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

Centre for Alternative Technology

December 2013

Contents

Key findings about the Centre for Alternative Technology

As a result of its Review for Specific Course Designation carried out in December 2013 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 programmes it offers on behalf of the University of East London.

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 this awarding body.

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 detailed collaborative review of each module by tutors and students which offers regular critical engagement on all aspects of the modules (paragraph 2.6)
- the work of the student support officers liaising with programme staff to support students and identify common issues (paragraph 2.10)
- up-to-date handbooks for each of the programmes are available to download by prospective students and other audiences (paragraph 3.1)
- the publication on the virtual learning environment of the complete review and enhancement process reports for the MSc Renewable Energy and the Built Environment (paragraph 3.2).

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:

- expedite the appointment of a Head of Education in order to achieve effective oversight of the provision (paragraph 2.2).

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

- re-establish regular and formal management meetings to oversee quality and standards (paragraph 1.2)
- engage fully with the appropriate chapters of the Quality Code (paragraphs 1.4 and 2.4)
- articulate a teaching and learning strategy to provide a framework for the systematic review and enhancement of programmes (paragraph 2.5)
- review its resourcing and strategic oversight of staff development (paragraph 2.12)
- take a systematic and consistent approach to induction, appraisal and peer observations of teaching (paragraph 2.13).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Specific Course Designation](#)[1] conducted by [QAA](#) at the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) 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 East London (the University). The review was carried out by Mrs Patricia Millner, Mr Iain Mossman, Dr Peter Rae (reviewers) and Mr Martin Hill (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 and the 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 (Quality Code)
- the expectations of the Architects' Registration Board
- the standards of the Energy Institute.

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

CAT is an environmental centre, based in Machynlleth, Mid Wales. CAT is an education and visitor centre, which demonstrates practical solutions for sustainability. Postgraduate programmes have been running at CAT since 2000 and the Graduate School of the Environment (the School) was founded in 2007 when CAT became a collaborative partner of the University. In June 2010 a state of the art eco-educational facility, the Wales Institute for Sustainable Education, was opened, constructed of low embodied energy materials. This building houses the four programmes, the support facilities, an IT suite, research laboratories, a restaurant and living accommodation.

At the time of the review there were 377 students studying at CAT. The three on-site programmes are offered in week-long blocks of teaching during which the students live on-site. The MSc Architecture: Advanced Environmental and Energy Studies is also offered as a distance learning programme. There are nine full-time equivalent academic staff at the School including 15 sessional teachers, together with five full-time equivalent support staff.

At the time of the review, the provider offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath the awarding body with student numbers shown in brackets:

University of East London

- MSc Architecture: Advanced Environmental and Energy Studies (full-time 57; part-time 101)
- MSc Architecture: Advanced Environmental and Energy Studies by distance learning (full-time 26; part-time 80)
- MSc Renewable Energy and the Built Environment (full-time 16; part-time 58)
- Professional Diploma Architecture: Advanced Environmental and Energy Studies (full-time 39).

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[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

The provider's stated responsibilities

CAT designs the programmes, operates the admissions process, delivers and assesses the programmes, produces programme handbooks and annual reports, supports students, gathers feedback and produces publicity material. The University validates the programmes, appoints external examiners and operates the Field Boards to consider the success and progression of students. There is joint responsibility with the University for staff development and the approval of publicity material. The programme leaders are appointed by CAT and staff appointment details are forwarded to the University for approval.

Recent developments

In 2010 there was a reduction in the numbers of students applying to study and enrolling. This, combined with the reduction in the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funding, led to a restructuring of programme delivery. Staffing levels for both academic and support staff were reduced over a two-year period. The CAT Strategic and Business Plan for 2013 envisages a return to the student entry numbers of 2010.

In April 2012 the University carried out a review of the collaborative relationship with CAT and agreed to re-approve the four programmes.

A new programme has been written to replace the MSc Architecture programme, with a working title of MSc in Sustainability and Adaptation in the Built Environment. This programme will be validated in 2013-14 and it is intended that the first students will be enrolled in September 2014.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the School were invited to present a submission to the review team. Staff emailed all students asking for contributions but only one was received. Subsequently the students were contacted with a feedback survey specifically for the review. A number of contributions were made for this but none from students on the MSc Architecture: Advanced Environmental and Energy Studies programme. The review of the comments in the survey gave useful insights. At the visit the team met with 11 students representing all programmes. Two students on the distance learning programme were also interviewed using electronic conferencing communication. This provided helpful information about the programmes and the students' views.

Detailed findings about the Centre for Alternative Technology

1   Academic standards

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

1.1   Responsibilities for the management of academic standards are clearly set out in a signed memorandum of agreement between CAT and the University, and in a table of roles and responsibilities. The School's academic staff are fully aware of their responsibilities under this agreement and are able to articulate them clearly. The University retains responsibility for the oversight and monitoring of academic quality, through the Link Tutor and the University's Quality and Standards Committee.

1.2   The Head of Education is a member of the CAT Management Committee. However, the post has remained unfilled for 18 months during a period of internal restructuring and most functions of the post have been carried by the Head of Quality and Support. The role also involves attending monthly meetings of the CAT's Management Committee. Within the School, the flat management structure means that programmes operate relatively autonomously. Accountability for academic standards is held by the University Quality and Standards Committee. Programmes function effectively, though they do not report to an internal quality or standards committee. Prior to recent restructuring, there was a monthly meeting of the School's programme leaders with the Head of Quality and Support and the Head of Education. Liaison between programmes currently relies heavily on the Head of Quality and Support, the Link Tutor and the student support officers; and informal discussion. It would be **desirable** for the School re-establish regular and formal management meetings across programmes to oversee quality and standards.

1.3   Within programmes, monitoring and reporting mechanisms are consistent and coherent. The pattern of module reviews and online module evaluations demonstrates extensive student participation. The review and enhancement process (REP) reports are a pivotal element in the CAT's quality assurance reporting requirements to the University, and offer a detailed and effective analysis of each programme, including a systematic response to previous action plans and external examiners' reports. These are available to students on the virtual learning environment (VLE).

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

1.4   All higher education programmes have been through formal validation processes with the University, which has ensured their clear alignment with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), subject benchmark statements, and with relevant sections of the Quality Code. The School's main engagement with the Quality Code is through the University Link Tutor and external examiners. Many of the School's policies have been provided by the University. The School's staff have a variable, and sometimes limited, knowledge of the various sections of the Quality Code, although this is being improved through the close working relationship with the University.

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

1.5   CAT meets the terms of its collaborative agreement with the University for setting, marking and moderating assessments, and providing feedback to students. The variety of assessment methods is commended by external examiners, and the quality and structure of feedback is generally strong. Internal moderation is reliable, and follows a consistent and approved pattern. Marking criteria are explicit and understood by students.

1.6   External examiners' reports commend the dedicated work of the School's staff. Programme leaders responded to external examiners' comments through the REP reports, which track action points. A few inconsistencies are reported, related to examples of coursework not being assessed by the module leader, and to the breadth of assignment briefs, which are being addressed by the School. It has implemented a practice of anonymous assessment across all programmes, following the policy of the University. The School has a clearly documented process for academic misconduct, and has started to make use of the University's software for preventing plagiarism. The University has delivered professional development sessions about the use of plagiarism software to all of the School's staff, but programmes are variable in their submission requirements, and some have yet to implement online submission through this software.

> 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 body.

2   Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1   CAT is successful in managing the quality of learning opportunities in line with its responsibilities as collaborative partner of the University. The management arrangements are described in paragraph 1.2.

2.2   Quality procedures are carried out capably to meet the University's requirements, but there is limited overview of the provision and consolidation of the programmes. Programme leaders have effective supervision of the quality of their individual programmes. They would normally report to a Head of Education but this post is vacant. The Head of Quality and Support provides valuable leadership for management and quality including all administrative procedures and leadership of the team of student support officers. It is **advisable** for CAT to expedite the appointment of a Head of Education in order to achieve effective oversight of the provision.

2.3   Programme committees meet twice per year and the minutes are attached to the annual REP report. The template for this is provided by the University and provides a comprehensive analysis for each programme. It includes a report on each module, commenting on delivery, management and key issues. Programme leaders complete these thoroughly and use the student profile, retention and achievement data, and student feedback to inform detailed action plans. The School has taken effective action to reduce the number of intermitting students and the attrition rate. The REP reports are read by the Quality and Support Manager before being forwarded to the University.

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

2.4   Although the School does operate some of its own policies, it has not engaged with any chapters in *Part B: Assuring and enhancing quality* of the Quality Code to develop student-focused policies. The School works cooperatively and satisfactorily with the University to meet obligations under the Quality Code. The programme leaders and the Head of Quality and Support have attended training sessions provided by the University to keep up to date with University policies, but not specifically on the Quality Code. Staff showed limited understanding of the provisions of the Quality Code. It would be **desirable** for the School to engage fully with the appropriate chapters of the Quality Code.

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

2.5   Within programme teams there is appropriate oversight of the quality of teaching and learning. The programme leaders manage the annual peer observation process within their teams. Staff reported that peer teaching observations were useful in improving their practice. However, there is little central collation of good practice for sharing between programme staff, and no strategic statement articulating the particular teaching and learning ethos and approach of the provision. It would be **desirable** for the School to articulate a teaching and learning strategy to provide a framework for the systematic review and enhancement of programmes.

2.6   The close and positive relationships between staff and students are built when modules are delivered on-site. Students on the distance-learning programme indicated a strong and supportive relationship with staff. Feedback from students is constant and is acted upon promptly. Module reviews are held by programme leaders with student groups at the end of every module. These are thorough and helpful in providing pointers for immediate further development of curricula and pedagogy. The detailed collaborative review of each module by tutors and students which offers regular critical engagement on all aspects of the modules is **good practice**.

2.7   Further student feedback is obtained from anonymised online module surveys, used also by distance-learning students. The student representatives who may attend programme committees provide another source of feedback, but this process is less developed. Student feedback is an important part of the REP reports. Both staff and student cited examples of where changes were made to the module delivery due to student feedback. However, there is no formal response from the School to inform students of the actions arising from their feedback.

2.8   Staff are well qualified academically and professionally. Students benefit from the wealth of knowledge and the range of up-to-date experience offered by part-time teaching staff, who are often experts in their field. Students appreciated the expertise of their lecturers and were enthusiastic about the specialist guest speakers engaged through links with industry. Distance-learning students were positive about the standard of teaching and learning materials they receive on the VLE, the opportunities for electronic group discussion and the staff guidance that they received.

How does CAT assure itself that students are supported effectively?

2.9   The School has a range of formal and informal processes which provide an effective level of support for students for academic and non-academic matters. Students are assigned a personal tutor at the beginning of their studies who remains with them throughout the course of their studies. At each study week students have the opportunity for an

individual tutorial to discuss academic progress. The distance-learning students can arrange individual electronic tutorials with staff. Students report positive and rapid responses when contacting the School when away from the Centre.

2.10   The student support officers for each programme are significant in maintaining close communications with students and often provide pastoral support. As a team they work closely together and can cover each other's areas so that they identify issues which arise across the programmes. Their monthly meetings are minuted and read by Programme leaders. They provide a valuable channel across programmes to raise awareness among staff of student issues. The work of the student support officers liaising with programme staff to support students and identify common issues is **good practice**.

2.11   Students receive appropriate study skills support in essay and report writing, referencing and academic style. Distance learners report a high level of satisfaction with the wide range of good quality, detailed material online including study skills resources. They are further supported with electronic weekly seminar tutorials. Arrangements to support students during the dissertation stage are appropriate. Wherever possible, students are allocated a supervisor who is a specialist in the chosen area of research.

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

2.12   In line with their collaborative agreement, CAT sends the CVs of new staff members to the University, who monitor staff development needs. Some staff training has been delivered at the School, including on e-assessment, plagiarism-detection software, and use of the VLE. However, the School recognises that it currently has very limited resources available for formal staff development, with unpaid sabbatical leave the only support for scholarly activity. It would be **desirable** for the School to review its resourcing and strategic oversight of staff development.

2.13   The procedures for induction and appraisal of staff are inconsistently applied and reviewed. There is an established process for peer observations of teaching, which is complemented by the collegial peer-to-peer feedback offered within programme teams during the block delivery weeks. However, not all of these are documented, and there is some confusion among staff about the differences between appraisal, peer observation of teaching and continuing professional development. It would be **desirable** for the School to take a systematic and consistent approach to induction, appraisal and peer observations of teaching. Teaching staff are often appointed on the basis of professional practice, and they are supported by a combination of informal and effective mentoring. This includes support for inexperienced assessors, through shadowing of mentors and double marking of student work.

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

2.14   The physical, human and electronic resources at the School are accessible and sufficient to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Students on residential modules derive enormous benefit from living within the environment of CAT. The range of specialist buildings, energy systems and other facilities are appropriately used in practical hands-on learning activities to provide a unique experience. Distance learners and students studying away from the School benefit from the well-developed learning materials provided on the University's VLE. Programme leaders have a budget for replacement, repair or purchase of new pieces of equipment.

2.15   Although library provision at the School is small, students are able to access texts, online books and electronic journals from the University. During induction, a librarian from the University visits the School to inform students of the library services and access to materials. Students have found this to be very helpful when they have subsequently had queries about resources. The School has also ensured that students can access the libraries of other universities.

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

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3   Information about learning opportunities

How effectively does CAT communicate information about learning opportunities to students and other stakeholders?

3.1   CAT uses its website as the primary mechanism for the promotion of its programmes. Printed matter is restricted to leaflets, banners and adverts in publications by CAT. The website has recently undergone significant development as part of a strategy to improve recruitment. CAT publishes considerable detail about each of its programmes at the School on the website, covering programme content, assessment, entry requirements and fees, with links to programme specifications on the University website. The website also features regularly updated student blogs which offer current and prospective students a relevant and detailed insight into the student experience. Up-to-date handbooks for each of the programmes are available to download by prospective students and other audiences, which is **good practice**.

3.2   Current students can access information on CAT's website, from programme handbooks, email contact from the student support officers, social media, and from an intranet. Information about each module is sent to students before their attendance at the monthly block delivery modules as module handbooks or programme information leaflets, which are well regarded by students. The VLE is a comprehensive resource for each programme. It is well used by students on attendance and distance learning programmes. The publication on the VLE of the complete review and enhancement process reports for the MSc Renewable Energy and the Built Environment is **good practice**.

3.3   The School makes effective use of electronic methods to communicate with its dispersed student body. The Student Support Officer for the MSc Advanced Environmental and Energy Studies compiles a weekly email newsletter for students, containing a digest of relevant information. It uses social media to engage with prospective students, current students and alumni. While no written social media policy exists, staff understand the online approach to interactions with these groups. Electronic conference facilities are also used to facilitate tutorials and discussions with students while away from the School and extensively with distance-learning students.

How effective are CAT's mechanisms for ensuring that information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy?

3.4   CAT has a clear remit, delegated to it by the University, covering responsibility for the production of information about learning opportunities. Staff at the School have a detailed and comprehensive understanding of their roles regarding information provision. Marketing materials are approved by the University for accuracy and branding. After the last revalidation, programme handbooks were reviewed to ensure consistency, and mechanisms

were put in place to ensure they are updated annually by programme leaders and student support officers.

3.5   While the post of Head of Education remains vacant, currently accountability for information about learning opportunities rests with the Head of Quality and Support. There are clear lines of reporting between the staff producing information, the Marketing Office, programme leaders, the student support officers and the Head of Quality and Support. This ensures that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.6   An effective and efficient collaborative editorial process exists between the School's staff and the CAT marketing office in creating accurate and appropriate promotional materials. For example, information on the website is monitored frequently by the Marketing Officer using website analytics. Meetings are held to ensure the timeliness, relevance and accuracy of webpages. The CAT strategy document identifies the future need for an education marketing strategy, which will be reinforced by the appointment of a Student Liaison Officer.

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 plan[3]

The Centre for Alternative Technology 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	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The review team identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within CAT:						
• detailed collaborative review at the end of each module by tutors and students (paragraph 2.6)	Module reviews will be shared with all programme academic and support staff	Collated and circulated to all programme staff	After semester Field Board - February, June and September	Programme leader	Head of Quality and Support	Through programme meeting minutes
	Actions arising from student module feedback will be communicated to students	Uploaded to the vitual learning environment/ Moodle	Monthly	Programme Support Officer	Head of Quality and Support	Through Quality and Support meeting minutes
• the work of the student support officers liaising with programme staff to support students and identify common issues (paragraph	Support officers to attend programme meetings	Support staff to attend on a rota basis	April 2014	Support staff	Head of Quality and Support	Rota to be established
	Standing item to appear on the programme meeting agenda	Support staff contribute to the agenda by raising issues of concern	April 2014	Support staff	Head of Quality and Support	Through programme meeting minutes

[3] The Centre for Alternative Technology 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 Centre for Alternative Technology's awarding body.

2.10)						
• The up-to-date handbooks for each of the programmes, which are available to download by prospective students and other audiences (paragraph 3.1)	Ensure these are updated annually	Discussions between programme leaders and support staff one month before the start of the academic year	August 2014	Programme leaders and support staff	Head of Quality and Support	Checks made by the Head of Quality and Support at the start of each academic year
• the publication on the virtual learning environment of the complete review and enhancement process reports for the MSc Renewable Energy and the Built Environment (paragraph 3.2).	Ensure all review and enhancement process reports appear on the virtual learning environment after they have been approved by the University	Nominate a member of support staff to do this	Annually at the end of the first semester	Support Officer	Head of Quality and Support	Checks made by the Head of Quality and Support
Advisable	**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 is **advisable** for CAT to:						
• expedite the	Appoint a Head of	The Head of Quality and	2014	Head of	CAT Charity	CAT Charity Ltd

appointment of a Head of Education in order to achieve effective oversight of the provision (paragraph 2.2).	Education as soon as possible	Support to raise this issue with the Departments Trustee (of CAT Charity Ltd)		Quality and Support	Ltd Trustees	Trustees minutes
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 is **desirable** for CAT to:						
• re-establish regular and formal management meetings to oversee quality and standards (paragraph 1.2)	Establish quarterly management meetings	In liaison with the Trustee who oversees the School	March 2014	Head of Quality and Support	CAT Charity Ltd CEO	Minutes of meetings
• engage fully with the appropriate chapters of the Quality Code (paragraphs 1.4 and 2.4)	Agenda this for the annual programme reviews	Annual planning for the next academic year to include reference to the Quality Code	August 2014	Programme leaders	Head of Quality and Support	Minutes of meetings
• articulate a teaching and learning strategy (paragraph 2.5)	To be discussed in the quarterly management meetings	Programme leaders to jointly develop a teaching and learning strategy	December 2014	Programme leaders	Head of Quality and Support	Publication of strategy on web site

• review the resourcing and strategic oversight of staff development (paragraph 2.12)	Quarterly management meeting to develop a schedule	Schedule to be included in annual strategy and budgets	August 2014	Programme leaders	CAT Charity Ltd CEO	Minutes of meeting
• take a systematic and consistent approach to induction, appraisal and peer observation of teaching (paragraph 2.13).	Quarterly management meeting to develop a schedule	Annual schedule to be developed for each member of staff	August 2014	Programme leaders	Head of HR	HR records

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.

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[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.