



Queensland College London

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

March 2012

Key findings about Queensland College London

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in March 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 Association of Business Executives and Edexcel.

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 this awarding body and organisation.

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 opportunities for student involvement in all College committees, and particularly in the Governing Council (paragraph 1.2).

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:

- ensure the consistency and quality of the process of internal verification of student work (paragraph 1.8)
- provide clear and detailed expectations in the assessment policy about the quality of feedback, and provide staff with the necessary training to implement these (paragraph 2.5)
- revise the level 7 student handbooks to ensure their accuracy and relevance (paragraph 3.4).

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

- include action plans with target deadlines in the annual monitoring reports (paragraph 1.4)
- review the management of the complaints procedure (paragraph 2.3)
- integrate staff appraisal, teaching observations and staff development plans (paragraph 2.4)
- formalise the pastoral student support systems (paragraph 2.7)
- use a more structured and formal process to induct new academic staff (paragraph 2.11)
- clearly communicate College policies, particularly on complaints, to all new students at induction (paragraph 3.5)
- clarify that scholarship awards are for both prospective and existing students (paragraph 3.6).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)¹ (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at Queensland College London (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, or will deliver, on behalf of the Association of Business Executives and Edexcel. The review was carried out by Mr David Charlton, Mr Diarmuid Fogarty, Mrs Kausar Malik (reviewers), and Mr Martin Hill (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the [Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](#).² Evidence in support of the review included documentation supplied by the College and awarding body and organisation, and meetings with staff and students.

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

- Academic Infrastructure.

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

Queensland College London (the College) was founded in 2004 by the current proprietor, who is the Principal/Chief Executive Officer, in order to provide high-quality international education. The College was originally based at premises in Acton, west London, which were soon outgrown as recruitment increased. Two years later, a second campus was established in Reading, partly to accommodate the College's expanding portfolio of provision and also to cater for those international students who prefer to undertake their studies outside the capital. In 2008, the Acton campus was relocated to a different building in central Acton, and in 2009 the College acquired additional premises in Reading, adjacent to the existing centre.

The College offers the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their awarding body and organisation (with current student full-time numbers):

Edexcel

- HNC/D Business (14)
- HNC/D Computing (Software Development) (3)
- HNC/D Hospitality Management (15)
- HNC/D Health and Social Care (Management) (18)
- Extended Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership (31)

Association of Business Executives

- Extended Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership and Management in Health and Social Care Sector (4)

The provider's stated responsibilities

In its self-evaluation the College states that it is fully aware of its broader educational obligations and is committed to the provision of liberal, accessible and inclusive educational opportunities in a friendly, dynamic and professional learning community. The College

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4.

² www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx.

mission is to excel in the delivery of high-quality teaching, in collaboration with external partners, recognising the ever-changing needs of our students through the provision of a responsive and innovative portfolio of programmes, and to engage the diverse learning community in an outstanding educational experience.

Recent developments

The College initially offered a range of professional certificate/diploma programmes validated by professional bodies such as the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, Association of Business Executives, The Institute for the Management of Information Systems, and the National Examining Board for Dental Nurses. Since 2008, Edexcel has become the College's chief awarding body at level 4 and above. HND/C programmes were augmented in 2010 by a level 7 programme, and the College is trialling an Association of Business Practitioners programme. The College still offers a Diploma in Dental Nursing and International English Language Testing System programmes, but these are not in the scope of this review. The College has recently received recognition from the Students Loans Authority and plans to enrol home students as well as international students. It also plans to broaden the range of programmes by developing partnerships with other awarding bodies or organisations.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the review team. Two student representatives gathered views from student groups for all the programmes. These views were summarised into a written student submission. The full feedback results of the student group discussions were also attached to the submission which was sent to the team. The team found this a very helpful review of the students' views. Further views were gathered from two representative groups of students whom the team met during the visit.

Detailed findings about Queensland College London

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The College has an effective management structure for managing its responsibilities for academic standards. The Chief Executive Officer has overall responsibility, and the Director of Quality Management, together with the Senior Management Team, oversee the quality assurance procedures. Currently, during the absence of a Director of Teaching, Learning and Student Support, the Courses Coordinator has responsibility for the practical operation of the programmes.

1.2 The Governing Council was established in 2011 to oversee the arrangements for quality assurance in the College and includes senior staff, external lay members and a student representative. Annual programme monitoring reports are considered at the Courses Committee meeting, where there is also student representation. The reports are then tabled at the Academic/Examinations Board. The College also has a Health, Safety and Facilities Committee, with student representation, to oversee the quality of the estate and the educational infrastructure. The team considers the opportunities for student involvement in committees, and particularly in the Governing Council, to be good practice.

1.3 In 2009, the College revised its quality assurance framework, in response to recommendations from the British Accreditation Council. The framework is periodically supplemented. The most recent addition was the research ethics guidelines, which reflect the requirements of level 7 provision. The framework is due for internal triennial review in 2012 and the College proposes to include any recommendations made by the team.

1.4 The annual monitoring reports are structured around 10 items for consideration, including examination results, student feedback and classroom observations. The team was concerned that a number of items of good practice were identical on three monitoring reports. On reading the minutes of the recent Courses Committee and Academic/Examinations Board, the team noted that no discussion of any action plans had been recorded and the action plans did not have any time frames for future actions. The team considers it desirable to include action plans with target deadlines in the separately identified annual monitoring reports.

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

1.5 Many of the academic procedures and policies have been informed by the Academic Infrastructure, and the general principles form the basis of the College Quality Assurance Policy. Staff are provided with training on the expectations of the awarding body and organisation, and meet the external examiners when they visit. During induction, the familiarity of new members of staff with the Academic Infrastructure is ascertained. Staff can subsequently refer to the programme leaders and the Courses Coordinator for guidance. The College has already provided some briefings for staff on the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and more will be held as it continues to be rolled out.

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

1.6 The process of considering the comments of Edexcel external examiners works well. At the end of their annual visit, the external examiners discuss the reports with the programme leaders so that the College is fully aware of, and understands, their recommendations. Student representatives see the reports at the Courses Committee or the Governing Council. External examiners' reports are also tabled at meetings of the Senior Management Team to ensure oversight of the educational standards and the effectiveness of management structures. Programme leaders respond to comments made in the external examiners' reports and actions are checked by the external examiners on their next visit.

1.7 Following comments from external examiners, the format for feedback to students on their assessed work has been improved with the introduction of a new College feedback form. Internal verification procedures within the College have also been changed following similar comments. Staff regularly use the assignment checking service provided by Edexcel to ensure that assignment briefs are fit for purpose and meet the awarding body's requirements.

1.8 The College uses internal verifiers to assure itself that assessment is of a suitable standard to meet the requirements of its awarding body and organisation. However, the student work reviewed by the team indicated that the standards of internal verification were not consistent. The team identified examples of inappropriate academic practices which had gone unnoticed by the assessors and the internal verifier. These significantly compromised the reliability of these assessments. The team recommends as advisable that the College takes action to ensure the consistency and quality of the internal verification of student work.

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 body and organisation.

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 responsibilities of the College for the management of the quality of learning opportunities are set out in paragraphs 1.1 to 1.4. The College is generally effective in monitoring and enhancing its devolved responsibilities.

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

2.2 As stated in paragraph 1.5, the College recognises the value of the Academic Infrastructure to the maintenance and enhancement of learning opportunities. There are clear procedures for dealing with student complaints and there are also well elaborated descriptions of the admissions procedures. These are in accordance with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), *Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters* and *Section 10: Admissions to higher education*.

2.3 The team considered that the College's practices could benefit greatly from consideration of the *Code of practice*, *Sections 3, 5, 8 and 9*. For example, the complaints

procedure provides a clear overview of what should happen when the College receives a complaint and yet there is no evidence that it is followed. Although the College indicated that this was because they had not received any serious complaints, the evidence provided to the team suggested that there was at least one serious complaint, although the complainant chose not to use the procedures. The most recent minutes of the Senior Management Team alluded to another complaint that the College had received, which involved a pre-entry student. The team concludes that it is desirable for the College to review the management of the complaints procedure.

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

2.4 The College has a range of effective mechanisms for overseeing the quality of teaching and learning. All teachers participate in peer and senior management lesson observations. However, there was no evidence of how these observations are linked to the College's strategic plans for teaching and learning. Nor was it possible to conclude how teachers could use these observations to enhance their work. Feedback consists mainly of positive reinforcement of existing practice and there is little sign of critical engagement in the observation process by the teachers. All full-time staff are required to participate in an appraisal process. The team recommends that it is desirable that the College integrates staff appraisal, teaching observations and staff development.

2.5 There is noticeable inconsistency in the quality and depth of summative and formative feedback that the College gives to students. In the samples of student work reviewed by the team, feedback was brief and had limited potential for indicating areas for development. The poor quality of feedback to students has also been identified by external examiners. The team concludes that it would be advisable for the College to provide clear and detailed expectations in the assessment policy about the quality of feedback, and provide staff with the necessary training to implement these.

2.6 The College has a well recognised and effective plagiarism policy, which is used to support students who are often unaccustomed to UK academic practices. At the time of the visit, the College was using online software to uncover plagiarised work and to deal with instances of plagiarism.

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

2.7 The College provides support to its students through a number of mechanisms, many of which are informal. There is no formal policy regarding either pastoral care or procedures for formally noting concerns about students. The College feels that this is adequate, given the relatively small number of current students. Students commented upon the ease of access that they had to all staff, although their written submission suggested that this did not apply to all students. Staff provided examples of how their support had contributed significantly to students' lives and the students whom the team met supported this. However, the team concluded that the College may place an over-reliance on informal procedures. It is desirable for the College to formalise the pastoral support systems.

2.8 There are adequate monitoring procedures to track an individual's progress through their studies. Teaching staff provide ongoing guidance to students on work and study plans. Additionally, the College seeks students' opinions in surveys on the quality of teaching and of their programmes, and conducts exit surveys with students finishing their studies. The College has recognised the challenge to improve the understanding of study skills by students. A new member of staff has recently been appointed to develop a study skills programme for international students.

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

2.9 The College has sound policies and procedures for staff development to support higher education. Part-time and full-time staff understand the academic standards required in higher education. This is evident in the setting of assessments and in matching learning outcomes in students' work.

2.10 All staff have relevant experience and are well qualified. The College encourages staff to participate in scholarly activities. Two members of staff have been supported to do an intensive Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector qualification. Another is being supported to complete a Master of Arts in Education. Two members of staff are doing postgraduate doctorates in their professional areas. The College supports some staff development and training by the payment of programme fees.

2.11 The College has an informal staff induction process. New staff receive training and support to familiarise themselves with the awarding body and organisation's requirements. The College described staff induction as a continuous process, in a close-knit college. The small management staff team support new staff. The team considers it desirable that the College uses a more structured and formalised process to induct new staff.

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

2.12 There is no specific policy for the review and evaluation of learning resources. The requirements for learning resources are identified in the annual monitoring reports submitted to the Courses Committee. The requests are considered for recommendation to the Academic/Examinations Board or the Chief Executive Officer. Staff and students agreed that resources at the College were good and this is further supported by comments made by the British Accreditation Council review and external examiners' reports. The College recognises the need to improve library facilities and is considering purchasing access to a range of electronic journals and other learning materials.

2.13 The HND Health and Social Care Management currently requires students to engage in workplace learning. The College does not have a specific policy or set of procedures for securing, monitoring, administering or reviewing such learning opportunities for the students. The College makes a handbook available to workplace supervisors.

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 information about its programmes through an easy-to-use and clear website. It is also responsible for publishing information related to the admissions and attendance requirements and fees. The website is the main source of information for intending students and gives a clear picture of the College's provision and the realities of

student life in London and Reading, including an indication of living costs. The College intends to further develop the website to include web links to the awarding body and organisation. Students can access programme materials and upload assignments to an electronic noticeboard. This can also be used for fee payment and to update personal records.

3.2 The prospectus and student and programme handbooks can be downloaded from the website or the electronic noticeboard for existing students, and are available in hard copy. The comprehensive student handbook provides basic information for students about the College and the College's policies and procedures. The students told the team that they appreciated the personal approach that the College provides to make information available, but felt that communication could be improved.

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

3.3 The College has arrangements for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of information it publishes. The Principal/Chief Executive Officer administers the website. The design of the prospectus and other promotional material is undertaken by the Senior Management Team which collectively approves all content. The Principal/Chief Executive Officer works with an external agency to update the content of the website, and an external consultant is employed to check the accuracy and layout of the website.

3.4 The College uses a generic format for programme handbooks. The academic content of the programme handbooks is assembled by the programme teams who decide on the appropriate combination of modules. The programme leaders check the academic detail and the Courses Coordinator is responsible for the generic information. Students are not directly involved in ensuring the accuracy and completeness of published information. The level 7 handbooks contained inaccurate information relating to progression opportunities to degrees. It is advisable that the College revises the level 7 handbooks to ensure their accuracy and relevance.

3.5 The College has a comprehensive complaints and appeals policy. It also has clearly defined policies on equal opportunities, anti-discrimination, and health and safety. These policies are included in the staff and student handbooks, which are available electronically. In its self-evaluation, the College recognised the need to communicate these policies more effectively. The College uses an induction checklist which students are required to sign to acknowledge receipt and understanding of policies. The team recommends that it is desirable that the College clearly communicates its policies, particularly on complaints, to all new students at induction.

3.6 The College offers scholarship awards for high-performing and hard-working students. The website contains references to these scholarship awards. One award was made this year to a current student. At the time of the review, it was unclear to the team who was eligible to apply for the awards. It is desirable that the College clarifies that scholarship awards are for both prospective and existing students.

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 plan³

Queensland College London action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight March 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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the opportunities for student involvement in all College committees, and particularly in the Governing Council (paragraph 1.2). 	Ensure that student representatives are on all eligible committees (voting will take place at the beginning of new academic year)	December 2012	Quality Manager	Student representatives are on all eligible committees	Courses Committee Academic Board Governing Council	Minutes of meetings
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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure the consistency and quality of the process of internal verification of student work (paragraph 1.8) 	Produce marking and assessment guidelines (Assessment Policy) Prepare staff training pack Carry out staff training	October 2012	Director of Teaching and Learning and Student Services Director of Quality	Marking standards are consistent	Courses Committee Academic Board Governing Council	External verifier's reports

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 body and organisation.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide clear and detailed expectations in the assessment policy about the quality of feedback, and provide staff with the necessary training to implement these (paragraph 2.5) 	Produce Assessment Policy (see above) Prepare staff training pack Carry out staff training	October 2012	Director of Teaching and Learning and Student Services Director of Quality	Positive student and staff feedback	Courses Committee Academic Board Governing Council	External verifier's reports Student feedback (regular questionnaires - reviewed during annual monitoring)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> revise the level 7 student handbooks to ensure their accuracy and relevance (paragraph 3.4). 	Check and make changes to handbooks as necessary (changes to be signed off by Senior Management Team)	June 2012	Programme leaders Registrar Director of Quality	Positive student feedback	Senior Management Team (sign-off) Examinations Board	External verifier's reports
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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> include action plans with target deadlines in the annual monitoring reports (paragraph 1.4) 	Revise monitoring report requirements Include new requirements in next monitoring cycle	December 2012	Director of Quality	Action plans prepared and carried out	Courses Committee Academic Board	Content of monitoring reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review the management of the complaints procedure (paragraph 2.3) 	Include complaints policy/handling in student and staff induction	December 2012	Director of Quality Registrar	Student and staff awareness of complaints procedures	Senior Management Team Governing Council	Student feedback (regular questionnaires - reviewed during annual monitoring)

						Any complaints that occur
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> integrate staff appraisal, teaching observations and staff development plans (paragraph 2.4) 	<p>Inform staff at induction</p> <p>Modify appraisal and observation forms</p> <p>Staff to be kept informed by regular communications (emails) on good practice and development opportunities</p>	December 2012	<p>Chief Executive Officer</p> <p>Director of Quality</p>	<p>Increased staff engagement</p> <p>All staff aware of available development opportunities</p>	<p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>Academic Board</p> <p>Governing Council</p>	Staff feedback (staff appraisals)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> formalise the pastoral student support systems (paragraph 2.7) 	<p>Formalise and produce Pastoral Care Policy</p> <p>Advertise policy on E-Board (internal e-learning environment)</p> <p>Incorporate pastoral matters into revised annual monitoring procedures based on updated student questionnaires</p>	December 2012	<p>Director of Teaching and Learning and Student Services</p> <p>Registrar</p> <p>Director of Quality</p>	Students are aware of support systems and access them	<p>Courses Committee</p> <p>Academic Board</p> <p>Governing Council</p>	Student feedback (regular questionnaires - reviewed during annual monitoring)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use a more structured and formal process to induct new academic staff 	Prepare and implement revised induction programme for staff	December 2012	Director of Teaching and Learning and Student Services	Staff receive complete and thorough induction	<p>Courses Committee</p> <p>Academic Board</p> <p>Governing</p>	Staff feedback (induction questionnaire)

(paragraph 2.11)	Ensure new staff complete an induction questionnaire at the end of their six months' probationary period		Director of Quality Registrar		Council	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clearly communicate College policies, particularly on complaints, to all new students at induction (paragraph 3.5) 	<p>Prepare and implement revised induction programme for students</p> <p>Ensure students sign a form at induction to confirm that they have been told about College policies</p> <p>Revise student feedback forms to include a question to check that students are aware of College policies and where to find them</p>	December 2012	<p>Courses Coordinator</p> <p>Registrar</p> <p>Director of Quality</p>	Students aware of College policies	<p>Courses Committee</p> <p>Academic Board</p> <p>Governing Council</p>	<p>Student feedback (Induction form, questionnaires - reviewed during annual monitoring)</p> <p>Any complaints that occur</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clarify that scholarship awards are for both prospective and existing students (paragraph 3.6). 	Modify wording on website	June 2012	<p>Chief Executive Officer</p> <p>Senior Management Team</p>	Website content readily understandable	Governing Council	Student feedback (regular questionnaires - reviewed during annual monitoring)

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: Handbook⁴](#)

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 one to eight, with levels four 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:

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.

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