Midlands Academy of Business and Technology

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

March 2012

Key findings about Midlands Academy of Business and Technology

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in March 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 Association of Business Practitioners and the Association of Business Executives.

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 can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the Academy is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Good practice

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

- the proactive approach to working with partner universities (paragraph 2.6)
- the effective use of the website and virtual learning environment to communicate with prospective and current students (paragraph 3.3).

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:

- review and implement a revised committee structure (paragraph 1.4)
- make full use of key student performance data to inform quality enhancement processes (paragraph 2.2)
- develop a consistent approach to formal assessment practice (paragraph 2.9)
- ensure that there is formal student representation within the revised committee structure (paragraph 2.13).

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

- review the role of senior staff in the management of academic standards (paragraph 1.3)
- review its higher education policies and procedures with reference to external reference points (paragraph 1.6).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](1) (REO) conducted by [QAA](1) at the Midlands Academy of Business and Technology (the provider: the Academy). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the provider discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes of study that the provider delivers on behalf of the Association of Business Practitioners and the Association of Business Executives. The review was carried out by Ms Michelle Callanan, Dr Ana-Maria Pascal, Ms Barbara Thomas (reviewers), and Mr Bob Saynor (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the *[Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](2)*.[2] Evidence in support of the review included documentation supplied by the Academy and awarding body and organisation, meetings with staff, students, reports of reviews by QAA, and British Accreditation Council reports.

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

- the Academic Infrastructure
- British Accreditation Council.

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

The Midlands Academy of Business and Technology (the Academy) was established in 2003 as an independent educational establishment focusing on students whose first language is not English. Higher education provision has been delivered for the past two years as an addition to English language provision. In April 2010, the Academy moved to a single modern facility in the centre of Leicester with improved teaching and learning facilities and more than quadrupled accommodation space to 18,000 square feet. Currently, the Academy has 124 students of whom 84 are studying on higher education programmes on a full-time basis. There are 21 (13.5 FTEs) academic staff of whom 6 (4.5 FTEs) teach on higher education programmes.

At the time of the review, the provider offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their awarding organisations (with total full-time students against each award):

Association of Business Executives
- Higher Diploma in Business Management (54)

Association of Business Practitioners
- Postgraduate Diploma in Business Management (30)

The provider's stated responsibilities

The Academy states that they provide English language, academic and subject-specific education programmes to enable students to enter the broader higher education system in the UK or through diploma courses, to develop professional skills within a commercial or civil environment, in addition to developing their English language skills. The vision and values of

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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.

the Academy state that their success has been built by experienced higher educationalists with a passion for providing learning. The Academy aims to provide high-quality tuition and pastoral care, work in partnership with parents/guardians/sponsors to ensure that students make most of their potential, ensure that students have the best opportunity to meet the academic standards, secure options for progression, develop provision in response to students, industry, commerce and society, add to the experience and well-being of students through community activities.

Recent developments

The Academy is in the second year of delivering the Association of Business Practitioners and the Association of Business Executives diploma and postgraduate programmes. To support these developments, the Academy has introduced changes to programme delivery and organisational structures to support higher education operations. Overall, student numbers studying at the Academy in recent times have been in excess of 300 students on roll over a calendar year; however, enrolment has been reduced due to the changes in visa regulations.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the Academy were invited to present a submission to the review team. A separate student submission was not submitted to the team in advance. The coordinator met students at the preparatory meeting. Evidence of student feedback through institutional, programme and module feedback was available during the visit. This evidence, together with the team's meeting with the students during the review visit, was helpful to the team.

Detailed findings about Midlands Academy of Business and Technology

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 Responsibility for the management of academic standards across the range of higher education programmes is delegated to the Academy in accordance with the agreements from the external awarding organisations. Both awarding organisations have reported that the Academy is meeting their required standards. The Academy is also accredited by the British Accreditation Council (BAC). The 2010 BAC Inspection Report confirmed that the Academy has effective systems to monitor its own standards. The team is confident that the Academy fulfils its primary responsibilities on behalf of the awarding organisations and the accreditation bodies.

1.2 The overall responsibility for the management of academic standards within the Academy is the function of the Senior Management Team, which comprises the Principal, Academic Principal, the Director of Operations and the Head of Services. The Senior Management Team meets to discuss strategic and operational issues. For example, they produced the Business and Development Plan for 2011-2012, which includes a review of the recommendations from the BAC inspection, with clear action points. The team is confident that the Senior Management Team fulfils its responsibilities to manage the academic standards on behalf of the Academy.

1.3 The Academy is currently implementing a revised academic management structure. The Academic Principal has specific management responsibility for standards within higher education. The post holder line manages the heads of department and has overall responsibility for liaising with external examiners and with accreditation bodies. The Director of Operations is responsible for quality assurance and for student data and analysis. The heads of department work with programme managers in maintaining academic standards at programme level. The team recognises the commitment of the Academy to these enhancements in their academic management systems and feel confident that managers address issues relating to academic standards, using mainly informal systems. However, the formal restructuring process has created some duplication and overlap in operational roles between those of the Academic Principal and Director of Operations, and links with heads of department. It is desirable that the Academy reviews the role of senior staff in the management of academic standards.

1.4 Within the restructuring process, the Academic Forum and Teaching and Learning Review Team has been established as the central group to review student attendance and performance. It is proposed that issues from the newly established Board of Studies, the Interim and External Assessment Boards, awarding organisations' external verifiers' reports, the Teaching and Learning Committee, and the Steering Team report to the Academic Forum and Teaching and Learning Review Team. The Steering Team deals with all external links, including those with the awarding organisations. The outcomes from the Academic Forum and Teaching and Learning Review Team feed into Senior Management Team meetings. Although this new structure is in its early stages, the review team noted some overlaps between the remit of these formal committees. For example, the review identified overlaps between the functions of the Boards of Studies, Steering Team, and the Academic Forum and Teaching and Learning Review Team, which the same staff attend.

It is advisable that the Academy reviews and implements a revised committee structure, with clear and differentiated remits for each committee.

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

1.5 The primary external reference points used by the Academy are those set by the awarding organisations and BAC. All staff teaching on Association of Business Practitioners (ABP) programmes are required to participate in ABP-led training event. The Academy use marking grids developed by the awarding organisations, which align with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), particularly *Section 6: Assessment of students*. The ABP, Association of Business Executives (ABE) and BAC reviews have all confirmed that the Academy embeds the academic requirements of awards within the delivery of the higher education programmes.

1.6 The Academy has recognised that more explicit embedding of additional external reference points, such as the Academic Infrastructure, would enhance academic standards. Staff are conversant with the Academic Infrastructure, through participation in staff development activities. However, at the time of the visit the review team was unable to identify evidence of how this feeds through into operational practice. The Academy plans to embed the Academic Infrastructure within the review of policies and procedures. It is desirable for the Academy to review its higher education policies and procedures with reference to external reference points and make more explicit reference to the Academic Infrastructure.

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

1.7 The Quality Assurance Strategy in Teaching, Learning and Assessment articulates the processes for the approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes. This strategy makes some reference to the various internal and external reference points to be considered within the overall process. It details the Academy's commitment to quality enhancement of its provision, using feedback from external verifiers, staff and students. The Teaching and Learning Strategy describes the processes for programme review both internally and externally. The Academy engages in annual reviews undertaken by an external verifier appointed by the awarding organisations. The external verifier provides an evaluative report after each visit, which is reviewed by the Academy. The subsequent action points are then implemented by heads of department and programme managers. The reports to date confirm that the Academy meets the academic requirements of the awarding organisations.

1.8 The self-evaluation review undertaken by the Academy was a comprehensive review of the academic management systems and processes. The Business and Development Plan articulates the Academy's overall response to both internal and external reviews. Progress has been made to date on these action points, including the use of plagiarism software to support students and staff in addressing academic misconduct, and to provide clear evidence of the various internal and external moderation meetings that take place. All students take external assessments as part of the requirements of the ABP programmes. The achievement for those students sitting external assessments confirms that standards are maintained in accordance with the awarding organisations. Staff and students confirmed that they understand the requirements of the awarding organisations.

> 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 organisations.

2   Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1   The responsibilities and arrangements for managing and reporting on the quality of learning opportunities are those described in paragraphs 1.1 to 1.3. These arrangements are effective in managing and supporting the quality of learning opportunities in the College's higher education provision, and are understood within the Academy.

2.2   Much of the work of the various committees is conducted through informal processes and collegial dialogue. As a consequence, formal recording of discussions, reviews and decision-making does not always occur. The Academy recognises the need to move towards a more formal approach to recording meetings and decisions. There is also some variability in how the Academy captures formal feedback from the student body and how this feeds into improvements to enhance the student learning experience. There is no formal process to collect and analyse the range of key quality indicators which feed into the review process. The team considers it advisable for the Academy to make full use of key student performance data to inform enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students.

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

2.3   The Academy engages with external reference points as stated in paragraphs 1.5 to 1.6 to manage and enhance learning opportunities for students.

2.4   The Academy's Teaching and Learning Strategy makes links to reference points within the Academic Infrastructure. Evidence of a recent self-evaluation review shows that proactive work has been done to use the Academic Infrastructure in a number of audits. These audits identified issues relating to teaching and learning, including student welfare, feedback and assessment, which have resulted in detailed action plans which are in progress.

2.5   The Academy has endeavoured to maintain a wider knowledge of external reference points through attendance at QAA briefings, UK NARIC (National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom), and IELTS (International English Language Testing System) events. The Academy has also organised internal meetings dedicated to increasing awareness of QAA principles and preparing for the Review for Educational Oversight.

2.6   The Academy works closely with a number of universities through progression partnership agreements. University link tutors are invited to visit the Academy to support their progression agreements. This also provides further external recognition of the Academy's provision and ensures that academic standards meet university progression requirements. Staff and students confirm the value of these links in enriching the overall student experience. These arrangements are in addition to those which are a requirement of the awarding organisations to meet the qualification outcomes and contribute to supporting student progression. The proactive approach to working with partner universities enhances the overall student experience, and is considered as good practice.

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

2.7 The Teaching and Learning Strategy is student-centred and matches the Academy's mission to build foundations for lifelong learning. In practice, this translates as an open, positive collaboration between students and academic staff, which is supportive and inspiring. The team is impressed by the positive attitude of students and their overall satisfaction with the Academy to maintain and enhance their learning experience.

2.8 The Academy undertakes observation of teaching and learning, which is carried out by either the programme manager or the Academic Principal. There are currently two observation recording procedures in place. One undertaken as part of the internal verifier's report of tutor performance for staff delivering ABE programmes. This has a simple structure to capture details about the actual session being observed. There is a second observation record form which is more comprehensive and used for all other programmes. The new Professional Review Policy includes using a revised version of the latter, which will be applied across all programmes and staff. The observation of teaching and learning process is currently not applied consistently for all staff to support teaching and learning practice.

2.9 The review team sampled a range of assessed student work during the visit. Although student achievement is generally high, there are clear inconsistencies and variability across modules in the quality of feedback provided to students and alignment with marking criteria. It is advisable that the Academy develops a consistent approach to assessment practice and captures this within an overarching strategy, and monitors its implementation.

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

2.10 Students are inducted to the Academy and programme of study in several stages. The Student Welcome Handbook includes general details relating to enrolment, finance, attendance, accommodation, leisure, and other administrative matters. Reference is made to plagiarism guidelines and an Academic Impropriety Policy is also available. Details concerning the programme and module specifications are provided to students separately.

2.11 Optional tutorials are offered to students once per week for each module. The Academy has recently introduced a personal tutor system for dealing with both academic and welfare issues, including personal development planning and career advice. There are 14 members of staff who speak languages covering all the countries from which students are drawn. This has assisted in helping to respond to queries from students' families as well as with students' own requests.

2.12 The self-evaluation review for ABP and ABE programmes identifies an informal culture of concern for student welfare which was recognised in the 2010 BAC Inspection Report. A number of testimonials evidence relationships with overseas organisations and authorised representatives. These positive relationships were highlighted by students who chose to come to the Academy because of peer and sibling recommendations, progression from an English programme and information available on the website. Careers fairs, award ceremonies, charity and social events and other community relationships have been developed. Students talked positively about the closeness of the relationships and inclusive environment in which they study.

2.13 The recent awarding organisation and BAC reviews also reported a need for more student representation, the review of staff teaching and learning, and students' access to resources. The Academy has responded through the introduction of a personal tutor system

to help students with both academic and pastoral issues, and an e-learning platform to support students' study. The Academy is also aware of the fact that existing questionnaires focus more on student satisfaction rather than genuinely exploring student perception of their experience and the quality of learning opportunities. It would be advisable for the Academy to ensure there is formal student representation within the revised committee structure.

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

2.14   The Academy requires all new academic staff with less than three years' full-time teaching experience to complete a recognised teaching qualification, with financial support from the Academy. As stated in paragraph 1.5, the Academy ensures that staff knowledge is maintained to meet awarding organisations' requirements. The Academy has recently introduced a new Professional Review Policy and provided staff training on how to develop reflective practice aimed at enhancing standards. Staff qualifications and experience meet and, in a number of cases, exceed that required to teach at the levels of programmes on offer.

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

2.15   Academic business management and strategic planning is the responsibility of the Director of Operations working with the Senior Management Team as part of the academic planning process. The Academy has arranged access for students to the De Montfort University library in order to support student study and research activity. The Academy's virtual learning environment is used to support students' learning and the students reported that this resource provided an enhanced experience to their studies. The Academy's learning resources are sufficient to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

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 Academy produces a Student Welcome Handbook, as described in paragraph 2.9, which includes contact information and relevant web links relating to key external organisations to support their studies and support needs and other requirements. The Staff Handbook incorporates details concerning responsibilities and expectations of staff who are employed by the Academy.

3.2   The Academy has been proactive in investing and developing the electronic resources to present public information to students and external stakeholders. The website has recently been relaunched and can be easily navigated to programme information and is accessible in a number of languages. Students reported that this was the main vehicle for information prior to enrolling in the Academy and during their studies. There is a direct link to the Academy Mission Statement admissions, student information and a section on general

information for students. The Academy reports that enquires have increased considerably since the new website was launched. Students reported that they had looked at many providers through their websites and had chosen the Academy because of the subject choice, information available and the status of the Academy.

3.3   There is appropriate programme and pre-arrival information for students on the Academy website and hyperlinks to the relevant national agencies to support international students studying in the UK. The Academy prospectus is available by request through a direct enquiry form. The Academy has undertaken work to establish the virtual learning environment to support the student learning experience. Students reported positively about the importance of the virtual learning environment for course information, lecture materials, access to group discussion forums and electronic communication with staff and fellow students. Students confirm that teaching staff used the virtual learning environment regularly to support their studies. The effective and integrated use of the website and virtual learning environment to communicate with prospective and current students is good practice.

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

3.4   The Academy's Published Information Policy and Approvals Procedures outlines the scope, principles, context and procedures for public information and is largely aligned with internal information, which is authorised by the Senior Management Team. The Head of Services acts as the gatekeeper for information made available externally through the website. The heads of department have responsibility for checking the accuracy of academic-related information and signing it off before uploading to the virtual learning environment. Generic administrative material is also checked by Senior Management Team before uploading. Internal quality control and regular audits of published information is undertaken by the Academy and these are effective in ensuring the accuracy and completeness of programme information.

3.5   The agreements with the awarding organisations and university partners include guidelines on the Academy's responsibility for the use of the body name, brand or logo. There is also a requirement for formal written consent of the partner university when publishing details of the association between the university and the Academy in its publicity materials. There are clear requirements for advance checking of published materials prior to publication on the Academy website.

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]

Midlands Academy of Business and Technology action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight March 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 proactive approach to working with partner universities (paragraph 2.6)	To consider the wider involvement with our current partnerships and to review how this might be extended to include: • achievement of embedded college status • establishment of new formal progression agreement partnerships with Tier 1 universities • achieving additional accreditation partners	December 2012	Academic Principal and Director of Operations	Consolidated higher education programmes augmented by foundation and English language courses New partnerships established New accredited programmes in operation	Senior Management Team	Updated partnership agreements in place which include: • integrated articulation agreements • data which confirms the extent to which the actions have improved recruitment, progression and learning, measured by the range of progression choices and success rates

[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.

• the effective use of the website and virtual learning environment to communicate with prospective and current students (paragraph 3.3).	Dissemination of identified good practice across all programmes and to further develop course virtual learning environment resources to support learning To use the virtual learning environment in developed programmes, such as the distance learning initiative	December 2012	Director of Operations, course leaders, the virtual learning environment coordinator and IT Manager	Positive student feedback on support and guidance across all higher education programmes and including all programmes below level 4 in the Qualifications and Credit Framework Sharing good practice through staff development events	Senior Management Team	Student survey reviews Staff development records Recorded usage of the virtual learning environment Progress of students Virtual learning environment usage on the distance learning programme
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:						
• review and implement a revised committee structure (paragraph 1.4)	Senior Management Team to agree and provide a more explicit and coherent overview of the organisation's academic infrastructure and personnel	Stage 1 August 2012 Stage 2 December 2012	Senior Management Team	Clear organogram, which is understood by all colleagues in the Academy Organogram detailed in the staff handbook	The directors	The Academy's documentation Minutes from boards and committees Effective application of academic

	This will be undertaken as part of a new structural reorganisation following Tier 4 UK Border Agency discussions and status review			and a short form version on the website		standards
• make full use of key student performance data to inform quality enhancement processes (paragraph 2.2)	Assessments will be reviewed to ensure that learning outcomes, grading criteria and assessments are used to allow tutors and students to understand how grades are determined and how this information is used to inform planning	Staff development to take place from July 2012 onwards Full implementation of revised planning documentation and assignment briefs for the September 2012 and January 2013 semesters	Academic Principal working with programme leaders and staff tutors External guidance and support from Association of Business Practitioners and partner accreditation providers	All staff involved in setting assessments to attend staff development session Marking criteria enhanced to align with learning outcomes	Report to the Senior Management Team as part of the revised organisational structure (see above)	Student survey will be used to monitor student satisfaction with assessment as a result of changes External examiners' views on enhanced mark schemes Feedback from awarding organisations evaluated
• develop a consistent approach to formal assessment practice (paragraph 2.9)	A holistic review of current assessment practice in each area of provision To identify required systems for each area of provision	June 2012 August 2012	Course leaders under direction of Academic Principal and Director of Operations	Common practice of assessment established Clear evidence of data feeding into planning, learning and teaching	The directors and Academic Principal	Assessment policy documentation Lesson planning documentation Improved recruitment and

	To bring together common practice in the production of a revised whole Academy assessment policy	September 2012	Senior Management Team	documentation		retention
				Increased progression statistics and higher retention data		Professional review documentation Standards consistent with best practice
	Staff training day to introduce revised whole Academy policy	September 2012	Senior Management Team	Lower attrition and course non-completion data		
				Staff inset profile on professional review records		
• ensure that there is formal student representation within the revised committee structure (paragraph 2.13).	As in item one above, Senior Management Team to provide a more explicit and coherent overview of the organisation's academic infrastructure and personnel, including the Staff-Student Liaison Committee	August 2012	Senior Management Team and course leaders	Increased student awareness of representation Increased student involvement in influence and direction on matters that have an immediate effect on them	The Academic Principal and Registrar	Minutes of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee, which would include feedback from related committees Minutes of the related committee showing consideration of these minutes

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:						
• review the role of senior staff in the management of academic standards (paragraph 1.3)	Linking in with the organisational review, the Senior Management Team to detail responsibilities of each department, the specific role of each member of the senior team in terms of management of academic standards	December 2012	Senior Management Team and the Academic Principal	Clearly articulated roles and responsibilities of key members of staff	The directors	Confirmed roles and responsibilities documented as part of the organisational review
• review its higher education policies and procedures with reference to external reference points (paragraph 1.6).	In collaboration with our partner universities and our various accreditation partners to triangulate the requirements of each so that they are integral to the Academy working practices in all areas

To identify appropriate external reference points such as those | April 2013 | Director of Operations, Academic Principal and course leaders | Documented external reference points mapped to the Academy's policies and procedures for managing the quality of learning opportunities and that these can be shown to be key drivers of provision | The directors | The Academic Principal to produce a report detailing the mapping of the outcomes in terms of monitoring and attainment

Report to be shared with the relevant external bodies |

	published by QAA and the higher education partners, and map these to the Academy's policies and procedures for managing the quality of learning opportunities					

About QAA

QAA is the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. QAA's mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education.

QAA's aims are to:

- meet students' needs and be valued by them
- safeguard standards in an increasingly diverse UK and international context
- drive improvements in UK higher education
- improve public understanding of higher education standards and quality.

QAA conducts reviews of higher education institutions and publishes reports on the findings. QAA also publishes a range of guidance documents to help safeguard standards and improve quality.

More information about the work of QAA is available at: www.qaa.ac.uk.

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

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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 academy 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.