



Helios International College

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

November 2012

Key findings about Helios International College

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in November 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 ATHE, Edexcel and The Organisation for Tourism and Hospitality Management.

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 organisations.

The team considers that **reliance cannot** 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 regular student academic support workshops shared across programmes and levels of study (paragraph 2.8).

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:

- establish a formal process for the ratification and recording of students' marks and ensure that they are fully informed of assessment outcomes (paragraph 1.7)
- ensure that assessments are set and marked at an appropriate level against relevant external reference points (paragraph 1.13)
- review all published information to ensure that it is accurate, current and complete (paragraph 3.7).

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

- ensure that terms of reference and membership for all committees have a clear focus and that deliberations are rigorously undertaken and formally minuted (paragraphs 1.3 and 1.12)
- ensure that quality assurance policies and procedures meet the expectations of relevant external reference points, accurately reflect College practices, and that roles and responsibilities are fully understood (paragraphs 1.5 and 1.8)
- ensure that the internal verification processes are undertaken robustly with formalised audit trails (paragraph 1.6)
- ensure that the process for the regular monitoring of academic standards at programme and college level is clear, effective and understood by staff (paragraph 1.10)
- establish an effective system for the monitoring and enhancement of learning and teaching practice (paragraph 2.1)

- ensure that the process for teaching observation is thoroughly embedded, linked with staff appraisal, and improves teaching quality (paragraph 2.4)
- provide comprehensive programme specifications and programme handbooks for all programmes (paragraph 3.3).

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

- further develop the teaching and learning strategy so that it appropriately reflects current practice in higher education (paragraph 2.3)
- develop a more extensive and systematic approach to staff development and scholarly activity (paragraph 2.11)
- continue to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of the virtual learning environment (paragraph 2.12).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)¹ (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at Helios International 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 ATHE, Edexcel and The Organisation for Tourism and Hospitality Management. The review was carried out by Mr Gary Hargreaves, Ms Deborah Trayhurn, Mr Lawrie Walker (reviewers), and Mr Simon Ives (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the [Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](#).² Evidence in support of the review included agreements with the awarding organisations, quality assurance documents, policies, handbooks and minutes of meetings, and meetings with staff and students.

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

- the Academic Infrastructure
- the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

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

Helios International College (the College) is a registered company and was licensed by UK Border Agency as a Tier 4 sponsor in January 2011, and recruited its first intake of students in April 2011. The College's mission is to be a leading provider of affordable high-quality further and higher education, which provides an open and friendly student learning environment. The College has one campus and a small number of teaching and administrative staff, many of whom work part-time. Some staff undertake several roles within the College. The strategic plan of the College is to build its management team and administrative structures to a level required by the standards of the accreditations being pursued. The College's strategic intention is to recruit qualified and capable staff who can deliver a high level of academic and administrative support, and continue to improve the learning opportunities and environment provided for students.

Currently, the College has students enrolled on six programmes of study in partnership with three awarding organisations. The College has further agreements with a number of awarding partners with a view to the future expansion of its range of provision, subject to demand. The total number of full-time students currently enrolled on the programmes under review is 47.

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

ATHE

- Extended Diploma in Management (level 5)
- Diploma in Management (level 6)
- Diploma in Strategic Management (level 7)

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

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

Edexcel

- HND in Business
- HND in Computing and Systems Development

The Organisation for Tourism and Hospitality Management

- Diploma in Hospitality Management (level 7)

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College has partnerships with three awarding organisations. Its responsibilities for the programmes delivered on behalf of the ATHE and Edexcel are to develop students' skills to meet the learning outcomes and assessment requirements of the programme. The College is responsible for setting and marking summative assessments, responding to student feedback and for undertaking a process of annual monitoring and review. The College's responsibility for the programmes delivered on behalf of The Organisation for Tourism and Hospitality Management is to develop students' skills to meet the learning outcomes and assessment requirements of the programme, to prepare students for external assessment and examination, and for undertaking a process of annual monitoring and review.

The College has accreditation from a range of other awarding partners, but currently no students are enrolled on these programmes.

Recent developments

There have been significant staffing changes immediately prior to the current academic year. The new Principal started in the post in July 2012, and four new teaching staff have been appointed with responsibility for improving the quality of teaching and raising academic standards within the College. These appointments followed external examiners' reports that identified a number of areas where students' achievement was deemed to be unsatisfactory. The College has recently entered into partnerships with two new awarding organisations, the ATHE and The Organisation for Tourism and Hospitality Management, delivering programmes at levels 4-7 on the *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. No formal student submission was received by the team, although a number of statements were received from individual students, along with information from the student survey. Students met reviewers at the preparatory meeting and during the review visit. The team found their views helpful in informing their discussions and in gaining a clear picture of the student learning experience.

Detailed findings about Helios International College

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The College's arrangements for managing academic standards do not provide effective oversight of the programmes being offered. The College understands its responsibilities for the management of academic standards within the partnership agreements with its awarding organisations. Responsibilities for curriculum planning, provision of core teaching materials, and overall quality assurance of the awards rest with the awarding organisations. The College has responsibility for assessment, student support and feedback, teaching quality, resources and monitoring and reviewing academic standards and student learning opportunities.

1.2 The College lacks clear formal mechanisms for the oversight of academic standards, and there is insufficiently robust management by the College of its delegated responsibilities. The College's deliberative meeting structure is yet to be embedded. Structures and responsibilities for the management of academic standards are neither fully understood nor implemented by the management team. Policies are presented in a conflicting and inconsistent manner in College documentation. For example, the policies, procedures and roles stated in the Quality Assurance Manual, such as programme approval, audit meetings, miscellaneous policies, and job titles, are either not undertaken, or conflict with those in other documents. The College has a formalised quality assurance structure, although there is little evidence of the operation of several committees overseeing the management of academic standards, or any detailed minutes of meetings. There is a reliance on informal processes, including staff focus groups, with few formal records made of discussions or decisions.

1.3 The Academic Committee, chaired by the Principal, is intended to review and evaluate the standards of programmes and the student experience. The College was unable to provide full terms of reference or membership for a number of its key committees, including the Programme Management Committee. Those for the Senior Management Team and the Academic Committee need to be strengthened and clarified, to enable the College to address the full range of evidence, have robust oversight of academic standards, and execute its responsibilities effectively. It is advisable for the College to revise the terms of reference and membership of all committees to ensure that they have a clear focus and that their deliberations are rigorously undertaken and formally minuted.

1.4 The Principal and Director of Studies have primary management responsibility for standards and quality, supported by programme leaders and lecturers. Staff at all levels appear unclear on their specific roles and responsibilities within the College's management and deliberative structures. There is a lack of clarity about the operational responsibilities of the Director of Studies, Registrar, Quality Assurance Officer and programme leaders. Staff are only partially able to articulate their responsibilities for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. There have been frequent changes in staff, resulting in a lack of continuity of programme management.

1.5 Senior managers confirm that the Quality Assurance Manual is a key document supporting the management of academic standards. However, staff are unable to say how the manual was developed, or demonstrate ownership of much of its contents. Many of the policies and processes presented in the manual conflict with other College documentation, and many staff roles and policies mentioned do not exist. Many of the procedures have

either not been coherently developed or used, or are not currently operational. It is advisable for the College to ensure that quality assurance policies and procedures meet the expectations of relevant external reference points, accurately reflect College practices, and that roles and responsibilities are fully understood.

1.6 Assessment practice is variable across the provision. Standardised assessment templates are not consistently used. The internal verification policy is not fully complied with, and processes are not recorded. Poor assessment design is not highlighted through the internal verification process. Full assessment and grading criteria are not always provided for students. Assignment briefs are sometimes ungrammatical and spelling mistakes remain uncorrected. Feedback on students' work is not always developmental and written feedback is at times illegible. It is advisable for the College to ensure that the internal verification processes are undertaken robustly with formalised audit trails.

1.7 There is no evidence of any formal process having taken place for the ratification of students' marks, and no formal records exist. Staff stated that this function is undertaken by the Academic Committee, although this role does not appear in its terms of reference. The team considers that it is essential for the College to establish a formal process for the ratification and recording of students' marks and ensure that they are fully informed of assessment outcomes.

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

1.8 The College currently uses two external reference points: the Academic Infrastructure and the QCF. The College has an emerging understanding of the Academic Infrastructure, and recent staff development has taken place through an external standards and quality adviser. Programme specifications have recently been produced for some programmes and this indicates a growing understanding of the requirements of the Academic Infrastructure. A number of College policies, including those on assessment, the accreditation of prior learning, and academic malpractice, are not supported by processes and procedures which fully reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), in particular *Section 6: Assessment of students*.

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

1.9 For Edexcel and ATHE programmes, the College has responsibility for contextualising awarding organisation modules, assessment design and implementation, and managing formative and summative assessment processes. For The Organisation for Tourism and Hospitality Management Diploma in Hospitality Management programme, responsibilities include formative developmental work to prepare students for external assessment and examination. The ATHE accreditation report and action plan from June 2012 required the College to provide teaching timescales, assessment submission and internal verification dates. Responses to these actions, expected within three weeks of the report, have not yet been made.

1.10 A Programme Annual Monitoring Report has recently been introduced. For the 2011-12 academic year, the report covered all provision at the College. The report has limited evaluation and an insufficiently critical approach. While some key issues are addressed, the report fails to respond robustly to serious issues about assessment and academic standards, or provide a sufficiently detailed or time-based action plan. The Quality Assurance Manual requires that programme reports are considered at a programme review meeting and at an audit meeting, but neither of these meetings has taken place to date.

It is unclear how formal responses are made to external examiners' reports. It is advisable for the College to ensure that the process for regular monitoring of academic standards at programme and college level is clear, effective and understood by staff.

1.11 In 2011-12, the one student enrolled on the Diploma in Hospitality Management programme achieved the award. The HND Business external examiner's report required that the programme be blocked until assignment work became less theoretical, and more linked to live organisations. The HND Computing and Systems Development external examiner's report of April 2012 raised serious concerns about academic standards. The report stated that staff had made incorrect assessment decisions, assessment was based on out-of-date curriculum and incomplete grading descriptors, and there was an ineffective internal verification system. The examiner required essential actions, including the production of an effective internal verification policy, rewriting of all assessment briefs with contextualised grading descriptors, addressing and challenging plagiarism, student tracking sheets, practical assessment tasks and updating the curriculum.

1.12 Following a second visit in July 2012, the external examiner's report confirmed that, while some improvements had been made, significant concerns remained. The report stated that an internal verification policy, comprehensive schemes of work and an assessment guide had been produced. Some assignments had been rewritten prior to two staff being trained in assessment practice, and these have subsequently been rewritten. However, a significant proportion of the assessment decisions were not agreed, there was a failure to provide practical assignments, assessment information and guidance for students needed to be improved, and internal moderation had still not identified or challenged plagiarism. Much of the student work was of a very poor standard. The examiner confirmed that further work needed to be undertaken to assure standards and ensure that the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure are fully addressed.

1.13 The action plan and audit trail demonstrated that insufficient deliberate action had been taken to resolve the issues. Students on the HND in Computing and Systems Development were given resit opportunities for the four failed modules, but have still not reached pass standard. The College proposes further resubmission attempts alongside their continuing studies. The College has not given sufficient attention to the considerable impact this has had on the students. It is essential for the College to ensure that assessments are set and marked at an appropriate level against relevant external reference points.

<p>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.</p>

2 Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1 The College's responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities reflect those in paragraphs 1.1 to 1.7. The Tutor Handbook, Staff Handbook and Quality Manual have extensive details of policies, procedures, and roles and responsibilities. However, many of these are not fully understood or operational. In practice, the College largely relies on informal and improvised processes, such as focus groups and informal one-to-one meetings that take place regularly. These meetings currently provide some oversight for the small range of provision. However, College policies need to be more fully developed and embedded to provide robust and effective management and enhancement of learning opportunities. The team considers that it is advisable for the

College to establish an effective system for the monitoring and enhancement of learning and teaching practice.

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

2.2 The Academic Infrastructure and the QCF are the College's primary external reference points. There has been active engagement with the awarding organisations as part of its process of aligning with external reference points. However, evidence of use of the *Code of practice* in the development of policies and procedures is limited and needs further work. For example, the College has only recently developed full programme specifications in line with QAA and awarding organisations' requirements, although several of these are still in draft form. The College intends to make these available to students and staff in programme handbooks.

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

2.3 The Tutor Handbook provides a useful set of guidance on approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, along with associated instruments to support good classroom practice. Additional information on learning and teaching is provided in the Quality Assurance Manual, which gives guidance on the setting of student work, examination procedures, and learning styles. Programme schemes of work and assessment plans demonstrate a range of teaching strategies, although there is little evidence of guidance on assessment, marking, level criteria and assessment feedback. There is a draft teaching and learning strategy, but it does not provide a full, coherent or pedagogical basis for the effective oversight of teaching and learning. It is desirable for the College to further develop the teaching and learning strategy so that it reflects current practice in higher education, and provides comprehensive and coherent information for staff on the management and enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

2.4 The College has a small and appropriately qualified teaching team, mostly working part-time. A teaching observation scheme and staff appraisal process have recently been introduced, but these are yet to be fully evaluated, or inform professional development planning. Some teachers have undergone one recent teaching observation, although the reports demonstrate little evidence of dialogue or clear targets for development. There is conflicting information in College documentation about who is responsible for undertaking observations. It is advisable for the College to ensure that the process for teaching observation is thoroughly embedded, linked with staff appraisal, and improves teaching quality.

2.5 Students are positive about the range and variety of teaching and learning. Students are encouraged to provide direct feedback to staff through questionnaires, one-to-one meetings and class representatives. The College also provides confidential feedback complaints boxes. In response to recent problems, students reported positively on the changes in teaching staff and delivery styles, which they felt had improved.

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

2.6 A range of students' academic and pastoral support methods is in place. Pre-enrolment support and advice is praised by students. Students consider staff to be welcoming and supportive, and prospective students are able to have a full discussion to ensure that the courses available would fully meet their needs.

2.7 All students receive a comprehensive induction. They are provided with a Student Handbook, module guides and key information, which provide useful information on the range of support and advice the College can offer. A student welfare officer provides advice and support on living in London. Diagnostic tests in literacy and numeracy are also undertaken.

2.8 Students have individual learning plans and professional development records. These are also used to monitor academic progress. A recent student satisfaction survey reported that all students were satisfied with the overall learning experience, and this was confirmed at a meeting with the review team. Students were also very positive about the opportunities to access one-to-one tutorial support and additional weekly skills workshops. These sessions include academic skills, research methods, plagiarism and referencing. The regular student academic support workshops are shared across programmes and levels and provide opportunities for students to work together and share experiences, and is good practice.

2.9 Students speak positively about the opportunities to provide feedback, and feel that their views are appropriately taken into account. Some students are aware of the formal process of student representation through programme management committees, but there is no formal record of these activities. There is no overarching policy on how the process of obtaining student feedback is planned by the College or how responses are provided.

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

2.10 The College does not have a formal staff development strategy. Generally, staff development events and professional development support have been sporadic and pragmatic, rather than coordinated and strategic. The College states that new staff will be provided with support and an induction programme, along with regular teaching observation and annual appraisal. Staff are expected to undertake scholarly activity and are encouraged to join professional associations, although financial support is limited. In practice, teaching staff mainly access professional development through activities external to the College. The recently introduced Annual Staff Development Calendar contains 10 planned 30-minute sessions. Four of these useful sessions have taken place, including one presented by an external consultant.

2.11 The College's ability to promote strategic longer-term improvements has been restricted by financial considerations. The academic team is primarily part-time or fractional and there have been significant recent staff changes. Staff development has focused on training and preparation for the educational oversight review rather than on teaching, scholarship and research. Activities have included briefing sessions from the awarding organisations, such as first aid, fire-marshalling, and health and safety training. Staff stated that sharing of good practice occurs informally. Some College staff have undertaken Edexcel training in assessment. The College is starting to plan staff development more systematically. It would be desirable for the College to develop a more extensive and systematic approach to staff development and scholarly activity, and undertake a full evaluation of the outcomes.

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

2.12 The College provides a good learning environment for the small number of students currently enrolled, with well appointed and well equipped classrooms which include data projectors. Resources for computing and information technology are adequate. Students

reported positively on the accessibility and usefulness of resources available. Students rely heavily on the study manuals provided by the awarding organisations. They also use the small College library, as well as public libraries. The College has recently invested in a virtual learning environment. Students reported that this was a useful tool for the repository of schemes of work, class notes and potentially for submitting their assessments online, although it is too early to judge how effective this is. Currently, the virtual learning environment provides only partial information. However, this is a welcome development and an accompanying handbook has been produced for students. It is desirable for the College to continue to develop and evaluate the effectiveness 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 publishes a wide range of information for potential and current students, staff and other stakeholders. These include the prospectus, staff and student handbooks, information related to awarding organisations' policies, complaints and appeals procedures, assessment policies, induction pack and quality procedures. Materials are produced in hard copy and electronically. The website is the primary means of publicity and marketing, and students confirm that they find this accessible and useful.

3.2 The key sources of internal communication are handbooks, noticeboards, emails, a set of policies, learning materials, and the virtual learning environment. The prospectus and website include programme information primarily using awarding organisations' formats and text. Full programme specifications, which contextualise awarding organisation information for delivery at the College, are not consistently provided.

3.3 Students are provided with a variety of handbooks, but there is no single source of comprehensive information about their programme of study. The Student Handbook gives general information, regulations and other policies, which students find helpful. Additionally, a Programme Handbook for 2012-13 provides useful overarching information on assessment, appeals and mitigating circumstances, and resources. Information on individual programmes is limited, and covers a range of awards from the awarding organisations. New programme handbooks have been developed recently, which are intended to include full programme specifications. However, there is a lack of clarity about the status of the new handbooks and whether they are intended to consolidate all key information for students. It is advisable for the College to provide comprehensive programme specifications and programme handbooks for all programmes.

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

3.4 The College publishes a variety of information which is inaccurate, conflicting, out of date, or incomplete. This includes handbooks, manuals and policy documents for both staff and students. Publications often provide overlapping and contradictory information about roles and responsibilities, departments, committees and procedures that do not exist, or are not currently functional.

3.5 The College claims to have a publications policy, although this was not made available to the team. Responsibility for ensuring accuracy and completeness of information depends on a few key staff. The Administration and Compliance Officer is responsible for the website, the Chief of Accounts and Marketing signs off all marketing and publicity, and the Quality Assurance Officer approves and monitors the content of the virtual learning environment. The Principal takes final responsibility for ensuring accuracy. Students are not involved in procedures for ensuring accuracy and completeness of information.

3.6 Materials on the College website are clearly laid out. Students spoke positively about the website information and the straightforward application process. The portfolio of programmes described in the prospectus reflects the College's aspiration, rather than the limited set of programmes to which the College is actively recruiting. The language of the prospectus and the Student Handbook implies the College currently runs all of its publicised programmes, which is potentially misleading for prospective students. Some students stated that prior to their enrolment they expected the College to be much bigger, with a larger student body and range of provision than they discovered on arrival.

3.7 The College publishes a set of policies which are described as evolving, and it admits that there are discrepancies in their documentation. The self-evaluation states that there is an annual review of policies and a regular audit of the accuracy of public information, carried out at least twice in each semester by either the external or internal staff. There is no reliable evidence of this having taken place. The inaccuracies and contradictions in policies and procedures provided demonstrate that this auditing process has been inadequate. Staff at all levels are not fully conversant with the contents, and sometimes the existence of, individual policies or procedures. It is essential for the College to review all published information to ensure that it is accurate, current and complete.

The team concludes that **reliance cannot 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

Helios International College action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight November 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 regular student academic support workshops shared across programmes and levels of study (paragraph 2.8). 	The weekly academic workshops (Tricks of the Trade) to be continued and themes to vary according to student and staff needs	March 2013	Quality Assurance Officer Director of Studies	Regular attendance and participation by staff and students	Principal Academic Committee	Participation feedback from students and staff, indicating the extent to which needs are being met
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"> establish a formal process for the ratification and recording of students' marks and ensure that they are fully informed of assessment 	An Academic Committee meeting to approve an assessment policy Embedding the assessment policy in the academic calendar of the	September 2013	Programme leaders Director of Studies Academic Committee	Staff are aware of the status and requirements of the assessment policy and the mandatory three-week turnaround period for internal	Principal	Internal and external verifiers' reports indicating the extent to which the formal process of marks ratification has been followed in the exam boards

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>outcomes (paragraph 1.7)</p>	<p>College</p> <p>Implementing a mandatory three-week turnaround period for assessment of student work</p> <p>Students to be informed of the outcome immediately after the internal assessment</p> <p>A comprehensive assessment update, timetable (including exam boards) and report on resits and current semester</p> <p>Establishing and following a formal timetable and composition for an exam board within the year</p>			<p>assessment</p> <p>Programme leaders' reports indicating assessment in accordance with the quality assurance requirements</p> <p>Student assignments are submitted and assessed on time</p> <p>Exam boards have been fully convened to ratify student marks and recorded accordingly</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that assessments are set and marked at an appropriate level against relevant external reference points 	<p>Submission of a revision and assessment plan (NB: learning outcome and assessment criteria) for all programmes for scrutiny</p>	<p>September 2013</p>	<p>Programme leaders, Quality Assurance Officer</p>	<p>Students have access to clear assignment briefs and assessment criteria Individual programme</p>	<p>Director of Studies</p>	<p>Student feedback on assignment briefs and revision indicate levels of assessment in accordance with relevant external</p>

(paragraph 1.13)	<p>Review of all internal and external verification provisions across all programmes</p> <p>Formalising the development and moderation of assignment briefs at the beginning of each semester based on the standards drawn from relevant external reference points (UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the National Qualifications Framework, and the relevant accrediting bodies)</p>		Quality Assurance Officer of accrediting bodies	<p>leaders have published assessment plans and assignment briefs are duly internally moderated</p> <p>Good external verifier reports on past assessment outcomes with few action points</p>		<p>reference points</p> <p>Internal and external verifier reports indicate adherence to relevant format of assessment</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review all published information to ensure that it is accurate, current and complete (paragraph 3.7). 	<p>Commissioning an immediate review of existing public information on the College and its programmes for accuracy, completeness and relevance to current context</p> <p>Approval of the public information policy that</p>	June 2013	<p>Programme leaders</p> <p>Quality Assurance Officer</p>	<p>Staff are aware of the policy and procedures with respect to public information</p> <p>All information on and about the College and its programmes are complete, accurate and up</p>	Principal	<p>Staff and student feedback on public information (website, course material) demonstrate accuracy and relevance</p>

	lays out how the College will accurately, comprehensively and regularly monitor information published in and about the College and its programmes			to date		
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"> ensure that terms of reference and membership for all committees have a clear focus and that deliberations are rigorously undertaken and formally minuted (paragraphs 1.3 and 1.12) 	<p>An update of the committee structure with a review of terms of reference, structure of deliberations and membership on committees, clarifying formal minute-taking responsibilities, tracking and implementation of action points</p> <p>The clarification and publication of annual meeting schedule for various committees and the regularity teams and working group meetings</p>	March 2013	Director of Studies and Quality Assurance Officer	<p>There is a clear and coherent record of deliberations and actions derived from the various committees</p> <p>All decisions are subject to the approval of the Academic Board</p> <p>A clear reporting structure between committees</p> <p>There is an approved set of terms of reference and</p>	Principal	Minutes of meetings indicate coherence of action plans and link between committees

				membership for all committees with clear indication of reporting systems		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that quality assurance policies and procedures meet the expectations of relevant external reference points, accurately reflect College practices, and that roles and responsibilities are fully understood (paragraphs 1.5 and 1.8) 	<p>Developing an ongoing update of changes for academic/teaching staff on standards and requirements in accordance with external reference points (for example UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the National Qualifications Framework, the Higher Education Academy and the relevant accrediting bodies)</p> <p>Ascertaining that programme leaders understand the requirements of programme annual monitoring</p>	April 2013	Programme leaders	<p>An interim programme monitoring report for each programme</p> <p>Comprehensive and coherent annual monitoring reports for all programmes with a clear audit trail</p>	Principal	Internal and external verifier reports and programme annual monitoring reports demonstrate that the quality assurance procedures have been adhered to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that the internal verification processes are undertaken robustly with formalised audit 	Redefining and writing of the quality assurance manual to reflect the current provision, as well as	June 2013	Director of Studies	A new quality assurance manual with a framework aimed at ascertaining	Principal	The effectiveness of the use of the quality assurance manual and external verifier

trails (paragraph 1.6)	<p>priorities of the College in consultation with all staff and with reference to requirements of external reference points</p> <p>Commissioning independent internal verifiers to assure the robustness of the assessment processes across all programmes</p>			clear guidance for programme leaders, tutors and other associate staff (including independent internal verifiers)		reports indicating how the internal verification and audit processes take place
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that the process for regular monitoring of academic standards at programme and college level is clear, effective and understood by staff (paragraph 1.10) 	<p>Ascertaining the assessment policy and its implementation is consistent across programme and includes a standard process of internal and external verification</p> <p>Regular staff training and development activities to update them with programme approaches</p> <p>Embedding teaching, learning and</p>	September 2013	Director of Studies	A new framework and instrument for appraisal with the assignment of primary programme monitoring responsibility to programme leaders	Principal Academic Board	<p>Links between the appraisal framework and teaching and learning</p> <p>Frequency of staff training and development</p>

	programme leadership into the appraisal process and continuing professional development					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> establish an effective system for the monitoring and enhancement of learning and teaching practice (paragraph 2.1) 	<p>Including effective monitoring and support in the teaching and learning strategy</p> <p>Developing a more structured and robust approach to the collection and analysis of the student voice</p> <p>Developing a peer teaching observation scheme that ascertains continual improvement in learning and teaching</p>	June 2013	<p>Quality Assurance Officer</p> <p>Programme leaders</p> <p>Director of Studies</p>	<p>There is a regular and structured forum for collecting the student voice</p> <p>The student voice is incorporated in the programme monitoring process</p> <p>A dynamic peer teaching observation scheme exists with a focus on learning and continual improvement</p>	Principal and Academic Board	<p>Student feedback of the effectiveness of their input in learning and teaching</p> <p>An annual report on the effect of the peer teaching observation on learning and teaching</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that the process for teaching observation is thoroughly embedded, linked with staff appraisal, and improves teaching quality (paragraph 2.4) 	<p>Establishing a formal peer teaching observation system that is clearly linked to staff development and appraisal</p> <p>Addressing the causes of high staff</p>	June 2013	Director of Studies	The new peer observation framework is linked to the appraisal and quality assurance manual	Principal Academic Board	<p>Staff feedback on the effectiveness of peer observation</p> <p>Student feedback on teaching quality and standards</p>

	turnover and including succession planning in the continuing professional development policy					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide comprehensive programme specifications and programme handbooks for all programmes (paragraph 3.3). 	Developing and publishing a comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date set of specifications for all existing programmes	February 2013	Programme leaders	A published set of programmes and module handbooks in line with the framework proposed by the external reference points	Principal and Academic Board	Student access to programme handbooks
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"> further develop the teaching and learning strategy so that it appropriately reflects current practice in higher education (paragraph 2.3) 	Reviewing and approving the draft teaching and learning strategy	February 2013	Director of Studies	An approved teaching and learning strategy with an up-to-date implementation plan	Academic Board	Staff awareness of the key principles underpinning the learning strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop a more extensive and systematic approach to staff development and scholarly activity (paragraph 2.11) 	Review and approve a staff development policy that captures staff participation in scholarly activities	March 2013	Director of Studies Principal Editorial board of the academic journal	There is a new performance management system that links peer observation to appraisal and staff development	Academic Board	Staff engagement with the new performance management system The status of the academic journal

				A proposal for an academic journal and a plan for publication has been approved by the Academic Board		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of the virtual learning environment (paragraph 2.12). 	<p>Evaluating and ascertaining the effectiveness of the newly commissioned virtual learning environment</p> <p>Developing the following features: repository for policies and procedures (for staff), interactive activities, wiki or common document portal for staff access only</p> <p>Developing regular training programmes for staff and students on the use of the virtual learning environment</p>	March 2013	IT Manager Quality Assurance Officer	An increased use of the virtual learning environment by both students and staff	Director of Studies Academic Board	Student feedback on the use of the virtual learning environment

Self-Evaluation

- The Director of Studies will present an interim self-evaluation report to the Academic Committee in July 2013 (the end of the current academic year) on the action plan.
- A full self-evaluation and a reviewed action plan will be presented to the Academic Committee in October 2013.

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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The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
Email comms@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk

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