

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

Point Blank Ltd

April 2014

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Key findings about Point Blank Ltd

As a result of its adapted Review for Specific Course Designation carried out in April 2014, 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 Middlesex University.

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**:

- the process of direct video review for producing feedback to students (paragraph 2.5)
- the provision of an extensive, intuitive and well-designed virtual learning environment that facilitates an innovative and stimulating learning experience for students (paragraph 3.1).

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:

- define more clearly the respective terms of reference of the four academic committees jointly responsible for the management of academic quality (paragraphs 1.1 and 1.2)
- increase the frequency of the committee meetings (paragraph 1.3)
- develop both a separate Teaching and Learning Strategy and a Student Charter and make them clearly accessible to students (paragraph 2.4)
- confirm that all policy documents and procedures are aligned with the relevant sections of the Quality Code (paragraph 2.8)
- ensure that teaching staff hold a teaching qualification or have equivalent experience (paragraph 2.12)
- develop the policies of annual appraisal and peer teaching observation and implement them within an integrated staff development framework (paragraph 2.13).

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

- share good practice in a more systematic way (paragraph 1.9)
- introduce a consistent approach to ensure high quality written feedback (paragraph 2.5)
- have student representation on all of its committees (paragraph 2.9)
- work with its awarding body to review the content of the student handbook (paragraph 3.2)
- adopt a more robust system for monitoring and recording all changes to published information (paragraph 3.4).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the adapted [Review for Specific Course Designation](#)¹ conducted by [QAA](#) at Point Blank Ltd (the School), 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 Middlesex University. The review was carried out by Mr David Jones and Mr Charles Sanders (reviewers) and Dr Alun Thomas (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 two reports published on the School by the Independent Schools Inspectorate, the College's partnership agreement with Middlesex University, strategy and policy documents, minutes of meetings and centre monitoring reports supplied by the provider and awarding body, supported by meetings with staff and students during the review visit.

QAA carries out an adapted review for providers who are also reviewed by another approved body. The *Review for Educational Oversight (and for specific course designation): Handbook, April 2013* provides further details.

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

- the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)
- the regulations of Middlesex University (the University)
- The Independent Schools Inspectorate's Framework for the Educational Oversight of Private Further Education and English Language Colleges.

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

The School provides both further and higher education. The total number of students following further education or non-accredited courses is 1,822 and there are 38 students on higher education courses. All students are distance learners and are full-time. It is based on a single campus which occupies part of a building in East London. The aim of the School is to provide a diverse range of innovative and engaging music industry courses for students from around the world. Teaching commenced in 1994.

The School is a company limited by shares. The senior management team consists of the Chief Executive Officer and the Managing Director, who act as co-principals.

At the time of the review, the School offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their awarding body with student numbers in brackets:

Middlesex University

- Certificate of Higher Education in Music Production and Business (5)
- Diploma of Higher Education in Music Production and Business (33)

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

The provider's stated responsibilities

The School has delegated responsibility for identification of curriculum needs, setting, grading and internal moderation of assessment, giving student feedback on assessment, recruitment and selection of students and the strategic development of higher education. It has shared responsibility with the University for defining programme specifications and learning outcomes, monitoring student admission, retention and completion, annual and other periodic monitoring of quality, staff development, student admission guidance and induction and student appeals.

Recent developments

The Certificate and Diploma of Higher Education in Music Production and Business, validated by the University, were introduced in academic year 2012-13. This new provision was developed after three years' experience in running a Higher National Certificate course in partnership with Canterbury Christ Church University. The School has plans to increase higher education student numbers further and to double the amount of floor space by purchasing a new building this year.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. Their input consisted of three submissions from three student representatives written independently of any members of staff, and these provided useful evidence for the review team. Two of the student representatives met the coordinator during the preparatory meeting through online video and all three student representatives took part in a web-based meeting with the team during the review visit.

Detailed findings about Point Blank Ltd

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The School has a functioning but loosely defined organisational structure that provides an adequate basis for the management of academic standards. Key contributors to this process are student and external examiners' feedback, as well as comments from academic staff and lesson observations. The Head of School is responsible for the management of academic standards and quality assurance, and there are four committees that oversee all aspects of the higher education programmes: the Annual Programme Review Committee, which has overall responsibility for academic policy and is chaired by the Managing Director; the Programme Management Committee, chaired by the Head of School; the Assessment Board; and the Board of Study, the latter two chaired by the University Link Tutor. However, as the terms of reference of these committees overlap, there is a risk of duplication of tasks.

1.2 The meetings of these four committees are clearly minuted, including action points, but it is not always easy to determine the action taken in response to these points. In recognition of the need to enhance the management of academic standards, the School has recently created, and appointed to, a new post of Head of Curriculum, which will have a more comprehensive overview of the higher education provision. In order to facilitate a more effective quality assurance framework it is **advisable** for the School to define more clearly the terms of reference of the four committees jointly responsible for academic quality.

1.3 The Board of Study and Assessment Board both meet twice a year, and these, along with the Programme Management Committee, which also meets twice a year, feed into the Annual Programme Review Committee which meets annually. Because of the infrequency of these meetings, there is a risk that issues may not be identified in a timely fashion which may in turn delay suitable responses being put in place. It is therefore **advisable** for the School to increase the frequency of the committee meetings.

1.4 The School has an adequate but loosely defined academic quality cycle. It produces an annual quality monitoring report for the University for its higher education programmes. This report incorporates an action plan and provides an update on progress on previous action points. The University reviews this report and action plan, but does not automatically provide a response, and only did so in the last academic year when prompted by the School.

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

1.5 The School makes proper use of external reference points relevant to academic standards. It is helped by the use of the policies and procedures of the University, which are guided by the Quality Code. Both programmes share a comprehensive programme handbook. Although the School uses the Quality Code to guide its actions and procedures, it does not do so comprehensively (see also paragraph 2.8).

1.6 The School suitably uses both internal and external validation processes to ensure that the subject benchmark statement specifically for music education is taken into account. Being practicing professionals, teaching staff are fully conversant with the latest developments in the music industry and a strength of the School is its strong vocational and professional focus, with an emphasis on the technical and business-related aspects of music technology. Strong relationships with professionals in the field of music technology provide

additional points of reference in developing the content of the School's programmes. The School's staff, who are also employed in universities, provide an additional and valuable input. Their experience provides extra points of reference.

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

1.7 The School makes effective use of external examiners, who are appointed by University. The external examiners attend the Assessment Board meetings, ensuring that the correct academic procedures and processes are followed. Where they have made suggestions, the School has responded effectively. For example, in 2012-13 the external examiner suggested that a section on academic writing might be a useful addition to the students' online learning platform. The School responded that this would be implemented, and it is now in place.

1.8 Moderation procedures are effective. The School sets all assessments, with oversight by the University, and has responsibility for the internal moderation of work. It adheres to the University's regulations on assessment. For example, a 10 per cent sample of assessments, together with all fails and distinctions, are second-marked by the Head of School. External examiners indicate that the standards resulting from these processes are appropriate.

1.9 The School has developed an innovative process for the sharing of good practice whereby members of the teaching team can view one another's online work, including lectures, tutorials and feedback. However, this is not consistently applied, for example, feedback on assignments is variable (see also paragraph 2.5). It would be **desirable** for the School to share good practice in a more systematic way.

1.10 In summary, the School manages academic standards in a way that is commensurate with its present size and complexity. However, the present system needs to be made more robust in order to facilitate the planned growth in higher education provision envisaged by the School in the near future.

The review team has **confidence** in the provider'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 School fulfil its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities

2.1 The management and enhancement of quality of learning opportunities is adequate. A range of policies and procedures have been introduced recently, some of which are adhered to while others have not yet been fully implemented. Areas such as student support and guidance, and resourcing demonstrate adequate practice but have no formal policy developed. Various School committees have terms of reference relating to the quality of learning resources, although these responsibilities sometimes overlap (see also paragraph 1.1). Senior staff have specific roles in relation to management and enhancement of learning opportunities, although lines of responsibility are unclear. For example it is not clear who has the authority to take decisions about the development of learning resources. School committees meet regularly to report and review issues with action points developed and a record of minutes taken.

2.2 The School's virtual learning environment (VLE) provides comprehensive and high quality programme information and supports a wide range of well-structured learning,

assessment, and personal development materials. This VLE is highly valued by students, and provides quick and easy access and use (see also paragraph 3.1). Teaching staff, who are experienced and active professionals in the music industry, provide students with current and relevant insight and perspectives into the modern music business. Online reading and resource web links, master classes, tutorials, chat room discussions and linked real-time or recorded video demonstrations support an engaging and enriching learning experience.

2.3 Students receive appropriate support for their pastoral and learning needs both before and during their programme and have direct communication access through electronic means to pastoral, management and academic staff. Admissions staff advise applicants on a one-to-one basis, and students are interviewed either by phone or internet video. Students with non-traditional qualifications or experiential backgrounds are required to produce evidence of a portfolio of work or demonstrate competence through completion of a mini assignment prior to acceptance. Once accepted, at least one week before they start the programme, students are provided with an electronic induction pack and given access to the VLE to familiarise themselves with the learning system and materials. Students indicate that they would like a more formalised introduction session to both teaching staff and fellow students during this induction period.

2.4 The School does not have a separate Teaching and Learning strategy although relevant information is dispersed across the handbook and other documentation, for example those relating to external examiner responsibilities and collaborative student entitlement. Similarly, the School does not have a Student Charter. It is **advisable** for the School to develop both a separate Teaching and Learning Strategy and a Student Charter and make them clearly accessible to students.

2.5 The quality of feedback on assessment is variable. In the case of Direct Video Review (DVR), used as part of the formative assessment and tutorial process, tutors provide comprehensive oral feedback to students through video upload. The process of DVR for producing feedback to students is highly valued by them and is **good practice**. Written feedback varies in its length and quality, ranging from the short and perfunctory to thorough, specific and comprehensive. It would be **desirable** for the School to introduce a consistent approach to ensure high quality written feedback.

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

2.6 The School has extensive links with the music production industry. Most of the staff are involved professionally with the professional music business outside their teaching or managerial commitments.

2.7 The partnership and validation agreement with the University plays a key role in determining the quality assurance requirements of the programme specifications in line with the Quality Code. External examiners' reports are used to determine the quality and robustness of the assessment process and any required changes. For example, the external examiner for the certificate and diploma programmes in Music Production and Business recommended changes to ensure that feedback on assessment relates to specific learning outcomes. Required actions were followed up at the Annual Programme Review Committee meeting.

2.8 The majority of the School's policies and procedures are well structured and detailed. However, links to the Quality Code are not explicitly embedded within the documents, for example in the School admissions, academic misconduct and appeals, or staff development policies. It is **advisable** for the School to confirm that all policy documents and procedures are aligned with the relevant sections of the Quality Code.

How does the School engage students in its quality assurance processes?

2.9 Students state that their opinions are listened to and valued by the School. Students sit on the Board of Study representing their year and class cohorts and report on and discuss issues concerning the quality of the student experience. Board of Study minutes and action points are made available to students through the VLE. Action points are followed up by the Head of School or other designated staff, as appropriate, and reported through relevant processes. Students are, however, represented on the Board of Study only. It would be **desirable** for the School to have student representation on all of its committees.

2.10 Student feedback is collated online at the end of every module. This is analysed and action points developed by the Head of School and outcomes or changes fed back to the student body through the VLE. Students report that attention is paid to their feedback on modules and that changes or responses are usually made in a timely and efficient manner.

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

2.11 The School has a staff development policy aimed at ensuring that staff are inducted appropriately and trained and developed to deliver the curriculum effectively. The policy and procedures involved have not been comprehensively implemented, although all new staff are now inducted on appointment.

2.12 Few of the teaching staff hold a teaching qualification although the majority have prior experience of teaching, and some hold similar positions at other higher education institutions. The high quality of their teaching is remarked upon by the students. The School is implementing a programme of continuing professional development (CPD) training relating to assessment marking and feedback for its teaching staff in conjunction with the University. It is **advisable** for the School to ensure that teaching staff hold a teaching qualification or have equivalent experience.

2.13 The School is committed to ensuring the quality of teaching through the processes of peer teaching observation and annual appraisal. Both of these processes do occur but have not been implemented systematically. New members of staff are observed by the Head of School within a few weeks of starting their teaching. It is **advisable** for the School to develop the policies of annual appraisal and peer teaching observation and implement them within an integrated staff development framework.

2.14 Overall, the School is adequately managing the quality of its learning opportunities and demonstrates good practice in some areas, such as the high quality provision of its VLE and assessment feedback provided through the DVR process. In other areas there is room for development. There is a need to ensure consistency in the quality of written assessment feedback; the inclusion of all teaching staff on a CPD course at the University is a positive development in this area. Students should be given a wider representation across the committee structure of the School. The School should also develop a formalised approach to staff development through the introduction of an integrated framework applicable to all staff and aim to ensure that teaching staff hold an appropriate teaching qualification. The School should provide guidance documents that are specific and relevant to the needs of the student and also demonstrate clearly how its learning opportunities link to the Quality Code.

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

3.1 The School, in collaboration with the University, produces comprehensive and accurate information that fully reflects its responsibilities under its partnership and validation agreement. It provides information via an extensive and very well-designed website and its bespoke VLE. Admissions processes and procedures are clearly documented on the website, which is very well organised and allows potential students easy access to relevant information, such as entry requirements and procedures. It is updated as necessary. The students found their pre-enrolment information clear, easily available and valuable. They were able to prepare suitably for their studies. For example, before the start of each module they are able to access course materials on the virtual learning environment. The website provides students with the latest information, both in terms of policy and procedure and the latest developments in the field of music technology. The provision of an extensive, intuitive and well-designed VLE that facilitates an innovative and stimulating learning experience for students is **good practice**.

3.2 The School provides helpful academic information to all its students in the student handbook. This handbook is available in electronic format on the online learning environment. It contains essential information, including programme specifications, timetables, programme calendars and policies and procedures in line with the requirements of the university. It is now though a collection of both programme specific materials, and those related to advice and guidance generally. This has resulted in it containing too much information and becoming unwieldy. It is therefore **desirable** for the School to work with its awarding body to review the content of the student handbook.

3.3 Procedures are in place to ensure the accuracy and completeness of publicity materials. The content of the School's website is subject to ongoing quality monitoring which results in accurate information for students. The Managing Director checks the public-facing website, with additional checks made by the University. Throughout the academic year, the module leaders are permitted to update the academic content of the VLE to reflect the dynamic nature of the programmes. Students reported that the information they receive on both platforms, from their initial enquiry onwards, is helpful and accurate.

3.4 The VLE is a vital resource which undergoes regular and effective updating. It is a crucial and very effective means of delivering teaching and assessment, communicating up-to-date information about the individual programmes and contacting individuals or groups of students. The School has procedures to ensure that the VLE provides students with current, extensive and valuable information. However, although its contents are regularly checked, this process is not documented, so there is a risk that material checks or updates could be missed, especially as the School's higher education provision expands in the future in line with its plans. It would be **desirable** for the School to adopt a more robust system for monitoring and recording all changes to published information.

3.5 Overall, the School produces and monitors the required advice and guidance, for both prospective and current students, in a way that is commensurate with its present size and complexity. Its VLE is a feature of good practice. However, the procedures for checking and updating information will need to be made more robust as the School's higher education provision grows in the future in line with its plans. The student handbook needs revision.

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

Point Blank Ltd action plan relating to the Review of Specific Course Designation, April 2014						
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 School:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the process of direct video review for producing feedback to students (paragraph 2.5) 	Consistent high quality feedback using direct video review	Continue successful induction and training for new members of teaching staff within video feedback	September 2014	Programme Leader	Senior Management	Teaching staff induction tracking document Internal moderation of video feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the provision of an extensive, intuitive and well-designed virtual learning environment that facilitates an innovative and stimulating learning experience for students 	Continue to provide a reliable and easily accessible platform for innovative distance learning	Review and update of the virtual learning environment content and structure	First review completed by September 2014	Programme Leader, module leaders, teaching staff and the Information Technology department	Director of Programmes	Student feedback, Board of Study, Programme Management Committee, Annual Programme Review Committee

³ The School 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 School's awarding body.

(paragraph 3.1).						
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 School to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> define more clearly the respective terms of reference of the four academic committees jointly responsible for the management of academic quality (paragraphs 1.1 and 1.2) 	Clarify the functions of each committee that are responsible for the management of academic quality	Review and update the terms of reference for the following: Board of Study, Programme Management Committee and Annual Programme Review Committee to remove overlapping items	November 2014	Director of Programmes	Middlesex University Academic Quality Unit	Terms of reference documents for Board of Study, Programme Management Committee, Annual Programme Review Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increase the frequency of the committee meetings (paragraph 1.3) 	Improve the management of the programmes through ongoing identification of potential risks and issues to ensure that responses are being put in place in a timely fashion	Increase the frequency of Board of Study meetings and Programme Review Committee from two to three per academic year	September 2014	Director of Programmes	Senior Management	Board of Study, Programme Management Committee, Annual Programme Review Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop both a separate Teaching and 	Increase students' awareness of the Teaching and Learning	Develop a separate teaching and learning strategy document	September 2014	Programme Leader	Senior management	Teaching and Learning Policy and Student

Learning Strategy and a Student Charter and make them clearly accessible to students (paragraph 2.4)	Strategy Formalise responsibilities for the school and students during course programme	Develop a separate student charter document	September 2014	Programme Leader	Senior management	Charter Policy, Board of Study, Programme Management Committee and students' feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> confirm that all policy documents and procedures are aligned with the relevant sections of the Quality Code (paragraph 2.8) 	Guarantee that all policies are in line with the Quality Code	Link current policy documents with relevant sections of the Quality Code	From September 2014 and to be completed by September 2015	Director of Programmes	Middlesex University Academic Quality Unit	<p>A document mapping how the School policies link to sections and indicators of the Quality Code</p> <p>Document will be reviewed at the Annual Programme Review Committee</p> <p>The document will also be reviewed by Middlesex University</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that teaching staff hold an appropriate teaching 	Maintain academic standards through recruitment of tutors with teaching qualification or equivalent experience	Identify continued professional development opportunities for current teaching staff and provide training on assessment	From September 2014	Programme Leader	Senior management	Teaching staff curricula vitae and training tracking documents

qualification (paragraph 2.12)		New staff recruited in line with centre policy				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop the policies of annual appraisal and peer teaching observation and implement them within an integrated staff development framework (paragraph 2.13). 	Identify staff strengths and weaknesses in order to share good practice, provide professional development opportunities, and improve teaching standards	<p>Develop an annual appraisal policy</p> <p>Implement a formal system for peer teaching observation</p>	From September 2014	Director of Programmes	Senior management	Annual appraisal policy, reports from peer observation, tutor observation sheets and student feedback
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 School to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> share good practice in a more systematic way (paragraph 1.9) 	Achieve a more consistent approach to the sharing of good practice and its implementations	Formalise the sharing of good practice in the Programme Management Review through each tutor highlighting one area of good practice they observed during their peer observation exercise	From September 2014	Programme Leader	Senior management	Programme Management Review Committee minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> introduce a consistent approach to ensure high 	Standardising written feedback quality to enhance learners' understanding of their	Organise training sessions relating to assessment marking and feedback for teaching staff in	From September 2014	Director of Programmes	Senior management	Training tracking documents, students' feedback (via

quality written feedback (paragraph 2.5)	achievement and grading decisions	collaboration with the University's Centre for Academic Partnerships				module survey and Board of Study) and external examiner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have student representation on all of its committees (paragraph 2.9) 	Ensure that students are involved in all aspects of the programmes	Invite student representatives to attend the Programme Management Review Committee in addition to the Board of Study meetings	From September 2014	Module leaders	Programme Leader	Board of Study and Programme Management Review Committee minutes and terms of reference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> work with its awarding body to review the content of the student handbook (paragraph 3.2) 	Ensure that all relevant information in the Student Programme Handbook is easily accessible to students	Yearly review and update of the Student Programme Handbook in collaboration with the University	From September 2014, then reviewed annually	Middlesex University Programme Leader	Middlesex University	<p>Student Programme Handbook is reviewed by Middlesex University annually</p> <p>Annual Programme Review Committee</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adopt a more robust system for monitoring and recording all changes to published information (paragraph 3.4). 	Ensure that all published information is accurate	Add new terms of reference for verification of internal and external information in the Programme Management Committee and the Annual Programme Review Committee	From September 2014	Module leaders, Programme Leader and Marketing Team	Senior management	Website, Student Programme Handbook and virtual learning environment reviewed by the Annual Programme Review Committee,

						Programme Management Committee and Middlesex University
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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 Specific Course Designation 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 Course 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.

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