



Cliff College

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

June 2012

Key findings about Cliff College

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in June 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 Manchester.

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 the University of Manchester.

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 external partnerships with churches and charities ensure curricular and professional currency (paragraph 1.5)
- there is careful and diligent planning and delivery of placement learning (paragraph 2.3).

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:

- make more explicit the linkages between learning outcomes and assessment design, marking and feedback (paragraphs 1.7 and 2.7).

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

- involve all external markers in College assessment training and standardisation events (paragraph 1.8)
- continue to develop a strategic and collegiate approach to teaching, learning and assessment, which facilitates the sharing of effective practices (paragraph 2.5)
- establish stronger institutional staff development priorities which take account of review and appraisal mechanisms and identified development needs (paragraph 2.15)
- continue to develop electronic resources to achieve consistency in the presentation of all College programme information (paragraph 3.7).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)¹ (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at Cliff College (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 Manchester. The review was carried out by Ms Erika Beumer, Ms Angela Maguire, Mr Philip Lingard (reviewers), and Dr John Hurley (coordinator).

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

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

- the Academic Infrastructure
- Methodist Church 'Faith in Worship'.

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

Cliff College (the College) is a Bible and theological college constitutionally related to the Methodist Church of Great Britain. It has a history of delivering education and training in mission and evangelism stretching back over 100 years. Since 2004, the College and its programmes have been validated by the University of Manchester. In November 2009, the College went through a five-year review process receiving an unconditional revalidation. The College is a prominent private higher education provider in Christian mission, particularly at postgraduate levels. While a Methodist-related institution, the College recruits students from a wide range of denominational backgrounds and nationalities. The College is increasingly seeking to position itself as a significant regional college, in addition to its national and international profile.

The College is situated in a rural location in the Derbyshire Dales, on a spacious campus. Current student enrolments are 50 full-time and 86 part-time at undergraduate level, 120 part-time MA students and 25 part-time and two full-time research students (167 full-time equivalent student numbers). There are a small number of international students, currently five. In 2011-12, the College has nine permanent faculty (7 FTE) and employs a number of specialist occasional (adjunct) lecturers. There are 18 current support staff.

At the time of the review, the College offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their awarding body:

The University of Manchester

- BA in Theology (full-time)
Exit awards: HE Certificate in Theology
HE Diploma in Theology

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4.

² www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx.

- BA in Mission and Ministry (part-time)
Exit awards: HE Diploma in Children's Mission and Ministry
HE Diploma in Youth Mission and Ministry
HE Diploma in Third Age Mission and Ministry
- MA in Mission
Exit awards: Postgraduate Certificate
Postgraduate Diploma
- MPhil/PhD (full and part-time)
- PhD in Missiology (part-time)

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College has a high degree of responsibility for its provision. The Academic Dean, on behalf of the College, has overall responsibility for all aspects of teaching, assessment, student support and tutoring in conformity with the regulations and requirements of the University. Students at undergraduate and master's level are registered with the College. Research students are registered with the University.

Recent developments

The portfolio of programmes is being extended through new pathways on the MA and BA part-time programmes and through a professional Doctorate in Missiology. The College has been proposed as one of two hubs designated by the Methodist Church for continued provision of theological education and training.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the review team. A clear and informative student written submission was compiled by a current part-time postgraduate student at the College, who also acts as Postgraduate Student Representative on the Board of Studies. The data collection process was planned and prepared in collaboration with the College's Academic Dean and College Principal. Information was compiled using a student survey and classroom discussions and drew on the College student feedback and National Student Survey data.

The team held a meeting with students during the course of the visit. They were aware of the submission and confirmed its principal findings. The students provided a supportive and balanced evaluation of the College, which informs the review team's report.

Detailed findings about Cliff College

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 There is a clear structure of governance for the College and a positive relationship with the University of Manchester. The governing body, Cliff College Committee, has delegated authority from the Methodist Council of the British Methodist Church. Normal processes of oversight and governance are devolved to the committee. The Methodist Council approves the membership of the Cliff College Committee and oversees major decisions, such as the purchase or selling of land and the appointment of the College Principal. The College entered into a second five-year validated arrangement with the University in 2010. The University relates to the College through the Academic Panel of the Department of Religions and Theology of the School of Arts, Histories and Cultures. An independent subject Academic Advisor liaises with the College. A Validation Officer is the main point of administrative contact.

1.2 The College effectively ensures that it is meeting the required standards by complying with the University of Manchester Manual of Academic Practice. The College has strengthened the management structure and management reporting lines for academic standards with the appointment of an Academic Dean and a Registrar. The Academic Dean, working with the Principal, has overall responsibility for coordinating and giving direction to all programmes. Each programme leader is responsible for the delivery of their respective programme, including the creation of timetables, delivery of lectures and oversight of assessment, ensuring the smooth, timely and effective management and delivery of academic standards.

1.3 The College has appropriate faculty structures in place to assure the academic standards of its programmes. The College Leadership Group is the senior executive body of the College, operating as an advisory body to the Principal. The Faculty Committee is responsible for all general academic matters, and approves programme reports which are submitted to the University. It has three programme subcommittees, one for each degree and the other for the master's programme. The Board of Examiners meets annually as three distinct committees to enable the external examiners to be present for relevant business only. The College states its intention to enhance the sharing of good practice across teams and improve consistency. Internal reporting is conducted in both a formal and informal manner. Student feedback is used frequently, with some decisions made through informal consultations, which aid responsiveness but which are not always reported to relevant committees. Decisions are generally made by consensus, but minutes of meetings do not always clearly or concisely record recommendations, decisions and the progress of agreed actions.

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

1.4 The College refers to the Academic Infrastructure to design its programmes and units. All academic awards reflect *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. The programme specifications and aims and outcomes of each unit descriptor are matched against the appropriate subject benchmark statements, normally the *Theology and Religious Statement (2007)* for undergraduate provision and the *Master's degree characteristics (2010)*. Reference is also made to the *Youth and Community (2009)* undergraduate benchmark statement. Appropriate staff also

note the guidance in Scottish benchmark statement *The Standard for Childhood Practice* (2007).

1.5 The College maintains effective relationships with the Church on a number of levels. Good practice is noted in a number of external partnerships with churches, including those of other denominations and charities, such as Urban Saints and Youth for Christ, which ensure curricular and professional currency. Through these partnerships students are recruited and the expertise of staff utilised in teaching. Successful completion of some programmes grants exemption from the Methodist Church's 'Faith and Worship' training programme, leading to accreditation as a local preacher.

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

1.6 The College places particular importance on the role of the external examiner in assuring academic standards both in terms of monitoring quality but also as a 'critical friend' advising on enhancement. Recent external examiners' reports, however, have been positive and brief, and only rarely make specific comments, except to affirm that all is in order. One examiner noted: 'The faculty is to be commended for working with a mixed ability range, and for drawing out a significant degree of potential from a range of student types and abilities.'

1.7 The College has a well developed system for the internal moderation of assessment on a sample or whole cohort basis depending on the programme. Marking is conducted against the University's generic grading criteria. An examination of assessment materials by the team found that intended learning outcomes are not identified on assignment sheets and that assignments, marking and assessors' summative comments are not transparently related to them. These links are explored in class tutorials, but would benefit from being more clearly identified in the assessment process. It is advisable that the College makes more explicit the linkages between learning outcomes and assessment design, marking and feedback.

1.8 The College utilises a system of adjunct supervisors and external markers. There have been positive recent developments in marking practice, with the more consistent use of standardised criteria and internal second marking or moderation. External markers are offered training and standardisation meetings are held; however, participation in the latter is low. The review team, identified instances where there are substantial discrepancies between external and moderated grades, and one marker had used a grading criteria sheet that was not current. It is desirable that the College involves all external markers in College assessment training and standardisation events.

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.

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 manages the quality of learning opportunities effectively through its academic structures (see paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3) and is very responsive to student feedback to enhance quality. A Board of Studies meets twice per year and its membership

comprises all faculty, the Student Union President and a student representative. This is the main formal point where the College is held responsible to the students for the quality of learning opportunities. Reports are presented by each Programme Leader. While this feedback often reflects issues raised in advance with the respective Programme Leader in conversation and through feedback forms, it provides a formal occasion where the College is held accountable for actions taken or any inaction. Papers and minutes from the Board of Studies are forwarded to the Academic Advisor.

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

2.2 While there is no direct reference to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, the College policies defining the quality of learning opportunities substantially satisfy the guidance. For example, special care is given to students with disabilities to ensure they can play a full part in college life and placement learning.

2.3 The College has evolved a well developed approach to placement learning, which utilises the strengths of its external relationships with church bodies. Full-time undergraduate students undertake a block placement at each level of their programme. The College works with a small group of placement providers, each for a defined period, which provide contrasting locations, experiences and challenges. Care is taken to match the students' preferences and development needs with a specific church. Students join particular initiatives to extend their range of learning and experience. The activities are tailored to individuals, not just to reflect their interests but to challenge them. Individual learning plans are developed with the College and are risk-assessed. Placements offer structured development from observation and participation, to leadership or specialisation. The College and placement provider meet before the placement and discuss the placement learning in detail; progress in placements is monitored by tutor visits. The College receives outstanding feedback from both students and placement providers. The careful and diligent planning and delivering of the placement learning is good practice.

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

2.4 The College maintains a rigorous peer observation policy designed to enhance practice by all staff members. In addition, new teaching staff members are monitored and mentored by permanent staff members and feedback is received from the students to ensure that the teaching is of a good standard. Specialist adjunct lecturers are observed to ensure appropriate teaching styles are adopted. Formal feedback is obtained from the students after the end of each study week for part-time students and the inputs are monitored and evaluated by the programme leaders and Academic Director. Students expressed satisfaction with the quality of teaching.

2.5 The College has not articulated a formal teaching and learning strategy, although a number of related policies are published. Programmes have developed effective practices according to their particular situation. The College could benefit from formalising the teaching and learning strategy and continue sharing better practices among all the programmes. It is desirable that the College continues to develop a strategic and collegiate approach to teaching, learning and assessment, which facilitates the sharing of effective practices.

2.6 The tutorial system is an integral part of the learning process. The system is well planned and managed for students on full-time and part-time courses. Care has been taken

to ensure that part-time students on a study week receive at least one tutorial session to discuss assignments and feedback. Students also contact academic staff via email, phone or in person and receive detailed formative feedback on assessments and guidance with assignments.

2.7 Written formative feedback on assignments is generally full and constructive, but in many instances it is not sufficiently related to intended learning outcomes. The quality varies somewhat across programmes, and annotation by external markers is not approached consistently. The team concludes that feedback should be related more specifically to learning outcomes in order to enhance student learning, as advised in paragraph 1.7.

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

2.8 The College recognises the diverse nature of its student intake and arranges support to cover both general and specific needs. All programmes have sessions that introduce study skills at the appropriate level and support academic writing, referencing and research, and discourage plagiarism. Support for study is also provided by the Librarian. Students are satisfied with the availability and support received from academic staff, library and administrative staff.

2.9 Students with special education needs receive appropriate assistance. Additional help is available for students with dyslexia and dyspraxia. Support provisions have enabled students with physical disability to participate in College programmes and to attend work placements.

2.10 For full-time students pastoral support is provided through the tutorial system and by appointment with student welfare officers. All students are encouraged to provide peer support within a caring community. There is a rota system of staff sharing meals with students. Appropriate guidelines for staff and students are contained in staff and student handbooks.

2.11 The effectiveness of provision is assured through student feedback. This is given both formally and informally. Teaching blocks are regularly reviewed by students and formal feedback is given through the Board of Studies. Informal feedback is gathered through tutorial contact and shared meals. Students are complimentary about the supportive nature of the College.

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

2.12 Staff are well qualified, the majority at doctoral level, and have established records of scholarship. There is a sabbatical provision to allow staff to engage in scholarship and maintain currency and a sporadic internal staff development programme supports the development of professional teaching skills. The self-evaluation, however, identifies these areas as requiring further development.

2.13 The teaching ability of staff is assessed at appointment. New academic staff are required to present a lecture to students, which is evaluated by staff and students. Appropriate professional training is supported, if required, so as to ensure all academic staff hold a recognised teaching qualification.

2.14 Staff performance is formally monitored by a yearly programme of in-class peer reviews, student assessment and formal staff appraisals conducted in accordance with the College reporting structure. The documentation produced is thorough and comprehensive.

2.15 The College concedes that there is no formal documented linkage from the review processes to staff development either recommended by or undertaken by the College. It is desirable that the College establishes stronger institutional staff development priorities, taking account of its review and appraisal mechanisms and identified development needs.

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

2.16 There are clear priorities for resource allocation implemented through a rolling programme of upgrading resources. The Principal has overall responsibility for learning resources, working with the Academic Dean, Registrar and administrative staff. Overall, the resources available to the student are adequate and well managed.

2.17 The College has effective procedures in place to ensure students have access to appropriate library resources, ensuring that texts identified by teaching staff are available. The library has a sufficient number of books and seating facilities for the students. There is a library archive and a collection of historic texts available to research students in a separate research library. An annual budget is allocated to add additional resources. Students also have access to the University of Manchester library and research students have access to the electronic resources of the University.

2.18 The College provides a small number of workstations for student use, but aims primarily to facilitate the use of their own laptops by students. The College has identified from student feedback shortcomings to wireless access in some locations on campus, which is being addressed.

2.19 The College has developed its intranet as a virtual learning environment that is used by academic staff to make study guides, assignments and classroom materials available to students. The intranet is accessible remotely by part-time students, although at undergraduate level better organised information is available to full-time students.

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.

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 publishes a range of useful pre-entry information about its higher education provision through course leaflets and its website. The information is clear and accessible, the downloadable prospectus giving curricular and college information. An outline of assessment is not provided. The College website and other ad hoc publicity, including advertising material, use a common house style, which presents information in a straightforward manner.

3.2 Public information for enrolled students includes course handbooks for each programme of study. There is a lack of consistency in course handbook content, with the presentation of programme specifications inconsistent between courses and levels,

paper and electronic presentation. Programme and unit specifications are included in handbooks, or online, with the latter being the favoured for future development. Other course information is available in electronic or paper copy.

3.3 The College also manages a self-built virtual learning environment and there are departmental and College social media accounts which provide updates to students on key events and information about the College. Alumni and professional contacts receive the bi-annual College magazine 'Cliff Today'. Overall, the College information is professional, well presented, current and effective in communicating with prospective students, existing students and other stakeholders.

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

3.4 All course-related public information, including online and advertising content, is submitted to the University of Manchester for formal written approval. The University Liaison Officer has provided the College with the University style guide and College-submitted material is checked for conformity, accuracy and currency of content by the University. The University also periodically undertakes an overall review of College-published information for consistency with its documentation and records.

3.5 There are appropriate procedures for ensuring the accuracy of public information. Programme information for publication is produced by the relevant academic staff and approved by the Academic Dean, who coordinates submission for approval by The University of Manchester for compliance with its requirements and regulations. Content for the College social meeting accounts is moderated, prepared and uploaded by the Web Master who checks for consistency and currency. All membership of the three College departmental social media accounts is available only by invitation to current students.

3.6 The effectiveness of these arrangements are not formally reviewed or documented by the College, although the informal processes practised are delivering public information which is accurate and current. Students reported that they are satisfied with the quality and currency of published information available to them both as candidates for entry and as members of the College.

3.7 Information supplied to students through the virtual learning environment currently comprises calendars, policies and guidelines, programme guides and learning content produced by academic staff for submission for uploading by programme leaders. The material is accessible on a read-only basis. The information is unevenly developed both within and between programmes, with better examples, at undergraduate level, in the BA in Theology programme. The College has identified a priority to develop the virtual learning environment. It is desirable that this opportunity be taken to continue to develop electronic resources to achieve consistency in the presentation of all College programme information.

3.8 The College management is aware that there is no formal document control over published material and is addressing this through the initiative of the newly appointed Academic Registrar to introduce a register of published material, including authorities, dates issued and dates for review.

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 plan³

Cliff College action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight June 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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the external partnerships with churches and charities ensure curricular and professional currency (paragraph 1.5) 	Strengthen and develop partnership links and closely monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these partnerships	Respective programme and annual reviews which are held June-September annually	Programme leaders	Positive student feedback on lectures related to the partnership programme	Board of Studies and the University of Manchester	Review of student feedback by the Academic Dean
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there is careful and diligent planning and delivery of placement learning (paragraph 2.3). 	Ongoing review of Placement programme to maintain and develop effective delivery	Respective programme and annual reviews which are held June-September annually	Programme leaders	Positive student feedback on placement units	Board of Studies and the University of Manchester	Review of student feedback by Academic Dean
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is advisable for						

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.

the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> make more explicit the linkages between learning outcomes and assessment design, marking and feedback (paragraphs 1.7 and 2.7). 	Revise assessment documentation to make these linkages more explicit	January 2013 agreement for September 2013 implementation	Programme leaders and Academic Dean, in coordination with external examiners	Approval by external examiners and the University of Manchester	Faculty, external examiners and University of Manchester	Revised and agreed assessment documentation reviewed by the Academic Dean
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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> involve all external markers in College assessment training and standardisation events (paragraph 1.8) 	Review assessment and standardisation training processes to further integrate external markers on all programmes	Jan 2013	Programme leaders and Academic Dean	Greater integration achieved on all programmes	Faculty meeting	Assessment and standardisation training processes reviewed by Academic Dean
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue to develop a strategic and collegiate approach to teaching, learning and assessment, which facilitates the sharing of effective practices (paragraph 2.5) 	Develop a formal and collegiate strategy to share effective practices in teaching, learning and assessment	March 2013	Academic Dean	Strategy accepted by the Faculty and implementation processes introduced	Faculty meeting	Strategy and implementation reviewed by faculty meeting and Principal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> establish stronger institutional staff development priorities which take 	Clarify staff development priorities on annual appraisal	Jan 2013	Academic Dean	New documentation introduced and used successfully	Faculty meeting	Implementation of developed documentation reviewed by

account of review and appraisal mechanisms and identified development needs (paragraph 2.15)	documentation			in 2012-13		Principal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue to develop electronic resources to achieve consistency in the presentation of all College programme information (paragraph 3.7). 	Develop a College template to be used by all programmes	September 2012	Academic Dean	Use of template by all programme leaders	Faculty meeting	Use of college template in all electronic resources reviewed by programme leaders and Principal

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 one to eight, with levels four 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:

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.

RG 1017 09/12

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© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2012

ISBN 978 1 84979 674 3

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786