



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of the Irish Baptist College

March 2021

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the Irish Baptist College. The review took place from 16 to 17 March 2021 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Richard Samuels
- Ms Elizabeth Shackels.

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 (and the associated Core and Common practices) 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
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

The impact of COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the review was conducted online and included meetings with senior management teams, teaching staff and students. The scope of the evidence considered, and the nature of the judgements and operational milestones have remained the same but with some adjustments due to the online format. A risk assessment was carried out prior to the review to identify and mitigate any potential risks.

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.

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/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/higher-education-review

Key findings

Judgements

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice**.

- The independent study and study skills modules which effectively develop students' critical and transferable skills and support the achievement of the learning outcomes (Core practice Q2).
- The approach taken to developing an inclusive community of learners is reflective of a genuine and committed interest in students extending beyond the formal learning environment (Core practice Q9).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations**.

By October 2021:

- to further embed the processes for the monitoring and development of individual staff including peer observation and staff appraisal (Core practice Q3)
- to ensure that the process for academic appeals is clearly articulated in student handbooks (Core practice Q6)
- to introduce and implement a formal process for postgraduate students to contribute fully to the quality enhancement processes (Core practice Q5).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions already being taken to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to students:

- The action being taken to articulate and implement a more formal admissions policy (Core practice Q1).

About the provider

The Irish Baptist College (the College) is the training department of the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland (ABCI). The ABCI comprises 117 churches throughout Ireland, with some 8,500 members, and a wider community of approximately 20,000. The College was founded in 1892 in Dublin, moving to Belfast in 1964 and then to its present purpose-built premises in Moira, County Down in 2003. A new library and study annex were added in 2010. There are currently 70 students enrolled on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

The College was founded to train Pastors for Irish Baptist churches. However, as well as fulfilling that role, today it also trains for other denominations, including Pentecostal and Congregational, as well as men and women entering Christian ministry opportunities of all types at home and internationally.

The core mission of the College is training for Christian service and particularly pastoral ministry in the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland (ABCI). The College delivers this training in a collaborative partnership with the University of Chester with the aim of preparing students to make effective and positive contributions in a range of avenues of vocation, including pastoral ministry, mission, youth work, teaching and religious education teaching. The College has a student body of approximately 70 higher education students, most of whom are focused on training for a career in Christian ministry.

The College has four strategic aims: to provide a regular supply of pastoral candidates for the churches of the ABCI; to provide degree-level training for ministerial candidates from other denominations who may not have degree-level training based in Ireland; to train students for Christian ministry opportunities in Ireland and overseas; to provide at least 70 Christian workers for churches and other organisations over a 10-year period until 2027.

Teaching for higher education awards first started in the 1960s. The College became a constituent college of the Institute of Theology at Queen's University Belfast (QUB) in 1977 to teach at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and became an affiliate college in 2012. The College offered postgraduate courses including MTh and PhD. QUB closed the Institute of Theology to new students in 2019 and the partnership agreement is currently on a 'teach-out' basis until all remaining students finish their courses. It is estimated that all such students will have completed their programmes by 2023.

Between 2003 and 2010, the College had a partnership agreement with the University of Wales, Lampeter (UWL). Following the closure of the UWL partnership programme, a new agreement was put in place with the University of Chester (UoC), starting in 2010. This agreement includes the Bachelor of Theology, Bachelor of Divinity, Graduate Diploma, Postgraduate Diploma, Master of Arts in Theology and Doctor of Ministry (DMin). Following a periodic review by UoC in 2016, the College withdrew the DMin from its portfolio in 2018 owing to low recruitment and challenges in providing a research environment comparable to a university. The DMin programme is therefore being 'taught-out' with the aim of all students completing by 2022.

The College is overseen by a College Management Committee which is answerable to the Association's Churches' Council. The Council is comprised of representatives from each member church of the Association and meets twice yearly. The Council's Executive Committee enacts policy and governance on behalf of the Council. The College Management Committee has two main sub-committees: the Board of Studies, tasked with the academic side of college life; and Finance and Staffing which functions as the executive group.

Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations

Core practice (S1): The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.

Findings

1.1 The College's current partners include Queen's University Belfast and University of Chester (UoC) who are primarily responsible for the setting of academic standards. The responsibilities for setting academic standards to be consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks rests with the University of Chester and Queen's University Belfast. The memoranda of cooperation and the responsibility checklists accurately reflect partnerships' relationships. The College's responsibilities for maintaining standards are centred on course delivery, assessment design, marking and moderation.

1.2 To support the maintenance of academic standards UoC has devised a Quality Standards Manual which contains the requirements for the management, delivery and assessment of programmes to be delivered which its partners are required to follow. During the review, teaching staff accurately articulated their responsibilities and the support provided by the University of Chester in the promotion of academic standards through the provision of staff development opportunities.

1.3 The processes and procedures put in place by the College would allow the Core practice to be met. The team considered a range of internal documentation - including minutes of meetings and various internal and external reports - and held discussions with staff at all levels.

1.4 Operationally, programme teams at undergraduate and postgraduate level are responsible for their own subject area, and for liaising with the link tutor from UoC. Annually, programme teams review and update all published student material, including programme specifications to ensure they are current and consistent with the relevant national qualification frameworks. This information is shared with visiting lecturing staff on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.5 Relevant external reference points such as Subject Benchmark Statements are well understood by staff. External examiner reports are reflected upon to ensure that students attain the required standards. The examiners' reports confirm that threshold standards are consistent with national qualification frameworks. The Continuous Monitoring for Enhancement (CME) process ensures, not only compliance with the UoC principles and regulations regarding quality and standards, but also ensures that its requirements for collaborative arrangements are met. In addition, this process of continuous monitoring provides the UoC with assurance that threshold standards are being maintained.

1.6 There are appropriate structures and processes which ensure knowledge and understanding of relevant standards are maintained at organisational level and disseminated to teaching staff. These structures include the Board of Studies meetings held three times a year, weekly staff meetings and an annual awayday. The review team concludes that the

Core practice is met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Core practice (S2): The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.

Findings

1.7 Approval of all new programmes is ultimately the responsibility of the University of Chester (UoC). The approval process is clearly articulated in the Quality Standards Handbooks. The College outlined how it employs these requirements when designing new programmes, and in the content and design of its programme specification.

1.8 Programme teams emphasise the importance of assessment design in ensuring that students achieve the academic standards beyond the threshold level expected of the programmes they are studying. Programme teams use the UoC quality handbooks as both a reference point and template for all new and modified assessment. In addition, the programme teams analyse student feedback from module reviews, end of semester progress tracking meetings and capture comments from students regarding assessment. Student liaison meetings are held with student representatives to identify where modifications to assessment are required.

1.9 The processes and procedures would allow the Core practice to be met. The team considered a range of documentation, including handbooks, reports and minutes of meetings, and held discussions with staff at all levels.

1.10 Board of Studies meetings are held three times a year to monitor student progress. In addition, Module Assessment Boards (MAB) are held formally to confirm all student marks. The progression of students and ratifying of awards is within the remit of the University. The Continuous Monitoring for Enhancement (CME) process ensures the College is not only compliant with UoC regulations but that there is a focus on ongoing monitoring and quality improvement.

1.11 External examiners are nominated by the College and approved by the University. External examiner reports highlight that students consistently achieve standards beyond the threshold, highlighting the diverse nature of the student cohort as a key factor. Clear evidence was provided of how modules have been changed following feedback from external examiners.

1.12 The Director of Training is responsible for monitoring the progress of all students including student pass rates. Progress is monitored through the Board of Studies and MAB meetings. Undergraduate and postgraduate programme teams are responsible for outcomes achieved and student achievement is formally discussed at weekly team meetings. Achievement reports demonstrate that student performance rates are comparable to other institutions.

1.13 The review team concludes that the College ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level. Academic standards are appropriate to the level of study and the learning outcomes meet

the requirements of the awarding bodies and ensure that the Core practice is met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (S3): Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.

Findings

1.14 The College currently offers the Bachelor of Divinity, Bachelor of Theology, Graduate Diploma, MA in Theology and Postgraduate Diploma. Its core mission is training for Christian service. As such, the College delivers this training in a collaborative partnership with the University of Chester (UoC) with the aim of preparing students to make effective and positive contributions in a range of avenues of vocation including pastoral ministry, mission, youth work and religious education teaching.

1.15 There are effective partnership arrangements whereby ownership of academic standards rests with the UoC, although the College has responsibility for programme and assessment design, marking and moderation.

1.16 The processes and procedures put in place by the College would allow the Core practice to be met. The team considered a comprehensive range of both external and internal documentation, including external examiners reports, minutes of meetings, and annual programme monitoring reports.

1.17 All arrangements at IBC, for the provision which leads to a University of Chester approved award, are subject to the relevant regulations and policies as laid out in *Handbook on Collaborative Provision*. An Organisational Agreement is in place which governs the overarching commitment to collaboration.

1.18 In addition to supporting the setting of academic standards, UoC has devised a Quality Standards Manual which contains the requirements for the management, delivery and assessment of programmes to be delivered which it expects its partners to follow. College teaching staff accurately articulated their responsibilities with regard to programme design, assessment design, marking and moderation. They also highlighted the support provided by UoC in the promotion of academic standards through the provision of staff development opportunities.

1.19 The College works closely with UoC to continually improve its provision through processes such as validation, revalidation and periodic reviews. The College utilises the knowledge of visiting tutors and its own specialist tutors to inform specification changes and the revision of student material. This knowledge is shared by teaching staff through an efficient and effective network of formal and informal meetings with students.

1.20 The review team concludes that there are in place, effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of awards are credible and secure and, therefore, the Core practice is met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (S4): The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.

Findings

1.21 The College is responsible for the design and marking of undergraduate and postgraduate summative assessment. Responsibility for ratifying final award rests with the awarding body and this information is fully articulated in UoC principles and regulations.

1.22 Programme design and modification of programmes are subject to the processes described in quality standards handbooks and includes the use of external expertise, such as external examiners reports, and subject experts as well as the full involvement of UoC at all stages. This means that a programme of study cannot be delivered until all the stages have been completed and approved by the awarding body. In addition, a mandatory Annual Programme Update Cycle provides a robust mechanism for validating and approving any changes. All policies and procedures are available online through the university portal which students are made aware of during induction.

1.23 The processes and procedures put in place by the College would allow the Core practice to be met. The team considered both external and internal documentation, including correspondence from awarding bodies, and held meetings with staff and undergraduate and postgraduate students.

1.24 The College's internal moderation process consists of first and second marking. There are regular reviews of assessment processes to support and improve student outcomes. Students appreciate the formal and informal feedback provided by staff regarding their module performance. Undergraduate and postgraduate handbooks include information on assessment schedules, marking criteria, academic integrity, the procedures for the submission of assessments and a statement on anonymous marking, and the use of plagiarism-detection software.

1.25 External examiners approve all assessments and review a representative sample of all work completed in an academic year for undergraduate programmes. For postgraduate work, the external examiner reviews all assessments. The College works effectively with its external examiners to ensure a timely flow of information and responds appropriately to comments received. External examiners attend the annual MAB and act as a critical friend in confirming marks, reporting on academic standards and the processes of assessment. External examiners confirm that assessment processes are reliable, fair and transparent and their reports confirm that programmes are achieving standards beyond the threshold level.

1.26 The review team concludes that the external expertise, assessment and classification processes are reliable, fair and transparent, and the Core practice is met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Common practice (Standards 1): The provider reviews its Core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

Findings

1.27 Internal governance is effectively exercised by the Principal supported by the Director of Training, and by the Board of Studies whose membership consists of a cross section of faculty staff and the College's Management Committee. Externally, the Continuous Monitoring for Enhancement (CME) process ensures the College is not only compliant with UoC regulations but that the College is focused on continuous monitoring and quality improvement. These processes are underpinned by the annual Assessment Board.

1.28 The structures and procedures in place would allow the Core practice to be met. The team considered a wide range of documentation, including review reports from all processes, and held detailed discussions with students and staff at all levels.

1.29 Responsibility for programme monitoring, review and enhancement rests with the Principal and is articulated in the UoC Quality Standards Handbook. At an operational level, undergraduate and postgraduate programme teams are responsible for their own subject area, liaising with the relevant link tutor from UoC. Annually, programme teams review and update all published student material including programme specifications, and this information is shared with the visiting tutors through the VLE.

1.30 No formal peer review process is currently in place to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. However, students on both the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are highly complimentary about the quality of the range of resources provided by staff and the academic stretch and challenge provided for postgraduates. Staff highlighted the additional preparation time they have had to undertake to meet the challenges of COVID-19 to ensure students were kept motivated and focused. External examiners undertake a review of programme standards and attend the annual MAB.

1.31 Student feedback processes are continuous and consist of formal and informal methods. Processes include module evaluations, student surveys and feedback on induction activities, student liaison committee meetings. Feedback is reported and considered thoroughly by the Principal, Director of Training and academic staff to drive improvement.

1.32 The organisational and reporting structure is well understood by staff. Terms of reference for committees are understood and minutes of meetings clearly outline responsibilities, actions and outcomes. Students are engaged with, and value, feedback processes. Processes were amended to reflect the changes in learning and teaching owing to COVID-19.

1.33 The College works closely with the UoC to drive improvement and enhancement. The College's provision is subject to a number of external benchmarks as well as the UK Quality Code and its approach to meeting these is to integrate all standards into its processes and procedures. The College's self-evaluation document provided for the review identifies a number of areas for ongoing development, including its admission processes.

1.34 The review team concludes that the College reviews its Core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement. Therefore, the Common practice is met and the level of risk is low.

Common practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.35 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.36 All four of the Core and Common practices for this judgement area are met and the associated level of risk is low in all areas. There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this area.

1.37 The College does not set the academic standards for the qualifications it offers as these are set by external awarding bodies. As a delivery organisation the College has a clear understanding of its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards. The College has put in place clearly understood structures and processes that ensure knowledge and understanding of relevant standards is maintained at organisational level and effectively disseminated to teaching staff.

1.38 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

Core practice (Q1): The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.

Findings

2.1 Information for prospective students is provided through a variety of sources. The website provides details about the College's purpose, programme structures, application procedures and fees. Additionally, the College runs promotional activities such as contact with alumni and open days to provide prospective students with additional information.

2.2 The University of Chester (UoC) admissions framework provides direction on admissions procedures and the requirements governing the assessment of applicants. The assessment of students is of particular relevance to the College because applicants will often follow an unconventional academic route that requires the recognition of previous qualifications and experience. UoC's requirements governing assessment provide clarity on the requirements relating to the accreditation of prior learning (APL). The final decision about acceptance to the programme is made by IBC although UoC makes the final decision where applicants are applying and requiring APL.

2.3 The internal processing of applications is the responsibility of the College's Principal with a Candidates Committee established to make final admission decisions. The application process requires students to complete a number of standard tasks including an interview and a written assessment. Interviews are conducted by experienced members of staff using a standard summary sheet that is ratified by the Candidates Committee to ensure reliability and fairness.

2.4 The review team examined the effectiveness of the recruitment, selection and admissions procedures by analysing published documentation, including website information and programme brochures. The team also held meetings with senior managers, teaching and support staff, and with students.

2.5 The admissions processes work effectively and serve the needs of diverse students. Students stated that the application process was clear and that they had received sufficient information to ensure that they were able to make an appropriate decision on whether to study at the College. Students stressed the value of open days and the interview process which provided them with further opportunity to consider the suitability of the course of study. Student feedback relating to admissions is received through a questionnaire distributed at induction and provides the College with the opportunity to review and enhance the application process.

2.6 The College's selection criteria are set appropriately for students to succeed academically and supports high rates of achievement and retention. Ensuring that students begin their studies with appropriate skills and knowledge to succeed is important for the College owing to the admission of students from diverse academic backgrounds. The College is open to finding alternative study options for students who cannot be admitted on to their favoured course.

2.7 While the admissions processes and selection criteria are working effectively, the College has identified the importance of articulating these into a single policy rather than in a diverse range of documents. The College has begun to address this through the consolidation of admissions information and with clearer information about its relationship with the awarding body. The review team **affirms** the work being undertaken to articulate

and implement a more formal admissions policy.

2.8 The review team concludes that students joining the College have been well informed and selected as having the potential to complete their courses. The College has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system and further work is being undertaken to articulate this more clearly. The Core practice is met and any associated risk is low.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q2): The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.

Findings

2.9 Memoranda of cooperation and responsibility checklists clearly outline partnership relationships. These include identifying the College's responsibility over course and assessment design, marking and moderation with the provider having primary responsibility for maintenance of academic standards. The College has a clear understanding of its role in line with agreements with the awarding bodies. The awarding bodies have the responsibility to meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework and that the value of the qualifications awarded is in line with sector-recognised standards.

2.10 The processes and procedures put in place by the College for the delivery of high-quality courses would allow the Core practice to be met. The review team held meetings with a range of staff and students, considered the resources available to support learning, and examined module evaluations and minutes of meetings.

2.11 Applicants must satisfy the relevant admission criteria, which includes eligibility, minimum entry requirements, training contract requirements, and prior attainment to determine levels of study. The College has an effective assessment strategy, and has developed a variety of assessments to ensure appropriate engagement with module content. Assignments address critical analysis, reflective learning, reviews, class presentations and class tests through a range of methods. There are clear arrangements through which programmes can be modified. The agreement with UoC is that the College complies with the overarching requirements with respect to assessment design.

2.12 The College makes effective use of the quality manuals, such as the Quality Academic Standards Manual provided by UoC when developing new programmes. As outlined in meetings with staff, they consider these as an important reference point in the design of new programmes. In addition, the College makes excellent use of guest speakers to address the student body on a range of specialist subject areas.

2.13 The College works collaboratively with the UoC link tutor and the faculty in the development of programmes utilising the experience of staff, the external examiner and UoC. Module courses and methods of student assessment are regularly reviewed by the external examiner to ensure that they match the current standards and prerequisites. Module specifications confirm assessment strategies and support is also made available for the development of module specifications and handbooks. Both undergraduate and postgraduate teams revise programme content annually; any revisions are forwarded to the external examiner for consideration, and the UoC for approval.

2.14 College staff identified ways in which they have worked collaboratively with the UoC to develop a mandatory independent study module and a study skills module for students to undertake. These are specifically intended to support students from a diverse range of

personal backgrounds and with varying educational experience. Both modules have been devised to develop students' critical and wider transferable skills and dispositions of students. Students spoke positively about the value of these modules in enhancing their critical faculties and supporting independent learning. The independent study and study skills modules effectively develop students' critical and transferable skills, and support the achievement of the learning outcomes, and are **good practice**.

2.15 The College undertakes formative assessments and provides appropriate feedback to students in preparation for summative assessment. For example, student feedback is regularly sought to ensure that feedback on assessment is both timely and constructive. During the weekly staff meetings, student feedback is discussed and acted upon where appropriate.

2.16 Students access a significant range of learning materials through the virtual learning environment (VLE). Module evaluations are undertaken at the end of each semester. Feedback is analysed and evaluated, and comments are discussed in detail at staff-student liaison committee and actions are referred through representatives to the student body.

2.17 The College promotes a supportive and well-organised approach to ensuring it has effective processes and systems in place to deliver high-quality courses. It works closely with its awarding bodies to achieve this. There is good practice in the independent study and study skills modules which support student achievement. The Core practice is met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q3): The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

Findings

2.18 Collaborative arrangements with UoC outline the basic requirements of teaching staff and the College values those with a blend of academic and professional knowledge and skills. Teaching at the College is undertaken by two categories of staff. The first is well-established full-time academic staff who provide the main teaching. The second is visiting tutors who provide supplementary teaching. Full-time teaching staff support visiting tutors in understanding programme details and expectations in marking.

2.19 The review team tested the Core practice through an analysis of staff curricula vitae, documentation on staff appraisals, training and professional development opportunities, and meetings with the senior team, students and teaching staff.

2.20 To ensure comparability of marking standards, staff conduct a peer review of assessments twice annually. An appraisal process has been established with internal workshops and external training opportunities available to all staff. Members of staff are able to utilise periodic continuing professional development activities provided by the awarding bodies, such as the postgraduate supervisor good practice workshop run by UoC. These activities provide an opportunity for staff to develop skills and discuss teaching and learning practice with external educational institutions. Internal staff awaydays also provide an effective opportunity for good practice to be shared.

2.21 Teaching staff are highly qualified in theology and have appropriate teaching experience. Staff confirmed that the College promoted training opportunities and is

supportive of individual requests for professional development. Students were complimentary about the quality of teaching, including during the COVID-19 pandemic, and confirmed that they completed module evaluation forms which feed back to the relevant tutor for evaluation and inform improvements.

2.22 Student feedback indicates broad satisfaction with the quality of teaching, and the College reviews teaching in the light of student module feedback. However, there is less effective embedding of the processes for formal teaching evaluation. Despite having a comprehensive appraisal system, its implementation is not currently applied systematically across the teaching team. Although teaching staff are able to take advantage of development activities, there is no established process for either management or peer observation of teaching to identify and promote individual training needs. The review team **recommends** that, by October 2021, the College further embeds the processes for the monitoring and development of individual staff, including peer observation and staff appraisal.

2.23 Staff are appropriately qualified and committed to delivering a high-quality academic experience. A range of professional development opportunities is available to develop staff further, but additional work needs to be undertaken to ensure that a systematic approach is in place to improve the quality of teaching and promote individual training needs. The Core practice is met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q4): The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

Findings

2.24 Responsibility for students' academic and support needs rests with the Principal and the Director of Training. Collaborative arrangements with UoC ensure that the College provides the necessary staff and physical resources to carry out academic and student support in line with the memorandum of agreement. UoC monitors the College's provision through a periodic review process - the most recent review taking place in 2019. The College also receives regular feedback from students on the appropriateness of resources through the module evaluation questionnaires and staff-student liaison committees which, if required, are processed through the College's continuous improvement plan.

2.25 The team tested the Core practice through consideration of reports of the awarding bodies, student feedback, and by gaining access to the VLE and electronic resources available. Additionally, the review team held meetings with the senior team, teaching and support staff, and students.

2.26 The College delivers teaching and learning in a purpose-built environment equipped with a library and through a comprehensive range of electronic resources. A library assistant is employed to support students in their learning needs. UoC provides access to specific support services, including learning and information services, study skills resources and the university VLE. Other specific online e-learning resources are available supporting both undergraduate and postgraduate student needs. Postgraduate students enrolled through a partnership agreement with Queen's University Belfast (QUB) have access to the university library which includes electronic resources. Students are given information on access to

resources and borrowing rights through the generic College Handbook.

2.27 Students have a personal tutor who also facilitates pastoral care. Students meet their personal tutor weekly in small groups. A designated pastoral support team within the College is established and professional counselling is available to students if required. Career advice relating to ministry work is provided to students and work placements are supported through placement supervisors.

2.28 There is provision for a wide range of appropriate resources and a high level of personal and pastoral support for students. The effectiveness of this support activity is reflected in reports and feedback provided by UoC and the student body. Reports from UoC demonstrate that there are appropriate resources and that the library budget is sufficient. Completed student questionnaires confirm that students believe resources to be sufficient. Students confirmed that they had access to an information service providing access to research, e-journals and e-books and appreciated the efforts made by the College to ensure that the library was open during COVID-19.

2.29 While the provision of resources and close student support are positive features of the College, providing the appropriate supervisors and environment for research students is challenging for a small institution. Consequently, the MRes and PhD programmes are currently being phased out following the closure of the Institute of Theology at Queen's University Belfast. Senior management stated that the College is looking to provide research opportunities through partnership with university departments. The model under consideration would be to provide research students with a supervisor at IBC while being enrolled on a UoC PhD programme.

2.30 The College, in partnership with its awarding bodies, provides sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience. The Core practice is met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q5): The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.

Findings

2.31 The College uses a variety of well-established and understood processes to engage with students. Staff-student liaison meetings are held twice a year. Staff and student representatives, chosen by the individual year groups, meet to discuss individual modules as well as non-academic matters. Action and changes are made where necessary and appropriate. This activity is reported back at the next liaison meeting.

2.32 Information from the student module feedback and Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) is fed into periodic processes, such as staff meetings, staff awaydays and through Board of Studies meetings. The College promotes an open-door approach for students and both staff and students highlighted the importance attached to the informal discussions that take place in person and online to support students and maintain their focus.

2.33 Students are also engaged formally through a Student Committee. Students complete an admissions questionnaire during the induction week and are encouraged to take part in the National Student Survey (NSS). However, the College is unable to access direct feedback from the NSS disaggregated to the programmes they offer. The College indicated that it is intending to implement in the 2021-22 academic year an internal survey

similar to the NSS to capture students' opinion and views.

2.34 The review team examined documentation linked to how the College engages with students, and held meetings with staff and students to confirm their understanding of how they are engaged both individually and collectively. The processes and procedures in place would allow the Core practice to be met.

2.35 The Director of Training has primary responsibility for engaging, collating and analysing the feedback from students. Significant emphasis is placed on the feedback provided through module evaluation questionnaires and through the SSLC. At the end of each semester, this information is used to assess and improve the quality of the educational experience.

2.36 The Student Committee is elected annually by the student body, and is made up of Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. The student chair presides over house meetings, liaises with the Principal and academic and professional support staff, and represents students at management committee meetings and presents a report. Committee members and the student committee chair ensure that the relay and dissemination of information to staff and students is effective in closing the feedback loop. Feedback from all student placements is collated from students and from mentors at the placement providers. As part of their assessment for the professional placement module, students are required to write a critical reflection which evaluates their experience.

2.37 However, the same formal process of feeding into the SSLC is not currently available to postgraduate students which represents a less unified cohort. The internal mechanism for student feedback is primarily through the SSLC which is only attended by undergraduate student representatives. The College has considered the challenge posed by postgraduate provision and recognises that technology may provide an opportunity for these students to be integrated into formal feedback mechanisms. The review team **recommends** that, by October 2021, the College introduces a formal process for postgraduate students to contribute equally to the quality enhancement processes.

2.38 The College has developed effective processes for obtaining, reviewing and acting upon individual and collective student feedback on their educational experience. However, further work needs to be undertaken to gather formal feedback from postgraduate students. The Core practice is therefore met, and the level of associated risk is low.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q6): The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.

Findings

2.39 The College aims to provide multiple channels for students to express concerns to ensure that issues are addressed informally before becoming formal complaints. The direct channels of communication available to students include group feedback provided at regular group tutorials and individual feedback which is encouraged through an open-door policy. The indirect channel of communication is through student representatives who engage in the Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) where minutes and actions are recorded.

2.40 A formal complaints procedure which clearly details responsibilities, time frames and outcomes is available to students in the Student Handbooks. Formal complaints are considered by the Management Committee with general complaints overseen by the Registrar and complaints of an academic nature overseen by the Principal. Academic issues related to an awarding body are directed to the relevant partner institution. Students have the right to appeal grades or awards through an academic appeals process through the awarding bodies. Specific procedures for academic appeals on UoC programmes are outlined in the handbook under the requirements governing student assessment. Academic appeals can be made on the grounds of mitigating circumstances, academic integrity or that proper procedures were not followed. Reference is made to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) process where the student remains dissatisfied with the outcome.

2.41 The team tested the Core practice by examining the complaint and appeals procedures, reviewing the student handbooks and holding meetings with the senior managers, staff and students.

2.42 The complaints and appeals processes are appropriate and fair in practice. The College has firmly embedded student feedback mechanisms and a culture of openness which ensures that students have the opportunity to raise concerns. The College has not recently received formal cases of complaints or appeals that required escalation, although it provided examples of written concerns raised, including those relating to assessment. The College additionally provided examples of their responses which showed that the College deals with concerns in a prompt and responsive manner.

2.43 Students confirmed that there are multiple channels to express concerns, highlighting the availability and receptiveness of tutors. Students stated that the complaints process was discussed at induction and that they would refer to their appropriate handbook if they required specific information on how to complain. The complaints process is clearly outlined in the College's Student Handbook with a complaints form included for students who wish to formalise the process. However, while the specific complaints process is articulated in the College Handbook, the UoC academic appeals process is only provided through a web link. Full guidance and information on academic appeals is not clearly articulated in either the generic or programme-specific student handbooks. The review team **recommends**, that by October 2021, the College ensures that the academic appeals process is clearly articulated in student handbooks.

2.44 Informal mechanisms and formal processes for complaints were found to be in place and understood by students. While there are comprehensive policies and procedures

for academic appeals these need to be more readily publicised in student handbooks. Therefore, the Core practice is met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q7): Where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments.

Findings

2.45 The College currently has a small number of research degree programmes that are in 'teach-out' mode with Queen's University Belfast (QUB). There is also no new recruitment to the DMin programme validated by the University of Chester (UoC). While the College continues to 'teach out' the remaining research programmes, it seeks to ensure that the ongoing needs of research students are being met. This activity includes providing supervision for these students, engagement with the universities' annual progress reviews, and guiding them through writing up and submission.

2.46 The College endeavours to provide an environment and infrastructure that serves to enable positive outcomes for research students through contextualising research, exposing them to research culture skills, responding to their changing needs, fostering their wellbeing, and encouraging creativity, critical independent thought and originality of research outcomes. This supervision is provided in collaboration with the College's university partners and is reflective in the independent study module that has been developed.

2.47 The review team examined associated documentation demonstrating how the College offers research degrees and provides an appropriate and supportive research environment. The review team held meetings with staff and students to confirm their understanding and reviewed relevant documents. The processes and procedures in place would allow the Core practice to be met.

2.48 Following a periodic review by UoC, at the College's initiative it withdrew the DMin from its portfolio in 2018 owing to low recruitment and the challenges in providing students with a research environment comparable to the University. This programme is therefore currently being 'taught out', although the College is giving careful attention to ensuring effective supervision for the small number of students enrolled. The anticipated conclusion of the programme is 2022. QUB closed its Institute of Theology to new students in 2019 and no further doctoral students have been recruited since that time. The College anticipates that the QUB programme will be concluded by 2023.

2.49 However, the College currently provides a supportive environment which includes the supervision of a small number of doctoral candidates who are in the process of concluding their research. Students studying through QUB can participate in the annual postgraduate research student experience survey providing further data for the College to consider in terms of its current teach-out arrangements.

2.50 In view of the teach-out processes, and the close monitoring and supervision of the remaining students on doctoral programmes, the arrangements in place provide an appropriate and supportive research environment. The Core practice is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q8): Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.

Findings

2.51 The College currently offers the Bachelor of Divinity, Bachelor of Theology, Graduate Diploma, MA in Theology and Postgraduate Diploma. There exists between the College and the UoC an effective partnership arrangement whereby ownership of academic standards rests with the UoC. However, the College has responsibility for programme and assessment design, marking and moderation.

2.52 The team explored how relationships work in practice by holding a range of meetings with staff and reviewing a number of key documents such as handbooks and periodic review reports. The arrangements allow for the Core practice to be met.

2.53 All arrangements at IBC, for the provision which leads to a University of Chester approved award, are subject to the relevant regulations and policies as laid out in *Handbook on Collaborative Provision*. An Organisational Agreement is in place which governs the 'overarching commitment to collaboration'.

2.54 UoC have devised a Quality Standards Manual which contains the requirements for the management, delivery and assessment of programmes to be delivered which it expects its partners to follow. College teaching staff accurately articulated their responsibilities with regard to programme design, assessment design, marking and moderation.

2.55 The College works collaboratively with UoC to continually improve its provision. The College utilises the knowledge of visiting tutors and their own specialist tutors to inform specification changes and the revision of student material. During the review, staff also highlighted the support provided by the University of Chester in the promotion of academic standards through the provision of staff development opportunities.

2.56 First-year students are assigned a placement at their home church where they are given opportunities to gain an understanding of how ministry works in practice. Second-year students are assigned to another church or ministry-based organisation as a student assistant. Students are mentored and work alongside an experienced pastor or parish worker.

2.57 Students stated that they consider that they are well matched to the placements provided. The College has developed a comprehensive database of placement providers and makes considerable efforts to ensure that students are placed appropriately. A provider agreement is put in place before the placement begins. This agreement is based on an underlying principle of a commitment to collaboration. The effectiveness of this approach was confirmed by a placement provider, and by students who spoke positively of the experience and appropriateness of placements. These arrangements ensure that placements provide a high-quality learning experience, and students confirmed that the activity is effective and collaborative in nature.

2.58 There are effective systems to ensure a high-quality academic experience for students on placement. The Core practice is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q9): The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.

Findings

2.59 The College provides a high level of support to students to ensure that they are fully equipped to succeed and achieve their career aspirations. The College engages collaboratively with UoC to ensure that the student experience is integral to enhancing provision.

2.60 The team tested the College's approach to ensuring it has effective processes in place to support students by holding meetings with a range of staff and students, reviewing staff resources and analysing annual surveys, minutes of meetings and other documentation. The processes and procedures in place would allow the Core practice to be met.

2.61 Undergraduate students begin their journey with an induction and orientation week designed to welcome and help them adjust to life and study at the College. They are specifically asked to feed back on this experience. A study skills booklet has been specifically designed to support students when making the transition into academic study. Staff stated that they have worked collaboratively with UoC to develop a study skills module. This matter is addressed as good practice under Core practice Q2. Students confirmed the value of this module in supporting them in areas such as researching, referencing and academic writing and the development of skills of critical analysis.

2.62 Student support is effective and well embedded across all years. All undergraduate students are assigned a personal tutor at the beginning of the academic year. Tutor groups meet on a weekly basis, and this activity is supplemented by end-of-semester module evaluations and student liaison meetings. Although postgraduate students are not provided with an equivalent level of support, they indicated that they feel supported and that their tutor had established a social media chat group to provide interaction and mutual engagement. Staff promote an open-door policy for students to access staff through informal meetings and through the virtual environment and by email.

2.63 Students can access learning materials through the VLE. There is a wide range of effective processes to ensure that students are able to continue with their studies and that the support is effective during the COVID-19 pandemic including, for example, a booking system to access library resources and allow social distancing.

2.64 Students are provided with support in key areas such as assignment writing and feedback. Assessment guidance includes guidelines and resources on how to approach the tasks required and plan their study. Feedback on assessment is designed to help students improve their achievement by highlighting how problems can be avoided in the future. The maximum turnaround period for marked assignments is 20 working days. There are clear guidelines for marking and monitoring. All assessment by visiting tutors is monitored by a faculty member. A standard form is used to document the process.

2.65 Students are effectively supported both academically and pastorally throughout each level of their studies. This support extends beyond the classroom and has positively impacted on achievement and outcomes. During the review, students were highly complimentary of the pastoral support provided by both academic and support staff. Students highlighted how staff had supported them in overcoming individual challenges when they first enrolled at the College. The approach taken by the College to developing an inclusive community of learners that is reflective of a genuine and committed interest in students that extends beyond the formal learning environment is **good practice**.

2.66 The annual Academic Partnership Monitoring process provides the opportunity for ongoing analysis and evaluation of student outcomes and achievement, and demonstrates how these factors relate to other criteria such as entry qualifications and students' progress through their studies.

2.67 Students are well supported through a wide range of mechanisms including through well-qualified tutors and a wide range of focused support and advice. There are effective processes in place to support students in achieving successful academic and professional outcomes. The Core practice is met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Common practice (1): The provider reviews its Core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

Findings

2.68 The College aligns to the University of Chester (UoC) requirements for quality monitoring. This requires engagement with a Continuous Monitoring for Enhancement (CME) process which allows an ongoing submission of updated information and data. Engaging with the CME process provides the College with a framework by which to document and track actions designed to drive improvements. The CME report and the tracking of the resulting action plan is the responsibility of the Principal and Director of Training. To complete the CME, different types of information are collected including student feedback from the SSLC and external examiners' comments. Information is processed at faculty level prior to a final report being presented by the College and signed off by UoC, which subsequently provides an analytical commentary.

2.69 Additional arrangements with UoC provide further opportunities to review and develop practices. An annual programme update process provides a clear structure by which to review and adjust modules and programmes. Adjustments are made following recommendations from module tutors, or leadership staff, and involve the UoC link tutor to ensure compliance with university requirements. Also, under the agreement with UoC, the College's organisational agreement is reviewed every five years. The review process is supported with information such as the CME and external examiners' reports and provides the College with a further opportunity to reflect on its Core practices.

2.70 The review team consider these arrangements to be effective in providing the College with opportunities to review quality and drive improvements. The alignment with UoC's annual review structure provides a clear and transparent process to review student performance and feedback as well as take account of external examiners' comments. The CME report provides evidence of the College identifying and tracking actions, with a separate action plan used by programme leaders to document enhancements.

2.71 Both staff and students confirmed that the process of student feedback was leading to enhancement. However, the same formal process of feeding into the SSLC is not currently available to postgraduate students.

2.72 Overall, the team conclude that effective arrangements are in place to review quality regularly and drive improvement although, at present, postgraduate students are

given less of a formal opportunity to provide feedback on their experience.

Common practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Common practice (2): The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise.

Findings

2.73 The College is required by its partnership agreement with UoC to engage fully with the designated link tutor. External examiners are also important in providing external expertise in the management of quality. The role of the external examiner is clearly defined by UoC in the programme agreement. The College makes recommendations and nominates external examiners to UoC for approval and appointment to the role.

2.74 External examiners feed into the annual review process through reports that follow the Module Assessment Board (MAB). The College is required to generate a formal response to any comments and recommendations highlighted in the external examiners' reports. The College is additionally required to process these comments and recommendations through the annual CME report which provides the structure to set and track any resulting actions.

2.75 External expertise is additionally used to support quality in programme design. The validation process, managed by the UoC, requires scrutiny from the appropriate external examiner who, along with the link tutor, also provides direct input into programme adjustments. External examiners have generally been positive about proposed amendments to course design, including through feedback provided on amending learning outcomes of the Pastoral Studies module.

2.76 The external examiners' role includes the monitoring of standards in assessment design and marking to ensure the awards meet the standards of comparable programmes. Assessment strategies are designed by academic staff in consultation with the external examiner, whose approval is required. External examiners subsequently approve student marks through the MAB. External examiners' reports consistently confirm that assessment methods and marking are appropriate for the achievement of threshold standards.

2.77 Overall, the team concludes that external oversight by the awarding body and the use of external examiners ensures that full account is taken of external expertise when managing quality.

Common practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Common practice (3): The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.

Findings

2.78 A variety of mechanisms ensure that students are engaged both individually and collectively in the quality of their educational experience. The main formal channel of communication for the collective student voice is through the SSLC which occurs twice yearly and is required by UoC as part of the student feedback and engagement mechanisms. A student chair works closely with the Director of Training to communicate issues that are arising and also attends the Management Committee. This process effectively ensures student engagement with senior management.

2.79 Individual feedback is primarily collected through module evaluation questionnaires which include opportunity for comments. The questionnaires are distributed to students at the end of each module and are evaluated by senior management and staff as well as student representatives at the SSLC. An additional opportunity for the individual student to provide feedback is through the individual interviews for undergraduates which are conducted by the personal tutor at the end of each semester.

2.80 Students highlighted the value of the feedback mechanisms and, in particular, the informal and pastoral channels of communication between staff and students. Staff and students have a strong sense of community with tutors following an open-door policy. Nevertheless, the review team identified a weakness addressed as a recommendation under Core practice Q5 to ensure that student engagement mechanisms are applied equally for postgraduate and undergraduate students. The SSLC ensures engagement from undergraduate students but does not include postgraduate students, subsequently limiting postgraduate students' contribution to quality enhancement. Furthermore, the postgraduate students are aware of this disparity and, in the process of the review, highlighted an interest in ensuring that they have equal opportunity to provide feedback through the SSLC.

2.81 Overall, the College provides students with individual and collective opportunities to engage in the quality of their educational experience. Nevertheless, as a collective the postgraduate students have less opportunity than undergraduate students which leads to the recommendation in Core practice Q5 to introduce a formal process that ensures postgraduate students contribute equally to the quality of their educational experience.

Common practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.82 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.83 All relevant Common and Core practices are met and the associated level of risk is low in all areas. There are two areas of good practice in the independent study and study skills modules, and the approach taken to developing an inclusive community of learners.

2.84 There are three recommendations and one affirmation. The recommendations advise the further embedding of the processes for the monitoring and development of individual staff, including peer observation and staff appraisal; ensuring that the process for academic appeals is published in student handbooks; and implementing a formal process for postgraduate students to contribute fully to the quality enhancement processes. The affirmation confirms the action being taken to implement a more formal admissions policy.

2.85 The review team concludes that the quality 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](#).

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

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**).

Common practices

Practices included in the UK Quality Code that will be applied by providers in line with their missions, their regulatory context and the needs of their students. These are practices common to the underpinning of quality in all UK providers but are not regulatory requirements for providers in England (registered with the Office for Students).

Core practices

Practices included in the UK Quality Code that must be demonstrated by all UK higher education providers as part of assuring their standards and quality.

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.

Expectations

Statements in the **Quality Code** which clearly and succinctly express the outcomes providers should achieve in setting and maintaining the standards of their awards, and for managing the quality of their provision.

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** (and associated, applicable, Core and Common practices) that 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.

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