Kaplan Law School

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

May 2012

Key findings about Kaplan Law School

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in May 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 Nottingham Trent University.

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

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 comprehensive and systematic way in which staff development is planned and delivered, which impacts positively upon student learning (paragraph 2.14)
- a well designed and exhaustive process assures the accuracy and completeness of published information (paragraph 3.6)

Recommendations

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

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

- involve students more formally in validation, revalidation and course modification (paragraph 2.5)
- consider a more systematic approach when communicating actions taken as a result of student feedback (paragraph 2.7)

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)[1] (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at Kaplan Law School (the provider; the School). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the provider discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes of study that the provider delivers on behalf of Nottingham Trent University. The review was carried out by Dr Gillian Blunden, Dr Clive Marsland and Mr Robert Mason (reviewers), and Mr Ian Fleming (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 provider and awarding body and meetings with staff, students and employers.

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

- the Academic Infrastructure and the emerging UK Quality Code for Higher Education
- Requirements stated by the following regulatory bodies: the Joint Academic Stage Board, the Solicitors' Regulatory Authority and the Bar Standards Board
- expectations and requirements expressed by sponsoring client firms.

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

The Kaplan UK Group is part of Kaplan, Inc, owned by the Washington Post Company and providing education and career services to one million students worldwide. Kaplan Law School was established in 2007 and is located in modern premises on London's South Bank at the rear of Southwark Cathedral. At the time of the review, nearly 300 students were studying at the School. The School intends to continue focusing upon providing an excellent student experience and outstanding academic support.

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

Nottingham Trent University
- Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL)
- Legal Practice Course (LPC)
- Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC)

The provider's stated responsibilities

The School works with one awarding body, Nottingham Trent University, with which a formal partnership agreement has been agreed. The University, together with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, specifies the content and intended learning outcomes of the three professional postgraduate programmes delivered by the School.

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

Recent developments

The measured growth of the School since 2007 has been linked to a commitment to quality and employability, one example of which is evidenced by the BPTC students obtaining a pupilage at a rate approximately twice that of the national average. Library space is at a premium and consideration is being given to methods of providing additional accommodation.

Students' contribution to the review

Students were invited to present a submission to the review team. The School encouraged and supported students in contributing to the review. A feedback questionnaire was produced, together with a short presentation and a poster about educational oversight. A student working group then decided to produce a video submission and a series of short presentations were filmed. Students were solely responsible for format and content. Two videos provided helpful contextual information for the team. In addition, the team met a group of eight students during the review.

Detailed findings about Kaplan Law School

1   Academic standards

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

1.1   The Kaplan UK Management Board has overall responsibility for human resources, financial status, physical resources and the overall academic portfolio including standards, strategic direction/objectives and performance monitoring. In 2011, its overall UK operations were accredited by the British Accreditation Council, with the Kaplan Law School successfully undergoing its own inspection.

1.2   The School offers three postgraduate professional legal programmes, the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL), the Legal Practice Course (LPC) and the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC) under a franchised partnership with Nottingham Trent University. Attainment of the Legal Practice Course or the Bar Professional Training Course, gives graduates a licence to practice. External regulation of these programmes is provided by the Joint Academic Stage Board (JASB), the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) and the Bar Standards Board (BSB) respectively. An institutional level franchise agreement with the University was approved in 2006 for a 10-year period. The University is responsible for the syllabus and assessment, while academic responsibility for the School rests with the Kaplan Dean of Law.

1.3   The respective responsibilities for the academic standards of the professional postgraduate awards are clearly delineated and key School staff, including programme leaders, are fully aware of their responsibilities and are able to articulate them clearly.

1.4   The School operates as a Kaplan centre and has a centre manager who provides monthly feedback to the Kaplan UK Management Board. Standards for the School professional courses are set jointly by both the relevant professional statutory and regulatory body and the University. Quality assurance is the responsibility of the School course team, subject to the processes and procedures of the University. Each of the three programmes is the responsibility of a designated programme leader, with the Dean providing academic leadership across the School. Overall responsibility for the management of the School, including the employment of staff to teach on academic programmes, is held by the Centre Manager, who reports to the Kaplan UK Management Board. A University assessment tutor has been appointed with overall responsibility for the management of academic standards relating to assessments.

1.5   All quality assurance procedures for the School awards are documented and managed in accordance with the University's Academic Quality and Standards Handbook. Programme handbooks, to a University standard template, incorporating the programme specifications, professional body requirements, an assessment manual and advice on the avoidance of academic offences, such as plagiarism, are issued to all students on enrolment, and also to programme leaders. Academic staff are responsible for supporting students in the effective use of these handbooks. Programmes are managed through course committees and staff-student liaison committees and extensive cooperation between the School and University safeguards academic standards.

1.6   In December 2010, Kaplan UK established an Academic Council based on guidance set out in the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* to provide academic oversight of programmes leading to awards validated by a UK university. Its terms of reference and membership are currently

under review with the aim of incorporating more fully the work of the School. The Council is responsible on behalf of the Kaplan UK Management Board for safeguarding the standard of academic and professional awards delivered by Kaplan UK.

1.7   The School has a well defined and effective academic quality cycle. Course team reports are submitted annually to the Academic Standards Quality Committee, which puts into place any actions deemed necessary to enhance quality. These reports in turn are fed into the University's Centre for Academic Development, which reviews all quality matters across the University.

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

1.8   The Law School uses the University's quality and standards procedures as its main reference points for maintenance of academic standards. These, in turn, draw on the elements of the Academic Infrastructure and the emerging UK Quality Code for Higher Education, when undergoing validation by the University.

1.9   The three professional postgraduate law programmes are externally regulated by the JASB, the SRA and the BSB. This external regulation provides a critical set of external reference points for the School.

1.10   In addition to the professional bodies, the expectations and requirements of the employers who sponsor a large proportion of the students provide further external benchmarks. A high level of employer sponsorship and involvement in the assurance of academic standards was noted by the team.

1.11   The School adheres to the University's regulations for assessment and also meets the requirements of each relevant professional statutory and regulatory body.

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

1.12   Under the franchise agreement with the University, external examiners have been appointed and they are required to attend all progression and award boards to ensure that the correct academic procedures and processes have been followed in respect of the assessment and the award of qualifications and academic credits. They are also required to produce an annual report, which could usefully be made accessible to students. All other aspects of assessment, including internal verification, assessment and responding to student feedback are the joint responsibility of the University and the School, with the School taking increasing responsibility as its experience grows. Marking and moderation of assessments takes place in an anonymised form randomly across both institutions.

1.13   The School produces annual course reports, drawn up by course teams and incorporating external examiners' comments and student feedback, which are considered by the Academic Standards Quality Committee. Regular meetings of the Senior Management Team, of which the University assessment tutor is a member, assist with the management of academic standards and measures are taken to minimise any assessment irregularities.

1.14   The monthly board reports from each Kaplan Financial centre and from the School are circulated to all centre managers as well as the Kaplan UK Management Board to share and facilitate best practice. Good practice in the management of academic standards is also effectively assured through staff appraisal, mentoring, use of student feedback and the School summer conference.

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.

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 School's responsibilities include student enrolment, induction and guidance, teaching and learning, the development of staff teaching skills, library, and learning resources and the shared quality review of the provision with its awarding body, including the collection and use of student feedback. Internal management responsibilities for these functions are overseen by the Kaplan UK Management Board, where management information is considered by means of monthly reports provided by the Centre Manager. Student satisfaction is an important feature of this reporting mechanism.

2.2   Arrangements for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities operate effectively. Quality assurance checks are regularly carried out through the use of student feedback, monthly oversight of student performance data and centre manager monthly reports. The monthly reporting system includes student experience metrics analysis, covering satisfaction feedback data, review of at-risk students and centre responses on academic excellence and student experience issues, and identifies areas of challenge in a timely fashion. Issues emerging from the monthly reports are used to identify key themes for school-wide consideration. Effective and timely action is taken in response to external client expectations of teaching delivery. The timeliness of student experience action planning and its direct link to training of staff are noted by the team.

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

2.3   The School is required to meet and maintain conditions for validated programmes of study and is subject to the University's assurance and compliance systems. These include audit and developmental visits, inspection reports and student feedback surveys. Relationships with the University are well developed and effective. The School delivers curricula to prescribed formats set by the University. Updated University requirements, including major and minor modifications, are a regular feature of board reports and liaison arrangements with the University are appropriate.

2.4   The School makes use of other external reference points which provide a broader context for the enhancement of student learning opportunities. For example, staff attend events provided by the Higher Education Academy. The School also has a developing understanding of student experience issues in higher education. Together with the School's own internal quality assurance reporting mechanisms, external reference points are used effectively to enhance learning opportunities for students.

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

2.5   The School has effective internal mechanisms for developing learning and teaching knowledge, for enhancement of learning, and for maintaining good practice in delivery of its programmes of study. The validation process for its programmes is secure and considers learning and teaching issues in a holistic way, taking account of best practice within the legal

profession. However, students are currently recipients of learning rather than participants in the process of programme delivery and the School could consider involving them more formally in the validation process of new programmes, and in revalidations or modifications in existing programmes.

2.6   Teaching is mainly centred on class-based study. However, the School is also committed to the support of classroom delivery by online learning, to innovation for learning in a virtual context and to developments such as the implementation of independent learner sessions, e-learning and case study modelling. The School acknowledges that more could be developed to support its students through online study and by the use of advanced technology, and this is to be encouraged. Class-based study is offered at flexible times during a normal working week to meet student needs. It involves an appropriate variety of teaching modes of delivery including lectures, seminars, and tutorials. Practically-focused learning methods, such as problem-solving, skills in context and preparation and reinforcement are effective and appropriate to the level discipline demands of the School's students. Programmes of study are directed towards examinations, and students value the significant study support provided for revision. Course materials, including handbooks, study guides and training and revision documentation are available to all students in both electronic and hard copy format and appropriately support student learning.

2.7   Student feedback is a central metric in monthly performance reports. Students are encouraged to evaluate teaching, especially by means of module evaluations, and action has been taken by the School as a result of issues being raised. However, students are not always aware of the action taken and it is considered desirable that the School takes a more proactive and systematic approach to communicating actions taken as a result of such evaluations.

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

2.8   Students are encouraged to give their views within the School's deliberative structures, including staff-student liaison meetings and the Student Council, which is being developed as a means of focusing student opinion. This development is to be encouraged.

2.9   An extensive range of mechanisms and procedures is in place to ensure that students receive a high level of academic and welfare support. For many students, their academic tutors are a first point of call for advice, and such advice is valued. There is also a personal tutor system, which operates effectively to provide objective academic pastoral support. There are appropriate orientation procedures for new students, covering enrolment guidance and joining instructions, while the admissions team offers one-to-one and generic support for incoming students as appropriate.

2.10   Academic support for students is organised to include standard one-to-one tutorial help and guidance. Additional individual tutorials and seminar support are available on request, as well as easy informal access to staff, which is appreciated by students, proactively managed by the School, and praised by its client firms. Students report positively on the high quality of tutorial content and the helpfulness and widespread availability of teaching staff, particularly at stress points during the year.

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

2.11   Kaplan UK has an established staff development process. Training and development needs of staff are identified both strategically and locally. All new staff attend a welcome day and the agenda includes student experience issues. Staff are supported to

achieve qualifications relative to their discipline specialisms and there is additional support for new and existing tutors through an intensive training course run by the Kaplan Tutor Academy.

2.12   A mentoring system is in place for new staff and continues for one year, after which staff join a peer observation scheme. This scheme is being developed, with clear process and guidance information provided to both observers and those being observed. A peer review model is used, which focuses upon skills for teaching rather than subject knowledge, and the process is used both for the purposes of individual appraisal and for wider sharing of good practice. Staff are able to observe teaching across all programmes, and can share peer observation themes at the annual summer conference. The conference allows an opportunity to draw together themes from student feedback, strategic priorities, peer observation outcomes and tutor training sessions in an intensive programme of activities at a dedicated facility in North Wales.

2.13   A learning innovation team provides strategic direction for learning, teaching and innovation, and the Kaplan Tutor Academy manages strategic development across the Company. Teaching staff confirm their engagement with activities and events arranged by the Academy. They can take part in a series of web-based seminars to enhance teaching practice, and online training is provided to update curriculum knowledge. Staff regularly attend external curriculum update conferences and annual internal training events. Some academic staff attend the Kaplan Europe Academic Excellence Summit. Financial and remission support is available to staff who wish to pursue discipline-related study, both for professional practice and for academic study up to level 8 in *The framework for higher education qualifications England, Wales and Northern Ireland.*

2.14   Teaching excellence is rewarded at both School and national level. The School is developing a Postgraduate Certificate in Education for its own staff. Teaching staff value the range of high-quality opportunities, the central focus provided by the Kaplan Tutor Academy, and the support of the School for their professional development and their teaching responsibilities. The review team considers the School's comprehensive and systematic approach to staff development to be a feature of good practice.

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

2.15   Physical resources for students include well equipped and well appointed lecture facilities of varying sizes, a shared social space with staff close to tutorial offices to facilitate student-tutor interaction, and a learning resources centre, which includes quiet and non-quiet computer study areas and a library. The student submission refers to the need to expand facilities in relation to the growth in student numbers; this view was confirmed in meetings with students and the School is in the active process of developing enhanced learning resources at another local site in response to student demand and rising student numbers.

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   Responsibilities for publishing and ensuring the accuracy of public information are shared between the School and its awarding body. The School publishes a wide range of information about its higher education provision for current and prospective students in electronic format on its website, including School details, facilities, programmes, entry requirements, application procedures, and careers guidance. Individual programme information includes teaching, learning and assessment methods, fees, timetables, and links to the University and partner law firms. The content, which is primarily focused on prospective students and other interested parties, is clear, comprehensive and easy to navigate.

3.2   For sustainability reasons the School produces a single comprehensive hard copy prospectus of programme and application information. This can also be downloaded from the website and mirrors website information. A range of marketing materials in the form of advertisements, flyers and posters is also available in electronic and paper format. These are used at promotional events such as open days. Students confirm that the range of information available is helpful and objective in allowing them to choose an appropriate programme.

3.3   A range of information is available to enrolled students through the virtual learning environment of the University. This includes handbooks, learning materials, module guides, policies for appeals, mitigating circumstances and plagiarism, and recorded lecture sessions. Paper copies of documents are also made available to students. All students are sent a welcome guide as an email attachment before starting their programme. This contains helpful details of the School, staff and other appropriate contacts, transport arrangements, and other important guidance. A very small number of International students attend the School. Before entering the UK they are sent an electronic copy of an international student handbook by email which contains briefings and familiarisation information about the School and UK study.

3.4   The University stipulates conditions for advertising and promoting their courses. These primarily focus on the use of logos and University information. Discussions with staff and scrutiny of evidence confirm that the School fulfils its obligations in this respect. Overall, information is well presented and effectively communicated to students and stakeholders.

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

3.5   There are clear lines and defined areas of responsibility for ensuring that information is accurate and complete before publication. All persons who deal with the processes and arrangements relating to its accuracy and completeness are responsible to the Kaplan UK Management Board. Within the School the Head of Marketing manages the flow and accuracy of public information including web and paper-based content and products.

3.6   Programme prospectuses are prepared by the Kaplan UK Marketing Team, in conjunction with the Business Development Manager and other relevant staff of the School. All other public information is published by the Kaplan UK marketing team in collaboration with appropriate product managers. There is a thorough and systematic process for ensuring that this public information is checked and complete before publication.

This process checks and scrutinises the documentation at each stage, including original drafts, revisions, conformance to house styles, appearance and suitability. In addition, the University may check copies where necessary. The review team considers this thorough and exhaustive process to represent good practice.

3.7   Effective accuracy checks on the content for the School website are carried out when changes to content are needed, for example open day dates and materials, or when new content is introduced. In these cases, new or amended material is sent to the School Marketing Team in electronic format. A final check is carried out by the Marketing Team before the final upload onto the website.

3.8   Programme handbooks follow guidelines of the University for format and content. Checks for accuracy and currency are made by course leaders prior to publication and checked finally by the Deputy Course Leader, Legal Practice Course. Learning materials produced by the University are checked at source of origin. Where materials are produced jointly between the University and the Law School, discussions take place before final production along with an annual review by the University in conjunction with School staff. Documentation is not loaded onto the virtual learning environment until these checks have been carried out and all copies approved. All paper copies printed by the School are taken from the virtual learning environment, which ensures that they are accurate and current.

3.9   Data protection is closely monitored with clear processes in place for the publication of student details and opt-out functions. Where the School wishes to use information for promotional purposes, individual consent forms are used to ensure that appropriate permissions are obtained for information used for photographic and film media.

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

Action plan[3]

Kaplan Law School action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight May 2012						
Good practice	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The review team identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the provider:						
• the comprehensive and systematic way in which staff development is planned and delivered, which impacts positively upon student learning (paragraph 2.14)	To continue to enhance the systematic approach by formalising peer observations process	30 August 2012	Kaplan Training Academy	Formal observation process	Kaplan UK Management board	Biannual staff feedback on the suitability of the peer observation process
• a well designed and exhaustive process assures the accuracy and completeness of published information (paragraph 3.6).	To continue to improve the completeness of information by introducing an electronically based workflow to streamline organisational wide processes	31 December 2012	Heads of marketing	Electronic workflow process	Kaplan UK Management board	Product heads review use of the system

[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

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:						
• involve students more formally in validation, revalidation and course modification (paragraph 2.5)	Use student reps in validation/modification events and/or circulate for Staff Student Liaison Committee and Programme Committee meeting discussion	From September 2012	Course leaders	Agenda items for discussion	Kaplan Law School senior management and Nottingham Trent University/Solicitors Regulation Authority Quality Assurance report	Through annual programme standards and quality reports to Nottingham Trent University and Solicitors Regulation Authority monitoring reports
• consider a more systematic approach when communicating actions taken as a result of student feedback (paragraph 2.7).	Local and national publication of how student feedback has informed improvements	31 December 2012	Centre managers and product managers	Local and national publication	Kaplan UK Management Board	Quarterly evaluation on board reports on improvements made and publicised

About QAA

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

QAA's aims are to:

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

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

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

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

Glossary

This glossary explains terms used in this report. You can find a fuller glossary at: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary. Formal definitions of key terms can be found in the *Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook*[4]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

framework A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

framework for higher education qualifications A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

provider An institution that offers courses of higher education, typically on behalf of a separate **awarding body or organisation**. In the context of REO, the term means an independent college.

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

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

quality See **academic quality**.

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

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

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

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk