Aston College

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

September 2012

Key findings about Aston College

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 **limited confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, ATHE and the Institute of Administrative Management.

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 these awarding organisations.

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

Good practice

The team has identified no features of good practice.

Recommendations

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

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

- ensure that all policies and procedures are accurate, clear and consistent, and are fully understood and followed by staff and students (paragraph 2.1).

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

- undertake a comprehensive effectiveness review of its quality assurance procedures at the conclusion of its first quality improvement and enhancement cycle (paragraph 1.2)
- systematically incorporate the *Code of practice* into its procedures and its staff training programmes (paragraph 1.3)
- provide further training for all teaching staff in the areas of marking, feedback to students and internal verification (paragraph 1.5)
- ensure that feedback available from all awarding organisations is routinely obtained and acted upon (paragraph 1.6)
- implement individual learning plans (paragraph 1.7)
- develop and implement a robust set of strategies to inform teaching, learning and assessment (paragraph 2.4)
- improve the teaching observations scheme and align it with a teaching and learning strategy (paragraph 2.6)
- revise all student evaluation forms so that they are fit for purpose and able to be analysed accurately (paragraph 2.8)
- formalise processes for the initial screening and support of students for disability and additional learning needs (paragraph 2.13)
- ensure that the College Standards and Quality Committee recognises and addresses its responsibility for monitoring published material (paragraph 3.7).

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

- engage with the higher education communities in order to utilise resources and raise staff awareness of professional developments (paragraph 2.9)
- clarify the scope and purpose of the tutorial system and evaluate its effectiveness (paragraph 2.12)
- meet its deadline for improvement of internet access and the installation of a virtual learning environment (paragraph 3.4).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)[1] (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at Aston College (the provider; the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the provider discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes of study that the provider delivers on behalf of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, ATHE and the Institute of Administrative Management. The review was carried out by Dr Helen Corkill, Mr Allan Davies, Professor Anthony Whitehouse (reviewers), and Professor Nicholas Goddard (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the [*Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook*](#).[2] Evidence in support of the review included documentation supplied by the College and its awarding organisations, meetings with staff, students, and an awarding organisation's representative.

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

- the Academic Infrastructure
- the awarding organisations' regulations
- the Qualifications and Credit Framework.

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

Aston College (the College) is a limited company which was established in 2009 by its current Managing Director who is styled Director of Administration. Two other directors participate in the operational activities of the College as Director of Finance/Human Resources and Director of Studies. Other senior management roles include a recently appointed Acting Principal and Centre Manager.

The College moved to its current location in October 2011. It occupies the first floor of a building which is within reasonable walking distance of Birmingham city centre. The College premises comprise 12,000 square feet and include a computer laboratory, library, prayer room and other facilities. The dedicated teaching space has a capacity of 244 students at any one time; it has 366 students studying at level 4 and above. Delivery of its programmes began in January 2011.

At the time of the review, the provider offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their awarding organisations (with current student full-time numbers in brackets):

Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)
- ACCA professional status (80)

ATHE
- Level 7 Diploma in Strategic Management (10)
- Level 7 Diploma in Healthcare Management (8)

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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.

Institute of Administrative Management (IAM)
- Level 6 Extended Diploma in Business and Administrative Management (62)
- Level 4 Diploma in Business and Administrative Management (146)

The College also offers NCFE Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care (Adults), which is not under the scope of the review.

The provider's stated responsibilities

The provider states that its vision is 'transforming lives and communities through learning' and that its mission is 'to educate students for career success'. It delivers programmes devised by its awarding organisations and aims to provide 'lifelong education and training that produces graduates with the skills necessary to sustain individual career success within a global economy' and 'employers and communities with the human resources they will require for economic success and contribution to the community'.

Recent developments

As the College has been in operation for less than two years, there have been few changes. As noted, the College moved to its current location in 2011 and it has recently acquired additional nearby premises where it intends to deliver its level 6 provision. It has also recently appointed an Acting Principal and a Centre Manager. It is no longer recruiting ACCA students and this programme is being phased out.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission and a very brief submission was available to the team. Its production was coordinated by the Student Welfare Officer, who collected and collated information and feedback from the students. The coordinator met a range of students at the preparatory meeting when the purpose and method of the review was explained. The team met a representative selection of 14 students and found the meeting useful.

Detailed findings about Aston College

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The College structures for managing its responsibilities for the academic standards of its awarding organisation programmes are appropriate, but yet to be tested. Both the ATHE and IAM require that quality assurance and management processes are in place before approving a centre, but there has only been one monitoring and development visit, which was recently conducted by ATHE. The new College Quality and Standards Committee, which replaces the former College Quality Team, is required to provide annual self-evaluation reports to the new Academic Board, which has been recently established.

1.2 Academic standards are actively managed by a part-time Acting Principal and a Centre Manager, who have appropriate qualifications and experience. These key appointments, which have been recently created, have a pivotal role in the management of the part-time academic staff team. The delegated responsibilities and reporting structures are undertaken by the Centre Manager. The College Standards and Quality Committee meets monthly and the first two meetings indicate that matters pertinent to quality management are addressed. Oversight of all academic matters rests with the Academic Board which plans to meet each term, but, as it has not yet met, its effectiveness has not been evaluated. A College quality improvement and enhancement cycle has been established, but is still in an embryonic state. It is advisable that the College undertakes a comprehensive effectiveness review of its quality assurance procedures at the conclusion of the first cycle.

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

1.3 The College makes some use of external reference points. Awarding organisations provide the programmes which the College delivers and the College uses their external reference points to inform its policies, procedures and practices. These external reference points, as they relate to awarding organisation provision, are understood by staff. However, staff agreed that while they are aware of the Academic Infrastructure, it does not inform their practice, although the College has some procedures which address the requirements of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice)* to a limited extent. It is advisable that the College systematically incorporates the *Code of practice* into its procedures and its staff training programmes. The College makes use of learning outcomes in the setting and assessment of student assignments and the tutors appreciate this structured way of working.

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

1.4 The assessment responsibilities delegated from the awarding organisations are fully documented and specify procedures for first marking, internal moderation and the provision of feedback to students. A specification of an internal verification procedure is in place. Extensive use is made of a commercial software package to detect plagiarism, with further checks made by teaching staff.The College is meeting ATHE requirements and following its guidelines for the conduct of assessment.

1.5   The team found that the College demonstrated weak practice in relation to the marking and verification of assignments and to the written feedback offered to students. The majority of marked work seen by the team had not been annotated within the body of the text. The written feedback provided to students was sparse, and offered little support for improvement. Feedback against specific outcomes and criteria was often absent or consisted of a tick or brief phrase. Internal verification largely consists of a series of ticks and total agreement with the first marker. There was little evidence of justification of verification decisions. Feedback sheets were frequently not fully completed by either the assessor or the internal verifier. A new member of staff has been appointed to help address these issues, and there was already clear evidence of this having an impact. It is advisable that the College provides further training for all teaching staff in the areas of marking, feedback to students and internal verification.

1.6   Staff have received support from the College awarding organisations, including specific staff development sessions, to help them understand the documented assessment practices. However, feedback on assessment and progress for IAM programmes requires the College to pay a fee, which as a consequence has not been obtained. Staff find the lack of feedback disappointing. It is advisable that feedback available for IAM programmes and other awarding organisations is routinely obtained and acted upon.

1.7   Marked work showed that assignments are based on awarding organisation assessment criteria and minutes of relevant meetings showed that assessment issues are discussed by the College team. Progress reports are in use, but limited in scope and concerned with compliance rather than learning. The team found that individual learning plans were being developed; it is advisable that these are implemented to support student learning.

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

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2   Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1   The responsibilities placed upon the College by its awarding organisations for the recruitment, selection, admission, induction and academic guidance of students are clearly specified. In addition, the College has the responsibility for the provision of learning resources, managing programmes through to completion and monitoring retention throughout. The College also has responsibility for reviewing and responding to annual programme monitoring, module evaluations and student opinion. The College is responsible for the development and implementation of teaching and learning strategies, and for the provision of staff development in teaching and learning in higher education, subject currency and scholarly activity. The team found examples where there were inconsistencies and errors in College documentation to support its policies and strategies, some of which have been uncritically adopted from other institutions, for example the student feedback referred to placements, although no placements are offered (see paragraph 2.8). It is essential that the College ensures that all policies and procedures are accurate, clear and consistent, and are fully understood and followed by staff and students.

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

2.2   The College makes variable use of a range of external reference points in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities. It makes extensive reference to the specifications of its three awarding organisations, and staff are conversant with relevant areas of these. The College finds the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) level descriptors to be a valuable resource for informing and supporting the development of good practice and the production of policies and procedures within the College. Teaching staff have made particular use of the descriptors for lesson planning and designing assessments. Students are well informed about the QCF.

2.3   As noted in paragraph 1.3, the College was able to demonstrate little effective engagement with the Academic Infrastructure by staff other than where awarding organisations have absorbed elements into their specifications.

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

2.4   The College has a limited Teaching and Learning Policy, but no document that details the intended strategies for delivering learning and teaching effectively. While staff had some awareness of the policy, they were unable to demonstrate detailed knowledge or its effective use. In addition, the College does not have an overarching assessment policy or strategy, which has been noted by the external examiner for ATHE, together with a recommendation that one should be in place by the date of the next visit. This was also the case for a Conflicts of Interest Policy, although a new one has been very recently developed. It is advisable that the College develops and implements a robust set of strategies to inform teaching, learning and assessment.

2.5   The College has a developing teaching observation scheme, which has very recently been strengthened. The College states that the lesson observation procedure is a key element in supporting the assurance of the quality of learning opportunities and highlighting development needs. However, the teaching observation procedure was not explained to staff in documentary format and is omitted from the Staff Handbook, the Staff Development Policy and the Teaching and Learning Policy.

2.6   Completed observations of lecturers provide largely short and affirmative responses to questions and therefore little detail or narrative around which to base insight as to the effectiveness of the teaching and learning being delivered. The team found little evidence that the College uses observations to disseminate good practice in assignment feedback or in a direct relationship between observation and student learning plans. It is advisable that the College continues to improve its teaching observation scheme, including embedding practice with a teaching and learning strategy and informing staff fully of its procedures and purpose.

2.7   Feedback from students is gathered on a range of subjects through an appropriate variety of informal and formal means. Students confirmed that the College is a friendly institution, which operates an open-door policy, allowing them access to all senior management without prior appointments throughout the working day. The College has a clearly defined system of student representatives. Each class has a representative who attends meetings with staff, the frequency of which have recently been increased to monthly. The students considered these meetings to be useful, an example cited being the opportunity to voice concerns about internet access to the College senior management.

2.8   The College has a student evaluation form which is employed at both module and programme level. However, the questionnaire includes questions on work placements, which do not operate, yet does not contain any questions specifically aimed at evaluating student support. It was not always clear how the questions related to the response options available, leading to some complications and distortion in analysis and the conclusions which could be drawn from it. It is advisable that the College revises all student evaluation forms, ensuring that both the questions asked and the responses available are fit for purpose and able to be analysed accurately.

2.9   All teaching staff appointed are appropriately qualified with either academic or professional qualifications. All academic staff are part-time, and few staff possess a teaching qualification. The College is starting more systematically to encourage staff to undertake teacher training, initially with the Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector awards. There was no evidence of awareness among the teaching staff of the activities of the Higher Education Academy or the UK Professional Standards Framework. It is desirable that the College engages with higher education communities in order to utilise resources and raise staff awareness of professional developments.

2.10   For IAM and ATHE programmes, the College has responsibility, and for ACCA it shares the responsibility, for developing staff teaching and assessing skills at higher education level. The external examiner for ATHE noted that staff participated in training provided by the awarding organisation on assignments and assessment earlier this year; the team found that staff are very open to learning and have a desire for improvement.

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

2.11   The College has a clear understanding of the mechanisms required to support its students in terms of admissions, enrolment, induction and pastoral care. All students receive a structured induction on arrival at the College, which students confirmed as being informative and helpful. Arrangements are made on an individual basis for students who join a course late, overseen by a student adviser.

2.12   There is currently no tutorial policy which identifies how the College intends to operate and the students were unclear about the meaning of the term 'tutorial'. The College has very recently reviewed its systems, subsequently revising the processes for tutorials, including a new system to be based on developmental individual learning plans. Students may be provided with extra tutorial support, comprising study skills, research methods and communication/IT skills, but the review team was unable to identify evidence that this took place. It is desirable that the College clarifies the scope and purpose of the tutorial system and evaluates its effectiveness.

2.13   The College makes a clear policy statement about admitting and supporting students with disabilities. Students are able to indicate disability prior to admission, and on arrival all students should be screened to identify any additional support required, but there was no evidence offered for either systematic screening or provision for dyslexia and little currently offered by way of support for other types of learning needs. It is advisable that the College formalises and adopts processes for the initial screening and support for students for disability and additional learning needs.

2.14   Academic staff should make use of appropriate data for target setting and ensure that learners are working to their full potential. However, the teaching team has made little use of retention data as it has only recently been made available to them. A new monitoring process has recently been put in place, partially to address this, but there is no evidence yet of its effectiveness.

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

2.15   There is no process as yet to evaluate the effectiveness of its policies for staff development to support higher education. The College states that it has recently considered its staff development policy and concluded that no review is currently required, but that the policy should be subject to annual revision. All staff undergo an annual review before the start of the academic year and complete a personal development return prior to their review. Training needs are currently determined at the end of the calendar year, but the College has acknowledged that this needs to be brought forward to September.

2.16   There is a high level of awareness of the professional currency of College staff. External visits from ATHE confirm the current occupational competence of staff within their relevant sectors, with some staff being employed in industry. The College does not have a policy for encouraging staff to engage in scholarly activity or research, and no staff are currently engaged in such activities. The College has an established procedure for the induction of staff, in which they are introduced to the workings of the College. Staff are made aware of their roles and responsibilities. They confirmed the induction process as being supportive and helpful to them.

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

2.17   The learning resources provided for students are variable but adequate. One awarding organisation report confirms that the College resources are fit for purpose and include a good range of teaching classrooms, IT suites and a well stocked range of supporting learning texts and publications for specific awards. The College library currently holds a book stock of two hundred volumes, some of which had been added very recently. Students noted that they were encouraged to make use of the city's central library. However, students do not currently have access to e-journals. The College has identified the necessity for the acquisition of online library facilities and gaining access to local university library resources as key areas for development.

2.18   While there is reference to the need to use electronic resources (ICT and e-learning) in the Teaching and Learning Policy, the College does not have in place the necessary strategies and guidance for staff to develop e-learning activity in practice. All students have access to web-based resources provided by the respective awarding organisations. The College uses a web portal which facilitates administrative functions and has acted as a document repository for students. It has not been used to support teaching and learning for the past six months, a matter raised by the students as a concern. The College recognises the limited applications of the web portal and is developing a virtual learning environment for launch in early 2013.

2.19   The importance of the workplace to vocationally orientated higher education awards is recognised by the College. However, the College is not permitted to provide work placements for its body of international students. In order to compensate for this, the College strives to appoint staff who are both academically well qualified and have substantial professional experience. Some staff are employed in industry. The professional currency of the staff has been recognised by one of the awarding organisations. In addition, the College makes extensive use of case studies and workplace simulations within its classes.

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 College provides public information through its website, prospectus and printed course booklets. The prospectus is well designed and provides a comprehensive bank of information to support students and other stakeholders. It offers guidance, including course outlines provided by the awarding organisations, financial information, facilities, resources and general advice about living and studying in the Birmingham area.

3.2   The website is well designed, clearly written and suitably interactive. It reflects most of the information contained in the prospectus, as well as making specific reference to the College's encouragement of students to develop practical skills, team working, leadership, career development and potential opportunity within their various programmes. Students confirm that this happens and cited examples of each activity. The students considered the website was a very helpful resource when they were considering applying to the College.

3.3   For current and prospective students, the College publishes a generic student handbook setting out general policies and procedures. It is available in hard copy and through the College website. It contains information on attendance policy, examination regulations, academic misconduct, dyslexia support, complaints, appeals and disciplinary procedures, and health and safety.

3.4   Internet access at the College is regarded as inadequate by both staff and students. The team's experience during the visit confirmed this and students considered that this was an area that needed to be improved. The senior management assured the team that they are committed to enhancing significantly the internet provision and are in the process of installing a virtual learning environment by January 2013. It is desirable that the College meets this deadline for the improvement of internet access and the installation of a virtual learning environment.

3.5   Although there is general healthcare information in the published materials and Disability and Equal Opportunities Strategies have been developed, there is no advice or general information for students with additional needs either in the prospectus or on the website.

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

3.6   The College has recently produced a comprehensive policy for the control of all of its information. The policy sets out the responsibilities of various stakeholders and other senior staff in relation to the management of the accuracy and completeness of public information. However, no evidence has yet been produced to judge its effectiveness.

3.7   The College Standards and Quality Committee has formal responsibility for ensuring the accuracy and reliability of information in hard copy and electronic formats.

The team was informed that information is authorised for distribution or publication only after the approval of College Standards and Quality Committee and the final sign-off is by the Acting Principal or Director of Studies. However, there is no evidence to demonstrate that the committee itself has considered any matters of public information. There are a number of grammatical errors in teaching resource materials. It is advisable that the College Standards and Quality Committee recognises and addresses its responsibility for monitoring published material and, in particular, for ensuring that any material published by staff for the purpose of student learning is proofread.

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

Action plan

The provider was required to develop an action plan to 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.