Institute of Cancer Research

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

January 2012

Contents

About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the Institute of Cancer Research (the Institute). The review took place on 24-27 January 2012 and was conducted by a team of reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Anthony Bagshaw
- Professor John Baldock
- Dr Sylvia Hargreaves
- Ms Alison Blackburn (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the Institute of Cancer Research and to make judgements as to whether its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - threshold academic standards[1]
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides commentaries on public information and the theme topic
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4.

In reviewing the Institute of Cancer Research the review team has also considered the theme of 'the transition to postgraduate study' (see page 11).

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] For background information about the Institute of Cancer Research see page 3. A dedicated page of the QAA website explains the method for Institutional Review of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland[3] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

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[1] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx
[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx

QAA's judgements about the Institute of Cancer Research

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the Institute of Cancer Research.

- Academic standards at the Institute **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the Institute **meets UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the Institute **meets UK expectations**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at the Institute of Cancer Research:

- the monitoring of, and support for, research students' progress (paragraphs 2.10 and 5.2)
- the quality of the research environment for research students (paragraph 2.10)
- the contribution students make to quality assurance (paragraph 2.35.2).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to the Institute of Cancer Research:

- the Institute should, by the beginning of the 2012-13 academic year, clarify and formalise the aims and intended learning outcomes of the development sessions for teaching staff and ensure these sessions are clearly targeted, structured and recorded (paragraph 2.1.2)
- the Institute should, by the beginning of the 2012-13 academic year, develop a system to assure itself that local supervisors are providing the support specified in the MSc Part C Module and Assessment Guide (paragraph 2.13).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that the Institute of Cancer Research is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students. The Institute:

- intends to increase the opportunities for module leaders to collectively review the MSc (paragraph 1.4.2)
- has plans to increase communication and collaboration between the internal and external members of periodic review panels (paragraph 1.4.3).

Public information

The information the Institute of Cancer Research provides about its higher education is valid, reliable, useful and accessible.

The transition to postgraduate study

The Institute of Cancer Research manages students' transition to postgraduate study

carefully and effectively.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the operational description and handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland](#).[4]

About the Institute of Cancer Research

The Institute of Cancer Research is a specialist cancer research organisation and a College of the University of London. Its three strategic goals are:

- to be a world leader in fundamental research into cancer and the translation of research discoveries into improved outcomes for cancer patients
- to educate and train the next generation of cancer researchers and clinicians
- to deliver a world class and sustainable organisation to support cancer research and education for patient benefit.

The Institute offers two postgraduate research programmes, an MPhil/PhD and MD(Res), and one taught postgraduate programme, the MSc Oncology. As of October 2011 the Institute had 232 students registered on the research programmes (including students writing up their theses) and 122 registered on the MSc.

All programmes lead to awards of the University of London. The University permits all its member colleges to publish their own regulations for the award of University degrees in accordance with an overall 'Academic Framework'. The Institute's Regulations are managed, maintained and published under the authority of the Institute's Academic Board and, where appropriate, made in accordance with the Statutes and Ordinances of the University of London. The Institute has its own regulations for taught courses, but operates under the regulations produced centrally by the University of London for research degrees.

The Institute's last review by QAA in 2008 led to judgements of confidence in the management of students' learning opportunities, confidence in the management of the academic standards of postgraduate research programmes, and limited confidence in the management of the academic standards of postgraduate taught programmes. The limited confidence judgement meant the Institute was obliged to develop and implement an action plan to address the weaknesses identified by the review team. The action plan was completed and signed off by QAA in 2010.

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/IRENI/Pages/default.aspx

Explanation of the findings about the Institute

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.[5]

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a **brief glossary** at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms[6] is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.[7]

1   Academic standards

Outcome

The academic standards at the Institute of Cancer Research **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for making this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualification benchmarks

1.1   The Institute approves and reviews its programmes of study with explicit reference to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). In consequence, the learning outcomes specified for the programmes match the expectations of the FHEQ. The volume of study required of students on these programmes is sufficient to make the specified outcomes achievable.

1.1.1   The specified learning outcomes for the MSc as a whole are described in its programme specification, while those for individual modules appear in Module Guides, the Student Handbook, the marking criteria, and the assessment guides. The volume of work required is reflected in mandatory minimum levels of student attendance and in the study required to pass the assessments.

1.1.2   For the Institute's research degrees, its Codes of Practice act as the generic programme specifications. The project description and intended learning outcomes for each research project are described in a studentship project bid form which must be approved by the Student Recruitment Committee before the project is advertised to applicants.

Use of external examiners

1.2   The Institute's use of external examiners ensures that the academic standards of both its research and taught programmes are maintained at the appropriate levels.

1.2.1   The procedures for appointing examiners to the MSc programme are set out in a formal policy and in the Institute's Examination Regulations, along with details of examiners' responsibilities. The examiners' reports deal with academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, and they are used as part of the evidence base for the annual monitoring of the programme as well as being submitted to the relevant academic committees. In 2011 the Institute asked its internal auditors to review its implementation of key taught course quality assurance provisions, including the arrangements for external examining, and this led to the introduction of a standard process of recording examiners' recommendations along with the Institute's responses. The Institute also writes to each external examiner to inform them whether and how their recommendations have been

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[5] The evidence underlying these findings is available in a separate, unpublished report. Please contact QAA Reviews Group if you would like a copy of this report.
[6] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx
[7] www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/IRENI/Pages/default.aspx

implemented. Student representatives on the Taught Courses Committee see and discuss external examiners' reports.

1.2.2   The Institute's use of external examiners in its research programmes is robust. Procedures for appointing examiners and the examiners' functions are described in a formal policy document and repeated in the Institute's Codes of Practice. While the reports are specific to individual candidates and their theses, any common themes are drawn out in an annual summary, which is put to the Research Degrees Committee (RDC). Student representatives on the Academic Board see and discuss the key themes and any comments made on them by the RDC.

Assessment and standards

1.3   The Institute's assessment procedures ensure that students have the opportunity to demonstrate the learning outcomes of their programmes.

1.3.1   The principles, policies and methods underlying assessment are clearly described in the relevant regulations, policy documents and handbooks, and they are regularly reviewed through the annual monitoring process and in the light of comments from external examiners, module leaders and students. The review team saw evidence of the Institute refining its assessment procedures in response to this feedback.

1.3.2   Both research and taught students whom the review team met clearly understood the nature and timing of assessment and the standards of performance expected. Students are given feedback on their assessment performance as a matter of course.

1.3.3   The Taught Courses Committee frequently discusses the alignment of the assessment strategy of the MSc with the specified learning outcomes of the programme as a whole and its constituent modules. Exam boards carefully and systematically consider student performance and discuss where performance has implications for the way assessment is carried out. The recording of marks and evidence of student performance is commended by external examiners.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.4   Overall, the Institute's procedures for the approval of new programmes, and the monitoring and review of existing programmes, ensure that academic standards are set and maintained at the appropriate levels.

1.4.1   Taught courses are monitored annually and are subject to periodic review every five years. The process of annual monitoring was developed in response to the last QAA review in 2008, which found that a lack of formal monitoring was putting academic standards at risk. The process is built on a series of annual reports, beginning with reports by module leaders, which are used by course leaders to compile reports considered by the Taught Courses Committee. There is comprehensive guidance for the staff involved, including on the nature of the evidence that should inform their reports.

1.4.2   Until the end of the 2010-11 academic year all the module and course leaders met together to discuss annual monitoring at an away day. However, owing to limited attendance this arrangement was discontinued in favour of separate meetings between course directors and the leaders of individual modules. The Institute indicated that its Academic Board would keep this arrangement under review and seek to increase the opportunities for module leaders to collectively review the course. **The review team affirms** this intention.

1.4.3   Periodic review of taught programmes is governed by a formal policy, which is itself subject to regular review. While the review team regarded the review process as

fundamentally sound, it also noted that the process expected internal and external panel members to work separately. The Institute is aware of this issue and the Academic Board has agreed to update the procedure. The updated version will take effect for the next Periodic Review of the Course, due in 2014-15. **The review team affirms** the Institute's plan to increase communication and collaboration between the internal and external members of periodic review panels.

1.4.4 The Institute manages the approval, monitoring and review of research programmes through an annual update of the Codes of Practice and the periodic review of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The project plans for individual research students must be approved by the relevant head of division before a student enrols.

Subject benchmarks

1.5 There is no subject benchmark statement for Oncology. The Institute's periodic review of the MSc Oncology in 2010 concluded that the programme was consistent with the description of specialised or advanced study in the *Master's degree characteristics* published by QAA.[8]

2 Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at the Institute of Cancer Research **meets UK expectations.** The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 The Institute upholds professional standards for teaching and learning.

2.1.1 The teaching team for the MSc Oncology comprises three course directors, a number of module leaders, and about 300 lecturers. The course directors and module leaders are a permanent team; the lecturers are often drawn from other institutions and hospitals. While all three directors and about a quarter of the module leaders have formal teaching qualifications or are working towards these qualifications, expertise in the discipline is a more important criterion in selecting lecturers. As a result, the curriculum is dynamic and reflects the very latest thinking in Oncology. This is highly valued by students.

2.1.2 The Institute's efforts to support the professional development of staff teaching on the MSc focus on the permanent team of course directors and module leaders rather than on the lecturers, who may only deliver one or two lectures a year. Until 2011, staff development had been one of the purposes of the annual MSc away day. However, due to poor attendance this arrangement was discontinued in favour of training after Examination Board meetings. The first session was held after the October 2011 Examination Board, but it was not possible for the review team to evaluate its effectiveness owing to the absence of programme details, minutes or record of attendance. **The review team recommends** that the Institute should, by the beginning of the 2012-13 academic year, clarify and formalise the aims and intended learning outcomes of the development sessions for teaching staff and ensure these sessions are clearly targeted, structured and recorded.

2.1.3 The Institute has established a formal recognition status for research degree supervisors. To achieve this status, staff must undergo formal training or, for those arriving from other institutions, demonstrate they already have the skills and experience required. Existing supervisors are encouraged to undergo refresher training every five years.

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[8] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/masters-degree-characteristics.aspx

Primary supervisors must demonstrate additional experience before taking on students, including experience as part of other successful supervisory teams, and are approved by the Deputy Dean.

Learning resources

2.2   Students regard the teaching and supervision provided by the Institute as being of high quality. This is evidenced in annual student surveys, surveys of alumni and periodic review reports, and was confirmed by the students whom the review team met.

2.2.1   The Institute gets feedback from its taught students on the quality of the teaching partly through written questionnaires. However, response rates to one of these questionnaires (the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey) have been very low. The Institute has taken steps to improve response rates to internal questionnaires through changes to their format and the introduction of an anonymous feedback facility in 2011. The review team encourages the Institute to maintain its efforts to increase response rates to student feedback surveys.

2.2.2   Research and taught students speak highly of the physical resources provided to support their learning, such as laboratory facilities, IT equipment and the library. The Institute has recently enabled students to access more electronic resources off-site and is piloting full remote access, including to the Institute's intranet and iSpace.

Student voice

2.3   The contribution students make to quality assurance is a feature of **good practice**.

2.3.1   Students are represented on all of the Institute's key committees, including the Board of Trustees and Academic Board. The Institute provides training to help student representatives participate in committee meetings effectively and expects them to attend all meetings to convey students' views and suggestions. The Institute has changed the timing of some committee meetings to facilitate better student attendance. The minutes of committee meetings show that students tend to contribute across a wide range of issues. Students also lead on specific agenda items, for example the annual report from the Student President to Academic Board.

2.3.2   Beyond representation on committees, students are involved in quality assurance through membership of periodic review panels and regular meetings with the MSc Course Manager and Directors. The Chief Executive has also set up an Advisory Forum to promote better communication between senior management and staff and students.

2.3.3   The Institute gets feedback from students through a number of mechanisms, including national postgraduate surveys, internal surveys and exit questionnaires. The results of these surveys and questionnaires are discussed at the relevant committees as a matter of course and form part of the evidence base for annual monitoring.

2.3.4   The review team saw several examples of the Institute responding positively and quickly to student feedback. These included increased safeguards for research students whose supervisors leave the Institute, and more opportunities for research students to present their projects to a wide audience.

Management information used to improve quality and standards

2.4   The Institute makes effective use of management information to safeguard quality and standards and to promote enhancement of student learning opportunities. It has developed key performance indicators for all its provision, reports on these indicators to

Academic Board annually, and uses them to inform improvements in its support of students. A good example of this is the strengthening of support for research students in the writing up phase at the end of their programmes.

Admission to the Institute

2.5   The Institute's policy and procedures for the admission of students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

2.5.1   Applicants can get all the information they need and make their application through the Institute's website. Feedback on this part of the website shows that applicants tend to be very satisfied with it.

2.5.2   The selection of applicants for all programmes is undertaken by senior academic staff according to explicit and transparent criteria. Unsuccessful applicants may obtain feedback on request or make a formal complaint or appeal. Applicants to research programmes attend a three-day selection event, when they have the opportunity to express a preference for the particular project they want to pursue.

2.5.3   All applicants are invited to complete an equal opportunities and disability monitoring form covering those characteristics protected by equalities legislation. The Institute uses these data to identify any evidence of bias in its recruitment procedures. It has found none.

Complaints and appeals

2.6   The Institute's procedures for complaints and appeals reflect the guidance in QAA's *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* and are made clear to students. The Registry is responsible for recording the basic details of all complaints and appeals, and submits an annual report on these cases to Academic Board so that any themes can be identified and addressed. However, in the absence of any complaints and appeals in the last few years, the report has been limited to confirming their absence.

Career advice and guidance

2.7   The Institute's programmes are closely tailored to careers in researching and/or practising in Oncology. The demand for careers guidance, therefore, tends to be confined to specific areas such as information on careers in research. The Institute provides this guidance in collaboration with its awarding body, the University of London. The programme has recently been redesigned and relaunched on the advice of students. The students whom the review team met commended the new services.

Supporting disabled students

2.8   The Institute manages the quality of learning opportunities for disabled students effectively. It has an overarching Equality of Opportunity Policy and has conducted Equality Impact Assessments on all its academic policies as well as comparing them against the guidance in QAA's *Code of practice.* All staff and research students are required to attend Equality Excellence training. Information about the support for disabled students is clear and is available both to applicants and registered students.

Supporting international students

2.9   The Institute manages the quality of learning opportunities for international students effectively. It provides a range of services or initiatives to help them settle in to the UK,

including a buddy system and a dedicated accommodation day. These services are overseen by the Student Liaison Committee. The international students whom the review team met spoke positively about the services they had used.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.10   The quality of the research environment for research students and the monitoring of, and support for, research students' progress are both **features of good practice**.

2.10.1   About two-thirds of the Institute's students are on research programmes. The information available to applicants about the application and selection process is clear and comprehensive. Students whom the review team met confirmed they had received the Student Charter, Code of Practice and University of London regulations during the induction process.

2.10.2   There is a comprehensive induction programme for PhD students. This includes a 'Speed PhD' event wherein groups of new students take a project through every stage of a PhD in two days to learn about the structure of the programme, the role of the supervisor, how to identify and overcome problems, and how to gain insight into their own learning needs. Students on the MD(Res) join at various times during the year and so do not have a similar induction event, but the Institute does provide mini inductions for them.

2.10.3   Research students are supervised by teams comprising at least one primary supervisor, an associate supervisor and a backup supervisor. All supervisors are obliged to attend initial training and encouraged to go through refresher training every five years (see paragraph 2.1.3). Student-supervisor contracts are drawn up at the beginning of programmes, alongside personal development plans that identify skills development needs and working arrangements. Skills training is provided by the Learning and Development Team. Students whom the team met praised the quality of skills training available and the willingness of the Institute to deliver new courses at students' request.

2.10.4   Students have regular, formal progress meetings with their supervisory teams. In addition, the Academic Dean's team has a programme of 'chats', giving students the opportunity to provide feedback on their supervision or any other aspects of their studies. Students whom the team met confirmed they understood clearly how to raise any academic or personal concerns. Records of progress meetings, chats with the members of the Dean's Team and other monitoring information are recorded in an online progress monitoring tool called iProgress.

2.10.5   PhD students register initially for an MPhil and go through a formal upgrade process normally within 18 months. Students very seldom fail to upgrade and, of those who have been successful at this stage, all have gone on to pass the PhD. Success rates for the MD(Res) are lower and the Institute is actively pursuing ways of raising them.

2.10.6   The research environment for students makes a particularly positive contribution to their learning opportunities. The library and laboratory facilities are at the leading edge of oncological research, as are the Institute's supervisors. Students whom the review team met drew particular attention to the Institute's encouragement of interdisciplinary research.

2.10.7   As a result of a recent restructuring exercise several primary supervisors left the Institute, creating a period of uncertainty for the affected students while the options for each were explored. Student representatives presented evidence to the Student Liaison Committee that a number of affected students were unhappy both with communications with the Institute about their position and with the speed of the Institute's response. The Committee made a number of recommendations, following which the Institute has

developed new operating procedures to ensure it can react more quickly, and maintain more effective and timely communication with students should a similar situation arise again.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.11   The Institute has no collaborative provision.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.12   None of the Institute's programmes is delivered predominantly by distance learning or by any other kind of flexible arrangement. Programmes do, however, make some use of e-learning; in particular the Perspectives in Oncology e-learning package, which is a requirement for new research students and also contains elements for taught students, and Lab Book, a website that provides transferable skills training throughout a student's research degree. The MSc (Oncology) contains an element of e-learning and assessment, which is integrated into the course.

Work-based and placement learning

2.13   Almost all students on the MSc Oncology are doctors who are released by their NHS Trusts for one day a week to attend the Institute. Students spend the third year of the programme (known as Part C) writing a dissertation, normally based on oncological research or practice within their NHS Trust, with the support of a local supervisor employed by that trust and a Part C Tutor appointed by the Institute. The role of the local supervisor is to provide day to day support for the research project, to help guide the student to seek appropriate permissions (for example ethics committee review), and to ensure the student has access to appropriate facilities at the local site. The Part C Tutor oversees the academic progression of the student. The Institute formally appoints the local supervisors, but it does not clearly specify its expectations of them and does not check their suitability to undertake the role until after they have been appointed. The review team **recommends** that the Institute should, by the beginning of the 2012-13 academic year, develop a system to assure itself that local supervisors are providing the support specified in the MSc Part C Module and Assessment Guide.

Student charter

2.14   The Institute has a formal Student Charter which covers all students and includes clear signposts to other policies and procedures. The students whom the review team met agreed that the Charter made the respective obligations of students and the Institute clear.

3   Public information

Summary

The information the Institute provides about its higher education is valid, reliable, useful and accessible. The team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

3.1   The Institute complies with the requirement by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) that information on academic standards and quality should be published or made publicly available. The Institute's next annual review of public information will consider what information it may need to add or change with the introduction of the Key Information Set in 2012.

3.2   External examiners' reports for the MSc are shared with student representatives on the Taught Courses Committee. The general themes arising from external examiners' reports on research degree theses are available to student members of the Academic Board.

3.3   The Institute has a formal annual review of public information to ensure the information it publishes is up to date and complete. The Academic Board may also commission a more substantial periodic review of what the Institute publishes as part of its five-yearly Quality Assurance and Enhancement Plan.

3.4   The students whom the review team met confirmed the information the Institute publishes is accessible and useful, including the information they considered before applying.

4   Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at the Institute **meets UK expectations.** The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1   The Institute has an incremental approach to enhancement which is appropriate and proportionate to the Institute's size and resources.

4.2   Enhancement is driven primarily by the five-yearly Quality Assurance and Enhancement Plan and the three-yearly Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, both of which are overseen by the Academic Board. In addition, the Institute draws on the information generated by its quality assurance processes and student feedback to identify opportunities to improve students' learning opportunities. Good examples of recent improvements include the introduction of iProgress (see paragraph 2.10.4), an automated system of voting for MSc students, and the development of a new training course for student representatives (see paragraph 2.3.1).

4.3   In 2011 the Academic Board decided to simplify the next Quality Assurance and Enhancement Plan to allow the Institute to vary the frequency with which it reviews aspects of quality assurance, prioritising those with greatest relevance to the Institute's provision. Given the size of the Institute and its resources, the review team regarded this change as appropriate.

5   Theme: The transition to postgraduate study

Each academic year a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's review teams. In 2011-12 the theme is 'the first-year student experience'. However, given that the Institute does not provide undergraduate programmes, QAA and the Institute agreed that the theme of **the transition to postgraduate study** would be more appropriate.

Supporting students' transition

5.1   The inductions provided for students differ according to whether they are doing a PhD or a master's programme.

5.1.1   The academic demands placed on new PhD students, as well as their study environment, tend to be very different from what they have experienced in other higher education institutions. To help new students adapt quickly, the Institute provides a thorough induction event, including the two-day 'Speed PhD' (see paragraph 2.10.2), and then asks them to complete 'Perspectives in Oncology', an e-learning course designed to introduce students to the full breadth of oncological research. International students may benefit from additional induction support, including a buddying system, English language training and

advice on practical issues like accommodation and banking. Where possible, new students' buddies are from the same country as the student.

5.1.2   Students on the MD(Res) join at various times during the year and so do not have a similar induction event, but the Institute does provide a number of mini inductions for them. There is a one-day induction event for MSc students focusing on academic skills and learning resources.

Monitoring and supporting progress

5.2   The monitoring of, and support for, research students' progress is a **feature of good practice**. New students and their supervisors draw up contracts setting out their respective expectations and responsibilities, along with personal development plans. Students meet their supervisors frequently to discuss progress and can also provide feedback to the deans on their supervision through the deans' 'chats'. Students' progress is recorded and tracked through iProgress.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions. For example, pages 18 to 19 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of: threshold academic standards; learning opportunities; enhancement; and public information.
The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary.

Academic Infrastructure Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the *Code of practice*. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Code of practice The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions. This should not be confused with institutions' own Codes of Practice.

academic standards The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

enhancement Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

feature of good practice A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

framework A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

framework for higher education qualifications A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS).

learning opportunities The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes** of study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios), and staff development.

learning outcome What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

operational definition A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

programme specifications Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes** of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

public information Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements, along with additional topics and overarching themes.

subject benchmark statement A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

threshold academic standard The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

widening participation Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.