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

Matrix College of Counselling and Psychotherapy Ltd

April 2014

Contents

Key findings about Matrix College of Counselling and Psychotherapy Ltd

As a result of its 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**:

- use of professional standards in course delivery and assessments (paragraph 1.5)
- nurturing support to students (paragraph 2.6).

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:

- articulate and record staff and committee responsibilities for the management of academic standards (paragraph 1.1)
- embed the UK Quality Code for Higher Education in all its policies and procedures (paragraph 1.4)
- monitor the effectiveness of its new policy on the observation of teaching (paragraph 2.4)
- provide students with access to online resources (paragraph 2.13).

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

- rationalise and make available its policies, codes and procedures to staff and students (paragraph 2.3)
- continue to improve provision for students with special educational needs (paragraph 2.8)
- develop its approach to staff development and review (paragraph 2.11)
- provide a wider range of information through its website (paragraph 3.1).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Specific Course Designation](#)[1] conducted by [QAA](#) at Matrix College of Counselling and Psychotherapy Ltd (the College), 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 Ms India Woof, Dr Marie Wheatley, Mr Peter Hymans (reviewers) and Mr Christopher Mabika (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:

- College policies and procedures
- meetings with management and representatives of Middlesex University, staff and students
- validation documents with Middlesex University
- guidance notes and handbooks from Middlesex University
- College membership documents of the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)
- annual monitoring reports from Middlesex University and the UK Council for Psychotherapy.

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)
- *Subject benchmark statement: Counselling and psychotherapy*
- UK Council for Psychotherapy: Psychotherapeutic Counselling and Intersubjective Psychotherapy College Standards for Education and Training
- *The framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ)
- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Professional and Ethical Benchmarks.

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 set up in March 2001 to deliver courses in counselling and psychotherapy to students in the East of England, South Midlands, London and the South East. It became a limited company in 2002 with a registered office in Norwich. The founder, who is also the Director, and the managers conduct the College's administrative functions from home offices.

The College staff, including its managers, are employed on a part-time basis. Staff conduct teaching weekends and seminars over weekends at sites in Ipswich and Norwich with current student intakes of 47 and 36 respectively.

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[1] [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/designated-providers/Pages/default.aspx](#)
[2] At the time of publication of this report, the Handbook has been republished as *Review for Specific Course Designation: Handbook, May 2014*, available at [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2707](#)

At the time of the review, the College had 83 students on its higher education programmes listed beneath the awarding body with student numbers in brackets.

Middlesex University
- Certificate in Higher Education - level 4 (26)
- Diploma in Higher Education - level 5 (20)
- BSc (Hons) Degree in Integrative Counselling - level 6 (37)

The College maintains contact with, and offers additional support to, students who complete each award. At the time of the review, students registered on such programmes were as follows:

- Consolidation year post - level 4 and 5 (17)
- Supplementary year post - level 6 (7)

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College develops the curriculum, carries out student admissions, teaches students and sets assessments. It first and second marks coursework and provides feedback on assessments. The College also appoints external examiners and responds to issues raised by the external examiners. Middlesex University annually monitors the provision of the College, and the College prepares and implements action plans to correct any weaknesses that the annual monitoring review identifies. The College also provides the resources needed to teach students.

The College recruits staff and is responsible for their induction and development. It collects feedback from both staff and students, and takes action to improve its provision through such feedback.

Recent developments

Since the founding of the College, the Director has developed its programmes and maintained oversight of academic activities. The College modelled its operations on the findings of the Director's doctoral action research project that explored function and dysfunction in organisational dynamics, with staff and students as participants.

In 2004 the College achieved professional accreditation as a training body from the UK Association for Psychotherapeutic Counselling (UKAPC) and became a member of the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) in 2009. During the College's validation process in June 2009, the UKCP recommended a number of actions, which included the appointment of a dedicated administrator and delegation of some of the Director's duties. The College initiated a succession plan for the Director. With the support of the Administrator, a team of managers will shadow the Director until her retirement in August 2014. The succession plan ensures continuity and the security of the oversight of the College's provision. The College also undertook a process of formalising its policies and procedures.

The College signed its validation agreement with Middlesex University in September 2005, which was renewed in 2011.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes were invited to present a submission to the review team. Students in different year groups at the College's different locations presented separate submissions. The College supported the students with their submissions

by allowing them to use College resources. Students attended the preparatory meeting and met reviewers during the review visit. Some students were present at both meetings. The students were enthusiastic and actively contributed to discussions with the review team. Their contribution at the meetings and in their submissions was valuable to the review process.

Detailed findings about Matrix College of Counselling and Psychotherapy Ltd

1   Academic standards

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

1.1   The College fulfils its responsibilities for the management of academic standards through effective management and committee structures. The Governance Document highlights the roles and responsibilities of all members of the College's staff and lines of communication internally and externally with Middlesex University (the University), professional bodies, external examiners and prospective students. The document also specifies the general terms of reference, frequency of meetings and reporting arrangements of the committees. The Governance Document, together with validation documentation from the University, show a clear monitoring and reporting system and clearly define the expectations placed on the College by the University. However, the College does not explicitly reference academic standards in job roles, documentation and minutes of meetings. It is advisable for the College to articulate and record staff and committee responsibilities for the management of academic standards.

1.2   The Management Committee comprising the Director, Shadow Director and Shadow Training Manager, provides effective oversight of the College's higher education provision. The Committee sets the strategic direction of the College, and is responsible for the management of its academic standards the quality of the learning opportunities and its relationship with the University. It meets a minimum of eight times a year. The programme leads make up the Training Committee, which is responsible for teaching and learning, implementation of policy and the curriculum and for student guidance. The Training Committee meets six times a year and reports to the Management Committee. Both managers and students value the work of the programme leads. Student representatives attend the Board of Studies meetings that take place twice a year where managers and staff discuss student issues, with the Director as the chair.

1.3   The College produces comprehensive annual reports, which further evidence the effectiveness of its management of academic standards. These reports form part of the agenda of the Assessment Board's annual meetings, which representatives from the University and the external examiner attend. At the annual Assessment meeting the Board considers all feedback from students, any action taken to address students' comments and external examiner's reports. The University confirmed the rigour of the annual monitoring process. Managers conduct course planning on a yearly cycle starting in July, incorporating feedback from students through the Board of Studies and from the end-of-year course evaluation. Although the College has no formal documents relating to the course planning process, the process is effective and the University confirmed that it works.

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

1.4   The College makes effective use of the Quality Code. The Programme Handbook references the Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (the Code of practice), Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning, which the Quality Code Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others, now supersedes. Although the College has completed mapping of its relevant policies to Chapter B1: Programme design, development and approval, and Chapter

B5: Student engagement, it is yet to map the remaining policies to the Quality Code. It is **advisable** that the College embeds the Quality Code in all its policies and procedures.

1.5   The College uses the professional standards of the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) professional standards to develop and underpin its programmes. The Student Handbook references the FHEQ and explains how the University uses it to determine the academic levels of its courses. The College applies the FHEQ level descriptors to set and mark assessments. As a member of UKCP, the College observes the organisation's ethical principles and code of professional conduct. The College uses the standards for education and training of the Psychotherapeutic Counselling and Integrative Psychotherapy College to design its programme and underpin its learning and teaching processes. Tutors as practitioners, maintain membership of UKCP and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy which requires them to keep continuous professional development logs and observe their professional and ethical benchmarks. Some managers sit on the UKCP board and engage in peer reviews with other member institutions. Tutors are familiar with the subject benchmark statement for counselling and psychotherapy, published by QAA. The College's use of professional standards in course delivery and assessment is **good practice**.

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

1.6   The College has effective arrangements for using external examiners to assure academic standards. It follows guidelines for assessment published in its Handbook and in information sheets on its intranet. The College takes advantage of its different locations to ensure the security of its marking. For example a tutor in Ipswich first marks the work of a tutor in Norwich and the tutor in Norwich second marks it. Tutors give detailed written feedback on the assessments. The external examiner moderates samples of marked work. Management meetings deliberate on actions to take in response to the outcomes of the external examiner reports. The introduction of the annual Essay Day and the provision of a list of suggested essay titles to students are examples of the College's response to external examiner reports that highlighted the need to develop the students' writing skills. Students can access external examiner reports on the College's externally provided intranet.

1.7   The College's academic standards are secure despite potential future risk and enhancement areas identified. Its effective processes for annual monitoring, use of moderation to assure standards, and commendable use of professional standards in course delivery and assessment, further strengthen its management of academic standards.

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.

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2   Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1   The College's arrangements discussed in paragraphs 1.1 and 1.2 for the management of academic standards also apply to the management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

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

2.2   The College's use of external reference points to manage academic standards (paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5) extend to the management and enhancement of learning opportunities.

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

2.3   With various documents in use the College's documentation relating to quality is not clear. These documents include the recently approved Quality and Standards setting out the College's framework for quality and standards management, and the On-going Quality Enhancement Actions. The newly developed learning, teaching and assessment strategy is not yet incorporated into working practices and institutional planning. The Codes and Procedures Handbook, dealing with professional and ethical requirements for counselling courses and complaints and grievance procedures is not comprehensive as a guide to College policies and procedures generally. It would be **desirable** for the College to rationalise and make available its policies, codes and procedures to staff and students.

2.4   The College uses a range of formal and informal mechanisms to recruit and support staff. The Tutor Recruitment Policy clearly outlines the qualities and teaching experience that prospective staff should have. Once appointed, new staff shadow other staff on several teaching weekends and are attached to a mentor for an academic year. The College is in the process of formalising its arrangements for the observation of teaching. It is yet to implement its new policy on peer observations. It is **advisable** that the College monitors the effectiveness of its new teaching observation policy.

2.5   Students have opportunities to give informal and formal feedback. Student representatives sit on the Board of Studies meetings. The College disseminates its response to student feedback through its intranet. Student representatives receive informal one-to-one support from staff and do not currently receive any formal training. Middlesex University intends to extend its new online training provision for its student representatives to the students at the College. Students complete evaluation forms at the end of each teaching weekend, and the College is developing an end-of-year evaluation form. Programme leads share student feedback with their counterparts. The College uses the feedback to inform its practice and planning. Students feel that they are able to use a range of formal and informal mechanisms to express their views on a range of topics.

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

2.6   The College has highly effective arrangements to support its students and responds positively to their needs. The University commended the success of the College's annual Essay Day discussed in paragraph 1.6. The College plans to develop an essay writing guide, and acknowledges that students admitted through the recognition of prior experiential learning require additional formal support. Students see staff as accessible and helpful, and value the support and nurturing they receive. All students are entitled to three tutorials a year with their designated tutor, which they initiate themselves. The College adapts its support to student circumstances with the use of video links and email correspondence outside teaching weekends. The nurturing support provided to students is **good practice**.

2.7   The College collects first destination data for final year students during tutorials, which it analyses in annual monitoring reports. It uses this data to inform programme design. For example, the College has now introduced professional networking sessions to develop

students' skills to build their client and support base, as most of them progress into private practice.

2.8 The College's policy and provision for students with special educational needs requires further development. The College has made progress, including the introduction of the Codes and Procedures Handbook, which encourages working positively with diversity, support for dyslexic students, and the Dyslexia Resources document. However, there are currently no resources to provide or signpost students to first-level dyslexia assessment and no tailored support or adapted assessments for such students. It would be **desirable** for the College to continue to improve provision for students with special educational needs.

2.9 Students receive effective assessment feedback. The College uses a range of assessment methods, including observation during teaching weekends, and provides timely feedback to students. The Student Handbook clearly outlines the assessment strategy and feedback expectations, and students are able to interpret the feedback they receive and to relate it to the learning outcomes. The College has recently reviewed its feedback processes, and plans to introduce a new, standardised assessment feedback template. The external examiner confirmed the effectiveness and quality of feedback given to students.

2.10 The College provides adequate support for students during their placement. Students find their own placements and feel the College could support them more in this respect. The College is exploring the possibility of producing further guidance on placements, and is working to expand its links with placement providers. Students value the opportunity to undertake a placement and the support they receive from programme leads in particular.

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

2.11 Staff development activities focus on professional practice with little emphasis on higher education teaching and learning skills development. Although both staff contracts and the UKCP require tutors to maintain continuous professional development, staff do not record their development activities and there is no evaluation of staff development and its impact. The College holds an annual Tutor Day, which includes an externally facilitated session on pedagogy and a strategic planning afternoon. It is not clear how the College identifies and disseminates good practice. There is currently no formal staff appraisal system, though informal meetings take place sporadically, where staff discuss progress and possible areas for improvement. It would be **desirable** for the College to develop its approach to staff development and review.

2.12 The College provides a comprehensive range of initial and ongoing support to its staff. Tutors feel supported in their work and value the nurturing they receive, the induction process and the mentoring scheme in which a relevant more experienced teacher supports new staff during their first year. The College is in the process of formalising the framework for mentoring.

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

2.13 Few physical learning resources are available to students, and the College does not provide students with access to electronic resources. The College has a library at the Norwich campus, which includes relevant course texts, journals, CDs, videos and hand-outs. There are mobile library facilities in Ipswich, which students can access during training weekends. The College considers resource requests responsively and channels them

through programme leads. It considers the resourcing needs for the next academic year in February at a Management meeting. Students do not have access to the University's online resources and have requested improved access to e-resources on several occasions. It is **advisable** that the College develops student access to online learning resources.

2.14   The College's processes for the management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities are fit for purpose. The College provides effective feedback to students on their assessments and has effective arrangements to receive feedback from them. Staff and students highly regard the support and nurturing they receive.

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   Information about learning opportunities

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

3.1   The College fulfils its responsibilities for the production of all documentation relating to its provision set out in the agreement with the University. The range of information it produces includes programme specifications, programme handbooks, teaching and assessment materials, policies and procedures. The College has a website, which contains basic College and programme information. Students confirm that the website is accurate and helped them make informed application decisions. The agreement with the University also stipulates that the College should publish the approved programme specification on the website. The website contains links to the policy on accreditation for experiential learning and the application form, but does not contain links to other policies useful to potential applicants such as policies on supporting students with special educational needs. The College plans to develop the website to include sections for students, tutors and the public to access using passwords and include a wider range of information. It would be **desirable** for the College to provide a wider range of information through its website.

3.2   The Student Handbook is a comprehensive document, which contains the programme specification and refers to the awarding body and the requirements of professional bodies. Students confirmed that they received the handbook at induction or before and it is effective in supporting them in their studies. Although the Student Handbook refers to a virtual learning environment, the College does not have one. The College makes information available to current students and staff by means of an externally hosted intranet containing handbooks, codes, ethics and procedural and policy documents. However, the College requests students not to upload any of their assessments as all students and staff have access to all documents within their year group; instead, assignments and marked work are communicated by email. File sharing arrangements are effective in ensuring students and staff can communicate and access relevant information within their groups. However, students can only view their group, which limits their opportunity to share across the year groups.

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

3.3   The College arrangements for ensuring that information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy are satisfactory. The College has no formal policy or procedure for the production and publishing of information. The Director

reviews all printed information and checks them for content and accuracy. The new Governance Document states that the Management Committee can produce handbooks. In practice, the Committee reviews all policies and procedures before publication. The Training Manager and the Director effectively monitor information that staff and students upload to the intranet. They receive notification of all uploads and are able to check on its suitability and accuracy.

3.4   The College produces adequate information in line with its agreement with the University. It has satisfactory arrangements to ensure that information about its learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

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 plan[3]

Matrix College of Counselling and Psychotherapy 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 College:						
• use of professional standards in course delivery and assessments (paragraph 1.5)	Seventeen tutors and six programme leads understand the UK Quality Code for Higher Education; and counselling and psychotherapy benchmarks and use them proactively	Use the Quality Code expectations in the Curriculum Day Programme review meeting	By June 2014	Shadow Training Manager	Shadow Director and Management team	Notes of changes to curriculum Management meeting minutes Amended year Programme Amended Student Handbook New essay marking sheets in all student and tutor e-groups New Portfolio
	All tutors are aware of and use UK Council for Psychotherapy Standards for Education and Training as a benchmark in their teaching	Produce marking sheets for essays that embed the learning outcomes for levels 4, 5, 6	June 2014	Shadow Training Manager	Management Committee	
		Develop the end of year Portfolio Checklist to include academic standards for levels 4, 5, 6	June 2014	Shadow Director	Management Committee	

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[3] The College 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 College's awarding body.

		Introduce an internal verification process for essay marking	November 2014	Director	Management Committee	Completions checklist, internal verification policy
		Ensure all new tutors have information on the Quality Code, subject benchmark statement and UK Council for Psychotherapy Standards for Education and Training	June 2014	Shadow Director	Management Committee	Induction policy and induction sheet
• nurturing support to students (paragraph 2.6).	Students feel that staff supported them and treat them as individuals	Publish and embed the Student representatives policy in briefings for new and existing representatives in weekend one	September 2014	Training manager and Programme Director	Management Committee	Improved student representative attendance at Board of Studies meetings
		Seek funding support for students with specific learning needs in essay and case study writing	December 2014	Programme leads	Management Committee	Weekend one budget stream identified for additional support
		Increase the amount of support to students in planning for course completion and next steps after graduation individual tutorial process	July 2015	Training manager	Training Manager	Monitoring evidence of term three tutorials for all students in term three
		Continue to provide additional Writing Day support	October 2014	Programme leads	Management committee	Tutorial/ assessment record sheet, portfolio

Advisable recommendations	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date(s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
						checklist, evaluate student feedback on Writing Days briefing
The team considers that it is **advisable** for the College to:						
• articulate and record staff and committee responsibilities for the management of academic standards (paragraph 1.1)	Ensure all Matrix programme leads, tutors and administrative staff are clear about the roles and responsibilities across Matrix	Matrix Governance Policy published	September 2014	Shadow Director	Management Committee	Matrix Governance Document
• embed the UK Quality Code for Higher Education in all its policies and procedures (paragraph 1.4)	All policies, procedures and actions are embedded in the decision making process	Management team agree process of publishing all new policies and procedures	Agreed at management team meeting in June 2014	Shadow Director and Shadow Training Manager	Management Committee	All policies make referenced to the relevant expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Minutes of management meetings

Minutes of programme lead |

						meetings
• monitor the effectiveness of its new policy on the observation of teaching (paragraph 2.4)	An effective tutor observation process which enhances students' learning	Implementation of the Staff Observation Policy in the 2014-15 academic year	Each tutor to be observed once in each academic year	Director and Training Manager	Management Committee	Agreed notes and actions resulting from teaching observations
• provide students with access to online resources (paragraph 2.13).	Develop a list of online resources	Consult with all tutors to gather all available potential sources and liaise with Middlesex University library and resources	June 2015	Shadow Director	Management Committee	Students have access to recognised online resources
		Investigate the cost of membership for online libraries	July 2015	Shadow Training Manager	Management Committee	Minutes of the July 2015 Management Committee meeting
		Add resources and links to 2014-15 Handbook	August 2014	Shadow Director and Shadow Training Manager	Management Committee	Student Handbook additions 2015-16 Handbook 2014 - 15
The team considers that it would be **desirable** for the College to:						
• continue to improve provision for students with	Build access to the Matrix BSc by supporting students with particular learning needs to be able	Publish new information sheet update on dyslexia support and the process of assessment in all student	September 2014	Director and Training Manager	Management Committee	e-groups Handbook

special educational needs (paragraph 2.3)	to meet the BSC course requirements	e-groups				
		Publish guidance on Dyslexia assessment on website	November 2014 for 2015 applicants			Updated student info sheet
		Add to Student Handbook 2014-15				Website
		Weekend one tutor input and briefing				Weekend one briefing
• develop its approach to staff development and review (paragraph 2.8)	Staff are well trained to deliver the curriculum and regularly consider their area for development and seek relevant training	Annual team development and training day	Annually starting June 2014	Director	Management Committee	Team day programme and outcomes
		Observation and feedback	Implement the staff observation process	Training Manager	Management Team	Staff observation notes
		Appraisal process policy and procedure developed	Policy and procedure development November 2014	Director	Management Team	Staff appraisal records
		Shadowing and ongoing tutor support	All new tutors shadowed by July 2014	Shadow Director and programme leads	Management Team	Management Team minutes
		Internal moderation and verification process	End of the 2014-15 academic year	Director	Management Team	Minutes of the Management Team meetings

						Policy on internal moderation and verification
• rationalise and make available its policies, codes and procedures to staff and students (paragraph 2.11)	All policies and procedures are disseminated to relevant areas	Policies to be published	August 2014	Director and Training Manager	Management Committee	Destination of Documents listing
	Quality policies are rationalised into one document	Develop Codes and Procedures Handbook to include many of the new policies	August 2014			Codes and Procedures Handbook Student Handbook
		First weekend group tutor briefing	August 2014			Weekend one tutor briefing student e-groups
		Add to essay and writing day	October 2014			Tutor e-groups
• provide a wider range of information through its website (paragraph 3.1).	To have more information in one place and targeted for students, staff and the public	Scope website development to have password access to students, public, tutors	Commence October 2014 Complete August 2015	Director and Administrator	Management Committee	Website with more information

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/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/RSCD.aspx.

Glossary

This glossary explains terms used in this report. You can find a fuller glossary at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary. Formal definitions of key terms can be found in the
Review for Specific Course Designation: Handbook, May 2014.[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.

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2707

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.