London College of Business

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

February 2012

Key findings about London College of Business

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in February 2012, the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of the University of Wales and Edexcel.

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

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

Good practice

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

- the Annual College Course Review is comprehensive, rigorous and evaluative, and provides the College with a clear evaluation of the management of academic standards (paragraph 1.2)
- the College's online MBA programme is well developed and provides students with extensive resources and learning opportunities (paragraph 2.5).

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:

- formalise the processes for the management of academic standards and record all decisions and discussions that take place at key meetings (paragraph 1.1)
- produce an annual review of the Edexcel programme with the same rigour as for the MBA and BA (Hons) programmes (paragraph 1.3)
- monitor the quality of written feedback on students' assignments to ensure that it meets the requirements of its own policy (paragraph 1.9)
- produce a learning and teaching strategy to ensure that students' learning opportunities are enhanced (paragraph 2.3).

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

- redraft the section on assessment criteria in its Quality Handbook and align it with its awarding bodies' policies (paragraph 1.4)
- continue to develop its plans to include work-based/placement learning and links with employers to enhance learning opportunities for students (paragraph 2.4)
- make clearer for students how the group work is assessed (paragraph 2.6)
- continue to develop a strategy for the observation of learning and teaching (paragraph 2.7)
- formalise its process for ensuring that public information is complete and accurate (paragraph 3.4).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)[1] (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at the London College of Business (the provider; the College). 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 Wales and Edexcel. The review was carried out by Harry Davison, David Malachi and Mike Slawin (reviewers), and Philip Markey (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the *[Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](#)*.[2] Evidence in support of the review included documentation supplied by the provider, its awarding bodies, and the British Accreditation Council, as well as meetings with staff, students, and the awarding bodies.

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

- the Academic Infrastructure
- Edexcel Information Manual.

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

The London College of Business was founded in 2005. It is located in Barking, Essex. It aims to provide an environment that assists students in achieving their goals. It offers a range of programmes at under and postgraduate levels in business, information systems, hospitality management and finance. The programmes are awarded by Edexcel and the University of Wales.

At the time of the review, the provider offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their awarding bodies (with full-time equivalent numbers in brackets):

University of Wales
- MBA (160 FTEs)
- BA (Hons) Business Administration (31 FTEs)

Edexcel
- HNC/HND Strategic Management and Leadership (8 FTEs)

The provider's stated responsibilities

For all programmes, the College is responsible for the recruitment and admission of students. It also takes responsibility for setting and marking of assessments, learning and teaching, student support and learning resources. The University of Wales Validation Agreement (2010) clearly sets out its and the College's responsibilities. The College has approval to assess Edexcel qualifications, with programme definitions setting out administrative and programme delivery information. In both awarding bodies, the College is responsible for the recruitment of staff and providing resources.

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[1] www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx.

Recent developments

In 2009, the University of Wales approved the change of the BA (Hons) programme from a three-year duration to two years. In June 2011, the University validated an MBA (online) programme. The College was awarded highly trusted sponsor status by the UK Border Agency in 2010. The College was granted a quota of 2,250 students in late 2010, but the new sponsorship guidelines reduced this to 134. The College's Strategic Plan outlines the College's goals to increase student numbers and extend learning opportunities by 2014. It is also seeking a new university partner to build on and carry forward the programmes when the existing arrangement with the University of Wales comes to an end.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. They produced a written report based on information from focus groups, surveys and questionnaires. The College provided the students with support and access to the self-evaluation, which gave the students a reference point for their submission. Students identified many positive aspects of their experience, such as study materials and the virtual learning environment. Some areas for improvement were mentioned, such as access to the library. Students met the reviewers during the review visit and at the preparatory meeting, and discussed their submission and other matters.

Detailed findings about London College of Business

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The College manages academic standards through a management structure, where the Senior Management Team makes decisions on strategic and policy matters and where the Academic Board is responsible for academic policy and the oversight of assessment. In practice, there is significant crossover of personnel represented on the two bodies, but with different chairs. The College has an Internal Board to confirm the accuracy of recording of marks. This Board reports to the University of Wales Examinations Board. There is a Joint Board of Studies which meets annually to review progress and approve programme changes. The Acting Principal, who is also the MBA Course Director, fulfils the role of the Quality Assurance Coordinator. Much of the work of committees and the management of the College are dealt with through informal processes and e-mail. A consequence of this is that the formal recording of decisions and discussions does not always occur. The College recognises the need to move to a more formal approach to recording meetings and the management team is enthusiastic and committed to this. The team recognises that the College is relatively small in terms of student numbers and does not have, or need to have, the extensive management systems associated with larger institutions. Issues tend to be addressed in a reactive manner, rather than there being formal systems in place. Nevertheless, the team considers it advisable for the College to formalise the processes for the management of academic standards and to record all decisions and discussions that take place at key meetings.

1.2 The reporting process for the management of academic standards includes the scrutiny of external examiners' reports. For the BA (Hons) and MBA programmes, there is a requirement to undertake a formal annual review, the Annual College Course Review process. The subsequent report is comprehensive, rigorous and highly evaluative. The team considers this to be good practice because the report provides the College with a clear indication of the evaluation of its management of academic standards**.**

1.3 There is no requirement to undertake a formal internal annual review of the Edexcel programme. The College does not produce an overall annual report which would provide an evaluation of the whole provision. It relies on the Edexcel external examiner's report. The team considers it advisable for the College to produce an annual review of the Edexcel programme with the same rigour as for the MBA and BA programmes.

1.4 The College's responsibilities for assessment are defined by the University of Wales and Edexcel. The College has an assessment policy in its Quality Manual, However, the policy makes reference to generic assessment criteria which do not have any clear reference to either the University of Wales's or to Edexcel's assessment information. As such, it can cause confusion. The team considers it desirable that the College redrafts the section on assessment criteria and aligns it with its awarding bodies.

1.5 Overall, the College recognises that it needs to formalise the management of academic standards. In its Quality Manual, the College refers to the role of the Academic Board in reviewing the terms of reference for managing the quality processes and it intends to do this.

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

1.6   The College engages with the Academic Infrastructure, such as the use of subject benchmark statements, in the setting of the levels of modules and the writing of assignments and projects. The College has sought to ensure that assessment, monitoring and review, and student support, are aligned with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education.* There is an understanding and awareness of the Academic Infrastructure which has been consolidated by staff development activity.

1.7   The College maintains effective links with both the University of Wales and Edexcel. There is effective communication and dialogue between the College and its partners, which ensures clarity of standards expected and the implementation of these requirements by staff at the College. This ensures that external reference points are effectively used.

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

1.8   The College thoroughly engages with its external examiners for all programmes. The annual course reviews confirm that the College conforms to the requirements identified by both the University of Wales and Edexcel. The College addresses the issues raised by external examiners, through, for example, the annual course reviews. There are detailed comments and action plans to ensure that external examiners' suggestions are considered. The University of Wales also provides a moderator's mid-term report which includes a meeting with staff and students and an action plan. The College responds to this plan in full.

1.9   The College's Quality Handbook sets out guidance for providing written feedback to students. This requires the feedback to be legible and to describe how students can improve future work. The external examiner for the MBA commented that he was disappointed at the poor quality of written feedback to individual students. The external examiner for the BA (Hons) Business Administration commented that there needs to be written feedback to enable students to improve. The Edexcel examiner found that the feedback given to students is not consistently provided in line with the identified assessment policy.
This relates to information for students on how well they have met specific assessment criteria and how they could improve future work. Student work samples seen by the team confirm the comments by the external examiners. Students are expected to word-process their assignments, but written feedback is handwritten, brief and of limited value. Some students also indicated, and the team confirms, that some written feedback is illegible.
The College has responded to external examiners regarding feedback, but has not fully implemented actions to enhance the quality of feedback. It has introduced a new Assignment Feedback Form and, starting with the next examination session, written feedback will be done electronically and tutors will provide a written response to external examiners' comments on their respective modules from the previous session. The team considers that it is advisable for the College to monitor the quality of written feedback to assure that it meets the requirements of its own policy.

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

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2 Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1   The College's processes for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities are such as described in paragraph 1.1.

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

2.2   The Academic Infrastructure is considered and applied in the management of learning opportunities. Staff are well supported by the awarding bodies in respect of the Academic Infrastructure, through the validation process. The College has also provided development workshops on the Academic Infrastructure for teaching staff. Staff are also aware of the guidance provided in the Edexcel Handbook.

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

2.3   The College does not have a learning and teaching policy or strategy. There is no reference to this in the College's Strategic Plan. However, staff and students explained that there is a range of learning and teaching methods used, but there is no documentation providing information about these. There is a brief reference made to learning and teaching in the MBA Programme Handbook and in programme specifications. However, without an overall strategy, the College is unable to identify the main principles guiding and the methods used for learning and teaching. The team considers that it is advisable for the College to produce a learning and teaching strategy to ensure that students' learning opportunities are enhanced.

2.4   In its Strategic Plan the College states that it wants to increase learning opportunities by developing work placements and internships with local businesses and industries. The team was told that the College had identified the need for the development of work-based and placement learning to enhance students' learning experiences. The revalidation report for the MBA recommends that the College explores the possibility of developing a work-experience placement for students while they are studying in the UK. All the College's provision is in the business and management area and links with business is regarded as a key development. Students also said that such an opportunity would benefit their learning. The team agrees and considers that it is desirable for the College to continue to develop its plans to include work-based/placement learning and links with employers to enhance learning opportunities for students.

2.5   The College offers an online MBA. The learning and teaching materials contained on the portal are produced by the College and supplemented by the University of Wales. The portal contains a platform which includes access to a virtual learning environment where lectures and discussions are posted, a live video link where students can proactively participate in live lectures broadcast through the MBA portal. Links are provided to the University of Wales Online Library. Students, including two living overseas, spoke positively about the ease of access and the quality of the learning materials. Students confirmed that they had received induction to both the College and the University, were highly complimentary about the quality of learning and teaching, and felt the service they received was enabling and empowering. The team considers that the online MBA is good practice because of the robust learning resource that the College has invested in to meet the needs of distance learning students. The programme is supported by the expertise and enthusiasm demonstrated by the Online MBA Project Manager.

2.6   In the BA (Hons) and MBA programmes, group assignments are used as a learning method to encourage leadership and teamwork. Students expressed concern that group assignments are marked for the overall group with students given an aggregate mark, but not an individual mark. They expressed some confusion regarding the process of how marks are allocated. The College has started to take actions to address this by, for example, using new marking schemes. The assessment maintains a formative aspect where the students comment on other students' contribution to the final piece of work as part of the development of teamwork. The module assessment changes were verified by the University of Wales and the external examiner. The team considers it to be desirable that the College makes clearer for students how group work is assessed. Students on the Edexcel programme do not undertake group work in assessment activities.

2.7   The College operates an observation process for learning and teaching as part of the Staff Appraisal Policy. Informal teaching observations have been undertaken by the College staff and also the University of Wales Moderator. The College recognises in its self-evaluation that teaching observation needs to be done more systematically across programmes. There is evidence of some formal recorded teaching observation, but there is no identified strategy for the observation of teaching and learning. The team considers that it is desirable for the College to continue to develop a strategy for the observation of learning and teaching.

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

2.8   The College is small enough to provide a highly supported environment for students. It is well aware of the special needs of international students and operates a selection process to ensure that the students are familiar with the demands of the programmes. It provides an extensive induction process to introduce students to the College and the country. Students are very appreciative of the pastoral support in the College. There is an equal proportion of full and part-time of staff. The College ensures that staff are readily available to provide academic and personal advice to students.

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

2.9   The College recognises the importance of staff development within the higher education experience and the staff development policy states that it seeks to 'increase the effectiveness of staff in teaching, learning and research bearing in mind the needs of those it serves'. There are records of staff development, including training and educational development. Teaching staff attended staff development sessions on module development, marking and moderation, assignment design and dissertation supervision at the University of Wales. There are records relating to training and qualifications. The staff are positive about their staff development opportunities, with a number appreciating the support of the College to undertake higher level degree programmes.

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

2.10   Learning resources are sufficient to enable students to achieve the learning outcomes. The College has a policy for the use of the library by students and for acquiring books. The small library is available to students from 12.00 to 14.00 and from 17.00 to 18.00 on a weekday, but not open on weekends. A daily rota of librarians is provided. When possible, students are also given access outside staffed hours. Students said that they found access to the library and its resources satisfactory. MBA and BA (Hons) students have access to the University of Wales Online Library, a well resourced e-library.

2.11   With the introduction of the online MBA, plans are being drafted to develop a college-based e-library. Tutors make requests for books and electronic resources to meet the requirements for the essential reading for modules. The College also has an open access information technology space for students and an information technology laboratory for the teaching of specific computing skills. This is well equipped and supports students in achieving their learning outcomes.

2.12   Overall, the College ensures that learning resources are accessible to students and sufficient to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes. Students expressed satisfaction with library and information technology resources. The College is aware of the need to review learning resources, renew equipment and replace stock.

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

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3   Public information

How effectively does the provider's public information communicate to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides?

3.1   The College demonstrates that it is clear about its responsibilities for its public information. It provides accurate information to prospective students who live in other countries. Information provided to students takes the form of publications produced by the College and its awarding bodies. Accountability for the accuracy of information is clearly identified in the awarding bodies' agreements. The College's information for international students includes promotional literature and a website, which contain information that complies with these agreements.

3.2   Prospective students are supported to make an informed choice about their programme of study through the recently improved website which provides a range of information. This includes programme information, learning resources, terms and conditions related to becoming a student of the College. Fee structures and additional charges that may be levied by the College are clearly stated. Student programme handbooks provide a factual overview of each programme of study. The College website provides factual information about the College, its environment, the programmes offered, as well as relevant College policies and procedures.

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

3.3   The College is in the process of developing a strategy for the purpose of assuring the reliability and validity of public information, the details of which were outlined briefly during the review. At present, the arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information are informal and inaccuracies are identified as and when they are brought to the attention of the College. This process of rectifying inaccuracies is ad hoc rather than proactive or subject to systematic review. Responsibility for the accuracy of information remains with two key staff, the Acting Principal and the Online MBA Project Manager. While information is broadly judged as accurate at the time of review, the sustainability of assuring the accuracy and completeness of information relies on an informal process. However, the College is implementing a policy that requires the Online Project Manager to review existing and authorise new information, after approval by the Senior Management Team.

3.4   The College has an undocumented procedure to quality assure its use of overseas agents in the recruitment of international students and, while the team was satisfied with the information management, the College would benefit from having an auditable process to demonstrate transparency in its management of information on behalf of their representative agents. Although plans to include students in assuring the accuracy and completeness of information through student representatives were indicated, these are yet to come to fruition. The team considers it desirable that the College formalises its process for ensuring that public information is complete and accurate, for example, by including a written policy in its Quality Handbook.

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

Action plan[3]

London College of Business action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight February 2012						
Good practice	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The review team identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the provider:						
• the Annual College Course Review is comprehensive, rigorous and evaluative, and provides the College with a clear evaluation of the management of academic standards (paragraph 1.2)	Discuss at Academic Committee and Senior Management Team level and review annually Apply to other programmes or branches (for example Edexcel and online MBA)	November 2012	Programme Manager for Edexcel and Programme Manager for online MBA	Clear, rigorous view of respective programmes; clear evaluation of the management of academic standards therein	Academic Committee Senior Management Team	End-of-year joint meeting of Academic Committee and Senior Management Team
• the College's online MBA programme is well developed and provides students with extensive resources and learning opportunities	Expand this practice at other online programmes that we might develop (for example BA programme)	Autumn 2012, depending on recruitment results for online BA programme	BA Director and online MBA manager	Quality of resources and learning opportunities for online BA students	Academic Committee Senior Management Team	Annual College and Course Review for the BA programme

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

Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
(paragraph 2.5).						
The team considers that it is **advisable** for the provider to:						
• formalise the processes for the management of academic standards and record all decisions and discussions that take place at key meetings (paragraph 1.1)	Make sure that all decision-making takes place in formal meetings Take minutes of all decision-making meetings	Effective immediately	Members of the two senior committees (Academic Committee and Senior Management Team)	Improved formalised systems and recording	Senior Management Team	End-of-year joint meeting of Academic Committee and Senior Management Team
• produce an annual review of the Edexcel programme with the same rigour as for the MBA and BA (Hons) programmes (paragraph 1.3)	Prepare a detailed Annual Review for the Edexcel programme	October 2012	Programme Manager for the Edexcel programme, assisted by other senior members of staff	Accurate, up-to-date information on the programme	Academic Committee and Senior Management Team	End-of-year joint meeting of the Academic Committee and Senior Management Team
• monitor the quality of written feedback on students' assignments to ensure that it meets the requirements of its own policy (paragraph 1.9)	Introduce a new electronic form for giving feedback to students for each assignment	During the spring 2012 semester	Programme directors and administrators	Better quality feedback to students assignments	Academic Committee	Annual College and Course Review
• produce a learning and teaching strategy to ensure	Produce a Teaching and Learning Strategy	By end of May 2012	Members of the Academic Committee	Clarification of the College's strategy on providing,	Academic Committee	End-of-year joint meeting of the Academic

				monitoring and enhancing learning opportunities for its students		Committee and Senior Management Team
that students' learning opportunities are enhanced (paragraph 2.3).						
Desirable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team considers that it is **desirable** for the provider to:						
• redraft the section on assessment criteria in its Quality Handbook and align it with its awarding bodies' policies (paragraph 1.4)	Remove existing paragraph from the Quality Handbook Replace it with clear information about assessment criteria aligned with the awarding bodies' policies	May 2012	Senior Administrator	Clear, up-to-date assessment criteria in line with the awarding bodies' policies	Academic Committee	Student feedback
• continue to develop its plans to include work-based/ placement learning and links with employers to enhance learning opportunities for students (paragraph 2.4)	Continue establishing links with practitioners through our Student Society Speakers series Approach local Council, Chamber of Commerce and other outfits who could enable us to establish further links with the business community Explore opportunities	Continuously May 2012 June 2012	Members of the two senior committees and other staff Senior Administrator Senior	Set up links with employers Provide career advice to students	Two senior committees	End-of-year joint meeting of the Academic Committee and Senior Management Team Student feedback

			Administrator			
	Set up a career advice desk in the library	June 2012	Senior Administrator			
• make clearer for students how the group work is assessed (paragraph 2.6)	Review marking criteria for group work and include clear description of it in the assignment brief	Starting from April 2012 semester	Module leaders	Clearer understanding concerning expectations and marking in group work	Programme leaders and Academic Committee	Student feedback
• continue to develop a strategy for the observation of learning and teaching (paragraph 2.7)	Discuss and agree details of class observation strategy (for example time frame, staff responsible, and so on), including the post-observation stage (collection, analysis and communication of findings, as well as action to be taken in response to them)	July 2012	Academic Committee	Clarity of strategy; level of communication to all staff; implementation	Senior Management Team and the awarding bodies	Student feedback Student-Staff Liaison Committee Annual review
• formalise its process for ensuring that public information is complete and accurate (paragraph 3.4).	Finalise/formalise strategy Discuss and agree at management level Communicate it to all staff	May 2012	Current person responsible for changes to website; senior staff members to discuss and agree	Clarity of strategy; better monitoring of public information processes	Senior Management Team	Annual review

About QAA

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

QAA's aims are to:

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

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

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

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

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx.

The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland.*

highly trusted sponsor An education provider that the UK government trusts to admit migrant students from overseas, according to Tier 4 of the UK Border Agency's points-based immigration system. Higher education providers wishing to obtain this status must undergo a successful review by QAA.

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

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

operational definition A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

programme specifications Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

provider An institution that offers courses of higher education, typically on behalf of a separate **awarding body or organisation**. In the context of REO, the term means an independent college.

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

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

quality See **academic quality**.

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

threshold academic standard The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

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