University of the Arts London

Institutional Review by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

January 2013

Contents

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 the Arts London. The review took place on 14-17 January 2013, and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Professor M Cook
- Mr R Evans
- Dr P Smith
- Mr M Kitching (student reviewer)
- Dr D Curnow (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the University of the Arts London 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[1]
  - 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 4.

In reviewing the University of the Arts London the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The theme is Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] Background information about the University of the Arts London 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[3] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

[1] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx
[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/IRENI/Pages/default.aspx

Key findings

QAA's judgements about the University of the Arts London

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

- 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 at 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 **feature of good practice** at the University of the Arts London.

- The University's web-based materials for staff, students and other stakeholders are clear, effective and accessible (paragraph 3.1).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following recommendations to the University of the Arts London.

- By the commencement of the next academic year the University should formulate and implement an institution-wide policy specifying the maximum turnaround time for feedback on students' assessed work (paragraph 1.3).
- By the commencement of the next academic year the University should clarify and communicate, to staff as well as students, the nature and extent of students' right of access to physical learning resources in colleges other than their own (paragraph 2.2.4).
- By the commencement of the next academic year the University should take institutional-level steps to ensure that colleges' support for students undertaking placements consistently meets the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraph 2.13).
- By the commencement of the next academic year the University should formally develop and disseminate a strategic, institutional-level approach to enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities (paragraph 4.1.2).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The University has begun to make progress towards ensuring the timely availability and reliability of student timetables (paragraph 2.2.2).

- The University is strengthening its support for students with disabilities through the strategic development of the University Disability Service (paragraph 2.8).

Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

A comprehensive student representation system is in place, and the University, while aware of the challenges involved, is committed to engaging with students in quality assurance and enhancement, and is increasingly taking a proactive approach to doing so.

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.[4]

About the University of the Arts London

The origins of the University of the Arts London (the University) lie in the London Institute, which was formed in 1986 of several long-established colleges. The institution, having obtained full degree-awarding powers, secured university title in 2004, taking its present name shortly thereafter.

The University now consists of six colleges located throughout London. Three of these (Camberwell College of Arts, Chelsea College of Art and Design, and Wimbledon College of Art) operate as a cluster under the direction of a single pro-vice-chancellor. Each of the remaining three colleges (Central Saint Martins College of Arts and Design, London College of Communication, and the London College of Fashion) is headed by a pro-vice-chancellor.

The University's higher education student population of over 16,000 originates from 114 countries and includes around 2,500 taught postgraduates and 200 research students. Collaborative provision comprises an additional 270 students in seven institutions, including 70 research students.

The University aims to provide distinctive practice-led learning in arts, design and communication. It describes itself as a single academic community with shared services and a single governance and quality framework, but with each college operating as a separate academic unit. Since some colleges offer overlapping degrees, sometimes with the same title, there is some inter-college competition for students.

Recent changes include: strengthening course management through the Supporting and Improving Course Organisation and Management (SICOM) project; centralising arrangements for supporting research and research students; introducing a central Registry Service with integrated links to college provision; and appointing college-level quality managers to strengthen consistency and communication. The University has also undertaken a programme of course closures and redundancies: in one college significant difficulties were encountered with this, leading to a Concerns Investigation by QAA to which the University responded satisfactorily.

[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/IRENI/Pages/default.aspx

Explanation of the findings about the University of the Arts London

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.[5]

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[6] 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.[7]

1 Academic standards

Outcome

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

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 Programmes of study are planned, developed and implemented with close attention to the levels specified in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ); the bodies charged with ensuring that this is so are robust and effective. The University's credit framework, which is aligned with all relevant external benchmarks, does not, however, mention the integrated four-year master's programme. In that the nomenclature of this programme (MSc or MA) does not conform to conventional practice, and while the team found no evidence of confusion resulting from this, the University will wish to ensure that no confusion arises in the future.

Use of external examiners

1.2 The University's use of external examiners is both appropriate and reflective of normal practice within the creative arts. The procedures associated with their appointment, induction, support and reporting are scrupulously discharged; responses are efficiently administered and appropriate in content; and reports are readily and universally accessible. While the University has a procedure for reviewing external examiners' reports in their totality, scope exists for further steps to be taken to ensure the consistency of standards across colleges.

Assessment and standards

1.3 The University's assessment website is an excellent resource (see paragraph 3.1), providing students with all necessary information and guidance. Common institution-wide criteria are in place, with standard assessment feedback forms, an online assessment tool and clear arrangements for matters such as extenuations; the procedures are subject to regular institutional-level review, with a particular emphasis on addressing critical student feedback. Nevertheless, evidence was found of variable practice across colleges in respect of the timeliness with which written feedback is provided, and of confusion among some staff as well as students in relation to this. The review team **recommends** that, by the commencement of the next academic year, the University should formulate and implement

[5] 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.
[6] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx
[7] See note 4.

an institution-wide policy specifying the maximum turnaround time for feedback on students' assessed work.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.4 The University's validation, monitoring and review procedures are well established and regularly evaluated; effective online guidance is available (see paragraph 3.1). Student involvement has been both clarified and strengthened since the Institutional Audit; appropriate external involvement is in place; annual course monitoring is universally achieved and fit for purpose; and planning for the move to programme monitoring is at an advanced stage. While students have commented on a lack of consistency across colleges, the University states that whereas it accepts the legitimacy of cultural differences among colleges, it is moving carefully towards achieving procedural consistency.

Subject benchmarks

1.5 The relevant benchmark statements are used consistently in the planning of new courses, and routinely recorded in programme specifications.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

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

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 The University has extensive experience in understanding and meeting the demands of teaching and learning in a creative and practice-based institution. Responsibility for doing so falls to the Dean of Learning and Teaching Development, supported by college-level associate deans. Recent steps to strengthen institutional support for teaching and learning include the SICOM project (see page 3) and the extensive range of opportunities offered by the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design. The University acknowledges and rewards good teaching. It supports associate lecturers; it ensures the preparation of newly-appointed staff and associate lecturers with substantial teaching responsibilities by compulsory engagement with a higher education qualification; it has a mandatory peer review scheme; and its annual Learning and Teaching Day is valued by participants and contributes to disseminating good practice.

2.1.1 The University acknowledges and is attempting at both institutional and college levels to address the fact that its scores in the National Student Survey are both variable and in some areas below the sector average. It also accepts that, in spite of having strong researchers in some academic areas, its approach to integrating research into teaching currently falls short of optimal.

Learning resources

2.2 Overall the human and physical resources the University devotes to supporting student learning are fit for purpose. Academic and associate lecturing staff are well qualified, trained and supported; the contribution of the large majority of technical staff is valued by students; and library resources are satisfactory. Both the learning zones, designed to provide access to services, software and equipment for students from all colleges, are

valued by students, as is the contribution of Library staff to identifying and meeting their needs and demands.

2.2.1 The University is replacing its virtual learning environment in the expectation that its new platform will achieve more widespread and sophisticated usage through its appropriateness to the teaching portfolio. Acknowledging that the challenges previously encountered were at least as much human as technical, it is taking steps to ensure that staff and students are prepared for the change, and has already made online information available. Its expectation that usage will both increase and improve, though plausible, has yet to be tested.

2.2.2 While the University has devoted resources to addressing concerns about the availability and variable accuracy of student timetables it has yet to solve the problem of late changes necessitated primarily by the availability of a minority of associate lecturers. While the deployment of texting and the virtual learning environment to alert students to cancellations and rearrangements is appreciated by students, some of whom have a lengthy journey to college, this appears largely a reactive measure. The review team, while noting that much has still to be done, **affirms** the progress made thus far towards ensuring the timely availability and reliability of student timetables.

2.2.3 It emerged in the review that not all prospective students appreciate the 'bottom line' costs of different courses, some of which are considerable. The issue emerged in relation to the purchase of materials for sculpting, but potentially has wider implications. While such costs will vary depending on choices yet to be made, it may be helpful for the University to consider how to ensure that applicants for admission understand that additional costs may be incurred and have full information about any financial support available to offset them.

2.2.4 Some confusion also surrounds students' right of access to learning resources at colleges other than their own. In fact, because ensuring the adequacy of such resources is a college not a University responsibility, no such right exists. While the efficiency and sustainability of the policy itself are for the University not the review team to judge, the existence of misinformation and informal arrangements has led to some uncertainty and resentment. The review team **recommends** that, by the commencement of the next academic year, the University should clarify and communicate, to staff as well as students, the nature and extent of students' right of access to physical learning resources in colleges other than their own.

Student voice

2.3 Students are widely and adequately represented on college and University committees and working groups. Informal Dean's Forums, organised and chaired by the Students' Union, serve as an open liaison event, at which issues can be raised and responses received. Given the size of the student population, students' stated opinion that their voice is more influential at local than at institutional level is unsurprising. It is confirmed that the University is taking steps to ensure that students' views are heard and appropriately addressed at all institutional levels.

Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.4 The University utilises appropriate information from internal and external sources; evidence was both submitted and found of this information contributing to student learning opportunities. The University Central Planning Unit provides detailed reports on student progress and achievement, and data is effectively used to identify variable outcomes for

different student categories. The University, which provided convincing examples of this data being constructively used, is also aware of, and beginning to address the need to improve the timing, quality and usefulness of course-level data.

Admission to the University

2.5 The University operates clear admissions policies, making relevant information and criteria readily accessible. Within these policies, which are overseen by dedicated Academic Registry staff and reviewed by a University Admissions Group, the admissions process is a college responsibility. An inter-college pool system is in place to enable rejected students to be considered for a cognate course elsewhere: the University confirms that this arrangement complies with the rules of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. Evidence was found of sound and professional admissions practice at undergraduate level; postgraduate students, however, gave examples of inefficiencies in communication. The University, acknowledging that problems existed, stated that it was strengthening procedures: it will no doubt ensure the continuing monitoring of this area.

Complaints and appeals

2.6 The University undertook a review of complaints and appeals procedures in 2010, as a result of which it appointed designated officers in the colleges; they meet regularly with each other and with officers of the University Complaints and Appeals Unit. These arrangements contribute to the work of the Complaints and Appeals Network, an enhancement-oriented body designed to evaluate procedures, address issues and capture good practice, which reports annually to the Academic Board. Instances of helpful advice and guidance being given to unsuccessful appellants were considered worthy of encouragement and possibly emulation across the institution.

Career advice and guidance

2.7 Career advice and guidance are available at institutional and college levels. At institutional level the fulcrum is the recently established Student Enterprise and Employability Service, while at college level profession-specific initiatives reflective of students' likely aspirations are often available. Students identify their interactions with associate lecturers as especially valuable; those who have undertaken work placements emphasise the opportunities such placements provide for them to gain and demonstrate professional skills, and to build and engage with professional networks.

Supporting disabled students

2.8 The University has taken steps to strengthen the support it provides for students with a disability. Its student population contains a significant minority with dyslexia-related disabilities and a smaller number with restricted mobility. Students reported a generally positive but uneven college-level approach to meeting such students' particular needs. Given this situation, a project to improve the parity and communicative efficacy of the support available for disabled students, which commenced in 2011, is currently being implemented. Thus far this project has seen the introduction of an institution-wide University Disability Service and the piloting in one college of a policy designed to meet with greater precision the individual needs of disabled students. The review team **affirms** the progress the University is making towards strengthening its support for students with disabilities through the strategic development of the University Disability Service.

Supporting international students

2.9 The student population contains a significant proportion of international students. The University meets its responsibilities toward them both institutionally (most student services have bespoke advice and information available for such students, and language support is readily available) and through the colleges, three of which have dedicated posts for this purpose. These responsibilities begin at interview, which can be conducted overseas, and continues through pre-admission, with relevant advice being provided on such matters as visas and living in London. One student spoke particularly positively of the availability of staff in different Indian cities to review portfolios and offer advice.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.10 The University takes a centralised approach to overseeing research degree administration, monitoring colleges' operations through its Research Degrees Sub-Committee, a body with student representation. Registration is undertaken in the colleges (or, in the case of the Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon cluster [see page 3], in that cluster's Graduate School). Supervisors are trained; students undertake a research training programme open also to partner institution students; subject-specific training is provided in colleges and research centres; workshops are available; and students are encouraged to present their research both in college and at conferences. The University provides a comprehensive, annually-updated, Handbook and Regulations which includes a Code of Practice for supervisors and students.

2.10.1 Research student numbers total almost 200. Since the largest cohort (61) is at Chelsea and the smallest are at Camberwell (four) and Wimbledon (14), Chelsea students constitute 77 per cent of the cluster's Graduate School membership. Given the time and cost of travelling between these colleges and critical student comments on the facilities in Camberwell and Wimbledon in particular, developing and nurturing a research ambience in these colleges appear both challenging and necessary.

2.10.2 A further 70 research students are registered in collaborative institutions, where numbers range from four to 57. Collaborative students are subject to the same expectations as their on-campus counterparts, and link tutors regularly visit the institutions concerned to establish the quality of the student experience.

2.10.3 The fact that opportunities for research students to teach are limited is a source of disappointment to some, but those students who are appointed are appropriately prepared. Career advice and guidance, though available, focus mainly on preparation for an academic career. The University, which acknowledges that a more robust professional development programme is needed, may wish to consider how to meet the needs of PhD graduates with different career aspirations, or who fail to secure an academic appointment.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.11 The University's 270 collaborative students are studying in one of seven institutions, of which two (accounting for 57 per cent of all students) are in London and three (containing all 70 research students) elsewhere in the United Kingdom; two (with a total of 35 students) are overseas. The University is teaching out its largest partnership, but has strategised plans to expand numbers elsewhere. Procedures to ensure the adequacy of learning opportunities in collaborative provision are readily accessible online, and it is confirmed that provision engages with all relevant external expectations.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.12 The University has little flexible, distributed or e-learning; such provision as does exist is in the form of two online master's programmes. The guidelines for these programmes date from 2005, when they were mapped against the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*. For the last two academic years no student feedback has been included in the annual monitoring reports; the University will doubtless take steps to secure such feedback in the future and also to ensure that its guidelines in due course meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Work-based and placement learning

2.13 The institutional portfolio of work-based and placement learning ranges from extended placements on the year-long Diploma of Professional Studies to opportunities for engaging with employment as part or all of a course unit. The University's policies and guidelines are appropriate for the oversight of placements, which are also subject to annual monitoring. Colleges, working within these requirements, draw up more specific guidelines for their own students and host organisations. The level of detail provided in these documents varies considerably, however, and this variability extends to the level of support actually provided. Hence, while students value the experience provided by placements, not all those who met the review team had had appropriate contact with their College or adequate opportunity to reflect on their experience. Overall it appears that institutional guidelines, aligned with external expectations in force at the time, were not consistently met. The review team **recommends** that, by the commencement of the next academic year, the University should take institutional-level steps to ensure that colleges' support for students undertaking placements consistently meets the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Student charter

2.14 The University published a new Student Charter in September 2012, following extensive and fruitful collaborative work with the Students' Union. The Student Charter is innovative in being presented in multimedia format, students having contributed a set of films to explain and humanise it. Annual review procedures are in place, and further design options are under consideration for future editions.

3 Information about learning opportunities

Summary

The information about learning opportunities produced by the University of the Arts London **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 provides staff, students and other stakeholders with clear, accessible and accurate information in electronic and hard-copy formats. The very recent Protocol on Information Accuracy is well understood, and constitutes a significant step towards ensuring clear lines of responsibility for inputting, checking, monitoring and reviewing the accuracy and currency of published information. The University is compliant with all statutory obligations, including the Key Information Set; its published information includes such materials as external examiners' reports, programme specifications, assessment details, and, following a recent joint initiative with students, guidance on contact hours. The University's readily-navigable website contains extensive information presented in a clear

and user-friendly manner; it is demonstrably valued by consumers. The clarity, effectiveness and accessibility of the University's web-based materials for staff, students and other stakeholders together constitute a **feature of good practice**.

3.2 Nevertheless, the outstanding quality of institutional-level information is not always matched at college level. The University is aware that this is so, and this report highlights a number of areas where greater procedural standardisation has reduced variability without threatening the cultural traditions of the constituent colleges (see paragraphs 2.6 and 2.8). The review team accepts that this engagement is part of a dialectical process, not an event with a definable end point.

4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

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

4.1 The University has an enhancement-seeking culture across all levels of staff, and identifies many pockets of enhancement activity being undertaken and disseminated. It does not, however, currently have a coherent or fully-developed strategic approach at institutional level.

4.1.1 Responsibility for enhancement rests with the Dean of Learning and Teaching Development, a post which has recently been refocused to include explicit responsibility for enhancement. The institutional approach is embedded in the Learning and Teaching Strategy, which states that enhancement is inextricably linked to several other strategies, including widening participation, information, and estates. It is also reflected in such initiatives as: SICOM (see page 3); improving communication with students; establishing and publishing student entitlements in areas which include contact hours, class and cohort sizes, staffing ratios and access to resources; the Learning and Teaching Day; the work of the Race, Ethnicity and Achievement Task Group; the student-led White Square Teaching Awards; the launch of the assessment website (see paragraph 1.3); and the developmental work of the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design.

4.1.2 These initiatives are of value in themselves and reflective of a strong commitment on the part of the staff and students involved in developing them. Nevertheless, their breadth has led some staff to question the institutional role in driving enhancement in a coherent fashion, and to take the view that enhancement has thus far emanated far more from below than from above. The review team, while acknowledging that examples exist of the reverse process - many of the initiatives cited above (see paragraph 4.1.1) can be defined thus - found little evidence of a strategic, institution-wide approach. The refocusing of the role of the recently appointed Dean of Learning and Teaching, for whom developing such an approach will be a major challenge, appears to reflect an institutional awareness of this. The review team **recommends** that, by the commencement of the next academic year, the University should formally develop and disseminate a strategic, institutional-level approach to enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities.

5 Thematic element: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The review team investigated student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement at the University of the Arts London. It found a comprehensive student representation system in place, and that the University, while aware of the challenges involved, is committed to engaging with students in quality assurance and enhancement, and is increasingly taking a proactive approach to doing so.

Innovations in student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

5.1 The University has taken steps both to engage constructively with and to transcend the formal committee representation system, also engaging with students through means which include cross-college focus groups on assessment; the successful encouragement of visual responses to the Library survey; development, in partnership with students, of the online 'My Contact Hours' initiative; and Dean's Forums (see paragraph 2.3).

Staff experience of/participation in student involvement in quality

5.2 The University acknowledges that senior institutional-level committees can be intimidating for students whose day-to-day experience is (or in the case of sabbatical officers has been) predominantly college-based. It has responded by strengthening the induction of student representatives, who also receive advice and support from Students' Union staff. It is also clear, however, that this challenge is manageable rather than soluble, and for that reason the innovations identified in paragraph 5.1 remain a desirable, if not necessary, complement to the representative system.

Acting on student contributions and 'closing the feedback loop'

5.3 At course and programme levels, students' satisfaction with college responses to their feedback is mixed. The 'We Hear You' website is addressed to the different colleges with the aim of identifying and addressing issues of concern; while the review team found it incisive and clear, it is not regarded by students as a wholly effective vehicle for communicating progress. The University is taking what steps it can to engage, and to be seen to engage, with student evaluations of their own learning opportunities.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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