Stoke College of Management and IT

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

September 2012

Key findings about Stoke College of Management and IT

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in September 2012, the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **no confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of ATHE.

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

The team considers that **reliance cannot** 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

No features of **good practice** have been identified.

Recommendations

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

The team considers that it is **essential** for the provider to:

- develop and implement strategic quality management processes that are fit for purpose and meet the requirements of the awarding organisation in order to secure and maintain effective oversight of academic standards and quality (paragraphs 1.1-1.4 and 2.2)
- undertake a thorough mapping exercise of its programmes against relevant external reference points (paragraphs 1.5,1.6 and 2.3)
- put in place a rigorous internal and external verification process (paragraphs 1.7 and 1.8).

The team considers that it is **advisable** for the provider to:

- establish a single point of reference for quality documentation and a system for regular review (paragraph 2.1)
- develop and implement a teaching and learning strategy (paragraph 2.4)
- develop and implement a formal process for reviewing and evaluating the arrangements for the provision of learning resources (paragraph 2.14)
- make the full text of College policies readily accessible to staff and students (paragraph 3.2)
- develop an effective system to assure the accuracy and completeness of public information (paragraph 3.3).

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

- develop formal procedures for addressing student feedback and informing students of actions taken as a result of their comments (paragraph 2.7)

- put in place a formal tutorial system to enable students to keep under review their academic progress and achievement (paragraph 2.9).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)[1] (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at Stoke College of Management and IT (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 ATHE. The review was carried out by Mr Mark Langley, Ms Patricia Millner (reviewers), and Dr David Taylor (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the *[Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](#)*.[2] Evidence in support of the review included ATHE guidelines and regulations, an ATHE report, documentation produced by the College, and meetings with staff and students.

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

- ATHE guidelines
- Accreditation Service for International Colleges guidelines
- 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](#).

Stoke College of Management and IT (the College) was established in November 2009, and came under its present ownership in March 2011. It occupies three floors of a serviced office block close to Stoke-on-Trent railway station. In July 2011, it received stage 3 accreditation from the Accreditation Service for International Colleges. There are three full-time members of staff: the Director, the Principal, and an Administrative Assistant. There are two part-time tutors employed on a continuing basis, and other part-time tutors who are employed on a needs basis. Current students are all from South Asia. Most travel on a daily basis from Birmingham, Wolverhampton and other nearby cities, but a few also live locally. To accommodate student requirements, teaching is organised on two days of the week, although library and IT facilities are available Monday to Friday.

The first students were enrolled at the College in February 2011. In the past, the College registered students with both ATHE and the Chartered Management Institute, but, in March 2012, the students studying on the latter programmes were transferred en bloc to similar qualifications at level 5 on the Qualifications and Credit Framework offered by ATHE. At the time of the review visit, 44 students were declared to be currently enrolled, 20 of whom had completed the programme and were awaiting external verification of their assessed work by the awarding organisation. Students who complete the extended diploma at level 5 have the possibility of progression to degree work at several universities in the UK, although the College itself has no agreements in place at the present time.

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

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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.

ATHE
- Extended Diploma in Management - level 4
- Extended Diploma in Management - level 5

The provider's stated responsibilities

ATHE provides the curricula and externally verifies the assessments. The College is responsible for student recruitment and admission, learning and teaching, learning resources, student support, staff development and public information for all awards, and for the general management of academic standards. ATHE allows its providers to develop their own assignments for assessment within their overall guidelines, but the College at present relies on ATHE materials.

Recent developments

Following the appointment of a new Principal in February 2012, the College has decided to focus on management qualifications offered by ATHE. It intends in the future to continue to recruit international students to qualifications offered at levels 4 and 5. The College has longer-term plans to establish a campus in London.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team, but chose not to do so. Groups of students participated both in the preparatory meeting and the review visit.

Detailed findings about Stoke College of Management and IT

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The Director, who took up his position in May 2011, has overall operational and financial responsibility for the College and is the designated Authorising Officer. The Director line-manages the Principal, appointed in February 2012, who also acts as the Centre Contact and Quality Assurance Co-ordinator for ATHE. The College states that the Principal is responsible for managing academic standards, including academic review, external partnerships, quality assurance and standards, and manages the teaching and administrative staff. The Centre Agreement with ATHE, valid for three years from 2012, together with the awarding organisation's operational handbooks, sets out precise responsibilities for the management of academic standards delegated to the College. ATHE requires the College to demonstrate a clear understanding of quality assurance requirements and have the capacity to develop and implement a robust internal quality assurance system. The College is also required to have key policies and procedures in place to support the learning process. The review team found fundamental errors in the College's existing systems.

1.2 The College does not have a clear and recognisable process for evaluating its own structures and processes for managing standards within a defined and documented framework. It has a Quality Assurance Manual and a Quality Procedure which provide a series of forms to gather student and staff opinion about course delivery, on the basis of which evaluation could take place, but there was no evidence of the information gathered having been used to review and evaluate the management of standards. The College pointed out that none of its student cohorts had so far completed their qualifications. However, the team found no evidence that the College management understood and was preparing to implement an annual quality cycle based on systematic monitoring of course delivery and student performance. A course review procedure based on informal discussion with students was in place, but the team saw no outcomes from it, and the methodology employed was clearly inadequate. Issues raised by one external verifier about the assessment criteria used for assignments and issues that had been raised internally about the quality of feedback remain unresolved, demonstrating that the College has not evaluated the effectiveness of its management of academic standards.

1.3 The quality assurance meeting cycle at the College is informal and lacks cohesion. Documentation provided for the review visit describes a series of monthly and weekly meetings to support the maintenance of academic standards. In practice, the College staff meet weekly on a Monday morning, but minutes indicate that these meetings discuss operational matters. They do not consider academic standards or quality assurance issues strategically or systematically, nor do they identify areas of good practice or consider how to disseminate these further. The College states that it invites student representatives to these meetings, but minutes do not record their attendance. The Director and Principal share an office suite and clearly discuss matters relating to standards, but these discussions are not recorded.

1.4 The College's general oversight of its higher education is poor and lacks cohesion. No strategic plan exists, and there had been no effective handover from the previous Principal to the current post holder. The change of awarding organisation had been made mid-year rather than as part of a broader repositioning process. During the visit, the team

saw no evidence of a long-term vision for the College. In the light of its findings in paragraphs 1.1-1.4, the team considers that it is essential that the College develops and implements strategic quality management processes that are fit for purpose and meet the requirements of the awarding organisation in order to secure and maintain effective oversight of academic standards and quality.

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

1.5   The College does not support its strategic and operational practice with systematic use of external reference points. College staff understand the need to observe guidance from its awarding organisation, which in turn accords with the requirements of the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual). However, College documentation does not reflect this understanding and none of it refers to any other external reference points, for example the Academic Infrastructure. This restricts the College from managing academic standards in a manner appropriate to higher education.

1.6   The College does not adequately map its programmes against the programme assessment criteria, as required by the awarding organisation. It does this in most cases by bunching several different types of assessment activity into one task. This is not in accordance with the awarding organisation's guidance, and indicates that even the observance of the assessment reference points is not thorough. While staff are able to articulate the difference between work at levels 4 and 5, indicated by the Qualifications and Credit Framework, and in line with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, this was not apparent in the assessed work that was seen. It is essential that the College undertakes a thorough mapping exercise of its programmes against relevant external reference points.

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

1.7   The College states that it internally verifies all assessments, followed by a process of external verification. However, the process of internal verification is not fit for purpose. Lecturers mark all assignments in the first instance, but there is no second marking process in place. The College's tick box forms documenting the process of assessment, feedback and evaluation only serve to complicate that process, and staff complete these forms cursorily. In many instances, they complete the forms incorrectly and the level of written feedback to the students on the assignments seen by the team is wholly inadequate, yet internal verification does not highlight these errors and omissions. Several examples of internally verified work indicate that instances of inaccurately labelled criteria and learning outcomes are not rectified. The programmes currently offered at the College are intended to be equivalent to the first and second years of undergraduate study, yet while students receive instruction within lectures on how to reference, they do not demonstrate an ability to reference their work adequately and in accordance with the awarding organisation's required referencing style, or in many instances to reference their work at all. The problem had only occasionally been picked up in the examples of feedback seen by the team, and is not identified through the process of internal verification.

1.8   A complete cycle of external verification had not been completed at the time of the visit, so it is not possible for the College to demonstrate in full how it would use external verification to assure academic standards. However, an external verifier's report for the previous awarding organisation, Chartered Management Institute, expressed concern about the matters stated in this paragraph and issued a corrective action request form in November 2011. The College subsequently changed awarding organisations and did not take the action requested in the external verifier's report, nor raise the issues as part of a

more general quality assurance discussion. It should be noted that the change between awarding organisations has involved students moving from one awarding organisation to another and changing assessment tasks mid-course. The team considers it essential that the College puts in place a rigorous internal and external verification process.

> The review team has **no confidence** in the provider's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding organisation.

2   Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1   As described in paragraphs 1.1 and 1.2, the College has overall responsibility for the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of its provision to students. Within the College, the Principal, reporting to the Director, is responsible for managing quality issues related to learning opportunities and for distributing information to academic and administrative staff. The Quality Procedure states that the College is committed to 'continually improving the quality of the student experience.' It covers production and monitoring of schemes of work, session plans, assessment, internal verification, student initial assessment and induction. The Quality Assurance Manual sets out the quality assurance and enhancement approach regarding student feedback on all aspects of their learning experience, course design and curriculum development, internal and external verification procedures and processes to monitor and analyse student performance. It also contains the College's own policies for performance appraisal review, teaching observation and staff development, including appropriate pro forma. There is some overlap between the Quality Procedure and the Quality Assurance Manual in the areas of student feedback, observation of teaching staff, peer observation, staff annual review, course self-assessment, college self-assessment and staff development. Since taking up his position, the current Principal has undertaken a partial review of quality assurance policies. It is advisable that the College establishes a single point of reference for quality documentation and a system for regular review.

2.2   The College does not have effective mechanisms to manage and enhance the quality of learning opportunities. The weekly staff meetings (see paragraph 1.3) provide the main vehicle for discussion of issues related to management and enhancement of learning opportunities. Although there is a standing agenda, the minutes do not reflect discussions on quality issues, such as student feedback reports, learning resources and support for students. All meetings include the same small number of staff and, as there is no quality cycle timetable, there is no differentiation in the agenda items between meetings. The College has not yet undertaken annual monitoring review and has not developed a process for doing so (see paragraph 1.2).

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

2.3   The College does not engage effectively with relevant external reference points in its management and enhancement of learning opportunities. The main external reference points used by the College are the requirements and procedures set by the awarding organisation, ATHE, which carried out a 'health check' visit to the College in May 2012. The College is also required to follow the reference points laid down by the Accreditation Service for International Colleges, which accredited the College for four years commencing

in August 2012. The College has followed up some actions from these approvals and has produced policies such as a reasonable adjustments policy and an accreditation of prior learning policy, but it is not clear how these will be used or made known to students. However, the College has not as yet addressed issues raised by the awarding organisation regarding a need to manage the dating and review of policies to ensure they are coherent, retrievable and evaluated in a timely manner so that they remain current. The team found duplication and overlap in versions of some policies, for example the Academic Misconduct procedure, the Plagiarism/Cheating Policy and the Malpractice Policy. In meetings with the review team, senior management and teaching staff made no reference to the Academic Infrastructure, sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* or the UK Quality Code for Higher Education relevant to the management of learning opportunities.

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

2.4   There is informal oversight of teaching, learning and assessment by the Principal, who works very closely with the staff. The College does not, however, have a written teaching and learning strategy setting out its expectations for delivery and acquisition of higher level skills and knowledge. At present, for example, teaching and guided learning is restricted to Monday and Tuesday to suit the convenience of students, but there is no indication of how students are expected to organise the rest of their study time. Schemes of work and lesson plans for each teaching session are required. These track the learning outcomes to make certain the programme specification is met. The staff make extensive use of the unit support materials provided by the awarding organisation, but supplement them with their own resources and contextualisation. The lack of a teaching and learning strategy is detrimental to the development of higher level skills and autonomous learning. It is advisable that the College develops and implements a formal teaching and learning strategy.

2.5   The College aims to recruit staff who hold a qualification one level above that which they teach, but they do not need a teaching qualification. Current teaching staff are appropriately qualified, with master's degrees in relevant subject areas. One of the two main teachers has teaching experience, a teaching qualification and is studying for a doctorate; the other plans to undertake a teaching qualification and is being mentored by the Principal. There is a general induction to the College and Assessor Induction Programme managed by the Principal to ensure knowledge of the programme specifications, assessment practices and expectations of the College.

2.6   Teachers are well supported. The Principal observes one-to-one assessment development sessions and classroom teaching once per semester. Feedback is given verbally and in writing through one of two pro forma: the Observation of Teaching - Personal Feedback or the Teacher Appraisal Form. Staff found that feedback had been helpful in developing their teaching styles. There are some opportunities for peer observation and the close working relations of staff allow sharing of practice in an informal way. Students confirmed their satisfaction with the teaching and described some teaching methods used by staff.

2.7   The College obtains student feedback on teaching and learning through a wide range of methods. Unit and end-of-course questionnaires, course review and meetings with student representatives potentially provide a large amount of information to management. Samples of student feedback seen by the team, however, indicated that student engagement with the process was limited. Minutes of meetings between staff and students showed that these were used to communicate information from the College to the students rather than to elicit student views. Moreover, response mechanisms to issues that might be raised are not formalised. It is desirable that the College develops formal procedures for

addressing student feedback and informing students of actions taken as a result of their comments.

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

2.8   There is a comprehensive one-day induction at the start of the programme, covering issues such as health and safety, course content, assessment regulations, attendance and student support. Students complete an evaluation sheet to provide feedback to the College on their experience of the induction process and reported that it had been helpful.

2.9   There is a personal tutor system, although it is not systematically implemented. However, due to the smallness of the College, close proximity of staff and good personal relationships, students are able to approach staff easily. The College uses a Student Experience Procedure which requires all students to complete a form to raise issues such as help with personal life, making a formal complaint, and giving the College feedback on any aspect of its work, including student support. It is desirable that the College formalises the tutorial system to enable students to keep under review their academic progress and achievement.

2.10   There is substantial opportunity for one-to-one support and formative feedback through the assessment process to help students achieve the learning outcomes. This is tracked on a sign-off sheet, although the written feedback is sparse as are the students' comments on the feedback they receive. Students are entitled to four of these sessions as they work through their assignments, with the opportunity to resubmit without penalty. However, it is not possible to ascertain from the documentation that was seen how this process works in practice, and how the College ensures that students are working independently at the level appropriate for their programmes.

2.11   The College is able to provide satisfactory additional student support. Students are able to inform the College prior to enrolment if they have additional needs. In the meeting with the review team, students felt that the College would provide support if requested. There is wheelchair access to the premises. The Principal carries out a basic skills scan at the start to the course to determine any particular learning needs. The College would need to seek advice on help for students who demonstrate specific issues, but so far none have been identified. Students were appreciative of the additional English classes on offer at no extra cost. The College does not currently offer study skills sessions.

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

2.12   The College has a Staff Development Policy and a Performance Appraisal Review Process in place. Staff confirm that this process has been positive, although they are expected to take ownership and individual responsibility for maintaining their own professional development. Each member of staff is expected to maintain a continuous professional development log, and to show at least 20 hours of activity a year. The College does not contribute financially. The staff are encouraged to participate in events organised by the awarding organisation, but as yet none have done so. However, the Principal undertakes in-house sessions to inform staff of the requirements of the awarding organisation, programme specifications and new assessment practices which he has introduced. The weekly meetings are the main opportunities for the staff to share their practice.

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

2.13   The learning resources available to students to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes are adequate. The numbers and sizes of teaching rooms and provision of computers are adequate for current student numbers. The College does not have its own virtual learning environment or facility for providing learning resources electronically. However, the students were highly appreciative of the online materials provided on the awarding organisation's website, which they use extensively for assessments and class activities. Reading lists are created by the tutors and provided to students. Not all key books and journals are available in sufficient numbers in the library and some students make use of local libraries and those of universities. The current arrangements enable students to complete assessments and meet the learning outcomes, but both staff and students felt that more texts should be made available in the library. The reduction in student numbers over recent months has led to staff changes and curtailment of spending on resources.

2.14   It is not clear how the sufficiency, relevance and currency of learning materials are reviewed and improved, as the College does not have a learning resources policy and this is not addressed in the self-evaluation. Student feedback forms for unit and end-of-course evaluations have no direct questions regarding their views on specific resources and library provision. There is also a lack of a comprehensive annual monitoring process which takes account of learning resources. The team considers it advisable that the College develops and implements a formal process for reviewing and evaluating the arrangements for the provision of learning resources.

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

3   Public information

How effectively does the provider's public information communicate to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides?

3.1   The pre-enrolment handbook the College provides is very useful to students; it is comprehensive and includes information about the course content, course fees, guidance on accommodation and living costs in the UK, registration with the NHS, travel cards and term dates. Students found this information helpful and accurate.

3.2   The public information the College communicates to students and other stakeholders is inconsistent in its coverage and is inadequately communicated. The College's original prospectus is now out of date. At the time of the visit, both the prospectus and website were being updated, with the new version of the website due to be published on the internet the day after the review. The post-enrolment handbook is useful in some respects, but does not detail key academic requirements, for example guidance on academic referencing. Nor does it contain policies that are critical for students, in particular complaints and appeals, which are only available upon request from the Principal or Director. As indicated in paragraphs 1.4 and 2.4, the College does not publish many quality management documents, for example a quality improvement plan or a teaching and learning strategy. The team considers it advisable that the full text of College policies and procedures is made readily accessible to staff and students.

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

3.3   The College does not have a formal system for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information. The Director has overall responsibility for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information, and asks staff to provide information as required. Because the Director does not have academic responsibility for the provision, the ability to check the detail of such documentation is constrained. A series of errors identified on the website and in the student handbook demonstrate that the College does not employ a regular and scrupulous process of reviewing and amending public information. Inaccurate information in the handbook about the students' right to work, or on the previous version of the College website about the range of courses it offers, are both misleading. During the review, the College amended these, but this indicates that due process was not followed. The organisation and version control of policies and procedures are not systematic. The team found a number of versions of the same item, for example, lesson observation and appraisal. (See also paragraphs 2.1 and 2.3.) It is advisable that the College develops an effective system to assure the accuracy and completeness of public information.

> The team concludes that **reliance cannot 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

The provider was required to develop an action plan to follow up on good practice and address recommendations arising from the review. However, an action plan was not complete at the time of publication and the report is therefore published without one.

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*[3]

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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[3] 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.