Integrated quality and enhancement review

Summative review

Harrow College

June 2011

SR 69/2010

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 Harrow College carried out in June 2011

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 strong and well-established partnership with the University of Westminster in the area of higher education programmes in teacher education provision provides a very effective environment for the support and development of College staff
- the way in which College teaching staff support all higher education students in their induction and teaching and learning opportunities and practice considerably enhances the student learning experience
- the effective way in which students on all higher education programmes receive timely and comprehensive formative feedback on all assignments involving practice and placement observations considerably enhances the student learning experience
- the overall process of collecting, detailing and reacting to student views and opinions and the way in which this affects good communication between staff and students makes a considerable contribution to the student learning experience.

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:

- enhance and expand the written records of meetings of the Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group in order to more accurately reflect the discussions and action plans in line with the group's terms of reference
- supplement effective informal communications by developing a more formal approach to meetings between the programme teams and the College Higher Education and International Manager such that there is a more robust process of following through issues identified during these meetings
- introduce a more formal process for routine evaluations of higher education staff development activities and develop an overall staff development plan for higher education that includes activities that cover all relevant aspects, including the Academic Infrastructure and other pedagogically related areas
- strengthen the relationship and links with Middlesex University to ensure timely and effective action is taken over key issues on the Foundation Degree in Counselling
- take a more strategic approach to timely and effective action on improving the accuracy of public information on the Foundation Degree in Counselling.

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

- introduce more effective and comprehensive practice in using 'unpacking sheets' to clarify assessment assignment criteria for students on the Foundation Degree in Counselling
- develop a strategic set of specifications and minimum requirements for the use of the virtual learning environment for all higher education students
- consider making the process of peer observation of teaching practice more relevant for higher education staff by developing better guidance and encompassing more criteria characteristic of their particular practice into the already well-established process for further education practice.

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 Harrow 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 Middlesex University and the University of Westminster. The review was carried out by Mr Richard Foyle and Mrs Saundra Middleton (reviewers) and Dr David Ross (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 the College's self-evaluation document and appendices, the College and awarding body websites, two student written submissions, the recent Ofsted report on the College, a variety of extra documents requested by the team and a sample of student work. This was supplemented through a series of meetings conducted during the review visit, including meetings with teaching staff, senior management staff and representatives of the awarding bodies and students. 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   Harrow College is a medium-sized vocational college situated in the outer London Borough of Harrow. In 2009-10 there were 2,431 students under 19 years of age, (2,206 full-time equivalent students) and 5,618 students over the age of 19 (1,702 full-time equivalents) enrolled on further education provision. In addition to these there were 147 students enrolled to level 4 or above programmes, 97 of whom were HEFCE-funded, a full-time equivalent of 40. In 2010-11 there are 73 students on HEFCE-funded higher education programmes, a full-time equivalent of 37. The College is one of eight in the London West Learning and Skills Council area and provides academic and vocational education and training to young people and adults, with a diverse range of courses from pre-entry level to higher education programmes.

5   The College operates on two main sites in central Harrow and Harrow Weald, and also has approximately 30 outreach and community-based venues. There have been significant recent changes in the senior leadership of the College. A new Principal joined the College in April 2008 and a new Vice Principal in January 2009. The College has a number of well-defined aims for its development of higher education provision.

Partnership agreements with the awarding bodies

6   The College delivers the following teacher education programmes:

University of Westminster

- Certificate in Education/Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) - generic (year one, 15 students (7.5 full-time equivalents (FTEs)), year two, six students (3 FTEs))
- Certificate in Education/PGCE with an Additional Diploma in Teaching ESOL - year one, eight students (5.2 FTEs); year two, seven students (4.6 FTEs)

Middlesex University

- Foundation Degree in Counselling (year one, 15 students (7.5 FTEs); year two, six students (3 FTEs); year three, 11 students (5.5 FTEs).

All higher education programmes are underpinned by an appropriate Memorandum of Collaboration.

Recent developments in higher education at the College

7   At the time of the Developmental engagement (February 2010), there was an additional higher education programme being delivered by the College. The Foundation Degree in Business Management was delivered in partnership with Buckinghamshire New University until this collaboration ceased in summer 2010. A decision has been reached to offer other higher education programmes in business management with other awarding bodies, such as a new HND Business.

8   Following a recent internal restructuring, the College now operates with four academic departments (Science, Maths and Technology; Business, English and Media Studies; Health, Arts and Wellbeing; and Foundation Learning and Skills). Subsequent to this, the internal structure of the College also underwent significant changes and now operates in two main faculties: Creative Arts, Science and Technology, and Industries, Wellbeing and Society. In addition, there is a new division for External Development and Marketing, in which the current higher education provision now lies. Concomitant with this, a new post of Higher Education and International Manager was created.

Students' contribution to the review, including the written submission

9   Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the Summative review team. Two such submissions were received - one from students on the teacher education suite of programmes and one from those on the Foundation Degree in Counselling. These submissions were prepared through student-led discussion groups. The coordinator met with a small group of students during the preparatory meeting, and during the visit the team also met with a cross-section of students from both programme 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?

10   The College Vice Principal for Curriculum and Quality has overall responsibility for all higher education curriculum matters. Recent changes have been put into place to establish the Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group. This group is the principal body responsible for monitoring the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities for higher education students, and it meets three times a year. It is chaired by the Vice Principal and its membership comprises the Higher Education and International Manager, the Head of Quality Improvement and Standards, the Director of Learner Services, the Curriculum and Operations Manager, and the Heads of Department. The Group reports to the Executive Management Group, which in turn reports on higher education matters to the Corporation's Curriculum and Standards Sub-committee.

11   The College has a number of responsibilities for managing standards and learning opportunities, as set out in the Memorandum of Cooperation for each of the awarding body partnerships. These include the development, administration, implementation and monitoring of the College Higher Education Strategy and the academic standards of its higher education provision. The College's own quality assurance processes complement those of the awarding bodies. For example, the College Assessment Policy and Handbook effectively clarifies the relationship between the regulations of the awarding bodies and the College's own policies and procedures.

12   The success of the various policies and procedures governing academic standards and student learning opportunities is evaluated through student questionnaires, student participation in a range of meetings, annual monitoring reports, external examiners' reports and the Higher Education Subject Sector Area Self Assessment Report. Documents emanating from all of these processes are evaluated by College teaching staff, the Higher Education and International Manager and the Quality Improvement Manager.

13   The Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group's remit states that the group approves and monitors those areas of the Higher Education Implementation Plan related to quality assurance and receives and monitors actions arising from annual monitoring reports and external examiners' reports. However, the minutes of these meetings contain only brief action points without any supporting record of the underlying discussions or reflection on when or how the previous actions have been achieved. For example, the available minutes did not refer to external examiners' reports. These omissions reduce the group's effectiveness in managing academic standards. The College is advised to enhance and expand the written records of meetings of the Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group in order to more accurately reflect the discussions and action plans in line with the group's terms of reference.

14   The College clearly articulates its plans for the future of its higher education provision and the management of its programmes through the College Higher Education Strategy and associated policies and procedures. The strategy also articulates the roles of managers with responsibility for higher education. This document confirms that, following a management restructuring, the new Higher Education and International Manager has

responsibility for both current higher education programmes and works closely with the programme leaders. Any higher education programmes developed in the future will be managed directly by the appropriate curriculum area, with oversight by the Higher Education and International Manager.

15   All higher education programmes produce annual monitoring reports. The link tutor at the awarding body provides written feedback on the draft report, and the final version is then resubmitted to both the university and the College's Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group. The Higher Education and International Manager is also required to write a Higher Education Self Assessment Report as part of the normal overall College quality processes. Programme teams and the Higher Education and International Manager meet regularly to discuss annual monitoring reports and other key developmental issues. This is further supplemented through regular meetings between senior managers, at which annual monitoring reports and action points are discussed but not minuted. Despite this lack of formal recording, the team concurs with the College's view that they are successful in identifying issues and good practice and in monitoring the progress of any actions arising from these reports.

16   The overall process for production and analysis of annual monitoring reports is generally effective and shows clear signs of improving each year. However, the mainly informal nature of the evaluation and monitoring process outside of the Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group is offset by a lack of formal records, and the College is advised to develop a more formal and robust approach to recording the discussions and action steps from meetings between the programme teams and College management.

17   The Developmental engagement action plan has been subsumed into the College Action Plan in order to simplify and integrate overall College processes. The plan includes the identified areas of good practice and recommendations and is being addressed. The team observed that progress has been made in dissemination of some aspects of good practice and some of the recommendations. However, this progress has been variable and slower that intended, mainly due to the significant restructuring and changes to College management of higher education since the Developmental engagement took place.

18   The College has considerable experience in the principles and practice involved in internal and external verification and examination and utilises this effectively for all higher education programmes. There are systems in place to ensure that there is full compliance with the relevant academic regulations of awarding bodies. The internal and external moderation processes in place within the College for the assessment of students are robust, well managed and an appropriate, pragmatic integration of College and awarding body requirements.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

19   Relevant aspects of the Academic Infrastructure are embedded in the College's higher education provision and are understood by teaching staff. There is an appropriate integration of College and awarding-body-directed processes which includes variously the use of subject benchmark statements in the design of curricula, the incorporation of appropriate sections of the *Code of practice* and the incorporation of necessary award benchmark statements. Staff teaching on the Foundation Degree in Counselling have developed a progression route for the programme to appropriate further study at Middlesex University.

20   Staff awareness of the Academic Infrastructure is updated through staff development events. However, the majority of this activity is reliant on awarding bodies

organising staff development events for the College's benefit rather than the College's own programme. For example, a regular programme of events is organised within the consortium of colleges that deliver teacher education programmes in collaboration with the University of Westminster.

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

21   Both awarding bodies maintain overall responsibility for the higher education programmes, while delegating the day-to-day management of quality and standards to programme leaders within the College. In the case of the Middlesex University provision, there is an additional requirement for a university link tutor and a College link tutor to be appointed to monitor the management and quality assurance of the programmes and ensure effective liaison with the College. The former is responsible to the relevant university dean, and the latter to the College Principal.

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

22   The College has a substantial staff development budget, including provision for higher education staff. One afternoon per week is cleared from teaching commitments to create time for continuing professional development. Records of staff development are collated centrally. The College's Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group has responsibility for identifying development needs relevant to higher education teaching staff. It also supports the monitoring of continuous professional development for staff teaching and assessing on the programmes. All permanent staff in the College have yearly appraisals where professional updating needs can also be identified.

23   Programme leaders have remitted hours for leading their programmes and all staff have 30 hours of continuous professional development contracted through membership of the Institute for Learning. All teaching staff spoke very favourably of the opportunities available to them for appropriate higher-education-related staff development, particularly through the links with both awarding bodies. However, limited time and other priorities within their working remit can put pressure on the ability of staff to take up these opportunities. Staff identified only a small number of higher-education-related activities which had been undertaken since the Developmental engagement, including use of the virtual learning environment and other technology-related events.

24   Teaching staff studying for postgraduate degrees can apply for funding and time relief from the College. This process takes place through discussions with line managers and the College's human resource department. The College supports, where possible, requests for sabbatical leave for scholarly activity. However, minutes of the Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group did not identify any recent discussion of staff development opportunities. Current practice with respect to staff development in higher education issues including the Academic Infrastructure is generally fit for purpose. However, the College should take a more proactive approach to staff development in this area, particularly in the context of its higher education expansion plans. The College is advised to introduce a more formal process for routine evaluations of higher education staff development activities and develop an overall staff development plan for higher education that includes activities that cover all relevant aspects, including the Academic Infrastructure and other pedagogically related areas.

> **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?

25   Responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities for higher education programmes are delegated appropriately within the College management structure and have already been discussed in paragraphs 10 to 18.

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

26   The College has been an Associate College of the University of Westminster since 1994. The link operates through a mutually beneficial consortium between the University, the College and seven other college partners in the London region. This is managed very effectively by a university-appointed consortium link tutor. This approach allows the College to supplement its own strong approach to the management of academic standards on the teacher education programmes with a shared approach to good practice and a very effective assessment design and moderation process. The link is mature, well established and very strong.

27   As a member of the consortium of colleges, the College is also a member of the Westminster Partnership, a Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT). Meetings of the consortium and training events by the CETT take place regularly, and the College teacher training staff team are active participants in consortium activity, which gives opportunities for scholarly activity. The College has recently undertaken three research projects for the CETT. The way in which the strength of this link contributes to all aspects of the provision of effective student learning opportunities for the teacher education programmes at the College is a model example of collaborative partnerships and is an example of good practice.

28   The team only partially agrees with the College's self-evaluation statement that the link with Middlesex University is also strong. Several aspects of this link lack effectiveness in managing standards or in enhancing the student learning experience. The team was assured that informal discussions take place between the link tutor and programme leader. However, no formal records of these meetings were evident. Also, students were unaware of any meetings between themselves and the university link tutor, and they confirmed that they did not receive any feedback on their summative assessments until after the university examinations board, contrary to College policy. This was confirmed in discussion with teaching and senior College staff and was, in their view, in line with the university's regulations. During the meeting with senior College management and the university link tutor the team was informed by the university that changes in their regulations to allow communication of summative assessment feedback to students within 15 days had been brought in the previous session. Senior College management indicated that this had not so far been conveyed to the teaching staff on the programme.

29   The team endorses the statements in the self-evaluation report that the College should develop more effective informal and formal communication processes for the Foundation Degree in Counselling programme, as had also been recommended during the Developmental engagement. This would assist in avoiding missed learning enhancement opportunities such as those noted above, particularly in the case of conveying changes in assessment regulations. The College is strongly advised to strengthen the relationship and links with Middlesex University to ensure timely and effective action is taken over key issues on the Foundation Degree in Counselling.

What account is taken of the Academic Infrastructure?

30   The ways in which the College takes account of the Academic Infrastructure with respect to its management of academic standards have already been outlined in paragraphs 19 and 20. With respect to student learning opportunities, the College has appropriate policies and procedures in place to complement those of the awarding bodies to enhance student learning through the effective application of elements of the Academic Infrastructure.

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

31   The College provides effective learning opportunities for higher education students that ensure the quality of learning and teaching. Students were very complementary about the quality of the teaching they received from College staff. Student retention rates for both programme areas over the last three sessions have been at least 89 per cent, with several instances of 100 per cent. Students were also very positive about the overall quality of the induction they had received on starting their programmes, particularly with respect to engaging them with teaching and assessment methodologies. The way in which College teaching staff support all higher education students in their induction and teaching and learning opportunities and practice considerably enhances the student learning experience and is an example of good practice.

32   College higher education staff teach across the complete range of levels up to degree level. Staff are clear about the different requirements across these various levels and that they are able to provide good integration and subject development as students progress. Staff are able to successfully apply this wide range of experience to the process of higher education programme and module design during routine module revisions and whole curriculum revalidations.

33   The quality of learning opportunities is also assured through explicit, valid and reliable assessment procedures. The process of assessment of students on higher education programmes is generally robust and fit for purpose. All students were very supportive of the way in which College processes for assessing work contributed to their overall learning environment. They are made aware of these regulations, the consequences of breaching them and the appeals process at induction, through discussion and copies of student handbooks. Assessment schedules are issued to students at the start of the year for teacher education programmes and at the start of each term for the Foundation Degree in Counselling. Teacher education students were clear on the meaning of intended learning outcomes and their relation to assessment. However, Foundation Degree in Counselling students found the concept of intended learning outcomes more confusing and had to rely on time spent during lectures to have these explained.

34   Staff teaching on the teacher education programmes have designed detailed assignment briefs in combination with guidance for students on how to approach their

answers. These 'unpacking sheets' demystify the assessment process and help to explain what students are required to do to meet the objectives of the assignment. These have been well received by students and this practice has recently been extended to some assignments for Foundation Degree students. The team considers it desirable for the College to introduce more effective and comprehensive practice in using 'unpacking sheets' to clarify assessment assignment criteria for all assignments for students on the Foundation Degree in Counselling.

35   All higher education students receive detailed and helpful formative feedback on their assessments, particularly in placement and role-play situations. This is given in a timely and constructive manner and, through a variety of one-to-one and group discussions with staff, students also have good opportunities to discuss their feedback and how best to use it. The effective way in which students on all higher education programmes receive timely and comprehensive formative feedback on all assignments involving practice and placement observations considerably enhances the student learning experience and is an example of good practice.

36   Practice with respect to giving feedback on summative assessments is more variable. Within teacher education programmes, this is a very effective process, managed in a timely and constructive manner by staff and well received by students. However, the process for students on the Foundation Degree in Counselling is less effective, as already discussed in paragraph 28.

37   All students agreed that placements and other workplace situations enhanced their overall learning experience by reinforcing theory and helping to place it in context. Students have responsibility for arranging their own work placements in connection with their programmes of study and are knowledgeable and largely comfortable with this situation. Teacher education students must find their own placements before enrolling on the programme, and Foundation Degree in Counselling students are provided with a list of previous work placement providers. Foundation Degree students felt that there would be benefit in appointing a work placement coordinator to help them find placements more effectively. Staff were aware of this view and concurred that such a post would be useful when resourcing levels allowed.

38   The College makes use of a variety of technologies to support and enhance the student learning experience. The College virtual learning environment has recently been improved and staff have undergone appropriate development to facilitate its use in supporting teaching and learning. All higher education students receive an induction on the use of the virtual learning environment at the start of each year. In teacher education programmes all teachers and students use the College virtual learning environment as well as making use of other technologies such as flip cameras, interactive whiteboards, and specialist websites. These students also have access to a well-equipped higher education room and were very supportive of the use of technology.

39   Improvements have been developed more slowly in the case of the Foundation Degree in Counselling, where usage is variable. The team was assured that the Higher Education and International Manager is working towards ensuring that students on the Foundation Degree in Counselling make better use of technologies in the future, including access to and usage of the virtual learning environment at Middlesex University. The team considers it desirable for the College to develop a strategic set of specifications and minimum requirements for the use of the virtual learning environment for all higher education students.

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

40   Higher education students are supported by the College in a variety of ways. All students have tutorials during which the individual student works with their personal tutor to discuss progress and to plan further development. Teacher education students are assigned a mentor who meets with them regularly, observes their teaching jointly with the personal tutor and gives appropriate feedback and support. Mentors are trained in this role by the programme leader. Further support is offered by the University of Westminster as mentors are invited to attend a mentor forum.

41   The College has a variety of methods for obtaining student feedback. All higher education programme teams hold regular formal and informal staff-student meetings including boards of study, Learner Voice and course committee meetings. Students on teacher education programmes appoint two student representatives, who attend two course committee meetings per year. Attendees at these meetings include the teaching team and the link tutor from the University of Westminster. The student representatives report on the strengths and areas for development that their peers have identified. The programme leader sends the minutes of these meetings to the University of Westminster and they are audited at the university's annual cognate meeting. A similar process is used on the Foundation Degree in Counselling programme, whereby the students appoint two representatives per year group. The course leader sends the minutes of these meetings to Middlesex University and they are then used in informing the writing of the annual monitoring report.

42   Detailed notes and minutes are recorded for all these meetings and action steps are followed up through standard College systems, for example the Quality Improvement Plan included within the College Higher Education Self Analysis Report. Students were clear about the role of the student representatives in these team meetings and confirmed that they had all been given feedback on the actions arising from each meeting within two weeks. The overall process of collecting, detailing and reacting to student views and opinions and the way in which this affects good communication between staff and students makes a considerable contribution to the student learning experience and is an example of good practice.

43   The College also participates in the National Student Survey as part of its strategy for higher education evaluation. In the 2010-11 session, third-year Foundation Degree in Counselling students have been encouraged to complete the National Student Survey through more effective support offered by Middlesex University. Students have received a presentation explaining why completing the survey is of benefit to them and the College has allowed time during sessions for students to complete it.

44   Students on the Foundation Degree in Counselling programme expressed concern that they were not notified of their study fees for the following academic year until late in the summer. The team was assured that effective action had been taken by the College to rectify the problem and information was now given by letter at an appropriately earlier point in the session.

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

45   Staff development activities relevant to the maintenance and enhancement of academic standards in higher education programmes have already been outlined in paragraphs 22 to 24. The College has appointed eight learning coaches and four advanced lecturers from the teacher education team to support staff development generally across the College. These college-wide roles are effective in enhancing staff expertise in pedagogy and

are not confined to higher education programmes. All staff teaching on higher education programmes also maintain appropriate continuing professional development activities, and in the case of the Foundation Degree in Counselling this also covers professional practice development.

46   Staff development to enhance the student learning experience is very well executed in partnership with the awarding bodies for all higher education programmes. The fruitful relationship of the College with the University of Westminster-led consortium of local colleges providing teacher education programmes also adds value to these staff development opportunities. As a direct result of the Developmental engagement, the programme leaders of both higher education programme areas have begun meeting to share good practice, including the 'unpacking sheets' originally identified in practice within the teacher education programmes, which have now been adopted for a limited number of assignments in the Foundation Degree in Counselling. However, as noted in paragraph 24, there is no formal mechanism for analysing requirements for higher education staff development that integrates across all elements of the provision.

47   The College has a process of teaching observation in place for all College teaching staff. This is based on Ofsted requirements and utilises a standard set of criteria designed for non-higher-education provision. Staff commented favourably on this process and maintained that it had also resulted in improvement of the teaching grades awarded within the higher education teams. However, this process is by its nature focused mainly on non-higher-education teaching and does not have specific criteria for observation at higher education level. It is only effective in that learning environment if observers are empathetic to the nature of the higher education process. The team considers it desirable for the College to make the process of peer observation of teaching practice more relevant for higher education staff by developing better guidance and encompassing more criteria characteristic of their particular practice into the already well-established process for further education practice.

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?

48   The College's Higher Education Strategy is an appropriate platform for the allocation of resources for higher education programmes. Senior managers carry out periodic review of resource needs using sources such as the annual monitoring review process and the Quality Improvement Plan.

49   All students on higher education programmes make good use of the College's existing resource support facilities such as the library, Study Plus and the Learning Resources Centre. Allocation of funds for higher education textbooks is provided through top-slicing the library budget, and increasing use is being made by all higher education students of online textbooks and research literature. In general, higher education students felt the resources were appropriate for their studies.

50   Students are also able to make use of awarding body resources, particularly at the University of Westminster for the teacher education programmes. These students also make appropriate use of the university's virtual learning environment. Students on the Foundation Degree in Counselling have restricted access to Middlesex University's virtual learning environment under the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement.

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?

51   The College is responsible for publishing a range of information about its higher education programmes. The College website has an area dedicated to these programmes and contains a range of appropriate information. This information is supplemented with a dedicated prospectus, programme brochures and student handbooks. The website is largely accurate, but information regarding the start date on the new HND in Business programme had not been updated and could lead prospective students and other stakeholders to believe the programme had started in the 2010-11 session. The team were assured that this information would be updated as soon as possible.

What arrangements does the College have in place to assure the accuracy and completeness of information the College has responsibility for publishing? How does the College know that these arrangements are effective?

52   The College works in liaison with its awarding bodies to ensure published information meets expectations for content, accuracy and quality benchmarks. Content for both the website and prospectus is developed by College staff and sent initially to the Higher Education and International Manager, programme leaders and higher education programme administrators, as well as being copied to the university link tutor. Draft information is reviewed in discussion between the College and the awarding body for accuracy and appropriateness of content. The College Marketing Manager approves final versions before information is published. Students agreed that public information regarding their studies is generally helpful and accurate and that their views on the usefulness of marketing information are regularly sought.

53   A comprehensive range of information is also available to students on the student portal which houses the College's virtual learning environment. The recently redeveloped and relaunched portal provides students with information on their individual programmes, as well as supporting their learning by providing planning and self-evaluation tools. Students commented very positively on this.

54   All students receive programme handbooks, assessment packs and extra guidance from staff at induction. Programme handbooks are quality-assured by either the College or awarding bodies according to the terms of the Memoranda of Agreement. Handbooks contain information regarding operational arrangements, tutor support, assessment, resources and learning styles. Programme specifications detail the learning outcomes and associated assessment strategies. Assessment methodology can also be found in validation documents. Information in handbooks is clear and accurate for students on teacher education programmes. It is also clear how the assignments provide the opportunity for students to demonstrate their skills at the required level.

55   The Foundation Degree in Counselling Handbook has been recently revised as part of the development of the programme towards its successful revalidation and in response to a recommendation made during the Developmental engagement. However, there is

evidence that this has not been a comprehensive exercise, and the accuracy and clarity of public information in this area is in need of further review. Specifically, the handbook still contains anomalies relating to the allocation of marks to assessment work within modules when the students are only able to be graded as Pass or Fail. This issue had been raised by students. The programme team had recognised this and indicated that the information had been further updated as part of the outcomes of the revalidation and would not appear in the programme handbook for the next academic year. Additionally, the academic regulations at Middlesex University refer to Foundation Degrees being awarded at Pass, Merit or Distinction grades. The handbook for the Foundation Degree in Counselling needs to make it clear that these regulations do not apply to this programme.

56   Further discussions with second-year students on the Foundation Degree in Counselling revealed that information they had received at induction was inaccurate with regard to the extra costs and time commitment for years two and three of the course. This related to paying for compulsory counselling sessions and personal supervision. The team was assured that this had been rectified for the start of session 2010-11. The team further noted that this action had been slow to be put in place and that the College website had still not been updated with the new information at the time of the review visit. The College is strongly advised to take a more strategic approach to timely and effective action on improving the accuracy of public information on the Foundation Degree in Counselling.

> **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

57   The Developmental engagement in assessment took place in November 2009. The lines of enquiry covered a range of issues associated with the assessment of students and were:

Line of enquiry 1: How do the College processes for providing formative feedback to students enhance learning opportunities?

Line of enquiry 2: How do the internal verification/moderation processes contribute to the assurance of academic standards?

Line of enquiry 3: To what extent is the information given to students about assessment clear, explicit and understood by students?

58   The review team for the Developmental engagement recorded a number of areas of good practice. These included the effective overall approach to standardisation of assessment design, the effective and strong access to University of Westminster resources for assessment assignments, and the way in which tutorial and mentor support draws together the theoretical and work-related elements of programmes in teacher education programmes and for the Foundation Degree in Business Management. Additionally, good practice was noted in the strong culture of reflective practice that exists within staff and students in all areas of higher education provision and the way it promotes and fosters self-reflection as a means of enhancing the formative feedback process, and the way in which the College's strong focus on quality improvement is further supplemented for higher

education staff by the provision of additional staff development opportunities offered by the awarding bodies.

59 The team noted a number of advisable recommendations for the College to consider through the action planning process subsequent to the review. These included, for the Foundation Degree in Counselling, the need for the College to align the timing of assessment feedback with College policy; the need to develop more effective informal and formal communication processes between students, staff and Middlesex University; the need for urgent revision ,especially in the clarity and accuracy of assessment information, of the student handbook; and the need to ensure the development of an appropriate model for use of a virtual learning environment, in support of student assessment and learning opportunities for students. Additionally, the team noted a number of desirable recommendations, including that the College should ensure that the practice of use of individual learning plans and personal development planning is strengthened through giving students more guidance on giving constructive feedback to their peers, and communicate clearly to students the recent decision to reduce the library loan period.

D   Foundation Degrees

60 Harrow College currently delivers the Foundation Degree in Counselling with Middlesex University. This was the only programme recruiting students in session 2010-11. A previous Foundation Degree in Business Management was delivered in partnership with Buckinghamshire New University until this collaboration ceased. The College has plans at an advanced stage to offer other Foundation Degrees in the future.

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

- the way in which College teaching staff support students on the Foundation Degree in Counselling in their induction and teaching and learning opportunities and practice considerably enhances the student learning experience (paragraph 31)
- the effective way in which students on the Foundation Degree in Counselling receive timely and comprehensive formative feedback on all assignments involving practice and placement observations considerably enhances the student learning experience (paragraph 35)
- the overall process of collecting, detailing and reacting to student views and opinions and the way in which this affects good communication between staff and students makes a considerable contribution to the student learning experience (paragraph 42).

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

63 The team agreed a number of areas where the College is advised to take action:

- enhance and expand the written records of meetings of the Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group in order to more accurately reflect the discussions and action plans in line with the group's terms of reference (paragraph 13)
- supplement effective informal communications by developing a more formal approach to meetings between the Foundation Degree in Counselling team and the College Higher Education and International Manager such that there is a more robust process of following through issues identified during these meetings (paragraph 16)

- introduce a more formal process for routine evaluations of higher education staff development activities and develop an overall staff development plan for higher education that includes activities that cover all relevant aspects, including the Academic Infrastructure and other pedagogically related areas (paragraphs 23 and 24)
- strengthen the relationship and links with Middlesex University to ensure timely and effective action is taken over key issues on the Foundation Degree in Counselling (paragraph 29)
- take a more strategic approach to timely and effective action on improving the accuracy of public information on the Foundation Degree in Counselling (paragraph 56).

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

- introduce more effective and comprehensive practice in using 'unpacking sheets' to clarify assessment assignment criteria for students on the Foundation Degree in Counselling (paragraph 34)
- develop a strategic set of specifications and minimum requirements for the use of the virtual learning environment for students on the Foundation Degree in Counselling (paragraph 39)
- consider making the process of peer observation of teaching practice more relevant for staff teaching on the Foundation Degree in Counselling by developing better guidance and encompassing more criteria characteristic of their particular practice into the already well-established process for further education practice (paragraph 47).

65   As a result of its investigations, the Summative review team considers that there can be confidence in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreement with Middlesex University, for the standards of the Foundation degree in Counselling. The team also considers that there can be confidence in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreement with Middlesex University, 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 Foundation Degree in Counselling.

E   Conclusions and summary of judgements

66   The Summative review team has identified a number of features of good practice in Harrow 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 Westminster and Middlesex University.

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

- the strong and well-established partnership with the University of Westminster in the area of higher education programmes in teacher education provision provides a very effective environment for the support and development of College staff (paragraph 27)

- the way in which College teaching staff support all higher education students in their induction and teaching and learning opportunities and practice considerably enhances the student learning experience (paragraph 31)
- the effective way in which students on all higher education programmes receive timely and comprehensive formative feedback on all assignments involving practice and placement observations considerably enhances the student learning experience (paragraph 35)
- the overall process of collecting, detailing and reacting to student views and opinions and the way in which this affects good communication between staff and students makes a considerable contribution to the student learning experience (paragraph 42).

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

69   The team agreed a number of areas where the College is **advised** to take action:

- enhance and expand the written records of meetings of the Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group in order to more accurately reflect the discussions and action plans in line with the group's terms of reference (paragraph 13)
- supplement effective informal communications by developing a more formal approach to meetings between the programme teams and the College Higher Education and International Manager such that there is a more robust process of following through issues identified during these meetings (paragraph 16)
- introduce a more formal process for routine evaluations of higher education staff development activities and develop an overall staff development plan for higher education that includes activities that cover all relevant aspects, including the Academic Infrastructure and other pedagogically related areas (paragraphs 23 and 24)
- strengthen the relationship and links with Middlesex University to ensure timely and effective action is taken over key issues on the Foundation Degree in Counselling (paragraph 29)
- take a more strategic approach to timely and effective action on improving the accuracy of public information on the Foundation Degree in Counselling (paragraph 56).

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

- introduce more effective and comprehensive practice in using 'unpacking sheets' to clarify assessment assignment criteria for students on the Foundation Degree in Counselling (paragraph 34)
- develop a strategic set of specifications and minimum requirements for the use of the virtual learning environment for all higher education students (paragraph 39)
- consider making the process of peer observation of teaching practice more relevant for higher education staff by developing better guidance and encompassing more criteria characteristic of their particular practice into the already well-established process for further education practice (paragraph 47).

71   Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, and other documentary evidence and from its meetings with staff and students, the team concludes that it has **confidence** that, in the context of this Summative review, the College discharges its

responsibilities effectively, as set out in the relevant partnership agreements for the management of the standards of the awards of its awarding bodies.

72   Based upon its analysis of the College's self-evaluation, and other documentary evidence and from its meetings with staff and students, the team concludes that it has **confidence** that, in the context of this Summative review, the College discharges its responsibilities effectively, as set out in the relevant partnership agreements for the management of the quality of learning opportunities to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

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

Harrow College action plan relating to the Summative review: June 2011						
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 **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
• the strong and well-established partnership with the University of Westminster in the area of higher education programmes in teacher education provision provides a very effective environment for the support and development of College staff (paragraph 27)	Share and replicate good practice in the partnership with Middlesex University	March 2012	Higher Education and International Manager with programme coordinators	Strong, well-established partnership which is on par with the College's partnership with Westminster University Effective environment for support and development of College staff	Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group	HE Self Assessment and annual monitoring reports (AMRs)
• the way in which College teaching staff support all higher education students in their induction and	Ensure that good practice is supported and standards remain high	June 2012	Higher Education and International Manager, E-Learning and Learning Resources	High standard of support in place for student induction and teaching and learning	Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group	HE Self Assessment, AMRs, teaching observations

teaching and learning opportunities and practice considerably enhances the student learning experience (paragraph 31)			Manager, programme coordinators	opportunities and practice		
• the effective way in which students on all higher education programmes receive timely and comprehensive formative feedback on all assignments involving practice and placement observations considerably enhances the student learning experience (paragraph 35)	Ensure that good practice is supported and standards remain high	June 2012	Higher Education and International Manager with programme coordinators	Effective and timely formative feedback in place for all HE programmes	Head of Development, Enterprise and Innovation	HE and curriculum self-assessments, AMRs, internal and external verification
• the overall process of collecting, detailing and reacting to student views and opinions and	Ensure that good practice is supported and standards remain high	June 2012	Higher Education and International Manager with programme coordinators, Head of Quality and Learner	A robust and effective process for collecting and acting on student views is in place	Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group	HE Self Assessment, AMRs

the way in which this affects good communication between staff and students makes a considerable contribution to the student learning experience (paragraph 42).			Services			
Advisable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team agreed a number of areas where the College should be **advised** to take action:						
• enhance and expand the written records of meetings of the Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group in order to more accurately reflect the discussions and action plans in line with the group's terms of reference (paragraph 13)	Ensure that action notes are comprehensive and reflect the issues within the remit of the Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group	October 2011 and ongoing	Chair of Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group	More comprehensive meeting records available	Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group	HE Self Assessment

• supplement effective informal communications by developing a more formal approach to meetings between the programme teams and the College Higher Education and International Manager such that there is a more robust process of following through issues identified during these meetings (paragraph 16)	Action notes of all meetings to be in place and shared more widely Action notes for one-to-one meetings will also be implemented	October 2011 and ongoing	Higher Education and International Manager	Action notes for all meetings in place and available	Head of Development, Enterprise and Innovation	Action notes disseminated and followed up at subsequent meetings
• introduce a more formal process for routine evaluations of higher education staff development activities and develop an overall staff development plan for higher education that includes activities	Develop and implement a staff development plan for HE teaching staff as training budgets will be devolved to curriculum managers in 2011-12 and therefore this will allow for planning staff development activities Seek support from West London Lifelong	January 2012	Higher Education and International Manager, WLLLN	Staff development plan in place	Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group, Head of Quality and Learner Services	HE Self Assessment, AMR

that cover all relevant aspects, including the Academic Infrastructure and other pedagogically related areas (paragraphs 23 and 24)	Learning Network (WLLLN) in relation to staff development activities					
• strengthen the relationship and links with Middlesex University to ensure timely and effective action is taken over key issues on the Foundation Degree in Counselling (paragraph 29)	In accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding - College Link Tutor and University Link Tutor to meet to plan and agree on effective working between the University and College	September 2011	Higher Education and International Manager, Counselling Coordinator, Middlesex University Link Tutor	Strong and well-established partnership in place	Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group	HE Self Assessment
• take a more strategic approach to timely and effective action on improving the accuracy of public information on the Foundation	Build in regular checks of public information	September 2011	Higher Education and International Manager, programme coordinators, Marketing Manager	Public information is accurate	Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group	HE Self Assessment and AMRs

Degree in Counselling (paragraph 56).						
Desirable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team considers that it is **desirable** for the College to:						
• introduce more effective and comprehensive practice in using 'unpacking sheets' to clarify assessment assignment criteria for students on the Foundation Degree in Counselling (paragraph 34)	Develop effective and comprehensive unpacking sheets	September 2011	Programme Co-Coordinator	Unpacking sheets in place	Higher Education and International Manager	Student views, HE Self Assessment, AMR
• develop a strategic set of specifications and minimum requirements for the use of the virtual learning environment for all higher education students (paragraph 39)	Develop and implement an e-learning action plan for HE	December 2011	Higher Education and International Manager, E-Learning and Learning Resources Manager	More use of e-learning and use of virtual learning environment by staff and students	Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group	Student views, HE Self Assessment, AMR

• consider making the process of peer observation of teaching practice more relevant for higher education staff by developing better guidance and encompassing more criteria characteristic of their particular practice into the already well-established process for further education practice (paragraph 47).	Develop and implement an action plan to make the process of peer observation of teaching practice more relevant to HE	December 2011	Higher Education and International, programme coordinators	Peer observation process in place	Higher Education Strategy and Academic Standards Group, Head of Quality and Learner Services	HE Self Assessment and AMRs