The City College

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

June 2012

Key findings about The City College

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in June 2012, the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of the University of the West of England, Bristol (through the Management Development Partnership), Heriot-Watt University 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 these awarding bodies.

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

Good practice

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

- the provision, within the internal verification process, of clear and focused advice to staff on providing feedback to students (paragraph 1.6)
- the comprehensive academic and pastoral support provided for students (paragraphs 2.5 and 2.6).

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:

- continue to develop and strengthen its management and committee structures (paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3)
- devise and implement formal processes for student engagement and the use of student views in quality enhancement (paragraphs 2.4 and 3.1)
- identify and deliver staff development within a strategic framework (paragraph 2.7).

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

- conduct the planned audit of the match of its activities to the Academic Infrastructure, and disseminate the results to staff (paragraph 1.5)
- formalise the channels for the dissemination of good practice for cross-college quality assurance and enhancement (paragraph 1.7)
- develop its plans for the peer observation of teaching (paragraph 2.3)
- include the use and monitoring of social media sites in a formal information technology policy, which recognises the potential for misuse of these platforms (paragraph 3.6).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](1) (REO) conducted by [QAA](2) at The City College (the provider; the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the provider discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes of study that the provider delivers on behalf of Edexcel, Heriot-Watt University and the University of the West of England, Bristol (through Management Development Partnership). The review was carried out by Peter Cutting, Rob Mason and Helen Thomas (reviewers), and Catherine Fairhurst (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the *[Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](3).*[2] Evidence in support of the review included student programme handbooks, policy documents, notes of meetings, partnership agreements, the website, publicity material and meetings with staff and students.

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

- the 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](4).

The City College (the College) is a privately owned college established in 1979 in north London. It moved to the current site on the edge of the City of London in 1995 and has had various validating partners. The current partners are Edexcel, Heriot-Watt University, and the Management Development Partnership whose programmes are validated by the University of the West of England, Bristol. The externally validated programmes include: HNDs, an MBA and the final stage of three BSc (Hons) level 6 awards.

There are currently 76 students on Edexcel programmes, 33 students enrolled on the Heriot-Watt University MBA programme, and 18 on the Management Development Partnership's BSc (Hons) final stage programmes.

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

Edexcel
- Advanced Professional Diploma in Management Studies (level 7)
- HND in Business
- HND in Computing
- HND in Health and Social Care
- HND in Hospitality Management
- HND in Travel and Tourism

University of the West of England, Bristol (through Management Development Partnership)
- BSc (Hons) in Business Management (final stage at level 6)
- BSc (Hons) in Hospitality and Tourism Management (final stage at level 6)
- BSc (Hons) in Health and Social Care Management (final stage at level 6)

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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.

Heriot-Watt University
- Master's in Business Administration (MBA)

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College's responsibilities for the management of standards and the monitoring of the quality of learning opportunities vary according to the awarding body and are specified in its agreements. For all programmes, the College is responsible for student recruitment and induction, teaching, student support and learning resources. The College's responsibilities for Edexcel programmes also include student selection and assessments.

Recent developments

From September 2012, a new department within the College will offer programmes in traditional Chinese medicine, including acupuncture, kinesiology and tui na.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. A sample of students was asked by the College for their comments on the quality of the provision. Topics were suggested for them to discuss. A part-time member of staff chaired three discussion groups, involving a total of 18 students, and collated their comments. The team found the student submission helpful and explored its content in meetings with students, both at the preparatory meeting and during the visit, to help gain a clear picture of the student learning experience.

Detailed findings about The City College

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The College's responsibilities are clearly set out and understood by key staff. They include managing student recruitment, scheduling, teaching, and providing appropriate student support and learning resources for all programmes. The College has no assessment responsibility for the final stage of the degree programmes validated by the Management Development Partnership and awarded by the University of the West of England, Bristol, or for the assessment of the MBA awarded by Heriot-Watt University. The College is responsible for assessment for programmes approved by Edexcel. The senior managers who have oversight for the management of academic standards are: the Principal, the Director of Studies, the Director of Student Services, the Director of Assessment and the three heads
of department.

1.2 The College's Academic Board supervises academic standards effectively, but its actions are not formally recorded. There are meetings and email correspondence between tutors and managers as they react to operational and administrative issues and student requests. However, the outcomes from programme committee meetings and responses to external examiners' reports are not always consistently monitored. The College is developing formal procedures to cover programme approval and changes, tutor appointments, College policies, quality enhancement, parity of academic standards and learning opportunities across programmes, and the dissemination of good practice.

1.3 Oversight of academic standards by the senior managers is effective because of regular communication between them, but it is informal. The College recognises the informality as an area for development and intends to improve its management and committee arrangements by establishing clear terms of reference, defined memberships, a formal reporting structure and procedures for the production of action notes.The review team considers it advisable that the College continues to develop and strengthen its management and committee arrangements to provide a consistent oversight of academic standards.

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

1.4 The external reference points that the College uses to maintain standards are the awarding bodies' contracts and agreements, and the Academic Infrastructure.

1.5 The College engages appropriately with the Academic Infrastructure in areas such as programme development, approval, monitoring and review, assessment, academic appeals, entry requirements, and academic partnerships through its adherence to the requirements of its awarding bodies. The College management team is fully engaged with the external reference points; however, other staff are less well informed regarding key elements within the Academic Infrastructure. There are plans to audit College activities and compare them with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*. The review team considers it desirable that the College conducts the planned audit of the match of its activities to the Academic Infrastructure, and disseminates the results to staff.

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

1.6   The internal verification processes for the Edexcel-validated programmes fully assure academic standards. The College's staff demonstrate a high degree of awareness and engagement with these processes. The team concurs with the external examiners' conclusions that students are provided with constructive feedback and assessment decisions are appropriate and consistent. The provision, within the internal verification process, of clear, constructive and focused advice to staff on providing feedback to students is good practice.

1.7   The opportunities for sharing good practice are limited and primarily focused on external awarding bodies' events. For example, the Management Development Partnership holds revision workshops at the College, enabling tutors to discuss concerns with subject leaders and programme managers. Although new draft terms of reference for both the Academic Board and Programme Team meetings include aspects related to good practice, no significant activity had taken place at the time of the review. The review team considers it desirable that the College formalises the channels for the dissemination of good practice for cross-college quality assurance and enhancement.

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

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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 team concurs with the awarding bodies' conclusions that the College fulfils its varied responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities delegated from the awarding bodies effectively but informally. There are positive and supportive relationships between the College and its awarding bodies. Arrangements for managing the quality of learning opportunities mirror those for academic standards, as outlined in paragraphs 1.1 to 1.3.

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

2.2   The use of the Academic Infrastructure in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities is as outlined for the management of academic standards in paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5. The College engages appropriately with the Academic Infrastructure in areas such as planned programmes of study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support and resources.

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

2.3   There is no formal College procedure for assessing teaching quality, disseminating good teaching and learning practice, or identifying appropriate staff development needs. The enhancement of teaching and learning relies on general discussions in programme and heads of department meetings. Some teaching observations are carried out by senior managers as a reaction to issues identified in student feedback, external verifiers'

comments, tutor underperformance, or poor programme outcomes. The College has recognised that the process needs further development and has designed a peer observation scheme to be piloted in the next academic year. The review team considers it desirable that the College develops its plans for the peer observation of teaching supported by the dissemination of good practice.

2.4   The College has made limited attempts to collect and use student views on the quality of teaching and learning. Students have participated in focus groups and completed questionnaires, but there are no examples of how student views have been systematically captured and analysed to enhance quality. Discussions with students confirm that they consider the teaching they receive to be good and cite examples of good links of theory to practice, clear explanations of concepts, and helpful group and participatory activities. However, the review team considers it advisable that the College devises and implements formal processes for student engagement and the use of student views to help assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced.

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

2.5   Academic and pastoral support for students is strong. There are timetabled tutorials, access to staff by an open-door policy and an appointment system. The awarding bodies provide virtual learning environments, electronic forums and revision workshops. In the case of Heriot-Watt University, detailed written module content is provided. Sessions on study skills, academic writing, and English language if necessary, are provided by the College. When appropriate, students are referred to an outside agency for specialist help. Students reported that they greatly value the range of support and access to staff provided by the College.

2.6   A comprehensive application and admissions process provides prospective students with clear guidance on their obligations and the requirements of the programmes and study in the UK. A thorough induction provides students with key information particularly appropriate to first-time visitors to the UK. It includes inputs on College facilities, programme requirements, living in London and the UK, local, regional, and national transport, and equality and diversity. Provision of support for students who declare a physical disability or medical condition is effective. Disability action plans outline appropriate support arrangements. These are reviewed by the Disability Action Plan Review Committee, which reports to the Academic Board. The College uses questionnaires in timetabled sessions to gather views on the effectiveness of the quality of advice and guidance. The review team considers that the comprehensive academic and pastoral support provided for students is good practice.

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

2.7   The management of staff development is informal and reactive. Internal and external activities are predominately focused on operational and regulatory processes. For teachers on the MBA, these include a biennial conference at Heriot-Watt University, virtual learning environment discussion groups, and opportunities to visit the University. Tutors of the final stage degree programmes attend London-based seminars with other partner colleges. Tutors of Edexcel programmes attend external development events, which are mainly focused on assessment. There is, however, very limited planning and delivery of staff development at College level. Evaluation of staff development does not effectively identify the impact of the developmental activity or how it may contribute to enhancement. The review team considers that it is advisable for the College to identify needs and deliver staff development within a strategic framework in order to enhance the teaching, learning and assessment of their higher education provision.

2.8 Tutors are well qualified in their disciplines with considerable, appropriate industrial and commercial experience. Many of the staff have doctoral or master's degrees, but few have teaching qualifications. The awarding bodies assure the suitability of tutors for their programmes through their approval processes set out in the relevant agreements. Students value the staff's experience and knowledge, and comment that it contributes well to the quality of teaching and learning they receive.

2.9 There is a comprehensive and effective induction process for new tutors. Each receives an induction guide and is assigned a mentor who meets them regularly, usually weekly, on a one-to-one basis. Tutors agree an individual development plan, which is proportional to their experience and the programme they will deliver. Plans mainly focus on programme administration, assessment processes and marking. The Management Development Partnership provides an induction session for staff teaching on their programmes, which includes key programme information, such as assessment protocols, plagiarism, use of virtual learning environments, and the link tutor system. All new staff receive a College staff manual, which provides clear guidance on employment regulations and other related policies and procedures.

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

2.10 There are limited formal procedures for the planning and provision of physical and electronic learning resources. Resource needs are identified through informal requests by tutors and programme leaders to senior management. This process covers library texts, computer software and hardware, and general teaching resources. The provision of books and other study texts is adequate for all the programmes, and the numbers and range meet the awarding bodies' requirements. There is no system to enable books to be borrowed and taken from the library to allow use off-site and students have requested this facility to be provided. The College does not support a virtual learning environment, but students have access to teaching notes and other documents by using the College's web application platform. The provision of computer facilities is well matched to the needs of students. A wireless network is available to students who have their own computers.

2.11 Heriot-Watt University supplies the MBA students with all necessary learning materials. These students also have access to the University's virtual learning environment, which has a wide range of programme information, study texts, past examination papers, sample answers, programme texts and an online forum. Students following the Management Development Partnership programmes have access to the company's virtual learning environment, which contains a comprehensive range of study resources and guides, and access to e-books.

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.

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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's public information effectively communicates to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides. The main method for communicating with prospective students and the general public is through the website provided by an external contractor. The website provides comprehensive information, in a variety of languages, about the learning experience offered by the College and its partners. This enables potential students to make informed decisions about the suitability of the College's programmes for them. There is no formal engagement of students in ensuring the accessibility, accuracy and completeness of public information, but the students reported to the team that the support and guidance they receive before entry is accurate and helps them to choose the appropriate programme.

3.2 The College provides a comprehensive and helpful range of information for students, including pre-arrival briefing notes and induction materials, College student handbook and Edexcel programme handbook, assignment briefs, timetables and course calendar, notices and posters. These all supplement the information provided by the awarding bodies.

3.3 Information for staff is managed effectively through informal communication between the Senior Management Team and teaching staff and internal newsletters from the Principal. The College has a series of shared computer drives that enable efficient and differential provision of information to groups of staff, supplemented by a very visible noticeboard.

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

3.4 The College public information is complete, accurate, current and accessible. The monitoring of web-based public information is effectively managed by the Senior Management Team through the corporate shared drive. The Director of Studies is responsible for the formal signing off of material. The majority of recruitment advertising is through magazines, specialist publications and web advertising. A consistent message is given by the recruitment activities. These are managed by the Principal who interviews all prospective international students, delivers overseas marketing presentations and engages with international recruitment agents.

3.5 The College has an effective, if informal, process for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of paper-based internal information. Material is developed and checked by senior managers on the corporate server and then approved by the Director of Studies. Errors for correction are reported informally to the Senior Management Team. Version control is managed by dating material before release and the timely removal or archiving of older material.

3.6 The College operates and manages a social media site, which students are encouraged to follow for news and timetable changes. The students reported that they value and find the facility helpful. The College has a clear information technology policy to ensure proper use of the facilities, but there is no policy for the use and monitoring of social media. The team considers it desirable that the College includes the use and monitoring of social media sites in a formal policy to recognise the potential for misuse of these platforms.

3.7   There is a shared responsibility for the procedures of ensuring the accuracy of public information for student admission. Student guidance and induction is shared by the College with Heriot-Watt University and with the Management Development Partnership. All the information relating to the Edexcel programmes is the responsibility of the College. Currently, there is no formal collection of student views to monitor the accessibility, accuracy and completeness of public information.

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]

The City College action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight June 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:						
• the provision, within the internal verification process, of clear and focused advice to staff on providing feedback to students (paragraph 1.6)	Staff seminars/ College newsletters - to share and propagate good practice Update staff manual with examples of good working practice and further detail on BTEC expectations on providing feedback	Ongoing staff seminars to happen at mid-point during the semester (starting September/ October 2012)	The Principal's newsletter Director of Studies to facilitate staff meetings with heads of department and Director of Assessment	Peer observations show enhanced teaching methods Student surveys report higher satisfaction with teaching styles Minutes of meetings	Senior Management Team	Peer observation write-ups, positive feedback from staff/student representatives Suggestions from staff meetings and by Senior Management Team for future good practice in feedback and any policy changes required
• the comprehensive academic and pastoral support provided for students (paragraphs 2.5 and 2.6).	Publish pre-arrival advice on website Ask for feedback on website to improve reader experience	January 2013 January 2013	Director of Studies	Testimonials from past and current students	Senior Management Team	Publish testimonials on website with permission from students

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

Recommendations	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is **advisable** for the provider to:						
• continue to develop and strengthen its management and committee structures (paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3)	Review committee structures	February 2013 Ongoing and annually in August	Senior Management Team	All committees functioning well and the reporting structure well established Roles of members identified, who have the right skills, abilities and experience, and who understand their responsibilities	Senior Management Team/committee members	Minutes which demonstrate that action points have been completed and that feedback from committees has been promulgated and acted upon
• devise and implement formal processes for student engagement and the use of student views in quality enhancement (paragraphs 2.4 and 3.1)	Appoint student representatives by course	October 2012 and review each semester	Senior Management Team	Student representatives for each course identified and displayed on noticeboards	Senior Management Team/staff newsletters	Minutes of staff/student representatives meetings and action taken
	Hold staff/student representatives meetings	At the start and end of each semester	Senior Management Team	Staff/student representatives meetings held each semester	Senior Management Team/staff newsletters	Display minutes and action taken on noticeboards
	Make regular use of student questionnaires	At induction, mid-term	Senior Management Team	Analysis of student satisfaction,		Survey analysed by Senior Management

		and end of term		course content, pre-arrival and induction information, including changes to visa regulations		Team made available on noticeboards
• identify and deliver staff development within a strategic framework (paragraph 2.7).	Review staff appraisal cycle Explore Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector/ Diploma for Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector, or better, for staff development	At induction, mid-term and end of term At induction, end of probation period/ anniversary of the employee	Senior Management Team Director of Studies	Explicit cycle for staff appraisal Staff input to their own development Staff undertake appropriate training	Senior Management Team	Documented staff appraisals for each staff member Self-assessments Documented staff attendance at training sessions and feedback received
Recommendations	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team considers that it is **desirable** for the provider to:						
• conduct the planned audit of the match of its activities to the Academic Infrastructure, and disseminate the results to staff (paragraph 1.5)	Gap analysis	Starting December 2012 and then every quarter	Director of Studies/Director of Student Services	Changes implemented to bring current College policy into line with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education	Senior Management Team	Policy changes documented and shared between Senior Management Team/staff via newsletters

• formalise the channels for the dissemination of good practice for cross-college quality assurance and enhancement (paragraph 1.7)	Hold regular staff meetings to share good experience and suggest improvements to partners Explore ways to enhance the virtual leaning environment	Twice per semester and any additional meetings held with partners	Senior Management Team/staff	Improved engagement with and sharing between staff Increased staff use of virtual learning environment and sharing good practices via virtual learning environment forums	Senior Management Team/heads of department	Agreement on changes which may improve academic outcomes and student satisfaction and learning
• develop its plans for the peer observation of teaching (paragraph 2.3)	Extend peer observations	At least once per semester per lecturer (more often if problems identified)	Staff/heads of department	Areas identified for improved performance and support agreed between heads of department/ staff and Principal	Senior Management Team	Observations and agreed action documented (copy held in staff member's file)
• include the use and monitoring of social media sites in a formal information technology policy, which recognises the potential for misuse of these platforms (paragraph 3.6).	Amend College policy for use of computers on-site to include use of social networking sites (inside or outside of College) Computer Use Policy signed by all students when they first enrol, to include details of acceptable behaviour on	September 2012 induction Mailshots to current students (before December 2012) Social networking sites	Director of Finance Director of Studies Principal	All students signed new College Computer Use Policy Any matters giving concerns over the misuse of computer networks and issues dealt with by the IT head of department in	Senior Management Team Senior Management Team	Copies of signed agreements in student files New policy available on noticeboards Monthly report on incidence of misuse of computer network or on social networking sites

	social media Provide continuous access to paper-based student questionnaire Investigate alternative survey tools, for example Survey Monkey	monitored weekly Paper-based survey responses to be analysed on a monthly basis		conjunction with Director of Studies	by Senior Management Team Summary of survey findings and action taken posted on noticeboards

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.