



# **Ashport Ltd t/a Shakespeare College London**

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

July 2013

## Key findings about Ashport Ltd t/a Shakespeare College London

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in July 2013, 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 programmes it offers on behalf of Pearson (designated as Edexcel by the College) and the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants.

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 organisations.

The team considers that reliance **can** be placed on the information that the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

### Good practice

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

- the College's encouragement of, and responsiveness to, student views in key areas, including curriculum and resources (paragraphs 1.3 and 3.5)
- continual formative dialogue providing feedback to students through extensive use of individual and group emails (paragraphs 2.4 and 2.8).

### 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:

- address the lack of customised Pearson course information (paragraphs 1.5 and 3.2)
- implement fully its scheduled annual review of programmes (paragraph 1.8)
- implement fully its new policy for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information (paragraph 3.4).

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

- complete the planned mapping of its policies and procedures to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraph 1.6)
- improve consistency in the quality and focus of written feedback on marked summative assessment (paragraph 2.8)
- continue to develop its online resources (paragraph 2.12)
- review classroom facilities to meet the needs of all students (paragraph 2.13).

## About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)<sup>1</sup> (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at Ashport Ltd t/a Shakespeare College London (the College), which is a privately funded provider of higher education. 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 Pearson (designated as Edexcel by the College) and the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA). The review was carried out by Dr Elizabeth Briggs, Mr David Jones and Mr Mike Slawin (reviewers) and Mr Peter Clarke (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the [Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](#).<sup>2</sup> Evidence in support of the review included the College prospectus, accreditation agreements from awarding organisations, minutes of meetings, external examiner reports, meetings with staff and a meeting with students.

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

- the UK Quality Code for Higher Education
- the Qualifications and Credit Framework
- awarding organisation requirements
- Independent Schools Inspectorate.

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

The College was founded in 2001 to offer a range of business and accountancy qualifications. Higher National programmes are awarded by Pearson, accountancy programmes lead to awards of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA). Four teachers contribute to the higher education programmes which cater for 313 students, all studying full-time. In addition to its higher education provision, the College also offers English language programmes, which are available to higher education students if needed.

At the time of the review, the provider offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their awarding organisations, student numbers are shown in brackets:

### **Pearson**

- HNC/HND Business (40)
- HNC/HND Health and Social Care (24)
- HNC/HND Travel & Tourism Management (15)

### **Chartered Institute of Management Accountants**

- Certificate Level (234)
- Operational Level (0)

## The provider's stated responsibilities

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<sup>1</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/educational-oversight](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/educational-oversight)

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx)

The College is responsible for recruiting and supporting students, arranging teaching and learning and providing appropriate resources and publicity for its programmes. In the case of Pearson programmes, the College is responsible for the assessment of students subject to approval by the external examiner. The awarding organisations are responsible for the design of the curriculum. CIMA sets and marks all assessments for its awards. The College provides CIMA students at Certificate level with IT resources for the completion of assessment tasks online.

## **Recent developments**

The College has recently consolidated its provision on to one site in Bloomsbury, having previously operated on two sites. Programmes offered on behalf of the Association of Business Executives ceased in 2011 and were replaced by the Higher National programmes.

## **Students' contribution to the review**

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider did not take up the invitation to present a written submission to the review team. Students met the coordinator at the preparatory visit and met the team during the review visit. These meetings provided valuable inputs into the review process.

## Detailed findings about Ashport Ltd t/a Shakespeare College London

### 1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The College manages its responsibilities for academic standards effectively through the oversight of the Principal, assisted by the Vice-Principal who also acts as Director of Studies. Quarterly formal Management and Administration Group meetings are supplemented by less formal meetings to resolve issues where rapid actions are considered necessary. This is facilitated by the small size of the College. Decisions reached in informal discussions are recorded at formal meetings in due course. Management Group meetings review College strategic matters.

1.2 The Board of Studies and Examination Boards provide effective oversight of academic issues. The College gathers enrolment and achievement data but recognises that a more structured monitoring process is required. To this end, it is starting to embed formal annual monitoring into the Board of Studies agenda so that the available data can be utilised in a more proactive manner. The clarity and incisiveness of minutes have improved significantly recently and this facilitates tracking of decisions.

1.3 The College actively and effectively consults students through a variety of methods, including a formal quarterly questionnaire, continuing informal feedback and the presence of student representatives on the Board of Studies. Students are encouraged to contribute their views on all aspects of provision and have a clear influence on their programmes of study. For example, their views have contributed to changes in the curricular content of the Higher National programmes in Travel & Tourism Management and to the design of the new website. The College's encouragement of, and responsiveness to, student views in key areas, including curriculum and resources, is **good practice**.

1.4 The College has well-considered planning arrangements. Its strategic plan, referred to as the Development Plan 2013-16, is reviewed at staff meetings and updated annually. The plan includes strategies for leadership and management developments, and for teaching, learning and assessment. The College has produced a revised Quality Assurance Manual, with policies, procedures and operational protocols that underpin the maintenance of academic standards. The College intends to review and update its policies and procedures regularly at its Management and Administration Group meetings.

#### How effectively does the College make use of external reference points to manage academic standards?

1.5 The College generally makes effective use of external reference points, through meeting the requirements of its awarding organisations. These ensure that the awards are aligned to the correct levels of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and subject benchmark statements. The College uses the generic published programme specifications for named awards. This is satisfactory for CIMA awards, but less so for Higher National awards, as the generic specifications do not reflect the specific nature of the College's programmes. It is **advisable** for the College to address the lack of customised Pearson course information, to assure its relevance to users and to meet the requirements of the awarding organisation and the recommendation of an external examiner.

1.6 The College has provided training to increase staff awareness of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and there is evidence that this has been successful. For example, staff demonstrated good understanding during discussions with the team, while students confirmed their understanding of the plagiarism policy and the use of accurate Harvard referencing. The College has developed new policies and procedures that are well designed to underpin the delivery and maintenance of academic standards. Staff indicated that the College intends to map these to the Quality Code. It is **desirable** for the College to complete the planned mapping of its policies and procedures to the Quality Code.

### **How does the College use external moderation, verification or examining to assure academic standards?**

1.7 The College operates effective processes to assure the academic standards of assessment. The Principal, acting as the Quality Nominee, liaises with Pearson, and all Higher National programmes have designated internal verifiers. Samples of assignment briefs demonstrate consistency in internal verification procedures, with grading criteria mapped to intended learning outcomes at the specified level. Examination boards consider and confirm student progression and awards, and agree student deferrals, referrals and resit arrangements. Staff have responded appropriately to issues raised in external examiner reports for all Higher National programmes. For example, the external examiner for the Health and Social Care programme recommended revision of assignment briefs to improve alignment with assessment criteria. Subsequent reports showed that revisions had been made in response.

1.8 The programmes are relatively new, with few completing students to date. Consequently, the College has not yet undertaken annual programme reviews. Staff informed the team that programme reviews are scheduled for autumn 2013, as recorded in the most recent Board of Studies minutes. It is **advisable** for the College to implement fully its scheduled annual review of programmes, to inform action plans and help maintain academic standards.

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

## **2 Quality of learning opportunities**

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

2.1 The College's arrangements for fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities mirror those for academic standards outlined in paragraphs 1.1 and 1.2. Operating through its quality assurance system and management structure the College fulfils the requirements of, and its responsibilities to, its awarding organisations. Procedures and processes designed to monitor the quality of learning opportunities are effective. These include analyses of student feedback and external examiner reports and interactions with awarding organisations. The Welfare Officer analyses and correlates student feedback and responds in a timely manner through student representatives.

## **How effectively does the College make use of external reference points to manage and enhance learning opportunities?**

2.2 As outlined in paragraphs 1.5 and 1.6, the College effectively engages with a variety of external reference points. Apart from guidance from the awarding organisation specifications and liaising with external examiners, lecturers engage with industry and sector practitioners to help them stay in touch with current standards of practice.

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

2.3 The College maintains an effective oversight of the quality of teaching and learning through a series of mechanisms linked to management and academic meetings. Programme managers and student representatives offer progress reports on aspects of their courses, including teaching and learning, at quarterly Board of Studies meetings, and action points are drawn up if necessary. Teaching staff are encouraged and supported to undertake continuing professional development activities, including scholarly activity and attendance at accredited courses to update their specialist knowledge and improve their performance, and this in turn feeds into appraisals.

2.4 In the case of formative tests and exercises and the developmental stages of summative work, students receive accurate, full and developmental feedback on their progress. This helps to enhance and develop understanding and support learning. Much of this valuable feedback is provided by email on a one-to-one basis, as well as on a whole-group basis. This continual formative dialogue providing feedback to students through extensive use of individual and group emails is **good practice**.

2.5 The College carries out formal teaching observations supported by additional peer observations, with outcomes recorded on a well-designed pro forma. Staff acknowledge that these processes have led to improved classroom practice, for example, by encouraging a greater variety of activities. These observations inform the effective, structured and supportive appraisal process.

2.6 There is a clear policy for the recruitment of teaching staff. Those who do not hold a teaching qualification have the opportunity to gain one, while industrial and practical experience is considered equally important.

## **How does the College assure itself that students are supported effectively?**

2.7 The College supports its students well. The well-designed induction programme introduces students to the College and their programme and includes an initial assessment with both generic and programme-specific elements. This helps staff and students identify any particular needs. The student welfare policy embeds elements of tutorial support into the student experience. The teaching team provides excellent support to students both on an informal basis and through regular Student Progress Meetings. Students praised the support received from senior management and welfare staff and commented very favourably on the enthusiasm and commitment of the teaching staff. The College provides free English language support to higher education students, in order to enhance progression opportunities.

2.8 As stated in paragraph 2.4, students receive full and supportive formative feedback. They welcome the arrangements for submitting a draft of their work prior to its final submission for assessment. This provides opportunities for developmental feedback and helps in the detection of any malpractice. Students also reported that, in addition to the

written feedback on scripts, helpful and extensive feedback is also provided both orally and by email. Written feedback provided on return of summative assessment is variable, but generally adequate, with guidance provided on how to improve. However, the team saw examples of rather limited written feedback, even on referred work. It is **desirable** that the College improves consistency in the quality and focus of written feedback on marked summative assessment.

### **How effectively does the College develop its staff in order to improve student learning opportunities?**

2.9 The detailed Staff Handbook supports the induction of new staff, and is enhanced by informal peer support mechanisms. A process of peer observation and more formalised management observation underpins the induction period, with new staff being observed within the first month. The College's Teaching and Assessment Policies set out the key expectations of teachers. Teaching staff are effectively monitored throughout the academic year and this contributes to the appraisal process. It is clear that both staff and management clearly understand and appreciate the value of these processes in driving up standards.

2.10 The College encourages staff to undertake formal and informal continual professional development activities and provides some financial support for this. It provides a programme of targeted staff development activities which is determined by the outcomes of observations, appraisals and student feedback. Furthermore, staff readily share good practice on a more informal basis. The College has provided support to staff wishing to study for a Diploma to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector award.

### **How effectively does the College ensure that learning resources are accessible to students and sufficient to enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes?**

2.11 The College's small library contains an appropriate stock of books, CDs and computers for student use. The latter are in the process of being upgraded. Reviewers concur with the view of students that the resources provided are effective in enabling them to complete their work. In addition, students are directed to relevant websites and electronic resources through emails with hyperlinks, and also as part of class activities.

2.12 The College's provision of computer facilities, including wireless access to the internet, meets student needs. This includes an open-access computer room, available during the college opening hours, in addition to the facilities available in the library. While the College has clear plans, it has not yet developed online access to resources and lecture notes out of College hours. It has recently developed a new website, and intends to implement a live blog to engage with current and potential students. The strategy is ambitious, with plans to update the website regularly with helpful articles relating to aspects of College life and resources. The College also intends to introduce a student extranet to enhance the student experience and provide a more structured access to online resources. It is **desirable** that the College continues to develop its online resources in line with its plans.

2.13 The College ensures that it keeps its resources and learning and teaching spaces under review. In particular, it uses student questionnaires, which are analysed centrally. Resources generally meet the requirements of the programmes, and students endorse this view. However, the chair tablets provided in classrooms in lieu of desks are not conducive to undertaking accountancy exercises, as they provide inadequate space for such activity: a point noted by CIMA students. It is **desirable** that the College reviews its classroom facilities to meet the needs of all students.



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 Information about learning opportunities

#### How effectively does the College communicate information about learning opportunities to students and other stakeholders?

3.1 The College effectively communicates a wide range of information to potential students, current students and staff. Its prospectus, which is available on the website, includes information on College facilities, student support, living in London and courses and course expectations. Other programme-related documents, policies and procedures are available in hard copy on enrolment. The College's recently updated website allows electronic access to key policies and procedures for staff, students and the general public. Staff are kept well informed of developments and updates, both formally and informally. The quarterly management and administrative meetings, chaired by the Principal and open to all staff, provide a valuable forum for communicating and discussing important key developments and identifying necessary actions.

3.2 The College's new website is easily navigable and includes details relating to courses, admissions, student support, access to the prospectus and other relevant material. Before enrolment, students receive clear, accurate and helpful information on learning opportunities. Following enrolment, the College provides students with a clear and useful student handbook which includes information and guidance on a range of issues such as referencing and plagiarism. In addition to this, CIMA students receive a brief college-produced Course Handbook. However, the College does not produce course handbooks for the HND programmes, although it provides links to Pearson resources and specifications.

#### How effective are the College's arrangements for assuring that information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy?

3.3 The Principal, along with the Vice Principal/Director of Studies, takes executive responsibility for ensuring the accuracy and currency of all published information, supported by a newly appointed Marketing Manager. The College has recently introduced a policy for assuring the accuracy and completeness of published information. This clearly identifies the responsibilities of key staff in ensuring that information about learning opportunities is appropriate, accurate and trustworthy. It further asserts that course information will be appropriately contextualised, current, and accurate.

3.4 The new policy is well considered. It requires the Principal, Vice Principal/Director of Studies and the Marketing Manager to meet regularly to discuss the content of leaflets, the prospectus and information contained on the website. The intention of these meetings is to see that publicity is scrutinised to ensure it gives an accurate reflection of the courses available to students, as well as any potential progression opportunities that the student may wish to pursue. The new website went live two days before the review took place, and although it is a significant improvement on the previous website, some minor inaccuracies were noted. With the introduction of the new policy, it is **advisable** for the College to implement fully its new policy for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information.

3.5 Student feedback is taken into account via a questionnaire that requests them to comment on the information available to them. Students confirmed that they were consulted regarding the new website, and that the new website was much improved and easier to use as a result.

The team concludes that reliance **can** be placed on the information that the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

## Action plan<sup>3</sup>

| Ashport Ltd t/a Shakespeare College London action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight July 2013  |   |                    |                         |  |                                 |   |
|--|---|--------------------|-------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---|
| Good practice  | Action to be taken  | Target date        | Action by               | Success indicators   | Reported to                     | Evaluation                                    |
| The review team identified the following areas of <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:  |   |                    |                         |  |                                 |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the College's encouragement of, and responsiveness to, student views in key areas, including curriculum and resources (paragraphs 1.3 and 3.5)</li> </ul> | Distribute student questionnaires quarterly and analyse results | September 2013     | Student Welfare Officer | More than 50% of questionnaires completed with meaningful feedback | Board of Studies and management | Analysis of comments and actions as necessary |
|  | Formulate and distribute individual Unit reviews                | October 2013       | All teachers            | Feedback on unit content   | Board of Studies and management | Annual self-assessment                        |
|  | Hold quarterly Students' Union meetings                         | September 2013     | Students' Union         | Improved student engagement  | Board of Studies and management | Annual self-assessment                        |
|  | Develop website resources                                       | First quarter 2014 | Marketing Manager       | Website use and student feedback                                   | Board of Studies and management | Website statistics                            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continual formative dialogue providing feedback to students</li> </ul>  | Formulate Policy to formalise format for dialogue between       | October 2013       | Teachers and management | Policy written leading to higher level of student                  | Board of Studies                | Annual review                                 |

<sup>3</sup> The College 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 College's awarding organisations.

|  |   |                       |                                  |  |                           |  |
|--|---|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--|---------------------------|--|
| through extensive use of individual and group emails (paragraphs 2.4 and 2.8).   | teacher and students and include in student handbooks   |                       |                                  | satisfaction evidenced in questionnaires and academic progress |                           |  |
| <b>Advisable</b>   | <b>Action to be taken</b>   | <b>Target date</b>    | <b>Action by</b>                 | <b>Success indicators</b>                                      | <b>Reported to</b>        | <b>Evaluation</b>                        |
| The team considers that it is <b>advisable</b> for the College to:   |   |                       |                                  |  |                           |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>address the lack of customised Pearson course information (paragraphs 1.5 and 3.2)</li> </ul>                               | Produce course handbooks for the Higher National Diploma programme using Pearson specifications including delivery timetable      | November 2013         | Higher National Diploma teachers | Access to course information to raise student awareness        | Principal                 | Annual inspections and reviews           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>implement fully its scheduled annual review of programmes (paragraph 1.8)</li> </ul>  | Analyse data from questionnaires, external examiners reports, and student progress and address at Board of Studies group meetings | Autumn 2013           | Teachers and management          | Action plan for 2014 programmes                                | Principal external bodies | Standards verification by Pearson        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>implement fully its new policy for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information (paragraph 3.4).</li> </ul> | Formalise weekly marketing meetings in addition to informal daily communications as needed  | Immediate and ongoing | Marketing Manager and Principal  | All documentation matches published content                    | Principal                 | As an agenda item at management meetings |

| <b>Desirable</b>  | <b>Action to be taken</b>  | <b>Target date</b> | <b>Action by</b>             | <b>Success indicators</b>   | <b>Reported to</b>         | <b>Evaluation</b>  |
|---|--|--------------------|------------------------------|---|----------------------------|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>complete the planned mapping of its policies and procedures to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraph 1.6)</li> </ul> | Revisit all policies and procedures to ensure their alignment with the Quality Code where relevant | December 2013      | Teachers and management      | Policy manual updated to comply with the Quality Code requirements                                | Management Team            | Annual QAA reviews   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improve consistency in the quality and focus of written feedback on marked summative assessment (paragraph 2.8)</li> </ul>         | Standardise format for feedback to be in line with external examiner recommendations               | October 2013       | Teachers' internal verifiers | Improved standard of feedback to students to be seen with immediate effect                        | Board of Studies           | Review by external examiners                                 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continue to develop its online resources (paragraph 2.12)</li> </ul>   | Review feasibility of an extranet including a blog for student engagement                          | First quarter 2014 | Marketing Manager            | Engagement with current/prospective students, with input, queries, suggestions and other feedback | Principal Board of Studies | Annual reviews and self-assessment                           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review classroom facilities to meet the needs of all students (paragraph 2.13).</li> </ul>   | Conduct a review of classroom facilities   | October 2013       | Teachers and management      | Identification of any shortcomings and recommended actions to improve                             | Principal                  | Any actions taken following the review of current facilities |

## 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](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

More detail about Review for Educational Oversight can be found at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/educational-oversight](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/educational-oversight).

## Glossary

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

**Academic Infrastructure** The core guidance developed and maintained by QAA in partnership with the UK higher education community and used by QAA and higher education providers until 2011-12 for quality assurance of UK higher education. It has since been replaced by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (**Quality Code**).

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

**academic standards** The standards set and maintained by higher education providers for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standards**.

**awarding body** A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the authority to award academic qualifications located on the **framework for higher education qualifications**, such as diplomas or degrees.

**awarding organisation** An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications.

**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 which formed the core element of the **Academic Infrastructure** (now superseded by the **Quality Code**).

**designated body** An organisation that has been formally appointed or recognised to perform a particular function. QAA has been recognised by UKBA as a designated body for the purpose of providing educational oversight.

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

**enhancement** The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. 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 for higher education qualifications** A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx)

**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 study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources, and specialist facilities (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

**learning outcomes** 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 reviews and reports.

**programme** An approved course of study that 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** A UK degree-awarding body or any other organisation that offers courses of higher education 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').

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

**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 standards** The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic award. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national qualifications frameworks and **subject benchmark statements**. See also **academic standards**.

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



**RG 1209 09/13**

**The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education**

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