Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education

December 2020

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education. The review took place from 8 to 9 December 2020 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Christopher Mabika
- Dr David Wright.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provision and to make judgements as to whether or not academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations (and the associated Core and Common Practices) are the statements in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)[1] setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A check is also made on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) with the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA[2] and explains the method for Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).[3] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

The impact of COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the review was conducted online and included meetings with senior management teams, teaching and administrative staff and students. The scope of the evidence considered, and the nature of the judgements and operational milestones have remained the same but with some adjustments due to the online format. A risk assessment was carried out prior to the review to identify and mitigate any potential risks.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.
[2] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk.
[3] Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers):
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/higher-education-review

Key findings

Judgements

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following feature of **good practice**.

- The comprehensive and timely response to the COVID-19 pandemic, through the introduction of revised approaches to student support, teaching, learning and assessment, that enabled programmes and student engagement to continue with minimal disruption (Core practice Q4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations**.

By May 2021:

- ensure the information in the Summative Assessment Policy and the Student Handbook accurately reflects the assessment practice across the full range of the College's programmes (Core practices S4 and S2)
- ensure that the College's quality assurance procedures are up to date and accurately reflect the operation of the internal monitoring systems (Common practice Q1)
- build upon the existing periodic review process to ensure that it is implemented in a planned and systematic manner (Common practice Q1).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team made no **affirmations** of actions already being taken.

Financial sustainability, management and governance

The financial sustainability, management and governance check has been satisfactorily completed.

About the provider

Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education (the College) is a small, specialist independent college, established in Dundee in 2001 primarily funded by the Al-Maktoum Foundation. It delivers programmes that fall into three categories: Higher National qualifications (HNC/Ds), Arabic language programmes and diplomas with an Islamic specialism. The Higher National qualifications are developed by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). The remaining programmes are customised awards that have been developed by the College and accredited by SQA.

Programmes are aligned with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and qualifications are awarded by SQA. The College also has an agreement with the University of Dundee (the University) through which it contributes to the delivery of three MSc programmes in Islamic finance. The University is responsible for the academic standards and quality of student learning opportunities on these programmes.

The College recruits both local and international students and at the time of the review, 67 students were enrolled on the College's programmes, nine of whom are on the MSc Islamic Finance offered in partnership with the University, nine are enrolled on an SCQF Level 5 Introductory Certificate in Arabic Language, with a further eight on SCQF Level 6. The remaining 41 students are enrolled on the HNC/D programmes, which have been offered since September 2019, and the Diploma in Moral Economy & Sustainable Development, Executive Diploma in Islamic Finance & Entrepreneurship, and Professional Diploma in Islamic Banking & Finance that began in September 2020. Students on the HNC/D programmes are able to progress into second and third years of relevant university degrees through an articulation agreement with Abertay University.

The College's priorities include increasing student and staff numbers, introducing more programmes and creating new relationships. However, activities during academic years 2019-20 and 2020-21 were markedly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, the College switched to online teaching and assessments on all its programmes from March 2020. There are plans to adopt blended learning for future delivery of programmes.

At its first QAA Higher Education Review (HER) (AP) in May 2016, the College received a judgement of 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' in the quality of student learning opportunities and the enhancement of student learning opportunities. A Partial HER (AP) review in January 2018 noted that the College had made structural changes, introduced new monitoring and review processes, and revised a range of policies, including the terms of reference of the Academic Council to include the responsibility for the review and enhancement of the quality and standards of learning opportunities. Enhancement of the student experience was noted to be embedded in strategic documents.

Further issues identified in the monitoring visit reports of January 2019 and March 2020 have been addressed. Both reports found that the evidence cited in action plans did not always fully support the conclusions made. The College has appointed an Academic Registrar to ensure that action plans and minutes of committees capture the actions to be carried out, assign responsibilities for their implementation with clear completion dates, and highlight when actions are completed and when they are signed off. In March 2020 it was also noted that procedures for the internal consideration of external verifiers' reports were unclear. The terms of reference of relevant committees have been revised to include the review and implementation of recommendations in verification reports.

Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations

Core practice (S1): The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.

Findings

1.1 The College is approved to deliver programmes accredited by SQA, which also awards the qualifications. These include the customised awards designed by the College, such as diplomas and postgraduate diplomas and a certificate in Arabic language, Diploma in Moral Economy & Sustainable Development, Executive Diploma in Islamic Finance & Entrepreneurship, and Professional Diploma in Islamic Banking & Finance. The two HNC/D awards in Business and in Management and Leadership are developed by SQA itself. The other programme is the MSc Islamic Finance falling under a collaborative agreement with the University. Under this agreement both parties are involved in programme design. The design and approval process follows the SCQF standards and the University's framework for Quality and Academic Standards. The University is responsible for the oversight of the standards of these programmes.

1.2 To become an approved and accredited centre, the College was required to demonstrate that it met the SQA Accreditation Regulatory Principles set out in *Developing Qualifications for Accreditation: A Guide for Awarding Bodies, 2018,* and underwent the SQA's Qualification and Systems Approval Process. SQA Accreditation Regulatory Principles require centres to map the qualifications they design, to align with SCQF standards. SQA ensures that threshold standards of these awards meet the requirements of the SCQF framework. Once the programmes have been approved, the College is required to seek further approval for any changes, down to the unit level, to ensure that the standards of the programmes continue to meet the SCQF standards. To provide assurance that the College maintains the minimum standards of the qualifications it awards, SQA carries out Systems and Qualification Verification Processes involving regular visits to the College and issuing reports of its findings.

1.3 Strategic documents, namely the five-year Strategic Plan (2017-22) and the Teaching and Learning Strategy, regard the maintenance of the College's accreditation and approval by SQA as one of its key targets**.** To achieve this target and ensure that the standards of its programmes continue to conform to SQA regulations, the College states that it adopts the SCQF standards and seeks advice from SQA on the design, delivery and review of its programmes, and follows sector guidance and SQA updates regarding qualification classifications and algorithms. The College has put in place processes for the proposal and approval of programmes, and structures, comprising committees, to manage the processes. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) develops and monitors these processes. Initial proposals and changes to programmes are presented and discussed in meetings of Boards of Studies. The Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Committee (TeLSEC) considers initial proposals, while the Academic Council approves programmes and changes to the programmes, including their cessation. The approval by Academic Council requires that the proposal regarding the maintenance of

threshold academic standards aligns with relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and meets threshold standards. There is also an internal SQA Coordinator responsible for sending requests for approval of final programme documents to SQA, obtaining clarification from SQA regarding standards and who is present during SQA verification visits. This is a requirement from SQA.

1.4   The arrangements relating to threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks, which allow this Core practice to be met and are implemented effectively. The review team established this through meetings with representatives from SQA and the University, senior members of staff and chairs of the committees, as well as teaching staff and students. The team considered available Qualification Approval, and Qualification and Systems Verification reports from SQA. The team scrutinised how the programme approval process was applied in practice, and the deliberations that took place when changes were proposed and made to programmes, as well as action plans developed to track any actions agreed.

1.5   When the student numbers on the Islamic Studies programme were observed to be falling in 2018, members of Boards of Studies presented the results of a statistical analysis confirming this trend to TeLSEC and AQSC for consideration. TeLSEC concluded that to attract more students, it was necessary to change the structure and content of the programme. The proposal progressed through the committee hierarchy according to the programme proposal and approval processes for the termination of the Islamic Studies programme and its reintroduction as the Diploma in Islamic Studies and Arabic Language and Professional Diploma in Muslim Chaplaincy. At the time of the review, the proposed programmes were awaiting internal approval by the Academic Council before sending them to SQA for credit rating and final approval, confirming that SQA approval is a key stage in the College's programme development process.

1.6   The minutes of meetings and action plans which the team reviewed, involving the approval of programmes and changes to programmes, further confirm that, within the College's processes, SQA approval is a final and key stage before such programmes can be delivered. Examples of reviews to programmes considered by the committees and/or await approval from SQA include changes to the Professional Diploma Programme, the Arabic Programme and the Arabic as a Foreign Language (SCQF Level 8), Advanced Diploma in Islamic Studies (SCQF Level 10) and the Professional Diploma in Islamic Economics & Finance (SCQF Level 11). SQA Qualification Approval reports for the Business Economics and Certificate in Arabic Language in which standards were stated as met in all areas, support SQA's assertion that this should be the case before programmes can be approved for delivery.

1.7   All the SQA Qualification Verification reports expressed 'High Confidence' that the College maintains SQA standards in designing and delivering its programmes, and Systems Verification reports mostly expressed 'High Confidence in the systems that support the maintenance of SQA standards'.

1.8   Teaching staff understood the programme approval process and demonstrated an understanding of the SQCF framework and how level descriptors are used in the design of programmes and how credits are applied in the awards. Students are informed about the alignment of the programmes to SQCF standards and where SQA qualifications fit within this framework, through the Student Handbook. Students and alumni also demonstrated an understanding of the credit rating and levels of the awards they receive on completion.

1.9   As all SQA-awarded programmes that the College currently delivers are approved or await approval by SQA, and staff and students understand that the standards of the programmes are aligned to the national frameworks, the team concludes that the College

ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks, and this Core practice is therefore met. This requirement is presented in the strategic documents and embedded in College processes and procedures for programme design, which the committees and responsible staff consistently apply. The team established that the University is responsible for the oversight of setting and maintaining academic standards for the programmes that fall under the collaborative agreement with the College. The team therefore considers the risk to be low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (S2): The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.

Findings

1.10   SQA sets the standards of the qualifications the College delivers under the accreditation and validations agreements. During the application for the approval of programmes, the College submits a description for each unit. The College is required to justify how its proposed programmes align with SQA standards. The College confirmed that it uses SQA guidance as a benchmark of the standards. Thereafter, SQA tracks all changes, which should be approved before they can be made. SQA also uses the Qualification and Systems Verification visits to check that the College continues to appropriately manage its systems and resources for student support and that assessment processes are applied to confirm student achievement is in line with national standards. The University has oversight of the standards of the programmes under the partnership agreement, as well as the necessary arrangements for students to achieve these standards.

1.11   The College states that it recognises its ethical and moral duty to ensure that all students admitted onto its programmes have the capability of completing the course. The Teaching and Learning Strategy expresses the College's commitment to making a wide range of programmes available for students to select the most appropriate for them, and arrangements enabling the support for student achievement. Both the College's Strategic Plan and the Teaching and Learning Strategy include as a target the recruitment and retention of talented staff to support the students.

1.12   To facilitate the College's commitment to student support to enable them to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers, the College has put the following policies in place: the Summative Assessment Policy details assessment and internal verification processes; the Internal Verification Policy explains how assessment decisions are verified to confirm that the standards of the awards are met; the Assessment Code of Practice, Verification and Monitoring outlines expectations of assessors and internal verifiers, including job roles, qualifications and skills they are required to possess; and the Summative Assessment Policy clarifies the roles of committees and staff, including the SQA Coordinator, in assessing students. The Student Handbook contains information for students, including general grading criteria on assessments and the support available, stating that academic support would normally be provided by the tutors, Unit Coordinators, or Programme Coordinators. Students with disabilities or those who require additional support are signposted to the Equality and Diversity Policy and Special Assessment Arrangements documents which are available on the College's website. Students provide feedback on the support they receive through the Student Unit Evaluation Forms.

1.13   The arrangements in place would allow the Core practice to be met. The team scrutinised documents, including qualification approval and Qualification and Systems Verification reports from SQA. The team considered minutes of meetings of the committees: Boards of Study, TeLSEC, Academic Council and Examination Boards as well as Unit Coordinator and Programme Coordinator reports. Course and assessment verification and feedback documentation was also scrutinised. The team conducted meetings with representatives from SQA and the University, senior College staff, academic staff and students. The team also considered student feedback.

1.14   The College offers a wide range of programmes, which are aligned to national standards that span Levels 8 to 11 of the SCQF, confirming the College's commitment to a

wide provision to enable the students to enrol on programmes that meet their future needs. All committee meetings discussed issues relating to standards. Boards of Studies regularly comment on the alignment of standards of the programmes they represent with SQA, and the views of the students on the standards, the support they receive and the assessments. Comments and proposals in these reports progress through the committee hierarchy where these reports are discussed. The Examination Board approves all final grades. Unit Coordinators' reports also comment on student achievement, while Programme Coordinator reports include data on student retention and achievement. These reports also cover the views of the students regarding teaching and assessment. Action plans are agreed, and actions monitored and tracked. The College enquires with SQA regarding approaches to teaching and assessment, where necessary.

1.15 Both Qualification Verification reports the review team saw expressed 'High Confidence' that the College maintained SQA standards. In one of these reports, students expressed satisfaction with their course and confirmed the range of assessments as well as the support available. Similar views are consistently reported in Unit and Programme Coordinator reports. They are also shown on the Unit Evaluation Survey forms, which the students confirmed they regularly complete to give feedback on their courses, including teaching on the course and assessments. Students also confirmed these views in the meeting with the team. Both Systems Verification reports also expressed high or reasonable confidence in the systems that support the maintenance of SQA standards. All SQA reports agreed that assessment procedures and the arrangements for the assessment of students were well documented, and that the College employed highly qualified staff to support its students.

1.16 Minutes of meetings of committees also show regular discussions on the scheduling of teaching, both to ensure the best support for the students and in response to student feedback. Both students and teaching staff confirmed that classes were quickly transferred to online, and blended learning was introduced during the lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff introduced various online resources and activities to keep students engaged. Further detail is provided under Core practice Q4, paragraph 2.33 where this is identified as a feature of good practice. Teaching staff demonstrated an understanding of the SQA standards and the SQCF level descriptors, and how they interpret these into teaching and assessments activities. Staff also stated that to support students, though they cannot change the programmes with respect to the learning outcomes and the structure of assessment, they can diversify content in line with the learning outcomes and resources such as reference texts or style of delivery.

1.17 Unit outlines the team reviewed showed clearly what the students needed to do to perform at the threshold level or higher for each assessment task. In addition to the standard assessments, course outlines provide student activities, tasks and additional reading listed under Additional Learning Opportunities and supported by lectures either in person or online, group discussions and online forums, for students who would like to deepen their understanding and to raise their grades. Students were clear regarding what they needed to do to achieve higher grades. Students confirmed that they receive a variety of resources, including mock tests which prepare them for the assignments and how they are laid out and for the use of time limits. They also stated that they are given an option to submit drafts on their assessments and receive feedback before the final submission. Students and alumni also stated that they receive timely and constructive feedback on their assessments, which allows them to reflect on what they did well and what areas to improve. These comments are confirmed on the student feedback forms, which contain details on what each student did well and what they could have done to achieve better grades. However, Unit outlines relating to the Diploma in Moral Economy & Sustainable Development state that the pass mark for these units is 50%, yet the Summative Assessment Policy and the Student Handbook provide a general pass mark of 45%. Senior staff at the College confirmed that changes

were made to the programme, including the pass mark to 50%. This was not updated in the Summative Assessment Policy and the Student Handbook which contain general information for all students. A recommendation relating to this is made under Core practice S4, see paragraph 1.33.

1.18   The College consistently aligns its threshold standards to that of the SQA. Students receive opportunities to enrol on a wide range of programmes and receive support from staff through engaging activities and challenging assessments, to achieve these standards. This Core practice is therefore considered to be met. Although there are differences between the pass marks required for programmes and the marks outlined in general documents, students on different programmes are aware of their pass marks. The integrity of assessment processes is unaffected, and the risk is therefore deemed to be low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (S3): Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.

Findings

1.19 The College works with SQA and the University of Dundee, which are the awarding partners for the qualifications offered under its higher education provision. The College has formal agreements in place with each partner that outline their respective responsibilities. Each is responsible for setting and maintaining academic standards of its awards and has put in place processes to regularly monitor and review the College provision to ensure that standards continue to be secure; for example, SQA conducts Qualification and Systems Verification checks and the University sets and monitors the standards under the University quality framework.

1.20 SQA is the College's main awarding partner, with accreditation and validations agreements which define the relationship between the two. SQA requires the College to demonstrate that it meets the SQA Accreditation Regulatory Principles and uses the Qualification and Systems Approval Process to confirm that the standards of the qualifications the College delivers are mapped to align with SCQF standards. The SQA Qualification and Systems Verification checks mentioned above involve regular visits to the College and the issue of reports of findings, which include recommendations of actions to be taken if concerns are identified.

1.21 Programmes offered under the collaborative agreement with the University are delivered by both the University and College's staff. Teaching takes place at the University, with the University having responsibility for monitoring and review, setting and maintaining academic standards in accordance with its quality framework. The University is also responsible for the appointment of external examiners, and has oversight of the standards of the programmes under the joint agreement, as well as the necessary arrangements for students to achieve these standards. This ensures that academic standards are consistent with the SCQF and the achievement by students is at or beyond the threshold level.

1.22 The processes and procedures in place would allow the Core practice to be met. The team considered SQA Qualification Approval, and Qualification and Systems Verification reports. The team also conducted meetings with representatives from SQA and the University, and senior College staff.

1.23 Using the SQA Qualification Approval report for the Business Economics as an example, which stated standards were met in all areas, the team was able to establish that SQA is the body responsible for ensuring threshold standards of awards meet the requirements of the SCQF framework. Furthermore, all the SQA Qualification Verification reports the team saw expressed 'High Confidence' in the College maintaining SQA standards in designing and delivering its programmes. Systems Verification reports also expressed 'High' or 'Reasonable' confidence in the systems that support the maintenance of SQA standards.

1.24   The awarding bodies the College is in partnership with have appropriate measures in place to ensure that the academic standards of its awards are credible and secure. Formal agreements are in place that identify responsibilities for each party and there are arrangements in place that effectively monitor and evaluate the College's provision. Therefore, the Core practice is met, with the associate level of risk low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (S4): The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.

Findings

1.25   The grading criteria and assessment regulations that apply to the College's Higher National programmes are set by SQA. For the College's customised awards, the College is responsible for the assessment of students and SQA determines the level of the awards. The assessments are set and approved at the time of programme validation. At the approval stage (the Qualification and Systems Approval process), SQA checks that the College has adequate delivery, assessment and internal verification processes (Systems Approval) in place for any SQA qualifications it wishes to deliver, and that for each of these qualifications, there are adequate resources to support and assess students to achieve the SQA standards (Qualification Approval). The College is required to complete a template justifying how proposed programmes align with this standard. SQA applies external verification processes using its own staff, namely the Qualification and Systems Verification, to check that the College continues to assess its students in line with national standards, manage its systems and resources for student support and that the College correctly applies assessment instruments that are valid and reliable, and in line with specifications. Qualification Verification reports provide detailed, external comments on assessment.

1.26   When the College applied for the approval of the Moral Economy & Sustainable Development programme, it stated that students achieve intended learning outcomes through the alignment of teaching and learning activities with the assessment activities. It stated that it applies a variety of assessment strategies to enhance students' academic and vocational skills, and the assessments are designed to challenge the students to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes, and to measure such achievement.

1.27   The College's Assessment regulations are defined in the Summative Assessment Policy which is also available on the College's public website. Information for students is provided through the Student Handbook. The Summative Assessment Policy outlines responsibilities of staff in assessments, submission conditions for student work, including special arrangements for students with disabilities, how extensions are granted and procedures for late submissions. The Special Assessment Arrangement Procedure, available on the website, gives further guidance on how students can request additional support. The Summative Assessment Policy also provides guidelines on grading and how and when students should receive feedback. The Student Handbook explains how students should avoid plagiarism and that student work should be submitted through plagiarism-checking software. More detailed staff roles are provided in the Assessment Code of Practice, Verification and Monitoring. The Assessment Code of Practice, Verification and Monitoring states that assessments should be aligned to learning outcomes, holistic, purposeful and timely, and the Internal Verification policy ensures that students have been given equal access to assessment, are graded fairly and that assessment processes are consistent and standard. The College has a Malpractice Policy and Procedures. The Examination Board approves and confirms outcomes and grades of assessments and finalises programme awards. The Examination Board also has a mandate to recommend changes to assessment processes, including the grading scales. Boards of Studies, established in 2019, were assigned the task of reviewing policies and procedures. The Colleges states that it uses external input, including external expertise, examiners, and subject experts, and that all its programmes undergo the SQA verification processes.

1.28   The arrangements in place allow the Core practice to be met in theory, and to test that it is met in practice, the review team scrutinised course documents, feedback on assessed student work, external verification reports and minutes of meetings. The team also

met the representative from SQA, the College External Advisor and senior staff, teaching staff and students.

1.29   Teaching staff stated that they diversify assessment tasks according to level and learning outcomes. This is confirmed in unit outlines, which indicate that each assessment task explains what the students are required to do to achieve the related learning outcome or better. Staff the team spoke to were clear about the internal verification process and were aware of the internal verification plan for the current academic year. They also stated that they conducted verification on assessment tasks to ensure that they were valid, fair and reliable, and also on the marked work. Internal verification reports on assessed student work show that assessors and internal verifiers generally agree regarding assessment outcomes. Assessor and internal verifier comments are generally confirmed in the external verification reports. There is evidence that student grades are considered at Examination Boards before certification requests are made. Students confirmed that the arrangement for them to receive feedback on their work before the final submission is made, and serves as helpful formative assessment for them to learn more and achieve higher grades. Students are aware that they should submit their work online, through the plagiarism-detection software.

1.30   The Recognition of Prior Learning Policy is an example of changes to the assessment processes and policies as a result of external input. Senior staff stated that during the preparation of the policy, the College enquired from different sources, including QAA guidelines for prior learning and QAA benchmarks, the policy at the University and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages which contains benchmarks for languages. The original internal verification process was based on double marking but had to change because SQA applies internal and external verification processes instead of double marking or moderation and external examination processes. One of the Programme Coordinator Reports stated that an SQA-verification report had identified the assessment load for students on the Advanced Diploma in Arabic Language programme as being too high, and, in response, students were required to sit two mid-term tests rather than three quizzes, and the speaking and written examinations were to be sat on different days.

1.31   The College has an External Advisor who had an input into the introduction of the HNC/D programmes and is now involved in the identification of new programme opportunities and the introduction and resourcing of the blended learning model. During the development of the new Professional Diploma in Muslim Chaplaincy and the Diploma in Islamic Studies and Arabic Language programmes, the College consulted an external subject expert who provided input to some aspects of the programme. External verifier reports confirm that the College addresses any issues raised, for example, a Qualification Verification report confirmed that the recommendation for the College to develop a disclaimer document to be included with online assessment submissions made online through the plagiarism-checking software had been actioned. It is also clear that SQA Verifier reports are being considered at the appropriate committees. Systems Verification reports for visits in 2018 and 2019, for example, required the College to investigate and act upon suspected malpractice by both staff and students and the report for 2019 also required the College to include in the Malpractice Policy the definition of malpractice as stated by SQA. Although there is no confirmation from SQA that this has been implemented and approved, the College has a revised Malpractice Policy and Procedure which indicates that it was approved by SQA in February 2019 and describes suspected malpractice by both staff and students, the investigation procedures and the actions to be taken. Further to these changes, the College states that the policy was revised in March 2020 after a review by TeLSEC.

1.32   The current Summative Assessment Policy and the Student Handbook are not applicable to the full range of programmes the College offers. The review team noted that there are differences in the pass marks within these documents and those in the unit outlines

relating to the Level 11 awards. The Summative Assessment Policy and the Student Handbook were recently updated but did not take into account the new programmes having different pass marks, as discussed above under Core practice S2. The assessment regulations that apply to the Higher National programmes and to the Advanced Diploma in Islamic Studies are also not described in either the Summative Assessment Policy or the Student Handbook. The Student Handbook also indicates how a student's overall grade is calculated. However, the procedure used for mathematical rounding of numbers, which could influence the final grade a student is awarded, is described incorrectly. Although the staff and students the review team met were fully aware of the correct regulations that applied to their specific programmes, the team concluded that the College's documentation was incomplete and, in some respects, inaccurate, and therefore **recommends** the College ensures the information in the Summative Assessment Policy and the Student Handbook accurately reflects the assessment practice across the full range of the College's programmes.

1.33   The College has systems and procedures that ensure that external expertise and assessments processes are reliable, fair and transparent. The classification systems are set and confirmed by the awarding organisation. Despite the inaccurate information in some documents, the rest of the systems remain secure; the review team concludes that this Core practice is therefore met. The security of these arrangements is monitored and confirmed regularly by the awarding organisation; the risk is therefore low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Common practice (1): The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

Findings

1.34   The College states that it has formal systems in place for monitoring and evaluation, giving verification processes by SQA as one of the examples. The College has processes for collecting student views; for example, there is a formal Academic Evaluation Policy which describes the process of distributing unit evaluation forms to students and collecting feedback from them. Once these forms are completed by the students, Unit Coordinators compile reports of the outcomes, which they submit for discussion at TeLSEC meetings, and to AQSC to ensure alignment of policies with the Quality Code and validating partners' requirements. The College also has Peer Review and Programme Review guidelines, in which staff review each other's teaching and resources and, during such reviews, may go over unit details to identify enhancement opportunities. The College conducted a major review of its policies in 2019-20 which was completed in July 2020. Senior staff stated that this review started following a review from SQA when the External Verifier recommended the review of the Malpractice Policy. Senior staff also stated that the College realises that it needs to review its policies regularly to keep abreast of changes in legislation and in the education sector.

1.35   As the College does not set standards of the programmes, it can only review Core practices in order to maintain the standards set by SQA. These arrangements would therefore allow the Common practice for Standards to be met. The review team considered College Policies, Unit and Programme Coordinator reports and minutes of TeLSEC, AQSC and Academic Council meetings where these reports and actions with enhancement topics are itemised for discussion, as well as programme review documentation. The team also met senior and academic staff, students and support staff.

1.36   When the June 2020 review of policies was conducted, the College produced a review schedule for future reviews. Each policy now shows when it was reviewed and the next review date. The Academic Registrar monitors these due dates.

1.37   Unit and Programme Coordinators comment on student feedback, make recommendations for reviews to the programme and identify possible enhancement opportunities which are discussed within the committees. Programme review documents confirm that the outcomes of these discussions are integrated into the programme reviews, although it is not clear these influence changes in policy for enhancement purposes. There are also active plans to involve alumni in various activities, including participation in programme reviews and the review of core practices.

1.38   The team concludes that this Common practice is met as the College has started regular reviews of policies and has arrangements for constantly looking at ways to enhance Core practices. As these policies now have review dates, and there is a member of staff to monitor these dates, the risk is considered low.

Common practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.39   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.40   The standards of the programmes the College delivers are set and monitored by SQA. All changes the College intends to make must be approved by the awarding organisation. There is evidence of regular reviews of the provision, both to consider the support of students to meet or exceed the threshold standards, and of the assessment processes that confirm the attainment of such standards. The College works effectively with external expertise and uses assessment processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.

1.41   The team established that all four of the Core practices and the Common practice for this judgement area are met and the associated level of risk is low in all areas.

1.42   There are no features of good practice or affirmations in this area. However, one recommendation is made under Core practice S4 for the College to ensure the information in the Summative Assessment Policy and the Student Handbook accurately reflects the assessment practice across the full range of the College's programmes.

1.43   The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the awarding organisation at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

Core practice (Q1): The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.

Findings

2.1 The College's recruitment and admissions procedures are described in the Student Recruitment and Admissions Policy. The policy notes the College's commitment to equality and diversity and to operating a fair and efficient admissions service. AQSC is responsible for developing and reviewing policies relating to the admission of students, for approval by Academic Council. The College is responsible for admissions to all its programmes. The University of Dundee is responsible for admissions to its MSc programmes in Islamic finance.

2.2 Information for applicants is provided via the College's public website. For each programme this includes entry requirements, level and number of credits, module information and career opportunities. Specific guidance and information are provided for those students requiring a Tier 4 visa to study in the UK. The website also includes information about fees and funding, College facilities and student support services. Responsibilities for ensuring the accuracy of information on the website are defined in the College's Public Information Policy.

2.3 Applications are made directly to the College. Applicants are able to disclose if they have a disability or any additional support needs and declare any criminal convictions. Any applicant who wishes to make a complaint or appeal an admissions decision can do so via the Complaints and Appeals Procedure for Applicants, which is directly accessed from the application section of the College website.

2.4 This approach would allow the Core practice to be met. The team tested this approach by reviewing information in the self-evaluation document and on the College website. Relevant policies and the terms of reference and minutes of committees with responsibility for admissions were examined. Admissions processes were discussed with students, academic and administrative staff. The team also reviewed the College's processes, including the checks and documentation used at each stage, to verify qualifications, inform admission decisions and communicate with applicants.

2.5 The students whom the review team met reported that the information on the website enabled them to make informed decisions about their programme and the College as a place to study. All information relating to programmes and entry requirements on the website is channelled through the Student Administration Unit and checked by the Academic Registrar before being signed off by the Vice Chancellor, thereby ensuring its accuracy and currency.

2.6 The College takes steps to ensure that its programmes are accessible to all. Most applications are made online but can also be made by paper. A large-format version is available if required. Applications from any student that has declared that they have a disability or additional learning support need are dealt with by the College's Equality and Diversity Officer on a confidential basis. The College encourages applications from students who do not meet its formal academic requirements. Work experience is not required, but professional experience is also recognised for enrolment. The College takes household income and whether the student is care experienced or a care leaver into account when assessing applications for bursaries and scholarships. In addition, laptop computers were

offered to all students enrolling on Higher National programmes in academic year 2019-20 and to students on all programmes in academic year 2020-21.

2.7   Administrative processes ensure that applications are processed efficiently and securely. Applicants' intent to study is assessed via their personal statements and a formal interview, if necessary. Interviews are recorded. Qualifications are checked against databases, including NARIC, before an offer is issued and originals verified once a student arrives at the College. Students whom the review team met confirmed that the admissions process was straightforward, that any queries were dealt with promptly and that the admissions team were exceptional at processing applications.

2.8   Admissions staff keep up to date with developments in the higher education sector and national requirements by participating in webinars, through contact with Independent HE and via mailings from UK Visas and Immigration. Policies are kept under review. Updated versions of the Student Recruitment and Admissions Policy and the Complaints and Appeals Procedure for Applicants were approved by Academic Council in July 2020.

2.9   The review team concluded that admissions requirements and procedures are well documented and operate fairly. They ensure that all applicants can make informed decisions about their choice of programme and that the College can ensure that those it accepts are capable of completing their programme successfully. The review team therefore concludes that the Core practice is met, and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q2): The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.

Findings

2.10   The College's approach to quality is governed by the Teaching and Learning Strategy which lists quality as one of the College's main targets and defines academic quality as the support given to students in the form of teaching and learning resources, and assessment, while quality assurance is regarded as the process for checking that the standards and quality of its provision meet agreed expectations. The curricula of the Higher National programmes are determined by SQA, which develops the programmes. As an approved centre for the delivery of programmes accredited by SQA, the curricula of the College's customised awards are approved by SQA prior to their delivery. As is the case for standards, SQA uses rigorous checking processes on quality through the verification processes to monitor that the College maintains the quality of the programmes it offers. SQA therefore has primary responsibility for ensuring that programmes are of high quality through its formal procedures for validation and quality assurance.

2.11   For the programmes delivered in partnership with the University of Dundee, the University is responsible for the oversight of quality. Both the University and the College work together to design and deliver courses under the agreement, and follow the University's Quality and Academic Standards Framework.

2.12   As the quality of programmes is approved and monitored by SQA, the team considered the College's arrangements for the development of the programmes before approval and for maintaining quality thereafter. The processes to ensure that the College achieves and maintains the quality of programmes it designs are underpinned by the new process for Programme Design and Approval. This process clearly shows the internal stages of the development and approval of new programmes, before final approval by SQA. Related processes include the Programme Proposal, and Programme Review Guidelines, Peer Review Guidelines, Internal Verification Policy, Summative Assessment Policy, Academic Evaluations Policy, Assessment Code of Practice and Monitoring. AQSC is responsible for developing and monitoring the College's process for approval of new programmes and changes to its taught programme provision, in liaison with validating bodies as required, and for recommending new or removal of existing programmes to Academic Council, which is ultimately responsible for approving new programmes.

2.13   These arrangements would allow the Core practice to be met. The team considered qualification approval outcomes and those of the verification visits by SQA; the internal policy documents and quality review documents; as well as minutes of relevant committees. The team also met Programme Coordinators and Unit Coordinators, and teaching staff. The team also conducted a detailed audit trail of the internal development and approval of the Diploma in Arabic Studies and Arabic Language and the Professional Diploma in Muslim Chaplaincy.

2.14   The review team confirmed that programme development processes ensure that the need for a new programme is established and that proposals are reviewed fully both internally and externally prior to submission to SQA. The development of the new programmes in Muslim Chaplaincy and in Arabic Studies and Arabic Language was initiated following a review of the Islamic Studies programme. Following compilation of unit and programme documentation, draft proposals were considered by Boards of Studies, AQSC and TeLSEC prior to them being sent to three external reviewers. Revised documentation, and the comments of external reviewers were then circulated to staff, prior to submitting the programmes to Academic Council for approval. Final approval by Academic Council requires that the proposal aligns with relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and meets threshold standards.

2.15   Academic programmes have clearly defined aims and learning outcomes that are linked to assessment. They incorporate development of students' transferable skills as well as acquisition of subject knowledge. Teaching and assessment methods are varied and underpinned by comprehensive learning resources on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Staff ensure that curricula are kept to date through personal research and scholarship. Any major changes to units or programmes, for example substitution of units or changes in assessment methods, require the approval of SQA.

2.16   SQA approval and verification processes consistently confirmed that the arrangements within the College allow it to maintain the quality of the programmes it delivers. Internal quality management systems, which include regular reporting on the quality of the programmes by Unit Coordinators and Programme Coordinators incorporating the views of the students, are effectively applied. These filter through the committees. Other reviews and adjustments to programmes are identified in programme reviews and committees consider and take forward recommendations made. Teaching staff stated that programmes are reviewed to make sure they remain current. Students met by the team confirmed that the quality of programmes was satisfactory and that the programmes met their needs.

2.17   The College provides high-quality courses, which are approved and quality assured by the awarding organisation. The College carries out internal processes to maintain the quality of courses. The review team concludes that this Core practice is met, and the associated risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q3): The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

Findings

2.18   The College's Teaching and Learning Strategy (2017-2022) sets out its aim 'to provide high quality teaching and learning enriched by a multi-cultural environment that inspires successful, confident, independent learners.' Recruiting high-quality staff and supporting their training and development is recognised as a key part of this. The College has policies relating to the recruitment and selection, development and appraisal of staff. Academic staff are monitored annually by a peer review process. Students provide feedback on their teaching and learning experiences in individual units by completion of evaluation forms which feed into the College's monitoring and reporting systems. Responsibility for overseeing teaching is distributed across College committees. Boards of Studies are responsible for the programmes that fall within their subject areas. TeLSEC is responsible for staff training and development and for promoting good practice and innovation in teaching, learning and assessment. Academic Council approves the College's Teaching and Learning Strategy, oversees all review activities relating to teaching and advises the Senior Management Team on the appointment and promotion of staff.

2.19   All staff involved in the assessment of students must be approved by SQA. College staff who contribute to teaching on the Islamic finance MSc programmes offered by the University of Dundee must be approved by the University.

2.20   This approach would allow the Core practice to be met. The review team tested this approach by reviewing the College's self-evaluation document, the Teaching and Learning Strategy and the students' written submission. It also reviewed the terms of reference and minutes of committees with responsibility for the oversight of teaching and learning. Policies relating to staff recruitment, approval and development and procedures for annual monitoring and review of units and programmes were examined. The team also discussed teaching and learning with students, with senior management and academic staff.

2.21   The Staff Recruitment Policy notes the College's commitment to equal opportunities and its emphasis on recruiting staff who have the skills, aptitude, knowledge and experience for the role. The College's academic infrastructure, including staffing and resources, are considered during the development of new programmes. For example, the introduction of the new Higher National programmes in Business, and Management and Leadership necessitated the recruitment of new full and part-time teaching staff. Senior staff of the University of Dundee and Abertay University have sat on interview panels for new teaching staff and, on a trial basis, two students recently participated in the appointment of an additional Arabic language instructor. Many of the teaching staff the review team met had formal teaching qualifications gained prior to their arrival at the College. All teaching staff are able to undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice in Higher Education, which is delivered through the University of Dundee and fully funded by the College. Induction processes for new staff ensure that they are made aware of College policies and procedures and the nature and scope of their teaching commitments. They are also allocated a mentor who provides ongoing guidance and support.

2.22   The Staff Development Policy applies to all College employees and embraces a wide range of relevant activities. Training is requested via a dedicated portal and records indicate that training opportunities have been taken up by a wide range of academic and administrative support staff. Where appropriate, training is delivered on a College-wide basis, for example following revisions to the College's governance structures. In addition, staff have now received copies of the new Quality Code and have received training on this; this information is also available in the Student Handbook. Training provided by the College

and the collegiate atmosphere across the staff community enabled teaching and operations to continue effectively during the COVID-19 pandemic, with due consideration being given to staff health and welfare. The development and implementation of modified teaching, learning and assessment practices was regularly monitored by Boards of Studies, TeLSEC, AQSC and overseen by Academic Council. This is discussed further under Core practice Q4 in paragraph 2.33.

2.23   Peer review processes encompass a variety of classroom and online teaching activities and enable staff to identify and reflect on any strengths and areas for development. Newly appointed teaching staff are reviewed during their first year in the College.

2.24   Monitoring and evaluation systems enable the College to maintain oversight of the effectiveness of its teaching staff. At the end of each unit students complete an evaluation form which enables them to provide feedback on their teaching and learning experiences. Unit Coordinators are required to identify any strengths and indicate how any concerns will be addressed in their Unit Coordinator's report. Summaries of student feedback and the individual coordinator's reports are subsequently considered by TeLSEC.

2.25   The students and alumni the review team met spoke positively about their teaching and learning experiences in the College. They noted that the variety of teaching methods used promotes their learning and engagement. They also highlighted that the transition to online learning during the pandemic was dealt with swiftly and efficiently.

2.26   Teaching staff ensure that curricula are kept up to date through engagement in personal research projects, academic scholarship and their involvement with professional bodies. Where appropriate, staff make use of external guest speakers so that students can gain first-hand experience of current practices. Students' overall learning experiences are further enhanced by a programme of open lectures and the College's Building Bridges Symposium, which aims to embrace diversity and promote dialogue between different faith groups.

2.27   The College's approach to the recruitment and development of staff, together with its monitoring and review processes, ensure that it can deliver a high-quality experience for its students. The review team therefore concludes that the Core practice is met, and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q4): The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

Findings

2.28   The College building houses its teaching, IT and library facilities and has private study and social learning spaces. College policies and procedures are publicly available on a dedicated section of the College website. Programme and unit information for students is provided via the VLE. Students on Arabic language programmes have access to a range of specialist audiovisual resources, books, films and other media to support their learning and language development. Students on the Higher National programmes have access to the library of Abertay University. Students on the University of Dundee Islamic finance MSc programmes are registered as students of that university and therefore have access to its facilities and support services. Both these institutions are located close to the College. The provision of resources to support and enhance learning is reviewed by TeLSEC and monitored by Academic Council. The College's academic infrastructure, including staffing and resources, are considered during the development of new programmes.

2.29   The Student Handbook provides general information for all students, including support services. Students can approach unit tutors, programme coordinators or staff of the student administration unit on any matter that is important to them. Two of the College's senior academic staff, one male and one female, are designated Student Welfare Officers. In addition, the College has agreements with the University of Dundee that enable its students to access the University's counselling and careers services.

2.30   These arrangements would allow the Core practice to be met, which the review team tested by discussing facilities and resources with students, the Student Welfare Officers, and academic and administrative support staff. It also reviewed the College's self-evaluation document and information relating to facilities and support on the College website and in the Student Handbook. It also examined learning support materials for a range of units on the VLE. The team also explored the resource implications of the introduction of new programmes and the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.31   As a result of its specialist nature, some of the College's academic programmes share areas of commonality, enabling it to make efficient use of staff and learning resources. Any resource implications are considered during the approval of new programmes and revision of existing ones.

2.32   Students report that library resources are good and that the process for requesting new titles is straightforward. Informative and helpful unit information, including lecture notes, learning support materials and assessment tasks, is easily accessed via the VLE. Students on the Higher National programmes also make use of candidate support packs developed by SQA. Students particularly value the calendar facility within the VLE which enables them to keep track of when assessments are due so that they do not miss submission deadlines.

2.33   The students the review team met highlighted the College's swift response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to online learning with minimal disruption to their studies. Face-to-face teaching was suspended in March 2020. The implications for teaching and learning were regularly discussed at Boards of Studies, TeLSEC**,** AQSC and overseen by Academic Council. Guidance from SQA, QAA and other external bodies was shared with staff. The College rapidly developed a policy for recording educational activities and lecture capture to enable it to meet data protection and copyright requirements. Students were kept well informed throughout the process. The students the review team met noted that academic staff made effective use of a variety of online platforms to facilitate small-group

activities as well as posting lectures and notes on the VLE. Regular emails from the College and contact with academic staff helped them to remain motivated and engaged with their studies in the absence of classroom teaching. Unit Coordinators monitor attendance so that any student who is no longer engaging with their studies can be identified and followed up. The review team recognised the College's comprehensive and timely response to the COVID-19 pandemic, through the introduction of revised approaches to student support, teaching, learning and assessment, that enabled programmes and student engagement to continue with minimal disruption as a feature of **good practice**.

2.34   Students feel free to approach academic and administrative staff with any query or concern they have. Any academic matters are dealt with efficiently by Unit and Programme Coordinators. If additional support is needed, the College's Welfare Officers can be consulted and will signpost students to relevant qualified professionals as required.

2.35   The College's facilities and resources enable it to successfully deliver its academic programmes and promote student learning. The guidance and support provided by Student Welfare Officers, and academic and administrative staff enable the College to promptly and efficiently address any welfare or academic concerns students may have. The review team therefore concludes that the Core practice is met, and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q5): The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.

Findings

2.36   The College states that as part of the academic governance, students are represented on all boards, committees and councils within the College and are encouraged to share their views on all aspects of the College. The Student Representative Document outlines where students are represented, the roles and responsibilities of the Student Representative, and the training they receive for their role. The information for student representation is available in the Student Handbook. Student Representatives play a key role serving as members of committees (TeLSEC, AQSC, College Council and Finance & General Purposes Committee, and Academic Council) and to serve as Lead Student Representative in quality assurance-related matters. Students attending these committees have opportunities to raise items on the agenda and are expected to report back to the students concerned. The Student Handbook informs students about the Student Society, which has a constitution, the Al-Maktoum College Student Society (ALMCSS) Constitution. The Constitution stipulates that its roles include representation and protection of the interests, rights, and general welfare of the students. All students are members of the Student Society, led by elected officers, namely a president, treasurer and secretary. All student representatives are elected by the students. The College also states that there is, in addition, a Student-Staff Consultative Group (SSCG), which acts as an advisory group and reports to TeLSEC. SSCG is chaired by the President of the Student Society. There is an Academic Evaluations Policy, which details the procedure for receiving feedback from students on their courses. Student Unit Evaluation Forms are given to students at the end of each unit. Unit and Programme Coordinators analyse the responses on the forms and compile reports which are discussed at Boards of Studies. Unit evaluation forms are now completed electronically.

2.37   These arrangements allow the Core practice to be met. To test this, the review team considered documentation which included a collection of Summary Analysis forms of the Student Unit Evaluation Forms; Unit and Programme Coordinators' reports; minutes of Boards of Study, TeLSEC and AQSC; and the student submission for this review. It also met students, senior academic and support staff at the College.

2.38   Students are actively engaged, with high participation and positive feedback on the Summary Forms where participation rates range above 60% and feedback from 4.6 to 5 (generally agree and strongly agree to positive statements on the forms) out of a possible 5 on all the 10 units covered on the forms. Satisfaction levels are also confirmed in the student submission to the review team. Students confirmed the surveys on units as another aspect of feedback. Minutes of meetings show that students are represented at committee meetings, where they confirmed that they make contributions. Unit and Programme Coordinator reports confirm this view. Student comments are taken on board, for example in instances where the students have raised some concern, these are addressed at the source or taken to the committees. An example is on the Islamic Commercial Law (SCQF 11) unit where some students had given feedback that the assessment had too many instructions that made it confusing. In response, the Unit Coordinator suggested changing one of the assessment elements to a formative assessment. Student comments are advanced through the Committees, for example the complaint quoted above was reported at a Board of Study meeting where the coordinator confirmed the decision to turn the assessment to a formative assessment activity. Students confirmed that they were engaged, and changes were made when they raised concerns.

2.39   Two students confirmed being President of the Student Council and showed to be knowledgeable about the College and influential in its processes and that the Council was

functional and independent with a budget of its own, provided by the College. Students also confirmed that the SSCG was student-led, with a student as a chair, and allows for open communication with staff on the student experience.

2.40   Support staff also highlighted that the College is looking at new and innovative ways to use alumni, confirming details in the Alumni Engagement Plan and other related documents highlighting their importance. Support staff stated and the alumni who met the team confirmed that alumni continue to receive College news and updates, as the College believes they are important for student engagement. Support staff highlighted other areas where alumni could be used, including speaking in lectures or just helping in activities.

2.41   The College actively engages students in the quality of their experience and the review team concluded the Core practice is met, and the associated level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q6): The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.

Findings

2.42   Students are able to raise a formal complaint about any aspect of the College's services or provision via the Students complaints procedures. Any applicant that wishes to appeal against an admissions decision can do so via the Complaints and Appeals Procedure for Applicants, that can be accessed via the admissions section of the College website.

2.43   The Student Attendance and Progress Policy notes the circumstances that can lead to a student being excluded from the College and includes details of how a student can appeal against such a decision. The Student appeals procedures specify the circumstances under which an academic appeal can be made.

2.44   All policies and procedures relating to complaints and appeals have been updated recently and revised versions were approved by Academic Council in July 2020. Officers of the College's Student Society can provide advice to students and representation during complaints and appeals processes.

2.45   The Students complaints procedures place emphasis on initially attempting to resolve issues through dialogue with the member of staff concerned. Any issues not resolved at this stage can be escalated through three formal stages, initially through the involvement of an independent member of staff, then with the Vice Chancellor and finally with the Academic Council. The policy notes that students who are dissatisfied at this final internal stage can raise the matter with SQA.

2.46   These arrangements would allow the Core practice to be met. The review team tested the Core practice by reviewing complaints and appeals policies and procedures and related information in the Student Handbook. It also discussed procedures with students and academic staff. It also examined how the College had addressed a formal complaint made by a student following their withdrawal from an academic programme.

2.47   Complaints and appeals processes are easily accessed via the College website and documented in a user-friendly format. Processes are detailed and timescales are clear. If an issue cannot be resolved informally then the student is required to raise this with the SQA Coordinator within five days. The procedures require that a meeting is held to resolve the issue within 10 days of being notified, and the student is informed of the outcome within the next three days. Where a student remains dissatisfied, he/she must inform the Vice Chancellor, who convenes a meeting within six days. The student is informed of the outcome and provided with a record of the meeting within three days. The review team examined documentation relating to and communications between the College for a student who had raised a formal complaint following their withdrawal from an academic programme. The team was able to confirm that the College had addressed the matter within the required timescales and according to the defined procedures.

2.48   The Students appeals procedures comprise one informal stage followed by two formal stages, the latter involving a meeting with the Vice Chancellor. The formal stages follow similar procedures and the same timescales as the Students complaints procedures. If a student remains dissatisfied after the two formal stages, they can take the matter forward as a complaint to SQA.

2.49   Students the review team met emphasised that they felt free to raise concerns they had with College staff and that matters were dealt with informally. However, they were aware of complaints and appeals procedures and how to access them.

2.50   The College's complaints and appeals procedures are accessible, clearly documented and ensure that issues are treated seriously and dealt with confidentially. The review team therefore concludes that the Core practice is met, and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q7): Where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments.

Findings

2.51   Although the self-evaluation document states that a collaboration agreement has been signed with Trinity College Dublin for the delivery of an MPhil in Middle Eastern Studies at the College, this will only take effect from September 2021. The College does not currently offer any research degrees, and this Core practice is therefore not applicable.

Core practice: Not applicable
Level of risk: Not applicable

Core practice (Q8): Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.

Findings

2.52   The College works in partnership with three other organisations: SQA, the University of Dundee and Abertay University. All of its current programmes are delivered at its site in Dundee and none involve work placements or any other external provider. SQA, as the awarding body, is ultimately responsible for the quality and standards of all the awards that the College delivers. The College has been approved to award SQA qualifications since 2013. In order to become an approved centre, the College had to demonstrate that it had appropriate management and quality assurance systems, including relevant policies and procedures, in place. It also had to demonstrate that it had the requisite staff, learning resources, assessment materials, equipment and accommodation needed to deliver, assess and internally verify each of the qualifications it planned to deliver. The College's ongoing approval to deliver these qualifications is subject to it continuing to meet SQA's quality management requirements. This is monitored by SQA's systems and qualification verification processes. In relation to students' learning opportunities, these require that the College's quality assurance systems are effective, implemented and continually improved and that procedures for managing physical and human resources and data management meet SQA requirements. They also require that students are supported and guided through their qualification. As noted in sections relating to Core practices S1 to S4 in this report, systems and qualification verification processes also encompass assessment. SQA is also responsible for approving the College's customised awards and for approving the College to deliver qualifications developed by SQA. The College has a designated SQA Coordinator with responsibility for liaison with SQA.

2.53   The College also has agreements in place with the University of Dundee through which College staff contribute to the delivery and assessment of three of the University's MSc programmes in Islamic finance and that enable College students to access the careers and counselling services of the University. It also has an articulation agreement with Abertay University. Its arrangements with its university partners are covered by signed agreements that clearly set out the responsibilities of all parties.

2.54   Responsibilities for monitoring partnership arrangements are delegated to the College's committees, according to their position within its governance structures. Academic Council is responsible for overseeing all external collaboration, validation and review. AQSC is responsible for overseeing the College's relationship with external bodies in the areas of quality assurance and enhancement. Both AQSC and Boards of Studies receive reports from SQA and the College's university partners, and work to address any recommendations.

2.55   This approach would allow the Core practice to be met. The review team tested this by reviewing the College's self-evaluation document and examining the relevant partnership arrangements and agreements. It also examined SQA monitoring reports and the College's procedures for considering and responding to these. The review team also discussed partnership arrangements with senior College staff and students, and with the MSc programme coordinator of the University of Dundee.

2.56   SQA appoints independent external specialists to monitor and report on the College's compliance with its requirements. Systems verification reports confirm that high confidence can be placed in the College's resources and its systems for student support and for managing the quality of its academic programmes. Qualification verification reports, which are compiled by external verifiers, focus on individual units and programmes.

A sampling procedure is used and not every unit is monitored every year. The external verifier reports that the review team saw also confirmed that high confidence can be placed in the College's management of individual units and the support provided to students following them. Where issues arise during monitoring, the College has systems in place to respond to them. For example, following recent inspections the College has revised its malpractice policy and updated its procedures and documentation relating to the sharing of student information. An external verifier report that noted that there were no candidate disclaimers included in the submissions for several modules was noted at the next AQSC meeting and the matter subsequently addressed in all programmes.

2.57   As noted under Core practice Q2 of this report, SQA's programme approval processes make use of independent subject specialists to evaluate the curricula and quality of any proposals the College submits. The College must also obtain SQA approval prior to making any major changes to its customised awards and must implement any changes that SQA makes to its own programmes.

2.58   From September 2019 College staff have contributed to the delivery of three MSc programmes in Islamic finance offered by the University of Dundee. Primary responsibility for the quality assurance of these programmes' rests with the University. It is responsible for the admission and selection of students, complaints and appeals, student engagement and the annual monitoring and review of programmes. College staff contribute to teaching and assessment of selected modules, as defined in the partnership agreement, and must be approved by the University. These programmes are delivered at the University campus but students on them also have access to the College's library. Both the University and the College report that the partnership is working well. The College does not have its own careers and counselling services. The College students the review team met were aware that they have free access to the careers and counselling facilities provided by the University.

2.59   The College's articulation agreement with Abertay University enables students who have successfully completed one of the College's Higher National programmes to progress into either the second or third years of selected programmes at that university. Students on the Higher National programmes also have access to the library of Abertay University.

2.60   The College's committees regularly receive and consider issues and reports relating to its external partnerships. Boards of Studies and AQSC receive and respond to issues arising in external verifier reports. Academic Council receives updates relating to the College's relationships with SQA and the University of Dundee.

2.61   The review team concluded that the partnership arrangements the College has are well documented, operating effectively and enable its students to have a high-quality academic experience. Therefore, the Core practice is met, and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q9): The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.

Findings

2.62   The support arrangements at the College are contained in the Student Handbook. This includes support at induction at the start of term, academic support which it states would normally be provided by the tutor, Unit Coordinator, or Programme Coordinator. At the start of academic year 2020-21, induction was conducted online. This enabled students to access their emails and online facilities such as the VLE and lectures. There are two Welfare Officers, a male and a female, for students with pastoral support needs. Details of where students can access career services, including help with preparation of their CVs, are provided. Students are alerted to a range of other services that they can access for their career needs, including workshops, interviews and career choices, skills and information sessions from employers and Careers Fairs where students can meet prospective employers on campus. The Student Handbook signposts students with disabilities to the Special Assessment Arrangements Procedures and related forms which are on the website. Other support services are highlighted on the College website, including funding support, access to Wi-Fi connectivity accessible from anywhere in the world once they sign up for it, and signposting for students with disabilities to where they can access additional support and counselling which is available at the University for free. Students can receive bursaries for up to £3,000. The Summative Assessment Policy notes that Programme Coordinators are responsible for providing a pastoral role for students. The College states that students wishing to progress with their education can complete a Continuation of Studies form to enable them to receive support with and ensure that they achieve their progression plans. The College has signed an articulation agreement with Abertay University for students on the Higher Nationals.

2.63   These arrangements allow the Core practice to be met. To test the support available to students in practice, the team carried out meetings with students and teaching and support staff. The team also checked Unit and Programme Coordinator reports for any additional support over and above academic support they provide. The team also considered feedback on assessed and internally verified student work.

2.64   The College actively supports students to achieve their academic and professional goals throughout the student's journey. Support staff stated and students confirmed that the support they receive begins at the application and induction stages, for example, students on the Arabic Language Certificate course and alumni on the Post Graduate Diploma in Islamic Finance confirmed that as much information was provided on courses as possible at the application stage to ensure applicants do not end up on wrong courses. Support staff also stated, and students confirmed, that at induction they assist students to set up online accounts, and, given the pandemic this year, support was provided online. Once on the course, students stated that they regularly receive emails signposting them to the welfare officers, unit coordinators, and student representatives where they can get advice and who they can talk to should they have any problems. They were aware of the support available. Students on the HND programmes also stated that they had been approached to complete continuation forms to show their interest in progressing to Abertay University and had discussion around careers support. Students who completed continuation forms said they receive support with references and writing personal statements.

2.65   Students also expressed confidence in academic staff and support staff, and the quality of teaching, saying arrangements in place show that the College is student focused. Those on the HND programmes received candidate support packs from SQA. The move onto online learning meant that students would require additional support to do so. Both students and staff agreed that such support is available. Unit and Programme Coordinators

report regularly on the support they have given to students and approaches to support for individual students and student groups. Feedback on assessed student work reviewed by the team showed that students receive extensive feedback on their work from the assessors, detailing what they did well, and how they could have improved their work to get higher grades. Internal verifiers corroborate the points and sometimes make additional comments concerning what students could have done to achieve higher grades.

2.66   The team concludes that the College supports its students to achieve their academic and professional goals. The Core practice is therefore met, and the risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Common practice (1): The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

Findings

2.67   Responsibilities for improvement and enhancement are distributed across the College. Academic staff are responsible for the improvement and enhancement of teaching and learning within their own subject areas. Boards of Studies are responsible for overseeing the academic quality and student experience of the programmes that fall within their remit. In relation to enhancement, TeLSEC focuses on overseeing staff development, improvement of curricula and reviewing the provision of resources; AQSC on programme design, delivery, assessment and information. Both committees have a role in monitoring and promoting good practice and both can formulate new policies and initiatives for approval by Academic Council.

2.68   The College has recently completed a major review of internal policies and procedures. The review commenced in 2019 and revised policies were approved by Academic Council in July 2020. An updated renewal schedule has been devised and all policies and procedures are scheduled to be reviewed annually.

2.69   The College has a tiered process for monitoring and review of teaching and learning that incorporates annual evaluation of individual units by students followed by completion of unit and programme reports by their respective coordinators. These reports are then considered by Boards of Studies, TeLSEC and AQSC. The responsibilities of the College's committees for these processes are defined within their terms of reference.

2.70   The College is responsible for the periodic review of its customised awards and has a set of guidelines for this process. SQA is responsible for the review of its Higher National programmes and keeps the College updated on any changes it makes to them.

2.71   These arrangements would allow the Common practice to be met. The review team tested this by reviewing the College's self-evaluation document, its policies and procedures for monitoring and review and the terms of reference and minutes of the committees involved in these processes. It also examined Unit and Programme Coordinators reports and periodic review reports. Monitoring and review processes were also discussed with academic and administrative staff.

2.72   The College's internal review of policies and procedures enabled them to be harmonised and any unnecessary duplication to be removed. To facilitate the review process, policies were initially divided between the two Boards of Studies. Any proposed changes were discussed by TeLSEC and AQSC before revised versions were approved by Academic Council in July 2020. The process also enabled the College to identify any gaps in its procedures. A new policy for the recognition of prior learning was devised using guidance in the QAA Quality Code and reviewing similar policies in other institutions.

2.73   Following their establishment in 2019, the College's two Boards of Studies now play a key role in overseeing the delivery of programmes and units that fall within their curriculum areas. The membership of each board includes all academic staff teaching within its programme area so that any issues can be addressed efficiently. The boards receive and review Unit and Programme Coordinators' reports and can make recommendations to Academic Council on the structure and content of programmes. Boards of Studies also receive external verifiers reports. Academic and administrative staff have a clear understanding of monitoring and review processes. However, the central role of Boards of Studies in monitoring and review is not reflected in the College's quality assurance documentation. Hence, the review team **recommends** that the College ensures that its

quality assurance procedures are up to date and accurately reflect the internal monitoring systems.

2.74   Academic staff review their units annually and introduce changes in response to student feedback and developments in their disciplines. Programme Coordinators reports are comprehensive and demonstrate active consideration of feedback from students and external verifiers, include commentary and analysis of student retention and achievement and note how issues identified in previous reports have been addressed and any changes required in the future. The College maintains oversight of monitoring and review processes via AQSC and Academic Council, which receive and consider Programme Coordinators reports**.**

2.75   The College has used its programme review process to review its Arabic language and Islamic Studies programmes and to propose changes to the content and title of other programmes and units. The template enables reviewers to identify any strengths and areas for improvement in the learning outcomes, resources, content and delivery of a programme or unit and their impact on the employability of graduates. However, the programme review process is combined with the guidelines for peer review of teaching and the review team concluded that the documentation does not differentiate sufficiently well between these processes. The review team was informed that the College reviews its programmes every five years, although this is not specified in the guidelines. The review team noted that the reviews of the Arabic language and Islamic Studies programmes had been informed by data on student recruitment and student evaluations of units. However, the guidelines do not identify what reference points and information should feed into the periodic review of programmes or any expected outcomes of the process. Hence, the review team **recommends** that the College builds upon its existing periodic review process to ensure that it is implemented in a planned and systematic manner.

2.76   The College has a comprehensive set of systems in place that enables it to monitor and enhance its policies, procedures and academic programmes. Academic and administrative staff have a clear understanding of the processes involved and the review team found evidence that they are operating effectively. However, the College's quality assurance documentation requires updating to reflect procedures that are currently in use. In addition, the guidelines for periodic review of academic programmes require strengthening. Hence, the review team concludes that the Common practice is met, and the level of risk is low.

Common practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Common practice (2): The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise.

Findings

2.77 SQA, as the awarding body, uses external specialists to ensure that the College has adequate management and quality assurance systems in place. It also uses external subject specialists in the initial approval and ongoing monitoring of the College's customised awards. SQA keeps the College informed of any changes that it has made to its own programmes. Any major changes to the College's customised awards must first be approved by SQA.

2.78 The College consults external advisers during the development of new programmes. Quality management in the College also benefits from the experience academic staff gain from their involvement with other institutions, including the University of Dundee, with which the College has collaborative arrangements.

2.79 These arrangements allow the Common practice to be met, which the team tested by reviewing SQA monitoring processes and reports and the College's responses to them. It also reviewed reports on new programme proposals submitted by external reviewers and the College's self-evaluation document. It also discussed the involvement of external expertise with SQA and College academic staff.

2.80 External specialists, appointed by SQA, regularly evaluate the College's quality management systems to ensure that they meet its requirements. Their reports identify any areas where the College's practices do not meet SQA's requirements and indicate remedial action required. For example, following recent inspections, the College has revised its malpractice policy and updated its procedures and documentation relating to the sharing of student information.

2.81 SQA also appoints external subject specialists as external verifiers to review and report on units. These reports are considered by Boards of Studies and AQSC. Any matters that require attention are dealt with promptly. For example, an external verifier report that noted that there were no candidate disclaimers included in the submissions for several modules was noted at the next AQSC meeting and the matter subsequently addressed in all programmes. Similarly, assessments in Arabic language programmes have been modified in response to external verifier comments.

2.82 Consultation with external subject specialists is an integral part of the College's internal programme development process. They provide independent advice on learning outcomes, curricula and whether programmes meet national standards.

2.83 Practices in comparable institutions also informed the College's review of its internal policies and procedures. For example, practices in the University of Dundee were used to inform the revision of the College's internal verification policy and the development of its recognition of prior learning policy.

2.84 Much of the external input into the College's quality management originates from SQA, as it approves the College's systems and accredits its awards. However, the College actively engages with SQA monitoring and review processes, responding as required, to ensure that it continues to meet its expectations. In addition, it also uses external expertise to inform its internal processes. The review team therefore concludes that the Common practice is met, and the level of risk is low.

Common practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Common practice (3): The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.

Findings

2.85   The College has three formal mechanisms by which it engages with its student community: via student representatives on College committees, the SSCG and through its annual monitoring and review processes.

2.86   Student representatives are appointed members of the College Council, Finance and General Purposes Committee, Academic Council, AQSC, TeLSEC and Boards of Studies. The SSCG includes representatives from academic programmes and is convened by the President of the College's Student Society. It meets twice each semester and reports to TeLSEC.

2.87   Annual monitoring and review processes commence with the completion of questionnaires by students at the end of each unit. These are summarised, and the findings included in Unit Coordinators reports. The outcomes of unit evaluation and any relevant issues noted by the SSCG are included in Programme Coordinators reports.

2.88   These arrangements would allow the Common practice to be met. The review team tested the Common practice by reviewing the College's self-evaluation document and the Student Handbook. It also examined the terms of reference and minutes of the College's governance committees and the SSCG. It also reviewed unit evaluation forms, Unit and Programme Coordinators reports and discussed student engagement with students, student representatives, alumni and academic staff.

2.89   The students and student representatives whom the review team met reported that their experiences on the SSCG and as members of other committees had been very positive. They highlighted that the SSCG is student led and provides an informal atmosphere in which they are able to put forward ideas and express their views freely. Students receive the minutes of these meetings and are kept informed of developments. The College monitors student participation in different committees, seeks students' views and encourages attendance.

2.90   Student feedback is an integral component of the College's annual monitoring and review processes. Unit evaluations allow students to provide individual feedback on their experiences of teaching, learning and assessment, learning resources, learning support and how the unit impacted on their personal development. Programme Coordinator reports include commentary on any issues arising from unit evaluation and the SSCG. At both unit and programme level, coordinators are required to identify how any issues noted by students have been addressed. Recent examples of enhancements made in response to student feedback include increasing opportunities for students on the Arabic language programmes to practice their communication skills and revising the timetable of the Higher National programmes.

2.91   The College has recently undertaken an internal review of how it engages with its alumni and identified how they can further contribute to the development of the College and its programmes.

2.92   The College's mechanisms for student engagement create a variety of opportunities for them to contribute to the development of their educational experience. Student feedback is actively sought and valued by the College and has resulted in tangible

benefits to academic programmes and students' experience. The review team therefore concludes that the Common practice is met, and the associated level of risk is low.

Common practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.93　　In reaching its judgment about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.94　　All applicable Core and Common practices have been met. Core practice Q7 is not applicable as the College does not offer research degrees. The risk was judged to be low in all applicable Core practices and Common practices.

2.95　　Two recommendations are made in relation to Common practice 1, using the outcomes of reviews of Core practices to drive improvement and enhancement. The first of these relates to ensuring that the central role that the recently established Boards of Studies play in monitoring and review is accurately reflected in the College's quality assurance documentation. The review team noted that review procedures were operating effectively at the time of the visit and that the revisions will not require or result in a major operational change. The second recommendation relates to the College's process for periodic review of academic programmes. The review team noted that these were broadly adequate but could be strengthened by more precisely defining the information that should be considered as part of the periodic review process and the outcomes expected from it. Hence, the review team concluded that the risk was low. Addressing these two recommendations will enable the College to meet this Common practice more fully.

2.96　　One feature of good practice is identified under Core practice Q4 recognising the College's comprehensive and timely response to the COVID-19 pandemic through the introduction of revised approaches to student support, teaching, learning and assessment, that enabled programmes and student engagement to continue with minimal disruption.

2.97　　There are no affirmations in this judgement area.

2.98　　The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 21-24 of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) handbook.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer Glossary on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/glossary.

Academic standards
The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Award
A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

Awarding organisation
An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications.

Blended learning
Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

Common practices
Practices included in the UK Quality Code that will be applied by providers in line with their missions, their regulatory context and the needs of their students. These are practices common to the underpinning of quality in all UK providers but are not regulatory requirements for providers in England (registered with the Office for Students).

Core practices
Practices included in the UK Quality Code that must be demonstrated by all UK higher education providers as part of assuring their standards and quality.

Credit(s)
A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

Degree-awarding body
A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

Distance learning
A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'. See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award
The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Expectations
Statements in the **Quality Code** which clearly and succinctly express the outcomes providers should achieve in setting and maintaining the standards of their awards, and for managing the quality of their provision.

Flexible and distributed learning
A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations. See also **distance learning**.

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: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS).

Good practice
A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

Learning opportunities
The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

Learning outcomes
What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

Multiple awards
An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

Operational definition
A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

Programme (of study)
An approved course of study that 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.

Quality Code
Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** (and associated, applicable, Core and Common Practices) that providers are required to meet.

Reference points
Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Self-evaluation document
A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

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.

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard
The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)
An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

Widening participation
Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.