



Adapted Review for Specific Course Designation by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Resource Development International Limited

December 2013

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Key findings about Resource Development International Limited

As a result of its adapted Review for Specific Course Designation carried out in December 2013, the QAA review team considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the programmes it offers on behalf of Anglia Ruskin University, University of Sunderland and Pearson.

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 bodies and organisation.

The team considers that **reliance** can be placed on the information that the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

Good practice

The team has identified the following **good practice**:

- the introduction of a legal framework clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the bodies responsible for governance and management (paragraph 1.1)
- the extensive virtual learning environment, platforms and systems to support student learning (paragraph 2.4).

Recommendations

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

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

- achieve greater student engagement with the range of mini-modules offered (paragraph 2.2)
- ensure the student representation system is clear to all students (paragraph 2.7).

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

- continue to pursue external benchmarking through professional body recognition of its programmes (paragraph 1.6)
- implement the diagnostic testing of academic skills for each student at an early stage of their studies (paragraph 1.7)
- develop external links to further promote innovation in teaching and learning (paragraph 2.8).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the adapted [Review for Specific Course Designation](#)¹ conducted by [QAA](#) at Resource Development International Limited (RDI), which is a privately funded provider of higher education. 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 Anglia Ruskin University, University of Sunderland and Pearson. The review was carried out by Professor Howard Colley (Reviewer) and Professor Peter Hodson (Coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the [Review for Educational Oversight \(and for specific course designation\): Handbook, April 2013](#).² Evidence in support of the review included documentation supplied by the provider, other recent QAA review reports, and meetings with staff and students.

QAA carries out an adapted review for providers who are also reviewed by another approved body. The [Review for Educational Oversight \(and for specific course designation\): Handbook, April 2013](#) provides further details.

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

- the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

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

RDI is a for-profit company, based in Coventry, which provides higher education programmes. Its provision is essentially delivered by distance learning to students in over 150 countries. RDI has 8,950 students and 136 tutors on flexible contracts, so a breakdown of full or part-time is not an approach taken by RDI.

RDI's programmes are mainly delivered by part-time tutors who together constitute what may be described as a distributed, or virtual, academic community, supported by a growing number of permanent senior academics. RDI actively seeks to engage its academics in the development and delivery of online learning, particularly through tutor development days. In the past year it has made significant investment in the enhancement of online learning systems and tuition platforms. These systems are seen as high quality by all stakeholders.

RDI offered the following higher education programmes for consideration under RSCD, listed beneath their awarding bodies and organisation:

Anglia Ruskin University

(validated)

- Master of Business Administration (MBA)
- MBA (Project Management)
- MBA (Management Consultancy)
- MBA (Finance)
- MBA (Marketing)
- MBA (Law)
- MBA (Human Resource Management)

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/designated-providers/Pages/default.aspx

² www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx

- MBA (Service Excellence)
- MSc Information Systems
- MSc Information Systems (Mobile Systems)
- MSc Information Systems (Systems Security)
- BA (Hons) Business
- BA (Hons) Business (Finance)
- BA (Hons) Business (Marketing)
- BA (Hons) Business (Tourism)
- BA (Hons) Business (Human Resource Management)
- BSc (Hons) Computing
- BSc (Hons) Computing (Information Management)
- BSc (Hons) Computing (Mobile Computing)
- BA (Hons) Graphic Design
- LLB (Hons) Common Law
- Graduate Diploma in Management
- Certificate of Higher Education in Management

(franchised)

- BSc (Hons) Psychology (Applied)
- BSc (Hons) Health and Social Care

University of Sunderland

- MBA (top-up)
- BA (Hons) Business Management (top-up)
- BA (Hons) Accounting and Financial Management (top-up)

Pearson

- BTEC level 7 Diploma and Extended Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership
- BTEC level 5 Higher National Diploma in Business (Management)
- BTEC level 5 Higher National Diploma in Business (Accounting)
- BTEC level 5 Higher National Diploma in Business (Marketing)
- BTEC level 5 Higher National Diploma in Travel and Tourism Management

The provider's stated responsibilities

In addition to RDI fully complying with the requirements of its awarding bodies, it has established academic and management structures and procedures which demonstrate that it is also taking full responsibility itself for the standards of the awards it delivers.

Recent developments

RDI has recently launched enhanced student learning and support platforms, providing a clearer interface for students and more accessible tutor tools. The integrated set of online platforms provided by RDI are sector-leading facilities.

Students' contribution to the review

This review was an adapted version of the review for specific course designation process, and has built on other ongoing QAA reviews which include observations of a wide range of meetings. Within this adapted process, a student submission has not been undertaken, with the student input received through the alternative QAA activity and through a meeting during the visit.

Detailed findings about Resource Development International Limited

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 RDI has an effective academic governance and management structure which includes a Board of Directors, Academic Board, Learning and Teaching Committee, programme and course committees and examination boards. A service-level agreement maintains the academic independence and integrity of RDI by defining its responsibilities and those of its parent company Capella Education. In addition, recent amendments to RDI's Articles of Association confirm that sole academic authority and responsibility for safeguarding the standards of awards lies with the Academic Board. In enhancing the legal framework for its academic operations RDI is supported by Eversheds, an experienced higher education law firm. The reviewers regard these recent arrangements as an example of **good practice**.

1.2 Minutes of the Academic Board and Learning and Teaching Committee meetings and previous observations of meetings indicate that they are operating as effective committees for the management of academic standards, quality assurance and quality enhancement. A recent organisational activity has been the review of RDI's academic procedures and practice to ensure alignment with the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). This has resulted, for example, in RDI introducing the Programme Monitoring Committee that has oversight of annual monitoring and review of programmes with partner universities. As a result, RDI has a more active role in monitoring of non-validated collaborative programmes with partner universities. A further example of the management of academic standards and quality is provided by the evaluation and rigorous and challenging monitoring of in-house annual review action plans by the Academic Board and the Learning and Teaching Committee. The Academic Board has also approved an annual review of its effectiveness, and the first one is scheduled for March 2014. The review will be conducted by experienced, independent academic members of RDI's Academic Board.

1.3 The effective management of academic standards is also evidenced by the successful validation of RDI programmes by its new partner Anglia Ruskin University. Between September 2012 and April 2013 a considerable number of programmes were validated with relatively minor conditions and recommendations. Senior staff from Anglia Ruskin University and independent external panel members commonly commended the high standard of documentation for validation and the online systems used by RDI to support staff and students.

1.4 The continuity and commitment of senior management has helped RDI to take forward major academic developments. Day-to-day management of academic matters and standards is led by the Academic Director and Director for Academic Affairs. These senior managers are supported by the Head of Learning and Development Practice, the Head of Student Support and a team of programme directors, and all senior staff meet regularly in face-to-face meetings. This is a well-established management team with most of the personnel having been involved in senior roles with RDI for at least five years.

How effectively does RDI make use of external reference points to manage academic standards?

1.5 RDI makes effective use of external reference points to manage and maintain academic standards and quality. The key external reference point for RDI has been the Quality Code. During 2013, RDI has reviewed its academic provision and practice against the revised Quality Code and presented mapping documents to the Academic Board. The Senior Management Team has required action planning to ensure alignment with the Quality Code and minutes of Academic Board indicate that progress has been monitored. Modification of process and practice has resulted from this mapping exercise, most notably with the establishing of an Admissions Group, a Programme Monitoring Committee, and a (Student) Progression Group. The last group is, among other matters, monitoring student progression and retention against key performance indicators agreed by the Senior Management Team and Academic Board. In addition, the re-validation of all RDI programmes by its new partner, Anglia Ruskin University, has confirmed that programmes meet *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and subject benchmark requirements. Further evidence of the use of external reference points is provided by external examiners confirming that programmes match with appropriate FHEQ levels and subject benchmark statements.

1.6 RDI is pursuing a wider strategy of professional engagement and assessing which programmes would benefit from recognition by professional bodies. It is in discussion with relevant bodies about the professional recognition or accreditation of programmes in law, computing and business. Current programmes, where appropriate, are designed to meet recognition requirements and, if RDI proceeds to formal recognition, this will establish additional external reference points. It would be **desirable** for RDI to continue to pursue external benchmarking through professional body recognition of its programmes.

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

1.7 The appointment of external examiners or verifiers to all RDI programmes contributes to the assurance of academic standards. Through observation of examination boards and review of external examiner reports and their consideration by committees, RDI operates an effective system of external moderation and verification. External examiners' reports are considered by programme teams and responses or actions are provided as appropriate. A summary of significant external examiner comments is considered by the senior committees and these have oversight of progress in meeting the recommendations of external examiners. A recent example of an RDI response to a persistent concern from the external examiners has been to develop a diagnostic tool to help students develop high level skills such as critical analysis. It would be **desirable** for RDI to implement the diagnostic testing of academic skills for each student at an early stage of their studies.

<p>The review team has confidence in the provider's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the programmes it offers on behalf of its awarding bodies and organisation.</p>
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2 Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1 RDI manages and enhances the quality of learning opportunities through its programme management and committee structure and annual monitoring of programmes. There is an established programme management structure, supported by a clear chain of responsibility from programme committees to the Learning and Teaching Committee to Academic Board, and staff recognise the remit and responsibilities of these committees. The establishment of the Learning and Teaching Committee in 2011, to take on business formally discussed in the Academic Board, has provided an enhanced focal point for academic debate, development and innovation and there is now evidence that the Learning and Teaching Committee is discharging its responsibilities effectively. Examples include the introduction of an effective peer review process, a community of interest for technology-enhanced learning and independent oversight of programmes with partner universities.

2.2 The community of interest group is assessing the enhancement to student support provided through more regular and interactive contact with tutors using web conferencing software. RDI is currently implementing a detailed roll-out plan for the use of web conferencing software, which includes enhancing module content, across its range of programmes and modules. There is also improved electronic reporting which has given tutors an opportunity to identify students at risk at an early stage. For all students, including those with particular learning needs, RDI is building up a bank of skills-orientated 'mini-modules'. Following conversations with students, it is **advisable** for RDI to achieve greater student engagement with the range of mini-modules offered.

2.3 RDI has an established annual monitoring approach, with input from staff teaching, students and external examiners. Annual reports and action plans are reviewed by the Learning and Teaching Committee and Academic Board. Enhancement of learning opportunities is achieved through various means, including appropriate responses to student and external examiner feedback, action plans from annual monitoring, peer review of teaching practice, input from the community of interest groups, recommendations arising from validation events, and staff development days. Examples of enhancement of learning opportunities include improving the effectiveness of student engagement through web conferencing software, a move to greater employer engagement, introduction of a diagnostic tool to help improve higher level skills and increased provision of careers information through the ilearn portal.

2.4 RDI has an effective means of access to online learning resources. It has invested £250,000 each year in resources to support learning development as RDI seeks to continuously improve its virtual learning environment. Guidance on using the upgrades made to the systems is a regular feature of staff development days. Student representatives also play a key role in gathering student feedback on systems and online learning materials. More recently the move to web conferencing software has given students improved access to tutors and chat room facilities and this is used to develop student-to-student debate as well as to gather feedback from students. The annual student survey also has a question about the usefulness of online materials and, in the most recent survey, 70 per cent of participating students expressed satisfaction with the provision of online resources. As an organisation with a history of providing online education, RDI has developed reliable systems for giving students access to materials and providing learning support. Access to materials and online support were key areas of interest during the recent validations and both external panel members and Anglia Ruskin University staff have commended the online support, primarily through the ilearn platform, provided by RDI. The continuing enhancement of virtual platforms is **good practice**.

How effectively does RDI make use of external reference points to manage and enhance learning opportunities?

2.5 RDI has mapped its provision against the Quality Code and, as a result, has developed its practice with changes such as an enhanced tutor to student feedback capability, delivered through the iSystem platform. Subsequently, student surveys have shown an increased satisfaction with the provision of feedback by tutors.

2.6 Currently, RDI is developing greater engagement with employers. The next strategic away day of the Academic Board will have a panel of employers, and will consider ways of enhancing employer engagement.

How does RDI engage students in its quality assurance processes?

2.7 RDI effectively engages students in quality assurance by using a range of approaches. It runs online end-of-module student assessments, recently extended with a prompt alert for students, and an annual satisfaction survey of students. The Academic Board and the Learning and Teaching Committee review the satisfaction survey findings and identify areas for development, a recent example being the level, timeliness and usefulness of feedback. RDI has also put considerable effort into creating a more effective student representation system. There are active student members on senior committees and programme committees. The input from students has been aided by the use of virtual attendance of meetings and provision of written comments where attendance is not possible. None of the students whom the reviewers met were familiar with the role of student representation. These are encouraging developments but nevertheless it is **advisable** for RDI to ensure that the student representation system is clear to all students.

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

2.8 Within the context of an online organisation with a distributed, largely part-time academic staff workforce, RDI is providing support and development in teaching and learning through its staff development activities. New staff are assigned a mentor and follow an induction procedure which will be delivered online in 2014. In order to enhance further the quality of learning opportunities, RDI has developed a system of peer observation and also holds regular staff development days. The peer observation system is based on triads of staff focusing on online delivery, student interaction and feedback to students. The Learning and Teaching Committee has oversight of the peer observation system. Staff development days are well attended by staff who have a significant teaching contract. A number of themes are covered during the day and there is an opportunity for programme teams to consider their own programme requirements. In addition, RDI provides some funding for staff to undertake further training, or to register for higher degrees, or to attend conferences. Currently RDI, working with Anglia Ruskin University, is looking to establish a Postgraduate Certificate of Higher Education for its staff. RDI is also planning to hold a research-style meeting in the spring of 2014 for staff and MBA students with a focus on teaching practice, professional practice and learning platforms. As yet there is limited development of RDI-generated staff research, though there is an aspiration for the community of interest groups to develop teaching practice themes. It would be **desirable** for RDI to foster links with external groups and organisations devoted to promoting innovation in teaching and learning.

2.9 RDI also ensures that its staff maintain 'currency' in their discipline area through the appraisal system. In addition, it monitors staff currency through its tutor profile database which requires staff to report annually on how their teaching practice is informed by current developments in their discipline.

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 Information about learning opportunities

How effective are RDI's arrangements for assuring that information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy?

3.1 The RDI website, which has online course brochures, is the main source of information about learning opportunities for prospective students. Students whom the review team met expressed satisfaction with information provided, commenting on its accuracy and informative style. RDI has the responsibility for providing all the information on its programmes validated by Anglia Ruskin University. One important activity has been the review by RDI of its information to students. Currently an action plan is being considered by RDI senior committees and the website has been upgraded to provide clearer and more transparent information to students. RDI also issued revised guidance in October 2013 on marketing and publicity and all material requires the internal approval of the Head of Marketing. Publicity material is also approved by its university partners as appropriate.

The team concludes that **reliance** can be placed on the information that the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

Action plan³

Resource Development International Limited action plan relating to the Review of Specific Course Designation December 2013						
Good practice	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date (s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluations (process or evidence)
The review team identified the following areas of good practice that are worthy of wider dissemination within RDI:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the introduction of a legal framework clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the bodies responsible for governance and management (paragraph 1.1) 	Ensure the Senior Management Team (SMT) and the Academic Board are fully informed of changes to the legal framework	<p>Report changes to the legal framework to the SMT and Academic Board</p> <p>Disseminate the changes to staff during 2014 annual staff meetings</p>	<p>Dec 2013</p> <p>Feb-Mar 2014</p>	<p>CEO, Academic Director</p> <p>CEO, Academic Director</p>	<p>SMT, Academic Board</p> <p>SMT</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>Evidence SMT and Academic Board minutes</p> <p>Presentations</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the extensive virtual learning environment, platforms and systems to support student learning 	Innovation and good practice in the development and use of the virtual learning environment, platforms and systems to support and deliver learning is	Continue to ensure good practice and strategies to enhance the virtual learning environment and other student support systems are considered regularly by Learning and Teaching	Dec 2014	Learning and Teaching Committee	Academic Board	Evidenced by minutes of meetings

³ RDI has been required to develop this action plan to follow up on good practice and address any recommendations arising from the review. QAA monitors progress against the action plan, in conjunction with RDI's awarding bodies and organisation.

(paragraph 2.4).	disseminated widely	Committee including an annual review of platforms and systems. Disseminate Learning and Teaching Committee outcomes through meeting minutes and staff meetings. Share good practice with University partners at meetings and conferences				
Advisable	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date (s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluations (process or evidence)
The team considers that it is advisable for RDI to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> achieve greater student engagement with the range of mini-modules offered (paragraph 2.2) 	Increase the number of students engaging with the range of mini-modules offered	Enhance post-diagnostic feedback to students to increase take up of mini modules	Dec 2013	Head of Learning and Development	Learning and Teaching Committee	Complete. Evidence is live on ilearn
		Ensure consistent ongoing signposting of students to mini modules in response to their performance in assessment	May 2014	Head of Learning and Development	Learning and Teaching Committee	Learning and Teaching Committee minutes, staff forum discussions, staff monthly updates, feedback to students.
		Review signposting of students to mini modules	May 2014	Head of Learning and	Learning and Teaching	Learning and Teaching

		and target staff development to ensure consistent tutor follow up		Development Committee	Committee minutes
		Annual report to Learning and Teaching Committee monitoring and evaluating student engagement with mini-modules and identifying enhancements	May 2014 onwards	Head of Learning and Development	Learning and Teaching Committee minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure the student representation system is clear to all students (paragraph 2.7). 	Increase student awareness of the student representation system	Undertake an annual survey of students to review their awareness of and views on the effectiveness of student representation; feed results into the annual review of student representation	Jun 2014	QA Team, Programme Leader	Academic Board minutes
		2014 annual review of student representation to include an assessment of the effectiveness of the measures introduced in July 2013 to give greater prominence to student representation mechanisms in the student handbook and during the online student induction	Jul 2014	QA Team	Academic Board minutes
		Add a section on student representation into the compulsory induction quiz	Apr 2014	Student Support Team	Academic Board minutes

		to monitor students' understanding of the representation mechanisms available to them Add details of elected student representative(s) to module introductory welcome messages	Apr 2014	Programme teams and student support staff	Course Committee	Welcome messages on ilearn
Desirable	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date (s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluations (process or evidence)
The team considers that it would be desirable for the RDI to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue to pursue external benchmarking through professional body recognition of its programmes (paragraph 1.6) 	Foster links with relevant professional bodies	Continue dialogue with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the Chartered Institute of Marketing, the Chartered Management Institute and the Joint Academic Stage Board ensuring alignment of new courses with the professional body requirements: Programme teams working on the development of new MA Marketing and MA Human Resources Management have been	Autumn 2014 Jan 2014	Academic Director Programme Team	Academic Board Academic Board	Academic Board minutes Complete Evidence - draft programme documentation

		<p>instructed to ensure alignment with Chartered Institute of Marketing and Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development professional body requirements. Programme approval event due in May 2014</p> <p>LLB Common Law re-validated Apr 2013 has been written in accordance with Joint Academic Stage Board requirements</p> <p>Continue ongoing dialogue with Joint Academic Stage Board regarding recognition of this online degree</p>	Aug 2014	Law Programme Leader	Academic Board	Progress evidenced in Law Action Plan for implementation during 2013-14; Academic Board minutes/papers Sep 2013
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implement the diagnostic testing of academic skills for each student at an early stage of their studies (paragraph 1.7) 	Deliver diagnostic skills testing during online student inductions	Roll out skills diagnostic testing for all new students during compulsory induction across all validated courses	Jan 2014	Head of Learning and Development	Learning and Teaching Committee	<p>Complete</p> <p>Skills diagnostics piloted in Oct 2013 and extended to all courses in Jan 2014</p> <p>Evidence live on ilearn</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop external links to further promote innovation in teaching and learning (paragraph 2.8). 	Foster links with appropriate external bodies	Continue dialogue with Higher Education Academy and explore QAA membership options post successful decision on application for taught degree-awarding powers	Summer 2014	Academic Director	Academic Board	Academic Board minutes
		Increase academic staff membership of Higher Education Academy	Feb 2015	Academic Director	Academic Board	Academic Strategy Plan 2014-15

About QAA

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

QAA's aims are to:

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

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

More information about the work of QAA is available at: www.qaa.ac.uk.

More detail about Review of Courses Specifically Designated for Student Support can be found at: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/designated-providers/Pages/default.aspx.

Glossary

This glossary explains terms used in this report. You can find a fuller glossary at: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary. Formal definitions of key terms can be found in the [*Review for Educational Oversight \(and for specific course designation\): Handbook, April 2013*](#).⁴

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

academic standards The standards set and maintained by degree-awarding bodies for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standards**.

awarding body A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree-awarding powers, research degree-awarding powers or university title).

awarding organisation An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications.

differentiated judgements In a Review for Specific Course Designation, separate judgements respectively for the provision validated by separate awarding bodies.

enhancement The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in QAA's review processes.

external examiner An independent expert appointed by an institution to comment on student achievement in relation to established academic standards and to look at approaches to assessment.

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*.

good practice A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's review processes.

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

⁴ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx

learning outcomes 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 reviews and reports.

programme (of study) An approved course of study that 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(s) (of higher education) Organisations that deliver higher education. In the UK they may be a degree-awarding body or another organisation that offers programmes of higher education on behalf of degree-awarding bodies or awarding organisations. In the context of Review for Specific Course Designation 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').

quality See **academic quality**.

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.

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.

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 standards The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic award. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks for higher education qualifications** and **subject benchmark statements**. See also **academic standards**.

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

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