



Markfield Institute of Higher Education

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

April 2012

Key findings about Markfield Institute of Higher Education

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in April 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 Gloucestershire.

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**:

- classes in academic writing skills (paragraph 1.10)
- regular uploading of material to the virtual learning environment (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:

- ensure that staff understand the Institute's quality assurance framework (paragraph 1.4)
- develop and implement a strategy for the systematic enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment (paragraph 2.5)
- ensure that the published generic assessment criteria are consistent with those included on the feedback cover sheet (paragraph 2.8)
- ensure that the link between assessment criteria and the achievement of specific learning outcomes is consistent and made clear to staff and students (paragraph 2.9)
- develop an integrated framework for staff development (paragraph 2.11).

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

- formalise the mechanism to consider information gathered from its quality assurance procedures and key performance statistics (paragraph 2.2)
- consider ways in which anonymous feedback on the overall student experience at the Institute can be gathered and evaluated (paragraph 2.7)
- improve the speed of return, quality and consistency of feedback on student assignments (paragraph 2.8)
- develop a process for the signing off of all public information to minimise minor inaccuracies (paragraph 3.2)
- evaluate the implications and challenges of developing the virtual learning environment (paragraph 3.3).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)¹ (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at Markfield Institute of Higher Education (the provider; the Institute). 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 Gloucestershire. The review was carried out by Mrs Joanne Coward and Mr John Holloway (reviewers), and Dr Margaret Johnson (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 a range of documentation supplied by the provider and its awarding body, and meetings with staff, an awarding body representative and students.

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

- the Academic Infrastructure
- the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA): Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area
- the regulations of the awarding body.

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

Markfield Institute of Higher Education (the Institute) is a private provider established in 2000 by the Islamic Foundation. There is one campus, with residential accommodation, situated on the outskirts of Leicester. The Institute fulfils a need in the local community to provide British academic higher degrees guided by Islamic ethos, and recruits both international and home students. It is an associate college of the University of Gloucestershire and its degrees are validated and awarded by the University.

The Institute offers a small range of programmes from level 7 to level 8. All provision can be studied full-time or part-time. There are currently 25 part-time students and 105 full-time students of whom seven are undertaking a new MA in Islamic Banking, Finance and Management, in distance learning mode. Higher education programmes are delivered by three full-time and three part-time teaching staff, supported by one information technology administrator, six full-time and one part-time administrators.

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

University of Gloucestershire

- MA Islamic Banking, Finance and Management
- MEd Islamic Education
- Professional Graduate Certificate in Education
- Professional Graduate Diploma in Education
- MA Islamic Studies
- PhD

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

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

The provider's stated responsibilities

The Institute's academic provision is offered under associate arrangements with one awarding body, which is responsible for ensuring that their processes and procedures take into account the Academic Infrastructure. The Institute has responsibility for the setting, moderation and marking of assessments, the production of course documents and support for teaching and learning, while the University provides the academic regulations and is responsible for the assessment procedures. Responsibility for research degrees is shared between the Institute and its awarding body.

Recent developments

The Institute is currently working with its awarding body to offer specialist master's programmes in peace and interfaith studies, international business (Islamic) law and business administration. There are also plans to offer a BA in Islamic Studies in October 2012 and the Institute is currently piloting a distance learning programme for the Master's in Islamic Banking, Finance and Management.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the Institute were invited to present a submission to the review team. A specific student submission was not prepared, but the students provided feedback that was used by the Institute to write the self-evaluation, enabling the identification of strengths and areas for improvement. The students met with the coordinator at the preparatory meeting and the review team during the visit. They made a useful contribution to the meeting, were enthusiastic about their experience at the Institute and, in particular, highlighted the caring environment and the generous support provided to them by staff.

Detailed findings about Markfield Institute of Higher Education

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 A clearly defined management and committee structure enables effective consideration of educational and external matters to ensure the maintenance of academic standards. The Institute adheres to the requirements of the awarding body and to the roles and delegated responsibilities for the management of academic standards. These are appropriately understood and correctly implemented within the Institute.

1.2 There is a clear reporting structure for committees, which, with the exception of the Research Degrees Committee, report directly to the Joint Course Board. The small size of the teaching and administrative teams enables the majority of staff to participate in decision-making processes and to be fully aware of the outcomes of meetings. However, the Institute may need, in the future, to review its management structures, as student numbers increase and further undergraduate and distance learning courses are developed.

1.3 The Joint Course Board makes an important contribution to the management of the provision. It has increased in importance since an administrative reorganisation in 2011 and membership now includes the University Link Tutor, the Director, all course leaders and a student representative. Terms of reference, roles and responsibilities for the Institute's committee structure and senior management are clearly outlined in the Quality Assurance Manual.

1.4 The Institute's areas of responsibilities are interpreted and contextualised by the Institute in documents produced for staff and students and are outlined by the awarding body in the Collaborative Handbook. In some cases, such as the Quality Assurance Manual, content is limited to regulatory governance. It is advisable that the Institute develops operational guides to ensure that staff understand its quality assurance framework.

1.5 There is effective formal reporting to the awarding body, at programme and institutional level, through the annual monitoring process. The Institutional Report distils key issues identified from the programme reports and includes further points generally relevant to partnership and planning. The Link Tutor receives drafts of the programme and the institutional annual monitoring reports to enable comment and immediate response to key points where necessary. Action points are considered at programme and institutional levels, and outcomes are reviewed at the Joint Course Board within the following year's annual monitoring.

1.6 Teaching staff hold qualifications that are appropriate to deliver the programmes of study. Three of the seven faculty staff hold the awarding body's Professional Graduate Certificate in Higher Education and it is a regulatory requirement that all research supervisors complete the awarding body's training programme prior to supervising a PhD student.

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

1.7 The Institute ensures that the Academic Infrastructure is embedded within all programmes and protocols, and that it is understood and used by all teaching staff.

This, together with the requirements of the awarding body, is considered by the Institute essential to the maintenance of academic standards. All new staff undergo an induction process that includes consideration of the Academic Infrastructure.

1.8 The Advisory Council encourages consideration of current religious issues within the development of new course curricula. In addition, the Institute uses external academic consultants within the course development process to assure itself of the range and currency of programme content.

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

1.9 Academic standards are assured, as detailed in paragraphs 1.1 to 1.6. The awarding body and Institute assessment processes are robust and provide assurance that academic standards are maintained. New programme requirements are considered as part of the validation process managed by the University. The programme specifications for each programme undergo formal approval by the validating body to ensure that they are accurate and kept up to date.

1.10 The awarding body and external examiners affirm that the standards achieved by students are appropriate for the level of the awards. External examiners have commented on general improvements in the standard of student work in recent years and this is confirmed by comments in the awarding body's Periodic Course Review and Collaborative Provision Committee minutes. Classes in academic writing skills, initially identified as effective by an external examiner, are now offered for all programmes over one semester and are identified as good practice.

1.11 Staff new to higher education undergo an extensive and rigorous period of mentorship to ensure that they fully understand and apply correct assessment procedures and practices. The Institute works closely with the awarding body to ensure pass marks and degree classification formulae are correctly applied by all staff.

1.12 On taught programmes, the Institute fully engages with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), *Section 4: External examining* and the awarding body's requirements. The Institute submits examination questions for verification and all assessed work is reviewed by the external examiner. External examiners' reports, related to assessment and examinations, are considered at the relevant examination and award boards. The annual external examiners' reports are considered by the Joint Course Board as part of the annual monitoring process, and are subsequently made available to students on the virtual learning environment, together with the response by the programme leader.

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

2 Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1 There are effective systems to manage the quality of learning opportunities, as described in paragraphs 1.1 to 1.6. This is confirmed in the evaluation of the Institute's management of its learning opportunities, undertaken by the University as part of its periodic

review process. The Management Board has overall responsibility, but day-to-day responsibilities are undertaken jointly by the Director and Registrar, and individual programmes are managed by each course leader. The programme boards, Joint Course Board and annual monitoring process reviews any issues concerning the provision of learning opportunities.

2.2 It is desirable for the Institute to introduce a formal mechanism to consider the information gathered from its quality assurance procedures and key performance statistics for the enhancement of learning opportunities. Student module evaluation surveys include questions on the quality of the teaching they receive and staff subject knowledge, but it is not clear how the information is considered and used to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided for students.

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

2.3 The Institute uses effectively the Academic Infrastructure in support of its management and enhancement of learning opportunities. It is supported by the University's Collaborative Provision Handbook and its Framework for Academic Quality Assurance and Standards. The Institute has ensured that the relevant sections of the *Code of practice* have informed its quality assurance systems at a regulatory level.

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

2.4 Students are complimentary about the quality of teaching, accessibility of staff and overall staff engagement in their learning. Programme delivery is fully supported through the recently introduced programme boards. All students receive a module handbook that describes teaching and assessment methods. Teaching accommodates the learning styles required by the varying backgrounds of the students studying the specialist subjects offered.

2.5 The Quality Assurance Manual describes the Institute's regulatory role in maintaining the quality of teaching and learning. However, there is no teaching, learning and assessment strategy and the Institute does not describe clearly how it implements or evaluates the operational procedures of quality assurance, as outlined in paragraph 1.4. This misses an opportunity to gather information that could usefully be used to enhance its teaching and learning. It is recommended as advisable that the Institute develops and implements a strategy that would enable systematic enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment.

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

2.6 Academic support for students in the classroom is well established and well regarded by the students. The student body elects annually a student to represent it on the Joint Course Board, which deals with academic matters across all programmes. Students are also represented on programme boards by either class or year group representatives. In addition, there is a Staff-Student Consultative Committee, which is open to all students and considers other aspects of the student experience.

2.7 Students highly value the caring and supportive ethos of the Institute, which is, in part, a consequence of its size. However, there is no formal mechanism for students to provide anonymous feedback on their overall experience at the Institute. It is desirable that the Institute considers ways in which such feedback could be gathered and evaluated in preparation for future growth in student numbers.

2.8 Written feedback is not always timely, formative or consistent, although one-to-one verbal feedback is valued by students. It is desirable for the Institute to improve the speed of return, quality and consistency of written feedback to students on their assignments. The Institute would benefit from closer liaison with the University to clarify the protocols surrounding the provision of unconfirmed results feedback. The feedback process would be improved with greater consistency between the published assessment and marking criteria on the virtual learning environment and those used on assignment cover sheets. This would enable students to better gauge their performance and achievement. It is recommended as advisable that the Institute ensures that the published generic assessment criteria are consistent with those included on the feedback cover sheet.

2.9 In addition, the generic assessment criteria guidelines, circulated by the Institute, are too general to be helpful to students and staff new to higher education assessment. The guidelines do not always map the criteria against the intended learning outcomes. It is recommended as advisable that the link between assessment criteria and the achievement of intended learning outcomes is consistent and made clear to students and staff.

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

2.10 The Institute has a good, well developed policy for annual academic and administrative appraisal, which is carried out by the Director. Academic staff development, scholarship and research needs are clearly identified through the annual appraisal system. In addition, academic staff undergo a formal system of peer review at least once every three years.

2.11 The Institute provided good examples of the way inexperienced staff are mentored and supported through their first year and longer if required. Both academic and administrative staff can access staff development, and academic staff are able to partake in the research offered by the University. However, it is recommended as advisable that the Institute develops an integrated framework for staff development that links teaching practice, peer review and staff appraisal. Staff development records demonstrate that staff maintain their vocational currency, but the records need to be monitored to ensure sufficient activities are directed towards improving planned enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

2.12 The Institute recognises the value, to individuals and to the organisation, of membership of professional bodies and associations. It supports, financially, membership of relevant professional organisations, and facilitates attendance at conferences, where this is perceived to be of importance.

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

2.13 There are effective processes to ensure that learning resources are sufficient and accessible, and students expressed satisfaction with the resources available to them. Student and Learning Charters have been recently introduced to monitor student access to learning resources and academic staff ensure that key resources, at module level, are available in the Institute's library for students before each module delivery. There is an increasing use of the virtual learning environment for lecture notes, reading lists and assessment by staff and students who have received training on its use. Any concerns about the availability of learning resources can be raised through programme boards and the annual monitoring process.

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 Institute communicates effectively an appropriate range of materials to students through student handbooks, the prospectus and the website. There is also guest access to some aspects of the virtual learning environment, including indicative timetables and module outlines that enable applicants to make informed choices about their study. The website includes a useful Arabic translation of the prospectus, aimed at the non-English speaking parents of potential students to inform them of the programmes offered. As described in paragraph 1.12, external examiners' reports, and the course leaders' responses to them, are also available on the virtual learning environment. Printed marketing materials are submitted for formal review as part of annual monitoring.

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

3.2 The team identified a number of minor errors within the prospectus and the virtual learning environment. However, these are not sufficient to mislead students as to the content of the programmes on offer, the Institute itself or the validating body. It is desirable that the Institute develops a process for the signing-off of all public information to minimise minor inaccuracies. The revised mechanism should ensure a separation of responsibilities for the authorship and approval of public information.

3.3 Useful academic materials are uploaded to the recently installed virtual learning environment for applicants and students. At its most effective, such as modules within the MA Islamic Banking, Finance and Management, the material is uploaded weekly, enabling students to prepare for teaching sessions, as well as reviewing the content of previous sessions, and this is recognised as good practice. Staff have been trained in the use of the virtual learning environment and ongoing support is available to them. The Institute has no formal systems for regulating the use of the virtual learning environment by staff, nor for identifying outdated material, although the inclusion of new academic material is a standard agenda item within committees. It is recommended as desirable that the Institute's management team evaluates the implications and challenges of developing its virtual learning environment.

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

Action plan³

Markfield Institute of Higher Education action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight April 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"> classes in academic writing skills (paragraph 1.10) 	Continue to offer classes in academic writing skills	Ongoing	Course leaders, tutors	Enhancement of student learning	Programme Board, Joint Course Board	Student feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> regular uploading of material to the virtual learning environment (paragraph 3.3). 	Staff to keep the virtual learning environment updated	Ongoing	Academic and administration staff	Availability of updated information on electronic platforms	Management Board	Minutes of the Management Board
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 staff understand the Institute's quality assurance framework (paragraph 1.4) 	Briefing session and workshops for staff	3 December 2012	Registrar	Individual members of staff understand the quality assurance framework	Management Board	Evaluation at the end of each briefing and workshop session
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop and implement a strategy 	Develop clear policy and procedures for	2 August 2012	Director	All aspects of learning and the	Management Board	Director's Annual Report

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.

for the systematic enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment (paragraph 2.5)	enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment and allocation of resources			student experience demonstrate positive evaluation Appropriate use of resources		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that the published generic assessment criteria are consistent with those included on the feedback cover sheet (paragraph 2.8) 	<p>Revision of feedback cover sheet</p> <p>Liaison with the University to improve the process of student feedback</p>	17 August 2012	Course leaders, tutors	Appropriate and timely written feedback is provided for students	Joint Course Board	Minutes of the Joint Course Board, minutes of student staff consultative meeting, student evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that the link between assessment criteria and the achievement of specific learning outcomes is consistent and made clear to staff and students (paragraph 2.9) 	Revision of module handbooks, module descriptors	20 December 2012	Course leaders, tutors	<p>Module handbooks make clear the link between assessment criteria and the achievement of specific learning outcomes</p> <p>Consistency in marking and assessment</p>	Joint Course Board, Examinations' Board	Minutes of the Joint Course Board, Examinations' Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop an integrated framework for staff development (paragraph 2.11). 	Encourage staff participation in staff development activities and allocate resources for staff development needs	23 October 2012	Director	<p>Academic staff gain teaching qualifications</p> <p>Effective academic</p>	Management Board	Minutes of the Management Board, Director's Annual Report

	that are identified through staff appraisals and peer review			mentoring Academic staff apply for fellowship of the Higher Education Academy		
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"> formalise the mechanism to consider information gathered from its quality assurance procedures and key performance statistics (paragraph 2.2) 	<p>Module feedback to be discussed at programme boards</p> <p>Statistical data to be included in the course leaders' response in the annual monitoring process</p>	5 November 2012	Course leaders	<p>Use of module feedback for enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities</p> <p>Statistical data considered formally at the Joint Course Board</p>	Joint Course Board, Student Staff Consultative Committee	<p>Module feedback analysis</p> <p>Analysis and discussion of statistical data</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider ways in which anonymous feedback on the overall student experience at the Institute can be gathered and evaluated (paragraph 2.7) 	<p>Administrative staff to ensure the anonymity of student feedback</p> <p>Explore the opportunity to develop online student feedback</p>	17 January 2013	Registrar and Information Technology Administrator	Student satisfaction about feedback	Course leaders, Student Staff Consultative Committee	Peer review, minutes of Student Staff Consultative Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve the speed of return, quality and 	Course leaders to set and adhere to	25 August	Course leaders, tutors	Feedback to be provided as soon	Course leaders, Management	Minutes of the Management

consistency of feedback on student assignments (paragraph 2.8)	deadlines for student feedback Tutors to collate a structured list of feedback remarks related to learning outcomes and assessment criteria	2012		as possible after the Examinations' Board Feedback to be directly related to learning outcomes and assessment criteria	Board	Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop a process for the signing-off of all public information to minimise minor inaccuracies (paragraph 3.2) 	Adopt a policy for the signing-off of public information, marketing and promotional material	29 November 2012	Director, course leaders, Information Technology Administrator	Relevant full and accurate public information	Management Board	Minutes of the Management Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> evaluate the implications and challenges of developing the virtual learning environment (paragraph 3.3). 	Adopt a strategy to develop and support the consistent use of the virtual learning environment	17 December 2012	Director, Information Technology Administrator	Increased use of the virtual learning environment by all academic programme teams and the inclusion of all key documentation for students	Joint Course Board, Student Staff Consultative Committee	Minutes of the Joint Course Board, minutes of the Student Staff Consultative Committee

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: Handbook⁴](#)

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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