Navitas UK Holdings Ltd

Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

May 2012

Annex 3: Hertfordshire International College

Introduction and background

Hertfordshire International College (HIC), formerly known as HIBT, was the first Navitas college in the UK, established in October 2000. A new organisational structure was implemented in October 2011, in order to bring HIC in line with the governance structure employed in the newer Navitas colleges. A new Recognition and Articulation Agreement was signed with the University of Hertfordshire (the University) in December 2011.

There are currently 353 students enrolled at the College, predominantly from Nigeria, Pakistan, China, and India. The College employs 17 administrative staff, and 20 academic sessional staff, and is currently trialing the appointment of a full-time academic member of staff, and will be the first Navitas College to do so. In line with other Navitas embedded colleges, the College has three intakes per year, in September, January and June.

Programmes which are offered are as follows:

- Pre-sessional English

- University Foundation in Business
- University Foundation in Computer Science and IT
- University Foundation in Law
- University Foundation in Mass Communications
- University Foundation in Science and Engineering

- First Year Degree in Business
- First Year Degree in Computer Science and IT
- First Year Degree in Law
- First Year Degree in Mass Communications
- First Year Degree in Science and Engineering

- Pre-Master's in Business

Good working relationships have been established between the College and the University of Hertfordshire. The new governance arrangements put in place by Navitas were welcomed by the University, and appear to have been beneficial. As a result, the College is perceived to be 'low risk' by the University.

Key findings

Academic standards

As a result of its investigations, the review team considers that there can be **confidence** that academic standards at Hertfordshire International College are managed appropriately and in accordance with the policies and procedures of the provider and the partner higher education institution (HEI).

Quality of learning opportunities

As a result of its investigations, the review team considers that there can be **confidence** that the quality of learning opportunities at Hertfordshire International College is assured and enhanced appropriately and in accordance with the policies and procedures of the provider and of the partner Higher Education Institute (HEI).

Public information

As a result of its investigations, the review team considers that **reliance can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the Hertfordshire International College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Good practice

In addition to the **features of good practice** detailed in the main report, the review team noted the following feature of good practice at this College:

- the range of extra-curricular activities organised by HIC staff (paragraph 15).

Detailed findings

How effectively do Navitas and HIC fulfil responsibilities for the management of academic standards at this college?

Selection and approval of UK partnership arrangements

1   The original Recognition and Articulation Agreement (RAA) between Hertfordshire International College and the University of Hertfordshire, was formally signed in 2000. The partnership was subject to a full review in 2011, which resulted in the signing of a new RAA in December 2011.The review team had sight of the RAA at the review visit to Navitas. In line with the procedures for approval set out in Section 10 of the College Policies and Regulations, the approval process followed the University's standard procedures for the approval of collaborative provision. The team concluded that Navitas has effective procedures in place for the selection and approval of UK partnership arrangements.

Academic standards and learning opportunities

2   The RAA clearly defines the responsibilities of the HIC and the University for the management of academic standards, the quality of the student experience, and public information. Academic standards are maintained through the routine use of the Navitas College Policies and Regulations, and the Quality Manual. The University maintains oversight at a variety of levels, not least through the link tutors. The link tutor role is seen as

pivotal to the relationship, and clear terms of reference for the role are set out in the RAA. The review team concluded that appropriate structures are in place for the management of academic standards and learning opportunities.

Approval, monitoring and review

3   New ideas for programmes can originate at either University or College level. A collaborative approach is taken to the development of new programmes, with considerable involvement at faculty level. The University validation process is considered to be robust, and all College programmes are subjected to this rigorous process. The recent review of the RAA was a productive experience for both HIC and the University. All Information and Communication Technology programmes will be subject to periodic review by the University during 2012. This process should be completed by July 2012. Thereafter, periodic review will take place every six years. The review team concluded that effective mechanisms are in place for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes.

How effective is the management of student assessment?

4   Students are clearly informed about the assessment requirements and regulations. These are made available to students in handbooks and via the virtual learning environment. Staff are made aware of their responsibilities regarding assessment through section 11 of the College Policies and Regulations. Assessment tasks are set and marked by HIC staff,in collaboration with staff in the relevant faculty of the University. The University has formal procedures for assessment, with work for moderation being submitted to a University Collaborative Committee. This process is overseen by the link tutors, who also attend relevant examination boards. External examiners do not moderate work by HIC's undergraduate students, but do see all pre-master's work.

5   Students are issued with award certificates by the University on completion of their programme. Navitas provides a Confirmation of Attainment statement to each student for the study on Navitas programs, on progression to the University. As Navitas does not make any awards, the review team was unable to see how students received formal certification for their achievement of credit at HIC. Students at the College are also unsure whether the statement constituted a form of certificate, although they were clear that they would like a certificate. The review team concluded that robust procedures are in place for the assessment of students at HIC.

How effectively are UK external reference points used in the management of academic standards?

6   Navitas embodies the Academic Infrastructure in its College Policies and Regulations. New programmes are developed with reference to the University's validation procedures, which routinely includes reference to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, subject benchmark statements, and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. The review team concluded that effective use is made of external reference points in the management of academic standards.

How effectively are external examining, moderation, or verification used to assure academic standards?

7   External examiners do not moderate work by undergraduate students at HIC, but they see pre-master's work.

How effectively is statistical information used to monitor and assure academic standards?

8   HIC uses the standard Navitas management information system known as MAZE. This is used routinely to track the progress of students, including attendance, module grade data, pass rates, and drop out rates. The data is used in the construction of reports to Navitas' Head office. These reports are considered at Academic Advisory Committee and at Joint Strategic Partnership Management Board. Members of the University staff had high regard for the quality of student data held by MAZE, and especially its use in terms of monitoring, progression and award. The University's periodic review process requires consideration of data regarding the performance of students for the last three years. This data shows that continuation rates are better for College students than those recruited directly to the University. The review team concluded that regular and effective use is made of statistical data in the monitoring and assurance of academic standards.

How effectively are responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities fulfilled?

9   Strong links exist between HIC and the University of Hertfordshire, to ensure that learning resources are always comparable and up to date. For example, specialist computer software at HIC mirrors that available at the University. Learning resources are considered by teaching staff to be more than adequate, with both staff and students having full access to facilities at the University, including Students' Union facilities and sports facilities. Library facilities are considered by staff and students to be excellent. Learning resources are monitored by link tutors. The review team concluded that effective systems are in place to enable HIC to fulfill its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities.

How effectively are external points used in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities?

10   External reference points are largely used in the approval and periodic review process. Use is made of student feedback for the enhancement of learning opportunities. Students the review team met confirmed that HIC listened to their feedback about learning resources and are responsive.

How do Navitas and HIC assure themselves that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?

11   Induction of teaching staff is very thorough, and there is a low turnover of staff. A wide variety of training opportunities are provided, at both HIC and the University. A number of staff are members of professional organisations. A 'buddying' system is in place between College and University staff. The review team considered this to be a strength in facilitating the sharing of knowledge and learning resources.

12   In line with Navitas policy, observation of teaching is undertaken by managers and by peers at least once per year. Student feedback is also routinely used to assure the quality of the teaching and learning at HIC. The review team concluded that robust systems are in place to assure HIC that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced.

How is student feedback used to assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities?

13   In line with Navitas policy, extensive use is made of student feedback, including module surveys, College surveys, and annual Navitas surveys. A Student Forum has recently been established; student representatives are elected to serve on the Student Forum. Students are represented on the Teaching and Learning Board. They claimed that there are good interactive relationships between staff and students, and that HIC always responded positively to their requests. The review team concluded that extensive use is made of student feedback to assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities at HIC.

How effectively do Navitas and HIC assure themselves that students are supported effectively?

14   There are a wide range of communication channels in existence between students and staff, including via the virtual learning environment, email, text messaging, and face-to-face. Staff claimed that communication with students was one of HIC's real strengths. Students are allocated a specific named personal tutor; and there is an expectation that students will meet with their personal tutor to discuss their progress at least three times per semester. The review team considered this to be a positive arrangement.

15   Staff try to offer an open-door policy as far as possible. However, as most staff are part-time, the new full-time member of teaching staff tends to field a lot of student enquiries. Managers are aware that this will need to be monitored. The review team noted the wide range of extra-curricular activities organised by HIC staff, and consider this to be a feature of good practice.

16   The review team concluded that there was clear evidence at HIC to support the identification of good practice in the main report, that effective team work has created a caring, accessible and responsive learning environment.

How effectively does HIC manage the recruitment and admission of students?

17   HIC follows a standard and rigorous approach to admissions, in line with Navitas policy. Clear roles and responsibilities are defined. Non-standard applications are checked against the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC), and considered by the Chair of the Learning and Teaching Board. They are then referred to the University admissions department for a final decision. HIC takes a very robust approach to agents, as they play a large part in recruitment processes. Their experience and qualifications are considered, and references are checked with other Universities, and signed off by Navitas.

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

18   Recruitment of staff follows Navitas standard recruitment and appointment processes, which appear robust. Staff appointments are subject to the approval of the University. Induction and initial training is both formal and informal, with staff fully aware of their academic and college responsibilities. Staff have access to staff development and training programmes at the University.

How effectively do Navitas and HIC ensure that learning resources are accessible to students and sufficient to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes?

19   On arrival, students are provided with course and programme handbooks. Comprehensive structured induction programmes are in place, including orientation to learning materials and the virtual learning environment. The adequacy of learning resources is monitored through formal student feedback surveys, and through the Student Forum. Access to learning resources is seen to be a strength, especially the extensive use of the virtual learning environment.

How effectively does Navitas' public information communicate to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides at this college?

20   Pre-departure information appears to have been received by all students. For the most part, this information was useful and clear.

How effective are Navitas' arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing at this college?

21   College Directors and Principals are responsible for the accuracy of all college public information and HIC is rigorous formal checking and sign off procedure is in place prior to the publication of public/student information. Proposed publications are produced by Navitas, checked for accuracy by HIC, and then sent to the University. These are considered by the link tutor in the relevant academic department at the University, and then checked by the International Office. The International Office also checks all online material. The review team concluded that robust procedures are in place for assuring the accuracy and completeness of published information at HIC.