



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

Essex International College Ltd

March 2015

Contents

Key findings about Essex International College Ltd	1
Good practice	1
Recommendations	1
About this report	2
The provider's stated responsibilities.....	2
Recent developments	3
Students' contribution to the review.....	3
Detailed findings about Essex International College Ltd	4
1 Academic standards.....	4
2 Quality of learning opportunities	6
3 Information about learning opportunities.....	9
Action plan	11
About QAA	15
Glossary	16

Key findings about Essex International College Ltd

As a result of its Review for Specific Course Designation carried out in March 2015, the QAA review team (the team) considers that it has **limited confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the programme it offers on behalf of 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 this awarding 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 way in which the study skills module contributes significantly to the support of all learners (paragraph 2.11).

Recommendations

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

The team considers that it is **essential** for the College to:

- ensure that the process for production of the Programme Annual Monitoring Report clearly identifies key criteria and appropriate evidence, and employs an effective and timely approach to action-planning (paragraph 1.4)
- ensure that assessment for all students is subjected to the internal verification process against agreed deadlines (paragraph 1.9).

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

- clearly define the purpose of, and relationship between, the Academic Board and Academic Committee (paragraph 1.3)
- develop and implement formal protocols and procedures for meetings of the Academic Board and Academic Committee (paragraph 1.5)
- improve the process for gathering and using feedback from student questionnaires through formal analysis and discussion at appropriate meetings (paragraph 2.6)
- analyse fully why students withdraw and take appropriate action to improve retention (paragraph 2.8)
- develop appropriate mechanisms for students to become formally involved in key discussions on academic standards and learning opportunities (paragraph 2.12)
- revise the Publishing Policy such that the process for checking and confirming the accuracy and currency of information is rigorous and robust (paragraph 3.5).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Specific Course Designation](#)¹ conducted by QAA at Essex International College 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 Pearson. The review was carried out by Shahban Aziz, Dan Morgan and Jenny Steer (reviewers) and David Ross (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the [Review for Specific Course Designation: Handbook, May 2014](#).² Evidence in support of the review included a College self-evaluation document and supporting documentary evidence, an extra submission of evidence after the preparatory meeting, a student submission, the College website, generic and specific documentation from Pearson, meetings with staff and students, and reports of reviews by QAA.

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

- the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code)
- Pearson programme specifications
- Pearson guidance documents.

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

Essex International College Ltd (the College) was founded in October 2009. The College has a mission to provide a safe, secure, friendly and professional service to national and international students, offering long established programmes from well recognised awarding bodies. The College is located at two east London venues in Romford and the Docklands.

At the time of the review, there were 745 students registered across both campuses. Some of these were originally registered as students of the College's various sub-centres (see paragraph 2.7) and have been absorbed into either of the two remaining campuses to allow completion of study.

At the time of the review, the provider offered the following single higher education programme, through Pearson as its awarding organisation.

- HND Business.

The provider's stated responsibilities

Responsibility for management of the single higher education programme is fully devolved by Pearson to the College and includes the specific areas: student recruitment and admission; monitoring student retention; identification of curriculum needs; curriculum development; setting, marking and moderation of assessments; feedback to students; annual monitoring; staff development; student support; resources; student appeals; collecting and analysing student feedback; and information about learning opportunities.

Pearson retains responsibility for programme specifications and intended learning outcomes and there is shared responsibility for periodic review of the higher education provision.

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/RSCD.aspx

² www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2707

Recent developments

There has been significant change at the College over the last two years. In 2012 the College went through a rapid expansion by opening 11 sub-centres in London and the rest of England, all offering the HND Business programme. After a review by the new management of poor progression statistics in the sub-centres, all of these were closed in 2014 and provision concentrated at Romford and Docklands. Over the past year there has been substantial reconfiguration of the organisation as a whole, including a more focused and streamlined management structure.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. This was submitted before the team visit. The submission was prepared by a group of senior students in consultation with their peers. College staff gave advice on this process. Students from both remaining campuses met reviewers during the review visit and preparatory meeting.

Detailed findings about Essex International College Ltd

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The College processes for fulfilling its responsibilities for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are in need of further improvement. The Principal is responsible to the Board of Directors through the Academic Board and the Senior Management Team. The purpose of the Academic Board is to consider recommendations from the Academic Committee and advise on key matters which affect the business of the College, including staff development, student recruitment and progression, academic standards, strategic planning and resources. The Academic Board is attended by the Principal, the College Directors and the Academic Coordinator.

1.2 The Academic Committee's remit is mainly operational. Membership comprises College Directors, the Principal, the Academic Coordinator, the Director of Studies, the Lead Internal Verifier and senior tutors. The Committee is remitted to make recommendations to the Academic Board about structure and procedure, selection of students, programme proposals, and the annual programme monitoring process. In practice, the Directors do not attend meetings of the Academic Committee. The Principal uses his attendance at meetings of the Academic Board to update the Directors of Academic Committee business.

1.3 The distinction between the composition and roles of the Academic Board and Academic Committee is not well defined. For example, recently reviewed Terms of Reference for College committees do not cite the Academic Board and there is an apparent mismatch between the membership of the Academic Committee as described and the actual attendance at meetings. It is therefore **advisable** for the College to clearly define the purpose of, and relationship between, the Academic Board and Academic Committee.

1.4 Monitoring of provision is regarded by the College as an important activity and is meant to be achieved through a process of annual review and self-evaluation. The current Programme Annual Monitoring Report (PAMR) is produced by the Principal as a summary document, and is informed by internal evidence, including student feedback questionnaires, and by external reports. However, there is no evidence that the College maintains a strategic oversight for the systematic production of this report, as is set out in the Expectation in Chapter B8 of the Quality Code. Also, actions arising from the production of the PAMR are not clearly identified and followed through in an action plan. Further, discussions with respect to approval of the Report in committees and staff meetings is not formally recorded in minutes. Thus a key part of the management of the quality of academic standards is less than effective. It is **essential** that the process for production of the Programme Annual Monitoring Report clearly identifies key criteria and appropriate evidence, and employs an effective and timely approach to action-planning.

1.5 The College has made progress in developing the action plan from the previous QAA review in 2013 with respect to minutes of the Attendance and Termination Committee, the Appeals Panel, and the Welfare Committee. These are detailed, clear and comprehensive with systematic referral to previous meetings and monitoring of action. However, there is insufficient detail or consistency in the minutes of the Academic Board and Academic Committee. For example, there is a lack of formal accounts of discussion and approval of the programme planning process, review of College procedures, consideration of external examiner reports and the Programme Annual Monitoring Report. The reporting process developed for other College committees should therefore be extended to meetings of the Academic Board and Academic Committee. It is **advisable** for the College to develop

and implement formal protocols and procedures for meetings of the Academic Board and Academic Committee.

1.6 The five-year College Strategic Plan is kept up to date via an effective version log system. This Plan has led to the development of a Continuous Improvement Framework, an annual Development Plan and a Learning and Teaching Strategy that is embedded in staff practice. The annual Development Plan incorporates action planning arising from external reviews of performance and annual monitoring into a single management document. In line with the planning process, key policies are also reviewed annually against Pearson standards, provisions and guidance, appropriate other external guidance and the College's institutional aims and objectives.

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

1.7 Management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities is informed with reference to key external reference points. These include the Quality Code and programme specifications and a range of guidance documents provided by Pearson.

1.8 The College makes some use of the Quality Code to inform developments in policy and practice, including staff development, assessment and student welfare. The College has recently mapped its policies and practices to the expectations and indicators of the Quality Code. The College has also provided staff with a guide to assessment, *The Way Forward*, which specifically references generic points in relevant sections of the Quality Code. However, as identified in paragraphs 1.4 and 1.9, further work is needed to align the College's practice to the expectations of the Quality Code.

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

1.9 The approach to assuring the standards and quality of assessment requires further development. Staff attend standardisation workshops each semester and before the submission of assignments. This process allows sharing of approaches to promote consistent practice. The programme is assessed and moderated under the College Internal Verification Policy in accordance with Pearson regulations. The latest external examiner's reports show that the College has taken some action on previous essential recommendations by appointing an internal verifier and redesigning the internal verification process to provide a platform for sampling of all student assessed work at least once a year. The report further specifies that internal verification practice and the frequency of standardisation meetings has improved in the current academic session. However, the report also indicates that the process is not comprehensive, and has not covered the work of all students, especially those whose registrations have been transferred from the various sub-centres. There is no evidence that the internal verification process is robust, comprehensive or consistently applied, and current practice is not in line with the Quality Code, *Chapter B6*. It is **essential** that the College ensures that assessment for all students is subjected to the internal verification process against agreed deadlines.

1.10 The HND Business programme team have made some improvements in managing the quality of academic standards in key areas since the monitoring visit by QAA in 2014. For example, staff awareness of the Quality Code has been enhanced through the development of guides referring to specific parts of the Quality Code. However, there is evidence, for example, with respect to internal verification not being extended to assessments for all students, that the College's capacity to soundly and effectively secure the academic standards of its awards is currently limited. Also, the lack of key criteria and

specification of evidence for Programme Annual Monitoring results in a process that prevents an effective and timely approach to action-planning.

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

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 fulfils its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities in an appropriate manner; for example with respect to: adequate staff development; effective teaching, learning and assessment practice; good student support; and appropriate resource planning. The Director of Studies has overall responsibility for the management of learning opportunities. This process is underpinned by the Quality Assurance Policy that details how the College provides, audits and improves the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and student satisfaction.

2.2 The College has responded appropriately in part to adverse comments in earlier awarding organisation reports. For example, recent such reports are now more positive with regard to student involvement in class and assessment performance. Issues still exist, however, with respect to internal verification as outlined in paragraph 1.9.

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

2.3 College processes for using external reference points to inform and enhance learning opportunities are discussed in paragraphs 1.7 and 1.8.

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

2.4 Students note that teaching practice is effective with good access to teaching staff and senior managers. For example, there is an effective 'open door' procedure in place, through which students can routinely discuss a range of academic and personal issues.

2.5 There are formal College policies, including Assessment, Internal Verification, Appeals, Admissions and Equality. These are effectively cross-referenced to strategic drivers such as the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Quality Assurance Policy. For example, the Internal Verification Policy is used to ensure that teaching activities and assessment design match the learning outcomes for each course unit and level. Consistent implementation of these policies and procedures takes place through standardisation meetings. Assessment feedback is given in a timely and appropriate manner during assignments and is valued by students.

2.6 Module questionnaires are used to gain feedback from students on a range of issues, including the quality of teaching and resources. Information is collated by the course coordinator. The College states that this is discussed at staff meetings. However, no teaching staff attend the staff meetings and it is not clear from minutes how issues are systematically analysed and acted on. It is **advisable** for the College to improve the process

for gathering and using feedback from student questionnaires through formal analysis and discussion at appropriate meetings.

2.7 The College experienced high student drop-out and academic failure rates during the rapid expansion mentioned on page 3. Problems due to the rapid expansion of sub-centres have been addressed with the decision to contract back to two main centres. The College has allowed students from the various sub-centres to continue to be registered for study until August 2015, with attendance and support arrangements in place for them to complete their studies. A significant number of students did not accept this offer and a substantial number have withdrawn from the College or not completed units within the expected timeframe.

2.8 The College has taken additional measures to improve retention. For example, they have implemented a more thorough and robust admissions process with diagnostic tests and interviews for all students. There is a thorough and effective administration process in place for student attendance and submission of assignments which allows prompt identification and counselling of at-risk students. The review team was assured that the reduction in the number of centres and other enhancement measures are leading to much lower drop-out rates. However, there is no in-depth analysis of why students withdraw from the course. It is therefore **advisable** for the College to analyse fully why students withdraw and take appropriate action to improve retention.

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

2.9 The College has some mechanisms in place to support enrolled students. For example, the outcomes of pre-entry diagnostic tests are used to determine suitability for study and where learning support is required. All students receive a one day induction where they are provided with information including copies of the HND handbook, course information leaflet, student handbook, academic calendar and class schedule. Students confirm that the admission and induction process sufficiently prepares them for their course and value the support given at these points.

2.10 The College has an effective student welfare model to ensure students receive pastoral support. For example, student welfare officers provide a useful first point of call for students and monitor student attendance. Members of the academic and administrative staff understand and fulfil the responsibilities for the quality of learning opportunities and can refer students to one of three learning support assistants. These provide students with academic guidance and tailored support when required. Learning support assistants and welfare officers are also able to provide advice on academic appeals and mitigation and also attend appeals committee meetings. Students commended the availability and quality of this support.

2.11 The College recognises the need for extra support to be provided to its students, many of whom are mature or have taken a break from studying. For example, extra lectures and seminars are provided to assist students with modules that they consider difficult. Additionally, there is a dedicated study skills module available to students which has been introduced at the request of students. Students commended this module and found it helpful in assisting them with their course. The way in which the study skills module contributes significantly to the support of all learners is **good practice**.

2.12 There are adequate mechanisms for students to feed back on their learning experience; for example, the open-door informal process operated by staff and the opportunity to complete feedback questionnaires and surveys. Additionally, elected student representatives have regular meetings with senior staff. Students are appreciative of the various mechanisms open to them for feedback. However, student representatives do not

currently sit on any formal committees and this restricts their access to important discussions on academic standards and quality of learning opportunities. For example, external examiner reports are not made available to students. It is **advisable** for the College to develop appropriate mechanisms for students to become formally involved in key discussions on academic standards and learning opportunities.

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

2.13 The College has clear policies and procedures in place for the recruitment and development of staff. For example, there is an induction checklist, a staff handbook, a continuing professional development process and a calendar in place for staff development activity.

2.14 The performance of staff is effectively managed as part of the overall College quality assurance policy. There is a peer observation policy and process in place which is undertaken by senior staff. The results from this are used to inform the staff performance reviews undertaken by the Principal.

2.15 Staff development planning is effectively managed by the Principal. The College has chosen to concentrate staff development according to its priorities which emerge from awarding organisation reports, planning and peer review. For example, there has been a recent focus on internal verification. A number of staff are engaged with completion of a PhD and study towards an Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment award. Staff are suitably qualified for their teaching roles.

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

2.16 There is a detailed Learning and Resource Allocation Policy that is part of the five-year College Strategic Plan. Proposals for additional resources are discussed at Academic Committee and approved by Academic Board. Resources are appropriate for the provision and students have favourable views on the quality of and access to these. They also appreciate the availability of teaching materials via the College's virtual learning environment (VLE).

2.17 Library provision is effective and is augmented through online textbook access. Students are provided with recommended reading and resource lists and training is provided on the use of the online library. Students are satisfied with the book to student ratios and feel that library resources are relevant and tailored to their course.

2.18 All students receive a free netbook from the College at the start of second term and these remain their property after they leave. Students note that this is effective in supporting their learning, particularly outside the classroom.

2.19 The HND Business programme team effectively fulfils its responsibilities with respect to the management of the quality of learning opportunities. The prospects for the quality of learning opportunities being maintained at current levels are sound. Teaching and learning practice is appropriate and well received by students. The College has rigorous mechanisms for the management of the quality of the learning opportunities in accordance with the requirements of the awarding organisation. There is strong support for student learning. For example, there is an effective module in place to assist students with study skills, appropriate resources and appropriate staff development.

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 effectively does the College communicate information about learning opportunities to students and other stakeholders?

3.1 The College communicates information about learning opportunities to students. Information is provided via email, College noticeboards, a range of printed materials and through the VLE. For example, it produces information on fees and financial matters, teaching and class timetables, an e-prospectus, policies and procedures, teaching materials, application forms and marketing material.

3.2 The effective student handbook given to all students at induction serves as a general introduction to the College and its environs and contains course information, student policies and procedures, information about the VLE and the library, a student code of conduct, as well as general information regarding the local area. Students value the information in the handbook and the methods by which they receive information from the College.

3.3 There is a College website that serves as a paperless prospectus and contains information about fees, location, and news and events. The website also contains application forms, marketing material, student handbooks, teaching and class timetables as well as information on events, holidays and other announcements. However, students commented that they infrequently visit the website.

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

3.4 A publishing policy exists and this is managed by the Principal, who has overall responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of information on the website and on the VLE. This is monitored on a monthly basis. Updates are checked and authorised in line with the policy.

3.5 However, elements of the published information are inaccurate. For example, online information includes the Employer Engagement Strategy. This highlights seven key areas focusing on work-related learning and employer engagement. None of these highlighted areas are currently part of the curriculum or used in student learning support. Additionally, there are a number of grammatical and spelling errors in the prospectus and on the website. Further, while students were mostly satisfied with the accuracy and usefulness of the published information, they stated that they had no mechanisms to formally comment on the content or quality of website or on published materials. It is **advisable** for the College to revise the Publishing Policy such that the process for checking and confirming the accuracy and currency of information is rigorous and robust.

3.6 The College prepares and communicates information about the provision through its hard copy and online information. Mechanisms are in place for assuring that information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. However, these mechanisms require further improvement.

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

Essex International College action plan relating to the Review for Specific Course Designation March 2015						
Good Practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The review team identified the following areas of good practice that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the way in which the study skills module contributes significantly to the support of all learners (paragraph 2.11). 	Increase the availability and presence of support staff	September 2015	Principal	More use of support facilities/staff	Academic Committee	Student satisfaction questionnaires
Essential	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is essential for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that the process for production of the Programme Annual Monitoring 	Recording of meetings where annual monitoring is discussed	From September 2015	Academic Coordinator/ Principal	Production of a clear plan for use within the College that has clear and measurable identified targets	Academic Committee	Review of the plan

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 College's awarding organisation.

report clearly identifies key criteria and appropriate evidence, and employs an effective and timely approach to action-planning (paragraph 1.4)	Evidence is SMART and is contained within a cohesive identifiable plan	From September 2015	Academic Coordinator/ Principal	A clear plan and understanding of what is necessary that can be checked for progression	Academic Committee	Review of the plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that assessment for all students is subjected to the internal verification process against agreed deadlines (paragraph 1.9) 	Continue the work highlighted by Pearson suggesting that the internal verification process is now successfully working, and build on the improvements	Immediately	Academic Coordinator/ Principal	Successful external verification visits	All committee members/ Principal/teaching staff/students	Successful annual monitoring review/QAA review reports
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is advisable for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clearly define the purpose of, and relationship between, the Academic Board and Academic Committee (paragraph 1.3) 	Overhaul governance procedures in the College to display formal roles and groups	Immediately	Academic Committee/ Principal	Completion of Governance document displaying the terms of reference for all committees/groups	Principal/ Academic Committee	Minutes from various groups and successful external reports from Pearson and QAA

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop and implement formal protocols and procedures for meetings of the Academic Board and Academic Committee (paragraph 1.5) 	Review the procedures for the Academic Committee and the day-to-day running of the College	Immediately	Principal	Completion of Governance document displaying the terms of reference for all committees/groups	Academic Committee/ Principal	Minutes from various groups and successful external reports from Pearson and QAA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve the process for gathering and using feedback from student questionnaires through formal analysis and discussion at appropriate meetings (paragraph 2.6) 	Centres/campuses to integrate teaching and learning strategy in (both) centres/campuses	September 2015	Academic Coordinator	Improved teaching practice	Principal	Completed student evaluation of teaching questionnaires
	Student feedback to be included in all teacher observation reports	Ongoing	Academic Coordinator	Increased student submission/pass rates	Principal	Student feedback fed into the staff appraisal system
	Staff development activity to be monitored	Ongoing	Principal	Positive student feedback through student questionnaires	Academic Committee	Staff appraisal responses to training and development needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> analyse fully why students withdraw and take appropriate action to improve retention (paragraph 2.8) 	Improve the recruitment process, and offer more detailed information as to the course requirements and in-depth analysis of student retention (figures)	From September 2015	Principal/ Academic Coordinator	Increased student attendance and less dropout	Academic Committee	Student attendance and retention figures

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop appropriate mechanisms for students to become formally involved in key discussions on academic standards and learning opportunities (paragraph 2.12) 	<p>Improve the College welfare model now there is a reduced number of campuses</p> <p>Improve student engagement in the non-teaching affairs of the College</p>	<p>From September 2015</p> <p>From September 2015</p>	<p>Principal/ Welfare Team</p> <p>Principal/ Welfare Team</p>	<p>More student involvement in academic issues</p> <p>Creation of a student council</p>	<p>Principal</p> <p>Principal</p>	<p>Students attending academic committee meetings</p> <p>Student council minutes</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> revise the Publishing Policy such that the process for checking and confirming the accuracy and currency of information is rigorous and robust (paragraph 3.5). 	<p>Review procedures for publishing information and delegate responsibility on a more coherent and regular basis</p>	<p>Immediately</p>	<p>Academic Coordinator</p>	<p>Completed 'checklists' on a monthly basis</p>	<p>Principal</p>	<p>Through reporting in committees</p>

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 for Specific Course Designation can be found at: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/RSCD.aspx.

Glossary

This glossary explains terms used in this report. You can find a fuller glossary at: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary. Formal definitions of key terms can be found in the [Review for Specific Course Designation: Handbook, May 2014](#).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).

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/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2707

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.

QAA1358 - R4553 - Oct 15

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2015
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Email enquiries@qaa.ac.uk
Website www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786