



Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education

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

May 2012

Key findings about Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in May 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 Aberdeen.

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 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**:

- strong student representation on, and engagement in, the work of College committees (paragraph 2.2)
- the supportive learning environment (paragraph 2.7)
- the encouragement given, and funding available, for staff development activities, particularly those involving research (paragraph 2.9).

Recommendations

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

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

- review the manner in which external examiners' reports are given proper formal consideration, acted upon and recorded in the minutes of meetings (paragraph 1.6).

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

- consider ways of systematically recording actions taken to address recommendations arising from awarding partner's approval events (paragraph 1.3)
- continue to liaise with the awarding body to encourage regular and consistent attendance at committee meetings (paragraph 1.4)
- encourage better staff engagement with Academic Infrastructure expectations (paragraph 1.5)
- introduce a formal system of peer review of teaching (paragraph 2.5)
- complete the current development work to introduce a formal staff development and review process (paragraph 2.10).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)¹ (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education (the provider; the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the College 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 Aberdeen. The review was carried out by Mr Dan Morgan, Dr Marie Wheatley (reviewers), and Mr Grant Horsburgh (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 a comprehensive self-evaluation document supported by a wide range of relevant and appropriate material, including a sample of assessed student work. During the visit to the College, the team met with all College staff involved in the delivery of higher education programmes and a representative group of current and former students.

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

- *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*)
- the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)
- the Scottish Qualifications and Credit Framework (SCQF).

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

The College was established in Dundee in 2001 as an independent, research-led centre of higher education in the study of Islam and Muslims. The College offers taught master's and PhD programmes of study, which are validated by the University of Aberdeen. The College views itself as a centre of excellence that aims to promote intelligent debate and understanding of Islamic tradition and Muslim societies in the contemporary world. It is a place of knowledge and reflection on the issues facing a diverse and multicultural world in the twenty-first century. In pursuit of its aims, the College is actively working to educate the next generation of scholars - both nationally and internationally - in the study of Islam and Muslims to enable them to face the challenges and opportunities of today's world.

Students and staff are from all over the world. Since its foundation, 106 students from 41 countries have successfully graduated with a postgraduate qualification. At the time of the visit, 18.4 per cent of students were from the UK, 14.3 per cent from the EU and 67.3 per cent from overseas. As a result, the College enjoys a diverse student population. In addition to its portfolio of higher education programmes, the College also works at community level by promoting multiculturalism. It aims to build bridges between the Muslim and western worlds through providing a scientific study of Islam and Muslims in parallel with western tradition and knowledge. The College has developed and maintained strong vibrant ties with the local, national and international communities. This has contributed to the creation of a lively and friendly student community in and out of the classroom.

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4.

² www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx.

At the time of the review, the provider offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their awarding body, with the number of students shown in brackets:

University of Aberdeen

- MPhil/PhD in Islamic Studies (12)
- MPhil/PhD in Muslims, Globalisation and the West (2)
- MPhil/PhD in Arabic and Islamic Studies (9)
- MPhil/PhD in Islamic Law (1)
- MPhil/PhD in Multiculturalism (4)
- MPhil/PhD in Bayt al-Maqdis and Jerusalem Studies (2)
- MLitt in Islamic Studies (3)
- MLitt in Muslims, Globalisation and the West (6)
- MSc in Development, Islam and the Muslim World (6)

The provider's stated responsibilities

The collaborative agreement with the University of Aberdeen makes it clear that, while ultimate responsibility for academic standards rests with the University, the College has responsibility for the management of academic standards, and for the maintenance of the quality of learning opportunities, as approved by the University at validation. The College has responsibility for reporting on the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities through annual monitoring. This is exercised through a formal committee structure and through informal contact among the small team of full-time staff. Responsibility for published information relating to higher education programmes rests with the College Principal.

Recent developments

The University of Aberdeen informed the College in June 2011 that the current collaborative agreement would not be renewed when it expires in September 2012. However, the University has stated that this decision has been taken for strategic reasons and not as a consequence of any action on the part of the College. The University has informed the College and all affected students that the University will continue to provide appropriate support to enable them to complete their studies after the agreement expires in September 2012. At the time of the visit, the College remained in dialogue with the University to explore whether a revised collaborative agreement could be negotiated to replace the current one. In addition, the College has entered into preliminary discussions with a number of other higher education institutions with a view to exploring the feasibility of establishing a formal collaborative agreement from September 2012. The College has an appropriate contingency plan in place to facilitate the move to an alternative awarding partner, should the need arise. The plan will help to ensure that the management of academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students will remain unaffected by a move to an alternative awarding partner. Given the uncertainty surrounding the availability of an awarding body after September 2012, the College has not advertised higher education programmes or offered any places to potential higher education students who wish to start their studies in September 2012.

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 written submission was developed by a group of students who gathered information through a series of focus group meetings and through a dedicated questionnaire. All students were encouraged to attend a focus group and to

complete a questionnaire which was available online and in paper format. Nineteen students attended the focus groups and 26 students completed a questionnaire. The coordinator met with a group of six students at the preparatory meeting and during the visit the team met a group of eight students. Views expressed by students during the meeting reflected those contained in the written submission. The written submission and the College's self-evaluation document had been made available to students. The written submission and the meeting with students were effective in enabling higher education students to contribute to this review.

Detailed findings about the Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The College has an effective governance and management structure in place to enable it to fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards. The College is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of four external representatives and the Principal. This body meets twice per year and provides strategic direction to the College through three reporting committees. The College Council is an advisory body made up of prominent figures from local and national organisations. It provides advice to the Board on all aspects of the work of the College. Both the Board and the Council conduct business effectively and actively provide support to the College.

1.2 Operational leadership is provided by the Senior Management Team consisting of the Principal and two other colleagues. The College Academic Council is the central committee for overseeing all aspects of research and academic-related activities. Membership of this committee includes awarding body and student representatives. A substructure of committees, including the Teaching Quality Committee, Library and Information Committee and Research Committee, report to the Academic Council. Within this substructure, there are a number of other working groups, including the Academic Affairs Committee and Student-Staff Consultative Committee. At the time of the review, in order to cater for a temporary reduction in staff, the College had subsumed the work of these committees and working groups within that of the Academic Affairs Committee, which now reports directly to the Academic Council.

1.3 All awards are underpinned by an original validation document and subsequent validation review reports. The College is responsible for the academic standard of the programmes it delivers. Staff have a clear understanding of this responsibility. The Principal prepares biannual academic reports to the awarding body in accordance with the latter's requirements. The biannual report includes progress made in addressing validation recommendations, which are also addressed in a separate response report to the awarding body. The College has responded to all of the validation recommendations. However, as actions taken are not systematically recorded, it is not clear whether these have been achieved in a methodical, measurable and sustainable way. It is considered desirable that the College considers ways of systematically recording actions taken to address recommendations arising from awarding partner's approval events.

1.4 There is inconsistent attendance at committee meetings by the awarding body's representatives. Following a recommendation within the 2009 validation report, the College now works more closely with the awarding body through staff representation on a number of College committees, including the Academic Council, Research Committee and Postgraduate Research Subcommittee. This allows the awarding body to monitor that the College is operating within its remit and enables the College to benefit from regular liaison with an awarding body representative. However, the College is required by the awarding body to assess progress of postgraduate students through annual assessment interviews and these are considered by the Postgraduate Research Subcommittee. It is a condition that this subcommittee has an awarding body representative as a member. The terms of reference for this subcommittee do not include an awarding body representative and meeting minutes indicate that the awarding body representative's attendance has been erratic since the September 2009 recommendation. Discussions with staff indicated that the

College is being proactive in encouraging attendance by the awarding body's representatives by circulating meeting dates in advance, sending reminders prior to meetings and through circulating papers. However, it is considered desirable that the College continues to liaise with the awarding body to encourage regular and consistent attendance by the awarding body's representatives at committee meetings in accordance with the agreed terms of reference.

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

1.5 The College makes effective use of a range of external reference points to inform the management of academic standards. The principal reference point is the operating policy and practice of the awarding body, and College staff demonstrated a clear understanding of awarding body expectations. The College implements a range of awarding body procedures to manage academic standards including those associated with assessment, the avoidance of plagiarism and mitigating circumstances. The awarding body ensures that full account is given to Academic Infrastructure expectations during the approval, monitoring and review of programmes. While the self-evaluation indicated institutional familiarity with the Academic Infrastructure, discussions with staff indicated a lack of familiarity with, and understanding of, sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*). It is considered desirable that the College encourages better staff engagement with Academic Infrastructure expectations.

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

1.6 External examiners are appointed by the awarding body. The College identifies potential appointees and these are approved by the Academic Affairs Committee before being submitted to the awarding body for consideration. External examiners' reports are sent directly to the awarding body. The self-evaluation indicated that external examiners' reports are sent by the awarding body to the College for consideration and action by the Academic Affairs Committee, but staff acknowledged that no reports had been received in the preceding academic session. Staff indicated that feedback from external examiners had been provided orally through external examiners' attendance at examination board meetings held each trimester. While it is clear that the College is taking account of external examiners' comments to manage the assurance of academic standards, it is considered advisable that the College reviews the manner in which external examiners' reports are given formal consideration, acted upon and recorded in minutes of meetings.

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 body.

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 comprehensive self-evaluation documentation and discussions with staff and students indicate that the College is fulfilling effectively its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. The committees and management structure discussed in paragraphs 1.1 to 1.3 apply equally to the management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

2.2 The student voice is well established in the College and is a feature of good practice. In particular, the College demonstrates a strong commitment to student representation on committees. It ensures student engagement in the management of the quality of learning opportunities by providing all students with direct input into decision-making processes at all levels. Students indicated that they are encouraged to contribute actively during committee meetings and that their views are given proper consideration. The College also provides a suggestion box where students can submit comments or suggestions anonymously, should they desire.

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

2.3 The College's use of external reference points discussed in paragraph 1.5 applies equally to their use in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities.

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

2.4 The College does not have a formal written teaching and learning strategy. However, the self-evaluation and meetings with students and staff demonstrated that the College has achieved its aim of creating a student-centred learning environment. Students confirmed that they are encouraged to develop their skills in analysis, evaluation, application of concepts and research through a combination of lectures, research seminars and case studies. Student feedback on the quality of teaching and learning is gathered through anonymous evaluation forms each semester. These are collated by the College administrator and then reviewed by programme coordinators prior to discussion at an academic team meeting. Students confirmed that they are confident that the College reacts favourably to their feedback and that they are kept informed of actions taken to address matters raised.

2.5 The College takes full account of the awarding body's effective recruitment policy, and this underpins the quality of teaching and learning. Teaching staff are well qualified and experienced in the specialist nature of the programmes offered. Visiting teaching fellows and lecturers are accompanied in their lectures by a member of academic staff as a means of assuring the quality of teaching and learning delivery. New teaching staff at senior lecturer level and below are monitored comprehensively during a structured probationary period. This period includes regular formal discussion of programme-specific developments and commitments. Each individual's progress is monitored by their line manager. Overall monitoring is carried out by the Human Resource Committee, which is a subcommittee of the Senior Management Team. However, the probationary period does not include formal peer observation of teaching. Staff indicated that the small size of the teaching team enables an informal process to operate with teaching methods, good practice and areas for future development being discussed at academic team meetings. Since April 2012, these meetings have been formally minuted and outcomes discussed by the Academic Affairs Committee. Staff acknowledged that the introduction of formal peer observation of teaching would contribute to the enhancement of teaching and learning and it is considered desirable that the College introduces a formal system.

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

2.6 The small size of the College and student cohorts facilitates a personal, friendly learning environment. The self-evaluation, and comments made during the meeting with students, described the College as 'having a family atmosphere', which is both respectful and supportive. Staff operate an informal open-door policy and students greatly appreciate

the caring personalised learning experience, which they regard as a positive aspect of being a student at the College.

2.7 The supportive learning environment provided by the College is a feature of good practice. The College provides all students with a formal induction programme to the College, their programme and each module. A student information booklet with advice for students joining the College is sent to all students. The College induction takes place over a two-day period and includes relevant information on the awarding body. Male and female student welfare officers help to ensure that students settle into the local area and provide support with any welfare problems. A weekly extended induction class on study skills is provided during the autumn semester. Discussions with students indicated that master's students received a more structured induction to their programme than research students. However, more experienced students acknowledged that the induction programme continues to evolve, as newer students are being provided with additional information as a result of their earlier feedback on the induction programme.

2.8 The College has an agreement with a neighbouring university for the provision of counselling services. Staff and students can be either referred or self-refer anonymously to this counselling service. Students have access to a drop-in service, individual needs assessment and weekly counselling meetings. The Senior Management Team monitors use of this service as a means of assuring itself that students are supported effectively.

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

2.9 The encouragement given, and the funding available, for staff development activities, particularly those involving research, are a feature of good practice. Staff development is featured within the College strategy and a training policy is set out in the staff handbook. Staff are strongly encouraged to attend subject-specific and teaching practice training and development events, and the College provides funding to facilitate this. A research excellence fund has been established to support academic staff who wish to develop their research activities. Grants of up to £10,000 may be awarded to support an academic project which reflects the College strategic priorities. Access to this fund has enabled staff to deliver papers at international conferences in London and the Far East. The College encourages staff to be members of professional academic associations in their field of expertise or interest, to enable them to keep up to date with current thinking and developments. The College pays any fees associated with such memberships.

2.10 The Staff Handbook includes a staff development review policy and process. The College acknowledged in its self-evaluation that the current process is a major undertaking calling for considerable commitment and goodwill from reviewers and reviewees. As a consequence, the College is in the process of developing a revised staff development system, which reflects the size of the College and meets the needs of all staff. Currently, staff discuss development needs with their line managers, but staff development plans are not being formally recorded. It is considered desirable that the College completes the current development work to introduce a formal staff development and review process.

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

2.11 The College provides students with access to an appropriate range of learning resources to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes. Students described the learning resources at the College as excellent and they have access to an appropriate range of electronic facilities to support their studies. The College has a substantial annual budget for

library provision and students are encouraged to identify books to be purchased to meet their research interests. Students also have access to learning resources at the awarding body, including web-based information, and to library facilities of two local universities.

2.12 Students are encouraged to apply for grants of up to £500 to access resources that are not available at the College. Examples include library visits, attendance at conferences and seminars and other networking events related to an individual's research interests. The College runs a programme of postgraduate research seminars, which are open to the general public and staff from neighbouring higher education institutions. The intention is to broaden students' exposure to a wider audience and to different ideas and opinions.

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 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 provides comprehensive and accurate information to students and other stakeholders principally through its website. Students indicated that the effectiveness of the College website in providing information about the College and its higher education programmes was a deciding factor in applying to the College. In instances where advertised programmes were not available due to insufficient demand, students indicated that the College contacted them immediately to explain the situation and offer an alternative programme. Students were unanimous in their praise of the level of information provided when web searching and making enquiries.

3.2 The College publishes a range of printed public information, including a prospectus, programme leaflets, Principal's annual report and student and staff handbooks. All published material is comprehensive and provides all stakeholders with accurate and complete information on the College's higher education programmes.

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

3.3 The College has effective arrangements in place for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing. The Director of Operations has delegated responsibility from the Principal for ensuring that all information is accurate before it is published. Information is drafted as required, edited and proofread by all staff prior to being submitted for final sign-off by the Director of Operations. If required, a working group may be formed to develop new material. Information to be published online is subjected to the same process as printed material. An in-house web manager monitors the College website to ensure that it remains up to date. The College employs a web designer with experience of working in higher education to undertake any substantial changes to the College website.

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 plan³

Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight May 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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strong student representation on, and engagement in, the work of College committees (paragraph 2.2) 	<p>Liaise closely with the Student Society</p> <p>Encourage student attendance further by giving more advanced notice of meetings</p> <p>Meet with new members of the Student Society at the beginning of each academic year to brief them on their responsibilities</p>	September 2012	Principal	<p>Student representation in committees will continue to be high</p> <p>Greater student awareness of responsibilities</p>	Principal	<p>Minutes of relevant committees</p> <p>General student feedback (formal and informal)</p> <p>Greater student awareness of responsibilities</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the supportive learning environment (paragraph 2.7) 	Ensure students are aware of the support available to them, through materials such as the Student Handbook, Student-Staff Consultative	September 2012	<p>Student Administration Officer</p> <p>Director of the Graduate School</p>	<p>Higher student performance</p> <p>Higher quality research</p> <p>Better student-staff relations</p>	Director of the Graduate School	Student feedback (student course evaluation forms and programme feedback) formal as well as informal

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 body.

	Committee and other committee meetings attended by a student representative, and through helpful and approachable academic and administrative staff					Good student progress Relevant committee minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the encouragement given, and funding available, for staff development activities, particularly those involving research (paragraph 2.9). 	<p>Highlight to all staff opportunities available for funding</p> <p>Encourage academic staff to use funding through the Academic Team meeting and the Academic Affairs Committee</p>	September 2012	Director of the Graduate School	<p>The College's visibility is increased</p> <p>Higher quality and quantity of research by academic staff</p> <p>More diverse titles of research by academic staff</p> <p>Increased staff development</p>	Principal	<p>Reports submitted to the Research Development Fund and Research Excellence Fund</p> <p>Publications produced</p> <p>Paper presentations at conferences</p>
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is advisable for the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review the manner in which external examiners' reports are given proper formal consideration, acted upon and recorded in the 	Ensure examiners reports/comments are submitted to and discussed at the Academic Affairs Committee	September 2012	Chair of Academic Affairs Committee	Examiners reports/comments have been submitted to and discussed at the Academic Affairs Committee	Principal	Minutes of Academic Affairs Committee, examiners meeting, and Academic Council meeting

minutes of meetings (paragraph 1.6).	Any recommendations and action plans are to be minuted and followed up in subsequent committee meetings			Action points completed Higher quality of teaching More diverse titles of dissertations		Action points completed
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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider ways of systematically recording actions taken to address recommendations arising from awarding partner's approval events (paragraph 1.3) 	<p>Recommendations by the awarding body are to be discussed and implemented by the College</p> <p>Action points are to be minuted and followed up in relevant committee meetings</p>	Once future validation and awarding body are confirmed	Principal	Recommendations by the awarding body have been discussed and implemented by the College	Principal	<p>Minutes of relevant committees</p> <p>Academic report to the validating partner</p> <p>Principal's reports</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue to liaise with the awarding body to encourage regular and consistent attendance at committee meetings (paragraph 1.4) 	<p>Encourage attendance of the new awarding body representative by liaising closely with them and giving advanced notice of meetings</p> <p>Clarify the committee terms of reference</p>	Once future validation and awarding body are confirmed	Chair of the committees	Improved engagement with the committees by the awarding body	Principal	Committee minutes (Academic Council, Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee, Postgraduate Research Sub-Committee)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> encourage better staff engagement with Academic Infrastructure expectations (paragraph 1.5) 	<p>Workshop on Academic Infrastructure to be held for all academic staff</p> <p>Staff are to familiarise themselves further with the <i>Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (the Code of practice)</i></p>	December 2012	<p>Director of Graduate School</p> <p>All academic staff</p>	<p>Academic staff have a better awareness of the Academic Infrastructure</p> <p>Academic staff clearly refer to the <i>Code of practice</i> when making amendments to/designing courses</p>	Principal	<p>Academic Affairs Committee/ Academic Team meeting minutes</p> <p>Course and programme proposals</p> <p>Student course evaluation forms</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> introduce a formal system of peer review of teaching (paragraph 2.5) 	<p>Discuss with new validating partner their current procedures for formal peer review</p> <p>Implement the above, adapting where necessary</p>	September 2013	Director of Graduate School and Principal	Higher quality of teaching	Director of Graduate School and Principal	<p>Academic Affairs Committee/ Academic Team meeting minutes, and minutes of the Academic Council</p> <p>Student course evaluation forms</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> complete the current development work to introduce a formal staff development and review process (paragraph 2.10). 	New system of appraisal to be introduced	September 2013 and reviewed in June 2013	<p>Principal</p> <p>Director of Operations</p> <p>Director of the Graduate School</p>	<p>Higher staff morale</p> <p>Better organisation of the College</p> <p>Increased staff development</p>	Principal	<p>Human Resources Committee minutes</p> <p>Staff appraisal records</p>

				Better performance management Higher quality of teaching and research		
--	--	--	--	--	--	--

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: Handbook⁴](#)

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 1 to 8, with levels 4 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:

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.

RG 988 08/12

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
Email comms@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2012

ISBN 978 1 84979 644 6

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786