Schumacher College (The Dartington Hall Trust)

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

December 2012

Key findings about Schumacher College (The Dartington Hall Trust)

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in December 2012, the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of the University of Plymouth.

The team also considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the quality and enhancement of the learning opportunities it offers on behalf of this awarding body.

The team considers that **reliance can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Good practice

The team has identified the following **good practice**:

- the mutually supportive partnership with the University of Plymouth (paragraphs 1.3, 1.5 and 1.6)
- the College's innovative approach to curriculum development (paragraph 1.6)
- the holistic, developmental and student-centred approach to learning and teaching (paragraph 2.3)
- the extensive use of visiting speakers, whose lectures are open to students, staff and the public (paragraph 2.5)
- the responsiveness of the College to the student voice (paragraph 2.7)
- the enhancement-driven approach to formative assessment (paragraph 2.8)
- the use of the physical learning resources for the full benefit of students (paragraph 2.12)
- the clarity and accessibility of the information for students on the College website (paragraph 3.1).

Recommendations

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

The team considers that it is **advisable** for the provider to:

- introduce a more coordinated and systematic approach to staff development (paragraph 2.10).

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

- provide clear and timely information to applicants concerning the precise nature of programmes involving distance learning (paragraph 3.2).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](1) (REO) conducted by [QAA](1) at Schumacher College (The Dartington Hall Trust) (the provider; the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the provider discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes of study that the provider delivers on behalf of the University of Plymouth. The review was carried out by Ms Colette Coleman, Dr Clive Marsland (reviewers) and Mr Robert Jones (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the *[Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](2)*.[2] Evidence in support of the review included documentation supplied by the College and its awarding body, and meetings with staff and with students.

The review team also considered the provider's use of the relevant external reference points:

- the Academic Infrastructure
- the regulations of the University of Plymouth.

Please note that if you are unfamiliar with any of the terms used in this report you can find them in the Glossary.

Schumacher College (the College) is a department of The Dartington Hall Trust. It represents the continuation of a commitment to education dating back to the formation of the Trust in 1925 by Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst and the inspiration of the Indian poet, educationalist, social reformer and Nobel Prize winner, Rabindranath Tagore. It admitted its first students in January 1991. They studied short intensive courses. From the mid-1990s, some of these courses attracted postgraduate credits through the University of Plymouth. In 1998, the College introduced its first full-length postgraduate programme, an MSc in Holistic Science approved by the University of Plymouth. This was followed by two other postgraduate programmes. In 2011-12, the College had 550 students following short courses and currently has 41 students studying for postgraduate qualifications. Of the postgraduate students, 37 are full-time and 4 are part-time. International students comprise 20 per cent of the total. There are eight academic staff, three full-time and five part-time. There are also two visiting fellows.

The College is located in the Old Postern complex that comprises the Old Postern, various outbuildings, three accommodation blocks, and the Craft Education Centre. The College is situated near the main entrance to the estate. It is adjacent to the main farm complex and has good access to both Dartington village and the Dartington Estate. The latter includes a cinema, various theatres, and open access to 1,200 acres, including three miles of the River Dart. Totnes is in easy walking or cycling distance and both Dartmoor and the coast are nearby. The University of Plymouth is within one hour door-to-door, using the train station in Totnes.

[1] www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx.

At the time of the review, the provider offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their awarding body, with student numbers in brackets:

University of Plymouth
- MSc Holistic Science (14)
- Postgraduate Certificate, Holistic Science (1)
- MA Economics for Transition (13)
- Postgraduate Certificate, Economics for Transition (0)
- MSc Sustainable Horticulture and Food Production (11)
- Postgraduate Diploma, Sustainable Horticulture and Food Production (0)
- Postgraduate Certificate, Sustainable Horticulture and Food Production (2)

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College has a high level of autonomy in managing its curricular development, teaching, assessment and learning opportunities, subject to overall monitoring and review by the University of Plymouth.

Recent developments

From 2010, the College embarked on the incremental development of three new postgraduate-level programmes as part of its five-year strategic plan. The objective is to open up inquiry into the application of holistic principles in systemic areas, where the resources of the College and Trust could have the most potential influence. The three areas identified were: economics, design, and food. In parallel, the College sought to increase the flexibility of study through the introduction of named postgraduate certificates and, where appropriate, postgraduate diplomas. At the same time, the Holistic Science programme underwent its periodic reapproval process. This process led to the development of the programmes listed above. In addition, postgraduate qualifications in ecological design will be introduced with the aim of recruiting in 2014.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. The 2011-12 students produced their submission in the form of a DVD. However, the 2012-13 students decided that they wished to produce, in parallel, a written submission. This was based on initial drafts from each programme, produced in an agreed workshop structure, without any staff input. The final draft was prepared by a small group of students. Between them, the two submissions provided a clear and evaluative picture of the student experience, which the team found very helpful. Students met the review coordinator during the preparatory meeting and the team during the review visit. Both meetings were highly productive.

Detailed findings about Schumacher College

1 Academic standards

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?

1.1 The College's arrangements for the management of academic standards are sound. The working relationship between the College and the University of Plymouth (the University) is effective in ensuring that academic standards are maintained. There are appropriate structures for the management and administration of academic programmes, and the provision of support for students. The College is a department of The Dartington Hall Trust (the Trust) and the Head of College (a recently established post) is a member of the Dartington Management Team, which is responsible for general strategic oversight. Details of the College's responsibility are clearly outlined in the Agreement for Taught Arrangements between the Trust and the University.

1.2 College staff work together effectively to manage academic standards. Programmes are overseen by the Head of College, who has responsibility for the academic staff and manages operational delivery, including responsibilities for teaching, student support, assessment and quality assurance. The Head of College is fully involved in the student experience and has regular insight into the delivery and quality of programmes.

1.3 The College has a mutually supportive partnership with the University and is well supported by a link tutor for each programme. This relationship represents good practice (see also paragraphs 1.5 and 1.6). There is frequent communication between staff at the College and the University. In particular, the link tutors perform a key liaison role between the College and the University. They provide regular effective academic liaison, attend programme management committees and are involved in the development of programmes and in teaching dissertation modules. College staff are invited to talk and give lectures at the University and University staff attend short courses at the College.

1.4 The Programmes Group, chaired by the Head of College, is the strategic body of the College and meets monthly, underpinned by regular Programme Management Committee meetings. Management of student matters operates well through day-to-day interaction facilitated by the small size of the College and the fact that there are student representatives on all committees. As a result, the support environment is strong, with good contact between tutors and students, and a supportive management culture.

1.5 There is an effective annual review process and the College works closely with the University to monitor academic standards and share good practice. For example, the University has adopted the College's approach to dissertation delivery. Module evaluations are used effectively to underpin the annual review process. Validation and institutional review processes are robust and effective, and the College is responsive to matters raised.

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

1.6 All programmes delivered by the College are validated by the University. The programmes are designed by the College according to the University's quality standards and with reference to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The programmes comply with the University's Regulatory Framework for Taught Postgraduate Awards, Assessment Policy, and Teaching

and Learning Strategy. The College produces programme specifications, which are approved by the University at validation. Because of their innovative nature, programmes taught at the College do not have specific subject benchmark statements and the College uses a wide range of input from independent experts as part of a rigorous process designed to develop innovative curricula; reference guidance from benchmarks in related subjects is used where appropriate. This represents good practice.

1.7   Engagement with external reference points is clear in programme specifications. The College's Quality Manual provides information on the Academic Infrastructure, although it does not explicitly refer to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education.* The Quality Manual provides a valuable source of reference and is used in conjunction with the University Quality Assurance Handbook: Taught Programmes.

How does the provider use external moderation, verification or examining to assure academic standards?

1.8   External examiners play a key role in the monitoring of standards and assessment, and ensuring comparability with other higher education institutions. Each programme has an external examiner nominated by the College and appointed by the University's External Examiners' Subcommittee of the Academic Board. Award boards are held at the College and chaired by a faculty representative from the University. The external examiners attend the award boards and submit an annual report to the University. The College values these reports and the contribution made to ongoing monitoring, which directly impacts on practices in teaching and learning. There is clear evidence that action is taken in response to these reports. For example, in her report submitted in January 2012, the external examiner for the MSc in Holistic Science suggested some changes in assessment and feedback that were implemented for the following academic year.

1.9   Moderation is used effectively to assure standards. All assessed work is blind double marked and provisional grades are provided to students on assessment forms. A selection of work is sent to the external examiner for moderation. The dissertation module is supervised by University staff with a secondary supervisor appointed by the College. Dissertations are double-blind marked by primary and secondary supervisors, provisional grades are provided to students and these are moderated by the external examiner. Grades are confirmed at the Awards Board.

The review team has **confidence** in the provider's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding body.

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2   Quality of learning opportunities

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1   The College's processes for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities reflect those for academic standards described in paragraphs 1.1-1.5. The Head of College oversees and monitors programme delivery in liaison with programme coordinators. The University's requirements are robustly implemented, and the College's responsibilities are clearly laid out in the Agreement referred to in paragraph 1.1.

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

2.2   Good use is made of the FHEQ and reference guidance from subject benchmark statements in related subjects is used where appropriate, as described in paragraphs 1.6 and 1.7. In particular, this results in curriculum development that ensures innovative teaching and learning.

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

2.3   The College has effective mechanisms for developing learning and teaching, for encouraging a holistic, developmental and student-centred approach to learning, and for fostering innovation in the delivery of its programmes of study. They represent good practice. The programmes are clearly informed by the College's overarching ethos of promoting sustainability in the context of holistic education. Students praised the commitment of staff to this philosophy and to their individual and collective needs as learners. They thought that the educational approach compared well with other practice they had experienced, and they also thought that the College treated them as genuine and valued partners in learning.

2.4   Classroom delivery techniques centre on advanced, reflective discussion and encourage the full participation of students across all programmes, with an appropriate balance between theory and practice and between lectures, seminars and tutorials. Students said that they considered this approach to be one of the strongest features of their College experience. Evidence from the visit confirmed a clear-sighted and current approach to teaching methods, including developmental and informal peer observation across all programmes of study.

2.5   In addition to the normal range of teaching and learning activities, students value the extensive and imaginative use of visiting scholars, who often have a national or international reputation. This enhances the student experience at all stages in their studies. Furthermore, these visiting speakers are used by the College to reach the wider community in a sustained programme of talks, lectures and seminars. This use of visiting speakers is good practice.

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

2.6   The College manages effectively the arrangements for student support at the pre-enrolment stage, in admissions, at enrolment, at induction and during students' time at the College. These are tailored to meet individual student needs. Students praised the support functions within the College. It is clear from meetings with staff involved in the support process, by students' corroboration of staff evidence, and by written evidence of dedicated support provided to students that the College provides wide-ranging, sensitive and effective support to its students.

2.7   The team endorses the College's claim that it regards student opinion and feedback as central. The student submission notes that students feel that they are listened to and that issues are acted on instantly. Students met by the review team strongly supported this positive evaluation of the effectiveness of their feedback. A range of sources for student opinion is used, including formal and informal written and oral feedback, student attendance at committees and a constant interchange of views, underpinned by community meetings, open session discussions between students and staff, and the immersive approach to learning characteristic of the College. An interesting innovation is the post of Postgraduate Bridge Volunteer filled by a past student, which connects students with one another and

promotes liaison between the student body and staff. The College's responsiveness to the student voice represents good practice.

2.8   Written feedback to students on their work is used effectively. The student submission notes that tutorial feedback from staff is rigorous and useful, and that essay feedback is useful and prompt. Evidence from the review visit demonstrates a positive and comprehensive approach to formative assessment, reflected in extensive tutorial support for individual students and detailed written annotations of their work at the drafting stage. This approach to formative assessment represents good practice. It is clearly enhancement-driven, and is deployed systematically in all programmes of study, with the aim of improving student achievement and providing a nurturing academic context for study.

2.9   In previous years, assessment feedback did not clearly relate achievement to intended learning outcomes. The College has taken action to address this and the detailed mapping of assessment criteria against learning outcomes in assessments within the Sustainable Horticulture and Food Production programme now reflects current sector expectations. Note: Because of the timing of the review visit, the Horticulture programme was the only one for which current student work was available.

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

2.10   The College published updated guidelines on staff development in February 2012. It recognises that staff development opportunities do not fully support all those involved in contributing to student learning experiences and that there is no formal recording or evaluation of staff development undertaken. Nor are there any college-wide initiatives in academic staff development. College staff are offered the opportunity to participate in relevant staff development activities offered by the University, but there is no evidence of these being promoted or of staff taking up these opportunities. The College recognises that it would benefit from externally-led staff development to develop a clearer understanding of the Academic Infrastructure.

2.11   The College makes effective use of the knowledge and experience of visiting scholars to enhance the learning community of the College (see also paragraph 2.5). The College has an individual development budget of £300 for each member of staff, to be increased to £1,000 next year. In addition, money earned by academic staff from any external teaching, lecturing or consultancy is allocated to a Scholars' Fund to support research development.

How effectively does the provider ensure that learning resources are accessible to students and sufficient to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes?

2.12   Students have commented on the excellence of the estate and facilities at the College. In particular, they praise the overall learning environment, the art room, the base rooms provided for each programme of study, and classroom and other learning spaces. Students regard their studies in the physical location of the Dartington Estate, with its associated opportunities for learning and reflection, to be a privilege. The College demonstrated the link between the estate and programme content and teaching methods, particularly in relation to learning through doing, experiential learning and experimentation. The use of the physical learning resources for the full benefit of students represents good practice. However, students also comment on the need for sustained improvements to library and information technology provision. The College has responded to these concerns. The appointment of a librarian is imminent and a new cataloguing system is to be introduced this session. The College also plans to upgrade the already well regarded virtual learning

environment and integrate the information technology systems to provide a more efficient service to students.

2.13   Access to learning resources at the University is somewhat patchy. However, students confirmed that once procedural hurdles were overcome, they found the support facilities at Plymouth, for example library and online journal access, to be helpful to their studies.

The review team has **confidence** that the provider is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the intended learning opportunities it provides for students.

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3   Public information

How effectively does the provider's public information communicate to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides?

3.1   The College is effective in communicating information about its higher education provision to prospective, current and past students. Its primary means of transmitting course information is the website, although video information is also used, as are hard copies of student and programme handbooks, which are distributed to all students at the commencement of their studies. These handbooks are also available electronically at the pre-enrolment stage and are of high quality. Website content is clear, straightforward and user-friendly for navigation purposes and ease of reference. Students confirmed their reliance on the website and its fitness for purpose. The student submission describes it as inspiring. The website is regularly updated for currency and navigability. The College takes a strategic approach to its overall management of electronic communication, evidenced by the clear consideration of public information issues within strategic meetings, and by the ongoing focus on the website's fitness for purpose. The clarity and accessibility of the information for students on the College website represents good practice.

3.2   The team saw and read evidence of the College's commitment to distance learning in the form of its relatively recent development of an MSc in Sustainable Horticulture and Food Production, combining residential and distance learning. However, students expressed concern about information provided at the application stage. In particular, it placed insufficient emphasis on the fact that students on this programme were not able to benefit fully from the immersive learning experience, which is one of the hallmarks of the College. Applicants would benefit from clear and timely information concerning the precise nature of programmes involving distance learning.

3.3   The College offers a tailored approach to pre-enrolment information for its students, overseen by the Postgraduate Courses Manager. There is a comprehensive and careful focus on this area of its activities, where student needs and requirements are met on an individual basis. The information given is detailed and fit for purpose, although, as the College expands, it may wish to consider further standardising its approach to pre-enrolment information. This has been acknowledged by the College and the team endorses the steps being taken by the College to enhance this area of its activity. The College's plans to progress with integrating systems with the virtual learning environment should assist in this process.

3.4   Subsequent to enrolment, there is a thorough and comprehensive process for the production of learning materials in both electronic and hard copy formats for each programme of study. These include video guides, study guides, in-house journals, study

packs, adjunct learning materials, resource guides, additional signposting for students, reference guides, PowerPoint slides and lecture notes. All such learning materials are reviewed and updated or replaced regularly, and are made available wherever possible in electronic and hard copy format.

3.5   Marketing materials provided by the College for prospective students and to advertise short courses and free, open access talks and lectures, are clear and fit for purpose. This documentation, and the clear arrangements put in place for its monitoring and dissemination, reinforce the sense of an educational community in a professional relationship with its local, regional, national and international stakeholders.

How effective are the provider's arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing?

3.6   Responsibility for publishing and ensuring the accuracy of public information is almost entirely delegated from the University to the College. Operational oversight for public information rests with the Head of Strategic Marketing and Communication, who exercises responsibility on behalf of the Head of College. In turn, the Head of College has overall strategic responsibility for the accuracy of public information and is supported in this role by the Programmes Group. Public information relating to all programmes of study undergoes the same production, transmission and monitoring procedures to ensure consistency, accuracy and completeness. Programme coordinators check the accuracy of academic information and regularly update course materials on the web and the virtual learning environment. The Postgraduate Courses Manager updates academic support information regularly, and the Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications and Head of College sign-off any external publication. The Programmes Group also discusses strategic public information on a regular basis and there is a clear timescale for checking and publishing key public information.

3.7   The virtual learning environment and other systems are monitored regularly by programme coordinators for academic content and updated as appropriate. Students confirmed that information on the virtual learning environment is accurate and useful; staff agreed, but noted that uploading procedures could be improved. Staff and students endorsed plans to integrate the virtual learning environment with other systems and thereby enhance the efficiency of the electronic sources of information provided by the College.

3.8   Data protection issues are monitored carefully, with clear processes in place for the publication of student details and opt-out criteria. Where the College wishes to use any materials directly involving students for promotional purposes (for example, unscripted video commentaries), individual consent forms are issued to ensure that consent has been granted for their use. Responsibility for ensuring that legislative updates are incorporated into the College's public information is shared between the Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications and the Postgraduate Courses Manager.

The team concludes that **reliance can be placed** on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Action plan[3]

Schumacher College (The Dartington Hall Trust) action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight December 2012						
Good practice	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The review team identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the provider:						
• the mutually supportive partnership with the University of Plymouth (paragraphs 1.3,1.5 and 1.6)	Enhance coordination of supervision on the dissertation modules	Sept 2013	Programme coordinators support manager	Enhanced supervisory support	Head of College Postgraduate Programmes Group	Student feedback in summer 2013
• the College's innovative approach to curriculum development (paragraph 1.6)	Research the development of Masters by Research pathway for existing programmes	Dec 2013	Head of College and Postgraduate Support Manager	Decision of yes/ no to progress Masters of Research pathways	Postgraduate Programmes Group	University approval approximately April 2014 of Masters of Research if College decides to progress this pathway
• the holistic, developmental and student-centred	Workshop(s) for Faculty staff on methods of teaching and learning	August 2013	Postgraduate programme coordinators	Purposeful integration of learning across programmes	Head of College and Postgraduate Programmes Group	Student responses to specified student feedback

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[3] The provider has been required to develop this action plan to follow up on good practice and address any recommendations arising from the review. QAA monitors progress against the action plan, in conjunction with the provider's awarding body.

approach to learning and teaching (paragraph 2.3)						
• the extensive use of visiting speakers, whose lectures are open to students, staff and the public (paragraph 2.5)	Broaden the reach and audiences of our open lectures (Earth Talks)	Ongoing	Events, Fundraising and Publicity officer	10% more people attending the Earth Talks Programme	Head of College	Number of ticket receipt sales; number of repeat returns
• the responsiveness of the College to the student voice (paragraph 2.7)	Student-led review of College strategy, to be held annually in March ('Futuremacher' initiative)	From April 2014	Head of College	The strategic direction (the plan of intent) annually refreshed and influenced by the student voice	The College's new strategy team that meets monthly (the Planning Group) The College external Steering Group	Evidence of alumni participation in College's emerging alumni network platform
• the enhancement-driven approach to formative assessment (paragraph 2.8)	To incorporate staff/student reflection in the learning workshops	July 2013	Head of College Postgraduate programme coordinators	Sharing and enhancement of best practice across of programmes	Postgraduate Programmes Group	Student feedback
• the use of the physical learning resources for the full benefit of students (paragraph 2.12)	Establish an outdoor classroom	June 2014	Head of College	Site established and in use	Planning Group	Frequency of use monitored through electronic booking system; have the improved access reflected in qualitative student feedback

• the clarity and accessibility of the information for students on the College website (paragraph 3.1).	Refine and enhance the website	Ongoing	Communications and Development Manager	Ease of navigation; development of the news page	The Postgraduate Programmes Group and Short Course and Development Group	Student feedback; improved scores on web analytics
Advisable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team considers that it is **advisable** for the provider to:						
• introduce a more coordinated and systematic approach to staff development (paragraph 2.10).	College staff to attend workshops to enhance teaching and learning activities	August 2013	Postgraduate programme coordinators	Strengthened teaching and research connection evidenced by publication Acquisition of Masters of Research and PhD students in the College	Head of College, College Steering Group members and Dartington Hall Trust Chief Executive	Student feedback and peer feedback from teaching observation
	College staff to explore gaining accreditation from Higher Education Academy, through collaboration with the University of Plymouth Academic Partnerships	April 2014	College Staff	Accreditation of one teaching staff who can offer peer support	Head of College	Peer feedback

Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is **desirable** for the provider to:						
• provide clear and timely information to applicants concerning the precise nature of programmes involving distance learning (paragraph 3.2).	Make explicit on website, and in the Course Handbook, exactly how programmes utilising distance learning are structured, and highlight their differences to immersion programmes	End March 2013 (website) June 2013 (Handbook)	Postgraduate Programmes Manager and Marketing Manager	No negative feedback from students relating to distance learning	Head of College	Student feedback
	Reiterate above when interviewing prospective students	Ongoing	Faculties conducting interviews	As above	Head of College	Student feedback

About QAA

QAA is the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. QAA's mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education.

QAA's aims are to:

- meet students' needs and be valued by them
- safeguard standards in an increasingly diverse UK and international context
- drive improvements in UK higher education
- improve public understanding of higher education standards and quality.

QAA conducts reviews of higher education institutions and publishes reports on the findings. QAA also publishes a range of guidance documents to help safeguard standards and improve quality.

More information about the work of QAA is available at: www.qaa.ac.uk.

More detail about Review for Educational Oversight can be found at: www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/tier-4.

Glossary

This glossary explains terms used in this report. You can find a fuller glossary at: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary. Formal definitions of key terms can be found in the *Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook*[4]

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.

academic quality A comprehensive term referring to how, and how well, institutions manage teaching and learning opportunities to help students progress and succeed.

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

awarding body A body with the authority to award academic qualifications located on the **framework for higher education qualifications**, such as diplomas or degrees.

awarding organisation An organisation with the authority to award academic qualifications located on the Qualifications and Credit Framework for England and Northern Ireland (these qualifications are at levels 1 to 8, with levels 4 and above being classed as '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.

designated body An organisation that has been formally appointed to perform a particular function.

differentiated judgements In a Review for Educational Oversight, separate judgements respectively for the provision validated by separate awarding bodies.

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:

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx.

The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland.*

highly trusted sponsor An education provider that the UK government trusts to admit migrant students from overseas, according to Tier 4 of the UK Border Agency's points-based immigration system. Higher education providers wishing to obtain this status must undergo a successful review by QAA.

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.

provider An institution that offers courses of higher education, typically on behalf of a separate **awarding body or organisation**. In the context of REO, the term means an independent college.

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

reference points Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured. Internal reference points may be used by providers for purposes of self-regulation; external ones are used and accepted throughout the higher education community for the checking of standards and quality.

quality See **academic quality**.

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.