



# **University of Reading**

Institutional Review  
by the Quality Assurance Agency  
for Higher Education

November 2012

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## About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Reading. The review took place on 5-8 November 2012 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Dr C Vielba (reviewer)
- Mr H White (reviewer)
- Dr M Wing (reviewer)
- Mr J Medland (student reviewer)
- Miss H Burns (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the University of Reading and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - threshold academic standards<sup>1</sup>
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the information provided about learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides commentaries on the theme topic
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the [key findings](#) can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

In reviewing the University of Reading the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [theme](#) in this review is student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>2</sup> Background information about the University of Reading is given at the end of this report. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for [Institutional Review](#) of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland<sup>3</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

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<sup>1</sup> For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/IRENI/Pages/default.aspx>

## Key findings

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the University.

### QAA's judgements about the University of Reading

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision of the University of Reading, both on-campus and at partner institutions:

- Academic standards at the University **meet** UK expectations for threshold standards
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**
- Information about learning opportunities produced by the University **meets UK expectations**
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations.**

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at the University of Reading:

- The Pathfinder process makes a significant contribution to strengthening the University's well thought-out, rigorous and comprehensive periodic review system (paragraph 1.4.1)
- The University offers excellent web-based multimedia support for staff in relation to assessment and feedback (paragraph 4.3).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following recommendations to the University of Reading. By the commencement of the academic year 2013-14:

- the University should introduce and address at institutional level a thematic summary of external examiners' reports (paragraph 1.2.2)
- the University should ensure that the final approval procedure for all new joint honours programmes includes external academic advice appropriate to both disciplines (paragraph 1.4)
- the University should, formally and in advance of their commencing teaching on University programmes, approve the curricula vitae of all relevant partner institution staff (paragraph 2.1.1)
- the University should ensure that no research degree student has a sole supervisor (paragraph 2.10.1).

## Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that the University of Reading is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The University is currently undertaking a project designed to systematise and strengthen the assessment feedback provided for students (paragraph 1.3.1)
- The University is currently undertaking a project designed to systematise and strengthen the personal tutoring system (paragraph 2.1.2)
- The University has decided to implement the recommendations of its recently-completed review of programme and module evaluation (paragraph 2.3.1).

## The involvement of students in quality assurance and enhancement

Students are increasingly and now extensively involved in quality assurance and enhancement at all levels of the University, though there is scope for the increasing systematisation of this involvement at school level.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the operational description and handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland](#).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/IRENI/Pages/default.aspx>

## About the University of Reading

The University of Reading (the University) is a three-campus institution, incorporated by Royal Charter in 1926. Its main campus is on an extensive parkland site some two miles from the town centre; its second, town-centre, campus houses the Institute of Education; its Henley-on-Thames campus became the third major campus following the University's merger with Henley Management College (now the Henley Business School) in 2008.

The University is structured academically around four faculties (including the Henley Business School), each headed by a dean and containing between four and six variably-constituted schools. In addition, the Graduate School, established in September 2011 and headed by the University Director of Postgraduate Research Studies and Researcher Development, provides central academic and administrative support for all postgraduate research students. The Vice-Chancellor, as Chief Executive reporting to Council, is supported academically by a Deputy Vice-Chancellor and three pro-vice-chancellors, as well as by the four faculty deans and the Director of the Graduate School.

The University's 3,645 academic staff teach over 9,000 undergraduates (including foundation degree students), 6,000 taught postgraduates and 1,400 research students. Of the student population 22 per cent are international (non-European Union) and 29 per cent are part-time. Student (particularly part-time) numbers have increased considerably following the Henley merger, the former College bringing with it programmes which include an MBA, taught in collaboration with partner bodies to 1,700 students around the world.

The arrival of a new Vice-Chancellor in January 2012 heralded or accelerated a number of institutional initiatives, some of which, including the Internationalisation Strategy, were in process or under development at the time of the review. They also include a substantial investment in 50 strategically targeted academic posts, and an Employment Project, accompanied by a requirement (taking effect in the current academic year) that all undergraduate programmes include provision for students to undertake a work-related placement.

## Explanation of the findings about the University of Reading

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.<sup>5</sup>

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#)<sup>6</sup> is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.<sup>7</sup>

### 1 Academic standards

#### Outcome

The academic standards at the University of Reading **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

#### Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 The review team found that the University pays close attention to its alignment with external expectations. It does so primarily at programme approval and review, where appropriate external advice is taken. Proposals to amend programmes and modules are scrutinised internally at institutional level.

1.1.1 External examiners report on students' achievement of stated learning outcomes, and all examiners of research degrees are required to confirm that candidates have met the level expectations of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. The review team confirms that these procedures are properly conducted.

#### Use of external examiners

1.2 The review team found comprehensive and appropriate procedures for appointing, inducting, supporting, responding to, and, when appropriate, terminating the appointment of external examiners, all of which are specified in an internal Code of Practice. External examiners are required to attend meetings and approve changes to marks; they are encouraged but not required to meet students; and are permitted to submit a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor in the event of matters of concern arising.

1.2.1 The University encourages academic staff to undertake external examining roles elsewhere, a policy which it plans to support by development sessions, and which it currently reflects in its promotion criteria.

1.2.2 The University pays close attention to external examiners' reports, and procedures are in place to ensure they are carefully addressed. Reports are made available to student representatives and the University plans to make them more widely available to the student body. Nevertheless, the fact that the University does not prepare and discuss at University level any overview summary of matters raised by external examiners circumscribes its capacity to capture emerging, recurrent or institution-wide themes. The review team **recommends** that by the commencement of academic year 2013-14 the University should

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<sup>5</sup> The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However, it is available on request for inspection. Please contact QAA Reviews Group.

<sup>6</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx)

<sup>7</sup> See note 4.

introduce and address at institutional level a thematic summary of external examiners' reports.

### **Assessment and standards**

1.3 The University has mature and competent procedures for ensuring the accuracy and appropriateness of assessment and standards, including extenuation and the equitable treatment of students with special needs. It has generic marking criteria and formal policies and guidance on marking and moderation; extensive guidance and staff development opportunities are available to support and enhance assessment practice.

1.3.1 The University has responded to concerns regarding feedback emerging in the National Student Survey by instituting developmental reviews of feedback and assessment. The review team **affirms** the University's decision to implement the recommendations of its recently-completed project designed to systematise and strengthen the assessment feedback provided for students.

### **Setting and maintaining programme standards**

1.4 The institutional-level oversight of school and faculty-level activity in respect of ensuring programme standards both by committees and officers is effective in itself, helpfully communicated in regulations and guidelines, and appropriately buttressed by external advice. Nevertheless, because utilisation of the full approval procedure for joint degrees constructed from pre-existing single honours programmes is at the discretion of the faculty (or faculties) concerned, it is possible for such a programme to be constructed without the benefit of external advice. The review team **recommends** that by the commencement of academic year 2013-14 the University should ensure that in all cases the final approval procedure for new joint honours programmes includes external academic advice appropriate to both disciplines.

1.4.1 Arrangements for annual monitoring and periodic review are appropriately formulated, communicated and executed. The review team noted in particular that, in order to support schools in periodic review and to maximise the enhancement opportunities involved, the University has developed a developmental Pathfinder process, which, supported by the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning, operates prior to, during and following the review to encourage sound advance preparation, and subsequent reflection and enhancement. The contribution of Pathfinder to strengthening the University's well considered, rigorous and comprehensive periodic review system is a feature of **good practice**.

### **Subject benchmarks**

1.5 The review team found subject benchmark statements central to institutional quality management.



## 2 Quality of learning opportunities

### Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at the University of Reading **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

### Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 The University has in place procedures to ensure that all staff teaching or supporting learning are appropriately qualified. Clear criteria and regulations exist in respect of appointment, mentoring, development and training, including a requirement for all new full-time staff (other than those formally exempted) and appropriate part-time staff to take all or part of a programme in academic practice. Similarly, clear requirements exist in respect of the training and support needs of research degree students with undergraduate teaching responsibilities.

2.1.1 In collaborative provision the University is assiduous in approving staff scheduled to teach on its programmes, but its approach to the suitability of staff appointed during the lifetime of a programme is less systematic. Accordingly partner institution staff may not have received University approval. The review team **recommends** that by the commencement of the academic year 2013-14 the University should, formally and in advance of their commencing teaching on University programmes, approve the curricula vitae of all relevant partner institution staff.

2.1.2 The University's personal tutoring system, for which extensive support and guidance are available and which the University is committed to retaining and enhancing, was acknowledged not to be functioning optimally and was under scrutiny at the time of the review. The review team **affirms** the University's current project designed to systematise and strengthen the personal tutoring system.

### Learning resources

2.2 The review team found learning resources, physical, human and technical, sufficient to allow students to achieve the learning outcomes of their programmes, and confirms that programme approval, monitoring and review all take account of the adequacy of such resources. The team noted:

- the constructive part played by the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning in ensuring the overall competence of academic staff
- the University's commitment to teaching excellence (which is reflected in promotion criteria)
- the effective utilisation of its six national teaching fellows
- the University's work to strengthen its responsiveness to student feedback (see paragraph 5.3).

### Student voice

2.3 The review team found that students make a significant contribution to quality assurance and quality enhancement. They have, for example, been involved in periodic review panels and a range of enhancement activities; they are represented on committees at all institutional levels; and representatives are supported in discharging their duties.

2.3.1 Students complete module and programme evaluations, the outcomes of which are conscientiously addressed, though there is variation in the manner and extent to which they are provided with feedback on action taken in the light of their responses. The University is aware of the need to increase the consistency with which this is done, and the review team **affirms** the University's decision to implement the recommendations of its recently-completed review of programme and module evaluation.

### **Management information is used to improve quality and standards**

2.4 The University makes effective use of management information to improve quality and standards. The central Planning Support Office provides a comprehensive data set for use at both local and institutional levels, and the review team saw extensive evidence of the effective use of such data in areas which include external benchmarking, the distribution of degree classification, progression and completion rates, disability and complaints.

### **Admissions**

2.5 The University has clear, fair and explicit policies and procedures for all admissions. Its approach is effective at both the strategic (in respect of matters such as fee setting, scholarships and access arrangements) and operational levels; in both cases the procedures are centrally managed, competently supported and systematically reviewed by the University Admissions Office.

### **Complaints and appeals**

2.6 The review team found the University's complaints and appeals procedures clear and effective. Information and support for potential appellants and complainants are readily available and clearly articulated; in the case of collaborative provision these procedures are reviewed at approval and included in agreements, with the main aim of ensuring clarity as to the locus of responsibility for each category.

### **Career advice and guidance**

2.7 The quality of the University's career education, information, advice and guidance is effectively assured. The Careers, Placement and Experience Centre is constituted as a one-stop shop for the provision of careers advice to students, support for schools in integrating employability into the curriculum, and undergraduate placement coordination (see paragraph 2.13). Examples were found of both the successful integration of employment-related skills and information into curricula, and of engagement with employers through liaison panels, programme sponsorship, employer involvement in careers-related events and placement supervision (see paragraph 2.13).

### **Supporting disabled students**

2.8 The University is committed to promoting equality of opportunity for all students, and ensures that it meets the particular entitlements of disabled students. A dedicated and effective institutional-level committee is responsible for promoting equality and diversity and for reviewing and developing relevant policies and procedures. The University's Disability Advisory Service offers comprehensive advice to students with a disability, liaising as appropriate with school-level disability representatives and colleagues in other services. The University provides extensive staff development in this area, and students reported a high level of satisfaction with the support available.

## Supporting international students

2.9 International students are well supported. The University has a general commitment to providing an inclusive environment which meets the needs of a heterogeneous academic community, and a specific commitment to internationalisation. In this latter context the University is currently monitoring student achievement by country of residence; developing a web resource for staff; expanding in-session language support; and reviewing the suitability of teaching methods, curriculum design and course materials for its culturally mixed cohort. In addition, its International Study and Language Centre is charged with supporting international students by means which include both pre-sessional and continuing programmes in academic English and study skills. These programmes are internally monitored and subject to external accreditation.

## Supporting postgraduate research students

2.10 The review team found both postgraduate research students and staff involved in research programmes appropriately supported. The University's Code of Practice on Research Students, which includes guidelines on admission, induction, training, supervision, progress monitoring and assessment, is mapped against all relevant external expectations and is fit for purpose. Clear arrangements exist for the strategic oversight of research degree policies and practices. The training and support facilities of the inter-institutional Doctoral Training Centre are available to research degree students. Internally the Graduate School, which provides multidisciplinary academic and administrative support for all 1,400 research degree students, is continuing to develop both the range and the quality of its services; this School also provides a social environment to facilitate the interchange of ideas and experiences. Committee representation of research students is available (the Graduate School is currently addressing a problem of variable attendance) and due regard is paid to the results of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. Research students expressed satisfaction with these arrangements, stating that their prior expectations had been met and in some respects surpassed.

2.10.1 The University's Code of Practice specifies an institutional requirement that research students have a minimum of one experienced supervisor. The review team was told that in up to 10 per cent of cases this means only one supervisor in total. While appreciating that the University takes a conscientious approach to the supervision of research students and that no evidence was found of the absence of a second designated supervisor, which only occurs in a small number of cases, having had adverse consequences, the team noted that the formal appointment of a supervisory team is increasingly common across the sector and will become a stronger expectation when the relevant chapter of the Quality Code is implemented. The review team **recommends** that by the commencement of the academic year 2013-14 the University should ensure that no research degree student has a sole supervisor.

## Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.11 The quality of learning opportunities delivered as part of collaborative arrangements is managed effectively. The range of collaborative provision has increased following the University's merger with Henley Management College, a well-established provider of collaborative programmes. The University has in place clear and legally-binding procedures for the establishment, maintenance, monitoring and review of all collaborative partnerships and programmes, and for the issuance of certificates and transcripts; the University stated, and the review team confirms, that these procedures reflect those for on-campus programmes, but pay additional attention to matters which include the quality of the student experience and the adequacy of information and learning resources.

## **Flexible, distributed and e-learning**

2.12 The quality of learning opportunities delivered through flexible and distributed arrangements, including e-learning, is managed effectively. The University states, and the review team confirms, that such programmes are subject to the same quality management procedures as other programmes; clear information is provided about programmes, delivery methods, and the demands involved; a full range of academic, administrative and technical support is available; and appropriate arrangements are in place to receive, monitor and respond to student feedback.

## **Work-based and placement learning**

2.13 The quality of learning opportunities delivered through work-based and placement learning is effective. A number of professional programmes contain a placement element; in addition to this longstanding arrangement, with effect from academic year 2011-12 all programmes have been required to provide an opportunity for an assessed placement. The review team explored this ambitious commitment to assure itself: (i) of the precise nature of the commitment; (ii) that the University is aware of and addressing the logistical, administrative and academic implications involved; (iii) that it is honouring any promises made; and (iv) that its activities meet all relevant external expectations.

The team confirms that:

- the process for approving such placements is rigorous
- the system is mapped against *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education
- the Careers, Placement and Experience Centre provides appropriate support and guidance for schools unfamiliar with placement arrangements
- staff training is available from the Centre for Staff Development and Training and the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning
- due regard is given to health and safety
- careful attention is paid to the appropriateness of the assessed report on the placement
- the procedure follows extensive and realistic internal debate.

The recent nature of this ambitious and innovative arrangement limits the team's capacity to analyse, evaluate or formally acknowledge it, but its continuation and development are encouraged.

## **Student charter**

2.14 A Student Charter, produced in conjunction with the Students' Union, has been available from the start of the present academic year. It sets out, in broad terms, the mutual expectations of the University and students. Undergraduates told the review team they were aware of the Student Charter's existence; postgraduates were less so. The University is currently considering how best to increase students' awareness of, and engagement with, the Student Charter.

### 3 Information about learning opportunities

#### Summary

The information about learning opportunities produced by the University of Reading **meets UK expectations**. The intended audience finds the information about the learning opportunities offered is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

3.1 The University has clear policies for information management. These include: designation of responsibilities; accessibility guidelines; procedures for controlling information provided by partner organisations; minimum content requirements; and records management. Its website provides extensive and accurate public information; information provided for potential applicants is clear and up to date, and includes dedicated sections for disabled, international and mature students. The review team found, however, that scope exists for the University to assure itself of the sufficiency of information about its programmes currently available on some partner organisation websites.

3.2 Current students expressed satisfaction with the quality and accuracy of information, and the review team confirms that online non-programme-specific information is easily located, extensive and sufficient. Programme specifications are appropriately constructed and up to date; while not uniformly linked to programme and departmental web pages they are readily accessible in a central repository. Programme handbooks, accessible on intranet pages, are based on a common framework and are user-friendly and helpful. Advice for staff with quality responsibilities is readily accessible, and supported by centrally-generated data for annual monitoring and periodic review (see paragraph 1.4.1). Procedures exist to ensure the integrity of assessment records; and the University meets all publication obligations to the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

### 4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

#### Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at the University of Reading **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1 The University takes deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. Enhancement initiatives are driven through institutional mechanisms which include thematic reviews, working parties, implementation groups with enhancement champions at different institutional levels, and the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning (see paragraph 1.4.1). The creation of the Graduate School has facilitated the coordinated enhancement of researcher development; external examiners are prompted to report on enhancement; institutional staff are encouraged to accept external examiner appointments; enhancement is central to the contribution of Pathfinder to periodic review (see paragraph 1.4.1); and students have been involved in enhancement projects.

4.2 The University identifies enhancement priorities on a two-year cycle, with the ownership of each assigned and monitored by key performance indicators. The review team confirms that areas including personal development, employability and the recognition of excellence in teaching have shown measurable improvement as a result. Alongside these priorities the focus of current or recent enhancement activity includes: programme and module evaluation; the use of technology in teaching and learning; the use of the virtual learning environment; student surveys; and personal tutoring.

4.3 Of the University's several channels for the dissemination of good practice, the review team particularly noted: (i) the web resources and other publications produced by the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning; (ii) centrally and locally-organised (and highly valued) away-days; (iii) communities of practice (these are mainly informal fora focusing on themes of interest to participants, most of which have a virtual presence); and (iv) an online teaching and learning blog developed by the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning. Both the communities of practice and the blog facilitate a two-way flow of information, including but not restricted to the effective dissemination of central initiatives. The excellence of the University's web-based multimedia support for staff in relation to assessment and feedback is a feature of **good practice**.

## **5 Theme: Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement**

Each academic year a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams. For this review the theme selected was the student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement.

The review team investigated the involvement of students in quality assurance and enhancement at the University. It found that the University takes genuine and realistic steps to involve students in quality assurance and enhancement.

### **Innovations in student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement**

5.1 The innovative nature of student involvement is increasing. The Students' Union has taken the lead in promoting an online voting system for student representative elections and in training representatives so elected; students are involved in several communities of practice; and student members have recently been added to periodic review panels.

### **Staff experience of/participation in student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement**

5.2 Students' Union officers have good relations with senior University managers, the Vice-Chancellor indicating the priority he affords to the student experience of teaching. The review team detected no reservations on the part of the staff it met to student participation in quality assurance and enhancement: on the contrary, staff expressed a strong commitment to exploring ways of strengthening the centrality of students to the work of the institution.

### **Acting on student contributions and 'closing the feedback loop'**

5.3 The review team found that for the most part the University addresses student feedback carefully and professionally, informing students of survey results and of the consequential action being taken. The University does acknowledge some variability, and is currently implementing the recommendations of a working party instituted to explore the issue (see paragraph 1.3.1). It also accepts that, while student representation is largely satisfactory, instances exist, particularly at subject level, where the operation of student-staff liaison committees falls below the level of acceptability, in respect both of the regularity and formality of meetings and of the following-up of agreed actions.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions. For example, pages 18-19 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of: threshold academic standards; learning opportunities; enhancement; and public information.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx).

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx).

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx).

**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 standards** The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

**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.

**credit(s)** A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

**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: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

**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.

**public information** Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

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

**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.



**RG 1078 02/13**

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