Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education

Partial review

January 2018

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Partial Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education. The review took place from 16 to 17 January 2018 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Christopher Clare
- Ms Ann Kettle.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provision and to make judgements as to whether or not academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)[1] setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

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

A check is also made on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) with the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA[2] and explains the method for Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).[3] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.
[2] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk.
[3] Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers):
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education.

Key findings

Judgements

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision.

- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

No features of **good practice** were identified.

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes no **recommendations**.

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team makes no **affirmations**.

Financial sustainability, management and governance

The financial sustainability, management and governance check has been satisfactorily completed.

About the provider

The Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education (the College) is an independent, research-led centre of higher education, and currently offers programmes of study approved and SCQF credit-rated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

The College was established in Dundee in 2001, through the initiative of HH Shaikh Hamdan Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Deputy Ruler of Dubai, UAE Minister of Finance, and the founder of a personal, humanitarian charity organisation, called Al-Maktoum Foundation (the Foundation). The Foundation funds the College, alongside a significant number of other educational institutions in more than 69 countries. The College is neither a mosque nor a religious institution and has no political and/or ideological agenda. Students and staff are recruited worldwide, including Dundee itself, from a mixture of religious and non-religious backgrounds.

The College aims to promote thought-provoking debates and an intellectual and scientific understanding of Islamic tradition and Muslim societies. It is considered to be a place of knowledge and reflection on the issues facing a diverse and multicultural world in the twenty-first century, with a major goal of promoting multiculturalism achieved through a scientific study of Islam and Muslims in parallel with western tradition and knowledge.

There are currently 18 full-time higher education students, six full-time academic staff and five visiting fellows supported by six administrative staff.

The last review took place in May 2016 and two areas received a judgement of 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations': the quality of student learning opportunities and the enhancement of student learning opportunities. As a result, the College surrendered its Tier 4 Licence and was required to undergo a Partial HER (AP) review of higher education two years after the first review. Since the last review the Principal has stepped down from his position as Principal and Vice Chancellor and began a period of sabbatical leave from 1 November 2017. The Director of Operations, who has significant experience in higher education management, is now acting as Head of College until a new Principal is appointed.

At present, the College offers five programmes, approved by SQA, ranging from SCQF level 5 to level 11: a Certificate in Arabic Language, a Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Arabic Language, an Advanced Diploma in Islamic Studies, and a Professional Diploma in Islamic Economics and Finance. Programmes that embrace both further and higher education can be challenging when recruiting new students, and for the public to understand the nature of the College. Prior to the last QAA review the College was preparing to offer, jointly, three MSc programmes in collaboration with the University of Dundee, but these were put on hold following the negative outcome, pending a successful QAA review and UKVI approval of the collaboration agreement with the University. A new programme, a BA in Arabic and Islamic Studies, is currently being considered for validation by the Open University.

The College produced a detailed action plan to address the recommendations made at the QAA review in May 2016 and has closely monitored progress in implementing the actions identified. Changes have been made to the organisational infrastructure, with new processes for the design, development and approval of programmes and formalisation of the processes for annual monitoring and periodic review. Academic Council, as the senior academic body, is responsible for academic standards and quality assurance and enhancement, and its terms of reference include the responsibility to review and enhance the quality and standards of learning opportunities, and teaching practices. Enhancement is now clearly embedded across all the College's strategic documents and the terms of reference of its academic governance committees. The College has also revised a range of policies and procedures in response to the recommendations from the last review.

Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

1   Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval*

Findings

1.1   The College has developed a programme proposal process that is used to ensure that the internal procedures for the design, development and internal approval of new programmes are formally documented and operated consistently. This multi-stage process involves market research, scrutiny of available resources, the identification of potential collaborators and feedback from external advisers, and is currently in operation.

1.2   The development of such a process would enable the Expectation to be met, with a low level of associated risk.

1.3   The review team tested the Expectation by examining documentation, including a series of programme proposal charts. The team also explored the new programme approval process in meetings with senior and academic staff and students.

1.4   A proposal for a BA programme in Arabic and Islamic Studies has been discussed and approved by the Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Committee (TeLSEC), before presentation to, and approval by, Academic Council. The team heard that external advisers had been identified, students had been consulted and the proposal was about to be considered by a potential validating university.

1.5   The review team confirms that the Expectation is met and concludes that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B2): Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*

Findings

1.6   The College's processes are clear and comprehensive, covering all aspects of student recruitment and selection. The College now maintains definitive records of student admission interviews to ensure transparency in the admission process.

1.7   The College's arrangements for the recruitment, selection and admission of students would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team further tested the Expectation by examining documentation, including the Student Recruitment and Admissions Policy and samples of student admissions records. The review team also held meetings with senior and academic staff and with students.

1.8   At present the College is in a position to accept all those who meet the entry criteria. A Personal Statement is considered as part of the overall application but does not currently have the same weight that it does in some universities. Should the amount of applications increase to such numbers that the College has to turn surplus applicants away or defer their entry, the Personal Statement will play an important role in helping to decide which candidates are made offers. This is made clear in the Guidance Notes for Applicants. Its use is also outlined in the Student Recruitment and Admissions Policy.

1.9   In the interests of transparency and clarification, the College has introduced a form for recording admissions interviews which is then kept in the applicant's file. It has also proved useful to introduce and record interviews of applicants to Arabic language programmes to clarify to applicants the nature of those programmes.

1.10   The review team confirms by examination of the evidence and by the meeting with students that the College's arrangements are clear and comprehensive in coverage of aspects of student recruitment and selection.

1.11   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

1.12   The College's approach to developing its new teaching and learning strategy has been thorough and staff and students confirm that there has been extensive consultation. The strategy is well organised and directed at students, staff, external stakeholders and alumni. Four interdependent goals are identified with the means to achieve them, and Key Performance Indicators are laid out to measure progress.

1.13   The formalisation and implementation of the strategic approach to learning and teaching would enable the Expectation to be fully met.

1.14   The review team tested this Expectation by scrutiny of the evidence provided, including the Teaching and Learning Strategy, 2017-2022. The team also held meetings with senior and academic staff and students.

1.15   In the latter part of 2016 the College began a process to articulate a formal strategic approach to teaching and learning that included enhancement. The development process involved an external consultant and extensive discussion with staff and students. The resultant strategy document was approved and endorsed by the College Council in 2017.

1.16   Implementation of the strategy will be led by the Head of the Department of Islamic Studies, progress will be monitored by TeLSEC, and annual reports on progress will be made to Academic Council.

1.17   The review team confirms that the Expectation is fully met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*

Findings

1.18   A variety of support mechanisms and resources are available for students. Student Welfare Officers provide pastoral and welfare support, and information for students is provided in the student handbook, at induction, on the College website and on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE). There is a recently developed formal Teaching and Learning Strategy with Key Performance Indicators to measure progress.

1.19   The College's arrangements for enabling student development and achievement would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team considered evidence including a student submission to the review, the Student Handbook 2017-18, minutes of the Student-Staff Consultative Committee and the Teaching and Learning Strategy, 2017-2022. The team also spoke to College staff and students.

1.20   One of the goals of the Teaching and Learning Strategy, 2017-2022 is to inspire learning in a supportive, empowering environment and the means to achieve that goal are set out in the strategy. Students, in their submission to the review and in their meeting with the review team, expressed complete satisfaction with the academic and personal support they receive from the College. They are fully aware of the arrangements made by the College with the University of Dundee for them to access counselling, careers advice and sports facilities.

1.21   The review team confirms that the College's arrangements for students' support and development are effective in developing student potential. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

1.22   The terms of reference for the Academic Council and its subcommittees make clear the extent of student representation on governance committees. Evidence has been provided of the call for nominations for student representatives and for the nomination of a lead student representative. The College provided a copy of the email to students announcing the representatives for the current year. There is also evidence of training provided for new student representatives.

1.23   There is now an explicit strategy document to show how the College engages with students, which sets out the role and responsibilities of student representatives. There is also evidence of the re-presentation of this document for the current academic year. The issue of student representation and the discussion of these documents was considered at AAC, a committee of the Academic Council, and the newer TeLSEC.

1.24   Students provide feedback to the College each year through student unit evaluation forms and a student experience survey. The unit coordinators report form requires commentary on student feedback.

1.25   Students commented positively on their involvement in the governance committees and on the operation of the student representative system.

1.26   The above processes enable the Expectation to be met.

1.27   The review team tested the above processes through scrutiny of the self-evaluation document, of committee minutes, of documentation relating to student representation and the use of student feedback. The team also held meetings with staff and students.

1.28   Students met by the team stated that there were a number of channels through which they could feed back to the College. They felt that the College staff listened to their views and, where possible, acted on them. Various examples of changes made following student feedback were given.

1.29   The minutes of meetings confirm student representation and students confirm that there is a transparent nomination and election system for student representatives. However, it has not been used in the current year as the number of volunteers matched the number of places available, and this was confirmed by staff.

1.30   The student representatives met by the team confirmed that they had been given training for the role by the College, and two of the representatives had attended external training to equip them more fully for their roles.

1.31   Staff confirmed that student feedback from unit questionnaires and staff-student meetings feeds into the unit coordinator and programme coordinator reports that form the annual monitoring process. The team is able to confirm the inclusion of student feedback through inspection of the reports.

1.32   The team considers that there are effective systems for gathering and responding to student views. There is clear evidence of student involvement in the quality assurance processes and in the operation of part of the College's governance structure. Consequently,

the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*

Findings

1.33   The College has a summative assessment and moderation policy and an internal verification policy. It also has a verification code of practice and an assessment code of practice and grid. These detail the College arrangements for assessment and internal verification to address the requirements of its awarding organisation. There is evidence of the College responding to comments raised by external verifiers.

1.34   The internal verification process is clearly laid out and there is evidence of its operation. There is also evidence of external moderation and the effective operation of assessment boards.

1.35   The policies for assessment and internal verification indicate that there are systems in place to ensure the security and integrity of the assessments, enabling the Expectation to be met.

1.36   The review team tested the above processes through scrutiny of the self-evaluation document, policies, and documentation relating to internal and external moderation, and in meetings with students and staff.

1.37   Students all comment positively on the clarity of assignment briefs and on the quality and timeliness of feedback on assessment. Feedback is usually returned within two days, with feedback on examinations returned within two weeks. Students are aware of the College assessment verification processes and accept that these result in the two-week turnaround.

1.38   The student handbook provides clear and comprehensive advice on plagiarism together with a module on the VLE concerned with plagiarism and its avoidance. Students confirmed that the module is compulsory for some courses but that they had all taken the module, even if it was not part of their own course. The team was impressed with the student response to this aspect.

1.39   Staff confirmed the operation of the verification and moderation of assessments. They also provide additional assessment support for students in the form of mock examinations taken under examination conditions.

1.40   The College has processes for managing its responsibilities for assessment which are rigorous and secure. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

1.41   The College's awarding organisation, SQA, is responsible for defining the role of external examiners/verifiers and there is evidence of its operation.

1.42   The SQA visit on an annual basis to undertake moderation and verification. The verifier produces annual reports and these were discussed formerly at AAC and more recently at TeLSEC. There are clear actions identified and reports on the College responses to the external verifier reports.

1.43   Assessment boards are operated effectively, and although they are only internal, due consideration is given to students' performance and results.

1.44   The above procedures would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.45   The review team tested the above processes through scrutiny of the self-evaluation document, verifier reports, and minutes of meetings. They also met with students and staff of the College.

1.46   Staff confirm the implementation of the processes set out above. They also confirm that detailed consideration of the external verifier reports takes place at TeLSEC and that the minutes of the meetings are subsequently presented to the Academic Council.

1.47   Staff also confirm that students have access to the external verifier reports through their representatives on TeLSEC and the Academic Council. They also have access through the minutes of those meetings.

1.48   The team concluded that the College has in place effective processes for the management of the work of external verifiers. The Expectation is met, with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*

Findings

1.49　　The College has in place an effective process for annual monitoring and review of its programmes. The self-evaluation document describes the changes that have resulted from this process, and lists, briefly, the responsibilities of various staff involved in the process.

1.50　　Unit coordinators produce an annual report on student feedback, comments from the unit coordinator and team and any changes proposed resulting from the feedback. The reports contain details of student performance and response to student feedback but do not include external verifiers' comments.

1.51　　The unit coordinators' reports are consolidated into programme coordinators' reports, and these comprehensive reports do contain commentary on the external verifier reports and are considered by TeLSEC and AQSC.

1.52　　Currently all programmes are subjected to periodic review by the SQA.

1.53　　The above processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.54　　The review team tested the above processes through scrutiny of the self-evaluation document, unit coordinators' reports, programme coordinators' reports and committee minutes. They also met with students and staff of the College.

1.55　　Staff confirm that annual monitoring takes place at programme level by way of unit coordinators' reports that are consolidated into programme coordinators' reports. These reports are discussed at TeLSEC and at Academic Council.

1.56　　Staff confirm their awareness of the requirement for periodic review of programmes, and of the process by which it is undertaken. The review process is driven by standard SQA procedures for the current programmes and by the relevant university procedures for planned programmes. However, none of the current programmes have yet reached sufficient maturity for these procedures to have been used.

1.57　　The team considers that the annual monitoring process is effective and that the periodic review processes have the potential to be effective when implemented. These processes are enhancement-focused and result in action plans that are followed up by the College committees. They also draw on relevant data and make appropriate use of external verifier reports. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation:　　Met
Level of risk:　　Low

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints*

Findings

1.58   Student Complaints and student appeals policies and procedures are multi-stage, involving an initial informal stage. They are clearly set out and comprehensive and were re-approved at a meeting of Academic Council during 2016-17.

1.59   Information about how to locate the complaints and appeals procedures is included in the student handbook.

1.60   The above would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.61   The review team tested the above processes through scrutiny of the 2016 HER report, policy documents and minutes of meetings. During the visit, they also met with students and staff of the College.

1.62   The student handbook has a clear section on student complaints and appeals and signposts how to access and invoke the procedures.

1.63   Students are aware of the processes and how to access them, through the student handbook and the website. However, no student has yet had cause to invoke the procedures.

1.64   The College has no history of student appeals or complaints. Its policies are readily accessible to students and are set out in procedures which are fair and timely.
The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B10): Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.

Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*

Findings

1.65   This section is not applicable to the partial review.

Expectation: Not applicable
Level of risk: Not applicable

Expectation (B11): Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols.
This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

1.66   This section is not applicable to the partial review.

Expectation: Not applicable
Level of risk: Not applicable

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

1.67   In determining its judgement on the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.68   All relevant Expectations in this section are met and the associated level of risk is considered to be low in all cases.

1.69   The College has taken appropriate steps to address the issues identified in the previous review, and the current governance, management and policy frameworks provide a sound basis for managing the quality of student learning opportunities. A new Teaching and Learning Strategy is in the process of implementation. The processes for annual monitoring and periodic review are clear, although none of the current programmes has yet reached sufficient maturity for the latter procedures to have been used.

1.70   Progress in other areas, such as procedures for the design, development and internal approval of new programmes, the strategic approach to enhancement, training for student representatives and the use of external verifier reports, together with clear and comprehensive policy structures, provides confidence that these new approaches will be effective in practice.

1.71   The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

2.1 Following the HER review of 2016, the College restructured the College Council, and established a new organisational structure; formed the Department of Islamic Studies; and re-established the Academic Council, supported by three committees: the Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Committee (TeLSEC), the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) and the Research Committee.

2.2 Academic Council, as the senior academic body, is responsible for academic standards and quality assurance and enhancement and its terms of reference include the responsibility to review and enhance the quality and standards of learning opportunities and teaching practices. The terms of reference of TeLSEC include: monitoring and promoting innovation and good practice in learning, teaching and assessment and reviewing the provision of resources, including the library, in order to enhance learning. The terms of reference of AQSC include: formulating new policies and initiatives in academic quality, standards and enhancement and identifying and responding to areas of concern/good practice arising from the quality and standards procedures in order to enhance provision and the quality of student learning opportunities.

2.3 The College's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the College's approach by examining strategy documents and the terms of reference and minutes for its deliberative committees. The review team also held meetings with the Head of College, teaching and professional staff and students.

2.4 Since the 2016 review the College has developed and approved a College Strategy, 2017-2022. One of the values expressed in this strategy is working together as a collegiate community of students, staff and partners to foster connections, promote understanding and enhance learning. Among the priorities listed are: rigorous, continuous quality enhancement in teaching and learning and enriching learning and enhancing operations through diversity. The stated purpose of the College's Teaching and Learning Strategy, 2017-2022 is to articulate 'the College's approach to strategic enhancement of our approach to teaching and support for learning'. The first goal of the strategy is 'to demonstrate the highest levels of academic rigour in continuous review and enhancement' and the fourth goal is 'to cultivate strong collaborations that enhance student learning opportunities'. The review team confirms that enhancement is now embedded in the College's strategic documents and the terms of reference of its academic governance committees.

2.5 In their meetings with staff, the review team found a strong commitment to enhancement and an awareness of the need to take deliberate steps to enhance the student learning experience. Staff demonstrate understanding of how responsibility for enhancement is embedded in the committee structure and are able to provide examples of recent enhancements to their teaching practice and of improvements prompted by student feedback. In their submission to the review and in their meeting with the team, students showed awareness of the nature of enhancement and provided examples of the College enhancing facilities, especially library and information technology provision, and of improvements to Arabic language programmes.

2.6 The review team found a common understanding of the enhancement process

embedded within the College and concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

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

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.7   In determining its judgement on the quality of the information about learning opportunities, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.8   The review team considers that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

2.9   The College has taken considerable steps to ensure that enhancement is embedded across all aspects of its new organisational structure. Staff and students have a clear understanding of, and commitment to, enhancement and its role in improving the student learning experience.

2.10   Academic Council, as the senior academic body, is responsible for quality assurance and enhancement, and its terms of reference include the responsibility to review and enhance the quality and standards of learning opportunities and teaching practices.

2.11   A key value expressed in the new College Strategy, 2017-2022 is working together as a collegiate community of students, staff and partners to foster connections, promote understanding and enhance learning.

2.12   The review team confirms that enhancement is now embedded in the College's strategic documents and the terms of reference of its academic governance committees and concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 21-24 of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) handbook.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer Glossary on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx.

Academic standards
The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Award
A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

Awarding organisation
An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications.

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

Credit(s)
A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

Degree-awarding body
A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

Distance learning
A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'. See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award
The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Enhancement
The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

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

Flexible and distributed learning
A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations. See also **distance learning**.

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

Framework for higher education qualifications
A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS).

Good practice
A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

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

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

Multiple awards
An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

Operational definition
A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

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

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

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.

Self-evaluation document
A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard
The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)
An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

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