

# Higher Education Review of Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education

February 2014

## Contents

<b>Contents</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>About this review</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Key findings</b> .....	<b>3</b>
QAA's judgements about Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education .....	3
Good practice .....	3
Affirmation of action being taken .....	3
Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	3
<b>About Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Explanation of the findings about Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education</b> .....	<b>6</b>
1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards .....	7
2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities.....	7
3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision.....	7
4 Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities .....	11
5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.....	15
<b>Glossary</b> .....	<b>18</b>

## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education. The review took place on 11-12 February 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Tommie Anderson-Jaquest
- Mr Martin Stimson
- Mr Anthony Turjansky

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code)<sup>1</sup> 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 the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of threshold academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

The Institute had recently been granted foundation degree awarding powers (FDAP) by the Privy Council following detailed scrutiny of the Institute's application by QAA which included consideration of the setting and maintenance of academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities. Consequently, this review focused exclusively on the two judgement areas of information about higher education provision and the enhancement of students' learning opportunities at the Institute.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 3. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

In reviewing Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode)

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx).

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)<sup>4</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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<sup>3</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus).

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education.

- The quality of information produced about its provision is **commended**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education.

- The comprehensive range of web-based and mobile resources to ensure the accessibility of information (Expectation C).
- The systematic consideration of information within established quality assurance systems and committees (Expectation C).
- The use of the Higher Education Observation of Teaching and Learning process to evaluate the information provided to students (Expectation C).
- The ownership of information by staff at all levels of the institution (Expectation C).
- The development of and support given to Students' Union initiatives in teaching, learning and assessment (Enhancement).
- The empowerment of students through their engagement in strategically driven enhancement activities (Enhancement).
- The institutional support for staff development relating to professional updating and scholarly activity (Enhancement).
- The institutional support and encouragement for staff engagement with the wider higher education sector through external activities (Enhancement).

### Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following action** that the Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- Continue to identify opportunities to embed and standardise the use of plagiarism-detection software as a tool that also enhances learning (Enhancement).

### Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The commitment to student involvement is clearly evident throughout Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education and underpinned by the 'Learner First' strategy. Students have a central role in the development and review of policies and processes and there are numerous methods for two way staff-student communication. Students are regarded as 'change agents' and there are practical examples to illustrate the positive impact of student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Higher Education Review](#).

## About Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education

Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education (Institute) is a large general further education college based in North East Lincolnshire which offers higher education provision to over 1,800 learners from a number of campuses.

The Institute's mission statement is 'to deliver accessible high quality education and training to all our communities' which embodies the notion of expanding provision and meeting the needs of current and future learners.

The Institute began delivering higher education programmes in 1993, after originally starting as a technical college in 1944. In 1999, the University of Lincoln (formerly the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside) vacated its Grimsby campus and this provided further opportunities for the Institute to expand its higher education portfolio to meet the needs of the local community and employers.

In January 2010 the Institute merged with Yorkshire Coast College (YCC), a small general further education college based in Scarborough with a small number of higher education students and only one Foundation Degree. Both providers are partners with the University of Hull and Teesside University. The Institute also offers Pearson programmes and is reaching the end of a partnership with Leeds Metropolitan University.

A major change since the last review is the merger with YCC, although preparations on the integration of the Institute's higher education practices, policies and strategies began in December 2008.

There have been significant changes in the Senior Management Team with the appointment of a new Principal and Assistant Principals, one of whom has responsibility for higher education provision. There has been significant investment in the resources for higher education provision demonstrated by the opening of the University Centre in October 2011. A new Chair of Governors was also appointed on 1 January 2012 and the range of expertise represented on the Corporation has been extended under the Chair's leadership.

The current review differs from a standard Higher Education Review as the provider was awarded foundation degree awarding powers (FDAP) in August 2013. The FDAP scrutiny included an examination of governance and academic management, academic standards and quality assurance, scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff and the environment supporting the delivery of foundation degree programmes. As a result of this recent scrutiny, the current review focused exclusively on the two judgement areas of information produced by the provider about higher education provision and the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

The Institute's most recent challenge has been to secure foundation degree awarding powers. Current priorities are to implement and embed processes requisite for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities.

The Institute currently has formal agreements with three higher education institutions and a number of students follow Pearson programmes. The major partnership continues to be with the University of Hull while an agreement with York St John University ended in 2011 and that with Leeds Metropolitan University is concluding. The Institute has entered into a new partnership with Teesside University.

The Institute has effectively responded to the eight good practice points and three desirable recommendations from the IQER Summative review, conducted by QAA in 2009. There has been continued development and monitoring of the implementation and embedding of higher

education codes of practice with the input of students. A review of the library provision and resources was undertaken in the year following IQER and student access to resources has been extended with the 24 hour opening of the resource centre. The Code of Practice, Accuracy and Completeness of Published Information, was revised and approved by the Quality Improvement Committee in June 2013. Students are satisfied that published information is up to date and relevant. Progress has also been made in responding to the recommendations received by YCC during their developmental engagement prior to the merger with the Institute.

## **Explanation of the findings about Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education**

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.

## **1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards**

1.1 As a result of the recent grant of FDAP to the Institute, the current review did not focus on this judgement area.

## **2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities**

2.1 As a result of the recent FDAP scrutiny, the current review did not focus on this judgement area.

## **3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision**

**Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit-for-purpose, accessible and trustworthy.**

### **Quality Code, Part C: Information about higher education provision**

3.1 There is a strategic approach to managing the quality of information relating to higher education provision with senior staff having developed a set of objectives to measure levels of success in operational planning and implementation. Staff members within the Institute are developing and implementing processes and procedures for information control that function effectively and efficiently.

3.2 Senior management ensures that standardised policies and processes for assuring the accuracy and reliability of published information cover higher education regulations, policies and guidelines, marketing and publicity materials, programme documentation and student records of academic achievement. The Higher Education Quality and Standards team must approve all documentation prior to release, including changes proposed for the website.

3.3 Meetings with staff members and students were held to confirm the processes used to manage information about higher education provision at the Institute. A demonstration of the virtual learning environment (VLE) was also given from a student perspective so the team could check the accessibility of course and student support information as well as the availability of external examiner reports. These opportunities enabled the review team to confirm the details presented in the Institute's self-evaluation document and associated evidence.

3.4 The Institute recognises that accuracy and completeness of information impact directly upon the quality of the student experience at many levels. Senior Managers express commitment to ensuring that students have full access to information from the start of their educational journey until completion. All stakeholders, including members of the public have access to a wide range of information, ranging from programme-related documentation to practical information regarding finance, accommodation, student support, career guidance and admissions. Additionally, the website also provides useful information about the Institute's history, mission and vision statements, strategic plans, policies, procedures and codes of practice.

3.5 The Institute provides higher education information that is comprehensive, accurate, reliable and fit for purpose. There are specialist areas of the website to meet the needs of



different stakeholder groups such as employers and for the wider community. Additionally, staff members and students have access to the Institute's VLE. Higher education students have a dedicated website and access to a number of specialised websites, including one for international students and one for work-based learning. Presentation is student-focused and aligned with the Institute's mission and vision statements. The website also provides auxiliary information and designated sections for prospective and current students.

3.6 The Students' Union's dedicated website focuses upon extracurricular activities for higher education students. Links are provided to social media. The Institute is also developing a new mobile version of the website that has received positive reviews from students. Additionally, there is an online forum (Student Voice Wiki) where students can exchange views about their experiences and register comments which are mediated and responded to by the Higher Education Quality and Standards team. Publications such as the Loop Newsletter aimed at students, provide a positive flavour to the learning environment. The comprehensive range of web-based and mobile resources to ensure the accessibility of information is **good practice**.

3.7 The Institute also makes key information set (KIS) and wider information set (WIS) information available. KIS data became live in 2012-13 and members of the Senior Management Team have expressed intentions to use the results of a mock HEFCE review (2012) for further development in 2013-14. .

3.8 The Institute has robust mechanisms in place for monitoring and verifying the accuracy of information. Internally, procedures are formalised in the 'Code of Practice: Accuracy and Completeness of Published Information', published on the website. The Higher Education Quality and Standards team screens all documentation for accuracy, relevancy, currency and accessibility prior to release, including information pertaining to financial assistance, student accommodation, and student support. In respect of updates to the Institute's codes of practice, the Quality Improvement Committee must approve all changes. Senior staff and teaching staff demonstrate substantial knowledge of procedures to be followed in respect of reviewing and signing off course-related documentation. Externally, the Institute complies fully with the standards and requirements set by its validating and awarding bodies for managing and presenting information relating to their higher education programmes. The systematic consideration of information within established quality assurance systems and committees is **good practice**.

3.9 Senior Management monitor and review the Institute's systems for managing information at institutional and school levels in a variety of ways. Thematic reviews, periodic reviews and the moderation of Annual Monitoring Reports are deemed to be particularly useful. For example, the Quality Improvement Committee carried out an institutional-level review of the Code of Practice: Accuracy and Completeness of Published Information in June 2013 focused on the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). Programme-level reviews of information are also conducted and the results are reported to the Quality and Standards Committee as part of the systematic approach to improvement.

3.10 The Institute undertakes periodic reviews within its schools and these include a clear focus on the management of higher education information. Reviews are modelled upon QAA requirements for Higher Education Review and require desk-based and events-based evidence. Additionally, heads of schools produce reports annually that incorporate critical reflections about the progress made in respect of assuring the quality of information. At programme level, lecturers undertaking teaching and learning observations are also required to make judgements about the quality and accuracy of information and to make recommendations for improvement. The use of the Higher Education Observation of Teaching and Learning process to evaluate the information provided to students is **good practice**.

3.11 Staff members analyse critically results from the various reviews undertaken with a view to implementing change as required. For example, in 2011-12 the Senior Management Team (SMT) delegated responsibilities for maintaining and updating higher education programme and module handbooks on the website to the Higher Education Quality and Standards team in collaboration with the Senior Web Officer in the Marketing and Student Recruitment Office. As a result, workloads of Higher Education Quality and Standards staff increased substantially and increased risks of delays. After careful review, the SMT decided in September 2012 to devolve some information management responsibilities to schools. Heads of schools, assisted by programme managers, are now responsible for assuring and maintaining the accuracy, completeness and reliability of information within their respective schools and departments. Clear processes also exist for awarding bodies to approve information relating to their awards. The ownership of information by staff at all levels of the institution is **good practice**.

3.12 The Institute's VLE provides a valuable source of information for students, particularly in respect of their specific studies. All module leaders are responsible for uploading module content on to the system and handbooks can be easily accessed on the VLE.

3.13 The Institute takes student views into account in respect of how information is presented on the VLE. For example, in response to students' comments that handbooks contained too much information, the University Centre has trialled a version in the Business School that breaks down the content into 'mini documents'. Staff members within the Learning and Teaching Group are now assessing the trial with a view to recommending a common approach to higher education programme and module handbooks for the 2014-15 academic year.

3.14 Overall, the review team concluded that the Institute should be **commended** on its information about higher education provision and that the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## Quality of the information produced about its provision: Summary of findings

3.15 In reaching its commended judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook and identified four features of good practice with no recommendations or affirmations.

3.16 There is a very thorough and well managed process relating to information produced about higher education at the Institute. The Institute is proactive in reviewing and developing the information provided and in ensuring it meets the needs of students and other stakeholder groups in an easily accessible way. Staff members at all levels demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that information was fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy and had a clear understanding of the appropriate procedures for managing this. Students were very positive about the information provided and cited examples of how this made a positive contribution to their progression.

3.17 Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education is **commended** by the review team on its information about higher education provision.

## 4 Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities

**Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.**

### Findings

- 4.1 The Institute's higher education strategy has a 'learner first' approach to the development and delivery of programmes and student learning opportunities. The Strategic Plan, Higher Education Strategy and assorted codes of practice and guidelines refer to students variously as 'partners', 'co-creators' and 'change agents'. The Institute regards the learner voice as an integral feature of its quality assurance and enhancement processes.
- 4.2 Plans to enhance the academic and practical experiences of students also take into account the external environment. Mechanisms for identifying and disseminating good practice at Institute level include staff participation in internal committees and learner-focused conferences in addition to those of awarding bodies and other college-based consortia.
- 4.3 The evidence provided by the Institute in support of its strategic approach to enhancement was supported by information gained during meetings during the review visit. Staff members and students demonstrated an acute awareness and commitment to enhancement-based developments and could readily cite appropriate examples.
- 4.4 Enhancement features prominently within the Institute's Higher Education Strategy. The appointment of an Associate Principal with specific responsibility for higher education provision enables institution-level consideration of quality and enhancement on higher education programmes.
- 4.5 The development of the University Centre and, within it, a Higher Education Learning Centre offering 24/7 access has been welcomed by students and external examiners as part of a wider Estates Strategy that also includes new centres for sports and creative arts and media. Learning resources and facilities are reviewed formally to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. There is a high priority placed on continued development and strategies for higher education teaching, learning and e-learning that contain objectives in support of sustaining and increasing excellence. Staff members acknowledged that it was sometimes difficult to establish the precise impact of individual enhancement-related activities but that the cumulative effect of multiple initiatives is having a significant impact on performance as evidenced by improved student achievement rates.
- 4.6 Self-assessments undertaken by schools and programme teams are considered and responded to at Institute level and form the basis for an overarching annual quality enhancement report. End-of-module evaluations enable improvements to be made to future delivery. Examples of improvements made in response to student feedback include modifications to module content and assessment, changes to the timetabling of lectures and seminars and the use of guest speakers in a module's delivery. In addition to annual monitoring, periodic and thematic reviews provide vehicles for identifying and disseminating good practice via institution-level committees, including the Quality and Standards Committee, Higher Education Coordinators Committee, and the Governors' Curriculum and Quality Committee. A newly-established Regulations, Progression and Performance Committee has within its remit the oversight of enhancement-led activities through the receipt of school and institute-level performance reports. Meetings of the Heads of School Leadership Group contain a standing item for the exchange of good practice. Examination boards provide further opportunities to identify and share good practice with the input of

external examiners. An increasing number of committees include enhancement within their remit. Staff members explained that this is beneficial since it facilitates the widest possible consideration of enhancement-related themes by a broad cross-section of staff.

4.7 The Institute works with awarding bodies and others to develop opportunities for identifying and sharing good practice through active participation in external meetings and learner-focused conferences. A cross-institute benchmarking project will use data to map the progression of students in further education settings through higher education with a view to establishing 'distance travelled'. The School of Health and Social Care Sciences received the UCAS sponsored Association of College's 2013 Beacon Award for HE in FE, which included in part recognition of its 'effective external partnerships and processes to review the validity and relevance of programmes to the local context, particularly employers and learners'. Employers have contributed to the review of programmes and the development of new provision including undergraduate programmes in refrigeration and air conditioning and a foundation degree in integrated care as part of the NHS's Assistant Practitioner agenda. In addition to work-based learning on foundation degrees, students participate in other work-related activities that enhance learning such as extracurricular involvement in producing a weekly sports programme for local television.

4.8 Prudent approaches are demonstrated by the Institute in respect of planning major changes that contribute to enhancement. In line with the E-Learning Strategy, a new virtual learning environment with added features such as social media has been piloted prior to implementation across schools during 2014-15. In a similar vein, a pilot of online submission and marking of coursework has been received favourably by students ahead of wider implementation. The Institute uses plagiarism detection software for coursework submission although some students indicated that they did not have direct access to the similarity reports. The review team therefore **affirms** the Institute's continued identification of opportunities to embed and standardise the use of plagiarism-detection software as a tool that also enhances learning.

4.9 Student consultation and feedback occur through participation in programme and institution-level committees and internal and National Student Surveys. Students collaborated in the development of an institution-level code of practice for student engagement. They also participate in periodic reviews, both as participants and panel members, which they perceive as an opportunity to shape their education and have a real input into their learning experience. Students identified changes to modules and assessment methods as examples of positive outcomes from participation in periodic review. A Students' Union was recently established with support from the Institute in the form of a block grant and funding for a paid appointed president post. Students were involved in the appointment of the first Students' Union President and although it is still becoming established, early perceptions have been positive with particular support for the development of societies and activities to promote interaction between higher education students. A project initiated by this Students' Union and managed by the central quality team has enabled volunteer students to undertake research into various aspects of the learner experience, for example assessment feedback. The development of and support given to Students' Union initiatives in teaching, learning and assessment is **good practice**. Student-led teaching awards provide well received opportunities to identify and reward staff excellence. Students input directly into the teaching observation process through completion of a Student Learning Journey feedback sheet. This enables them to comment on the overall learning experience in a module and has been received positively by teaching staff who welcome the positive and developmental nature of feedback obtained in this way.

4.10 Student consultation has informed other enhancement-focused activities and projects including the redevelopment of the Institute's website to include a mobile version and the creation of a student information portal. A Higher Education Student Voice Wiki,

moderated by the central quality team, also provides timely and effective two-way communication between students and staff. The review team noted that use of the Student Voice Wiki was currently variable across student groups. Staff members explained that the wiki was currently being promoted to achieve greater participation and in the meantime a range of alternative and appropriate communication mechanisms was available. A student proposal for developing 'mini' online course handbooks was being piloted in one school and would be evaluated before any further rollout. The empowerment of students through their engagement in strategically driven enhancement activities is **good practice**.

4.11 Continuing professional development plays a key role in promoting enhancement and is linked to individual staff appraisals. This is supported by the Institute's higher education fellowship scheme and Higher Education Academy (HEA) accreditation of its Leadership and Teacher Excellence Programme. A teaching, learning and scholarship wiki provides an online forum for academics to disseminate their research through a peer-reviewed process. Staff teaching vocational-professional subjects maintain their skills through relevant industrial updating. Staff members are supported in acquiring HEA Fellowship status and benefit from fee remission when studying for higher qualifications. The institutional support for staff development relating to professional updating and scholarly activity is **good practice**. Staff members receive bespoke training in the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and an increasing number are securing external examiner appointments which provide further opportunities for good practice exchange. The Institute's support and encouragement for staff engagement with the wider higher education sector through external activities is **good practice**. The Students' Union is being supported to deliver student-led staff development on assessment feedback and the use of new learning technologies which were still in development at the time of review.

4.12 The Institute makes systematic use of internal quality assurance procedures to identify opportunities for enhancement. At programme level, performance data from Boards of Examiners are discussed in various committees and recommendations made in respect of areas to be developed or good practice to be disseminated. In turn, data is analysed in school-based annual monitoring reports and self-evaluation documents, periodic and thematic review reports and reports produced for awarding bodies. Opportunities to enhance the Institute's higher education provision are identified through these processes of self-evaluation.

4.13 Overall, the review team concluded that the Institute should be **commended** on the deliberate steps it takes, at Institute level, to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.14 In reaching its commended judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook and identified four features of good practice, one affirmation and no recommendations.

4.15 There is a well developed strategic approach to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities at the Institute and this is consistently evident in practice. The commitment to enhancement is shown through the development and funding of new initiatives and a focus on the 'learner first' ethos. Innovation, monitoring and review are key features of initiatives within the Institute and involve both staff members and students as 'partners' and 'co-creators'.

4.16 Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education is **commended** by the review team on its enhancement of learning opportunities.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

### Findings

5.1 The review team found numerous examples of student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement at the Institute.

5.2 There is a strategic commitment led by the Principal to improve continuously and involve students in the Higher Education Strategy. This approach was confirmed in meetings with staff and students providing examples of how student opinions are welcomed and responded to. The Higher Education Strategy (2011-15, p.10) encourages 'the involvement and participation of students in shaping our ambition for outstanding higher education provision' and was developed after 'extensive consultation' with students.

5.3 Meetings with the Principal, senior staff, lecturing staff and students confirmed that there was a culture of enhancement. The review team saw a joint statement of intent regarding engagement which develops the concept of students as 'change agents'.

5.4 Recently the Institute funded the creation of a Students' Union and an appointed president post. The review team met the founding and current President who is active in establishing the Students' Union among the higher education student community. The Students' Union is leading on the training of student representatives and student-led research activities such as monitoring student attendance and actions from the National Student Survey results. A formal Code of Practice has been developed for student engagement which includes students producing a report collated by the Students' Union to give them a stronger voice. Students saw the Code as the Students' Union's 'overarching strategy' to make them aware of the Institute's 'ethos of continual improvement' and there was evidence of the Code being used and discussed with students. The review team also noted evidence of a Higher Education Student Governor leading discussions and change.

5.5 The review team was able to confirm the information submitted in the self-evaluation document, most notably that student involvement with the enhancement process is extensive and includes Student Led Teaching and Supporting Learning Awards introduced by the Students' Union. Students are involved in observations of teaching and learning as well as contributing to scholarship activity by working collaboratively with staff on action research projects related to teaching in specific discipline areas. Student reviewers are also employed on developmental projects, working with the Higher Education Quality and Standards team on thematic reviews of issues identified by the Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee. The Student Voice Wiki is used to gather student opinion and provide feedback on a wide range of issues. Senior Management recognise the significance of student engagement and this is demonstrated by students leading on agenda items in a number of meetings. The role of a student on the governing body is a sign of strategic commitment to listening to students and encouraging their participation.

5.6 Students contributed to the Higher Education Review process in various ways. They produced a student written submission under the guidance of the Lead Student Representative. This detailed document was peer reviewed by students of another college provider of higher education and signed off by the Students' Union President. In more general terms, involvement of the Students' Union in training representatives has improved engagement and a Student Charter has been developed in partnership with the Institute.

5.7 A Higher Education Student Representative Committee provides a platform for the student voice with senior management. The terms of reference for this Committee include



providing feedback on areas of good practice and making suggestions on the development of Institute policy and strategy as well as enhancing the learner voice.

5.8 The Higher Education Student Representative Committee identifies themes, trends and actions and provides students with an opportunity to comment on the student experience. The review team saw evidence that students made presentations at the cross-institutional Quality Improvement Committee. A pilot project, originating from student feedback, is being conducted with a focus on the visibility and accessibility of the Student Handbook. Students are actively engaged in consultations about a revised format for this handbook and student opinion is being considered by staff.

5.9 Students are involved in providing feedback at a national level and also in the Institute's review processes. There is evidence of an increased participation of the Students' Union and student body in the National Student Survey (NSS) and in the development of resulting action plans. Students are involved with the validation and periodic review process at the Institute and have also been consulted (via the VLE and the Student Voice Wiki) with respect to regulations relating to extensions to submission dates.

### **Innovations in student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement (especially the nature of the student contribution, and how a diverse student body is included)**

5.10 JISC highlighted the involvement of students with the design of the website as good practice and students gave positive feedback about the availability and access to information. The use of the Student Voice Wiki is innovative and is used to provide information, receive comments from students and to offer responses to issues raised so that the feedback loop is closed. Other innovative practices also involve seeking opinion from a student reviewer in periodic review from another school, students presenting at collaborative best practice conferences and including Student Learning Journey Feedback as part of the Higher Education Observation of Teaching and Learning process.

### **Staff experience of/participation in student involvement in quality**

5.11 Staff members actively encourage and welcome the role of the student as a 'change agent'. The frequency of Higher Education Student Representative Committee meetings has been increased. This reflects the growth of the higher education student representation system and improved attendance at meetings is creating an increasingly valuable platform for the student voice.

### **How contributions from students are acted upon, and how students know they are acted upon (often referred to as 'closing the feedback loop')**

5.12 The Institute takes student feedback seriously and endeavours to respond to comments efficiently and effectively making use of the Student Voice Wiki. Students value the small-scale nature of some of the programmes and this enables staff and students to form a close working relationship where communication is good and feedback loops can be closed swiftly.

5.13 Discussion takes place in Quality and Standards Committee meetings to improve the feedback loop with minutes reporting that 'reviewers recommend that the School report on the actions taken in relation to student feedback in the next SED' and students are heavily involved with the annual review process.

5.14 There are a wide variety of informal and formal mechanisms for the student voice to be heard and feedback to be given. A number of surveys are undertaken to collect student opinion, including open events, focus groups, web surveys, National Student Surveys and

face-to-face tutorials. There was limited feedback through web-based surveys of modules so following a review of this, the Institute has returned to paper-based surveys.

5.15 Overall, the Institute places a high level of importance on the role of students in quality assurance and enhancement. This emphasis was demonstrated through documentary evidence, discussions with staff members and students and also through the provision of practical examples.

## 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 27-29 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#)

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality).

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

### Blended learning

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

### 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

### 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 our review processes.

### **Expectations**

Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

**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.

### **Public information**

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

### **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.

### **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.

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