



Sterling College

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

September 2012

Key findings about Sterling College

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in September 2012, the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **no confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of the Association of Business Executives, the Confederation of Tourism and Hospitality and the Organisation for Tourism and Hospitality Management.

The team also considers that there can be **no 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 organisations.

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.

Recommendations

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

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

- implement comprehensive, robust and effective policies for the management of academic standards and learning opportunities (paragraphs 1.1-1.3 and 2.1)
- ensure that the Academic Board and the Academic Staff Meeting operate according to their terms of reference and membership (paragraphs 1.2 and 2.1)
- implement a learning and teaching strategy relevant to its higher education programmes (paragraph 2.5).

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

- implement an effective procedure for responding to external reports (paragraph 1.6)
- develop an effective procedure to collect, analyse and respond to retention, achievement and success data at programme and cohort level, and take appropriate action (paragraph 2.2)
- provide students with opportunities to be more involved in Academic Board and Academic Staff Meeting (paragraph 2.8)
- provide staff development activities that support the delivery of higher education programmes (paragraph 2.10)
- review its procedures for quality assuring and managing the quality of public information (paragraph 3.5).

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

- consider ways to engage academic staff with the Academic Infrastructure (paragraphs 1.5 and 2.3).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the Review for Educational Oversight¹ (REO) conducted by QAA at Sterling 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 Association of Business Executives, the Confederation of Tourism and Hospitality and the Organisation for Tourism and Hospitality Management. The review was carried out by Mr David Malachi, Professor Danny Morton, Mr Charles Sanders, Mrs Maz Stewart (reviewers), and Mr Philip Markey (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the *Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook*.² The review of Sterling College formed part of a joint review with three other colleges owned by Access Education Ltd. Evidence in support of the review included the College's own internal minutes from the Academic Board and the Academic Staff Meeting, external examiners' reports and reports from the awarding organisations. The team also made use of evidence from meetings with staff.

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

- the Academic Infrastructure
- reference points provided by the awarding organisations.

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

Sterling College (the College) is owned by Access Education Ltd. It is located in Kingston upon Thames, near London. Its management is also responsible for three other colleges, two also located in Wimbledon and one in Leicester. The College achieved Stage 2 approval from the Accreditation Service for International Colleges in May 2010. All four colleges were visited during the review period.

The management system is common for all four colleges. The team met management staff, who are responsible for all four colleges, and the Academic Director, who will teach on the higher education programmes when they run. The report is written on the review of the systems that the College has in place for its higher education provision and how this relates to the requirements of the awarding organisations.

The College is in an unusual position as a private provider of higher education. At the time of the review, it had no higher education students. There were students studying English language, but not at higher education levels. The review team was unable to see the operation of any of the higher education policies or procedures for maintaining academic standards or the quality of learning opportunities, nor meet with any higher education students. Samples of student work were not available.

The College has programmes accredited by the following awarding organisations, but has not recruited any students:

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

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

Association of Business Executives

- Diploma in Business Administration

Confederation of Tourism and Hospitality

- Postgraduate Diploma in Hospitality and Tourism

Organisation for Tourism and Hospitality Management

- Diploma in Tourism and Hospitality Management

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College is responsible for delivering programmes that are devised by the awarding organisations. Assessments are set externally, with the College supporting students in assessments set by the organisations. The College sets formative assignments to prepare students for external examinations and is responsible for marking, moderating and providing feedback to students. With respect to all other responsibilities, the College manages its student recruitment and support, learning resources, the monitoring of the quality of learning and teaching, collecting and acting upon student opinion, staff development and the accuracy of public information.

Recent developments

There have been no recent developments since the submission of the College's self-evaluation.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. Because the College did not recruit any students, a submission was not supplied.

Detailed findings about Sterling College

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The operation of the key management committees and the policies on which these are based are in need of improvement. The College management structure comprises a Principal, Centre Manager, Curriculum Development Manager, Quality and Compliance Manager, and directors of study. The Centre Manager is responsible for overseeing the operational management of the College. The Curriculum Development Manager and the Quality and Compliance Manager have overall responsibility for curriculum delivery and quality compliance across the four colleges within the consortium. The colleges work to a common Policy Manual, which addresses all issues associated with the maintenance of academic standards within the colleges. An Academic Board collectively represents all four colleges and, according to its terms of reference, membership comprises directors of study, the Curriculum Development Manager and the Centre Manager. The Principal was also present at all meetings recorded. The overall remit of the Academic Board is to ensure that the College's quality assurance processes are in line with standards set out by each awarding organisation. The College also operates an Academic Staff Meeting, whose duties are stated to include receiving monthly course reviews and considering individual student progress reports from lecturers.

1.2 Academic Board meetings minutes from January 2011 to March 2012 are cursory in their approach to the management of academic standards and provide little evidence that important issues, as defined within its terms of reference, are being addressed. The Board does not follow its own terms of reference in respect of monitoring academic policies and reviewing academic standards. The membership requirements of the Board are not fulfilled. Many key decisions are taken informally and outside of the structure defined within the College's policies. In order to maintain effective oversight of academic standards, it is essential that the College ensures that the Academic Board and the Academic Staff Meeting operate according to their terms of reference and membership.

1.3 The College operates with the same policy documents and procedures used by the other three colleges. Some policies are not being applied and some are copies from other education institutions, which are inappropriate for the College. For example, the Staff Development Policy includes references to features that do not exist at the College. The Resources Policy is based on a study support centre delivering programmes at levels 2 and 3. The procedure for monitoring academic progress is not comprehensive because the document refers only to individual progress of students and not cohort analysis. The College does not have an effective process for producing an overview annual course review report for all its programmes. This was a recommendation in the Accreditation Service for International Colleges report (2010). The team is, therefore, unable to confirm that all policies will be appropriate for the management of academic standards in the future. It is essential that the College implements comprehensive, robust and effective policies for the management of academic standards.

1.4 The College has an academic misconduct policy, which clearly describes the students' responsibility to ensure that work submitted for assessment is their own and is not plagiarised. Students are provided with this document and are required to sign confirmation of their understanding of this policy when commencing their course of study. The College also has access to a commercial plagiarism package, which checks for plagiarism against a

national database. As there are currently no students, the team was unable to assess how this policy is applied.

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

1.5 The College is dependent on its awarding organisations for ensuring that programmes meet the expectations of external reference points associated with programme delivery and assessment. It does not have any direct involvement in the design of new programmes. The College has a policy document entitled Academic Infrastructure, which describes its responsibilities for engaging with relevant sections of the Academic Infrastructure. Staff at the College showed little awareness of this policy. While some staff had attended QAA briefings in preparation for the review, there was no evidence of any relevant staff development being undertaken within the College. There is no evidence that the College's policies and procedures have been informed by the UK Academic Infrastructure. It is desirable that the College considers ways to engage staff more with the Academic Infrastructure.

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

1.6 For all programmes, the College is expected to follow the guidelines of its awarding organisations. Because there were no students or student work available at the time of the review, the team was not able to assess how the College uses external moderation, verification or examining to assure academic standards. There is currently no process for the consideration of reports from the awarding organisations by the Academic Board or Academic Staff Meeting. It is advisable that the College implements a process for the consideration of external reports.

The review team has **no confidence** in the provider's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding organisations.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1 Paragraphs 1.1 to 1.3 also relate to the management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities. There is an over reliance on informal structures to support the management and enhancement of learning opportunities. Managers rely on informal communications to discuss issues relating to learning opportunities.

2.2 The College has a procedure for monitoring the academic progress of individual students through a data management system, which is monitored by the Director of Studies. However, there is currently no system in place to monitor data across cohort or programme. It is advisable that the College develops an effective procedure to collect, analyse and respond to retention, achievement and success data at programme and cohort level, and take appropriate action.

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

2.3 Paragraph 1.5 also relates to the use of external reference points in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities. The College uses the reference points of its awarding organisations. College staff were unaware of those elements of the Academic Infrastructure relating to learning opportunities.

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

2.4 The teaching staff have appropriate vocational/professional qualifications. There is a policy for teacher observation. Teaching observations will be undertaken by the Director of Studies and the Academic Manager, although neither has received formal training in teaching observation at higher education level. Only four out of 18 prompts for staff observation focus on student learning; the rest are concerned with teacher performance. Lesson observation sheets provide little comment on the student experience.

2.5 The College's policy document on learning and teaching is a copy of a policy of a secondary school, and is inappropriate for higher education. For example, it makes no reference to higher-level skills. It does not refer to academic study skills relevant to study in the UK, and how the UK expectations may be different to other countries. It also refers to a coaching and modelling team, which does not exist. It is essential that the College implements a learning and teaching strategy relevant to its higher education programmes.

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

2.6 Although there were no students at the time of the review, the team reviewed the policies for student support. Appropriate student support policies and procedures are in place, including those for student selection, application and admissions, and induction. All students are recruited and interviewed prior to admission, either by overseas agents or by a member of the Senior Management Team, to ensure enrolment on the most appropriate programme of study. On arrival at the College, all students complete a comprehensive programme of induction, supported by an induction pack. Students are assessed on arrival at the College to ensure that they are enrolled on the appropriate course.

2.7 The College has strategies in place for dealing with student welfare matters. There are individual and group tutorials available to support students personally and academically. The Quality and Compliance Manager acts as Student Welfare Officer and oversees welfare activity undertaken by various administrative and academic staff.

2.8 The College intends to gather student feedback through use of questionnaires at the end of each semester. It does not have a policy for engaging students in the quality process. For example, students do not take part in either the Academic Board or Academic Staff Meeting. Student participation would provide the College with more information on student evaluations. This was also a recommendation in the Accreditation Service for International Colleges report (2010). Student participation would provide the College with more information on the students' learning experiences. It is advisable that the College provides students with opportunities to be more involved in the Academic Board and Academic Staff Meeting.

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

2.9 The College provides an induction programme for staff, which aims to ensure understanding and compliance of their duties and responsibilities towards students and the College. There is a comprehensive staff induction pack providing relevant information about their role and duties.

2.10 The College has a Staff Development Policy committed to ensuring appropriate professional development. This is based on a policy from another higher education institution, and includes information not relevant to this College. The College will appraise staff annually, although it is not clear how this will inform staff development. The College stresses the vocational and professional nature of its programmes, with staff being academically competent in their respective areas, resulting in relatively few staff holding teaching qualifications on arrival. The College supports staff in obtaining teaching qualifications, with several having recently completed the Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector and Diploma to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector qualifications. Staff also benefit from updating and development activities with the awarding organisations. To date, no members of staff are members of the Higher Education Academy or involved in research or scholarship. Most are members of professional bodies relevant to their areas of teaching. It is advisable for the College to provide staff development opportunities that support the delivery of higher education.

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

2.11 Students will be able to make use of the awarding organisations' provision of online learning materials specific to their professional area, including e-journals, training manuals, articles and past examination papers. Students will have access to these materials through the College's computer rooms and can also use their own laptops, tablet computers and smart phones through the use of the College's wireless network. Upon registration with the awarding organisations, the students will be able to access these learning materials remotely through the internet.

2.12 One computer suite is reserved primarily for online practice and sitting examinations with the awarding organisations. Library provision links closely to the academic programmes and is sufficient for the requirements of the students. The College stated that further learning resources and facilities are available at the nearby public library. A College virtual learning environment is in development, which will make learning materials for students more readily accessible through one unified portal. The system has recently been successfully piloted in a partner college with some student groups and will be released for all colleges later this academic year.

2.13 The College has a Resource Policy, but it lacks coherence and clarity for higher education programmes. It is based on that of a secondary school. For example, it refers to a Study Support Centre which does not exist, and has a section on the promotion of reading in schools, rather than matters relevant for a college delivering higher education programmes. It is also unclear how priorities for the provision and enhancement of learning resources outlined in these procedures are determined through either Academic Staff Meeting, Academic Board or other planning meetings.

The review team has **no 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 At the time of review, the College demonstrated that it provided broadly accurate information to prospective students, although some minor inaccuracies can be found in various sections of the website. Information provided to students takes the form of publications produced by the College and its awarding organisations. Accountability for the accuracy of information remains the responsibility of the originating source. The College generally adheres to the branding guidelines of its awarding organisations and promotional literature demonstrates this.

3.2 The College website provides general information about the College and its programmes. References are made to relevant College policies and procedures. Some information overstates the facilities provided by the College, for example its library facilities and the extent of information technology available to students.

3.3 Student course handbooks incorporate generic information provided by the awarding organisations, are not suitably contextualised to the College, and do not contain sufficiently detailed programme information. Grammatical errors feature in the majority of College-produced documentation. Some of the information contained in the Student Handbook does not accurately reflect services provided, for example reference is made to a College counselling service. This service provides access to a welfare officer, who is the Quality and Compliance Manager, rather than a professional counsellor.

3.4 Information provided to staff is insufficient in depth and detail to enable them to assure that they are maintaining academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The College's published quality processes and procedures do not make any reference to the Academic Infrastructure or other external reference points.

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

3.5 The College has a policy for assuring the reliability and validity of public information, but it is not robust. The process for assuring public information is informal and inaccuracies are identified as and when they are brought to the attention of the College. Processes to ensure that inaccuracies are rectified are ad hoc rather than proactive or subject to systematic review. Responsibility for the accuracy of information remains the responsibility of two key staff. There is no procedure for documenting decisions and outcomes relating to the quality assurance of public information. It is advisable that the College reviews its procedures for quality assuring and managing the quality of public 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

Sterling College action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight September 2012						
Essential	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is essential for the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implement comprehensive, robust and effective policies for the management of academic standards and learning opportunities (paragraphs 1.1-1.3 and 2.1) 	<p>Check and update all policies and procedures in these areas</p> <p>Remove plagiarism from policies and procedures</p> <p>Quality and Compliance Manager will double-check all policies and procedures once updated</p> <p>Embed revised policies and procedures through staff training and monitoring</p> <p>Monthly programme reviews and progress</p>	April 2013	<p>Academic Board</p> <p>External Management Consultant</p> <p>Quality and Compliance Manager</p>	<p>Updated policies and procedures</p> <p>Staff awareness</p>	Principal	Use annual monitoring routine to check reception and operation of key policies

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 organisations.

	<p>reports from lecturers will be produced and considered by the Academic Staff Meeting</p> <p>The Principal will ensure that all policies are applied</p> <p>The procedure for monitoring academic progress will include cohort analysis</p> <p>The College will produce an overview annual monitoring report for all its programmes as recommended by the Accreditation Service for International Colleges report (2010)</p> <p>The Academic Board will monitor its compliance with its own terms of reference in respect of membership, monitoring academic policies, and reviewing academic</p>					
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	standards All key decisions will be taken formally and within the structure defined within the College's policies					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that the Academic Board and the Academic Staff Meeting operate according to their terms of reference and membership (paragraphs 1.2 and 2.1) 	<p>Immediate update of terms of reference and membership of boards</p> <p>Updating to include rationalisation - identifying specific purposes for each committee and appropriate meeting frequencies and reporting lines</p> <p>Operate all meeting accordingly</p>	February 2013	<p>Academic Board</p> <p>Quality and Compliance Manager</p>	Meeting minutes will show evidence of changes	Principal	<p>Academic Board meeting minutes</p> <p>Specific single-agenda Academic Board meeting to discuss success of the actions</p> <p>Academic staff meeting minutes with action points</p> <p>Quality Manual</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implement a learning and teaching strategy relevant to its higher education programmes (paragraph 2.5) 	<p>The College will rewrite the policy on learning and teaching strategy and Quality and Compliance Manager will double-check it</p> <p>The Director of Studies will apply the policy and will keep</p>	April 2013	<p>External Management Consultant</p> <p>Quality and Compliance Manager</p> <p>Director of Studies</p>	Updated policies and procedures	Principal Academic Board	<p>Student coursework (formative assignments)</p> <p>Teacher's observation procedure</p> <p>Mock exams</p>

	<p>checking its implementation every two months</p> <p>Senior managers to be trained in offering feedback to teaching staff</p> <p>Teaching staff to be briefed and rebriefed on expectations.</p>		Teaching staff			Student evaluations
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"> implement an effective procedure for responding to external reports (paragraph 1.6) 	<p>The College will implement an effective process for external reports</p> <p>The College will consider external reports (for example external examiner reports, awarding organisation reports, British Accreditation Council, or QAA reports) at the Academic Board</p> <p>The College management and</p>	March 2013	Teachers	Evidence of reports and meeting minutes	Academic Board Director of Studies	<p>Academic Board meetings with action points</p> <p>Academic Staff Meeting</p> <p>Teaching and learning procedure</p>

	<p>teaching staff will consider the implications of the external reports for how higher education is managed and delivered, and take action</p> <p>Any action taken in response to external reports should be monitored and evaluated by the Academic Board</p> <p>The reports will be shared with student representatives</p> <p>Academic Staff Meeting will also discuss such reports</p>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop an effective procedure to collect, analyse and respond to retention, achievement and success data at programme and cohort level, and take appropriate action (paragraph 2.2) 	<p>New module will be added to retrieve retention, achievement and success data</p> <p>Analysing progression data by programme facility will also be added in the Student Management System</p>	April 2013	<p>IT Manager</p> <p>Analysing the data: working party of the Academic Board</p> <p>Analysis considered by the Academic Board</p>	<p>20 per cent module has been programmed, 80 per cent will be completed by end of December 2012</p> <p>Full implementation will be done in January 2013</p>	<p>Principal</p> <p>Academic Board</p> <p>Director of Studies</p>	<p>Student Management System</p> <p>Reports will be generated periodically on the data with action points</p> <p>Evaluation to be made by the</p>

	The Academic Board will commission analysis of the data, which is the point of the recommendation		Responsibility for acting on the data rests with the Academic Board through its officers			Academic Board of the effectiveness of this new system following next receipt of achievement data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide students with opportunities to be more involved in Academic Board and Academic Staff Meeting (paragraph 2.8) 	A student representative system will be implemented from January 2013 in Academic Staff Meeting and Academic Board Meeting	January 2013	Academic Board Director of Studies	Meeting minutes	Principal	Quality Manual terms of reference Academic Board meetings with evidence for student involvement Academic Staff Meeting with evidence of student involvement Student evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide staff development activities that support the delivery of higher education programmes (paragraph 2.10) 	Academic staff will be encouraged to engage more in research and scholarship The College will make reference to the Higher Education Academy and the UK professional	March 2013	Director of Studies	Course bookings Staff awareness	Principal	Staff development procedure with evidence of higher education activities

	standards framework					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review its procedures for quality assuring and managing the quality of public information (paragraph 3.5). 	<p>Public information clause will be added in quality assurance procedure</p> <p>Also documenting decisions and outcomes relating to public information will be added to quality assurance procedure</p>	April 2013	<p>IT Manager</p> <p>Director of Studies to carry out the new procedure</p> <p>Responsibility for checking and signing off rests with the Principal</p>	Updated policies and procedures	<p>Principal</p> <p>Quality and Compliance Manager</p>	<p>Quality assurance procedure</p> <p>Publishing policy for electronic and paper-based information</p>
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"> consider ways to engage academic staff with the Academic Infrastructure (paragraphs 1.5 and 2.3). 	<p>Copies of the Academic Infrastructure will be provided to the academic staff</p> <p>The College will conduct a short seminar where all academic staff will be present along with Quality and Compliance Manager; information about QAA and the Academic Infrastructure, now referred to as the UK</p>	February 2013	Director of Studies	Details of seminar will be documented	Principal	<p>Staff development procedure</p> <p>Feedback from staff</p>

	Quality Code for Higher Education, will be provided					
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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.

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

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

Code of practice *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

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

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

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

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

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

framework for higher education qualifications A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks:

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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