UK Business Academy Ltd

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

October 2013

Key findings about UK Business Academy Ltd

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in October 2013, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (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 Institute of Administrative Management (IAM) and ATHE.

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**:

- useful feedback to students on their formative assessments (paragraph 1.8).

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:

- implement fully the annual programme evaluation plans (paragraph 1.3)
- include the Quality and Administrative Committee in assuring accuracy and accessibility of information (paragraph 3.4).

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

- specify student and staff representation in the terms of reference of committees (paragraph 1.2)
- engage all staff in the application of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraph 1.5)
- improve the design of the student survey questionnaires (paragraph 2.6)
- link teacher observation and appraisals with the staff development policy (paragraph 2.10)
- introduce opportunities for staff to obtain teaching qualifications (paragraph 2.11)
- formalise the review and allocation of learning resources (paragraph 2.13).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](1) (REO) conducted by [QAA](1) at UK Business Academy Ltd (the Academy), 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 the IAM and ATHE.
The review was carried out by Mr Daniel Morgan and Dr Ana-Maria Pascal (reviewers) and Mrs Catherine Fairhurst (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 includes: policies and procedures; reports supplied by the provider and its awarding organisations; meetings with staff; an awarding organisation representative and students; and reports of review and monitoring visits by the QAA review team also considered the provider's use of the relevant external reference points:

- the IAM documents
- the guidelines provided by the awarding organisations
- the specification for accreditation by the Accreditation Service for International Colleges
- The UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

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

The Academy is a small college located in one campus on two floors of a building in Wembley, North West London. It was formed in February 2010 as a private limited company with the intention of offering a range of programmes in business and management. At the time of the review it offered seven programmes. There are currently 103 full-time higher education students enrolled. There are four full-time management and administrative staff, and seven part-time teaching staff at the Academy.

The Academy's mission is 'to prepare our students to be the leaders of the next generation, by providing an education distinguished for its high level of excellence and personal attention; to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and to educate the next generation of scholars by providing further, higher and professional study at the highest level and to cooperate actively with public sector institutions in the development of academic knowledge for the enhancement of our teaching programmes.'

At the time of the review, the Academy offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their organisations and with full-time student numbers in brackets:

ATHE

- Extended Diploma in Management level 4 (3)
- Extended Diploma in Management level 5 (7)
- Diploma in Management level 6 (60)
- Diploma in Strategic Management level 7 (12)

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[1] www.qaa.ac.uk/educational-oversight
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx

- Diploma in Health Care Management level 6 (4)
- Diploma in Health Care Management level 7 (7).

IAM

- Extended Diploma in Business and Administrative Management level 6 (10).

The provider's stated responsibilities

The Academy delivers the programmes according to the programme specifications, syllabus and assessment regulations produced by the awarding organisations. Although it makes no contribution to the curriculum design, the Academy is responsible for the content of units, and the learning and teaching methods. The staff, who are approved to teach by the awarding organisations, are required to ensure that the content of all units is covered. They ensure that students have access to the necessary learning resources and provide formative assessment and evaluation by setting, marking and giving feedback on assignments. Summative assessment is carried out by the awarding organisations. The Academy encourages students to provide continuous feedback of their views on teaching, learning, administration and support.

Recent developments

An REO was carried out at the Academy in February 2012. It was not possible to evaluate the implementation of the action plan in the 2012 review report at the monitoring visit in March 2013, as no students had been enrolled since July 2012. However, since April 2013 103 students have been enrolled. There are plans to recruit students to a Pearson HND in Business in 2014. The Academy has plans to further expand student numbers and develop its own curriculum for other related courses in business management to be validated and accredited by UK universities.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on the higher education programmes were invited to present a submission to the review team. Students on the programmes met to discuss their views and a student submission was written with support from the staff. The team found this submission very useful. A group of students met the coordinator at the preparatory meeting in advance of the visit and 11 students participated in a meeting during the review. Their contribution was constructive and helpful.

Detailed findings about the UK Business Academy

1   Academic standards

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

1.1   The Academy fulfils its responsibilities for the management of academic standards effectively. The awarding organisations are responsible for course design and content, progression agreements and summative assessment for all the programmes.
The Academy's responsibilities focus on teaching and learning. The Principal chairs the Management Committee and is responsible for managing academic standards. A full-time management team comprising of a Quality Manager, an Administration Manager, a Marketing Manager and a part-time Academic Adviser assist the Principal with the responsibilities.

1.2   The committee structure reflects the current size of the Academy and is designed to accommodate future growth. The Quality Control and Administrative Committee, and the Academic Board report to the Management Committee. The Teaching and Learning Committee reports to the Academic Board. A newly formed Assessment Committee (a subcommittee of the Teaching and Learning Committee) standardises assessment and the improved internal verification processes. All committees have terms of reference, but the composition and numbers of staff and student representatives are not specified. This leads to a lack of attendance. For example, on one of the two occasions that the Teaching and Learning Committee has met, only one student representative was present and on the other occasion no teaching staff attended. It is **desirable** that the Academy's committees' terms of reference specify student and staff membership to ensure their participation in quality assurance processes.

1.3   The development of quality assurance policies and procedures at the Academy is almost complete. However, routine programme monitoring and evaluation is not yet fully implemented. The Academic Board will consider the annual monitoring reports of all programmes on completion of the first year. These reports will include student and staff feedback and student progression data. There are plans to evaluate each unit and obtain more detailed feedback. It is **advisable** that the plans to undertake annual programme evaluation and unit monitoring be fully implemented to inform the quality processes.

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

1.4   The Academy demonstrates a clear understanding of the responsibilities it has to each of its awarding organisations. One awarding organisation confirms that following an annual inspection the Academy has implemented all action points from its visit report. The awarding organisations are responsible for sections of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) related to managing the standards of the subject and qualification, the programme approval processes, externality and assessment of the learning outcomes.

1.5   The Academy engages with the sections of the Quality Code relating to the admission of students, and learning and assessment of students. Staff confirm the Quality Code has been discussed in the Management Committee and the Quality Control and Administrative Committee, but did not demonstrate a complete understanding. It is **desirable**

that the Academy engages all staff in the application of the relevant reference points from the Quality Code in its activities.

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

1.6   The awarding organisations determine the aims, objectives, intended learning outcomes and summative assessments for all programmes. The Academy has assessment responsibilities for the first marking of the assignments. The Quality and Operations Manual outlines the assessment rules and the internal verification procedure. The Academy's qualified internal verifier has recently conducted a standardisation exercise to map assessment criteria onto intended learning outcomes to ensure consistent marking. Staff confirm that this was communicated to them and it has improved consistency. The awarding organisations provide forms to record and track student achievement of the assessment criteria and ensure that they match the intended learning outcomes. The staff stated they found these sheets useful.

1.7   Students are given assignment feedback on standard forms and, although the amount of detail varies, the students stated that it is helpful. From the review of work by the team, it is apparent that lack of referencing in essay writing is not always corrected and there is occasional gender bias. The Teaching and Learning Committee intend to introduce the use of software to help improve students' understanding of referencing and academic conventions.

1.8   The programmes are assessed by external examinations which are set and marked by the awarding organisations. The Academy gives students formative assessments and feedback based on the awarding organisations' comments on previous final assignments. The students and staff state that this helps the students prepare for the examinations and better assess their progress; the team identify this as **good practice.**

> 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 Academy fulfil its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1   The Academy's management of the quality of learning opportunities is effective. The Academy has recently clarified its management structure. Its processes for managing the provision are described in paragraphs 1.1 to 1.3. Responsibility for the management and enhancement of the learning opportunities rests with the Management Committee, assisted by Academic Board and the Quality Control and Administrative Committee.

2.2   The Academy has a comprehensive Quality and Operations Manual and a dedicated committee responsible for its implementation. There are formal processes for discussions and decision making by the relevant committees. Staff meetings are formally recorded and minutes are circulated to all concerned. Specific staff are designated to follow up action and an audit trail is evident in the minutes.

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

2.3   The use of external reference points used in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities is as described in paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5.

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

2.4   The Academy has a clear Teaching and Learning Strategy implemented by the Teaching and Learning Committee. The Academy management, staff and students confirm the progressive nature of the learning and teaching from initial teacher-led classes through to student independent learning. Two industry speakers have addressed the students and their performance has been monitored and evaluated.

2.5   The Academy has a formal process for monitoring the quality of teaching through class observations and feedback from students. The Academic Adviser conducts class observations and provides feedback to tutors. The results are fed into an annual teacher appraisal, which has so far only been undertaken for one member of staff.

2.6   Students' feedback on lectures is collected at the end of each term, analysed by the Academic Adviser and the results are discussed in the Teaching and Learning Committee. This feedback shows that, in general, students are satisfied with their classes. There is, however, a low response rate to the surveys which generally require just yes or no answers. It is **desirable** to improve the design of the student survey questionnaires to increase the response rate and obtain valid and reliable student opinion.

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

2.7   Students are provided with effective academic support. Additional tutorials are available by request from a student. Students who join the Academy after the beginning of a semester are provided with extra support. Towards the end of their programmes, students receive training on job applications and personal development. Students confirm they are satisfied with the level of academic support they receive, particularly the tutors' help and availability.

2.8   The Academy provides appropriate non-academic support for the students. The Student Welfare Officer provides advice on personal issues and topics such as accommodation, travel and visas. Students confirm that they have helpful pastoral support when they need it.

2.9   The Academy has a range of methods to ensure that students' views are heard, including suggestion boxes, surveys and student representatives. Students confirm that their views are heard formally or informally and that the Academy responds to their requests quickly and efficiently. They gave the team examples of concerns that were effectively dealt with, including the distribution of student identity cards, requests for additional library books and the poor connectivity of the wireless network.

How effectively does the Academy develop its staff in order to improve student learning opportunities?

2.10   The Academy stated in its self-evaluation that it aims to promote and encourage a positive framework for both personal and professional updating. There is a clear continuous professional development policy and, as a result of this policy, three members of staff have

attended Pearson and QAA briefings. The teacher observation and staff appraisal procedures as described in paragraph 2.5 are not yet being used to identify specific areas for development. It is **desirable** that teacher observation and appraisals are clearly linked with the staff development policy.

2.11   Staff are well qualified and experienced with almost all teaching staff having a master's degree or a professional qualification. The Academy is supporting one member of the teaching staff to study for a doctorate. Only one member of staff has a teaching qualification. It is **desirable** to introduce opportunities for staff to obtain teaching qualifications to improve student learning opportunities.

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

2.12   The Academy's learning resources are sufficient for the number of students currently enrolled. In the student submission and at the meeting with the team, students indicated they are satisfied with their learning resources. The Academy's learning resources include overhead projection facilities in classrooms and wireless internet, which is available to both staff and students. There is a small library and the issue of lack of books for students has been remedied quickly with the recent purchase of additional volumes. Students are encouraged to purchase copies of requisite texts, refer to the awarding organisations' websites and use a local public library. The Academy has recently introduced a virtual learning environment (VLE), which is to be used both as a depository of teaching material, assignment briefs and to provide feedback to students and answer their queries.

2.13   The Academy allocates a small budget to update resources and deals with resource issues as they arise. There is no learning resources policy and it is unclear how resources are reviewed, or if there is a formal process for this. Resource allocation appears as an item on the annual monitoring reports but it is not within the terms of reference of any of the committees. It is **desirable** that the Academy formalises the process of review and decision making for learning resources.

The review team has **confidence** that the Academy is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the intended learning opportunities it provides for students.

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3   Information about learning opportunities

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

3.1   The higher education provision at the Academy is effectivly communicated to students and other stakeholders. The Academy is responsible for publishing materials in accord with the regulations of its accrediting organisations and its own internal policies, procedures, regulations and recruitment information.

3.2   The main method of communication with students, staff and other stakeholders is by electronic mail together with printed handbooks and the internal noticeboard. These provide comprehensive and relevant information and there is a system of version control. The Academy posts appropriate information on a social media site. The Academy website, which is well designed and simple to navigate, includes information for current

and prospective students and the wider community. There are links to the awarding organisations' websites. Students confirm that the information that is provided is easy to use. Both students and staff have recently been consulted about their views on the information provided, and their responses are currently being analysed.

3.3   The Academy conducts a formal induction period to welcome students at the commencement of their programmes. They receive an induction pack comprising a student handbook, timetable, and programme specifications provided by the awarding organisations. The student handbook contains information for both prospective and current students with a clear complaints procedure and information about academic malpractice. A special induction is organised for late-comers whose arrival may be delayed because of their visa application. Students confirm that they found the induction helpful and are satisfied with the information provided.

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

3.4   The Academy has developed a policy for ensuring that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The Academic Adviser is responsible for ensuring that all information published is accurate, complete and current. The Academic Adviser reviews published information quarterly and reports to the Quality Control and Administrative Committee. This committee should discuss and approve any substantial changes. However, the minutes of the meetings do not indicate any discussion; although the information is reliable and accurate, it appears to depend on informal decisions, and any urgent changes or updates are approved by the Principal. It is **advisable** that the Quality Control and Administrative Committee are included in assuring the accuracy and accessibility of information to safeguard consistency.

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[3]

UK Business Academy Ltd action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight of October 2013						
Good practice	**Intended outcomes**	**Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes**	**Target date(s)**	**Action by**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation (process or evidence)**
The review team identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the Academy:						
• useful feedback to students on their formative assessments (paragraph 1.8)	Students able to recognise good practice and be able to rectify any mistakes,thus increasing their knowledge	Provision to new tutors of specimen copies of (unidentified) previous assignments with examples of good and poor feedback	Start of every term from January 2014	Academic Head	Teaching and Learning Committee and then to Academic Board	Questionnaires to students on effectiveness of feedback
	Tutors improve knowledge of their students and of themselves and are able to chart students' progress more easily	Tutors encouraged to produce detailed marking schemes for assignments where relevant	Start of every term from January 2014	Academic Adviser		Fewer discrepancies in marking by individual tutors
	Comprehensive and detailed feedback given for all assignments to students	Samples of formative assignments to be	March 2014; then twice termly	Programme leaders		

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[3] The Academy 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 Academy's awarding organisations

	on all courses even those not featuring internal assessments	analysed by senior academic staff once marked to maintain quality				
		Standardisation of marking by internal verifier	Already taking place	Internal verifier		
Advisable	**Intended outcomes**	**Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes**	**Target date(s)**	**Action by**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation (process or evidence)**
The team considers that it is **advisable** for the Academy to:						
• implement fully the annual programme evaluation plans (paragraph 1.3)	Assess effectiveness of teaching and learning for each module before next corresponding one begins, and also for each course on an annual basis	Obtain feedback from students and staff	At completion of each module effective from January 2014 once all relevant results have been declared	Academic Board	Management Committee	Staff/student questionnaires and assessment results and comments from awarding bodies
	Provide feedback to awarding body to improve syllabus content and assessment methods	Inspect students assessment results as given by awarding organisations and note any comments they may have	Course monitoring at end of each academic year from March 2014			
• include the Quality and Administrative Committee in assuring	Bring committee more fully into the discussion of information provision and the implementation of any changes	Institute a review of information policy as a regular feature on the agenda of this committee and	To begin on date of next committee meeting (before 14 January 2014) and finalise by	Academic Adviser	Quality and Administration Committee	Minutes of meetings

			April 2014			
accuracy and accessibility of information (paragraph 3.4)		record minutes				
Desirable	**Intended outcomes**	**Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes**	**Target date/s**	**Action by**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation (process or evidence)**
The team considers that it is **desirable** for the Academy to:						
• specify student and staff representation in the terms of reference of committees (paragraph 1.2)	To clarify terms of reference of committees with regard to composition and thereby to improve attendance	Revise terms of reference where necessary	March 2014	Principal and Academic Adviser	Each committee	No cases of 'I didn't know there was a meeting'
		Obtain suggestions for available dates from members and assign actual date accordingly	March 2014	Chair of each committee		Improved attendance
• engage all staff in the application of the Quality Code (paragraph 1.5)	To familiarise all staff with the relevant parts of the Quality Code (this includes administrative as well as teaching staff)	Set up special Quality Code subcommittee to brief staff on how the Quality Code affects their duties	April 2014	Head of Quality Control	Quality Control and Administration Committee	Improvement in quality as reflected by student/staff questionnaires and students' performance
• improve the design of the student survey questionnaires (paragraph 2.6)	Improved questionnaire both to improve response level of students and to gain a more comprehensive verdict of what they actually think	New questionnaire design to be devised and circulated to students and staff for their opinions before it is formally	March 2014	Academic Adviser	Teaching and Learning Committee	Greater response from students (at least 60%)

		used				
• link teacher observation and appraisals with the staff development policy (paragraph 2.10)	Relate tutor appraisal to staff development policy	Revise development policy for academic staff to make tutor appraisal a specific part of their career development as and when required	March 2014	Principal	Management Committee	Review of staff progress (annually)
• introduce opportunities for staff to obtain teaching qualifications (paragraph 2.11)	To have a greater proportion of staff with formal teaching qualifications	Subsidise cost of training up to 50% of cost for part-time staff and pay entire costs for full-time staff Award higher pay rate to staff with qualified teacher status	December 2014	Principal	Management Committee	Observation and feedback to determine whether tutors with a formal teaching qualification perform significantly better than those without one (at least one-third of tutors would need the qualification to make the study worthwhile)
• formalise the review and allocation of learning resources (paragraph 2.13)	To make the entire concept of learning resources to be the responsibility of the Teaching and Learning Committee, so it can be discussed and reviewed adequately	Instigate a formal learning resources policy and adjust the terms of reference of the Teaching and Learning Committee to take charge of it	June 2014	Academic Adviser	Teaching and Learning Committee	Satisfaction with learning resources as evidenced by student questionnaires

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/educational-oversight.

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 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 degree-awarding bodies for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standards**.

awarding body A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree-awarding powers, research degree-awarding powers or university title).

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

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 review processes.

external examiner An independent expert appointed by an institution to comment on student achievement in relation to established academic standards and to look at approaches to assessment.

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*.

good practice A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's review processes.

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx

highly trusted sponsor An organisation 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, and resources (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 (of study) 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 (s) (of higher education) Organisations that deliver higher education. In the UK they may be a degree-awarding body or another organisation that offers programmes of higher education on behalf of degree-**awarding bodies** or **awarding organisations**. In the context of Review for Specific Course Designation 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 See **academic quality**.

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of reference points for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the Expectations that all providers are required to meet.

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.

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 **frameworks for higher education qualifications** and **subject benchmark statements**. See also **academic standards**.

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