Peter Symonds College

Initial Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

March 2013

Contents

About this review

This is a report of an Initial Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Peter Symonds College. The review took place on 19-20 March 2013 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Glenn Barr
- Professor Peter Bush
- Mr Laurence McNaughton (student reviewer)

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Peter Symonds College and to make judgements on the likelihood that the College's policies and procedures (some of which may still be under development) will meet UK expectations for academic standards and quality. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
    - threshold academic standards[1]
    - the quality of learning opportunities
    - the quality of information
- 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.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.[2] Background information about Peter Symonds College is on page 4 of this report. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for [Initial Review](#) and has links to the review guidance and other informative documents.[3]

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[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/rche/pages/initial-review.aspx

Key findings

This section summarises the QAA review team's key findings about Peter Symonds College (the College).

QAA's judgements about Peter Symonds College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Peter Symonds College.

- The policies and procedures at Peter Symonds College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in maintaining the threshold academic standards set by its awarding body.
- The policies and procedures at Peter Symonds College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in the quality of the student learning opportunities.
- The policies and procedures at Peter Symonds College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in the quality of information produced for students and applicants.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at Peter Symonds College:

- the detailed and timely responses to external examiner reports, supported by the mutual understanding of the approved processes by the Director of Adult and Higher Education and Programme Leaders at the College, and Middlesex University colleagues (paragraph 1.4)
- the College's comprehensive and clear guidance on marking and giving feedback (paragraph 1.8)
- the scrupulous attention paid by programme teams to QAA's subject benchmark statements, professional body requirements and other external benchmarks in the development and monitoring of programmes (paragraph 1.24)
- the varied and supportive learning and teaching experience provided by the college in line with its higher education mission (paragraph 2.1).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Peter Symonds College:

That by the start of the academic year 2013-14 the College should:

- establish, implement and embed robust arrangements for the communication of consistent information in relation to course deadline submissions, feedback on assessed work and the submission of assignment drafts
(paragraphs 1.12, 1.13, 1.14 and 1.15)
- extend the composition and terms of reference of the Academic Board to enable it to take effective oversight of higher education (paragraph 1.19)
- ensure that student representatives are appropriately trained and supported for their roles to reach the broader student community (paragraph 2.9)
- revise its procedures for complaints and appeals so that they relate specifically to higher education students (paragraph 2.18)
- develop and implement an information policy (paragraph 3.5).

That by the start of the academic year 2014-15 the College should:

- map its quality assurance arrangements against sections of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraph 1.1)
- develop procedures, with external representation, for its own periodic internal review of programmes prior to formal awarding body review
  (paragraphs 1.21 and 1.22)
- develop a higher education staff development plan to include teaching and learning and scholarly activity (paragraph 2.6)
- develop management information systems that make better use of comprehensive higher education management information including benchmark data
  (paragraph 2.14)
- develop and implement a planned approach to career and progression advice for higher education students (paragraph 2.21)
- enhance the effectiveness of the virtual learning environment as an interactive learning tool (paragraph 2.26)
- develop an effective approach to the securing and monitoring of placements and identifies and implements support mechanisms for the development of placement staff (paragraph 2.29)
- in consultation with students, revise the current College Charter to more accurately reflect the expectations, entitlements and responsibilities of higher education students (paragraph 2.30).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that Peter Symonds College is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students:

- the continuing development of a higher education focused process for the observation of teaching (paragraph 2.4)
- the continuing development of a student questionnaire based on the national student survey questions for implementation in June 2013 (paragraph 2.8).

About Peter Symonds College

Peter Symonds College is a sixth form college offering a broad choice of courses for 16-19 year olds of all academic abilities within the community of Winchester and its environs. It is the only sixth form college nationally to offer boarding places, frequently to those in forces schools abroad, but also to nationals of the Falkland Islands.

On a separate site, and within the wider community, the College offers a range of adult education courses and training. The College seeks to equip its students not only to succeed in the short term, but to recognise their longer term potential. The Adult and Higher Education Division (AHED) responds to the diverse needs of the wider adult community. The programme for adults ranges from the development of essential, basic skills, courses for fun and leisure, through to foundation and full honours degrees. AHED aims to provide a second chance for many and the opportunity to advance both in the workplace, socially and academically.

The College is the lead college and founding member of the Caxton Group, which is a national group of top performing sixth form colleges. Each college is working with Middlesex University as an awarding body to provide an alternative non-traditional route to achieving a higher education qualification.

The majority of the College's higher education programmes are written by staff at the College and validated by Middlesex University. The College also offers a selection of higher education courses validated by Pearson Edexcel and the University of Greenwich.

Explanation of the findings about Peter Symonds College

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.[4]

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[5] is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the Review of College Higher Education handbook, also on the QAA website.[6]

1   Academic standards

Outcome

The policies and procedures at Peter Symonds College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in maintaining the threshold academic standards set by its awarding body. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1   The College delivers awards offered by the University of Greenwich, Middlesex University and Edexcel. The review team found that each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). This is established through Middlesex University validation arrangements, which confirm that the programme specifications designed by the College demonstrate such alignment, and by University of Greenwich franchise approval and monitoring arrangements. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2014-15 the College map its quality assurance arrangements against sections of the UK Quality Code for Higher.

1.2   The University awards are underpinned by four separate Memoranda of Cooperation with Middlesex University and a Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Greenwich. The student handbooks are comprehensive and include programme specifications, which note the relevant FHEQ level and subject benchmarks. External examiner reports confirm that programmes continue to be at the appropriate standard. The College's Academic Regulations, approved by Middlesex University, are described clearly. These clarify for students the nature of levels and credit and the overall requirements to achieve these.

Use of external examiners

1.3   The College makes scrupulous use of external examiners and actively engages with the appropriate procedures of each examining body. The College recommend the appointment of external examiners to Middlesex University and responds comprehensively and in a timely manner to the external examiners' reports through procedures established by Middlesex University. External examiners are offered the same induction as for Middlesex University on-campus external examiners and have the opportunity to visit the College. Staff confirmed that external examiners visited the College to meet students as well as attending assessment boards.

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[4] The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However, it is available on request for inspection; please contact QAA's Reviews Group.
[5] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx
[6] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx

1.4	External examiner reports are received by Middlesex University and forwarded to the College for comment within six weeks. The reports are comprehensive, commenting on standards, assessment and learning opportunities. The Director of Adult and Higher Education and the Programme Leaders consider the reports and send detailed responses direct to the external examiners. These are copied to Middlesex University. The review team found the detailed and timely responses to the external examiner reports supported by the mutual understanding of the approved processes by the Director of Adult and Higher Education and Programme Leaders, and Middlesex University colleagues to be a feature of **good practice**.

1.5	Boards of study meetings receive a note of the key points in, and the responses to, the reports, though not always the full reports, at the December round of meetings. The College might wish to ensure that each board of study receives the full reports and responses. The review team learned that external examiners were usually present at progression/award boards, and the team saw evidence of their input to discussion.

1.6	The external examiner reports are made available to student representatives on the boards of study, and the course handbooks indicate how individual students might access the reports, which are available on the virtual learning environment. Students confirmed these arrangements, although none whom the review team met had seen any reports and were unclear about the role of the external examiners. The College does not brief students on the role of the external examiners, nor support student representatives in their consideration of external examiner reports at boards of study meetings.

Assessment and standards

1.7	Assessment strategies and approaches are approved at validation, explained in course handbooks and provide students with appropriate and varied opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of the stated learning outcomes.

1.8	The College's assessment strategy is supported by a comprehensive clear 'guide to good practice in marking and providing feedback on assessed work', which is helpful to and well regarded by staff. The review team found the College's comprehensive and clear guidance on marking and giving feedback to be a feature of **good practice**.

1.9	Details of the learning, teaching and assessment strategies are also contained in the validation documents, with reports of validation panels noting discussions on assessment strategies and practice. Programme teams responded satisfactorily to validation panel recommendations on assessment issues.

1.10	Student handbooks produced in collaboration with Middlesex University and the University of Greenwich provide comprehensive guidance on assessment criteria, including arrangements for submission, receipt and feedback. Students confirm their understanding of the marking arrangements and agree that they are aware of what is required to obtain particular grades.

1.11	Second marking takes place. However, processes are lacking for recording first and second marks and explicitly resolving any differences.

1.12	Students submit coursework in hard copy by given deadlines and are aware of mark penalties for late submission. Students may additionally submit their coursework electronically, and all are encouraged to use plagiarism detection software. Students confirm they have been advised on plagiarism at induction, through their programmes and some by their personal tutors.

1.13   Some programmes permit the submission of draft assignments. Students report varied experiences in this regard; some being permitted one draft, others an apparently infinite number of drafts and others with increasing limitations on the volume able to be submitted in sequential drafts. Students report that one programme did not permit draft coursework submissions.

1.14   Course handbooks indicate an assignment feedback turnaround period normally 'within 15 days' of submission. The assessment and marking flowchart made available to staff refers to a 'three working week' period. Students the review team met were unaware of formal timescales for feedback and expressed concern at a lack of clear information on this and of varied experiences encountered in turnaround times.

1.15   Students report that dates for the submission of coursework are often at variance with those listed in the course handbook; different dates often appear on lists distributed at the start of the course, and some students report their experience of these being further changed during the programme. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2013-14 the College establish, implement and embed robust arrangements for the communication of consistent information in relation to course deadline submissions, feedback on assessed work and the submission of assignment drafts.

1.16   Most students report that the feedback they received is very helpful and that programme and personal tutors are accessible and supportive in developing the feedback they offered.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.17   The College offers validated programmes of Middlesex University, which has overall responsibility for the quality and standards of its courses offered at the College. The Middlesex University Quality Handbook clearly identifies the relative responsibilities of the College.

1.18   The relationship with the University of Greenwich for Postgraduate Certificate in Education franchised provision is governed by a Memorandum of Agreement, the most recent being concluded in May 2012. This clearly shows the responsibilities of both parties. On approval, the University of Greenwich establishes a validation panel and stipulates the requirements for the validation document.

1.19   The College has recently established an Academic Board, which has met on one occasion, with a remit 'for the development and oversight of the higher education work' of the College. It also has overall College responsibility for academic standards. The composition includes up to two student members, although these had not yet been elected, and the Curriculum Heads. There is no representation for academic support staff who might be expected to advise on resource matters and contribute to monitoring and review. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2013-14 the College extend the composition and terms of reference of the Academic Board to enable it to take effective oversight of higher education.

1.20   Each programme has a board of study which includes student members, the Programme Leader, the Director of Adult and Higher Education and a university link tutor; although not all of these were represented at the meetings for which minutes were available. The College may consider it beneficial that the Academic Board receives the minutes of the boards of study, prior to their consideration at Middlesex University, to enable it to gain an overall view of the ongoing business of each of the programmes.

1.21   Each of the awarding bodies requires an annual monitoring report, and requires the College to complete a detailed template for submission to the awarding body. Annual monitoring reports are not discussed prior to submission to the awarding bodies. This hampers immediate feedback to programme teams.

1.22   Having mostly been validated within the last two years, the programmes have not been subject to periodic review. The College does not have in place procedures for its own periodic internal review of programmes prior to the reviews conducted by the awarding bodies. This hampers immediate feedback to programme teams. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2014-15 the College develop procedures, with external representation, for its own periodic internal review of programmes prior to formal awarding body review.

1.23   The College's own internal monitoring is considered through a Quality Cycle Review. The Senior Management Team considers these arrangements to be effective, and teaching staff confirm the rigour of the process.

Subject benchmarks

1.24   Staff demonstrate a professional awareness of appropriate QAA subject and level benchmark statements, which, together with other subject and professional body reference points, contributed to the initial setting and ongoing maintenance of the academic standards of the awards. The review team identified the scrupulous attention paid by programme teams to QAA's subject benchmark statements, professional body requirements and other external benchmarks in the development and monitoring of programmes as a feature of **good practice.**

2   Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The policies and procedures at Peter Symonds College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in the quality of the student learning opportunities. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1   Teaching at the College is varied, supportive and meets individual student needs. Staff were able to coherently describe the use of small classes, workshops, seminars and the use of a variety of teaching methods as strengths in line with the learning and teaching strategy. Students who the review team met confirm that such an approach enabled them to learn effectively in accordance with their individual learning preferences. The review team identified the varied and supportive learning and teaching experience provided by the college in line with its higher education mission as a feature of **good practice.**

2.2   Professional practice is central to the curriculum for the qualifications delivered by the College. The portfolio of qualifications including Foundations Degrees, HNDs, honours and a forthcoming master's have been developed with representatives from the relevant disciplines. Visiting speakers and part-time practitioners employed as teaching staff maintain the currency and vocational relevance of teaching. Students confirm that they are able to apply theory to their workplace practice and to develop workplace knowledge in the classroom.

2.3   Effective processes support teachers new to teaching in higher education. Effective induction for new teachers covers assessment for higher education, awarding body regulations and elements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). Early review and observation of teaching ensures appropriate support at the start of their careers.

2.4   An effective process of observing teaching takes place in the College. A trained team observes teaching across the College. Although the criteria and grading are currently those of the Ofsted common inspection framework, the College is exploring ways of observing teaching to more accurately reflect the Quality Code. The College plans a more holistic approach to the observation process to include scholarly activity and student feedback. The review team **affirms** the progress made and the ongoing development of a higher education focused process for the observation of teaching.

Learning resources

2.5   Appropriately qualified staff, supported by College services and physical resources, enables students to achieve the learning outcomes of their programme.

2.6   The programme of supporting research and scholarly activity to inform teaching and learning is at an early stage of development within the College. Staff are supported by time and/or funding to attend courses and conferences, or to improve their qualifications. Teaching staff may also attend awarding body staff development sessions or gain qualifications although this has yet to be fully utilised. The appraisal process identifies staff development needs for all College staff. The College is yet to develop a central plan to assure itself that all higher education teaching staff remain current and well qualified. The recent validation of a master's programme adds impetus to the need for such a plan. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2014-15 the College develop a higher education staff development plan to include teaching and learning and scholarly activity.

2.7   Learning resources are sufficient to support current numbers. The College has met recent demands for additional books, journals and computers. Boards of study do not currently discuss resource requirements and the process of identifying needs remains informal. However, through questionnaires, student representation and programme review, the process is responsive to student needs. The main College site houses the library, with a small stock of key texts available for loan on the higher education site. Students have access to electronic books and online journals and may borrow laptop computers during College opening hours. Students who met reviewers did not make extensive use of library facilities on the main site. Higher education students do not have access to the Middlesex University library or electronic resources. Students of the University of Greenwich do have such access. Classroom facilities are suitable for higher education learning and students who met the team are satisfied with specialist resources for sport and counselling.

Student voice

2.8   Extensive canvassing of student opinion and student representation on boards of study allows students to make a significant contribution to quality assurance. Students who met with the review team provided examples of how the College had responded to their representation, for example extending café opening hours or the order of teaching in a module. The College plans to revise a cross-college survey to reflect more closely the views of higher education students by using the national student survey questions. The review team **affirms** the continuing development of a student questionnaire based on the national student survey questions for implementation in June 2013.

2.9   The College has yet to fully implement the terms of reference which allow for student representation on the Academic Board. Informal elections take place for student representatives. However, training is not provided to prepare them for their roles or for how best to disseminate the results of their representations. Student representatives from different programmes do not have a forum for sharing their experiences. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2013-14 the College ensures that student representatives are appropriately trained and supported for their roles to reach the broader student community.

2.10   Curriculum design and effective tutorials support students' future career enhancement. The vocational curriculum offered by the College provides a strong focus on workplace knowledge and skills. Study support services and specialist tutors help students with academic writing and study skills. Students, and in particular mature students and those with non-academic backgrounds, who met the review team, valued such support.

Management information

2.11   Extensive use is made of management information to review individual programmes. An annual meeting between the Principal and programme leaders examines recruitment, success rates, progression, staffing and other issues raised in the annual monitoring reports. Mid-year the Quality Manager and Vice-Principal scrutinise student satisfaction and student progress statistics. The College also allocates performance grades to its programmes, although higher education was not included in this process because the programmes are relatively new.

2.12   Operational targets for higher education are not included in the strategic and operation plan produced in June 2012. Processes to consider management information by senior decision-making bodies are in the early stages of development, as the Academic Board had only met once at the time of the review. The extent of the Academic Board's remit to examine data is unclear from its current terms of reference and the absence of a meetings cycle.

2.13   Data is available to support the current management of programmes, but is limited in quantity and largely generated at programme level. The College plans to bring higher education data in line with the main site by July 2013.

2.14   Monitoring of disability, appeals and complaints statistics is at College level, or for the whole of the Adult and Higher Education Division. The College is unable to use such data to inform decision-making and secure enhancement of student experience for higher education students. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2014-15 the College develop management information systems that make better use of comprehensive higher education management information including benchmark data.

Admission to the College

2.15   College policies and procedures for admission and induction are clear and accessible. Fair and inclusive admissions procedures focus on interviews and identification of student potential. Detailed application forms and interviews facilitate admission to college programmes. Initial screening allows the College to provide appropriate additional support for students. The application form and early course activities identify students' ability in written tasks.

2.16   Students who met the team describe the process of application, admission and induction as clear and helpful. Feedback from the first cohort of students has improved the

length and detail of the induction process. Student views are canvassed early in the programme to assess the effectiveness of the induction process.

Complaints and appeals

2.17   Complaints and appeals processes are well documented and accessible to students. Students who met with the team knew where to access information on appeals and how to complain but had not needed to invoke the processes. The Curriculum and Quality Assurance Committee noted higher education complaints as 'minor'. Standard college appeals and complaints procedures and documentation apply to higher education students. However, the procedures refer explicitly to sixth form programmes rather than higher education programmes. Students may appeal to the awarding body once they have exhausted College procedures.

2.18   Specific higher education processes exist for students asked to withdraw and for cases of academic misconduct. Because of the small number of staff involved in higher education, the roles of those involved in the process need clear separation to guarantee impartiality throughout the process. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2013-14 the College revise its procedures for complaints and appeals so that they relate specifically to higher education students.

Career advice and guidance

2.19   External accreditation to the Matrix standard for careers, advice and guidance secure the quality of the College's procedures. However, procedures are not mapped against relevant chapters of the Quality Code.

2.20   Initial advice and guidance in the College is clear and easily available. Students who met the team knew where to access information and felt that they received good support from the College.

2.21   Although most higher education students are already in employment they do not receive planned career and progression guidance. The Student Handbook (Adults) 2012-13 refers students to the national careers service website and phone contact. Students who met the team report that information on progression opportunities is inconsistent across programmes. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2014-15 the College develop and implement a planned approach to career and progression advice for higher education students.

Supporting disabled students

2.22   The College supports the needs of disabled students. The College complies with relevant legislation through its policies and procedures in relation to disability, race, gender or other characteristics. It has consulted with external stakeholders to inform its procedures and taken appropriate action as a result. The College reviews the impact of policies and procedures regularly to maintain their efficacy throughout the student journey. Physical changes to the property ensure access for disabled students and an environment more appropriate to their needs.

2.23   The identification of and support for dyslexic students is particularly strong. The College takes steps through its application, induction and early assessment processes to identify and support students with dyslexia. This is effective in securing student performance.

Supporting international students

2.24   The College currently has no plans to recruit international students.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.25   Student handbooks detail that the College uses a virtual learning environment and that all programme information and relevant learning materials will be loaded and ready for use. Students are expected to log in at least once a week.

2.26   The College does not make full use of the potential of the virtual learning environment to enhance student learning. Teaching staff upload course handbooks, schemes of work for each module along with handouts and course materials. This was not done consistently by all staff across all courses. Some pages contain links to relevant academic and other sites including publicly available video clips. Discussion threads using the virtual learning environment are yet to be developed. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2014-15 the College enhance the effectiveness of the virtual learning environment as an interactive learning tool.

Work-based and placement learning

2.27   Students report that they are able to apply their studies to the workplace and that the learning outcomes had real life relevance.

2.28   Quality assurance arrangements for work-based and placement learning are not mapped against the relevant sections of the Quality Code. Many students are already on work placements at the start of their studies. In its Prospectus, the College states that those currently not working will be given support in finding a work placement, however responsibility for this ultimately lies with the student. Students met by the team comment that they would have welcomed further information on this prior to commencing a course of study. Students report that the College does not currently provide enough support for those students without a placement and this has led to additional costs for the affected students.

2.29   The College provides detailed mentor guidance and handbooks for work-based learning modules. The College, in its self-evaluation, recognises that further work needs to be done to create more effective relationships with placement mentors. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2014-15 the College develop an effective approach to the securing and monitoring of placements and identifies and implements support mechanisms for the development of placement staff.

Student charter

2.30   Student handbooks identify what is expected of students and what they can expect of the College. However, students who met the review team confirm that they are not aware of the information contained in the handbooks or of its relevance. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2014-15 the College, in consultation with students, revise the current College Charter to more accurately reflect the expectations, entitlements and responsibilities of higher education students.

3 Quality of information for students and applicants

Summary

The policies and procedures at Peter Symonds College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in the quality of information produced for students and applicants. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

3.1 There is a large amount of easily accessible information available for prospective students through the website, prospectus and course leaflets. Students confirm the value and accuracy of this information.

3.2 Checking procedures for published information have yet to be fully implemented. Currently sign-off of marketing materials are fragmented with no clear, distinct and overarching process for all published materials.

3.3 Information directly related to higher education courses, including student handbooks, is approved by the awarding bodies. The documents are finalised and approved at validation. However, any subsequent documents are not revisited as a matter of course.

3.4 There are inconsistencies in course level information provided to students who report that handbooks, handouts and virtual learning environment information on assignments' deadlines and word counts varied.

3.5 There is an inconsistent approach to final sign off of information. Staff are unclear about who has responsibility for final sign-off of information. There is a need for formal discussion through the committee structure to ensure parity and consistency of information, including the development of clear guidelines for staff about the creation of all publications including course documentation. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2013-14 the College develop and implement an information policy.

Glossary

Initial Review is very similar to Review of College Higher Education (RCHE). The guidance note for Institutional Review is intended to be read in conjunction with the RCHE handbook. The RCHE handbook gives formal definitions of terms such as 'threshold standards' and 'learning opportunities' (pages 17-20). This glossary provides a quick reference to the terms.

The guidance for Initial Review can be found on the QAA website at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/initial-review-guidance.aspx

The RCHE handbook can be found on the QAA website at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-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 standards: The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

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 or college 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 the UK-wide set of reference points for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the Expectations that all providers are required to meet.

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.