Macao Polytechnic Institute
Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

November 2013

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a special Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the Macao Polytechnic Institute. The review took place on 26-30 November 2013 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Jeremy Bradshaw
- Professor Philip Cardew
- Mrs Barbara Howell.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the Macao Polytechnic Institute and to make judgements as to whether or not the QAA review team can reasonable place confidence in the soundness of current and likely future of the management of the following areas:

- threshold academic standards[1]
- the quality of learning opportunities
- the information provided about its higher education provision
- the enhancement of learning opportunities.

Also in this report the QAA review team:

- provides commentaries on the theme topic
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 3. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

In reviewing the Macao Polytechnic Institute the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The theme selected by the institution, in consultation with student representatives, was the First Year Student Experience.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] Background information about the Macao Polytechnic Institute is provided at the beginning of this report. A dedicated page of the website explains the principal method for Institutional Review of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland,[3] which was the principal method applied to this review, and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. This special review brought together the approach of Institutional Review in that it considered the application of each of the Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) in operation during 2012-13 (as set out in the *Institutional Review of Higher Education Institutions in England and Northern Ireland: A handbook for higher education providers, March 2012 (Second edition)*) with the judgement system from the previous method of Institutional Audit, which results in judgements about the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of: the academic standards of awards, the quality of the learning opportunities

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[1] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx
[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx

available to students and, by extension, to information about its higher education provision and the enhancement of the learning opportunities available to students.

To arrive at its conclusions, the review team spoke to members of staff throughout the Macao Polytechnic Institute (the Institute) and to current students, graduates and employers, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the Institute manages the academic aspects of its provision. These documents included a fully evidenced self-evaluation document and student written submission, both of which were highly effective in enabling the review team to gain insight into the academic management and operation of the Institute and the student experience from the perspective of its students.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about the Macao Polytechnic Institute

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the Macao Polytechnic Institute.

- **Confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards, and those that it delivers on behalf of its UK partner awarding body.
- **Confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.
- **Confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of the information it produces about its higher education provision.
- **Confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of the enhancement of the learning opportunities available to students.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at the Macao Polytechnic Institute.

- Reward and support for staff to promote teaching excellence, funding for PhD and research activities and attendance at international conferences (paragraph 2.4).
- Support for new staff (including induction processes for staff entering the Institute) (paragraph 2.5).
- The effective deployment of learning resources to support the learning opportunities of students, particularly the attention to the maintenance of a positive relationship between staff and students (paragraph 2.9).
- The flexibility and responsiveness of the Institute to student feedback (paragraph 2.14).
- The effectiveness of the induction and orientation processes for students entering the Institute (paragraph 2.24).
- The effective organisation and monitoring of work-based and placement learning opportunities focusing on the educational benefit and professional development benefit of students (paragraph 2.56).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following recommendations to the Macao Polytechnic Institute. By the end of the academic year 2013-14, the Institute should:

- develop a systematic mechanism for recording incremental change at course and programme level which maintains clear institutional oversight of the cumulative effect of change over a sustained period of programme evolution (paragraph 1.9)
- develop a more formal process to underpin the current informal system for supporting the learning opportunities of students, so that it is less dependent on the commitment of individual staff (paragraph 2.13)

- review the method of reporting of student satisfaction at course level to ensure that specific concerns in individual areas are not lost within the aggregation and averaging of results (paragraph 2.20)
- develop a more systematic mechanism to share external examiners' reports with students (paragraph 3.3)
- develop a more systematic approach to the collation, application and consideration of good practice and of management information at institutional level in order to underpin the enhancement of students' learning opportunities (paragraph 4.6).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following action** that the Macao Polytechnic Institute is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The Institute's progress to date to develop and implement periodic review at programme level (paragraph 1.14).
- The Institute's continued development of deliberative structures to comply with current legislative restrictions while maintaining effective and appropriate student engagement in core quality assurance activities (paragraph 2.14).
- The Institute's continued progress towards portfolio development at postgraduate level in order to seek local accreditation in the future for postgraduate taught and research programmes (paragraph 2.43).

The First Year Student Experience

The Macao Polytechnic Institute is committed to supporting students throughout their first year as they develop the key skills of higher education study. The Institute provides targeted and valuable pre-entry information and support. Dedicated academic and pastoral support is provided throughout the first year which anticipates student needs and is an ethos which pervades all years of study.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the operational description and handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland.[4]

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx

About the Macao Polytechnic Institute

Macao Polytechnic Institute (the Institute) is a public institution of higher education with an emphasis on applied knowledge and skills. It was founded in 1991, by the Portuguese Administration. The Institute is responsible to the Macao Special Administrative Region Government through its Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture. The main legal instruments, which are the primary sources of power for the Institute, are Government Decrees which establish the Institute as an institution of higher learning and define the principles, aims, structure, and terms of reference of its governing bodies. Governance is carried out by the Board of Management comprising the President, the Vice-President, and the Secretary-General. The Institute consists of six schools and each school is headed by a Director, supported by Programme Coordinators for taught programmes. The School Directors, assisted by Programme Coordinators, are responsible for the management and operation of the academic programmes which are established to facilitate the social and economic structure and the changing needs for human resources in Macao. Consequently, some of its programmes and courses are unique as the Institute is the only institution of higher education in Macao that offers undergraduate programmes in sports, music, computing with gaming technology, public administration (Portuguese section) and languages and translation. The Institute strives for excellence with its philosophy of high quality, student-centred education. In 2013 the total student enrolment was 2,941, with the largest schools being the School of Business and the School of Public Administration.

The Institute strives to achieve international standards in teaching and learning and to develop into a continuously improving higher education institution of excellence in terms of management, teaching and research within a vibrant academic culture. This long-standing ambition is embodied in the Institute's Strategic Plan 2013-2020 and its vision:

'to excel as an institution of higher learning distinguished by its open and transparent management, multidisciplinary approach to studies and high standard of scholarship in both teaching and applied research.'

The Institute faces a number of key challenges and its 2013-2020 Strategic Plan sets out a clear vision for its future development with the aim of joining the league of leading tertiary institutions in the Asia Pacific Region. Moreover, these challenges are underlined by the Macao Government's steady and deep investment in its higher education sector and by the anticipation that the new Macao Higher Education Law will soon be passed, bringing with it the introduction of academic accreditation which is expected to assure academic standards and to support the delivery of an enhanced student experience of higher education institutions in Macao. In response to these initiatives, the Institute has established sound quality assurance and enhancement systems to assure the academic standards of its awards and enhance the learning opportunities for its students. The Institute follows the UK model for its degrees, and has, over time, made substantial revisions to Academic Regulations. The Institute has developed and implemented: an external examining system, an assessment strategy for academic staff, and an improved mechanism for programme approval, monitoring and review of all programmes of study. A range of the Institute's undergraduate programmes have already received international and professional accreditations. For example, the Institute's BSc Programme in Computing was successfully accredited by the UK's Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) in December 2011, while its Bachelor of Accounting Programme was accredited by the Certified Practising Accountants (CPA), Australia in September 2012 and the UK Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) in November 2012.

The increased number of applications to study in the Institute has been a direct result of such recent initiatives and the Institute has ranked first in terms of the number of local

applications over the past few years. However, the Institute is mindful of the fact that Macao's birth rate declined from 1992 to 2002 which will result in a corresponding decline in those seeking entry into higher education over the next decade. It is anticipated that the demand for higher education places from Macao's neighbouring areas will continue to increase, so providing opportunities for the Institute's further development, although such growth is currently planned on a modest basis. Given the relatively small size of Macao in terms of both area and population, there is considerable competition from the other 9 tertiary institutions in the territory as well as from neighbouring higher education providers in Hong Kong and Taiwan for students, academic and professional staff, and other professional and academic resources. In this climate, it is crucial for the Institute to position itself accordingly so that its distinctiveness is recognised.

The current Institute Charter prevents the Institute from permitting student membership of key committees. The awaited new education law, the Macao Higher Education Law, has yet to be enacted by the Legislative Assembly of the Macao SAR, and therefore any potential adjustments to the Institute Charter cannot be effected at this stage.

Explanation of the findings about the Macao Polytechnic Institute

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.[5]

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#)[6] is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.[7]

1   Academic standards

Outcome

Confidence can be placed in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards, and those that it delivers on behalf of its UK partner awarding body. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1   The Institute maintains oversight of programme development and approval under the auspices of its Technical and Scientific Committee (TSC), and these processes are described within the Quality Assurance Manual. The Institute has demonstrated a clear desire to benchmark against international standards, focusing on *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and individual subject benchmark statements, both of which are used in the scrutiny and approval of new proposals. Individual discipline areas are also subject to professional standards requirements, as appropriate, exemplified by the Institute engagement with the IET and ACCA, as well as in the academic discipline subject to statutory regulation, such as nursing and social work.

1.2   The Institute has mapped its statement of graduate attributes against the descriptors of the FHEQ. This statement describes the qualities, skills, knowledge and abilities that an employer can expect a graduate of the Institute to possess. The attributes are incorporated in a sub-section of the Institute's Strategic Plan 2013-2020. The Institute has drawn parallels between the majority of the eight attributes listed in the Strategic Plan 2013-2020 and the QAA descriptors, although the Graduate Attributes statement includes some aspects of student qualities that are not explicitly part of the QAA descriptors. The review team was advised that when the Institute programmes are reviewed, the TSC has an active role in ensuring that its academic programmes are aligned with the FHEQ and saw evidence that the Institute has made a commitment to meeting the standards expected of a UK university.

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[5] The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However these references are available on request for inspection. Please contact QAA Reviews Group.
[6] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx
[7] See note 4.

Use of external examiners

1.3   The Institute is unusual, for an international provider, in its use of a model of external examiner engagement which closely reflects practice within the UK. The Institute employs 19 external examiners across all areas of higher education subject provision, and these are appointed against rigorous criteria which reflect both their level of seniority and experience and their ability to operate within an international context. The Institute makes scrupulous use of its external examiners throughout its quality assurance and enhancement processes.

1.4   The Institute is careful to provide the necessary advice and guidance to examiners undertaking these roles (especially those who do not originate from a higher education environment where external examining is the norm), providing a formal induction process for examiners, which supplements written guidance. This induction process is, where necessary, captured electronically and disseminated virtually to examiners who are unable to attend in person. Examiners' responses to a questionnaire on this process reflect that they were satisfied with this level of support.

1.5   Through scrutiny of examiners' and annual monitoring reports, and meetings with staff and students, it was clear that that advice of external examiners was appropriately disseminated to teaching staff and that action taken as a result was monitored at institutional level. Changes at course level were made in response to external examiners' advice and comments, and such changes were monitored within the annual monitoring process at programme level. The review team found a potential weakness in this process, in terms of the cumulative effect of such changes over a number of years (but outside the scope of periodic review). The team encourages the Institute to reflect on how the current process might be improved to maintain a stronger oversight of such changes and their impact on programme learning outcomes and assessment strategies.

1.6   While it was clear that external examiners' reports can be made available to students on request, it was less clear that this was undertaken in a systematic way, independent of individual application. The review team encourages the Institute to reflect on how it might develop more systematic processes to share external examiners' comments with students.

1.7   The original documentation pertaining to external examiners had suggested a potential for them to be utilised in an advisory context in terms of programme development, which was seen as a potential weakness by the review team (leading to the opportunity for a conflict of interest). However discussions with senior staff made clear that this was neither the intention nor the practice of the process, and the review team encourages the Institute to review its guidance in this area to reflect this more clearly.

Assessment and standards

1.8   The Institute has put in place an institutional assessment strategy and associated regulations, which establish institutional expectations of assessment. These are tested though the approval process and cross referenced to consideration of level, standard and professional requirements in specific subject areas. The TSC has oversight of such processes through its Standing Committee.

1.9   As noted in paragraph 1.3, the Institute makes scrupulous and effective use of external examiners in the approval and monitoring of assessments, both in terms of their setting and examination, and has established a process of review arising from external examiners' comments which accommodates changes to the content, nature and balance of

assessment within an annual cycle. Processes are in place at course and programme level to monitor the overall effect of such changes at programme level (capturing, for example, the impact of a change in context of assessment within one course on others within the same, or subsequent, level of the programme). These may, however, need further strengthening to assimilate the cumulative effect of such changes over a longer time period. To this end the review team **recommends** that, by the end of academic year 2013-14 the Institute should develop a systematic mechanism for recording incremental change at course and programme level which maintains clear institutional oversight of the cumulative effect of change over a sustained period of evolution.

1.10   Staff who are less experienced in assessment are given a high level of induction and support in their implementation of assessment processes. This includes mentoring by senior and experienced staff, the opportunity to engage with colleagues who have demonstrated excellence in this area, close monitoring and support through student evaluation, and regular engagement with external examiners.

1.11   All awards are delivered with governmental approval, which includes oversight of the delivery of the curriculum, ensuring, for example, that designated optional elements are always available to students (notwithstanding resource implications).

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.12   The Institute has an established process of programme approval, operating at institutional level under the auspices of the TSC. This is ultimately delegated at programme level, in terms of the operational process of approval. The programme approval process is described within the Institute's Quality Manual and includes all aspects that would normally be expected in this area: a central institutional committee (TSC) which consider proposals and approves them for development; clear guidelines (within the Quality Manual) on the documentation required for approval; operational aspects of approval are monitored at programme level, through PSC; approval includes a specific 'event', overseen by a properly constituted panel with appropriate levels of externality.

1.13   The annual monitoring process operates at programme level and includes consistent review and action planning, informed by systematic data and the analysis of student feedback. Analysis of monitoring reports indicates that this is an effective process, and usefully ties in external examining through the inclusion of the appropriate report(s) and response(s) as appendices to the main document.

1.14   The Institute is in the process of implementing a periodic review process from the 2013-14 academic year, and so the review team was unable to comment on the effectiveness of this process in terms of underpinning a judgment in this area. However, the review team **affirms** the Institute's progress to date to develop and implement periodic review at programme level, as explicated within its guidelines, as this is robust and includes sufficient emphasis on external engagement and scrutiny at institutional level.
In operationalising the process, the review team encourages the Institute to reflect on the interface between annual and periodic processes, to ensure that the one necessarily supports and informs the other.

Subject benchmarks

1.15   The Institute has developed a rigorous approach to benchmarking which includes reference to the Quality Code and demonstrates the Institute's engagement at discipline and programme level with appropriate framework documentation. The Institute has carefully positioned itself as a professionally focused institution, delivering relevant practical programmes within a context which depends on professional engagement and accreditation. Engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) represents an important feature of a considerable number of programmes. In common with many such institutions, there is a slight tendency to reflect PSRB engagement as parallel to but distinct from core academic and quality structures, and the team encourages the Institute to reflect upon ways in which these relationships could become more seamlessly integrated.

Conclusion

1.16   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the Expectations of the Quality Code. Through scrutiny of documentation provided, and in discussion with colleagues during the visit, clear evidence was provided that shows the Institute takes the management of standards seriously, and has taken care to design institutional processes which map onto UK Expectations. All of the Expectations, in so far as they apply to this judgement area, were met and the Institute is already taking appropriate action in areas where it was recognised further work would enhance practice and contribute positively to the student experience, such as the implementation of a formal periodic review process. The team made one recommendation regarding the development of a systematic mechanism for recording incremental change at course and programme level which should ensure clear institutional oversight of the cumulative effect of change over a sustained period of evolution. The review team is therefore able to express confidence in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of the academic standards it awards and particularly those that it delivers on behalf of its UK partner awarding body.

2   Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

Confidence can be placed in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1   The Institute has an effective approach to supporting professional standards for teaching and learning and has developed various mechanisms to incorporate research, scholarship and professional practice into teaching activities. Recruitment of academic staff is conducted in an open and transparent manner, with clear qualification requirements, and in recent years all recently recruited lecturers are now required to hold a Doctoral Degree with at least four years' teaching experience at the tertiary level.

2.2   The Institute has taken significant steps to recognise and support teaching excellence as set out in its Quality Assurance Handbook and Academic Staff Development Strategy. A commitment to professional standards for teaching is further demonstrated through the recently established Teaching and Learning Enhancement Group (TLEG) which oversees the implementation of the Institute Staff Development Strategy and the Annual School Health Checks. School Health Checks provide a forum for discussing school

responses to institutionally identified enhancement priorities and engagement with strategic projects.

2.3   Support for teaching excellence is provided through institutional staff training opportunities such as the themed Higher Education Annual Conference (for example, 'The Cultivation of Creativity in University Students' and 'The Construction of a Modern University System: University Governance in Theory and Practice'), on the job learning by shadowing colleagues, prescribed reading and online learning resources, and so on. However, the review team encourages the Institute to make further use of external agencies such as the Higher Education Academy for additional support and resource materials.

2.4   Recognition for learning and teaching is acknowledged through the annual Teaching Excellence Award for excellence in learning and teaching. The Institute also provides staff with financial incentives to encourage academic research, subsidies to engage in professional associations such as the IET and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, support for participation in consultancy projects and funding for Doctoral study. The review team also heard many examples of support for attendance at international conferences. The review team considered these measures, to reward and support teaching excellence, including the Teaching Excellence Awards, incentives to encourage academic research, financial funding for PhDs and attendance at international conferences, to be a **feature of good practice**.

2.5   The review team saw evidence of the helpful support provided to new staff. For example, new staff are supported by a colleague prior to joining the Institute and given advice on matters relating to settling in. After joining they are allocated an academic mentor from their immediate course team and also encouraged to attend the institution-wide induction programme. The induction programme consists of general induction seminars given by various departments and sharing sessions hosted by senior members of the faculty, followed by class observations (for new staff to observe and be observed). The review team considered the support for new staff to be **a feature of good practice**.

2.6   To ensure satisfactory teaching performance, the Institute sets out clear procedures for dealing with unsatisfactory teaching performance, with principles that seek to apply reasonable work standards, monitor and manage performance, and recognition that failure is not deliberate or wilful. The review team was advised of two systems for staff appraisal, one for administrative staff and one for academic staff. Administrative staff are graded as part of the annual appraisal review. Those achieving below a certain threshold trigger discussions on performance with their respective line managers. Academic staff are appraised by the School Director and will comprise an evaluation of a number of measures to include peer observation, student survey, staff and student feedback. The School Director compiles a report on all staff on their performance for review and approval of renewal of contract by the Board of Management (BOM). The maximum length of the contract is two years and renewal of contract is conditional upon a successful performance review. The promotion of academic staff complies with the Institute's Charter and regulations.

Learning resources

2.7   Overall, the review team considered that the learning resources are appropriate to allow students to achieve the learning outcomes for their programmes.

2.8   Making effective use of statistical data provided by various administrative departments, the School Directors and Programme Coordinators ensure that appropriate staffing and resources are available for the delivery of academic programmes. All staff who teach are required to teach for an average contact time of nine hours per week and class

sizes are restricted, for example, in business and languages student numbers are limited to 18 per class.

2.9   To support the acquisition of resources, each School has a named School Representative to liaise with the TSC sub-committee for the purchase of books and teaching equipment, with BOM providing the final authority. School Directors and Programme Coordinators were clear about the processes for the procurement of goods and services. The review team found that the effective deployment of learning resources to support the learning opportunities of students, particularly the attention to maintenance of a positive relationship between staff and students, to be a **feature of good practice**.

2.10   The library has a range of e-learning software and multimedia resources, offers bibliographic instruction sessions, e-database training workshops and orientation tours to help students in the use of existing and new library resources. Partnership agreements with local libraries provide additional learning resources and the main library provides a document delivery service to enable global access to items not held in the Institute library collections. The library further offers a self-service system and off-campus remote access to the library subscribed e-resources.

2.11   The Computer Service Centre provides IT Infrastructure for staff and students, including campus wireless networks, cloud computing, service architecture, virtualisation, green computing and mobile networks. Electronic resources include 22 computer laboratories spread across four campuses and free printing services . The Institute has also recently built an electronic lecture theatre to allow students the experience of video conferencing with teachers from overseas.

2.12   The Institute currently uses two virtual learning environments (Blackboard and Instructure-Canvas) to make available course materials. The review team found evidence of the support provided by the MPI-Bell Centre, including activities to build confidence and debating skills, English support and writing clinics, IELTS preparation classes, English Movie Club, International English Business Forum and English Lunch Table. The Year Tutor system also provides general support and guidance for students. Learning resources are evaluated through user satisfaction surveys (for staff and students), a first year engagement survey and dialogue meetings between the BOM, administrative departments and students. Surveys are also conducted independently by the library, technical Services and the MPI-Bell Centre.

2.13   The review team found that students were satisfied with the facilities and technical resources and the students met by the team commented on the range of textbooks, 24 hour access to computing facilities, and sufficient piano and practice laboratories, with some laboratories open until midnight. Although learning resource support for students was prioritised by staff, the review team **recommends** that the Institute should, by the end of 2013-14, ensure that processes are reviewed and developed to balance informal operational practice with formal systems for supporting learning opportunities for students, capturing those aspects of current practice which are highly reliant on individual staff.

Student voice

2.14   While the current Institute Charter does not permit students to be members of key committees, there is a commitment by the Institute to maintain strong and effective engagement with students through formal and informal mechanisms. The review team **affirms** the Institute's continued development of deliberative structures to comply with current legislative restrictions while maintaining effective and appropriate student

engagement in core quality assurance activities. At the programme level, students reported that they were able to raise issues directly with their teachers, Year Tutor, and Programme Coordinators at any time. At the school level, students are able to raise issues with the School Director at the School's Staff-Student Dialogue Meeting every semester. At the Institute level, students are able to make their opinions heard at the Institute's Staff-Student Dialogue Group meeting and the Students' Union (SU) has regular meeting with the Institute to address issues related to the student experience and identify possible solutions. The team also heard that social media has been used positively to gather student comments. The team found the flexibility and responsiveness of the Institute to student feedback to be a feature of **good practice**.

2.15   A student representative system is in place across all Schools, with support for the representatives provided by the Student Affairs Office and the Welfare and Recreation Department. Representatives are elected by students to undertake the role as set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook. Training is provided by the other student representatives and Year Tutors on how to gather student views and feed back comments to the School. Although the team found the student representative system to work in practice, it encourages the Institute to develop a more systematic approach to the training of student representatives through the SU.

2.16   All the Institute's students, including the student representatives, are encouraged to contribute at the regular Dialogue Meetings with BOM members, School Directors, Programme Coordinators and Heads of Administrative Department in attendance. The team confirmed the involvement of both staff and students with evidence of the Institute's responses through the minutes of the meetings and 'You Said We Did' posters. The team also heard examples of positive experiences of student involvement and participation in accreditation processes.

2.17   The Institute conducts student evaluation of courses and teaching organised centrally by the TSC Secretariat to obtain students' opinions on teaching performance. The findings are reviewed by the Programme Coordinators, School Directors and TSC for further action. The review team saw evidence of TSC receiving student evaluations and confirmed the use made by School Directors and Programme Coordinators. A graduate survey and alumni survey also provide views on career choices and the use made of learning experiences and programmes of study.

Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.18   The review team found that effective use is made of management information to assure standards and to promote the enhancement of learning opportunities. Management information is used as part of the review process at all levels, including Annual Programme Review and examination boards.

2.19   Management information on applications and admissions data is provided centrally by the Registry and monitored by the BOM, with figures open to all Programme Directors. The team learnt that the student numbers have remained at a constant level over the past 10 years and a quota system set by the Board of Management of MPI monitors the maintenance of those numbers. Information on student progression is managed by the Academic Affairs Office and monitored by TSC, and Programme Directors provide a rationale for any significant cohort dropout rates. The Academic Affairs Office also produces analytical statistics on complaints for consideration annually by the TSC and the BOM.

2.20   The review team noted that the Institute focused on the mean as the primary benchmark for comparisons across ratings for the satisfaction survey for service users and the evaluations of courses and teaching. The team saw evidence that results presented as

aggregations of averages may not always be the most useful approach when class sizes were small. The team considered that taking account of additional information on the number of respondents for a particular response could provide course teams and the institution with a valuable context for overall responses. The review team therefore **recommends** that, by the end of 2013-14, the Institute should review the method of reporting of student satisfaction at course level to ensure that specific concerns in individual areas are not lost within the aggregation and averaging of results.

Admission to the University

2.21   The Institute's policies and procedures for admissions are clear and accessible. There are effective processes in place to monitor and review the operation of the admissions system.

2.22   The Admissions Policy, overseen by the Student Admissions Group and under the auspices of TSC, encompasses the principles and procedures for selecting local and overseas applicants for the Institute's degree programmes. The policy clearly states the admission requirements and outlines the responsibilities and roles of those involved in the process. The students met were clear about the process and found that the programmes met their expectations.

2.23   Before the beginning of the academic year, first year students are invited to attend the School and Programme Orientation sessions, also known as the Institute Opening Ceremony. At the School Orientation, they meet students from the other programmes and learn about the aims and mission of the Institute. At the Programme Orientation, they are advised of what is expected of them during their years of study at the Institute, to include such topics as academic regulations, plagiarism, career planning, work placement and graduation requirements (see paragraphs 5.2-5.3 for a consideration of these points from the perspective of the thematic element).

2.24   At the start of their first year all students are allocated a Year Tutor. The Year Tutor is responsible for providing general support and guidance to an identified group of students. The Institute also uses social networking tools to enable first year students to make contact with teaching staff and classmates. The team found the effectiveness of the induction and orientation processes for students entering the Institute to be a feature of **good practice**.

Complaints and appeals

2.25   The review team found that the Institute's complaints procedures, which also cover academic appeals, are effective. There is consistent support for students and clear information for staff and students. The team found well evidenced monitoring and review processes in place.

2.26   The Institute provides guidelines as well as many channels for students to complain or appeal about academic or more general concerns. Formal procedures are available from Registry, with information also readily available on the Institute's homepage . Information related to the complaints and appeals process is further provided by Year Tutors during orientation and is contained within the Student Handbook . The review team noted that both staff and students do not make a distinction between complaints and appeals in practical terms.

2.27   Academic and administrative departments report to the Academic Affairs Office on a monthly basis, on issues raised via less formal student suggestions for improvements through to the more formal end of complaints and dissenting opinions. The Academic Affairs

Office produces a set of analytical statistics based on the reports, for submission to the BOM. The review team found the submission to the BOM to be comprehensive, including a categorisation of the various types of issues, processing time and measures carried out by the relevant departments to address the items raised.

Career advice and guidance

2.28   The Institute has a comprehensive strategic approach to Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) and there have been significant attempts to embed professional and career management skills into programmes of study. There is clear evidence that the Institute monitors and reviews its activities in line with other student feedback mechanisms.

2.29   CEIAG is incorporated within the Learning and Teaching Strategy, with an emphasis on skill development and opportunities to participate in supported work-related learning. Over 90 per cent of the Institute's graduates join the job market almost immediately after graduation.

2.30   The majority of the programmes provide placement opportunities and students are introduced to employment relevant to their profession at a very early stage by either their teachers or placement instructors. The Institute also employs a significant number of part-time teachers who are professional practitioners to support the vocational programmes. Careers advice and support for students is through career counsellors from the Student Affairs Office. Activities take place at School and Programme level and they include career planning sessions during orientation week, career workshops each semester and an annual Careers Day. The Institute maintains a close relationship with external bodies such as the Higher Education Bureau and Labour Department and makes use of both graduates and employers to talk to students about their experiences.

2.31   The student written submission commented that although the Institute organised many related career and advice seminars, a significant number of students remained unaware of the activities taking place. The team saw that information on career days and job opportunities can be found online and that students are informed of activities though email, notice boards, text messages and Dialogue meetings.

2.32   The students met commented that longer periods for placement would be welcomed, but overall they valued their current experience.

Supporting disabled students

2.33   According to the self-evaluation document, the Institute is committed to treating students with disabilities equally. This commitment is articulated in the Policy for Students with Disability, which provides general guidance for supporting the learning opportunities of students with disabilities. Equality of opportunity in all aspects of their learning, for students with disabilities, is the responsibility of the Welfare and Recreation Department, whose role includes the provision of counselling services for students on issues they may encounter inside and outside of the campus, and the provision of preventive and therapeutic activities and courses to strengthen students' capability to cope with everyday problems. Each student with a declared disability has an advisor who works with them to provide the most appropriate service, such as seating, equipment and other learning aids. The advisor maintains regular contact with the student and also has responsibility for making academic staff aware of any particular needs of the student. Students with physical disabilities are allocated to classrooms on the ground floor, and parking spaces close to classrooms are allocated to students with disabilities. Barrier-free access to all campus locations is available.

2.34   There is a section on the Institute's application form that provides applicants with an opportunity to declare a disability. Existing students may also disclose a disability. Students complete a Disability Support Form and subsequently comments are added by the Registry and relevant School. This information is used by the disability advisor in the Welfare and Recreation Department to offer advice and support and to make the necessary special arrangements in advance. Financially challenged students with disabilities may apply, each academic year, for a grant from the Institute.

2.35   While there is no question that the Institute is providing the support for its students with disabilities, it is not clear how much this depends on the high staff-student ratio and the currently small number of disabled students. When questioned, staff expressed confidence that the current policies for supporting students with disabilities are sustainable should the population of students with disabilities increase or diversify in type. However, the review team reflected that in any forthcoming review of process, the Institute may wish to consider a wider definition of disability, to include other related unseen conditions (such as dyslexia) for its support options.

Supporting international students

2.36   The Institute has a small number of international students, representing about 15 per cent of the total student population. The Institute has no intention to expand this number significantly.

2.37   Policies, structures and procedures to support the quality of learning opportunities for international students are the responsibility of the Student Affairs Office. International advisors based in the Student Affairs Office support international students with financial, visa and other matters that might have an impact on their studies. This office provides guidance to international students who have accepted an offer of study, telling them what to expect from the Institute and advice on how to make appropriate arrangements for coming to Macao. The office coordinates its activity with programme coordinators in the schools.

2.38   On arrival at the Institute, international students attend special induction sessions and orientation workshops, organised by the Student Affairs Office. The pre-sessional induction programme includes cultural orientation and English and Cantonese language courses are available. There are targeted sessions for international students and students from Mainland China particularly in their first year of study at the Institute (see also paragraph 5.2). Regular functions and events during various traditional festivals are arranged and attended by the BOM and members of the senior management team to facilitate the settling in of international students.

2.39   The provision of language support facilities is made available to international students outside normal term time. Language support is available through the MPI-Bell Centre, which offers regular classes, including a writing clinic and speaking with confidence sessions. Students come to these sessions on their own initiative, though they may also be advised to attend by their teachers. There is currently no formal monitoring of progress.

2.40   The Student Affairs Office is responsible for raising any major issues concerning international students through proposals and reports to the BOM. The review team concluded that the Institute provides highly effective support for its small number of international and Mainland Chinese students.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.41 The Institute Charter does not currently allow for the award of postgraduate degrees, though it is possible that this will change in the near future, as a result of new legislation. The Institute has stated its intention to offer its own postgraduate degree programmes as well to strengthen its existing joint programmes. The intention is to expand the student population by around 250 students (approximately 10 per cent), all of whom would be postgraduates.

2.42 Many staff members are active in research, to the benefit of their undergraduate teaching. Their funding tends to come from various government funding bodies that support research projects for higher education institutions in Macao, or from the Institute's internal research fund. Institute staff currently contribute to programmes leading to the award of a postgraduate degree by another institution and several staff members have experience of PhD student supervision. All collaborative PhD programme degrees are awarded by a partner university.

2.43 The review team **affirms** the School's continued progress towards portfolio development at postgraduate level in order to seek local accreditation in the future for postgraduate taught and research programmes.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.44 The Institute has an extensive range of collaborative agreements with institutions around the world. However, in each case, the awarding institution is the partner; the Institute does not currently make any awards under collaborative agreements.

2.45 In keeping with its strategic objectives, the Institute has formed links with many institutions and organisations around the world, notably in Portuguese-speaking areas. By 2012, there were cooperation or exchange agreements with over 30 institutions in four continents. The institution intends to continue to extend its international profile through further agreements of similar nature.

2.46 At institutional level, there is a partnership strategy. This partnership strategy provides guidance for the development and management of such partnerships. The rights and obligations of the Institute and its partners are established in written agreements. The Institute maintains a comprehensive list of partner institutions and the awards presented by them.

2.47 New collaborative programmes must be approved by the TSC, the BOM and endorsed by the Macao SAR Government. Schools have Programme Coordinators who act as points of contact for collaborative partnerships. Programme Coordinators are expected to work closely with partner institutions in order to provide feedback on issues of quality and levels of satisfaction with the student experience.

2.48 Several of the collaborative links cover postgraduate study. While its Charter has not yet allowed the Institute to award postgraduate degrees, it has been pro-active in seeking to develop cooperative postgraduate programmes with respected universities around the world, with the aim of providing postgraduate opportunities to its students. These collaborations are also providing staff development opportunities for Institute staff, in anticipation of changes to the Charter that might allow the award of postgraduate degrees at some time in the future. All joint postgraduate programmes are reviewed annually by the Joint Postgraduate Programme Group.

2.49   The Institute has clear strategic objectives behind its portfolio of collaborative agreements. There are explicit policies and procedures for the establishment and review of partnerships. Although the role of the Institute in collaborative programmes may change substantially, should postgraduate degree awarding powers be granted, staff were clear that they do not see this as detrimental to the relationships it currently has with a range of institutions across the globe.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.50   The Institute does not deliver learning opportunities through flexible or distributed arrangements, in the UK context of this expectation. However, there is widespread use of virtual learning environments (VLEs) for supporting on-campus learning.

2.51   There is a policy that all courses are launched on the VLE, and there is training for teachers to make the most effective use of the online tools and features as well as workshops for students on how to use the platform effectively. Each School receives a monitoring report on how effectively its staff are using the platform.

2.52   There are plans for a number of Best Online Course awards to recognise the efforts of teaching staff and to promote effective use of the VLE.

Work-based and placement learning

2.53   There is an institutional-level strategic approach to internship and placement learning, and published guidelines to ensure the effectiveness of learning opportunities that are delivered through them. The institution views internships as a mechanism for providing students with an element of experiential learning in the field of their programmes as part of an integrated education. They also provide opportunities for students to apply what they have learned to real-life situations.

2.54   Students are assigned to various organisations related to their professions and practise under the supervision of experienced staff who act as mentors. Schools provide guidance and subject specific preparation prior to these internships. Schools or programmes provide mentoring and support to employers responsible for students undertaking internships, and seek feedback from employers as part of the quality assurance mechanism to enhance the student experience and their learning opportunities. Feedback is also sought from the students, through the student surveys at the course level and as part of a programme review.

2.55   Internships are managed by the Academic Affairs Office, with close liaison with the relevant programme coordinator. The exact approach varies between schools, principally in relation to size of programme. Students are required to keep in contact with their programme coordinator every week and to talk to them about the placement and any issues or problems arising from it.

2.56   The review team found the effective organisation and monitoring of work-based and placement learning opportunities focusing on the educational benefit and professional development benefit of students to be **a feature of good practice**.

Student charter

2.57   There is a student charter document, known formally as the Student Expectations . It was developed jointly by the staff and students of the Institute. The charter covers all

undergraduate students and postgraduate students studying at the Institute through collaborative partnerships with other institutions.

2.58   The charter is reviewed on a regular basis, normally after a period of two years [SED 31]. It is available on the Institute's website and hard copies are made available for new students. Year Tutors are expected to discuss the Student Expectations in their first meeting with their students.

2.59   Students met by the review team knew broadly what they should be able to expect, what was required of them, and what to do if things do not meet expected standards. They knew how to find the Institute Student Expectations document on the website.

Conclusion

In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the Expectations of the Quality Code. Through scrutiny of documentation provided, and in discussion with colleagues during the visit, the Institute provided clear evidence that it manages the quality of learning opportunities provided for the students in a highly effective manner. All of the Expectations, in so far as they apply to this judgement area, were met and the Institute is already taking appropriate action in those areas where it was recognised further work would enhance practice and contribute positively to the student experience.

The team made two recommendations regarding the development of a more formal process to support the learning opportunities of students so that the Institute is less dependent on the commitment of individual staff members and to ensure that specific concerns in individual areas are not lost within the aggregation and averaging of results. The team also affirmed the Institute's continuous development of deliberative structures to comply with current legislative restrictions and maintenance of effective and appropriate student engagement in core quality assurance activities, as well as its progress towards portfolio development at postgraduate level in order to seek local accreditation in the future for postgraduate taught and research programmes. Moreover, the team identified a number of features of good practice across this judgment area including: support for new staff; reward and support strategies for staff; effective deployment of learning resources to support the learning opportunities of students; the flexibility and responsiveness of the Institute to student feedback; the effectiveness of the induction and orientation processes for students entering the Institute; and the effective organisation and monitoring of work-based and placement learning opportunities.

The review team is therefore able to express confidence in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities it provides for students.

3   Information about learning opportunities

Outcome

Confidence can be placed in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of the information it produces about its higher education provision and that it is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

3.1   As discussed in paragraph 1.11 programme information provided by the Institute is subject to governmental approval and is thus legally constrained in terms of the fitness for purpose, accessibility and trustworthiness of information. Programme information is

produced to a common template and approved through a centralised process. Publicity information deriving from these materials is subject to scrutiny and approval at both School and Institutional levels.

3.2   External examiners' reports are shared as a matter of course with the institution's student representatives, for example through staff-student committees. External examiners' reports are collated centrally and disseminated within the teaching team in a systematic fashion, enabling both programme and course response to individual matters raised. Responses to external examiners' reports are monitored at institutional level and included within annual monitoring reports.

3.3   Through meetings with staff, it was confirmed that external examiners' comments would be made available to students on request and were not considered, in this context, to be 'privileged information'. The team **recommends** that, by the end of 2013-14, the Institute should develop a more systematic mechanism to share external examiners' reports with students.

Conclusion

In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the Expectations of the Quality Code. Through scrutiny of documentation provided, and in discussion with colleagues during the visit, the Institute provided clear evidence that it manages the information it produces about its higher education provision systematically and effectively. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the team made one recommendation regarding the more systematic sharing of external examiners' reports with students. The review team is therefore able to express confidence in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of information about higher education provision.

4   Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

Confidence can be placed in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of the enhancement of the learning opportunities available to students. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1   There are a number of enhancement activities and initiatives at all levels of the institution that foster and disseminate good practice. In 2011, the Institute introduced a task force of academic staff with a remit to develop teaching and learning in the Institute. This task force subsequently evolved into the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Group (TLEG), which, in addition to academic staff, also includes representation from all of the student-support services.

4.2   The remit of TLEG includes: to assist the BOM to set and review strategies for teaching and learning; to assist in the development of institutional enhancement priorities; to conduct the Annual Health Checks as a forum for discussing school responses to institutionally identified enhancement priorities and engagement with strategic projects; and to organise workshops and seminars for the enhancement of teaching and learning and related aspects of the academic programmes in the Institute.

4.3   In recent years, there has been an annual staff symposium that is intended to be a forum for sharing good practice and to provide an opportunity for the Institute's academic and administrative staff to engage with experts from other institutions to learn more about developments in higher education internationally. Keynote speakers' and contributors'

papers have been published as a book following each symposium, for the benefit of staff unable to attend. However, not all teaching staff met by the review team were aware of the annual conference.

4.4　　There is a Teaching Excellence Award scheme (see paragraph 2.4), which is administered by the Secretariat of the Technical and Scientific Committee. The main objectives of this scheme are: to reward excellent teachers in the Schools of the Institute; to promote continuous enhancement of teaching quality; and to encourage student involvement in quality enhancement. Students and staff are encouraged to make nominations for the award. The selection process then assesses applicants with the criteria of student opinion about their teaching, findings of class observation, and personal contributions to the development of curricula and academic programmes. Winners of the award are encouraged to share their experiences in teaching and research though the events organised by the Institute.

4.5　　Student feedback is analysed annually, and feeds into staff appraisals. The feedback includes a five-point scale of teaching quality. Any low scores are checked against examination performance scores and may lead to sanctions. The scores of high-performing staff members are also compared to examination results, with the result that the teachers may then be used to mentor new members of staff.

4.6　　 While there is evidence of a strategic approach to enhancement of student learning opportunities, together with an institutional commitment to continuous reflection and improvement, the review team **recommends** that, by the end of 2013-14, the Institute should develop a more systematic approach to the collation, application and consideration of good practice and of management information at institutional level in order to underpin the enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

4.7　　Currently, enhancement relies to a considerable extent on local initiatives. It is the review team's view that currently the Institute is missing the benefits of full integration of the enhancement agenda into the quality assurance committees and systems. The review team encourages the Institute to reflect on how it could usefully benefit from more systematic collation of good practice and use of management information at institutional level for the benefit of staff in supporting the enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

Conclusion

In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the Expectations of the Quality Code. Through scrutiny of documentation provided, and in discussion with colleagues during the visit, the Institute provided clear evidence that it manages the enhancement of its learning opportunities effectively. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the team made one recommendation regarding the development of a more systematic approach to the collation, application and consideration of good practice and of management information at institutional level in order to underpin the enhancement of students' learning opportunities. The review team is therefore able to express confidence in the soundness of the Institute's current and likely future management of the enhancement of learning opportunities.

5   Thematic element

Each academic year a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams. In 2012-13 there was a choice of two themes: First Year Student Experience or Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement. The Institute, in consultation with its student body, elected to explore the theme of the First Year Student Experience.

First Year Student Experience

5.1   The review team explored the First Year Student Experience at the Institute. This has been an area of significant focus and development for the Institute. The team regarded the work that has been undertaken as a considerable strength of the Institute and found that the results of the telephone survey of first year students undertaken as part of the student written submission was particularly helpful in facilitating insight into the experience of students during their first year of study at the Institute.

5.2   Before the beginning of the academic year, first year students are invited to attend the School and Programme Orientation sessions also known as the Institute Opening Ceremony (see also paragraph 2.38 in terms of targeted activities provided for international students and students from Mainland China). At the School Orientation, they meet students from the other Programmes and learn about the aims and mission of the Institute. At the Programme Orientation, they are advised of what is expected of them during their years of study at the Institute, to include such topics as academic regulations, plagiarism, career planning, work placement and graduation requirements.

5.3   At the start of their first year all students are allocated a Year Tutor. The Year Tutor is responsible for providing general support and guidance to an identified group of students. The Institute also uses social networking tools to enable first year students to make contact with teaching staff and classmates. As noted in paragraph 2.24, the team found the effectiveness of the induction and orientation processes for students entering the Institute to be a feature of good practice.

5.4   In order to help first year students in their transition to higher education, the Institute ensures that support services are both adequate and continuous. Such services are also monitored and periodically reviewed. Mechanisms to monitor and review include the Student Engagement Survey of the Computing Programmes, the Taught Course and Teaching Evaluation Questionnaires, focus groups and telephone interviews . The Institute further monitors first year student retention and progression through programme review and the institutional planning process.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions. For example, pages 18-19 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of: threshold academic standards; learning opportunities; enhancement; and public information.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx.

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

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

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

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.

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

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

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

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.

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements, along with additional topics and overarching themes.

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.