



## **Northam College**

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

November 2012

## Key findings about Northam College

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in November 2012, the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **limited confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of the Association of Business Practitioners and the Institute of Administrative Management.

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

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

## Recommendations

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

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

- ensure the effective oversight of academic standards (paragraph 1.2)
- implement a programme approval process for new higher education programmes (paragraph 1.4)
- revise its internal verification procedures to ensure the appropriate level of assessment (paragraph 1.10)
- ensure effective management of the teaching and learning strategy (paragraph 2.5)
- review the prospectus and website in advance of the recruitment of any future students (paragraph 3.1).

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

- customise academic policies to make them suitable for the level and scale of provision (paragraph 1.3)
- fully implement the proposals that were developed to improve the practice of lecturers and the internal verification process before teaching recommences (paragraph 1.5)
- develop the outcomes of teacher observations to be used more effectively to inform staff development (paragraph 2.6)
- review the effectiveness of student induction (paragraph 2.8)
- produce more detailed and evaluative annual monitoring reports to identify good practice and enhance learning opportunities (paragraphs 2.11 and 2.15)
- consider formal support for new staff through mentoring arrangements (paragraph 2.14).

## About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)<sup>1</sup> (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at Northam College (the provider; the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the provider discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes of study that the provider delivers on behalf of the Association of Business Practitioners and the Institute of Administrative Management. The review was carried out by Rebecca Morrison, John Skinner (reviewers) and Martin Hill (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the [Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](#).<sup>2</sup> Evidence in support of the review included:

- the agreements and handbooks of the Association of Business Practitioners and the Institute of Administrative Management
- meetings with students
- meetings with staff
- samples of marked student work
- the policy documents and manuals published by the College.

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

- the Academic Infrastructure
- Accreditation Service for International Colleges.

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

Northam College (the College) was founded in 2009 and began teaching in September 2010. It obtained accreditation from the Accreditation Service for International Colleges in early 2010 and a licence from the UK Border Agency in May 2010. It has teaching premises in Hounslow, but these remain unused. The College's main office and teaching facilities are in Brentford. There are two full-time and five part-time administrative staff and four staff registered as potential lecturers.

The College has recruited 152 students over 18 months. In June 2011, teaching at the College was suspended by the UK Border Agency. The final group of students completed their programmes in February/March 2012. A number of students discontinued their programmes and transferred to other providers.

At the time of the review, the School was not offering any higher education programmes and there were no higher education students. The School previously had accreditation from the Association of Business Practitioners for the Postgraduate Diploma in Business and Management (level 7), the Institute of Administrative Management for the Diploma in Business Administrative Management (level 4), and the Institute of Commercial Management for the Advanced Diploma in Business Studies (level 6).

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<sup>1</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4)

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx)

## **The provider's stated responsibilities**

The motto of the College is 'Excelsior', meaning to aim higher and higher. Its mission is to mentor and equip students to achieve academic and career success that is aimed towards providing a lifelong difference in career progression.

The College states that major elements of the management of academic standards, such as curriculum, key aspects of assessment, primary reference to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and some aspects of the programme specifications, are the responsibility of the awarding organisations. In the assurance and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities, the College evaluates new programmes and the processes of delivery of learning and teaching and resource allocation. The College states that it evaluates the delivery of the academic experience from the students' perspective.

## **Recent developments**

Since the College has no current students, the teaching and learning facilities have been removed from the building in Brentford and put into storage.

In March 2012, the Association of Business Practitioners informed the College that it was withdrawing the Postgraduate Diploma in Business and Management and that the College was approved to run the replacement programme, the Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership and Management in the Health and Social Care Sector.

## **Students' contribution to the review**

There were no students studying on higher education programmes at the College when the invitation to present a submission to the review team was made. Thus, it was not possible for the College to supply a student submission. At the visit, the team met three past students and was able to gather some information about their experiences when they studied at the College.

## Detailed findings about Northam College

### 1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The College has one committee, the Senior Management Team, which considers all academic and administrative matters. According to the Quality Assurance Handbook, the Principal has executive responsibility along with the Marketing and Administrative Director for establishing and implementing the quality standards of the College's programmes. Responsibility for the management of academic matters is delegated to the Academic Director.

1.2 The College does not have a formal reporting line through the Senior Management Team meetings to an overall governing committee, nor any separate assessment or standards boards. There is no clear overview of the academic strategic plan of the College and important issues, such as the discussion of new programmes, are not being appropriately addressed at a senior level. Although the Quality Assurance Handbook identifies the frequency of the different types of meeting, this timing is not always being followed and meetings are often convened at the request of management. The membership varies for the discussion of different topics. Staff may be invited to join the Senior Management Team meetings if appropriate to the topic under discussion. Minutes are recorded and action points noted. Action points are not tabled at subsequent meetings to allow completed outcomes to be recorded or further actions to be noted. When the College delivered programmes, the Principal held regular meetings with student representatives. The team was told that the issues raised at these meetings were either agreed or actioned, with responsibilities identified. However, there is limited evidence in the minutes of the Senior Management Team meetings that these discussions had taken place or that action points had been resolved. The College plans to hold more regular management meetings. It is advisable that the College formalises its management committee structure to ensure that it operates proactively to provide effective oversight of the management of academic standards. It should also make appropriate use of an improved annual monitoring process referred to in the desirable recommendation in paragraph 2.11.

1.3 A number of the academic policies are not appropriate to the level or scale of operation at the College. The Quality Assurance Handbook has a large number of policies on academic standards that are approved by the Principal and the Marketing and Administrative Director. However, many policies have little, or no, application. For example, the Best Practice Policy refers to Academic Team meetings which are not identified in the College's governance structure, and dissemination events which are not held. As the College is awaiting the resumption of teaching, there is no evidence that these or other policies have been reconsidered. It is desirable that the College customises academic policies to make them suitable for the level and scale of provision.

1.4 The College has not appropriately considered a significant change in the programmes being offered. The College informed the team that they were contacted by the Association of Business Practitioners to inform them that the Postgraduate Diploma in Business Studies was being withdrawn. The College chose the Postgraduate Extended Diploma in Leadership and Management in the Health and Social Care Sector as a replacement from a list of alternative programmes. The self-evaluation provided to the team made no reference to the new programme and the team was only made aware of this when access to the website and the draft prospectus was gained. Members of the Senior Management Team had only considered this new programme through email communication,

much of which related to another college. There was limited evidence of any wider consideration of the academic standards, market demand, learning resources, or academic skills needed to teach it. It is advisable that the College implements a process of programme approval for new higher education programmes to evaluate their academic, operational and staffing implications.

1.5 The team saw limited evidence of strategies to improve the management of academic standards being implemented. In May 2011, as a result of poor pass rates on the Institute of Administrative Management programme, the Academic Director prepared a well-reasoned strategy for improving student retention and performance. Due to the suspension of teaching in July 2011, actions from this strategy have not been put in place. The College also received a critical external verifier's report for the Association of Business Practitioners programme following a visit in June 2011. This resulted in a special management meeting where the Academic Director identified key weaknesses in the practice of lecturers and the internal verification process. The required actions from this meeting were documented in the next Senior Management Team meeting, but, because of the suspension of teaching, there is no evidence that any changes have been made. In December 2011, the following external verifier's report noted some areas of improvement. It is desirable that the proposals that were developed to improve the practice of lecturers and the internal verification process are fully implemented before teaching recommences.

1.6 The College has contact with its awarding organisations and it regards this relationship as effective. When it delivered programmes, there was regular administrative contact with the awarding organisations. Senior management have subsequently attended training sessions at the Association of Business Practitioners. The visits by the Association of Business Practitioners' external verifier provide the College with useful feedback. The College creates an improvement plan using areas highlighted by the external verifier's report. Responsibilities for actions are identified and completion dates are listed. The Academic Director has the responsibility for ensuring the completion of the action plan. Prior to the suspension of teaching, the monitoring and completion of the action points was appropriate, but there is no evidence of the extent to which this process has been continued.

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

1.7 The College uses a variety of external reference points to support the management of academic standards. The Quality Assurance Handbook was benchmarked to various aspects of the Academic Infrastructure. This was approved by the Senior Management Team and subsequently made available to teaching staff.

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

1.8 Both awarding organisations have responsibility for curriculum development, intended learning outcomes and programme specifications for their respective programmes. The Institute of Administrative Management has responsibility for the setting and marking of students' work. The College is unable to advise its students on their performance in the Institute of Administrative Management examinations, as it receives no qualitative feedback.

1.9 The College has overall responsibility for the setting and marking of assessments for the Association of Business Practitioners programme. Lecturers have responsibility for designing and setting the assessments. The scrutiny process includes reviews from the Academic Manager and the Academic Director, who signs off the assessments. When the College delivered programmes, the process of setting assessments was effective.

1.10 The level of student performance for the Association of Business Practitioners programme is below that expected of postgraduate students. The team reviewed a sample of internally verified past assessments for the Postgraduate Diploma in Business Management. The work demonstrated little critical evaluation, was not at the appropriate academic level and referencing was inadequate. Oral feedback on student work was provided, but written feedback was very limited, often simply identifying which intended learning outcomes had been achieved. It did not clearly show students how they could improve their performance. The internal verifier did not identify these issues. The Internal Verification Policy and Procedure defines the responsibilities and process for assessment setting and marking. There is evidence of internal verification, but it is inadequate. As noted in paragraph 1.5, the quality of the internal verification process was questioned by the external verifier and subsequently by the Head of Academics, but there is no evidence that any changes have been made. It is advisable for the College to revise its internal verification procedures to ensure the appropriate level of assessment and adequate developmental feedback is provided.

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

## 2 Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1 The Principal and the Marketing and Administrative Director have the overall responsibility for ensuring the quality of student learning opportunities. The Academic Director has operational responsibility to ensure that the teaching plans and assessment methods are appropriate. As noted in paragraph 1.2, the College does not have an effective system to ensure that important issues about the quality of learning opportunities are systematically addressed at a senior strategic level. The advisable recommendation in paragraph 1.2 also applies to the quality of learning opportunities.

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

2.2 The College makes use of some external reference points for the management and enhancement of learning opportunities. As mentioned in paragraph 1.7, the College has undertaken a mapping exercise to ensure consistency with the Academic Infrastructure. In managing the learning opportunities, it has made effective use of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters* and *Section 10: Admissions to higher education*.

2.3 In addition to taking account of the Academic Infrastructure, the College has used other external reference points, such as those provided by the Accreditation Service for International Colleges.

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

2.4 The Teaching and Learning Strategy is only partially operational. The review team has found inconsistencies between the published strategy for 2010-13 and the existing management structure. The lecturers are familiar with some aspects of the published

strategy. In particular, they are aware of the need to ensure that students achieve the intended learning outcomes. They are also aware of the need for a variety of activities to provide students with opportunities for the development of transferrable and employability skills. However, as noted in the advisable recommendation in paragraph 1.10, the written feedback on student work is limited and does not clearly show students how they could improve their performance.

2.5 The Academic Director actively reviews and verifies schemes of work, lesson plans and assessment tasks. Other mechanisms in the approved strategy are not yet operational, including the Learning and Teaching Committee, the Academic Council, and the Teaching Enhancement Forum. Senior management stated that parts of the strategy are aspirations rather than current practice. It is advisable that the College ensures effective management of the teaching and learning strategy.

2.6 The College operates a formal teacher observation scheme. The scheme aims to observe each member of staff at least once a year, and newer staff at least every six months. This has not been achieved due to the suspension in teaching. The records of observations are descriptively detailed, but the resultant evaluations are limited and not developed to produce identifiable actions linked to staff development. It is desirable that the outcomes of teacher observations are used more effectively to inform staff development.

2.7 The College's recruitment policy to teach on higher education is that staff are qualified to master's degree level and either have, or are working towards, a teacher qualification. The College relies primarily on recruiting staff with current experience of teaching in colleges offering similar programmes.

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

2.8 The College has clear procedures for student admission and induction. Upon admission, students receive a one-day structured induction programme. However, the team met students who had missed the formal induction process and had to rely on the comments and advice of other students. Other students viewed the programme as limited in scope and duration. It is desirable that the College reviews the effectiveness of student induction.

2.9 The College does not operate a formal designated tutorial system, but makes time in the teaching programme for student issues. It has built into its teaching programme diagnostic tests to help identify additional support for students. This resulted in the provision of additional English classes for some students. The students that the review team met said that these are effective.

2.10 The College uses both formal and informal feedback from students, putting more weight on informal communication to evaluate its provision. Students are consulted through programme questionnaires and student meetings with the Principal, at which they can raise issues. These areas of concern are considered and target dates for action are set. The student surveys indicate that there is a high level of satisfaction with student support, and the teaching and learning methods. The meetings with students confirmed this.

2.11 The evaluations in the annual monitoring reports lack detailed evaluation of the provision. The annual monitoring reports only describe the support mechanisms for students for each programme. Student feedback is collated, together with staff evaluation and comments from the external verifier's report. The annual monitoring reports are structured with appropriate topic headings, but lack the identification of good practice and action points for enhancement. It is desirable that the College produces more detailed and evaluative annual monitoring reports to enhance learning opportunities.



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

2.12 The College has a formal process of staff development, which is outlined in the Staff Development Policy. This states that academic staff should attend regular training events and continuing professional development. They may also receive financial support from a designated budget. Staff are requested to keep details of this training on their human resources file and to complete a post-training evaluation.

2.13 The interruption of teaching means that recent training has been limited and ad hoc. Key staff have recently attended briefings from awarding and regulatory organisations. As mentioned in paragraph 2.6, there is currently no staff development arising from the teacher observation programme. The College is at present relying on the part-time teaching staff remaining up to date and receiving staff development elsewhere. The advisable recommendation in paragraph 1.4 applies to the updating of the part-time staff to be employed by the College.

2.14 There are no formal mentoring arrangements for staff in the College. On appointment, all new staff receive a copy of the Quality Assurance Handbook and the Academic Director ensures that lesson plans and teaching and assessment strategies are appropriate. The College relies upon the compact nature of the teaching teams to ensure support for individuals. Given the planned expansion of student numbers and the resultant need for more staff, it is desirable that, as the number of teaching staff increases, the College considers formal support for new staff through mentoring arrangements.

2.15 There is limited dissemination of good practice. The College has a Good Practice Report Form, but the review team found no examples of this documentation being used. As noted in paragraph 1.3, the policies from the Quality Assurance Handbook have not been fully implemented. The identification and dissemination of good practice has been limited to the Academic Director emailing staff to inform them of desired actions. As identified in the desirable recommendation in paragraph 2.11, the College should develop mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice.

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

2.16 The meeting with past students and the report from the Accreditation Service for International Colleges indicated that, before the suspension of teaching, the classroom resources were of good quality and sufficient in quantity. Students had free access to internet and email in the information technology room, which was available for independent study when not in use for teaching. There was a library with additional information technology stations. The College's library policy was to provide e-library facilities and also supply textbooks to students for reference.

2.17 The College has a virtual learning environment which is currently used to store teaching information rather than as an interactive learning tool. The Principal and the Marketing and Administrative Director review the provision and use of resources for effectiveness. Past students met by the team stated that there were sufficient resources for them to achieve the requirements of their programmes and that when they raised issues concerning the speed of computers and sufficiency of library stock, the College management were responsive to their needs.

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

### 3 Public information

#### **How effectively does the provider's published information communicate to students and other stakeholders?**

3.1 The College is not currently making information available to students or other stakeholders. At the time of the review, the lack of staff at the College made it difficult to respond to enquiries. Before and during the review, the website was under construction and new information was being added. The prospectus was in draft format. The review team was given access to the current version of the website and the draft prospectus. It is advisable for the College to review the prospectus and website, in advance of the recruitment of any future students.

3.2 The College is responsible for the production of the prospectus and website, which contain contact details for the College, brief programme information and clear information on fees and the enrolment process. The website provides students with adequate information on moving to the UK and support with finding accommodation and health care resources. The College plans to use the website to publish programme information with the ability to download a prospectus. The information contained in the draft prospectus is consistent with that on the current version of the website, and is appropriate and accurate.

3.3 Previously, the College also used a promotional video for marketing trips. It plans to upgrade this to make it appropriate to the programmes being offered. Students are given induction packs. The College produces a Student Handbook which contains important information about the College. Staff members are provided with an Employee Handbook, outlining expectations and policies for their employment. There is college-wide information on the virtual learning environment, including policies on academic misconduct and lateness. It is the intention of the College to make information regarding students' attendance and fees easily accessible on the virtual learning environment.

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

3.4 The College has shared responsibility with both the awarding organisations for public information, and is clear that it is only permitted to publish information about the programmes in line with their agreements. The programme specifications are written by the awarding organisations and the College uses these without modification.

3.5 The Academic Department is responsible for preparing other internal student-related documents. The Academic Director reviews the documents before they are sent to the Marketing and Administrative Director, who has ultimate responsibility for the accuracy of all published documentation. The College has a document policy, and implementation of the policy is planned when teaching recommences. The team considers this process to be appropriate for the size of the College.

3.6 The team saw evidence of an agreement with one agent being used by the College in the recruitment of students. The Marketing and Administrative Director is responsible for the management and quality assurance of the material published by agents. They are

required to complete an application form, a questionnaire for quality assurance, and sign a contract agreement. The suspension of teaching means that the College is not currently using agents.

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

## Action plan

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

## About QAA

QAA is the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. QAA's mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education.

QAA's aims are to:

- meet students' needs and be valued by them
- safeguard standards in an increasingly diverse UK and international context
- drive improvements in UK higher education
- improve public understanding of higher education standards and quality.

QAA conducts reviews of higher education institutions and publishes reports on the findings. QAA also publishes a range of guidance documents to help safeguard standards and improve quality.

More information about the work of QAA is available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

More detail about Review for Educational Oversight can be found at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/tier-4](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/tier-4).

## Glossary

This glossary explains terms used in this report. You can find a fuller glossary at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary). Formal definitions of key terms can be found in the [Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](#)<sup>3</sup>

**Academic Infrastructure** Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

**academic quality** A comprehensive term referring to how, and how well, institutions manage teaching and learning opportunities to help students progress and succeed.

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

**awarding body** A body with the authority to award academic qualifications located on the **framework for higher education qualifications**, such as diplomas or degrees.

**awarding organisation** An organisation with the authority to award academic qualifications located on the Qualifications and Credit Framework for England and Northern Ireland (these qualifications are at levels 1 to 8, with levels 4 and above being classed as 'higher education').

**Code of practice** *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

**designated body** An organisation that has been formally appointed to perform a particular function.

**differentiated judgements** In a Review for Educational Oversight, separate judgements respectively for the provision validated by separate awarding bodies.

**enhancement** Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

**feature of good practice** A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

**framework** A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

**framework for higher education qualifications** A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks:

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<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx).

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

**highly trusted sponsor** An education provider that the UK government trusts to admit migrant students from overseas, according to Tier 4 of the UK Border Agency's points-based immigration system. Higher education providers wishing to obtain this status must undergo a successful review by QAA.

**learning opportunities** The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

**learning outcome** What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

**operational definition** A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

**programme (of study)** An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

**programme specifications** Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

**provider** An institution that offers courses of higher education, typically on behalf of a separate **awarding body or organisation**. In the context of REO, the term means an independent college.

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

**reference points** Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured. Internal reference points may be used by providers for purposes of self-regulation; external ones are used and accepted throughout the higher education community for the checking of standards and quality.

**quality** See **academic quality**.

**subject benchmark statement** A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

**threshold academic standard** The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

**widening participation** Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

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