Magna Carta College

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

February 2012

Key findings about Magna Carta College

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in February 2012, the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of the University of Wales.

The team also considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the quality and enhancement of the learning opportunities it offers on behalf of this awarding body.

The team considers that **reliance can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Good practice

The team has identified the following **good practice**:

- the integration of plagiarism detection into the assessment process, and the transparent and rigorous enforcement of the College policies when plagiarism is detected (paragraphs 1.5, 2.9)
- the student voice is canvassed widely and used to inform prompt and effective responses which, in turn, are communicated clearly to the student body (paragraphs 2.2, 2.6)
- the well structured, comprehensive and interactive student induction process is appropriately geared to the nature of the student intake (paragraphs 2.7, 3.5)
- the effective use of the well designed virtual learning environment to support student learning (paragraphs 2.11, 3.2).

Recommendations

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

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

- complete its planned review of the Prospectus and website, before promotional literature is distributed for the next academic year (paragraphs 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7).

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

- implement its plans for sharing external examiners' reports with students in the current academic year (paragraph 1.10)
- review student representation on the College committees to ensure that students have a direct input into the College decision-making processes (paragraphs 2.2)
- encourage greater staff engagement with professional development opportunities and review means of identifying and sharing good practice, through activities such as teaching observations (paragraphs 2.5, 2.10)
- make reports and minutes of the College management meetings more readily available to part-time academic staff, to inform their understanding of the College and the views of stakeholders and to broaden their interaction with the College as a whole (paragraph 3.1).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the Review for Educational Oversight[1] (REO) conducted by QAA at Magna Carta College (the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the provider discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes of study that the provider delivers on behalf of the University of Wales. The review was carried out by Dr Philip Davies, Professor Christopher Gale, Mr Lawrie Walker (reviewers) and Mr Jeffery Butel (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the *Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook*.[2] Evidence in support of the review included documentation supplied by the provider and the University of Wales and meetings with staff and students.

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

- University of Wales
- the Academic Infrastructure

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

Magna Carta College was founded in 2006 and recruited its first students in 2009. It is a private institution whose governing body comprises board members of the company owning the College. It occupies one site in the Summertown area of Oxford and draws its core academic staff from universities in Oxford, Cambridge, Birmingham and London. Four full-time and 16 part-time academic staff, representing 15.6 full-time equivalent staff, and 10 full-time administrative staff, are employed.

The first student intake comprised 20 MBA students and to date this programme has recruited a total of around 500 students. From their commencement in 2010, the MA and MSc programmes recruited a total of 55 students but recruitment ceased after the February 2011 intake and the remaining students are expected to complete in 2012. Since September the College has recruited to the third year of its BA (Hons) Business programme as a 'top-up'. At the time of the review visit a total of 117 students were enrolled.

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

University of Wales

Student numbers in brackets. All programmes are full-time:

- BA Business Studies (Year 3 top-up) (10)
- MSc Business Information Management (2)
- MA Marketing (6)
- MBA International Management (top-up) (19)
- MBA Business Law (2)
- MBA Healthcare Management (24)

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[1] www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx.

- MBA International Management (54)

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College states that it has sole responsibility for first and second marking of student work and providing feedback on it. The College is also responsible for student admissions, in line with University of Wales' admission criteria, and for monitoring student retention and completion, and providing guidance on progression. Liaison with employers is also the sole responsibility of the College as is collecting and acting upon student feedback. Provision of staff development is a College responsibility, although it works closely with the University Moderator to deliver continuous professional development opportunities. All other responsibilities are shared with the University of Wales.

Recent developments

Student numbers rose dramatically in the years from 2008-09 to 2010-11, but have fallen in 2011-12. Some 56 new students were enrolled in 2011-12, compared with 89 in the same period of 2010-11. This reflects non-recruitment to the master's programmes and reduced enrolment on the MBA. The College ascribes this to changes in the UK Border Agency rules relating to overseas students requiring entry visas. The College intends to deliver a three-year BA (Hons) Business Studies from September 2012, validated by the University of Wales. This builds upon the College's current provision of the third year of this award as a top-up. The College is also in an advanced stage of negotiations with the University of Gloucestershire to deliver franchised programmes from September 2012.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. Following an unsuccessful attempt by students to set up a student focus group, it was decided that the College would put together a student submission by collating student views obtained from minutes of student-staff liaison meetings, analysis of student feedback questionnaires, online survey responses and video interviews. There were 47 responses to the survey and 12 students were interviewed. The coordinator met students at the preparatory meeting and the team met students during the review visit. The student contribution to the review was extremely helpful to the team.

Detailed findings about Magna Carta College

1   Academic standards

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

1.1   The College designs its own programmes which are validated by the University of Wales. Ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of the programmes lies with the University of Wales, in accordance with the *Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* (the *Code of practice*). Responsibility for the academic standards at the point of delivery lies with the College Academic Board which consists of the Dean, Vice Dean, Chief Operating Officer, Academic Coordinator and Programme Coordinator. The Academic Board meets termly, in line with University of Wales' requirements.

1.2   The Academic Board devolves responsibility for monitoring, review and enhancement to its Academic Team, which provides academic and administrative support and meets once a term. The Academic Team considers future directions in teaching and learning, responding in particular to policy initiatives emerging from the University of Wales. It reports directly to the Academic Board, providing effective linkage between the College's operational and strategic operations.

1.3   Academic standards are monitored by the College in a number of ways. This includes academic staff meetings (known as faculty meetings) at least once per term, staff-student liaison group meetings, student questionnaire feedback, reports from external examiners and the University of Wales Moderator and Annual College and Course Review, as required by the University of Wales.

1.4   Programmes are delivered and managed in accordance with the University of Wales' regulations, policies and procedures which are supplemented by the College policies. The College enjoys a close working relationship with the University and draws upon it freely for assistance and guidance.

1.5   Students are introduced to academic plagiarism detection software at induction and all student work is submitted through this on the virtual learning environment. The process is applied rigorously, and prompt and effective action taken in cases where plagiarism is identified. The integration of plagiarism detection into the assessment process, and the transparent and rigorous enforcement of the College policies when plagiarism is detected, represents good practice.

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

1.6   The College refers to two major external reference points, the University of Wales academic regulations and the Academic Infrastructure. The University of Wales ensures that external reference points are incorporated at programme validation and in subsequent monitoring processes. The University of Wales Moderator has oversight of the College programmes, provides an accessible source of external reference for sector requirements, offers advice on the development and delivery of programmes and provides staff development opportunities. The College staff demonstrate limited understanding of the

Academic Infrastructure. The College intends to address this by means of discussions during the Moderator's visits and through attendance at courses held by the University of Wales.

1.7   The College employs part-time academic staff who teach, or have taught, in public sector institutions. These staff bring with them knowledge and understanding of appropriate external reference points, which is shared with colleagues on an informal basis and helps to align the College provision with these.

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

1.8   The College places reliance on the University of Wales Moderator and external examiners appointed by the University. If programmes require minor amendments, these are discussed by the College's Academic Board and then sent to the Moderator and external examiners for approval. If major amendments are to be made to any programme materials or examining procedures, the recommendations of the Academic Board are presented to the Joint Board of Studies which comprises: the relevant University of Wales Validating Officer, the Moderator, external examiners, all College academic staff and the Academic Board. The recommendations are then taken to the University of Wales for final agreement.

1.9   Assessment is subject to stringent scrutiny by the University of Wales. Assessments are required to be approved by the University Moderator and external examiners to ensure they are of an appropriate standard for the level of the award. The College undertakes first and second-marking of student work. External moderation is provided by third-marking of a sample of student work by the University, except in the case of dissertations where the University requires all to be third-marked by the external examiner. The Academic Team works with the Moderator and other colleagues at the University to assure academic standards. All relevant procedures are available on the virtual learning environment. The University holds External Examination Board meetings at the College, which include the University of Wales Validation Officer, the Moderator, external examiners and the College academic staff teaching on the programmes involved. External Examination Board meetings are held after the Internal Examination Board meeting to consider and ratify students' results.

1.10   The College does not currently share external examiners' reports with students, although they informed the team of their intention to do so. The team considers that it is desirable for the College to find ways to implement this in the current academic year in order to enhance transparency and inform student input to institutional and programme review.

The review team has **confidence** in the provider's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding body.

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2   Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1   Responsibilities for the quality of learning opportunities provided are well embedded in the College's systems. Staff are aware of the management structures and procedures, and engage fully in enhancing the quality of learning opportunities which are monitored through annual reviews and academic staff meetings.

2.2   Although the student voice is canvassed widely, student representatives are not members of the Academic Board. Students have no direct role in decision making, nor do they have access to the minutes of meetings or external examiners' reports. The team considers it to be desirable for the College to review student representation on the College's committees to ensure that students have a direct input into the College decision making.

2.3   All programmes are monitored through the Annual College and Course Review that allows the College to reflect on their effectiveness. A college-wide action plan is produced jointly by the academic staff and the Academic Team at the start of each year. The College does not currently produce programme-specific action plans.

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

2.4   The College makes limited formal reference to external reference points in its management and enhancement of learning opportunities. Although external reference points play an important part in validation procedures, there is little explicit recognition by the College of their relevance to the provision of learning opportunities. As explained in paragraph 1.7, the College relies on part-time staff bringing with them their knowledge and expertise gained in the public sector.

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

2.5   The quality of teaching and learning is monitored through lesson observations. These are conducted by the Dean, Vice Dean and Director of Quality Assurance and Compliance, and are effective in monitoring the quality of teaching. The College regards this as peer observation, although it is management-led and senior staff are not observed. It provides little opportunity for the sharing of good practice among teaching staff or incorporation of peer observation into staff development. It is desirable that the College reviews means of identifying and sharing good practice, through activities such as teaching observations.

2.6   All programmes have student representatives who represent student views at staff-student liaison meetings. In addition, there are opportunities for students to comment on the quality of teaching in end-of-module surveys, an end-of-year survey and in online questionnaires. Further opportunities exist for students to express their views in meetings with the University of Wales Student Engagement Team, with external examiners, at the Student Hub Meeting where students from all University of Wales partners meet, and at the Student Convention Weekend. Students value these opportunities and indicate that not only is the College highly responsive to any issues they raise but it also ensures that they are kept well informed of progress in addressing these. The widespread canvassing of the student voice, and its use to inform prompt and effective responses which are communicated clearly to the student body, is good practice.

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

2.7   New students undergo an effective four-day induction programme. The induction is well structured, comprehensive and interactive, giving students hands-on experience of the virtual learning environment and clear guidance on study skills, avoiding plagiarism, and academic procedures. Students spoke highly of the induction programme which they felt identified and addressed their needs effectively at this critical time. The well structured, comprehensive and interactive student induction process that is appropriately geared to the nature of the student intake represents good practice.

2.8   The College has a wide range of support mechanisms for students, which are well embedded. At enrolment, each student is provided with a personal tutor whom they meet at least twice per year and who provides academic and pastoral support. Students consider that staff are approachable and friendly. The College has developed a Personal Development Programme which seeks to inculcate life skills and develop the individual. Although in its early stages, it has the potential to enhance the student learning experience in its widest sense.

2.9   Feedback on student work is specific and detailed, and is obtained through a number of written, oral and online mechanisms. Students consider it to be an important aspect of their learning. Plagiarism detection software is used to provide formative feedback to assist students in avoiding plagiarism, and is effectively integrated into the virtual learning environment for online submissions. There is a clear process for monitoring the feedback turnaround time and students report that the College returns work well within the University's stipulated timescale.

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 policy on staff development or allocation of time for scholarly activity but it does provide financial support for staff development. It has funded staff to obtain master's and doctoral qualifications and for research leading to the publication of academic papers. The College staff can engage in the University of Wales' activities, although there is limited take-up of this. It is desirable that the College encourages greater staff engagement with professional development opportunities. New staff are supported by an experienced member of the teaching team who acts as an informal mentor.

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   Academic resource planning is monitored by the College Committee of Validation Standards. The staff have an input into the resource specification through the academic staff meeting, and students raise concerns through the staff-student liaison meeting. Some students felt that the College's library resources were insufficient. While, however, the College library has limited stock, students have access to considerable learning materials through the University of Wales, including its online library, Oxford Brooks University and, on payment of a fee, the Oxford Union Library. Access to the virtual learning environment is welcomed by students as being a valuable source of learning materials and feedback on their work. It also enables staff to monitor student progress closely and, where necessary, take prompt remedial action, and represents good practice.

2.12   The College provides a range of extra-curricular activities, such as visits and social events, which are highly valued by the students. Students felt this had a valuable impact on their learning experience and would welcome more of these activities. The College, by virtue of its location, has access to Oxford Union resources for its students, although most of them feel it is too expensive to take up this opportunity.

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.

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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 provides a wide range of documentation, although accessibility to this varies. Some documents, including the Student Handbook, Dissertation Handbook and Library Policy, are online and accessible to all staff and students; others, such as committee minutes, external examiners and the awarding body's reports, are accessible to senior staff but not part-time academic staff. The team considers it desirable for the College to make reports and minutes of the College management meetings more readily available to part-time academic staff in order to inform their understanding of the College and the views of stakeholders and to broaden their interaction with the College as a whole.

3.2   The College's virtual learning environment is well organised and provides an easily accessible source of up to date information for staff and students. It includes the Student Handbook, Assessment Handbook, lecture notes, case studies, reading lists and assessment information. Submission, scanning by plagiarism detection software, marking and feedback on student assessments are conducted through the virtual learning environment, which also provides access to student/tutor forums and to online libraries. Students find it extremely useful. The effective use of the well designed virtual learning environment to provide an easily accessible source of updated information for students to support their learning and to enable staff to monitor student progress and, where necessary, take prompt remedial action, represents good practice.

3.3   Students consider that the College information is generally helpful in setting out the provision, although the images of Oxford University colleges did not reflect the physical reality of Magna Carta College. The Prospectus includes quotations from students, some of which are included under the headings of programmes that have not yet run. The College is reviewing the information provided in the Prospectus and website to avoid any potentially misleading information. It is advisable for the College to complete its planned review of the Prospectus and website, before promotional literature is distributed for the next academic year.

3.4   The College's contract with agents specifies respective responsibilities for marketing and promotional activities although, like other College documentation, it contains typographical and grammatical errors. The College is advised and committed to addressing this issue as part of its review of all of its internal and external documentation.

3.5   During their induction students are provided with a range of essential information. Students are also taught how to access wider information from the virtual learning environment. They confirmed that the induction was effective in conveying key information. Subsequently, personal tutors check that students have information about their timetables, access to the virtual learning environment, the Student Handbook and the Assessment Handbook. Information and guidance booklets for students, such as the Assessment Procedures Handbook and the Dissertation Handbook, are generally well written.

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

3.6   The College's Public Information Policy is determined largely by the requirements of the University of Wales.The College is responsible for all information published about the institution and the programmes available and these are checked and monitored by the University of Wales. The overall responsibility of ensuring the availability and quality

of College-wide documentation falls to the Vice Dean, while responsibility for programme-level information lies with the Academic Coordinator and Programme Coordinator. E-marketing platforms are approved by the Board of Directors. The College's Business Quality Manual identifies individual responsibilities for the control of documents and records, and lists the location, status and retention dates for a range of key documents. A number of typographical and grammatical errors, however, occur in internal and external documentation and the College is advised to address these as part of its review of the Prospectus and website.

3.7   The programme information provided in the Prospectus is not aligned fully with the validated programme specifications. The BA (Hons) programme specification refers to specialisations within a single award, not to different award titles. However, the Prospectus and website refer to award titles with named specialisations. The Validation Agreement with the University of Wales confirms that four BA (Hons) awards are available but they are described in the Prospectus with different titles; for example, BA (Hons) Business Studies in Finance and Accounting and BA (Hons) in Finance and Accounting. It is advisable for the College to work with the University of Wales as part of its planned review of the Prospectus and website, to resolve these matters before promotional literature is distributed for the next academic year. The College is working with the University of Wales to establish how the requirements of the Key Information Sets can be met by a private college.

The team concludes that **reliance can be placed** on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Action plan[3]

Magna Carta College action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight February 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:						
• the integration of plagiarism detection into the assessment process, and the transparent and rigorous enforcement of the College policies when plagiarism is detected (paragraphs 1.5, 2.9)	Continuous review to enable best practice	From April 2012	Compliance Officer	Reduction of percentage of unfair practice in any given cohort	Academic Committee Academic Board Committee of Validation Standards The Joint Board of Studies	Evidence of completed work Monitoring of students' work
• the student voice is canvassed widely and used to inform prompt and effective responses which, in turn, are communicated clearly to the student body (paragraphs 2.2, 2.6)	Increased student involvement on College committees	June 2012	Programme Coordinator Student representatives	Student feedback is positive on the subject of student representation	Academic Board Joint Board of Studies	Student feedback

[3] The provider has been required to develop this action plan to follow up on good practice and address any recommendations arising from the review. QAA monitors progress against the action plan, in conjunction with the provider's awarding body.

• the well structured, comprehensive and interactive student induction process is appropriately geared to the nature of the student intake (paragraphs 2.7, 3.5)	Continual review of the induction process	From April 2012	Academic Administrative Team Student representatives	Student feedback is positive about the induction process	Academic Committee Academic Board Joint Board of Studies	Student feedback
• the effective use of the well designed virtual learning environment to support student learning (paragraphs 2.11, 3.2).	Continuous review and improvement	From April 2012	Academic Administrative Team Student representatives	Student feedback is positive Students academic results reflect use of the virtual learning environment	Academic Resource Planning Committee Joint Board of Studies	Student feedback External examiners' reports University moderator's reports
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:						
• complete its planned review of the Prospectus and website, before promotional literature is distributed for the next academic year (paragraphs 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7).	Review of consistency of all promotional literature is in progress	End of April 2012	Compliance Officer	Review of promotional material before each academic intake	Academic Resource Committee Joint Board of Studies	Student feedback

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:						
• implement its plans for sharing external examiners' reports with students in the current academic year (paragraph 1.10)	All available reports already uploaded to virtual learning environment To continue as best practice	End of April 2012	Academic Administration Team	Feedback from students and lecturers	Internal and external examination boards Academic Board Joint Board of Studies	Student feedback Student end-of-year meeting
• review student representation on the College committees to ensure that students have a direct input into the College decision-making processes (paragraph 2.2)	Student representatives to be involved at all stages of the programme management process	June 2012	Compliance Officer Student representatives	Student feedback Feedback from class representatives	Committee of Validation Standards Academic Board Joint Board of Studies	Minutes of student-staff liaison meetings
• encourage greater staff engagement with professional development opportunities and review means of identifying and sharing good practice, through activities such as teaching	Classroom observation Workshop for teaching staff Discussion of best practice	Sept 2012	Vice-Dean	Feedback from academic staff through newly-implemented questionnaires	Academic Board Joint Board of Studies	Staff feedback

observations (paragraphs 2.5, 2.10)						
• make reports and minutes of the College management meetings more readily available to part-time academic staff, to inform their understanding of the College and the views of stakeholders and to broaden their interaction with the College as a whole (paragraph 3.1).	Put reports and minutes of Academic Team meetings; Joint Board of Studies meetings; external examiners' reports; end-of-term meetings; on Staff Forum	June 2012	Academic Coordinator	Questionnaire discussion at academic staff and Joint Board of Studies meetings	Academic Board Joint Board of Studies	At staff end-of-term Meeting

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:

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[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.

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk