



# **The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education**

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

June 2012

## Key findings about The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education

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 Birmingham, Newman University College and University of Gloucestershire.

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 these awarding bodies.

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**:

- there is careful and diligent delivery and monitoring of placement learning (paragraph 2.4).

### 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:

- return marked work, with feedback to students, consistently within the timescale set by the awarding bodies (paragraph 1.9).

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

- involve all external markers in assessment training and standardisation events (paragraph 1.8)
- provide pre-course information and college advice and guidance that clearly identifies different study pathways (paragraphs 2.2, 2.10, 2.11 and 3.2)
- implement the proposed tutorial arrangements to provide equitable and appropriate access to academic guidance and support (paragraphs 2.2 and 2.12)
- implement a formal policy and processes to ensure accuracy, completeness and consistency of all public information (paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5).

## About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)<sup>1</sup> (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education (the provider; the Foundation). 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 Birmingham, Newman University College and University of Gloucestershire. The review was carried out by Dr Gillian Blunden, Mr Mike Coulson and Ms Francine Norris (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](#).<sup>2</sup> This review formed part of a linked series of review visits to six theology colleges training ordinands and laity for Anglican, Methodist, United Reformed and Baptist churches. The colleges underwent a common preparation process for the visits which were carried out by two teams. Reports are made individually on each college and reflect their diverse organisation and character.

Evidence in support of the review included documentation supplied by the provider and awarding bodies, meetings with staff, students, and placement providers. The review team also considered the provider's use of the relevant external reference points:

- the Academic Infrastructure
- the Churches' Quality in Formation Framework.

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

Queen's College Birmingham can trace its roots to 1828, but assumed its role in teaching theology to Anglican clergy in 1853. The current institution was formed by an amalgamation with the Methodist Handsworth College in 1970 to create an ecumenical theological college. The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education (the Foundation) has pursued its ecumenical mission through mergers with other institutions, extending its established work with Black and Asian Christians.

The Foundation's main campus is situated in Edgbaston, Birmingham, and includes teaching and residential accommodation organised around a quadrangle. A small second campus is situated at Shallowford. The Foundation currently provides programmes for 49 full-time and 81 part-time undergraduate students, constituting 89 full-time equivalents (FTE) and 10 full-time and 42 part-time taught postgraduate students (31 FTE). There are four full-time and 17 part-time postgraduate research students. There are 14 full-time members of faculty and five half-time (16.5 FTE), and 10 FTE administrative and support staff.

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

### University of Birmingham

- Graduate Diploma in Applied Theological Studies
- BA in Applied Theological Studies (including certificate and diploma exit awards)
- MA in Applied Theological Studies

<sup>1</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4).

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx).

- PhD

#### **Newman University College**

- Foundation Degree in Mission and Ministry
- BA in Theology (including certificate and diploma exit awards)
- MA in Theology and Transformative Practice (pending validation in June 2012)

#### **University of Gloucestershire**

- PhD

### **The provider's stated responsibilities**

For BA and MA awards with the University of Birmingham and Newman University College, the Foundation has full responsibility for the curriculum, assessment, teaching, learning and student support, with the monitoring of quality and standards being shared with the awarding body. Newman University College plays a more proactive role in ensuring the quality and standards of the Foundation Degree, with more essential responsibilities being shared with the awarding body. Responsibilities for research degrees rest largely with the validating bodies, with the Foundation providing supervision and support.

The provision at the College is subject to review and approval under the provisions of the Quality in Formation Framework developed through the cooperation of the Ministry Division of the Church of England, and the Methodist, Baptist Union, and United Reformed Churches. This provides a comprehensive review of academic standards and involves benchmarking against similar provision.

### **Recent developments**

Following a strategic decision by the University of Birmingham to withdraw from validation of awards at the Foundation, the programmes have been revalidated with Newman University College. The Foundation has been proposed as one of the two centres designated by the Methodist Church for continued provision of theological education and training. In common with other colleges providing training for ordination, it is now proposed by the Church of England Ministry Division that validation of awards is transferred to the University of Durham.

### **Students' contribution to the review**

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. It did not prove possible for students to develop and present a submission in the time available. The team met a cross section of students from undergraduate to postgraduate level, representing ordinands from Anglican and Methodist traditions, lay ministers and independent students. This provided useful reflections on strengths and areas for development.

## Detailed findings about The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education

### 1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The Foundation fulfils its responsibilities for the management of academic standards effectively. It is currently in a period of transition between awarding bodies and at the time of the review visit had completed the first year of delivery to students under new arrangements. The responsibilities delegated to the Foundation have varied between the different awarding bodies. The self-evaluation stated that they find this situation challenging and complex, and have not yet taken full ownership of the management of quality. However, core members of faculty are fully aware of their responsibilities and are able to articulate them clearly.

1.2 There are clear responsibilities for managing and reporting academic standards. The work of the Foundation is carried out within five academic centres reflecting different aspects of the college's work. The academic leadership and the day-to-day operation of each of the undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes is the responsibility of the Director of Studies. There is currently a management and internal reporting structure whereby two programme boards, one for undergraduate and one for postgraduate courses, report to the Academic Board. The Foundation manages the research degrees through the Queen's Research Degrees Committee, chaired by the Director of the Queen's Graduate and Research Centre, who is also the Foundation's Quality Assurance Officer.

1.3 The Foundation's academic portfolio is overseen effectively by the Queen's Academic Board, chaired by the Principal. The Academic Board meets four times a year, and membership includes all faculty, student representatives and a representative from the awarding body. The Academic Board additionally meets as an examination board, with external examiners, but without student representatives.

1.4 The management and reporting structure is currently being evaluated to ensure continued cohesion across the Foundation's academic portfolio. The Foundation intends that a recently appointed Quality Officer will produce a comprehensive annual overview and report of all its provision for governors and other external stakeholders, including the Church, drawing together reports from the Foundation's five centres. This is intended to strengthen and secure the effective management of academic standards.

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

1.5 There is appropriate engagement with the Academic Infrastructure through the requirements of the awarding bodies. Recently validated programme documentation and programme specifications make direct reference to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and subject benchmark statements.

1.6 A key external reference point for the provision is the Church of England Ministry Division, which provides guidance on the content and quality of ministerial training. This includes the Churches' Quality in Formation Process and the Churches' Agreed Learning Outcomes, leading to the ordination and licensing of ministers for both the Anglican and Methodist Churches. A Quality in Formation Panel conducts periodic reviews on

providers of ministerial training on their behalf. The Foundation last underwent this type of review in 2007 and is due to undergo a review during 2013-14.

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

1.7 The Foundation is broadly effective in its use of external examining to assure academic standards. The Academic Board responds to the external examiners reports and monitors actions in response. External examiners have noted that the quality and quantity of written feedback on student work is good.

1.8 In general, assessment practices show evidence of good management. Each programme specification outlines module content, learning outcomes, learning and assessment strategies and learning resources. Assignment setting and marking shows evidence of internal moderation and standardisation. There is some inconsistency as to how assessment tasks are related to intended learning outcomes. Feedback to students, to provide clear guidance on how grades were arrived at and the actions necessary to improve performance, is variable, in particular from external markers. It is desirable that the Foundation involves all external markers in assessment training and standardisation events.

1.9 Despite adverse external examiners' comments and repeated student feedback at both programme meetings and the Academic Board, the turnaround time to return assessed work to students often exceeds the awarding bodies' requirements by some considerable time. It is advisable that Foundation staff should return marked work, with feedback to students, consistently within the timescale set by the awarding bodies.

1.10 The Foundation has relevant mechanisms to enhance and share good assessment practices. About a third of faculty members are external examiners elsewhere. Some are also involved in the Church's panels and boards for quality and good practice. Staff development days are held off-site once a term by the Foundation.

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 bodies.

## **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 general management structures for the quality of learning opportunities are outlined in paragraphs 1.1 to 1.4. Module feedback, external examiners' reports and the contribution of student representatives at the programme and the Academic Board are used to inform monitoring of the quality of learning opportunities, which culminates in an annual programme review report prepared by the Director of Studies for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The report includes specific reference to student support and learning resources, and has an action plan to address any issues identified. The report is part of a current awarding body's procedures for monitoring collaborative provision and is approved by them.

2.2 Students play an influential role in the Foundation's management of standards and quality. Active consideration of student feedback and differential marks obtained by different groups of students, including the substantially increased number of independent students,

has led to a consideration of improved mechanisms intended to enhance quality. While this demonstrates the strength of internal reflection, the Foundation is encouraged to implement these proposals which are outlined subsequently in paragraphs 2.11 and 2.12.

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

2.3 The Foundation does not specifically use the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*) to inform the development of processes, policies and practices related to the management and enhancement of learning opportunities. It has adopted the awarding bodies' policies in many instances and has reasonably presumed alignment on this basis. The College takes account of The Church of England Ministry Division criteria for the learning environment and the requirements of the Quality in Formation process.

2.4 The Foundation offers a range of placement and attachment opportunities that are well managed and effective. The arrangements sufficiently reflect the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. For ordinands, placement is mandatory and for independent students it is optional. In both cases, however, students are expected to take a placement in a challenging and unfamiliar context. The aims and objectives of the placement are set out in a learning agreement, which is developed between the student and the placement provider/supervisor. Midway through the placement and at the end there is a formal review and, in addition to assignments undertaken by the student, the supervisor is required to write a report on the placement experience. Placement supervisors receive extensive briefing and support, and a range of staff are involved in developing and maintaining an extensive network of suitable placement providers. There is careful and diligent delivery and monitoring of placement learning, which is good practice.

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

2.5 The teaching and learning strategy is clearly related to the vocational requirements of formation and ordination. It is set out in validation documents for the undergraduate provision. It aims to provide an effective balance of theory and practice through the provision of academic programmes in the context of a learning community and through the provision of a range of opportunities for placements and attachments.

2.6 The teaching observation scheme is that of a current awarding body, the University of Birmingham. All staff are observed annually and this informs the annual appraisal process, which includes the identification of development needs. The process is thorough and reflective. Observers felt that they benefitted from the process as much as the observed. The Principal maintains overall oversight of the teaching observation scheme.

2.7 Student feedback on the quality of teaching is good. The Foundation uses a module evaluation scheme and verbal feedback from student representatives as the principal formal means of gaining feedback. Students stated that they found the teaching effective and stimulating, and that a range of techniques and approaches were used to respond to different learning styles.

2.8 Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. The awarding bodies approve the appointment of all staff and their allocation to courses. All new members of staff are observed teaching as part of the selection process and are required to be qualified to a minimum level in relation to the award that they will be teaching. In practice, however, the majority of staff are qualified to doctoral level. Although a teaching qualification is not

required, a high proportion of staff hold it and several staff have been supported to either undertake it or apply for membership of a professional teaching organisation in recent years.

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

2.9 The Foundation has an admissions policy which sets out clearly the academic criteria for entry. This includes the arrangements for the accreditation of prior experience and learning, which require approval by the awarding bodies. The admissions policy does not make any specific mention of disability, or arrangements in respect of international applicants.

2.10 There have been significant changes in the student intake. Until recently, the student body predominantly comprised of ordinands who had been pre-selected by a sponsoring Church. This year, there has been a significant increase in the number of independent students, which has required a review of several policies and processes, including those for admissions, retention and placement. In particular, students were concerned that they should be more adequately informed of the curriculum of different pathways and that independent students should be better supported.

2.11 The Foundation provides initial information, advice and guidance through open and taster days. All students are expected to attend for interview, including those who have been pre-selected by sponsoring churches. All enrolled students attend an induction course, which for part-time students involves a residential weekend. Some students found the amount of information presented at induction overwhelming. Some ordinands, who had no choice of provider, lacked the pre-enrolment information to confirm their course of study. The Foundation has reviewed its approach to induction, following feedback from the annual programme review of undergraduate courses. It is desirable that it provides pre-course information and college advice and guidance that clearly identifies different study pathways.

2.12 Tutorial and pastoral support is provided for all students by means of an allocated personal tutor. For ordinands there is a specified number of tutorials each academic year and the Course Handbook explains how these sessions should be used and advises students on how to prepare for them. The tutorial system was less developed for independent students and lacked formal monitoring, leading to some students not receiving their entitlement. The Foundation has recently identified significant differences in achievement levels between ordinands and independent students, which it attributes partly to differences in support, and is seeking to address this through the establishment of a separate Centre for Discipleship and Theology. The Centre will provide a 'home' for independent students with specific academic and pastoral tutorial arrangements and monitoring. It is desirable that the Foundation implements the proposed tutorial arrangements to provide equitable and appropriate access to academic guidance and support.

2.13 Effective additional pastoral and tutorial support is provided. A Chaplain and a Learning Support Tutor are available to all students by appointment. The Learning Support Tutor is able to offer specific support, including diagnostic testing to students with additional needs. Students with disabilities are well supported and the Foundation is proactive in tailoring teaching and learning to particular requirements. Postgraduate students are offered a programme of study skills support in collaboration with the University of Birmingham, which includes a focus on developing academic writing skills.

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

2.14 The Foundation has a range of relevant staff development procedures in place. There is a supportive and well documented induction procedure, appropriately tailored to the staff member. A mentor is assigned to teaching staff during the six-month probationary period. Staff confirmed that induction is effective and that a comprehensive handbook, which the Foundation is currently revising, is issued. Teaching observation and annual appraisal are used to define staff development needs. Staff are required to attend five days per year of staff development for teaching, assessment and related skills. Records provided indicate that operation of the in-house programme is less frequent than intended, and the Foundation is encouraged to seek to improve this and ensure linkage to identified development areas.

2.15 The Foundation greatly values and encourages scholarly research and publication. All academic staff are currently given a contractual entitlement to one term of study leave per five years of service, although senior staff are reviewing this to ensure more effective management and allow staff greater flexibility. Additionally, each staff member receives financial support to maintain professional memberships and to attend conferences. Staff CVs detail extensive publication of books and research papers. The Foundation seeks to appoint teaching staff who either have or are working towards a theological PhD.

**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 The Foundation provides its students with good quality learning resources, which have been well managed over a long period. The main campus at Edgbaston comprises teaching and residential accommodation supported by a chapel, refectory and library. The quality of the provision is good, providing a contemplative context and community focus. Additionally, there is a small teaching facility at Shallowford, which was not visited as part of the review. Resources are organised to support the learning needs of both full and part-time students, who access the campus, community events and teaching at different times. This ensures a parity of access to key resources.

2.17 There are library facilities at both Edgbaston and Shallowford. The Edgbaston site houses the principal library comprising 50,000 books in addition to extensive online resources. Students studying at Shallowford have access to the Edgbaston facility in addition to a small on-site library provision. Postgraduate students also have access to the library facilities of the appropriate awarding body.

2.18 Evidence of the effectiveness of the management of learning resources is sought from module evaluation. Students give good feedback on general learning resources. Where issues have been raised, there is evidence of actions taken in response. There has been a separate annual survey undertaken on the library, which has provided specific feedback on this aspect of the provision. Recent feedback has revealed a lack of clarity regarding the access different cohorts have to the library facilities of the various universities validating their award during the transition period.

2.19 A virtual learning environment has recently been developed to provide students with access to learning materials. This development is very much at its early stages and is seen as supplementary to the core face-to-face teaching provided for all 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 Foundation uses an appropriate range of mechanisms to communicate public information to students and other stakeholders, including its website, virtual learning environment and printed course and promotional material. The website contains comprehensive information on the range of courses available, appropriate to the variety of backgrounds and needs of prospective students. There are also descriptions of Foundation's accommodation and other facilities, together with its recent equality and diversity policy.

3.2 The Foundation has traditionally relied on students being sent by sponsoring churches. It is a new entrant to marketing its provision, but increasingly is attracting independent students. Promotional leaflets of a high standard have recently been produced to recruit more independent and lay students. Students confirmed that pre-enrolment information is generally accurate, although, due to the complex course offer, training pathways could be stated more clearly in pre-course and on-course information.

3.3 Comprehensive programme and module handbooks have been issued to all students, including the research degree students, and all members of academic staff are responsible for supporting students in their use. The Foundation makes satisfactory use of the virtual learning environment to provide course handbooks, teaching and learning materials and module news for courses. Students indicated that some teachers make better use of the provision than others and that discussion forums exist for some modules. Staff confirmed that 'colleagues vary in their embracing of it'. The Foundation is encouraged to continue to increase the effective use of the virtual learning environment across all courses.

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

3.4 The Foundation currently uses a well understood, but informal, arrangement for checking published information; however, it does not have a formal written policy. The Director of Studies oversees the website, which has recently been reviewed by an external consultant. The Director of Studies, together with the Principal, is responsible for the production of programme handbooks and other material, which are then proofread by a member of the administration team. Reviewers noted a small number of typographical errors on the website and some minor inconsistencies in cross-referencing across the complex system of handbooks. While current information is accurate and complete, in view of the expanding role of the Foundation and potential changes in validation, it is recommended to strengthen its assurance arrangements. It is desirable to implement a formal written policy and procedures to ensure accuracy, completeness and consistency of all public information.

3.5 The Foundation is currently strengthening senior staffing arrangements and believes that, once complete, this will make a significant difference to the administrative and support areas and greatly improve both communications and written information. The opportunity has been taken to redefine specific administrative roles and appoint new key

staff. The Foundation is encouraged to make effective use of this opportunity to strengthen the management of information.

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<sup>3</sup>

The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education 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 <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the provider:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>there is careful and diligent delivery and monitoring of placement learning (paragraph 2.4).</li> </ul>	Brief all new tutorial staff who are taking up responsibilities for placements	October 2012	Current Placement Tutor	Positive evaluations from supervisors and students	Undergraduate Programme group	Placement evaluation forms Direct feedback from supervisors
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is <b>advisable</b> for the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>return marked work, with feedback to students, consistently within the timescale set by the awarding bodies (paragraph 1.9).</li> </ul>	Implement new process for distributing assignments  Issue alerts/reminders to staff as deadlines approach	November 2012	Director of Studies and Academic Administrator	All marked work returned within deadlines	Undergraduate and MA programme groups	Student feedback at programme groups  Annual review responses

<sup>3</sup> 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 bodies.

<b>Desirable</b>	<b>Action to be taken</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Success indicators</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
The team considers that it is <b>desirable</b> for the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>involve all external markers in assessment training and standardisation events (paragraph 1.8)</li> </ul>	Invite all external markers to assessment training event	November 2012	Director of Studies	Positive reports from assessment moderators and external examiners	Programme groups	Programme group minutes  External examiner reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide pre-course information and college advice and guidance that clearly identifies different study pathways (paragraphs 2.2, 2.10, 2.11 and 3.2)</li> </ul>	Handbooks and website to be updated	October 2012	Director of Studies and Principal	Student feedback	Foundation Staff Group	Student feedback evaluated by Foundation Staff Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>implement the proposed tutorial arrangements to provide equitable and appropriate access to academic guidance and support (paragraphs 2.2 and 2.12)</li> </ul>	Appoint new tutor  Publish and implement tutorial guidelines for all students	June 2012  September 2012	Director of Studies and Discipleship and Theology Tutor (who has tutorial responsibility for independent students)	New tutor employed  Student satisfaction improves	Undergraduate and MA programme groups	Student feedback evaluated by programme groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>implement a formal policy and processes to ensure accuracy, completeness and consistency of all public information</li> </ul>	Write policy and devise processes to ensure accuracy, completeness and consistency of public information	December 2012	Principal and Principal Executive Assistant	Positive feedback on quality of information (or no complaints)	Governors	Evaluated termly by Senior Leadership Team

(paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5).						
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## 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](http://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](http://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](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary). Formal definitions of key terms can be found in the [Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](#)<sup>4</sup>

**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:

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<sup>4</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx](http://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 1035 09/12**

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