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

The International College of Oriental Medicine (UK) Ltd

January 2014

Contents

Key findings about the International College of Oriental Medicine (UK) Ltd

As a result of its Review for Specific Course Designation carried out in January 2014, the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the programme it offers on behalf of the University of Greenwich.

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 the University of Greenwich.

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 active contribution to discipline development and sharing of good practice within the community of acupuncture colleges (paragraph 1.8).

Recommendations

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

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

- review the committee reporting lines to clarify lines of responsibility and accountability (paragraph 1.5)
- include in the minutes of appropriate committees fully articulated action points and outcomes (paragraph 1.6)
- review the terms of reference of the Programme Committee to include specific goals for the enhancement of learning opportunities (paragraph 2.2)
- adopt a more formal and systematic approach to staff development opportunities (paragraph 2.10)
- continue to develop the virtual learning environment as a learning resource (paragraph 3.2).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Specific Course Designation](#)[1] conducted by [QAA](#) at the International College of Oriental Medicine (UK) Ltd (the College) 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 the University of Greenwich (the University). The review was carried out by Dr Mark Rawlinson, Ms Deborah Trayhurn (reviewers) and Mr Alan Soutter (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 a range of documentation supplied by the provider and its awarding body and meetings with staff and students. The review team also considered the provider's use of the relevant external reference points:

- the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)
- the policies and procedures of the University
- Standards of Education and Training for Acupuncture
- British Acupuncture Accreditation Board
- British Acupuncture Council.

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

The College was established in 1972 and is a small specialist institution offering a single degree programme, a BSc (Hons) in Acupuncture to 59 students. From 2001 until 2008, the programme was validated by the University of Brighton but, following a review of partnerships by the University of Brighton, the agreement was terminated and a new partnership was established from 2008 with the University of Greenwich.

At the time of the review, the provider offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath its awarding body:

University of Greenwich

- BSc (Hons) Acupuncture.

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College has shared responsibilities with the University for matters including curriculum development, programme specifications, staff development and student appeals. The University retains responsibility for overall quality assurance and review and for progression and award matters. The College has responsibility, under a memorandum of agreement for identifying the topics to be included in the curriculum and the setting and first and second marking of assessments and feedback to students. The College also has responsibility for student learning resources.

---

[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

Recent developments

In 2013, the College introduced part-time study provision for those students taking the course at weekends resulting in four modes of study; a full and part-time mode of study for both the weekday and weekend version of the programme.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on the higher education programme at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. A student submission in the form of a video was coordinated by a small group of students. During the visit some students met the review team and engaged in useful discussion.

Detailed findings about the International College of Oriental Medicine (UK) Ltd

1   Academic standards

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

1.1   The College is effective in managing its responsibilities for the academic standards on behalf of the University. Responsibility for the framework and operation of academic standards rests with the University, and the College's validated provision is subject to the University's quality assurance processes. The programme is jointly accredited by the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board with the professional body requirements taking precedence over University requirements in the programme specification. The College is a trusted partner of the University, having provided this programme since 2008.

1.2   The relative responsibilities for standards between the College and the University are clearly defined. Management responsibility for the College provision rests with the Programme Leaders (who are also the College's Joint Principals). They report directly to the College's Board of Governors. Day-to-day management of the College rests with the Joint Principals and there is a monthly meeting of the Senior Management Team, which deals with developing and implementing College strategic direction and quality assurance matters. The Management Team comprises the Joint Principals, Clinic Director, Treasurer, Assistant Programme Leaders, Marketing Coordinator and Student Administrator.

1.3   The Programme Leaders work closely with the Link Tutor, appointed by University, and with the Department of Acute and Continuing Care in the University's School of Health and Social Care, on the annual planning of activity with the College. This includes the sharing of good practice and outcomes of reports from external examiners through attendance by the Link Tutor at the College's Programme Committee meetings. When designing and updating the delivery of the weekend mode of the programme, the College took a consultative approach to ensure that students would have equal opportunities to achieve the same learning outcomes as students on the weekday modes.

1.4   The College is accountable directly to the Director of Learning and Quality at the University, for the management of the programme. The School's Learning and Quality Committee and Department Assessment Panel makes provision for College membership, and a Joint Principal attends the School's Progress and Awards Board, and Accreditation and Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) tariff rating group meetings. The College has approved APEL procedures enabling students to gain recognition for their prior learning. The procedure is well understood by students, diligently applied and thoroughly documented at the College.

1.5   The College's Senior Management Team oversees all quality assurance practices, considering reports from the Programme Committee and programme activity overall. The College is small and more than one role may be undertaken by the same individual, which makes it more difficult on occasions for the College to demonstrate clear lines of reporting. For example, the terms of reference of some committees chaired by the Joint Principals record the reporting line as being to the Joint Principals, so there is potential for conflict of interest. It would be **desirable** for the College to review the committee reporting lines to clarify lines of responsibility and accountability.

1.6   Annual and periodic monitoring of the programme is reviewed by the University and the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board. For each course comprising the programme, there is a Course Coordinator who is responsible for the management and the delivery of the course, including responsibility for the production of annual course reports for the consideration of the Programme Committee. Following the meeting of the Programme Committee, action points are raised and highlighted for development and are reported to the University along with the marks achieved by the students. Responsibility for the tracking of actions plans and outcomes rests with the Joint Principals. The minutes of meeting recording action points, however, do not consistently include a fully documented tracking of action taken and subsequent outcomes. It would be **desirable** for the provider to include in the minutes of appropriate committees fully articulated action points and outcomes.

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

1.7   The College effectively uses a range of external reference points to manage academic standards. This includes effective communication with the University through regular attendance at University meetings, which enables the programme team to maintain links with the awarding body. The programme was designed using key information from a range of external reference points including *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, the Standards of Education and Training for Acupuncture and the British Acupuncture Council. The College maintains close links with the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board who visit to monitor practice annually across all courses and benchmark comparative standards. Professional body standards are integral to the programme and practical clinical experience is developed against these standards across all levels of the programme. Students work to meet professional codes of practice and gain professional body membership on successful completion of their study. The College is required to produce annual datasets for the University to enable the University to measure the College's performance against a set of key performance indicators. External support for staff practitioners to practise in clinics and the extensive engagement with the regular inspections by the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board ensure that the programme meets the clinical learning focus.

1.8   Reviews of the College by professional bodies confirm the academic standard of the programmes. The most recent review by the University in 2011 revalidated the College and the programme unconditionally until 2017. The College's active contributions to discipline development and sharing good practice within the community of acupuncture colleges, as founder member of the Council of Heads of Acupuncture Colleges (CHAC), is **good practice**.

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

1.9   The College has effective procedures for assuring the consistency of marking. The marking criteria including the internal moderation of assessments are adhered to in accordance with the assessment policy of the School of Health and Social Care, dated September 2011. Procedures for markers and moderators are clearly set out. Following a risk assessment by the University, the University determined that the robustness of the College's assessment practices meant that external moderation of coursework by the University is not necessary.

1.10   Although the College manages its responsibilities well under the 2011 policy, this policy has been updated by a new assessment and feedback policy, dated June 2012, which the College is not currently required to adhere to. There are important differences in the policies in relation to external examining. There are two external examiners (one for

Chinese medicine, clinic skills, clinic practice and final year research, and one for Western medicine and two research courses). Both are appointed by University on the nomination of the College. Under the 2011 policy, the School of Health and Social Care operates a scheduling of scrutiny of courses which means that some courses are scrutinised by the external examiner only every second year. The revised University policy requires the external examiner to scrutinise work each year.

1.11   The external examiner for Chinese medicine, clinic skills, clinic practice and final year research submits an explicit annual report to the College, but the external examiner for Western medicine reports to the University on its overall provision of Western Medicine. Issues are reported in writing and orally at the University Department Assessment Panel and are subsequently reported to the College as part of the course monitoring reports. The College is responsible for responding to external examiners' reports, which it does through its annual programme monitoring report. The external examiner attends the University Department Assessment Panel, at which course outcomes are approved and statistical representations of student achievement measured against the University key performance indicators.

1.12   Overall, the College is effective in managing its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards. It has close links and a productive relationship with its awarding body and its professional organisations. The College's contribution to discipline development through the Council of Heads of Acupuncture Colleges is **good practice**.

The review team has **confidence** in the College's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the programmes it offers on behalf of its awarding body.

---

2   Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1   The College's responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities are set out in paragraph 1.1.

2.2   The Programme Committee's terms of reference are wide, including programme management, quality assurance, monitoring, development of learning and teaching strategies, and discussion of new initiatives and programme development. However, the management of learning opportunities would be enhanced by explicitly including reference to this within the terms of reference for this Committee. It would be **desirable** for the College to review the terms of reference of the Programme Committee to include the enhancement of learning opportunities.

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

2.3   The process by which the College effectively uses external reference points to manage and enhance learning opportunities is described in paragraph 1.6.

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

2.4   The College has effective means for assuring the quality of learning and teaching. There is an effective peer-observation of teaching scheme which is appreciated by teaching

staff. Observations are documented using a pro forma with guidelines and a check list, which are appropriate to the levels of delivery. The team saw evidence of reflective dialogue about approaches to teaching and the delivery of the curriculum. Teaching staff are observed twice annually. The College has a policy on the recruitment of teaching staff. All teaching staff are required to hold a teaching qualification or complete the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education.

2.5 Students are very positive about the learning and teaching in the College. The College makes use of a range of means to seek student evaluations of the delivery, including student evaluation questionnaires and reports by student representatives. These evaluations are considered as part of the programme monitoring report, which is subsequently submitted to the University. The College has a Learning and Teaching Strategy which identifies the approaches to learning and instruction on the programme but it lacks a strategic focus on the enhancement of learning opportunities (see paragraph 2.2).

How does the College assure itself that students are supported effectively?

2.6 Students are very appreciative of the support they receive from the College and students have a good understanding of their entitlement to support and services from both the College and the University. There is an effective induction process including a study skills day. Student support arrangements, including personal tutoring, are outlined in the Student Handbook and in separate guidance to personal tutors. The expectation of personal tutors is clearly set out for students. The outcomes of meetings of students with their personal tutors are recorded on a form used to review student progress. Study skills instruction is provided in the first year and students have access to the University online study skills support. The entitlement to student support from the University is indicated in the student handbook.

2.7 Students' views are gathered on an ongoing basis by means of student questionaires and are presented to the Programme Committee. Student representatives inform staff of student views and responses to the points raised are made formally at Programme Committee with issues addressed and followed up as necessary, and reported back to students by email. The College responds well to issues and concerns raised by students. For example, a point about the timely return of assessed work to students had been addressed to the satisfaction of students with a clear expectation set about turn-around times. The College reflects on retention data in evaluating the effectiveness of its support to students and interviews students who withdraw to understand the reasons for their non-completion.

How effectively does the College develop its staff in order to improve student learning opportunities?

2.8 The College provides opportunities for staff to undertake development activities. Staff involved in teaching, many of whom are practitioners, are proactive in continuing professional development and the College maintains a log of staff development activities undertaken.

2.9 The College requires new staff without a teaching qualification to undertake a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education after one year in the post and it supports staff to undertake this at the University. The College provides an effective induction programme for new staff which is recorded in a checklist. All staff are appraised biennially following which individual objectives are set. Good practice in learning, teaching, assessment, student support and quality assurance is disseminated in the College through formal quality assurance procedures and through informal interactions between teaching staff, particularly within subject groupings.

2.10   Although staff take part in many developmental activities through attendance at courses or conferences, the College does not have a formal process for identifying staff development needs, for resourcing staff development, or for evaluating its effectiveness although it does use appraisal to reflect on staff skill sets. The College has inaugurated a Research Committee to oversee the enhancement of staff research opportunities. It would be **desirable** for the College to adopt a more formal and systematic approach to staff development opportunities.

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

2.11   The Joint Principals/Programme Leaders are responsible for the provision of resources. Resources are well planned for each mode of delivery and are regularly reviewed. Monthly Senior Management Team meetings are attended by the Treasurer, which enables the discussion of resources to feed into management discussion with the Board of Governors. External reviews of programme resources are made annually by the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board and their feedback is considered on a regular basis through the meetings of the Programme Committee. Specialist library resources are the responsibility of the College, are managed by College staff and offer a small space to work for students. It is well stocked with key references, enabling students to borrow texts. Students can also make full use of access to the electronic library resources at the University. Additionally, students may use four computer work stations and a printer with free printing at the College.

2.12   The College is at an early stage of development of technology support for learning with a virtual learning environment at the University having recently been introduced for College use. The College has started to use plagiarism-detection software and students reported its use as a development tool which they appreciated. Although these are positive developments, the College needs to formulate an effective coherent plan for the enhancement of learning opportunities in relation to the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

2.13   Clinical practice and working activity is a strong feature of the programme. Students sign an agreement on entry to the programme which ensures that students are aware of their professional responsibilities. The College remains in close contact with professional practice, running an onsite clinic with designated teaching rooms equipped to meet British Acupuncture Council Code of Safe Practice standards. Students learn from practitioners throughout their programme and they develop practitioner and clinical skills from the outset being exposed to a wide variety of patient conditions which enable valuable learning opportunities.

2.14   The programme embeds work-based learning culminating in a 'license to practice' upon successful completion. The College provides ample opportunities for these practical skills developments. Further requirements for observations to be made in clinics outside of the College are facilitated by the professional contacts made during the early parts of the programme including discussions with the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board.

2.15   Overall, the College is effective in its responsibilities for the management and enhancement of learning opportunities although it was recognised that currently there is no formal responsibility in the committee structure for learning opportunities. The College provides a supportive environment for its students, which is appreciated by the students.

The review team has **confidence** that the College 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 effectively does the College communicate information about learning opportunities to students and other stakeholders?

3.1   The College effectively communicates information to potential and current students. The College website is the main media for communicating information about the College to potential students. It provides information about entry requirements, fee levels, the demands of the programme and learning opportunities. Students confirmed that the information and guidance they received when applying to the College was informative and reliable, and that they appreciated the advice on workloads, particularly on the demands of the weekend delivery mode of the programme.

3.2   The College publishes very thorough hardcopy student handbooks and programme handbooks and has recently commenced the development of a virtual learning environment through 'The Greenwich Portal'. Students were appreciative of the use of the virtual learning environment as a learning resource. It would be **desirable** for the College to continue to develop the virtual learning environment as a learning resource.

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

3.3   The College is responsible for course and programme handbooks and shares responsibility with the University for information about learning opportunities, including programmes specifications and learning outcomes. The College is responsible for its website and for the accuracy of references to the relationship with University.

3.4   The College has recently approved a policy for the signing-off of information published by the College. Apart from course handbooks and courses on the virtual learning environment, for which course coordinators are responsible, all information published by the College, including the website and social media outputs, has to be signed off by one of the College's Joint Principals. It is too soon to measure the effectiveness of this new policy.

3.5   Overall, the College is effective in managing its responsibilities for the communication of information and ensuring that information is fit for purpose and accurate. The procedure for signing-off published information has recently been strengthened by the introduction of a new publications policy.

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

Action plan[3]

The International College of Oriental Medicine (UK) Ltd action plan relating to the Review of Specific Course Designation, January 2014						
Good practice	**Intended outcomes**	**Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes**	**Target date(s)**	**Action by**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation (process or evidence)**
The review team identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
• the active contribution to discipline development and sharing of good practice within the community of acupuncture colleges (paragraph 1.8).	To include acupuncture community issues as a formal standing item on the Management Team and Programme Committee	Committee secretaries to include a standing item on each agenda	March 2014	Committee secretaries working with Programme Leaders	Board of Governors (Treasurer attendance at Management Team meetings)	Evidence from recorded minutes of the meetings of the Management Team and Programme Committee
Desirable	**Intended outcomes**	**Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes**	**Target date/s**	**Action by**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation (process or evidence)**
The team considers that it would be **desirable** for the College to:						

---

[3] The College 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 the University of Greenwich.

• review the committee reporting lines to clarify lines of responsibility and accountability (paragraph 1.5)	Clear lines of responsibility and accountability to eliminate or reduce any potential conflict of interest	Joint Principals to discuss with Management Team and with Board of Governors	July 2014	Joint Principals and Management Team	Chair of the Board of Governors	New terms of reference showing clarification of lines of responsibility and accountability
• include in the minutes of appropriate committees fully articulated action points and outcomes (paragraph 1.6)	To ensure clear tracking and outcomes of actions of committee meetings	Construct a separate actions table summarising the required actions from committee meetings Outcomes will be recorded for each item in the table and minuted at the next committee meeting	June 2014	Course coordinators to report actions and outcomes	Joint Principals	Clear recording of actions and outcomes in minutes of committees
• review the terms of reference of the Programme Committee to include specific goals for the enhancement of learning opportunities (paragraph 2.2)	Include specific goals for enhancing learning opportunities within the terms of reference of the Programme Committee	Programme team to review and discuss specific goals for enhancing learning and to adopt these as part of the terms of reference for Programme Committee	December 2014	Course coordinators to inform and Joint Principals to prepare terms of reference for approval by Programme Committee	Board of Governors	New terms of reference to include specific goals and strategies for enhancement of learning opportunities
• adopt a more formal and systematic approach to staff development opportunities	Implement a system to log and review identified staff development needs to take account of: **External** Changing requirements	Create a new log for staff development Link Tutor and IT coordinator at University to inform of any new requirements in systems	October 2014	University staff to inform as and when changes occur Course coordinators,	Joint Principals to ensure log is complete and up-to-date for reviewing	Programme Team and Management Team to review annually

(paragraph 2.10)	from profession and professional body Update of academic systems from Greenwich Implementation of new technology **Internal** Person-specific needs will be identified from Annual peer observation feedback Bi-annual appraisal process Staff development opportunities will be consolidated where possible	or technology Student administrators to update log and alert Management Team of new training needs Course coordinators to inform of any new development need arising from peer observations carried out in their subject area, also reviewed by Programme Leaders; Programme Leaders to include in log Appraisals - Joint Principals to include in log agreed training or development for individuals The log to capture internal and external requirements		student administrators and Programme Leaders to update central log		
• to continue to develop the virtual learning environment as a learning resource (paragraph 3.2)	Formulate goals or action plan for the development of the virtual learning environment for students and staff Encourage students to use the virtual learning environment more often	Discuss with Programme Team current approach and new initiatives regarding the material published on the virtual learning for students as learning resources Discuss with students in student representative/	Complete action plan by December 2014 following the next full Programme Committee meeting, 22 October 2014 and	Programme Team, students, IT coordinator at the University	Programme Leaders	Learning resources included on the virtual learning environment

		staff meetings Agree actions and formulate action plan Ensure staff are trained appropriately for the use of virtual learning environment and Turnitin Ensure students receive information and direction about help and support for virtual learning environment use	consultation with all staff and students through autumn term			

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 Courses 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).

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

---

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

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.