



Trinity College Bristol

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

June 2012

Key findings about Trinity College Bristol

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 Bristol.

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 active role students play in the management of academic standards and in the annual monitoring of programmes (paragraphs 1.3, 1.4 and 2.2)
- the comprehensively documented and good quality information, advice and guidance for applicants (paragraph 2.9 and 3.2).

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 recommended by the awarding body (paragraph 1.9).

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)
- link observation of teaching and appraisal to planned staff development (paragraphs 2.8 and 2.14)
- review tutorial arrangements to provide equitable and appropriate access to academic guidance and support (paragraph 2.11).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)¹ (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at Trinity College Bristol (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 Bristol. 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](#).² This review formed part of a linked series of review visits to six theology colleges training ordinands and laity for the 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 College and the University of Bristol, meetings with staff, students, and placement providers. The review team also considered the College'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](#).

Trinity College Bristol (the College) came into existence through the amalgamation in 1972 of three originally independent educational institutions, namely Clifton Theological College, Dalton House with St Michael's, and Tyndale Hall. The College is situated in the grounds of Stoke House, one of Bristol's significant historic houses, and the campus extends to about nine acres in size, including substantial woodlands. The College and Bristol Baptist College agreed to integrate their provisions in the mid 1990s, with the most recent formal agreement dated 2005. They now operate jointly with regard to most of the teaching and other educational activities, with the College effectively running the academic arrangements for both institutions.

The majority of the College's teaching takes place at Stoke House. In addition, some teaching also happens at Bristol Baptist College, situated about 1.5 miles across the Clifton Downs. The combined enrolment of undergraduate students in 2011-12 is 166. Of these, 76 full-time and 57 part-time undergraduate students, constituting 106.5 full-time equivalents (FTE), are registered with the College. Of the 49 students studying taught postgraduate courses, 22 full-time and 19 part-time students (31.5 FTE) are enrolled with the College. In addition, there are 15 full-time and 34 part-time postgraduate research students studying at the College. There are four international students studying at the College.

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

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

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

University of Bristol:

- Certificate in Theology
- Diploma in Theology
- BA (Hons) in Theology
- Graduate Diploma in Theology
- MA in Theology
- MLitt
- MPhil
- PhD

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College has full responsibility, with Bristol Baptist College, for curriculum, assessment, teaching, learning and student support, with the monitoring of quality and standards being shared with the University of Bristol.

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

The provision has been broadly stable in recent years, with some expansion of the range particularly of postgraduate teaching and a continuing relationship with the awarding body. A new Academic Dean has recently been appointed to lead the academic work of the two colleges. In common with other colleges providing training for ordination, it is now proposed by the Church of England Ministry Division that validation of awards be 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. A student submission was produced by three students, including the student president and the student representative on the Academic Board. Due to time pressures, the students used a simple survey to determine the principal strengths and areas for improvement, and drew on College student feedback data to produce a clear report. Students also met reviewers during the course of the visit and confirmed the principal findings, which are also reflected in the review report.

Detailed findings about Trinity College Bristol

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The College fulfils its responsibilities for the management of academic standards effectively. It delivers theological programmes in conjunction with the Bristol Baptist College, covered by a memorandum of agreement, with the College effectively responsible for the academic arrangements of both institutions. Responsibilities for academic standards are clearly delineated and understood within the colleges. The University of Bristol (the University) retains responsibility for the oversight and monitoring of the quality of its awards, while the colleges are responsible for all aspects of operation and delivery.

1.2 Management and reporting arrangements for academic standards are clear and efficient. The College is managed by the Principal and Senior Management Team reporting to the College Council. The provision at the two colleges is coordinated by an Academic Dean. Management and operation of each of the undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes is the responsibility of a programme director, with each unit being coordinated by a convenor.

1.3 The College's academic portfolio is overseen effectively by a joint Academic Board which reports regularly to the Council. The joint Academic Board meets three times a year, chaired by the Academic Dean, with a student representative from each college in attendance. Students also sit on the Teaching and Learning Committee, a subcommittee of the joint Academic Board, which reviews the operation of programmes. Through these means, it is intended that students play a key role in the management of the College's academic standards.

1.4 The oversight of academic standards is effectively evaluated through the annual monitoring process. Annual programme reports are made following a university checklist. Each takes account of student evaluations, staff responses, some analysis of progression and achievement statistics and external examiners' reports. They are considered at the Colleges' joint Annual Monitoring Review Meeting prior to reporting to the University. Action plans are drawn up and effectively monitored. A sample of units is evaluated each academic year by a Level Evaluation Committee. Each committee contains a representative sample of students engaged on units at that level, including taught master's awards. Postgraduate research programmes are similarly evaluated. The active role students play in the management of academic standards and in annual monitoring of programmes is good practice.

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

1.5 The College complies effectively with external reference points it uses. The College has embedded relevant parts of the Academic Infrastructure into its programmes. All academic awards reflect *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and relevant subject benchmark statements. The Colleges have jointly conducted a recent internal three-year curriculum review, which assured the use of programme specifications and relevant sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*) as well as compliance with University systems. The College implements the provisions of the

University's comprehensive Process Manual of Theological Colleges, which was compiled with strong involvement from the colleges.

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 Framework and the Churches' Agreed Learning Outcomes, leading to the ordination of ministers for the Anglican Church. the Church of England inspections are discussed at the Academic Board and its relevant subcommittees and action plans drawn up and monitored in response to any recommendations.

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

1.7 The College uses external moderation effectively to assure academic standards. All aspects of assessment, including assessment design, marking and internal verification and responding to student feedback are the responsibility of the College. External examiners' reports are received by the joint Teaching and Learning Committee and discussed at programme committees. The College makes appropriate responses to enhance its academic standards.

1.8 Assessment is in most cases well organised. The College formally adheres to the University regulations for assessment and is guided by the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*. It has established appropriate systems for the internal moderation of assessment. Marking is undertaken by College staff and a number of external markers. Extensive guidance is provided on anonymous marking and marking differentials at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Marking criteria are clear and staff feedback to students is generally linked to intended learning outcomes. External examiners have reminded faculty to moderate assessment tasks and use the marking scheme in feedback to students. There is a concern remaining that external markers do not always sufficiently adhere to the guidance provided, which leads to variations in practice. It is desirable that the College involves all external markers in College assessment training and standardisation events.

1.9 Not all internal or external markers observe the timescales for the return of student work established by the University. This is related to bunching of hand-in dates, which creates excessive workloads for staff and students. It also results in the granting of extensions to student deadlines to deal with this, which can have an adverse impact on student equity. The College is addressing the scheduling of assessment dates. It remains advisable that College staff return marked work, with feedback to students, consistently within the timescale recommended by the awarding body.

1.10 The effectiveness of assessment is evaluated by student feedback through unit evaluations and participation on committees. Good practice is shared through faculty meetings and teaching and learning workshops. A number of members of the College's academic staff are external examiners to other colleges.

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 Management and reporting systems for learning opportunities are substantially the same as those outlined in paragraphs 1.1 to 1.4. Responsibility for teaching quality, staff development and resources are shared, while pastoral support and liaison with employers is the sole responsibility of the College. Annual Programme Review is the focus for reporting on the quality of learning opportunities and recording and monitoring of any necessary actions. Additionally, an annual report is submitted to the College Council by the Teaching and Learning Committee giving a qualitative appraisal of learning opportunities, including student/staff liaison, placement and staff development.

2.2 There is a formal system of student representation with a student president and campus executive. There are regular formal and informal meetings with staff representatives and the Principal. Students are positive about the responsive and consultative nature of their relationship with staff and pointed to several instances of actions taken in relation to student feedback.

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

2.3 As stated in paragraph 1.5, the College takes appropriate account of relevant sections of the *Code of practice*, which are embedded in its delivery. It 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 College offers a range of effective placement opportunities and a formal context-based programme in four church settings in the local area. The arrangements sufficiently reflect the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. The context-based programme provides an opportunity for students to integrate the theoretical and practical elements of their training by spending part of the week in College and part in a real community. For college-based ordinands a range of placement activities include long-term community placements taken alongside their academic studies and intensive full-time block placements. There is a comprehensive range of handbooks covering these activities and full guidance for placement supervisors in receiving churches and community settings. Students and supervisors are supported by regular visits and meetings.

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

2.5 The College has generally effective mechanisms to assure the quality of teaching. A teaching and learning strategy, embedded within the College Strategic Plan, is aligned with resourcing strategies and is monitored through a structured approach to action planning. It benefits from drawing on the experience of Bristol Baptist College in sharing new initiatives.

2.6 Teaching is delivered by a joint team comprising staff from both partner colleges. Staff are appropriately qualified in relation to the level of course on which they are deployed. The majority of staff are qualified to doctoral level, which is a requirement for all staff teaching at level 6 or above.

2.7 Student feedback on the quality of teaching is varied. Students confirm that teaching is adequate, but not always inspirational. Most teaching is lecture and seminar-based and, although there is a variety in assessment tasks, it was not evident that different learning styles were being addressed through the delivery of the curriculum.

2.8 Peer observation of teaching does not currently play a sufficient role in maintaining the quality of teaching and learning. A scheme has been in existence for several years following the policies and procedure of the awarding body. The scheme has not been consistently implemented, due to staff changes, and it is not linked, due to its emphasis on personal enhancement, to either staff appraisal or the overall planning processes for staff development or scholarship.

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

2.9 There is a clear and effective admissions policy. Intending students attend an interview day, which includes an introduction to college life. During the interview, the range of suitable programme options is discussed with the student and presented visually in order to aid understanding and clarity. Similarly, rigorous interviews for international students are undertaken through Skype. Subsequently, an offer letter sets out any further module options so that students are able to confirm their individual module selection prior to enrolment. The process is clearly documented and students confirmed the quality of advice and guidance. The comprehensively documented and good quality information, advice and guidance for applicants is good practice.

2.10 Appropriate arrangements are made for induction. Currently, an introductory week includes sessions on academic, formational and community aspects of the provision, including initial study skills. In future, this will be spread over a longer period as a response to student feedback.

2.11 Academic guidance and support is effective for most students. All full-time students are allocated a personal tutor whom they meet twice a term. The tutor is engaged with all aspects of the student's academic and personal development and is responsible for writing an annual report or reference. There is an optional fellowship group available for postgraduate students, which is compulsory for international students new to the British educational context. Further pastoral support is available for all students from a part-time Chaplain. Part-time independent students do not have academic tutors allocated to them and, as such, felt that they lacked overall academic guidance and oversight. It is desirable that the College reviews tutorial arrangements to provide equitable and appropriate access to academic guidance and support.

2.12 Students who self-declare learning needs have access to diagnostic screening and additional language and skills support, including English as a second language. More generally, study skills are supported in student handbooks, with materials on the virtual learning environment. Supplementary skills workshop sessions are welcomed by students, though adult returners and those without a humanities background felt they 'fell between' available support mechanisms.

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

2.13 The College has a thorough programme of relevant in-house training. Development days aimed at sharing good practice are held jointly with the Bristol Baptist College for all faculty four or five times per year, although adjunct faculty and external teachers are not

always invited. Topics within the last year have included sessions on supporting dyslexia, marking and assessment, use of the virtual learning environment and detecting plagiarism.

2.14 There is a regular programme of annual appraisals in operation, but implementation of the peer observation policy is inconsistent. The College has identified a weakness in the linkage between these, peer observations, and staff training. The Academic Dean has recently produced a draft staff development policy, in order to provide a stronger alignment with the overall strategic plan for the College. It is desirable that the College links observation of teaching and appraisal to planned staff development.

2.15 New staff are selected and inducted effectively into teaching roles. Representatives from the University and from both colleges sit on interview and appointments panels. A teaching presentation is part of the selection process and students are invited to attend and give feedback. There is a clear and appropriate induction procedure for new staff, with relevant handbooks issued. New teachers without a formal pedagogic qualification are required to attend suitable training at the University of Bristol.

2.16 There is effective support for scholarship. Staff publications evidence the College's encouragement for scholarly research. Scholarship is supported by the provision of a study day every week for staff. Faculty members are entitled to one term's study leave after five years' service. There is funding for professional conference attendance.

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

2.17 The College benefits from good quality and well managed accommodation. The campus comprises a range of residential and teaching accommodation supported by library, refectory, bookshop and chapel. The strategic plan includes a commitment to continued investment in the College's infrastructure to support teaching and learning, including planning towards a new learning resource centre.

2.18 Student evaluation of resources is positive. Particular enthusiasm is expressed for library resources and the level of support and advice available from library staff. Student feedback on general learning resources is incorporated into unit evaluation and is good. A current priority is improving the participation in evaluation in order to ensure the accuracy of feedback in reflecting the balance of student views accurately.

2.19 There is a developing use of electronic resources. A virtual learning environment is shared with Bristol Baptist College, which provides students with access to learning materials. Staff have received training and been given guidance on how to use electronic media to support the teaching of units and the required information that should be uploaded. There is little evidence of its use for discussion forums. Electronic submission has been trialled, but the College recognises that further work and training is necessary. Students suggested that a refresher course on its use, following induction, would aid their understanding. The College is encouraged to continue its development of the virtual learning environment.

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 communicates public information to students very effectively. Mechanisms include the College's website, prospectus, newsletter, brochures and other promotional materials. In addition, there is a restricted-access intranet and a virtual learning environment, which is shared with Bristol Baptist College students and staff. A wide range of printed leaflets, publicity flyers, prospectus and regular newsletters provide comprehensive and accurate information to prospective students, supporters and other partners.

3.2 Pre-entry information and guidance is of a high standard. Students indicated that course modules and options were made very clear at interview and in the offer letter. The College has produced a comprehensive interviewer's handbook to ensure clarity of course pathways and standardisation of verbal information given by staff. Students confirmed that information provided prior to enrolment and at induction was clear, accurate, wide-ranging and helpful.

3.3 There is comprehensive information for students about their programmes. Hard copy College and programme handbooks are issued at induction. These provide information on the programme content, structures and assessment. Students report finding these helpful. The virtual learning environment contains all College and course handbooks, as well as University of Bristol regulations and other necessary documents. It is used to provide teaching materials for all modules, although students indicated that some teachers make better use of it than others. An intranet contains general information essential to the smooth running of the College, including lunchtime notices, template forms and contact lists.

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

3.4 The College has a clearly understood and effective structure to ensure accuracy of the public information currently provided. Overall responsibility is shared by the Executive Director, Publicity Coordinator and Academic Dean. They are responsible for originating or coordinating information in their area of responsibility. All those involved in information publication work in conjunction with at least one other staff member to ensure accuracy.

3.5 Academic information is approved by the University. Publicity, promotional, and programme information, as well as use of the University's name or logo, are submitted for approval to the awarding body prior to publication. Educational programmes, where appropriate, are identified as awards offered by the University and under its authority.

3.6 There is a clear security hierarchy in operation to ensure the security of the virtual learning environment and intranet, and the contents are kept under regular review. All documentation is subject to regular review. The prospectus is published every two years. End-of-year student feedback has been taken to obtain student views on information accuracy, although this is still being analysed. The College is encouraged to continue using student involvement to verify and quality assure 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 plan³

Trinity College Bristol 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 active role students play in the management of academic standards and in the annual monitoring of programmes (paragraphs 1.3, 1.4 and 2.2) 	Establish a formal process and written documentation reporting back to students the outcomes of student feedback received through the academic year Process will include: draft report and	June 2013 Circular letter to students/Student Executive in penultimate week of teaching in academic year, acknowledging student feedback and explaining new process (information also in the Handbook and virtual learning environment Week five of	Academic Dean in collaboration with colleges' Directors of Studies and undergraduate/part-time/taught postgraduate, postgraduate research administrators	Increased student satisfaction evident in feedback Improved student-staff-faculty relationships evident from feedback Positive feedback through Student Executive and student representatives on board meetings	Teaching and Learning Committee Academic Board Colleges' student executives	Student Executive report to Joint Senior Management Team Joint faculty meeting Normal cycle of student feedback

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.

	action plan and information on action already taken	subsequent academic year				
	evaluation of action taken					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the comprehensively documented and good quality information, advice and guidance for applicants (paragraph 2.9 and 3.2). 	Review admissions policy and produce written Admissions Policy	December 2012	Admissions Officer and Academic Dean Senior Management Team	Written policy document	Senior Management Team, faculty meeting	Senior Management Team, student feedback, Faculty
	Conduct semi-formal review of faculty opinion on admissions process (including interviews)	Sept-Oct 2012	Admissions Officer	Brief Report to Academic Dean	Faculty meeting, teaching and learning workshop	
	Further training for existing and new faculty to enhance applicant interview skills	October 2012	Admissions Officer and Academic Dean	Applicant Interview Manual	Teaching and learning workshop, Teaching and Learning Committee	
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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> return marked work, with feedback 	Formal review of assessment	June 2013	Undergraduate Administrator,	No bunching of deadlines	Students and Faculty	Student feedback

to students, consistently within the timescale recommended by the awarding body (paragraph 1.9).	deadlines to avoid bunching of hand-in dates		Academic Dean			monitoring and recording through Undergraduate Administrator
	Clearer communication regarding return dates for marking	September 2012	Academic Dean	Revised handbooks and virtual learning environment information		Teaching and Learning Committee receives marking records
	Early recruitment and training of external markers at teaching and learning workshops	October 2012/January 2013	Academic Dean			
	Establish an early warning system to anticipate and plan for pressure points	October 2012	Academic Dean, Directors of Studies, undergraduate, part-time and taught postgraduate administrators	'Slack' in the system, marking consistently returned within five weeks, pressure points relieved through competent external markers		
	Establish automatic recall procedure when marking deadlines have been breached	January 2013				
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 	Early recruitment and training of external markers at teaching and learning workshops	October 2012/January 2013	Academic Dean, Directors of Studies	'Slack' in the system, marking consistently returned within five weeks,	Students and Faculty	Teaching and Learning Committee receives marking records and

events (paragraph 1.8)				pressure points relieved through competent external markers		student feedback on external marking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> link observation of teaching and appraisal to planned staff development (paragraphs 2.8 and 2.14) 	<p>Establish reliable process to ensure that relevant staff undergo peer review</p> <p>Revise staff development concept paper into clear Staff Development Policy linked to faculty appraisal and strategic academic needs of institution</p> <p>Integrate peer review with strategic staff development</p>	<p>Throughout academic year 2012-13</p> <p>December 2012</p>	<p>Academic Dean</p> <p>Academic Dean with Senior Management Team</p>	<p>All relevant faculty undergo peer observations</p> <p>Good practice shared at faculty meetings</p>	<p>Teaching and Learning Committee</p> <p>Faculty meeting</p> <p>Principal, Senior Management Team (trends only)</p>	<p>Faculty appraisals</p> <p>Reports to Teaching and Learning Committee, Academic Board, Principal</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review tutorial arrangements to provide equitable and appropriate access to academic guidance and support (paragraph 2.11). 	<p>Conduct survey of part-time students' needs for additional tutorial support</p> <p>Implement findings effectively and sustainably</p>	<p>January 2013</p> <p>September 2013</p>	<p>Director of Part-time Studies</p>	<p>Increased part-time student satisfaction with tutorial support evidenced through student feedback</p>	<p>Academic Dean, Senior Management Team</p>	<p>Student feedback, Student Executive</p>

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.

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