Spurgeon's College

Review for Educational Oversight
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

May 2012

Key findings about Spurgeon's College

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in July 2012, 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 awards it offers on behalf of the University of Chester and the University of Wales.

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 these awarding bodies.

The team considers that **reliance can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Good practice

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

- the extensive student involvement in the College's committees (paragraph 1.3)
- the considerable contribution made by academic staff to discipline-based research and advanced scholarship (paragraph 2.14)
- the work placement support and guidance for students, staff and mentors (paragraph 2.18)
- the use of blogs, social media and newsletters, to provide active support and information for students, alumni and other stakeholders (paragraph 3.3).

Recommendations

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

The team considers that it is **advisable** for the provider to:

- review the process for the management of external examiners' reports and ensure that comprehensive action plans are produced with clear, targeted and timely actions (paragraph 1.8)
- introduce a systematic process for the review and analysis of student achievement as part of annual monitoring (paragraph 1.9).

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

- undertake a comprehensive review of College policies and procedures to ensure that they are fully mapped against the expectations of all relevant sections of the *Code of practice* (paragraph 1.6)
- develop comprehensive module-specific assessment criteria and provide feedback on student work, which is consistently linked to intended learning outcomes (paragraph 1.11)
- formalise and implement a strategy which supports a wider range of teaching and learning methods (paragraph 2.4)
- take a more systematic approach to the management and oversight of learning and teaching, including peer review (paragraph 2.7)

- consider ways in which distance learning students can be more fully engaged and represented in student feedback processes (paragraph 2.8)
- take a more systematic approach to staff development (paragraph 2.15).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)[1] (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at Spurgeon's College (the provider; the College). 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 Chester and the University of Wales. The review was carried out by Seth Crofts, Kausar Malik and Clive Marsland (reviewers), and Simon Ives (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the *[Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](#)*.[2] This review formed part of a linked series of review visits to six theology colleges training ordinands and laity for Anglican, Methodist, United Reformed and Baptist Churches. The colleges underwent a common preparation process for the visits which were carried out by two teams. Reports are made individually on each college and reflect their diverse organisation and character.

Evidence in support of the review included documentation supplied by the provider and awarding bodies, meetings with staff, students, employers, and reports of reviews by the Quality in Formation panel on behalf of the Church of England, Baptist Union, the United Reformed and the Methodist Churches.

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

- the Academic Infrastructure
- the requirements of the awarding bodies
- The Churches' Quality in Formation Framework.

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

The College was founded in 1856 and is one of the seven providers with the core aim of training ministers for service in the Baptist Union of Great Britain. Currently, the College trains 40 per cent of students studying for the Baptist ministry in the UK. The College attracts students and staff from the UK and the rest of the world. It intends to provide a stimulating intellectual environment where students and applicants from all backgrounds can realise their full potential. The integrated syllabus allows the opportunity for students to transfer easily between programmes of study and use online learning modules where appropriate.

The College is located on a single campus in Croydon, south London, with some residential accommodation for both students and staff. There is a long history of delivering higher education, initially in conjunction with the Council for National Academic Awards, and, since 1992, with the University of Wales. In 2010, the College was approved to deliver a Doctor of Ministry programme in a new partnership with the University of Chester. Programmes of study are delivered in various modes of study, including full-time, part-time and distance learning. The College delivers higher education programmes at levels 4 to 8 on *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). There are currently 98 full-time students, 251 studying part-time, and 435 studying by distance learning - a total of 784 students.

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[1] www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx.

At the time of the review, the College offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their awarding bodies with full-time equivalent student number in brackets:

University of Chester
- Doctor of Ministry (6)

University of Wales
- Certificate in Theology (Preaching) (1)
- Certificate in Theology (15)
- Diploma in Theology (27)
- Bachelor of Divinity (Hons) (21)
- Bachelor of Theology (Ord and Hons) (47)
- MA in Advanced Christian Studies (14)
- MA in Christian Faith and Practice (16)
- MA in Mission and Ministry (4)
- MTh in Applied Theology (19)
- MTh in Biblical Studies (4)
- MTh in Christian Doctrine (5)
- MTh in Preaching (9)
- MTh in Radical Free Church Movements (3)
- Master of Philosophy/Doctor of Philosophy (10)

University of Wales Trinity Saint David
- Doctor of Ministry (6)

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College has an established partnership with the University of Wales and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, which validate the majority of programmes. There is also a collaborative partnership with the University of Chester. The College's responsibilities vary according to the partnership agreement with each awarding body. Academic and administrative staff are fully aware of their obligations and responsibilities under the collaborative arrangements. The College is responsible for the recruitment and admission of students, programme delivery, assessment and internal moderation, the quality of teaching and learning, the provision of appropriate staffing and physical resources, application of the awarding bodies' standards, regular internal monitoring of quality, and compliance with the awarding bodies' requirements for annual evaluation and review.

The provision at the College is subject to review and approval under the provisions of the Churches' Quality in Formation Framework, developed through the cooperation of the Ministry Division of the Church of England, and the Methodist, Baptist Union and United Reformed Churches. This provides a comprehensive review of academic standards and involves benchmarking against similar provision.

Recent developments

In October 2011, the University of Wales announced that it would be terminating all its validation partnerships and this will have a significant impact on the College. The College is able to recruit one further cohort of students in October 2012, and the University has confirmed that it will continue to fully support students during their period of registration. The College is currently in discussions with the University of Manchester, with a view to transferring programmes currently validated by the University of Wales. Students confirmed that they had been kept fully informed by the College about the possible changes in

validation partnerships, and considered that the process would be well managed by
the College.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. The College briefed student representatives on the review process at the Staff and Student Liaison Committee. The production of the student submission was facilitated by the College, and focused on the three core themes of the review. Responses were drawn together by student representatives and circulated to the student body for comment and amendment, prior to final submission. Students were offered support and guidance throughout the process, but were given complete editorial control over the final submission. At a meeting with the team, students confirmed that they had contributed to the student submission and agreed with the comments it expressed. Students met reviewers during the review visits and at the briefing meeting, and the team found their views helpful in informing their discussions.

Detailed findings about Spurgeon's College

1   Academic standards

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

1.1   The College has effective structures and processes for fulfilling its responsibilities for managing academic standards. There is a clear leadership structure, which ensures appropriate accountability in relation to academic standards. The Principal leads the strategic development of the College and takes overall responsibility for all aspects of the College's academic delivery and staffing. The Academic Dean manages operational delivery, including responsibilities for teaching and student support, assessment and quality assurance. The team found that there was a good interaction between key staff in relation to the management of academic standards. The management structure enables a highly collaborative approach, which supports the ongoing review of standards within the College.

1.2   The College operates an effective committee and deliberative meeting structure that allows for detailed discussions in relation to academic standards at both strategic and operational levels. The Board of Governors exercises ultimate responsibility for governance and management, and comprises a range of external trustees and the Principal. Academic and support staff use this structure effectively and are able to differentiate between the functions of the different forums.

1.3   The Academic Board takes an overall lead in overseeing standards and the student experience, and reports to the Principal and Board of Governors. There is effective discussion of student achievement, student evaluations and external examiners' feedback. These issues are debated in detail at subcommittees of the Academic Board, including the Joint Board of Studies, Quality Assurance Committee and examiners' meeting. The student body is fully represented and engages well with all the main College committees. Students speak positively about their meaningful engagement with review activities, and the team found that the committee process ensures a thorough and effective review of programme delivery and leads to enhancement. The extensive student involvement in the College's committees provides opportunities for effective discussion and feedback on academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, and is good practice.

1.4   The responsibilities of the College and each awarding body are set out in a series of partnership agreements and detailed memoranda of cooperation. These provide clear and extensive guidance in respect of the responsibilities of each party, and are well understood by staff across the College. The University of Wales appoints a moderator who oversees all validated programmes, attends examiners' meetings, and provides extensive support to the College.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management of academic standards?

1.5   The College engages with some elements of the Academic Infrastructure, including the use of subject benchmark statements and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). College staff are aware of key external reference points, and each programme is designed taking account of relevant subject benchmark statements, which are used as the foundations for programme design. The programmes are supported by well designed programme specifications, which are clear and appropriate to the level of study. These provide an excellent resource for students and staff. The monitoring required by the Churches' Quality in Formation Framework provides an

additional external reference point and helps ensure consistency between this provision and similar theological education delivered by other higher education institutions.

1.6   The team found that the College's engagement with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*) is less well embedded. While staff demonstrated a broad awareness of the *Code of practice*, they were not able to articulate how the precepts have been fully addressed in the formulation of key College policies and procedures, such as those on external examining and assessment. It is desirable for the College to undertake a comprehensive review of college policies and procedures to ensure that they are fully mapped against the expectations of all relevant sections of the *Code of practice.*

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

1.7   The College engages extensively with its external examiners, and examiners' reports and annual monitoring processes confirm that the College meets the requirements of its awarding bodies. External examiners' reports confirm that academic standards and student achievement are comparable to those at other institutions. Examiners liaise closely with module tutors to ensure that there is agreement in relation to proposed changes to the programme and regularly approve examination questions and other assessment tasks.

1.8   The contents of annual external examiners' reports and other external examiners' feedback are reviewed by the Academic Dean and action plans are initiated in response to issues raised. However, on some occasions these action plans are brief and do not reflect all of the reported comments. The summary produced by the College draws out a limited number of action points, which do not always reflect the breadth of examiners' feedback, and the action plans lack rigorous analysis and clear timescales for improvement. There is no clear process for disseminating good practice which has been identified. It is advisable for the College to review the process for the management of external examiners' reports and ensure that comprehensive action plans are produced with clear, targeted and timely actions.

1.9   The College has a systematic approach in place to gather student feedback through module evaluation questionnaires. These inform course action plans and contribute to the annual monitoring of programmes. The annual monitoring reports produced by the programme teams are very comprehensive, with very detailed written commentaries. Annual monitoring reports cover all aspects of programme delivery, the student experience and student achievement. Review of student performance occurs through a range of College committees, and is considered at the Joint Board of Studies, although data analysis at these committees, and in the annual monitoring process is limited. Reports are forwarded to the awarding bodies for consideration and comment. The team found that there was no systematic analysis of student achievement based on issues such as gender, age, ethnic origin or mode of study. Additionally, the comparison of achievement between different modules and modes of study is limited. It is advisable for the College to introduce a systematic process for the review and analysis of student achievement as part of annual monitoring.

1.10   The College has established detailed and rigorous procedures for marking and second marking of student work. The allocation of staff to second marking and moderating is managed centrally by the Academic Dean and a sample of student work is scrutinised by the external examiners. These requirements are well understood by academic and administrative staff. This process is clearly described in a College policy, which is consistently applied.

1.11   Assessment feedback on student work is generally detailed and constructive. Most feedback provides useful developmental indicators for students to be able to improve their performance. Students commented that they value the high standard of feedback they receive. The College has established agreed marking criteria to ensure consistency of grading, which are clear and workable. However, the team identified that generic assessment criteria are applied to all assignments and there is an absence of specific criteria linked to individual module learning outcomes. This resulted in the assessment feedback for students being too general. It is desirable for the College to develop comprehensive module-specific assessment criteria and to provide feedback on work which is consistently linked to intended learning outcomes.

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

2   Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1   The College processes for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities are described in paragraphs 1.1 to 1.5. The Academic Dean oversees and monitors programme delivery in close liaison with the Principal. The Management Team proactively implements the varying requirements of the two awarding bodies, and the College's responsibilities are clearly laid out in the range of agreements with its partner universities.

2.2   The College has an effective system of informal and formal communication between students and staff. All key committees have student representation. Students value and understand the role of the student representatives and express their satisfaction that their views lead to effective changes in all aspects of the provision. Student involvement in the quality assurance framework is comprehensive and results in significant enhancement of learning opportunities.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities?

2.3   The Academic Infrastructure is used and applied in some of the College policies and procedures for managing and enhancing learning opportunities. This is outlined in paragraphs 1.6 and 1.7. However, the College's engagement with the precepts of some sections of the *Code of practice* is variable. Some policies and procedures, such as those for the recruitment and admission of students sections, are well addressed, while others, such as assessment and e-learning, need further consideration.

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

2.4   Students are very positive about their learning experience and commented that this matches their high expectations. They stated that academic staff are well respected and made the subjects interesting. However, some students felt that teaching approaches could be more interactive and discursive, and provide a greater variety of teaching styles. Student feedback indicates that they are generally satisfied with the quality of teaching and learning, but would like to see more variety, especially at levels 4 and 5, and would welcome a greater

use of new technologies in teaching methods. Students appreciate the input from visiting lecturers and speakers, but feel they would benefit from more time on their core modules. They value the range of assessment tasks, which are challenging, and stated that tutors provided clear guidance on requirements and expectations. It is desirable for the College to formalise and implement a strategy which supports a wider range of teaching and learning methods.

2.5   The College has recently produced a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework document. This is intended to draw together existing practice and provide guiding principles for staff. Further work is needed to ensure that this becomes fully developed, implemented and embedded within the College. Extensive guidance on academic processes and policies is available to both staff and students in the staff handbook. However, the terms of reference of the Quality Assurance Committee do not include a formal review of learning and teaching, which would assist in providing a college-wide oversight. Tutors are required to evaluate student feedback and their own performance at the end of each module, although there is no overview to inform strategic decisions at the senior level.

2.6   A mentoring system is in place for new and existing staff and this process is working well with all academic staff supported during their first year. The informal nature of staff interaction and the relative size of the College facilitate ease of contact between mentors and mentees. The College might find it useful, however, to keep more systematic records of the timetabling and outcomes of mentoring sessions, which could feed into the College appraisal system.

2.7   The College operates a peer observation policy through a tutor pairing collaborative arrangement and team teaching also takes place in some modules. Staff spoke positively about the value of this collaborative process. However, the current focus is on the subject discipline, and a more systematic focus on pedagogy and good teaching practice would be appropriate. The appointment of a dedicated member of staff to support and coordinate staff development has started to facilitate this process. There is currently no formal cross-college mechanism for monitoring the outcomes of the peer observation process, although discussion takes place individually during annual appraisal. All members of academic staff are appraised once a year by the Principal, together with a member of the Governing Body. In discussions with staff, the Principal stated that this was a useful means by which governors can learn directly of the contributions academic staff make to College life. It is desirable for the College to take a more systematic approach to the management of learning and teaching, including peer review.

2.8   There is an effective range of formal mechanisms for on-site students to provide feedback on the quality of teaching and learning. Students confirmed that staff are very approachable and supportive, and generally responsive to suggested improvements in teaching delivery. Module and programme level feedback is gathered through module evaluation questionnaires, although the response rate for these is low, especially for programmes delivered online. Some statistical summaries of student module feedback are considered at the Quality Assurance Committee where these are available, and are also discussed at the staff and student liaison meetings. However, these committees do not sufficiently address issues related to online learning, although this represents a significant proportion of the student body. Responses to important concerns raised are fed back to students at regular meetings in the Chapel. Students testify to the responsiveness of the College to issues raised and provided examples where their comments had improved their learning experience. It is desirable for the College to consider ways in which distance-learning students can be more fully engaged and represented in the student feedback processes.

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

2.9   There are effective arrangements for ensuring that students are supported both formally and informally. All students receive an interview prior to enrolment, and many attend open days where they can meet staff, and current and former students. Students commented that the application process was supportive and provided a realistic understanding of the College's requirements. The student body consists of a high proportion of mature students and the student demographic means that they have high expectations of the support and guidance expected from the College.

2.10   Many students find out about the College through colleagues in the Ministry or through personal recommendation. They confirmed the College's positive reputation for training for the Ministry and the supportive learning environment. There is good advice and guidance, and students are able to transfer between different modes and programmes of study. Students find this flexible approach very responsive to their changing personal and professional circumstances.

2.11   The College has effective policies and processes for academic, pastoral and learning support for higher education students. There are sound mechanisms for identifying and supporting students with additional learning support requirements. The College provides study skills as a series of sessions in orientation week and throughout the first six weeks of the academic year. Some of the sessions, such as the one on academic misconduct, are compulsory, and there is evidence that these support sessions have improved students' essay writing, research and referencing skills.

2.12   Support for students on all modes of study is good and the virtual learning environment enables distance and part-time learner's access to a wide range of resources. Online learners are expected to buy key texts and are supported by academic tutors through the use of emails and blogs. Distance learners work through their programmes using Spurgeons Online, which provides guidance and a very comprehensive student handbook.

What are the provider's arrangements for staff development to maintain and/or enhance the quality of learning opportunities?

2.13   The College has an established, though relatively informal, staff development process, although a draft Staff Development Policy is currently awaiting ratification. Development needs of staff are highlighted both on appointment and on an ongoing basis. Academic staff benefit positively from away days at the start and end of each academic year, and from an annual staff retreat. There is separate staff training available to support staff, and the College is considering ways of bringing together its annual events for academic and support colleagues.

2.14   The College produces a detailed Staff Handbook which is up to date and which usefully contextualises the College's staff development activities. Academic staff are well supported by the College to achieve discipline-based qualifications, with a particular emphasis on gaining doctorates and advanced scholarship. Each member of teaching staff is funded to attend a minimum of one academic conference annually, and every four years College tutors are eligible for a term's study leave to facilitate research and writing. This support is effective in underpinning a strong research emphasis appropriate to the delivery of higher degrees, and these opportunities are highly valued by staff. Staff are actively involved in research and advanced scholarship. This serves to achieve research-informed teaching, which references current debates within theology. The considerable contribution made by academic staff to discipline-based research and advanced scholarship is considered good practice.

2.15   Staff development within the College has recently been coordinated by a dedicated member of the teaching staff with considerable experience. This has resulted in a range of recent staff development activities, to which full-time and associate tutors are invited. However, the College might consider extending its range of support to include a firmer focus on support for associate tutors, pedagogic training and encouraging staff to gain teaching qualifications. The College is encouraged to develop a broader approach to staff training, which includes wider sector developments in learning and teaching and to ensure that the new Staff Development Policy, once approved, is operationally effective. Online tutors are supported within the staff development sessions, and, additionally, this includes a specific annual virtual learning environment training day. This includes developments in online delivery and examples of current sector good practice. It is desirable for the College to take a more systematic approach to staff development activities and encourage staff engagement with developments in the wider higher education sector.

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

2.16   The College has a clear business planning process to ensure that resources are suitable for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. This is overseen by the Learning Resources Committee, which students also attend. Resources are scrutinised as part of programme validation and periodic review, and at institutional accreditation, by the partner universities. The annual monitoring process identifies ongoing resource needs, and module leaders keep resources under close review, and report specifically on gaps in requirements. Some students and staff live on the campus, which assists in the development of a supportive learning community. The College offers students the flexibility to study online and distance learning, part-time and full-time with Church and College-based options.

2.17   The College library was recently refurbished and is now a modern learning resource. The College houses a significant theological library and is well resourced for all provision. Students are highly satisfied with the library stock, and individual support provided by library staff. The library also provides links to appropriate online subscription-based databases and e books and has plans to expand this. In addition, most students have access to the University of Wales online library. The College's virtual learning environment provides a valuable resource for distance learners along with students and staff based on-site. Distance learners are able to access established online resources, and have good remote access to academic tutors for both academic and pastoral support.

2.18   Students entering the ministry value the extensive advice and guidance on work placement provided by the College. There are highly effective arrangements in place for work placements for church-based students, who are well supported. Placement tutors visit the students at least twice a year and provide support and resolve any emerging difficulties. This is supplemented by a visit from the College's placement coordinator who observes students preaching and leading worship, and provides feedback. Students are supervised by volunteers with a background in Ministry. They receive comprehensive training and mentoring, and have regular contact with the placement coordinator and an annual refresher day. Students are well supported in seeking employment through relevant employer networks and well connected teaching staff, and are provided with a breadth of experience relevant to their potential role. The work placement support and guidance for students, staff and mentors, provide effective preparation for those entering the ministry. This is good practice.

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   Public information

How effectively does the provider's public information communicate to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides?

3.1   The College publishes a wide range of information about its higher education provision for potential and current students, staff, employers and other stakeholders. This is produced in hard copy and electronic format on its website, which is the primary means of communication. Information published includes the College's mission, values and ethos statements, its facilities, programmes of study, awards information, entry requirements, application procedures, and careers guidance. The latter is appropriately focused on students entering the ministry. The Strategic Plan and College's Annual Report are widely distributed within the College, and are available externally on the website.

3.2   Programme specifications and programme handbooks for individual programmes of study provide full information on teaching, learning, assessment, and additional study support. Programme information, including the General Student Handbook and programme handbooks, are available electronically through the College virtual learning environment, readily accessible to all students. Students also have printing facilities within the College, which allows students to have hard copies of key information. The College website is used mainly for the purposes of marketing and recruitment, and is fit for purpose. However, there is a designated section of the virtual learning environment which is also the repository of much programme information and information such as lecture notes uploaded by teaching staff.

3.3   The College maintains active relations with its former students, employers and other stakeholders by means of its official magazine *The Record* and through other high-quality publications, including a recently produced newsletter, *Off the Record*. Students commented positively on the way staff encouraged the use of social media, and that discussion forums provide an effective means of dialogue and debate. Staff, students and alumni make regular use of blogs and a wide range of social media, which provide active support information and opportunities for academic discourse. This is good practice.

How effective are the provider's arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing?

3.4   Responsibilities for publishing and ensuring the accuracy of public information are shared between the College and its awarding bodies. The College meets the requirements of its awarding bodies in relation to all programme-specific documentation for awards it delivers, and submits information to the University for checking. The College and the University of Wales operate appropriate division of oversight between public information for validated awards, for which the University has ultimate authority, and all other information which promotes the College and its activities.

3.5   Responsibility for the accuracy of marketing and publicity information rests with the Business Manager. The Academic Dean has responsibility for ensuring that student handbooks contain current and accurate information, except for the DMin programme and MPhil/ PhD, which rests with the programme leaders. There is currently no clear process to

ensure that feedback provided by external examiners is made available to students and other stakeholders, and the College should consider this as part of its emerging public information strategy.

3.6   Responsibilities for checking the accuracy of the majority of material published electronically rests with the Academic Dean, who updates this annually. Tutors have responsibility for learning materials posted on the virtual learning environment, although there is no overarching process for checking this information. Operational responsibilities for website updating and checking are delegated to the College Business Manager. The College's self-evaluation admits that responsibility for the website is not clearly defined and that greater clarity is needed, and plans are in place to completely review the website in 2012-13. To address some of the areas where responsibilities are unclear, the College has a newly developed policy on public information, currently in draft form. This document provides a clear framework for a public information strategy and oversight in the medium term and its early implementation is to be encouraged.

The team concludes that **reliance can be placed** on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Action plan[3]

Spurgeon's College action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight May 2012						
Good practice	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The review team identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the provider:						
• the extensive student involvement in the College's committees (paragraph 1.3)	Propose having a student observer at the governors' meetings	31/12/12	College governors via their governance subgroup	A decision about having a student observer	The public in the annual report	Minuted discussion by governors late 2013
• the considerable contribution made by academic staff to discipline-based research and advanced scholarship (paragraph 2.14)	Make resources available to keep the output at the same level	31/10/13	Principal and staff supported by College governors	Continuation of the same level of output	Validating universities	Annual research reports
• the work placement support and guidance for students, staff and mentors (paragraph 2.18)	Questionnaire to identify further training needs	31/03/13	Placements coordinator and Principal	Agreed list of training needs	The public and the validating universities	Annual review by the Training Group
• the use of blogs, social media and	Introduction of e-newsletter	30/09/12	Business manager	Regular publication of	The public in the annual report	Minuted discussion in

[3] The provider 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 provider's awarding bodies.

				e-newsletter		Management Team summer 2013
newsletters, to provide active support and information for students, alumni and other stakeholders (paragraph 3.3).	Investigate further uses of e-communication with students		Business manager	Introduction of new forms	Academic Board	Annual reports
	Revisit use of online forums		Director of Spurgeon's Online	Greater participation in the forums	Academic Board	
Advisable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team considers that it is **advisable** for the provider to:						
• review the process for the management of external examiners' reports and ensure that comprehensive action plans are produced with clear, targeted and timely actions (paragraph 1.8)	Describe the process of responding to external examiners' reports	31/10/12	Academic Dean	Policy in place; Academic Board receives full response to external examiners' reports	Academic Board, external examiners, validating universities	Minuted discussion in external examiners' meeting June 2013
• introduce a systematic process for the review and analysis of student achievement as part of annual monitoring (paragraph 1.9).	Introduce systematic review and analysis of student achievement	31/07/13	Academic Registrar	Systematic review and analysis of student achievement appears in annual reports	Academic Board, external examiners, validating universities	Minuted discussion in external examiners' meeting December 2013

Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is **desirable** for the provider to:						
• undertake a comprehensive review of College policies and procedures to ensure that they are fully mapped against the expectations of all relevant sections of the *Code of practice* (paragraph 1.6)	Comprehensive review of college policies	31/07/13	Academic Dean and Management Team	Report on the comprehensive review of college policies	Teaching staff and governors	Minuted discussion in teaching staff and governors' meetings
• develop comprehensive module-specific assessment criteria and provide feedback on student work, which is consistently linked to intended learning outcomes (paragraph 1.11)	Discuss the desirability and feasibility of this with the validating universities Provide feedback which is linked to intended learning outcomes	31/07/13	Academic Dean All academic staff	Report on discussion with the validating universities Improved feedback	Academic Board, external examiners, validating universities	Minuted discussion in external examiners' meeting December 2013
• formalise and implement a strategy which supports a wider range of teaching and learning methods (paragraph 2.4)	Explore and formulate a strategy to increase the diversity of teaching and learning methods	31/07/13	Academic Dean and all teaching staff	Discussion on introduction of a wider range of teaching and learning methods in Academic Board	Validating universities	Minuted discussion in external examiners' meeting and Academic Board

• take a more systematic approach to the management and oversight of learning and teaching, including peer review (paragraph 2.7)	Action plan to be written including: Threshold standards in teaching and learning to be expected of staff Strategies for ongoing staff development The above to include associate tutors and patterns of peer review	31/03/13	Staff member responsible for staff training, and teaching staff	Action plan accepted by staff and Academic Board	Academic Board	Minuted discussion in Academic Board
• consider ways in which distance learning students can be more fully engaged and represented in student feedback processes (paragraph 2.8)	Make submission of feedback compulsory	31/12/12	Academic Dean and Director of Spurgeon's Online	80% feedback received	Quality Assurance Committee	Minuted discussion in Quality Assurance Committee
• take a more systematic approach to staff development (paragraph 2.15).	Action plan to be written including dates and subjects	31/12/12	Principal and staff member responsible for staff training	Staff development sessions taking place at regular moments in the year	Academic Board	Minuted discussion in Academic Board

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 Educational Oversight can be found at: www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/tier-4.

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: Handbook[4]

Academic Infrastructure Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education
community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses
meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a
suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference
points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark
statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway
(2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher
Education.

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

academic standards The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and
expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

awarding body A body with the authority to award academic qualifications located on the
framework for higher education qualifications, such as diplomas or degrees.

awarding organisation An organisation with the authority to award academic qualifications
located on the Qualifications and Credit Framework for England and Northern Ireland (these
qualifications are at levels 1 to 8, with levels 4 and above being classed as 'higher
education').

Code of practice *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards
in higher education*, published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for
higher education institutions.

designated body An organisation that has been formally appointed to perform a particular
function.

differentiated judgements In a Review for Educational Oversight, separate judgements
respectively for the provision validated by separate awarding bodies.

enhancement Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning
opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

feature of good practice A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution
manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

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:

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx.

The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

highly trusted sponsor An education provider that the UK government trusts to admit migrant students from overseas, according to Tier 4 of the UK Border Agency's points-based immigration system. Higher education providers wishing to obtain this status must undergo a successful review by QAA.

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

learning outcome 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 reports.

programme (of study) An approved course of study which 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 An institution that offers courses of higher education, typically on behalf of a separate **awarding body or organisation**. In the context of REO, 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').

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.

quality See **academic 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 standard The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

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