

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

## Open College of the Arts

February 2014

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## Key findings about the Open College of the Arts

As a result of its Review for Specific Course Designation carried out in the Open College of the Arts, the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the programmes it offers on behalf of the University for the Creative Arts.

The team also considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the quality and enhancement of the learning opportunities it offers on behalf of the awarding body.

The team considers that reliance **can** be placed on the information that the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

## Good practice

The team has identified the following **good practice**:

- the quality of online teaching and learning materials (paragraph 2.4)
- the comprehensive feedback on and support for assessment (paragraph 2.6)
- the range and use of exemplary online video support materials available to staff and students (paragraph 2.11)
- the quality and variety of media and formats for presenting public information (paragraph 3.2).

## Recommendations

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

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

- review the current terms of reference of the Curriculum Quality Committee to indicate clearly its responsibilities for academic standards (paragraph 1.4)
- review the constitution of its committees to provide for a greater representation and engagement of staff and students (paragraph 1.5)
- approve a procedural document to capture the formal approval of information (paragraph 3.5).

## About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Specific Course Designation](#)<sup>1</sup> conducted by [QAA](#) at the Open College of the Arts (the College), which is a privately funded provider of higher education. The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the provider discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes of study that the provider delivers on behalf of the University of the Creative Arts (the University). The review was carried out by Ms Lucy Bannister, Mrs Amanda Greason, Dr Nick Sutcliffe (reviewers) and Mr Bob Saynor (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the [Review for Educational Oversight \(and for specific course designation\): Handbook, April 2013](#).<sup>2</sup> Evidence in support of the review included documentation supplied by the College and University, online documentation including staff and student teaching and learning materials and resources, and meetings with staff and students.

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

- the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)
- subject benchmark statements
- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*
- the Qualifications and Credit Framework
- University regulations.

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

The Open College of the Arts was founded in 1987. It is an educational charity with the charitable purpose: 'To widen access to Creative Arts Education at Undergraduate and Graduate levels through flexible supported open learning.' The College is a significant provider of creative arts education through open learning within the UK. The College's head office is in Barnsley, South Yorkshire and comprise a team of 16 staff responsible for leading the organisation, advising students and managing the logistics associated with flexible open learning. All tuition is currently provided by 128 tutors who work from their studios or homes.

At the time of the review the College had 959 students registered for designated awards validated by the University. The College offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath the awarding body and with the number of students registered for each in brackets:

### University of the Creative Arts

- BA (Hons) Creative Arts (299)
- BA (Hons) Creative Writing (70)
- BA (Hons) Painting (166)
- BA (Hons) Photography (313)
- BA (Hons) Textiles (75)
- BA (Hons) Visual Communications (17)
- MA Fine Art (19)

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<sup>1</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/designated-providers/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/designated-providers/Pages/default.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx)

## **The provider's stated responsibilities**

The College takes account of the external reference points provided by the University, along with the Quality Code. As part of the partnership agreement the College is responsible for recruitment and admission; programme delivery and support; implementing appropriate assessment and internal moderation processes; the quality of teaching and learning; responding to outcomes from validation, review and external reports; student engagement activity to enhance the student experience and quality improvement; the provision of appropriate staffing resources and training; application of the University's standards; internal monitoring of quality; and compliance with the University's requirements for annual evaluation and review.

## **Recent developments**

The decision was made by the College Trustees in 2011 to transfer validation of all validated higher education awards from Buckinghamshire New University to the University of the Creative Arts. This process was completed by September 2012 with the explicit consent of all transferring students. The team confirmed that the transition process was well managed and included full engagement from the student body, College staff and University representatives. All awards offered from the 2012-13 academic year are validated by the University.

Following a governance and management restructure in June 2013, the College implemented changes to the organisational structures that govern and manage its operations. The College is headed by a Board of Trustees who act in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Charity Commission rules and company law. The Board of Trustees has three subcommittees. These are the Development Committee, Audit Committee and Remuneration Committee.

## **Students' contribution to the review**

Students on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the review team. This was received in advance of the team's visit. The overall process for collating the student responses was led by the Open College of the Arts Student Association (the Association) and individual course representatives. An analysis taken from the November 2013 Association student survey provided the basis of the submission. The Association received 319 responses from students studying a range of awards. The coordinator met students at the preparatory meeting. This evidence, together with the team's meeting with students during the review visit, was very helpful to the team.

## Detailed findings about the Open College of the Arts

### 1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The team identified robust quality systems in operation to maintain academic standards. The College's overarching ethos stresses 'passion, professionalism and inclusivity'. This clearly underpins and guides the College in all its activities, including the management of academic standards. It effectively influences the College structure, committees and the College's acute awareness of its responsibilities to students and other stakeholders. The College's management of academic standards, policies and procedures has been clearly informed by the University's regulations. This effectively ensures that the College manages its responsibilities for academic standards within its agreement with the awarding body. There is a positive and productive relationship between the College and University. This is clearly evidenced by the successful and collaborative approach to the transfer of the designated higher education awards and the responsiveness of the College in working with the University.

1.2 A key strength of the College lies in the governance arrangements that assure and manage the academic standards of the College. A recent review of these arrangements has resulted in enhancements that include more streamlined decision making and less overlap in meetings. There is a clear committee structure which exercises effective oversight of standards and quality. The College is headed by a Board of Trustees which includes senior figures from both the academic and commercial sectors. For example, individual trustees are directly involved in strategic and management initiatives that clearly benefit the College. This has included support for the development and approval of the overarching College brand guidelines. Trustees also identify and advise the College on areas for staff development.

1.3 The Board of Trustees has three subcommittees. The Audit Committee and Remuneration Committee have remits covering financial and budgetary aspects, while the Development Committee reviews all teaching and learning activity and advises the College executive on proposed policy changes that have the potential to impact on the student experience. It recommends to the Board of Trustees an annual programme of investment to maintain standards and enhance the quality of the learning experience. The effective relationship between the College and trustees is a clear strength and contributes to the maintenance of standards and enhancement of quality.

1.4 There are two further committees: the Commercial Committee and the Curriculum and Quality Committee. The former provides strategic direction at executive level for all commercial aspects of planning, delivery and management and reports to the Audit Committee, while the latter provides a strategic lead on and monitors progress of all aspects relating to academic planning, quality improvement and learner support, reporting to the Development Committee. While the terms of reference of the Curriculum and Quality Committee do not make explicit reference to managing academic standards, the review team confirmed that matters relating to academic standards are considered and action taken as required. However, it would be **desirable** for the College to review the current terms of reference of this committee to indicate clearly its responsibilities for academic standards.

1.5 The College provides opportunities for staff and student representation in the committee structure. The Association provides effective liaison with students. There is a bilateral meeting between the President of the Association and the Chief Executive which takes place every two months and the minutes of these meetings are posted on the

Association's website. In addition, the President is also a member of the Development Committee and the Board of Trustees. Curriculum leaders are consulted on academic issues which impact on the curriculum and teaching and learning, and the results feed into the Curriculum and Quality Committee decision-making process. However, there is limited representation or involvement from tutors. The College has plans to introduce a number of additional committees, the degree committees, which will involve tutors and students and provide a forum for consideration of award-specific matters. It would be **desirable** for the College to review the constitution of its committees to provide for a greater representation and engagement of staff and students.

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

1.6 The College makes extensive use of the Quality Code. The validation process involves mapping each unit against relevant subject benchmark statements and this is confirmed in validation and external examiner reports. The College reported that future revisions to academic regulations and policies will provide an opportunity to map expectations and make more explicit reference to the Quality Code. In addition, the review team confirmed that the College is meeting the required expectations as specified within the partnership agreements and supporting regulations of the University.

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

1.7 The College robustly discharges its assessment responsibilities as delegated by the University. Assessments are set, first-marked and internally moderated by the College. Tutors provide detailed feedback at the formative assessment stage with summative assessments being marked by a first and second assessor. This is a key strength of the assessment process. Assessed work is moderated by the University prior to final confirmation at the Board of Examiners.

1.8 The arrangements for the review of external examiner reports and the approval of responses are robust. The University appoints all external examiners in line with the collaborative agreement and the Quality Code, Part B: *Chapter B7: External examining*. The examiners attend assessment events and the Board of Examiners which are held at the College. External examiner reports are initially considered by the Director of Curriculum and assessment and curriculum leaders who jointly consider a response which is then passed to the University. An overview report of responses for all external examiners' reports and any resulting actions is compiled annually and presented to the Curriculum and Quality Committee for monitoring. Reference to external examiner reports are made in the annual monitoring report. Reports and action plans are published on the College's website for students.

The review team has **confidence** in the provider's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the programmes it offers on behalf of its awarding body.

## **2 Quality of learning opportunities**

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

2.1 The responsibilities and arrangements for managing and reporting on the quality of learning opportunities are the same as those described in paragraphs 1.2 to 1.4. These

arrangements are effective in managing and supporting the quality of learning opportunities, and are understood within the College. The College effectively fulfils its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities.

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

2.2 The College clearly and effectively engages with the Quality Code as described in paragraph 1.6. The review team identified evidence that clearly responded to Part B of the Quality Code: *Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement*. The nature of the College's online delivery requires it to implement systems and procedures that ensure the indicators of sound practice identified in the Quality Code are particularly relevant to this mode of delivery.

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

2.3 The College is effective in maintaining and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning which is delivered through open learning. The College has quality processes in place to ensure that tutors delivering the awards are fully supported and professional standards maintained and enhanced. Mentoring is provided to tutors by the appropriate curriculum leader. In addition, tutors observe assessment events, participate in staff development activities, and review tutor reports and student feedback. There is also evidence of effective monitoring of tutor engagement in online continuous professional development activities.

2.4 Students have access to well-designed and accessible online facilities. There is open access to extensive high-quality course materials, as well as facilities for extensive interaction with other students, tutors, curriculum leaders, support staff and the College executive. The engagement of both staff and students in this virtual method of delivering the awards clearly opens opportunities for students who would not normally participate in higher education. Students met by the review team during the visit reported this overwhelmingly. The quality of online teaching and learning materials which fully engage staff and students is **good practice**.

2.5 Student learning is significantly enhanced by the appointment of high-calibre tutors. Tutors are highly qualified and experienced with current specialist experiences within their chosen field. This has led to the establishment of an impressive group of writers, artists, designers and photographers who contribute to delivering the College awards, which enhances the student experience.

2.6 The College's delivery and assessment strategy uses a staged approach for students completing individual assignments. Students are supported during this stage by subject-specialist tutors and comprehensive and detailed formative feedback provided throughout. Students finally submit all assignments for summative assessment and for module credit. The focus on student-centred learning is reflected in the quality of the learning materials used, and in the comprehensive and developmental nature of the written feedback provided to students about their work. The comprehensive feedback and support which contributes to the formative and summative stages of assessment provided to students is **good practice**.

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

2.7 The review team found evidence of an extensive range of support activity and systems which are effective in ensuring that all students receive support to engage in

learning. Measures to achieve this include a set of guiding principles for supporting all students. These are captured in the College's Equality and Diversity Policy. There is also work currently being conducted by the College, involving the Association, in the area of student engagement under the 'Project 2014' initiative. This project seeks to engage and support students studying at a distance from the onset of their studies and is aimed at supporting both home-based and overseas students.

2.8 The College has sound processes and procedures in place to support students at induction, to provide access to learner support, and the practical operational aspects of studying through open learning. These are clearly articulated within the student handbooks, and also within the induction and registration pack sent to new students. The information provided to new entrants is well received by them. It is extensive and professionally presented. Students report that they are well supported at the point of induction to their studies and this contributed to building their confidence.

2.9 Students commented positively on the support they had received from the College. The College is responsive to issues raised by students that impact on the quality of learning and teaching. For example, changes have been made and support has been provided with respect to the language and terminology used by tutors in formative feedback to students, particularly those in their early stages of study. The College responded by providing clearer guidance to students on assessment. As a measure of peer and informal learning support, student participation in web forums has been progressively increasing. This is at the core of the work of the College. Student responses in this area, such as access to and level of engagement with tutors, are positive. Academic and support staff report specific examples of help that had been provided for students with dyslexia and visual impairment support needs.

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

2.10 The College has been successful in developing a community of practice among tutors. This is evident across the full range of disciplines which reflects the core values, ethical stance and charitable status of the College. Induction for new tutors includes comprehensive materials and an online meeting with the Director of Teaching and Learning Quality. Staff have access to a range of induction and continuous development materials covering topics such as tutoring at higher education level, writing effective feedback and exercises to support tutor assessment and feedback skills and knowledge. All new tutors have their first three formative assessment reports checked and verified by the relevant curriculum leader prior to submission to students. Tutor performance is monitored regularly with performance issues remedied by mentoring and participation in continuous professional development workshops.

2.11 Good practice in tutoring is disseminated at development days and through the tutor newsletter. Staff are also able to participate in the annual research, learning and teaching conferences offered by the University. Attendance at tutor development days currently stands at 80 per cent. Tutors who are unable to attend in person are invited to observe an assessment event and be briefed by the curriculum leader and assessors. Good practice from tutor reports is shared with new tutors as part of the induction process and with existing tutors at tutor development days. The College has a significant range of online videos available to staff and students. These cover topics such as showcasing students' work, demonstrations of artist and designer techniques, tutors at work at their studios, reports from exhibitions, and critiques of artists and designers. These are widely viewed and staff and students report that they are a vital form of assistance used in their studies and tutoring. The team identified the range and use of exemplary online video support materials available to staff and students as **good practice**.



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

2.12 The College is effective in ensuring that learning resources are accessible to students and are sufficient to enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Students are mainly supported by distance-learning materials and electronic resources. However, all students also have easy access to information and support materials in written, audio, video and online formats. The range of resources available to students is set out at the point of enrolment and is also made available on the College's website. Students feel positive about the resources provided to them, rating them as interesting and intellectually stimulating. The College has taken steps to address student concerns about perceived inadequacies in the resources available to them.

2.13 An example of the way the College provides access to online resources to enhance learning is the establishment of a dedicated student website. This contains detailed study guides to support students in the induction phase of their studies. The College also arranges study visits for students to support their studies. These include, for example, visits to museums, galleries, studios and study visits to provide creative and inspirational ideas to support their assignments and topics. Such visits are reported back to other students through videos and online presentations.

The review team has **confidence** that the provider is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the intended learning opportunities it provides for students.

## **3 Information about learning opportunities**

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

3.1 The information the College provides to students is consistent with the information the University approves. It is provided both digitally and as a physical package. This includes, for example, information on admissions, fees and finance, curriculum content, examples of student work and tutor profiles, academic regulations, and the role of the Association. There are clear statements about the nature of the relevant award certificate and transcript, complaints and appeals procedures and how to make use of these. Students are confident in doing so. The College has made effective use of approved brand guidelines which were informed by the expertise of a member of the Board of Trustees. These guidelines were subsequently approved by the Board. Following approval, the College has implemented a focused media promotion campaign which has been successful, for example, in generating increased interest from students who may wish to engage with and benefit from this form of learning.

3.2 The College has made significant efforts to provide appropriate learning resources which enable students to receive tailored personal support combined with social learning opportunities. This enables the College to communicate effectively with the student body through the 'WeAreOCA' blog. This acts as a communication channel between staff and students and facilitates discussion among students through the use of forums and commenting on blog posts. The blog is also used to promote the College by showcasing staff and student work through various media, giving prospective students a sample of the experience of studying at the College. Students are knowledgeable and confident in using the website and the digital elements of their studies. They find these clear and easy to

navigate. They also report that they know where to find help should they require assistance accessing information. The quality and variety of media and formats for the presentation of public information made available to both staff and students are **good practice**.

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

3.3 The College submits agreed publicity information for approval by the nominee of the University's Head of Quality, Standards and Assessment. This information includes details concerning the academic standards to be met and the quality of provision offered. This information clearly defines the nature of the collaborative arrangement and outlines the respective responsibilities of each partner.

3.4 The College has in place a number of key committees and individual staff who are responsible for ensuring that information provided is trustworthy, accessible and accurate. This includes the Commercial Committee which is responsible for the accuracy of information relating to the College, including information regarding fees, learning opportunities and what studying at the College involves. The Curriculum and Quality Committee is responsible for the accuracy of information on academic aspects of the provision. This includes student regulations, degree handbooks and student guides. The Webmaster, Head of Operations and the Registrar are responsible for ensuring the latest versions of documents are made available on the website.

3.5 There are informal systems in place for reviewing and updating published information. A log is kept for amendments to major documents such as the student regulations and student handbooks, and these are approved by the Curriculum and Quality Committee. When identified, errors in course materials are corrected and disseminated by a system of errata sheets until a new version of the materials is produced. Errors, inaccuracies or confusing content brought to the attention of the College are addressed immediately on an ongoing basis, and errors on the website are corrected as soon as they are identified. The team has confidence that the College has in place effective and responsive measures to maintain accurate, reliable and consistent information made available to students. However, the College does not have a procedural document that captures the process for approving public information. It would be **desirable** for the College to approve a procedural document to capture the formal approval of information made available.

The team concludes that reliance **can** be placed on the information that the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

## Action plan<sup>3</sup>

Open College of the Arts action plan relating to the Review of Specific Course Designation February 2014						
Good practice	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date(s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The review team identified the following areas of <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the quality of online teaching and learning materials (paragraph 2.4)</li> </ul>	Greater tutor awareness of the resources available to support students	Review and rewrite tutor handbook (one of the key ways we will ensure a dispersed network of tutors is aware of good practice)  Review structure of tutor development days	31 August 2014  31 March 2014	Curriculum Director and Director of Teaching and Learning Quality	Curriculum and Quality Committee (CQC)	2015 Tutor Survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the comprehensive feedback on and support for assessment (paragraph 2.6)</li> </ul>	Greater tutor awareness of the role of this feedback in supporting student progression	Review and rewrite tutor handbook (one of the key ways we will ensure a dispersed network of tutors is aware of good practice)  Review structure of tutor development days	31 August 2014  31 March 2014	Curriculum Director and Director of Teaching and Learning Quality	Curriculum and Quality Committee	2015 Tutor Survey

<sup>3</sup> The College has been required to develop this action plan to follow up on good practice and address any recommendations arising from the review. QAA monitors progress against the action plan, in conjunction with the College's awarding body.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the range and use of exemplary online video support materials available to staff and students (paragraph 2.11)</li> </ul>	Greater accessibility of video resources	Develop improved indexing on student website	31 August 2014	Webmaster	Commercial Committee	Video view statistics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the quality and variety of media and formats for presenting public information (paragraph 3.2).</li> </ul>	Special feature in tutor newsletter on benefits to students and tutors of generating rich public information content	Encourage more tutors to contribute posts	30 May 2014	Chief Executive	Commercial Committee  Board of Trustees	Traffic figures
<b>Desirable</b>	<b>Intended outcomes</b>	<b>Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes</b>	<b>Target date/s</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>Evaluation (process or evidence)</b>
The team considers that it is <b>desirable</b> for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review the current terms of reference of the Curriculum and Quality Committee to indicate clearly its responsibilities for academic standards</li> </ul>	Responsibilities for ensuring academic standards set out in the Curriculum and Quality Committee Terms of Reference	Review CQC Terms of Reference	30 April 2014	Director of Teaching and Learning Quality	Curriculum and Quality Committee  Development Committee	Curriculum and Quality Committee Minutes  Development Committee minutes

(paragraph 1.4)						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review the constitution of its committees to provide for a greater representation and engagement of staff and students (paragraph 1.5)</li> </ul>	<p>Teaching staff represented at senior level</p> <p>Ensure appropriate level of student representation on College committees</p>	<p>Elect a Lead Curriculum Leader (LCL). Potentially extend membership of the Development Committee and Board to LCL</p> <p>CQC to review current level of student representation on committees</p>	<p>Proposal to Development Committee in May 2014</p> <p>If approved, LCL to sit on Development Committee and Board from September 2014</p> <p>30 April 2014. If student representation on committees deemed insufficient by CQC, proposal to Development Committee in May 2014</p>	Chief Executive	Board of Trustees	Review Board effectiveness in September 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>approve a procedural document to capture the formal approval of information (paragraph 3.5).</li> </ul>	Formalisation of procedures for approving publication of information	Produce a document describing formal procedures for approving/checking information on public website	30 April 2014	Chief Executive	Commercial Committee	Commercial Committee minutes

## About QAA

QAA is the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. QAA's mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education.

QAA's aims are to:

- meet students' needs and be valued by them
- safeguard standards in an increasingly diverse UK and international context
- drive improvements in UK higher education
- improve public understanding of higher education standards and quality.

QAA conducts reviews of higher education institutions and publishes reports on the findings. QAA also publishes a range of guidance documents to help safeguard standards and improve quality.

More information about the work of QAA is available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

More detail about Review for Specific Course Designation can be found at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/designated-providers/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/designated-providers/Pages/default.aspx).

## Glossary

This glossary explains terms used in this report. You can find a fuller glossary at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary). Formal definitions of key terms can be found in the [Review for Educational Oversight \(and for specific course designation\): Handbook, April 2013](#).<sup>4</sup>

**academic quality** A comprehensive term referring to how, and how well, higher education providers manage teaching and learning opportunities to help students progress and succeed.

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

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

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

**differentiated judgements** In a Review for Specific Course Designation, separate judgements respectively for the provision validated by separate awarding bodies.

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

**external examiner** An independent expert appointed by an institution to comment on student achievement in relation to established academic standards and to look at approaches to assessment.

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

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

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

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

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<sup>4</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx)

**operational definition** A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

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

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

**provider(s) (of higher education)** Organisations that deliver higher education. In the UK they may be a degree-awarding body or another organisation that offers programmes of higher education on behalf of degree-awarding bodies or awarding organisations. In the context of Review for Specific Course Designation the term means an independent college.

**public information** Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

**quality** See **academic quality**.

**Quality Code** Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of reference points for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the Expectations that all providers are required to meet.

**reference points** Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured. Internal reference points may be used by providers for purposes of self-regulation; external ones are used and accepted throughout the higher education community for the checking of standards and quality.

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

**threshold academic standards** The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic award. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks for higher education qualifications** and **subject benchmark statements**. See also **academic standards**.

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

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000  
Email [enquiries@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@qaa.ac.uk)  
Website [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786