

Review for Specific Course Designation by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Academy of Music & Sound Ltd

December 2013

Contents

Key findings about the Academy of Music & Sound (UK) Ltd	1
Good practice.....	1
Recommendations.....	1
About this report.....	2
The provider's stated responsibilities	2
Recent developments.....	3
Students' contribution to the review	3
Detailed findings about the Academy of Music & Sound (UK) Ltd.....	4
1 Academic standards.....	4
2 Quality of learning opportunities	6
3 Information about learning opportunities.....	8
Action plan	10
About QAA	15
Glossary	16

Key findings about the Academy of Music & Sound (UK) Ltd

As a result of its Review for Specific Course Designation carried out in December 2013, the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the programmes it offers on behalf of the University of Wolverhampton.

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

The team considers that reliance **can** be placed on the information that the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

Good practice

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

- involvement in setting national standards (paragraph 1.9)
- using online file sharing for the moderation of assessment (paragraph 1.11)
- effective practitioner and employability support for students (paragraph 2.9).

Recommendations

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

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

- separate academic and commercial management functions for its higher education provision (paragraph 1.2)
- make Annual Reviews more detailed and focused on individual programmes (paragraph 1.7)
- make necessary information more easily accessible to students (paragraphs 2.7, 2.15, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4).

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

- continue to develop student representation (paragraph 2.2)
- standardise the consistency and timeliness of feedback at each centre (paragraph 2.6)
- adopt more consistently effective approaches to tutorial provision (paragraph 2.8)
- review the processes for communicating changes to students (paragraph 3.1).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Specific Course Designation](#)¹ conducted by [QAA](#) at the Academy of Music & Sound (UK) Ltd (the Academy), which is a privately funded provider of higher education. The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the provider discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes of study that the provider delivers on behalf of the University of Wolverhampton. The review was carried out by Mr Gary Hargreaves, Mr Matthew Kitching, Dr Hayley Randle (reviewers) and Dr John Hurley (Coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the [Review for Educational Oversight \(and for specific course designation\): Handbook, April 2013](#).² Evidence in support of the review included documentation supplied by the provider and awarding body, meetings with staff and students.

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

- University of Wolverhampton
- the UK Quality Code Higher Education (the Quality Code).

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

The Academy has a diverse, music-related, provision. Founded in 1994, it has expanded from being a provider of private instrument lessons and music technology tuition to a national network of eight centres across the UK offering specialist instrument-specific education and training for modern musicians who specialise in popular music performance and production.

The Academy offers a range of further education and apprentice training provisions in addition to higher education. Higher education is offered at five centres. There are 208 higher education students, all on full-time courses, out of 845 enrolments or just under 25 per cent of the total. Higher education numbers at any centre range from 14 in Southampton to 72 in Birmingham.

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

University of Wolverhampton

- BA (Hons) Performance Industries (Top-Up)
- Fd (Arts) Music Performance
- Fd (Arts) Creative Music Production

The provider's stated responsibilities

The Academy works very closely with the University, using the University's quality processes and student information system, so many responsibilities are shared, including development of the curriculum. The Academy is responsible for teaching and tutoring, setting and first marking assignments and providing feedback to students upon them, learning resources, industry links and some student support. A number of other student support and guidance

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/designated-providers/Pages/default.aspx

² www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx

services are provided by the University, as are electronic journal and library resources. Programme review is conducted in parallel by the Academy and the University.

Recent developments

There have been some changes in the course offer at some centres. The FdA in Music Performance has been introduced in Gateshead and discontinued in Southampton. The FdA in Music Production has been introduced in Southampton. Investment in relevant physical resources has accompanied these changes. There has been a small increase in higher education numbers overall through student progression through the levels.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. A written submission was prepared by two final year student representatives, with some Academy assistance, based on survey data and focus groups. Although largely based on student experience at the largest centre in Birmingham, it included some evidence drawn from other centres. The submission was helpful to the team and was amplified by information drawn from a meeting with students from Birmingham and online video interviews with students from other centres during the visit.

Detailed findings about the Academy of Music & Sound (UK) Ltd

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The Academy has a central management structure that is responsible for academic standards. The Board of Directors has overall responsibility for management of the commercial aspects of the business and of academic standards. It meets monthly to review commercial and academic matters for all programmes. Two members of the Senior Management Team have specific responsibility for curriculum and for standards across the centres.

1.2 The Board of Directors discharge all central responsibilities for quality and operate as the assessment board. There is not a clear separation of academic and commercial matters. Although there is satisfactory oversight of higher education processes by the Academy there is no distinct internal structure and process for assuring quality and standards which is independent from the commercial operations of the Academy. It is **advisable** for the Academy to separate academic and commercial management functions for its higher education provision at all levels.

1.3 Day-to-day responsibilities for standards are delegated to programme leaders who have a remit to ensure that all centres provide a consistent approach to the management of academic standards. Programme management files show effective planning and record keeping. Programme leaders and senior managers make regular planned visits to all Academy centres.

1.4 The validation and partnership agreements with the University of Wolverhampton outline the responsibilities delegated to the Academy. These require the management of academic standards to conform to the processes outlined by the University in its document 'Quality Assurance and Enhancement: an Overview'. Links with the University are strong with regular meetings, updates and staff development opportunities.

1.5 There is a process of reporting directly to the University. Annual programme reviews have now been superseded by a new University system of Course Journals. The majority of evidence in these Course Journals is derived from course leaders with some student input. While the reflective Course Journals are a developing resource, some currently only provide a limited overview of the programme.

1.6 There is a parallel internal process of reporting and review from centres and from programmes. External examiners have indicated that the maintenance of standards has not been equally effective at all centres, and this is being addressed by the Academy. Reporting and collation of evidence from centre staff, students and programme leaders is undertaken by the Vice Principal. Higher education review meetings consider retention, achievement, progression and assessment. There is a standardisation procedure for assessment. Centre managers meet and report annually to the Board of Directors. The Vice Principal makes monthly reports to the Board of Directors and all reporting materials form the basis of an internal annual programme review.

1.7 The 2012 Academy annual programme reviews focused effectively on each programme, with a broad range of evidence, including from the University reports. The last Academy Annual Course Programme review 2013 was less substantive and combined all

the higher education programmes. Actions are embedded in this short document although there is no action plan or monitoring. There is scope to redevelop these documents to be more evaluative, based on the 2012 model. This would entail a reversion to reporting supported by evidence from external examiners, students and the University. It would include recommendations with a clear action plan with monitoring to ensure clear and timely signing off of actions and recommendations. It is **advisable** for the Academy to make Annual Reviews more detailed and focused on individual programmes.

How effectively does the Academy make use of external reference points to manage academic standards?

1.8 The Academy demonstrates familiarity with the Quality Code. Close involvement with the University's systems ensures alignment. The Academy was instrumental in the design of the current programmes, including programme specifications referenced to subject benchmark statements. The Academy has also provided more detailed module guidance to help staff and students differentiate performance at each higher education level.

1.9 The Academy has also been substantially involved in the development of external standards. It has been leading on National Occupational Standards frameworks for Music Performance and, following successful publication of the level 3 standards, is now working on level 4-5 frameworks. This work has again impacted nationally on the Review of Adult Vocational Qualifications, with some further contribution by the Academy. The involvement in setting national standards underlies provision in the Academy and is **good practice**.

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

1.10 There are effective processes for responding to external examiners. External examining takes place annually, organised by the University, and in some programmes covers other providers. In 2012, external examiner reports raised the issue of standardisation across the various centres. Previous reports noted that there was insufficient oversight and monitoring of assessment procedures carried out for all centres. Following the reports, a number of measures have been undertaken to ensure all students are receiving comparable grading for practical performance and the summative assessment components. Staff development has been undertaken in response to the comments. In addition, a visiting lecturer from the University has conducted training sessions for all tutors.

1.11 Lead teachers now oversee an internal moderation process for semester one assessments. Tutors use file sharing, allowing for commentary on, and moderation of, assessment and assessment feedback. It allows all centres to view assessed work simultaneously and promotes consistency in assessment and moderation processes. In the context of a multi-centre organisation, the process for using online file sharing for moderation is **good practice**.

1.12 The Academy conducts a planned internal verification standardisation meeting. Systems for sharing good practice, which have previously been informal, are developing. There is a comprehensive audit trail which demonstrates that staff have absorbed guidance from the University that includes sharing good practice, operational processes, training and formal links with the University.

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

2 Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1 The Academy centres play a substantial role in the management of the quality of learning opportunities, subject to the overall management and reporting processes of the Academy described in paragraphs 1.1 and 1.6. Course coordinators and lead teachers at each centre are responsible for ensuring the quality of the academic delivery and the provision of industry-appropriate resources. The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality plays a pivotal role in quality management, functioning as a conduit between the awarding body, the Academy and its centres.

2.2 Student representation and involvement in decision-making is currently evolving within the Academy, having previously been limited in scope. There are a number of processes facilitating involvement, including a Staff-Student Liaison meeting, student representatives and anonymous feedback opportunities. A number of these mechanisms are new developments but the majority of students felt they were working effectively and allowed them to be involved in decision making. The team spoke to students at one centre who felt that student representation was not working as effectively and that decisions were not always communicated to students. The Academy reported that further work is due to be undertaken to strengthen student representation. It would be **desirable** for the Academy to continue to develop student representation.

How effectively does the Academy make use of external reference points to manage and enhance learning opportunities?

2.3 The Academy benefits from a strong working relationship with the University as described in paragraph 1.8. Delivery and management staff are fully cognisant of the sections of the Quality Code that are pertinent to their specific roles.

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

2.4 Students consider that there is a high quality of the teaching and learning at the Academy. This is assured by the Academy in a number of ways. Staff are well-qualified in their field and expose students to contemporary industry practice. An effective relationship between University staff and the Academy supports the management and enhancement of teaching and learning. Consistent and comprehensive use is made of standardised regulatory, guidance and course-related materials present on the Academy's virtual learning environment (VLE). While staff are employed on the basis of their professional standing and expertise, all are currently undertaking, or hold, a nationally recognised teaching qualification.

2.5 Lead teachers at each centre play a fundamental role in ensuring the quality of teaching and learning. They act as champions of good practice rather than managers, supporting staff through mentoring, regular teaching observations and the identification of further training needs. There is an appraisal system for staff.

2.6 Assessment feedback is clear, with annotation of scripts and comments on a cover sheet from each marker. Feedback is generally informative and developmental. In best practice it is clearly related to learning outcomes and the grading criteria although some variation in quality is observable. Feedback is generally given in a timely manner although students stated that the University timescale for assessment marking was not always

adhered to. It would be **desirable** for the Academy to standardise the consistency and timeliness of feedback at each centre to reflect best practice in the Academy.

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

2.7 Student support is delivered both by the University and the Academy and services are clearly valued by students. However, there is a lack of clarity among students as to the full range of services available and how and where these can be accessed. The University provides information, advice and guidance across a range of areas, much of which is available online.

2.8 The Academy offers more individual support, including counselling facilities where necessary. Initial needs assessments begin during the interview and audition stage. A support system based predominantly on the tutorial system is in place. Different tutoring practices are evident across the centres. These range from following predetermined curricula specifically designed to develop academic skills to those run on a more informal basis which has resulted in a reduction in attendance. Where they are working well, tutorials are used effectively to institute and review personal development plans for individual students. Where the tutorial system is not as effective, and where attendance is low, students appeared to be less aware of support arrangements. It would be **desirable** for the Academy to adopt more consistently effective approaches to tutorial provision.

2.9 Students benefit from the currency and expertise of Academy staff who have extensive industry experience as practitioners and music specialists. Students benefit from close working relationships with their tutors. Students value highly the open and creative dialogue they can enter into with staff and this supplementary support, outside of timetabled classes and the formal tutorial system, enriches their experience. Student support extends into the development of employability skills through the curriculum. Opportunities to engage in master classes, and the provision of careers guidance and employability modules which are embedded within the curriculum, are supported by the staff practitioners. The effective practitioner and employability support for students is **good practice**.

How effectively does the Academy develop its staff in order to improve student learning opportunities?

2.10 There is a well organised approach to staff development. Academy staff are appointed principally on the basis of their professional experience and subject specialist knowledge. All staff undergo a comprehensive induction process and receive training while working at the Academy. The University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is used by the Academy to plan its staff development programmes. Individual staff development needs are identified by lead teachers and course coordinators through mentoring, teaching observation and appraisal processes.

2.11 The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality ensures that all higher education delivery staff receive regular training provided by either the University, the Academy or external practitioners, to ensure that they are familiar with contemporary teaching, learning and assessment practices. Staff development activities are well documented and include feedback and trainer records. All staff development is formally recorded in a continuous professional development log.

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

2.12 Sufficient learning resources are available and accessible to students allowing them to achieve the intended learning outcomes of their chosen programme of study. The Academy's higher education programmes are delivered within an appropriate industry-relevant environment. Students benefit from the Academy's established relationship with key industry manufacturers through established sponsorship relationships resulting in the students receiving tuition on up-to-date industry-standard equipment.

2.13 Resource management has strategic and flexible elements. Centre Managers are responsible for the annual review of resources which considers major capital requirements. In addition, a responsive process is in place ensuring that the resource needs identified by students, tutors or management staff are considered promptly and any shortfalls that arise during the academic year are resolved quickly.

2.14 The Academy provides small libraries at all of its centres containing hard copies of all of the books listed on the module study guide reading lists for the higher education programmes delivered at each site. Students report that they currently need to find resources from external sources. In response to student requests, the basic book stock is currently being augmented with additional generic resources that underpin the programme portfolio.

2.15 Academy students have access to a wide range of University resources. Access to the physical resources presents difficulties for those students who are based further away. Academy students can also use the University electronic resources including its intranet and VLE. Uptake is currently inconsistent, which students partly attribute to variation in the encouragement and guidance provided by tutors.

The review team has **confidence** that the provider is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the intended learning opportunities it provides for students.

3 Information about learning opportunities

How effectively does the Academy communicate information about learning opportunities to students and other stakeholders?

3.1 While students were broadly content with the accuracy and completeness of pre-entry information, a number reported some concerns. Students on the BA Performance Industries believe their programme contained less practical performance aspects than had been communicated during open days and informal discussions with staff. Students also reported that their tuition fee had doubled during the application process. Academy staff clarified that this was due to the removal of an undersubscribed part-time pathway. It would be **desirable** for the Academy to review its processes for communicating changes in the future to ensure all students understand the cause of such changes.

3.2 Student handbooks and module study guides are comprehensive and available through the Academy's VLE. The handbooks contain a pre-course reading list which is made available to students, in advance of their studies, through the University's student portal. While some students reported receiving their reading list during their interview others had not received it before the start of their course and none reported accessing it through the

University portal. The Academy may therefore want to introduce a more effective mechanism for providing this information.

3.3 Students reported that induction was thorough and ensured they had a detailed understanding of how their programmes would operate. However, they were not entirely clear about the support services they could access at the Academy and through the University. Information is contained within the Degree Guidance Notes section of the Academy website and it may prove more useful to students to be contained in an area that is more obviously related to student support.

3.4 External examiner reports are made available to students through the University's VLE. No students with whom the team met had viewed an external examiner report, however, and this may stem from the fact that they have little reason to use the University's VLE. The Academy may wish to make external examiner reports more readily accessible to all students. It is **advisable** for the Academy to make necessary information more easily accessible to students.

How effective are the Academy's arrangements for assuring that information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy?

3.5 The Academy has a clear Publicity Materials Policy which articulates responsibilities for the production, approval and monitoring of marketing information. The responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of published information is shared with the University. Information originated in the Academy is ultimately approved by the Senior Management Team. This is subsequently sent to the University where the Associate Dean for Partnerships and a central Account Manager approve the material, which is also subject to an annual review by the link tutor.

3.6 Within the Academy, the Marketing and Commercial Director is responsible for the management and oversight of information. The Director receives draft materials from the Academy centres ensuring they comply with internal policies, the requirements of the University and align with the Quality Code. While Academy policy also refers to the production of academic materials they are not its focus and therefore monitoring arrangements for information relating to course materials could usefully be made more explicit.

The team concludes that reliance **can** be placed on the information that the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

Action plan³

Academy of Music & Sound (UK) Ltd action plan relating to the Review of Specific Course Designation, December 2013						
Good practice	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date(s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The review team identified the following areas of good practice that are worthy of wider dissemination within the Academy:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> involvement in setting national standards (paragraph 1.9) 	To continue involvement with developing National Occupational Standards via Creative and Cultural Skills	Creative and Cultural Skills have indicated that Academic Director will be involved in further development of National Occupational Standards for music performance, but have not give any timeline to date	Timeline to be confirmed externally	Timeline to be confirmed externally	Academic Director	Further Development of National Occupational Standards for music performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> using online file sharing for the moderation of assessment (paragraph 1.11) 	To use online file-share to make it easier for the link tutor at the University of Wolverhampton and the external examiner to compare samples of assessments from each Academy	<p>A new system is currently being trialled to replace the current one for May 2014 assessments</p> <p>There is no limit to the file size for videos, and it is housed on our own server</p>	April-May 2014 for semester two assessments	Technical Support (to set up the new system and ensure staff are supported with its use)	Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality	Course Reviews (ease of use and time taken for uploads for May 2013 assessments will be

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

	To encourage tutors and internal moderators to use the online file-share to study feedback and grades given by other teachers marking the same modules and, thus, improve standardisation between centres	<p>Technical support to produce a 'How to upload' guide for technicians and course coordinators</p> <p>Course coordinators and centre technicians to be trained and supported to use the new system</p>		<p>Course coordinators (to upload assessed work and feedback)</p> <p>Centre Technicians (to upload video files)</p>		<p>reviewed)</p> <p>Feedback from Link Tutor and external</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> effective practitioner and employability support for students (paragraph 2.9). 	Ensure all students have effective contact with a variety of industry practitioners throughout their time with the Academy	<p>Continue to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> engage tutors who are current music practitioners organise master classes with relevant industry experience, including three arranging master classes for BA students <p>Organise industry mentor for all BA students in their final term</p>	Programme planned at the start of each semester	Centre Manager	Principal	<p>Course Journals will record master classes</p> <p>Staff/student liaison meeting will record student view</p>

Advisable	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date(s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The team considers that it is advisable for the Academy to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • separate academic and commercial management functions for its higher education provision (paragraph 1.2) 	To have separate meeting minutes and records for different aspects of the business	Course Reviews, Senior Management Team and Directors meetings will be clearly divided up into commercial, higher and further education	With immediate effect	Centre managers, vice principals Senior Management Team	Directors	Team meeting minutes, Course Reviews Senior Management Team meeting minutes Director meeting minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make Annual Reviews more detailed and focused on individual programmes (paragraph 1.7) 	Academy Annual higher education review to encompass all higher education reports and outcomes and be a more evaluative document	Include in the Annual Course Review report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student numbers and progress • equality and diversity information • highlights from course journals • highlights from University moderator and external examiner • tutor training sessions • evaluation of the 	July 2014	Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality	Senior Management Team	Higher education Annual Course Review 2014

		<p>academic year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> improvement plan for the following year 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> make necessary information more easily accessible to students (paragraphs 2.7, 2.15, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4). 	To improve the accessibility of student information	<p>Review what information student can assessed from the Academy of Music & Sound (UK) Ltd website and the virtual learning environment</p> <p>Make links and signposting clearer to students to information of the University of Wolverhampton websites</p>	To be completed by September 2014	Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality	Principal	Student Information Questionnaire
Desirable	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date/s	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The team considers that it is desirable for the Academy to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue to develop student representation (paragraph 2.2) 	Continue to improve the student voice system	<p>Student voice evaluation meeting May 2014</p> <p>Visits to each Academy of Music and Sound by the University of Wolverhampton Students'</p>	<p>End May 2014</p> <p>During February 2014</p>	<p>Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality, Lead Student Voice Coordinator</p> <p>Course coordinators</p>	<p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality</p>	<p>Annual Course Review</p> <p>National Student Survey</p>

		Union representative				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> standardise the consistency and timeliness of feedback at each centre (paragraph 2.6) 	To ensure students feel they receive their feedback in a timely manner and have accurate expectations of when this will be	To set dates when feedback will be available to students and communicate this clearly to students	For the May assessments and each semester after	Course coordinators	Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality	Staff/student liaison meetings Student satisfaction survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adopt more consistently effective approaches to tutorial provision (paragraph 2.8) 	<p>To ensure students have the best possible tutorial experience</p> <p>To ensure attendance to second year tutorials improves in those centres where attendance is low</p>	<p>Share tutorial good practice between centre</p> <p>Monitor levels of attendance of tutorials</p>	With immediate effect	Course coordinators	Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality	Course reviews Staff/student liaison meetings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review the processes for communicating changes to students (paragraph 3.1). 	<p>To ensure all applicants know the accurate price of the course they are applying for</p> <p>If there are changes from part to full-time provision to communicate in writing the implications to the cost</p>	<p>Review all marketing materials to ensure the price is clear</p> <p>Ensure Centre managers communicate in writing to students if the mode of delivery of a course changes</p>	<p>With immediate effect</p> <p>With immediate effect</p>	<p>Director of Marketing</p> <p>Centre Managers</p>	<p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>Board of Director</p>	<p>Student Information Questionnaire</p> <p>Student Information Questionnaire</p>

About QAA

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

QAA's aims are to:

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

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

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

More detail about Review of Courses Specifically Designated for Student Support can be found at: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/designated-providers/Pages/default.aspx.

Glossary

This glossary explains terms used in this report. You can find a fuller glossary at: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary. Formal definitions of key terms can be found in the [Review for Educational Oversight \(and for specific course designation\): Handbook, April 2013](#).⁴

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

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

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).

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

differentiated judgements In a Review for Specific Courses Designation, separate judgements respectively for the provision validated by separate awarding bodies.

enhancement The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in QAA's review processes.

external examiner An independent expert appointed by an institution to comment on student achievement in relation to established academic standards and to look at approaches to assessment.

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*.

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 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.

⁴ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx

operational definition A formal definition of a term, which establishes 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.

provider(s) (of higher education) Organisations that deliver higher education. In the UK they may be a degree-awarding body or another organisation that offers programmes of higher education on behalf of degree-awarding bodies or awarding organisations. In the context of Review for Specific Course Designation the term means an independent college.

public information Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

quality See **academic quality**.

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 that all providers are required to meet.

reference points Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured. Internal reference points may be used by providers for purposes of self-regulation; external ones are used and accepted throughout the higher education community for the checking of standards and quality.

subject benchmark statement A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

threshold academic standards 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 for higher education qualifications** and **subject benchmark statements**. See also **academic standards**.

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

QAA666 – R3662 - Mar 14

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2014
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Email enquiries@gaa.ac.uk
Website www.gaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786