attest that guidance in the Consortium Quality Handbook and the Programme Developer's/Reviewer's Handbook is of particular value. There are numerous contacts between partners during which there is dialogue on quality and standards. The relationship between programme managers and link tutors is particularly significant. College representatives participate in a range of committees. This keeps curriculum staff aware of any changes in the requirements of the awarding body. Staff report that revalidation of programmes provides a valuable opportunity for checking that standards are appropriate and for rethinking assessment strategies and approaches to delivery of the curricula. Taken together, these processes enable the College to check that the standards of provision are meeting requirements.

18 The Consortium has recently validated programmes in disciplines where the University of Hertfordshire has no corresponding provision. To ensure that appropriate academic advice and guidance is available, the University appoints an external specialist subject adviser to work with College staff. Such appointments can be made prevalidation, where

the expertise of the external consultant is also available to the validation panel, or post-validation, where the advice is available to the programme team. The engagement of external specialists is likely to become more prominent in the future as the Consortium seeks to introduce more vocational provision, and there is scope to clarify and formalise the arrangements for external advice and guidance.

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

19 The College's staff development provision covers personal and professional development, cross-organisational themes and strategic curricular developments such as the use of blended learning. Formal staff development includes attendance at development days organised by the Consortium. It is a sector and College requirement that academic staff hold, or work toward, a teacher training qualification. Staff participate in the University's continuing professional academic development programme. Staff development opportunities are available equally to both full and part-time staff. At an informal level, the Consortium is a community of scholars with opportunities for peer networking, sharing good practice and for the joint development of learning materials.

**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?**

20 Overall College responsibility for managing the quality of learning opportunities lies with the College's Higher Education Committee, and the Consortium Quality Committee ensures the consistency of learning opportunities across all Consortium programmes. There is a strong strategic focus on the development of teaching and learning at the College which reflects the strategy of its awarding bodies. For example, the University of Hertfordshire's teaching and learning strategy is reflected in College procedures, and one example of this is the involvement of students in committees responsible for the review and enhancement of their learning.

21 At the operational level, the programme manager and programme committee are responsible for managing learning opportunities. The annual monitoring and evaluation review process enables programme teams to assess the effectiveness of one year of operation, and to plan for the following year. Reports contain commentary from the programme manager, university link tutor and external examiner. Student feedback informs the report. The programme committee meets three times a year and monitors and reviews the action plan. The Higher Education Committee identifies specific issues relating to the quality of learning opportunities during the review of monitoring and evaluation reports. These inform the College's Quality Improvement Plan. Responsibilities are managed effectively and a wide range of learning opportunities is available.

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

22 The College uses a number of strategies to ensure appropriate learning opportunities for its students. Staff have access to an Essentials for Excellence tool-kit on the College intranet designed to ensure consistency of teaching and learning across all academies, and effective practice in lesson planning and delivery. The system was developed for College programmes in general, and it has been enhanced to support higher education provision in particular. Academies focus improvements in teaching and learning in accordance with College-wide targets, and advanced learning practitioners support specific initiatives. There are opportunities for staff to engage in the teaching on programmes at the University of Hertfordshire that enhances higher education within the College.

23 Recent revalidations confirm effective management of the quality of learning opportunities. In 2008-09, revalidation of the Extended Degree in Science addressed the changing development of information technology skills in students, and modules with an integrated contextualised approach to information and communications technology were introduced. Student feedback during annual monitoring had confirmed a need to change the process for developing information technology skills on science programmes in general.

24 Students report that a wide range of appropriate learning opportunities is available and commend the provision. Students on the FD Sports Studies noted an effective balance between individual and group work, with an emphasis on practical activities. Business and computing students attested that the cross-Consortium project work using the virtual learning environment was well received. Science students also confirmed the value of the College intranet within their education, and the team noted good practice in the use of the virtual learning environment. Exercises are used to identify the preferred learning styles of students in health and social care. Business students welcomed the focus on the development of professional skills and the use of external speakers.

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

25 Programme documentation is aligned to the Academic Infrastructure. Programme specifications for all awards are designed using the standard university template that reflects external reference points. The development of new FDs includes engagement with employers to reflect the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, and employers participate in the validation of such programmes. A work-based learning coordinator is employed by the Consortium to offer advice and guidance on the design and delivery of work-based elements and to ensure accordance with the Academic Infrastructure. This is evident in the work-based learning elements of the recently validated FD in Beauty Therapy Management, and in the FD Creative Enterprise. The work-based learning coordinator moderates work-based learning assignments to ensure commonality across programmes, and that good practice is shared across both the College and the Consortium. The intended learning outcomes enable students to engage fully in the design of their work-based activities and this supports their personal development. The team concluded that the employment of a work-based learning coordinator is good practice.

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

26 There is a strong student voice within the College. The maintenance and enhancement of teaching and learning is assured through annual monitoring, with student representation on the programme committees that review action plans, and on the Higher Education



Committee. The Students' Union organises elections for student representatives, and students reported good attendance at programme committees. Small-group numbers enable representatives to identify issues for discussion and to report back effectively on the actions taken by the College. There is a separate Students' Union building on the Hitchin Campus, with space dedicated to higher education students which enhances the provision.

27 The College has invested in new technology to support its blended learning strategy and has appointed a blended learning champion to promote new approaches to teaching and learning. A recent staff development exercise in the application of flip-video recorders that allow current students to provide simple video-based information for prospective students has led to their use in performing arts. The innovation is proving effective and is now used in a variety of ways such as a reflective tool in creative theatre work, and for personal development planning activities.

28 Learning materials are produced by programme teams and assignment briefs are devised to a standard template to ensure consistency and accuracy. There is explicit reference to formative feedback and students reported that this is effective. Where there are multiple partners, the responsibility for writing the brief is shared across the Consortium which stimulates peer networks. Following the Developmental engagement, the team noted that performing arts assignment briefs have been redesigned to ensure the accuracy of information on intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

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

29 Students endorse the level of academic support. Each student has a personal tutor who is the first point of contact and with whom they meet in formal tutorials each week. There is an open-door policy and small student numbers assist ready access to tutors. Students cited specific examples to demonstrate the effectiveness of support systems. Assignment briefs are discussed in class to check the students' understanding. Assessment criteria, hand-in dates and feedback arrangements are clarified, as appropriate. Advice on how to improve grades is effective. Feedback is provided both face-to-face and through the virtual learning environment. Student concerns that arose in business and computing, beauty therapy, and performing arts were dealt with both quickly and effectively.

30 Pastoral support is equally effective. Students reported an issue on programme fees which were higher than expected. The College took account of the situation and students confirmed their satisfaction with the result. They attest that the College is generally sympathetic to their concerns, and cited reorganisations of the timetable to meet their learning needs.

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

31 Lesson observation procedures aim to maintain and enhance the quality of learning opportunities through formal staff appraisal. Senior colleagues observe the teaching of each member of the teaching team, and all staff receive training in the procedures. Staff confirm that they gain substantially from informal peer review of their work. The outcomes are discussed during appraisal alongside information about their staff development record. Further observation, peer support, mentoring by advanced learning practitioners and attendance at formal staff development activities may result from the appraisal. A programme of higher education development days and related activities has been available throughout 2008-09. This supports the provision in line with the College's higher education strategy, ensures it meets external and university requirements and promotes the

sharing of good practice. An experienced mentor is appointed for all new staff. Mentoring is also available to part-time staff where their time at College is limited and precludes attendance at scheduled staff development activities. The team noted a sharing of good practice between academies, with experienced staff in computing and business helping colleagues in beauty therapy to implement work-based learning strategies.

32 Following the Developmental engagement, the tracking of staff development activity was enhanced by the introduction of electronic recording of attendance. The progress of an individual can now be accessed through an intranet-based system. It is evident that key staff, such as programme managers, attend sessions. However, the routine uptake by staff in general was not evident from attendance records, or from staff profiles. The team recommends further improvements to the monitoring of staff development to ensure that all staff gain appropriate knowledge and skills to support the programmes.

### **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?**

33 There is a clear and effective strategy for the development of learning resources aligned to the growth of the higher education provision. At the Hitchin Campus, an area of the College has been allocated to the higher education students within the Integrated Learning Centre. The Centre for the Arts Campus has been renovated and significant investment has been made in new facilities to support the FD in Beauty Therapy Management. A similar investment at the Goldsmith Management Centre in Letchworth provides accommodation for business and management students, such as those on the Postgraduate Diploma in Management Studies. There is to be a new building on the Hitchin Campus with a specific higher education wing, and work is scheduled to begin in the near future. The investment in equipment and infrastructure enhances learning and is an example of good practice that is worthy of wide dissemination.

34 For each programme the appropriateness of learning resources is considered at validation and reviewed each year as part of annual monitoring. Students reported general satisfaction with the resources available, but cited some problems. For example, demand for learning resources is thought to be high between Tuesday and Thursday each week. B Block at Hitchin is considered conducive to higher education study, but D Block can be noisy and geared to further education programmes. This was also true at Stevenage, and students reported access to computers as a problem. Students have access to facilities at the University of Hertfordshire and the FD Sports Studies students reported that they had used them effectively in the first year, but less so in the second. The students considered this unfortunate as they expected to transfer to the University in the near future and would welcome continual engagement with University facilities. Science students commend the book stock at the University as a valuable aid to their learning.

35 The College's National Student Survey results generally compare favourably with the sector and exceed the sector average in a number of areas. Students respond particularly positively to questions in the area of personal development. Responses on learning resources, and especially on the availability of specialist resources, were lower than the average of further education colleges. The College has tried to identify the origin of this low response, but has not been successful. They believe that this might be related to the availability of computers or software, and have introduced a booking system for computers. The team concluded that as the College has yet to resolve this issue, it should seek further measures to enable it to interrogate the survey results on resources more effectively in future.



**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?**

36 The College publishes a wide range of marketing and programme promotion materials in association with the University of Hertfordshire and the Consortium. There are separate guides for full and part-time provision which include information on all the programmes available in each academy. The Consortium produces discipline-specific booklets which include detailed information on module content. The College publishes similar documents for programmes that it alone provides at the Goldsmith Management Centre and the Centre for the Arts, such as the Postgraduate Diploma in Management Studies, FD Beauty Therapy Management and FD Health and Social Care Practice.

37 The Consortium also publishes a prospectus for FDs and extended degrees. This prospectus lists all programmes available within the Consortium and includes basic information on preparing for higher education studies. The document is produced annually and the version in use at the time of the review is dated within the year of publication. This does not align with the dates on College documents which relate to the year of entry. All partners have recognised this anomaly and are planning to address the issue during the current academic year to avoid any confusion in the future.

38 Students are briefed about regulatory and academic support issues during induction and in subsequent follow-up sessions. This includes referencing, plagiarism, attendance, penalties, and appeals. Further information on such issues is included in programme documents and on the website. All students are aware of where to look for further information should they require it.

39 In general, students find that the virtual learning environment is useful and provides rapid access to user-friendly information. On technology-based programmes a great wealth of material is available to students through the virtual learning environment. Students on the FD Performing Arts reported that only basic programme information is available on the virtual learning environment, but that this is appropriate as the programme is highly practical and centred primarily around group-based activities. There is a useful online personal development planning tool that is relevant to all students, graduates and staff. The University provides access to all its online facilities through an alumni portal once students have completed their period of study that, for example, enables them to access careers advice information postgraduation.

40 The College produces an informative events calendar for its Centre for the Arts. This is published each semester and lists all the creative and cultural activities occurring on the Campus.

**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 these arrangements are effective?**

41 The College checks all marketing and promotional material for accuracy. This is checked again by the Consortium before a final check by the validating body. The process also applies to web-based information. Information is distributed to students in printed form and through presentations at formal open days. The information gives an accurate reflection of programme content and delivery which is comprehensive and user-friendly. Students commended the standard of communication evident at open days and informal visits.

42 Programme specifications and information relating to assessment procedures and tools are current and accurate. The preparation of validated module descriptors, termed definitive module documents at the University of Hertfordshire is the responsibility of the validating body. Middlesex University documents, termed narratives, are the responsibility of the College. Any changes to these require approval by the validating body and the external examiner is involved in the process. Module guides that are distributed to students annually before each module starts are based upon these validated module descriptors. The module aims and learning outcomes cannot be changed from those of the approved definitive module documents, but other information, such as assessments and schemes of work, may change annually. These are written by the College or the Consortium and are reviewed by the validating body as part of the moderation process.

43 Module guides and assignment briefs are checked for accuracy at a number of levels. The programme team undertakes an initial check. The module coordinator and programme manager verify this, and a final check is then applied by the Chair of the Higher Education Committee. A checklist charts the progress through the various levels of internal verification. Documents are further verified at university level and, where relevant, by Consortium partners. Samples are sent to the external examiner. The verification process ensures that essay titles are not reused from the previous year and that examination questions and coursework are appropriate and original.

44 Programme handbooks are produced by the validating body and are devised to standard templates to ensure consistency and completeness. These are reviewed annually for the intake of new students. Where necessary, updates are distributed. One such example is the Postgraduate Diploma in Management Studies, cited in the student written submission. Students find these useful and accurate.

45 In the current academic year there is no printed information available on the BA Performing Arts top-up degrees, as the programme validation is transferring from Middlesex University to the University of Hertfordshire. Information on the College website refers to the existing Middlesex University programme and notes that the programme is subject to validation. However, the website does not include information on programme content or audition procedures for students seeking entry in 2009-10. The College states that it offers documentation in a range of languages, in large-print format and in Braille, and complies with standard practice.

**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**

46 The Developmental engagement visit took place in May 2008 and was structured around the following lines of enquiry, which were agreed with the College:

- the implementation of assessment and moderation procedures in compliance with University of Hertfordshire systems and processes
- the effectiveness of feedback on assessment given to students to support their learning
- the communication mechanisms in place to support students with assessment.

47 In the course of the Developmental engagement, the team identified good practice that was worthy of dissemination in a number of areas. These included initial year programmes that supported widening participation; engagement with link tutors in the development of modules and assignments at programme preparation days to ensure consistency of standards; active support from partner universities in staff development; accessible staff who provided effective written and oral feedback; strategies to enhance employer engagement and work-based learning; a user-friendly virtual learning environment; development of FDs informed by experience on current programmes; strong support for student learning that improves the referencing of assignments; avoidance of plagiarism; user-friendly student handbooks; electronic assessment feedback and achievement data; procedures for checking the accuracy and reliability of information; and timely and appropriate action to resolve issues.

48 The team advised the College of the need to address the format of assignment briefs and feedback sheets that differed between awarding bodies, resulting in a lack of information on some programmes. The team reported that it would be desirable for the College to minimise the bunching of assignments, further prepare performing arts students for work-based assessments, address some inconsistencies in course profile information and ensure that all higher education staff participate in development opportunities.

## **D Foundation Degrees**

49 The College currently offers six Foundation Degrees (FDs) validated by the University of Hertfordshire, and operating within the framework of the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium. The FD in Sports Studies was revalidated in February 2009. The FD provision is designed to meet the needs of the local community in line with the College's mission. A Consortium Executive Group considers all new proposals and membership of the group is drawn from the principals of the four further education partner colleges and the University. In some instances, the Consortium validates programmes in discipline areas where the University has no corresponding provision, such as beauty therapy. To ensure appropriate academic advice and guidance, the University appoints external specialists to work with College staff and to serve on the validation panel.

50 There are currently 145 full-time and 115 part-time students on FD programmes. The provision has developed around specific subject areas to address local and regional skills needs, national trends and initiatives to widen participation. The College and its partners have developed strategies to enhance employer engagement, such as the appointment of a jointly funded work-based learning coordinator. There is a Vice-Principal with specific responsibility for employer engagement and business development.

## E Conclusions and summary of judgements

51 The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in North Hertfordshire 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, the University of Hertfordshire and Middlesex University.

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

- the standard templates for the production of programme documentation, which are supported by handbooks, ensure consistency across the provision (paragraphs 13, 16, 28, 44)
- the joint production of learning materials and assignments is supported by peer networks and scholarship across the Consortium and College academies (paragraphs 19, 28)
- activities that support higher education, such as the engagement of College staff on University programmes, and the promotion of a strong student voice organised by the Students' Union (paragraphs 22, 26)
- the effective learning support provided by the virtual learning environment and blended learning approaches (paragraphs 24, 27, 29, 39)
- the Consortium work-based learning coordinator ensures effective design and delivery of the work-based learning elements on all programmes (paragraph 25)
- the investment in equipment and infrastructure that enhances learning (paragraph 33).

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

The team agreed an area where the College is **advised** to take action:

- to develop and implement measures to ensure that information for applicants to all programmes is accurate and available each year (paragraphs 37, 45).

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

- to review the large number of committees and groups across the College, Consortium and University that has the potential for duplication of activities, and streamline committee structures (paragraphs 9, 10, 13, 14, 15)
- to make further improvements to the monitoring of staff development to ensure that all staff acquire appropriate knowledge and skills to support the programmes (paragraph 32)
- to seek further measures to interrogate the information available from the National Student Survey on learning resources (paragraph 35).

54 Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, other documentary evidence, and from its meetings with staff and students, the team concludes 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.

55 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 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.

56 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/or completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

North Hertfordshire College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2009						
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>the standard templates for the production of programme documentation, which are supported by handbooks, ensure consistency across the provision (paragraphs 13, 16, 28, 44)</li> </ul>	<p>Share good practice across college, consortium and in the development of new and revalidation of existing programmes</p> <p>Share and develop good practice through College HE related meetings and staff development activities</p>	July 2010	Director of HE / Programme Managers	Good practice shared	College HE Committee	Annual monitoring process and HE Committee

**North Hertfordshire College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2009**

Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Consortium work-based learning coordinator ensures effective design and delivery of the work-based learning elements on all programmes (paragraph 25)</li> </ul>	<p>Share good practice across college, consortium and in the development of new and revalidation of existing programmes</p> <p>Share and develop good practice through College HE related meetings and staff development activities</p>	July 2010	Director of HE / Programme Managers	Good practice shared	College HE Committee	Annual monitoring process and HE Committee

North Hertfordshire College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2009						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the joint production of learning materials and assignments is supported by peer networks and scholarship across the Consortium and College academies (paragraphs 19, 28)</li> </ul>	<p>Share good practice across college, consortium and in the development of new and revalidation of existing programmes</p> <p>Share and develop good practice through College HE related meetings and staff development activities</p>	July 2010	Director of HE / Programme Managers	Good practice shared	College HE Committee	Annual monitoring process and HE Committee



**North Hertfordshire College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2009**

Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• activities that support higher education, such as the engagement of College staff on University programmes, and the promotion of a strong student voice organised by the Students' Union (paragraphs 22, 26)</li> </ul>	<p>Share good practice across college, consortium and in the development of new and revalidation of existing programmes</p> <p>Share and develop good practice through College HE related meetings and staff development activities</p>	July 2010	Director of HE / Programme Managers	Good practice shared	College HE Committee	Annual monitoring process and HE Committee

North Hertfordshire College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2009						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the effective learning support provided by the virtual learning environment and blended learning approaches (paragraphs 24, 27, 29, 39)</li> </ul>	Continue to develop in all areas and disseminate good practice	July 2010	Blended Learning Champion Programme Managers	Continued development and use of VLE in all areas	College HE Committee	Annual monitoring process and HE Committee
	Share good practice across college, consortium and in the development of new and revalidation of existing programmes  Share and develop good practice through College HE related meetings and staff development activities	July 2010	Director of HE / Programme Managers	Good practice shared	College HE Committee	Annual monitoring process and HE Committee

**North Hertfordshire College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2009**

Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the investment in equipment and infrastructure that enhances learning (paragraph 33)</li> </ul>	<p>Share good practice across college, consortium and in the development of new and revalidation of existing programmes</p> <p>Share and develop good practice through College HE related meetings and staff development activities to continue to enhance learning</p>	July 2010	Director of HE / Programme Managers	Good practice shared	College HE Committee	Annual monitoring process and HE Committee

North Hertfordshire College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2009						
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team agreed an area where the College should be <b>advised</b> to take action:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to develop and implement measures to ensure that information for applicants to all programmes is accurate and available each year (paragraphs 37, 45)</li> </ul>	To work with the HEI to develop appropriate information to provide to applicants on Top Up Degree in Performing Arts	2009/10	Director of HE / Performing Arts Programme Manager	Appropriate information in place	College HE Committee	Annual monitoring process and HE Committee
	To work with the HEI and within the Consortium to ensure that appropriate dates are used for the Consortium prospectus	July 2010	Director of HE and Marketing Manager	Clear and appropriate dates in place	College HE Committee	Annual monitoring process and HE Committee

North Hertfordshire College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2009						
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>desired</b> to take action:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to review the large number of committees and groups across the College, Consortium and University that has the potential for duplication of activities, and streamline committee structures (paragraphs 9, 10, 13, 14, 15)</li> </ul>	Work with UH, the Consortium and within the College to consider and review committees and groups associated with HE	July 2010	Director of HE	Committees considered and reviewed as appropriate	HE Committee	Annual monitoring process and HE Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to make further improvements to the monitoring of staff development to ensure that all staff acquire the appropriate knowledge and skills to support the programmes (paragraph 32)</li> </ul>	Engagement with HE staff development to be monitored centrally through the HE Committee	July 2010	Director of HE / Programme Managers	Improved monitoring and engagement of all staff with staff development	College HE Committee	Annual monitoring process and HE Committee

North Hertfordshire College action plan relating to the Summative review: March 2009						
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to seek further measures to interrogate the information available from the National Student Survey on learning resources (paragraph 35)</li> </ul>	<p>To undertake further staff development in the interrogation of the National Student Survey</p> <p>To work with the Learner Resources Manager and students to ensure any issues continue to be addressed</p>	July 2010	Director of HE / Programme Managers/Learning Resources Manager	Further interrogation of the information of the National Student Survey to ensure any issues relating to Learning resources are fully understood and addressed	College HE Committee	Annual monitoring process and HE Committee

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