

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

Springdale College

November 2013

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Key findings about Springdale College

As a result of its Review for Specific Course Designation carried out in November 2013, the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the programmes it offers on behalf of Middlesex University, the University of Wales and York St John University.

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

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 effective management of a complex educational environment (paragraphs 1.2, 2.12, 2.14)
- the rich mixture and variety of learning methods employed across campus sites (paragraph 2.1)
- the comprehensive support for student placements (paragraph 2.2)
- the flexible methods of academic and pastoral support provided to students (paragraphs 2.7, 2.8)
- the high quality of the study materials written by the College's teaching team (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:

- formalise the meetings of the Senior Management Team (paragraph 1.1)
- develop further the Quality Assurance Handbook (paragraph 1.3)
- develop further its methods of identifying and sharing good practice (paragraph 1.6)
- review the arrangements for matching students to placements (paragraph 2.2)
- provide formal training and support for student representatives (paragraph 2.9).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Specific Course Designation](#)¹ conducted by [QAA](#) at Springdale College (the College), which is a privately funded provider of higher education. The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the provider discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes of study that the provider delivers on behalf of Middlesex University, the University of Wales and York St John University. The review was carried out by Ms Michelle Callanan, Mr Paul McGrath and Mr Peter Ptashko (reviewers) and Mr Robert Jones (Coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the [Review for Educational Oversight \(and for specific course designation\): Handbook, April 2013](#).² Evidence in support of the review included documentation supplied by the College and meetings with staff and with 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)
- the regulations of the College's awarding bodies.

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

Springdale College is a theology college, originally founded in 1980, which draws students from the major UK denominations including Anglican, Baptist and Methodist and also from new and ethnic minority churches that have emerged in the last 40 years. The College teaches and trains students of all ages, from a wide range of backgrounds, and with very different prior educational experiences. The aim of the College is to develop reflective practitioners who have critical self-awareness of their beliefs and practices and how to relate these to the beliefs and practices of others.

The College operates a blended learning environment (that is, partly online and partly face-to-face) for its postgraduate and undergraduate programmes, based on regional study networks for the postgraduate programmes, and regional campuses for the undergraduate programmes. The regional study networks are based in Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, London, Rugby and Southampton. The five regional campuses are in Bath, Birmingham, London, Leeds and Liverpool. Currently, there are 193 students registered for higher education programmes, of whom 131 undergraduates are full-time and 62 postgraduates are part-time. International students comprise one per cent of the total. There are nine core academic staff, comprising 5.2 full-time equivalents, together with 24 freelance academic staff attached to individual campuses.

At the time of the review, the provider offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their awarding bodies:

Middlesex University

- BTh (Mission) (85 full-time students)

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/designated-providers/Pages/default.aspx

² www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx

University of Wales

- MA in Missional Leadership (two part-time students)

York St John University

- BA (Hons) in Theology and Mission (46 full-time students)
- MA in Missional Leadership (60 part-time students)

The agreements with Middlesex University and the University of Wales will end when the final students on the programmes validated by those bodies have graduated. Thereafter, all of the College's programmes will be validated by York St John University.

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College has a significant level of autonomy in managing its curricular development, teaching, assessment and learning opportunities, subject to overall monitoring and review by its awarding bodies.

Recent developments

The College was relaunched in 2010, after having been dormant for a number of years. During 2010, the College successfully sought validation by Middlesex and York St John universities, before being asked by the University of Wales to take over two programmes, previously operated by another college which was closing. Since then the College has gradually increased its provision by opening additional sites from which it is able to offer its programmes on a distributed basis.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. A third year BTh student compiled a submission based on documentation summarising student views, supplemented by informal consultation. It was clearly focused and very helpful to the review team. Students met the Coordinator during the preparatory meeting and the team during the review visit. Both meetings were highly productive.

Detailed findings about Springdale College

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The College employs effective arrangements to manage those aspects of academic standards delegated to it. The Vice Principal takes the lead responsibility and is supported by programme leaders at postgraduate and at undergraduate level. Along with the Principal, they constitute the Senior Management Team which meets regularly but informally to take strategic oversight of college-wide activities. While these meetings are not minuted, the Senior Management Team reports to the formally constituted Board of Trustees. It would be **desirable** for the College to formalise the meetings of the Senior Management Team.

1.2 The programme leaders and their core teams carefully manage the delivery of the college-designed programmes, including setting and marking assessments. As noted by an external examiner, managing this level of consistency across a blended distributed scheme of such complexity, covering widely dispersed campuses (see page 2) represents a considerable accomplishment. Maintaining standards in this environment pays testimony to the College's collective commitment and effectiveness. This is facilitated through boards of studies; programme, academic and admission boards; and informally through team meetings and site visits supported by robust administrative systems. There is appropriate student representation within this formal committee structure. Constructive dialogue with link tutors and external examiners has clearly contributed to this achievement. The effective management of a complex educational environment represents **good practice** (see also paragraphs 2.12, 2.14).

1.3 The College systematically collects data and reflects upon key indicators. These processes include the production of reports by programme and module leaders alongside formal meetings with student representatives. This activity culminates in annual monitoring reports on its programmes, which have been well received by the relevant awarding bodies. The recently produced Quality Assurance Handbook provides a useful overview of College roles and procedures, amalgamating the content of many other documents. However, it does not address the totality of the management of academic standards. For example, it does not include the terms of reference of the formal committees. It would be **desirable** for the College to develop further the Quality Assurance Handbook.

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

1.4 In designing its programmes for validation, the College has made extensive reference to *Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). It has made particular use of the *Subject benchmark statement: Theology and religious studies* and guidance on the formulation of programme specifications as well as the qualification descriptors within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. The College has responded comprehensively to issues emerging from the awarding bodies' rigorous validation processes.

1.5 The College has introduced policies and procedures that reflect meaningful engagement with *Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality* of the Quality Code. The Quality Assurance Handbook contains a useful set of appendices, which comprehensively

detail how the College is seeking to engage with the Quality Code. These commentaries cover admissions (*Chapter B2: Recruitment, selection and admission to higher education*), learning and teaching (*Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*), enabling student development and achievement (*Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement*), student engagement (*Chapter B5: Student engagement*), assessments of students and recognition of prior learning (*Chapter B6: Assessments of students and the recognition of prior learning*) and appeals (*Chapter B9: Academic appeals and student complaints*).

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

1.6 The assessment regime is secure. College moderation policies address both the setting and marking of assessments. For the former, intended learning outcomes to be addressed are noted in each assignment brief within postgraduate programmes. This is not always the case for undergraduate provision. Similarly the quality of the accompanying guidance also varies. It would be **desirable** for the College to develop further its methods of identifying and sharing good practice.

1.7 Students are well informed about the nature of plagiarism and systems are in place to both deter and ultimately detect any such instances. There are mechanisms to ensure consistency across the various sites of delivery. The external examiners appointed by the relevant awarding bodies are fully engaged in the moderation of assessed student work. Their involvement in assessment boards safeguards standards through appropriate adjustments when deemed necessary.

1.8 Each assessment board engages in suitable deliberation about the external examiner's report. When concerns arise, they are raised by the College with the awarding body link tutor. Such matters have been or are being resolved satisfactorily. External examiners report that there has been significant progress over their years of appointment.

1.9 The College has now reached a level of maturity in the management of its academic standards as it moves over time to working with a single awarding body. This has been achieved through the extensive previous experience of key personnel in managing higher education provision. In addition, ongoing engagement with practitioners as well as the experience gained from working successfully with a number of different awarding bodies has contributed to this level of success.

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 bodies.

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 rich mixture and variety of learning methods employed across campus sites represents **good practice**, and the learning environment is rated highly by both staff and students. This blended learning environment encompasses both online and offline resources, including self-directed study, facilitated learning, tutorials, support for the dissertation and summer schools. The process for integration and federal management of this environment, enabling shared reflections across campuses, is supported by the College's management and its committee structure.

2.2 There is a clear process for the selection and establishment, monitoring and reviewing of placement opportunities. Formal feedback on the quality of placements is of a very high quality, with positive responses from students and staff. In their meeting with the team, students described the placement as the highlight of their learning experience. In each campus, the formation tutor ensures that a formation facilitator and a placement supervisor provide support in the form of formal training and access to both academic and pastoral care in each placement. Included within this process are regular quality assurance visits to placements. The comprehensive support for student placements represents **good practice**. However, there is some concern that this high standard is not met in a small number of cases, where a suitable placement is not always secured. It would be **desirable** for the College to review the arrangements for matching students to placements.

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

2.3 Good use is made of *Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality* of the Quality Code, as described in paragraph 1.5. In addition, the use of external examiners' reports is both detailed and careful, with a focus on continuous improvement. Responses to the external examiner's reports to the undergraduate programme have been particularly thorough. Assessment boards consider the reports in detail, and invariably respond positively. The reports are predominantly favourable.

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

2.4 The College has policies and procedures to ensure the management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities. In particular the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy governs the management and enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment across the College. All this is clearly disseminated to students through the induction process.

2.5 As indicated in paragraph 2.1, the College employs a wide range of effective teaching and learning methods. Students emphasised the enthusiasm of staff for their subject and praised the interactive nature of their teaching style. Teaching is regularly monitored. All academic staff are observed to assess the quality of content and delivery. These observations are then reviewed by the relevant programme leader. For example, areas for development were explored with a member of staff who had been observed, with subsequent improvement.

2.6 The College has effective means of gathering student feedback. Methods vary for undergraduate and postgraduate students. Appropriate use is made of student representatives, undergraduate cluster meetings, postgraduate regional study network links and student questionnaires. Student feedback is largely positive, and swiftly acted upon. Module leaders' reports and meetings clearly enable reflection on evidence from student feedback.

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

2.7 The flexible methods of academic and pastoral support provided to students represent **good practice** (see also paragraph 2.8). The admissions process is comprehensive and supportive to the diverse range of students that make up the College's annual intake. Induction arrangements are diverse, flexible and informative for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Although these sessions can be repetitive in the

eyes of some students, they are managed and reviewed for consistency and quality and have consequently improved over time.

2.8 Subsequent academic and pastoral support for students successfully addresses the range of individual needs. The campus-based tutors are crucial to the support for undergraduate students. Students praised the exceptional helpfulness of their tutors and said that, if they had personal problems, they felt genuinely cared for by them. Student tutorials are both staff and student led, with pre-arranged activities designed to facilitate constructive and beneficial sessions. Tutors also give constructive written feedback to students on their written work, supplemented as necessary by oral help. Tutors are supported by campus formation tutors, campus managers and formation facilitators to foster an integrated and flexible approach to student support. Analogous arrangements are in place for postgraduate students, adapted to their part-time mode of attendance.

2.9 The College organises an effective system of student representation at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Student meetings and representation on senior committees are useful in improving the quality of learning opportunities. There are also mechanisms for reporting progress back to the student body. However, student representatives receive no formal guidance and support. It might help them if their duties were specified in the Quality Assurance Handbook and their training supported by written guidance and input from the York St John Students' Union. It would be **desirable** for the College to provide formal training and support for student representatives.

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

2.10 Staff are highly qualified in terms of academic qualifications and practical experience. The teaching team present regularly at conferences, contribute papers to the *Journal of Missional Practice* (an international online journal sponsored by the College) and have published a substantial number of books and articles.

2.11 The College provides a comprehensive and valuable internal staff development programme on both general pedagogical and subject-specific matters. Staff confirmed that they value these events especially for cross-campus discussions and training. General sessions include updates on assessment and marking, online submissions and marking, plagiarism, the virtual learning environment and general student issues. In addition, the College organises events specifically designed for staff teaching on the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes respectively. The overall management of staff development is considered within the appraisal process as well as within module and programme team meetings. The effectiveness of the training is monitored through teaching observations and module and programme reviews.

2.12 The College uses an effective online system that is central to the management of staff across the campuses. Staff populate it with the academic calendars and programme and module information for teams across campuses. Staff use this system to identify, track and resolve issues and provide regular updates on programme and college matters. Staff confirmed its central role in the operational management of their modules and programmes and in prompting swift responses to issues across campuses. An external examiner commented favourably on the 'deployment of the innovative online management and collaboration platform for staff.'

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

2.13 Each campus has access to its own tailored learning resources, including libraries, e-learning opportunities and available texts, often shared through use of book boxes. There is some variety in quality across campuses, but this is compensated for by the development of the online library, which provides a common cross-campus resource. The College has also invested in a subscription to a major online resource that provides access to an extensive database of books and journals. This represents a major enhancement to student learning.

2.14 The College's virtual learning environment is a central element in supporting the College's distributed blended learning scheme. It is a valuable resource for students in obtaining programme and module information, for submitting their assessments online, and for ensuring that they all have easy and common access to a wide and continually enhanced range of learning materials. An external examiner commented specifically that the virtual learning environment was one of the College's major strengths and 'better utilised than many other similar facilities in other institutions'. Programme leaders ensure that all the programme and module information meets the required specification and is current and accessible. Although the virtual learning environment has established interactive tools, students tend not to make use of them, but instead use external social media tools to engage in discussions among themselves. The College is aware of this problem and has measures in hand to extend the scope of the virtual learning environment to cover social media.

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 College provides clear and reliable information to potential candidates for admission through a number of channels, including the promotional materials produced by the College, its website and through its networks, including churches and community centres. The website provides information on the application process, the programmes on offer, programme fees, an online application form, and student newsletters. It also provides links to the College's social media sites, the College's virtual learning environment and the Principal's regular blog.

3.2 Following admission, the College provides a range of comprehensive and useful information for students. Especially to be commended are the Dissertation Handbook and the undergraduate and postgraduate study guides, which are written by the College's teaching team. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy makes specific reference to these materials; 'For every module, the College has produced a set of learning materials which are effectively a series of lectures in print format, although the depth and content of the material will often go beyond that delivered in many lectures'. The team endorses this evaluation of the learning materials. Students praised their value and centrality to the parity

of the delivery across campuses. The high quality of the study materials written by the College's teaching team represents **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 uses both formal and informal mechanisms in an effective system for checking the accuracy and consistency of the information it publishes on the website. The College is responsible for the preparation, maintenance and enhancement of its information, but must obtain approval from its awarding bodies before publication. The programme leaders are responsible for the provision of up to date course details. They forward updates to the College's administration team as changes are agreed and signed off. The administration team then use the updates to maintain and refresh the website and the virtual learning environment.

3.4 Under the terms of its agreements with its awarding bodies, the College must update its student handbooks each year. They are revised in the light of any changes to the programmes and reissued to students each September, with clear dates and editions provided on each document. The team confirms the currency of the handbooks.

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 plan³

Springdale College's action plan relating to the Review of Specific Course Designation November 2013						
Good practice	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date(s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The review team identified the following areas of good practice that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the effective management of a complex educational environment (paragraphs 1.2, 2.12, 2.14) 	Maintain and enhance the College's good practice in this area	To hold an annual quality meeting to review the Self Evaluation Document and refresh the evidence pool as a precursor to producing the Annual Monitoring Reports for the validating institutions	August 2014	Vice Principal, undergraduate and postgraduate programme directors and Admin Team Leader	Senior Management Team	Revised Self Evaluation Document and evidence pool
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the rich mixture and variety of learning methods employed across campus sites (paragraph 2.1) 	Maintain and enhance the College's good practice in the development of new programmes and the review of existing provision	<p>Planning for new courses and curriculum design to consider whether proposed learning strategies are appropriate</p> <p>Review module leader reports for examples of good practice in this area and to evaluate the ongoing effectiveness of</p>	<p>May 2014</p> <p>August 2014</p>	<p>Postgraduate programme director</p> <p>Undergraduate and postgraduate programme directors</p>	<p>Academic Board</p> <p>Academic Board</p>	<p>Course rationale and design documentation</p> <p>Module leader reports</p>

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

		teaching and learning strategies adopted on each module				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the comprehensive support for student placements (paragraph 2.2) 	Maintain and enhance the College's good practice in this area	Monitor placement experience through review of student feedback, coaching logs, and Formation Tutor reports to both identify good practice and learning opportunities in supporting student placements	June 2014	Under-graduate programme director	Academic Board	Student module and programme feedback and student representative reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the flexible methods of academic and pastoral support provided to students (paragraphs 2.7, 2.8) 	Maintain and enhance the College's good practice in this area	Monitor student experience through review of student feedback to identify learning opportunities for the College and examples of good practice to be shared across programmes	Sept 2014	Under-graduate and Postgraduate programme directors	Academic Board validating institutions	Programme annual monitoring reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the high quality of the study materials written by the College's teaching team (paragraph 3.2) 	Maintain the production and use of high quality materials to facilitate learning on each programme offered	Annual review of programme materials to ensure that they are still up to date and fit for purpose	July 2014	Under-graduate and Postgraduate programme directors	Academic Board and Vice Principal	Writing development plan for each programme
Desirable	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date/s	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The team considers that it would be desirable						

for the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> formalise the meetings of the Senior Management Team (paragraph 1.1) 	<p>To create a formal agenda for each Senior Management Team meeting</p> <p>To develop an action plan after each Senior Management Team that will then form the first part of the agenda at the next Senior Management Team</p>	<p>Agree agenda items with Senior Management Team members before the meeting</p> <p>Keep formal minutes of Senior Management Team meetings</p> <p>Create action plan with responsibilities for action allocated to key individuals</p>	<p>January 2014</p> <p>January 2014</p>	<p>Principal</p> <p>Vice Principal</p> <p>Vice Principal</p>	<p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>Principal/ Senior Management Team</p> <p>Principal/ Senior Management Team</p>	<p>Complete - (agendas now produced for Senior Management Team meetings)</p> <p>Complete - (minutes and action plan now circulated)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop further the Quality Assurance Handbook (paragraph 1.3) 	<p>That the College's quality procedures fully reflect all the requirements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education</p>	<p>Undertake an annual review of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and update the College's Quality Assurance Handbook</p> <p>Review the Self Evaluation Document produced by the college for QAA review and refresh the evidence pool on an annual basis</p>	<p>July 2014</p> <p>August 2014</p>	<p>Under-graduate programme director</p> <p>Vice Principal Under-graduate and postgraduate programme directors and Admin Team Leader</p>	<p>Vice Principal</p> <p>Senior Management Team</p>	<p>Production of revised Quality Assurance Handbook</p> <p>Revised Self Evaluation Document and evidence pool</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop further its methods of identifying and sharing good practice 	<p>That good practice on different academic programmes is shared</p>	<p>That different academic programmes have a common Academic Board rather than separate boards, and the agenda</p>	<p>May 2014</p>	<p>Under-graduate and postgraduate programme directors and</p>	<p>Vice Principal</p>	<p>Common date for undergraduate and postgraduate academic boards</p>

(paragraph 1.6)		will include 'Sharing of good practice' in the future Staff development sessions - sharing of good practice is included on the agenda	February 2014	Administration Team Leader Undergraduate and postgraduate programme directors and Administration Team Leader	Vice Principal	Minutes of Academic Board Agenda for staff development sessions Feedback on staff development sessions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review the arrangements for matching students to placements (paragraph 2.2) 	Review the procedures contained in the placement handbook and the training given to staff involved in helping students find suitable placements	Review and amend the procedures contained in the placement handbook where appropriate Review and where necessary adapt the training given to staff involved in helping students find suitable placements	May 2014 July 2014	Formation tutors and undergraduate delivery team Undergraduate delivery team	Undergraduate programme director and Academic Board Undergraduate programme director	Item on Academic Board agenda Part of summer staff development retreat programme if applicable Review of feedback from students and from staff involved in placements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide formal training and 	Formalise the role of the student representatives	Update the Quality Assurance Handbook to	July 2014	Undergraduate	Vice Principal	Section in Quality Assurance

<p>support for student representatives (paragraph 2.9)</p>	<p>on all academic programmes</p>	<p>formally identify the duties of a student representatives Provide the opportunity for the formal training of student representatives and gather feedback on this to inform future training Evaluate the training provided to student representatives</p>	<p>July 2014</p>	<p>programme director Under-graduate and postgraduate programme directors</p>	<p>Academic Board</p>	<p>Handbook Minutes of academic board and evaluation of training provided for student representatives</p>
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About QAA

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

QAA's aims are to:

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

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

More information about the work of QAA is available at: www.qaa.ac.uk.

More detail about Review for Specific Course Designation can be found at: www.qaa.ac.uk/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. Formal definitions of key terms can be found in the [*Review for Educational Oversight \(and for specific course designation\): Handbook, April 2013*](#).⁴

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx

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

operational definition A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in 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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