



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

Irshad Trust t/a The Islamic College

February 2014

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Key findings about Irshad Trust t/a The Islamic College

As a result of its Review for Specific Course Designation carried out in February 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 programmes it offers on behalf of Middlesex University and the Association of Business Practitioners.

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 awarding body and organisation.

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

Good practice

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

- the mutually supportive relationship with the awarding body (paragraph 1.3)
- the interdisciplinary approach to curriculum design and delivery (paragraph 2.2)
- the strong student research ethos (paragraph 2.3).

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:

- ensure that level descriptors are fully incorporated in programme design and assessment (paragraph 1.5)
- establish robust procedures for the timely return of student work and the provision of summative feedback to students (paragraph 2.7).

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

- fully embed its quality procedures in the context of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraph 1.6)
- extend staff development activities to include pedagogic development (paragraph 2.18).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Specific Course Designation](#)¹ conducted by [QAA](#) at Irshad Trust t/a The Islamic College (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 Middlesex University and the Association of Business Practitioners. The review was carried out by Dr Chris Hudson, Dr Clive Marsland, Mr James Lovett (reviewers) and Dr Monika Ruthe (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 the College's self-evaluation and supporting documentation such as policies and procedures, external examiner and annual monitoring reports, minutes of committee meetings, a student submission 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 framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

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 1998 to promote a sound understanding of Islam. It operates from a single location in High Road, North West London. The College offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes to Muslims and non-Muslims who are interested in understanding various aspects of Islam. It aims to provide high-quality learning and skills development through collaboration with its partner university to meet the educational needs of its students while adhering to Islamic moral values and principles.

The College has a long-standing relationship with Middlesex University which validates the vast majority of the College's provision. It also delivers one programme in collaboration with the Association for Business Practitioners. There are 34 academic staff (nine full-time and 25 part-time) supported by nine full-time support staff.

At the time of the review, the College offered the following higher education programmes from Middlesex University and the Association of Business Practitioners. Student numbers are provided in brackets.

Middlesex University

- BA (Hons) Islamic Studies (27)
- BA (Hons) Muslim Cultures & Civilisation (16)
- MA Islamic Studies (39)
- MA Islamic Law (16)
- MA Islam and the West (13)

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

- MProf/DProf Muslim Cultures (12)

Association of Business Practitioners

- Cert Islamic Banking & Finance (1)

The BA (Hons) Islamic Studies has designated status while the BA (Hons) Muslim Cultures and Civilisation has temporarily designated status.

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College's responsibilities in relation to the undergraduate and postgraduate provision validated by Middlesex University are clearly defined in the signed Memoranda of Cooperation for each programme. For 'validated' programmes the College is responsible for all aspects of programme management. This entails recruitment and admissions; curriculum development; programme delivery and monitoring; assessment, including setting and marking assessments and feedback to students; student support; monitoring teaching quality; staff development; and providing programme and module information and learning resources. Reviews of programmes and appeals are shared responsibilities with the University. Two of the programmes are designated 'joint' programmes. For these, curriculum development and providing programme and module information are the responsibility of the awarding body.

For the programme delivered on behalf of the Association for Business Practitioners the College's responsibilities are specified in the Centre Agreement. These include student recruitment and admissions; programme delivery; assessment including marking assessments and student feedback; student support; and providing learning resources. The awarding organisation is responsible for curriculum development, complaints and appeals.

Recent developments

The College has recently enhanced its teaching space by constructing a new block of teaching and administrative accommodation. The College now has a single campus consisting of two blocks.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the College were invited to present a submission to the review team.

Undergraduate student views were gathered by the Student Council in a written submission based on a survey of students and focus groups.

Students met the coordinator at the preparatory visit and the team during the review visit. The student submission and the meetings provided valuable input in the review process.

Detailed findings about Irshad Trust t/a The Islamic College

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The College has effective arrangements in place to monitor and assure academic standards, which are the overall responsibility of Middlesex University and the Association of Business Practitioners as the awarding body and organisation respectively. The Academic Board has strategic oversight of managing academic standards and is exercising this responsibility effectively. Boards of Study with student and awarding body representation report on key operational aspects of academic standards to the Academic Board, including student performance. The Director of Education has day-to-day responsibility for academic standards and maintains oversight of all programmes within the College's portfolio. Programme and module leaders have oversight of the curriculum, including updating and modification. Students contribute directly to managing standards within the College and curriculum design through their involvement in Boards of Study.

1.2 The College is a long-standing partner of Middlesex University and has a strong relationship with the University. Formal quality processes such as programme approval and periodic review are well managed, and the College actively engages in them to assure standards on an ongoing basis. There are effective points of contact between the University and the College. The University works closely with the College to keep it apprised of changes to University regulations and procedures. Link tutors attend at least one Board of Study each year. These key relationships are effective in contributing to the management of academic standards within the College. The mutually supportive relationship with the awarding body is **good practice**.

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

1.3 The College engages indirectly with the Quality Code through the implementation of the awarding body's quality procedures. Its higher education programmes are designed, approved, monitored and reviewed in line with the procedures in place at the University, and meet the requirements of *Chapter B1: Programme design, development and approval* and *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* of the Quality Code.

1.4 The assessment and moderation procedures used by the College are those of the University, and are consistent with the published specifications for each programme of study. Learning outcomes for each award are clearly established in programme specifications and module information provided to students. They are also clearly indicated in assessment briefs given to students. Learning outcomes are in alignment with the FHEQ and relevant subject and level benchmark statements and are tested at programme approval.

1.5 Academic staff at the College display a limited awareness of the FHEQ level descriptors and are not generally aware of the implications level descriptors have on what is expected of students at each level of assessment. Consequently, some undergraduate assessments are set below the expected level. It is **advisable** for the College to ensure that level descriptors are fully incorporated in programme design and assessment.

1.6 Knowledge of the Quality Code among academic staff is diffuse. While the College has provided some welcome staff development on quality assurance matters, it would be **desirable** for the College to fully embed its quality procedures in the context of the Quality Code.

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

1.7 External examining procedures within the College are secure and well managed. External examiner nominations are provided by the College but appointments are made by the University. There are clear procedures for receiving, distributing, acting upon and responding to external examiner reports which the College strictly follows.

1.8 External examiner reports are considered by both senior academic staff within the College and by Boards of Study. Responses to external examiner reports give clear evidence of action planning which is followed through and overseen by the Director of Education. A significant number of external examiner reports in recent years describe examples of very good academic practice, which is also disseminated across the College and to the University. There is clear evidence of a developmental relationship between academic staff and external examiners through meetings which could usefully be extended to students.

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 and 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 broadly fulfils its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities using a clear structure in its higher education provision. Processes designed to monitor the quality of learning opportunities include student feedback, external examiner reports and annual monitoring. Boards of Study comment regularly on learning opportunities and students feel that the College listens to their feedback and takes appropriate action.

2.2 The College has an interdisciplinary approach to curriculum design and delivery. Students are exposed to a variety of different viewpoints and approaches in class, from guest speakers and through field trips. The interdisciplinary approach to curriculum design and delivery is **good practice**.

2.3 The College has a well-defined student research culture at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, supported by a research methods module and a range of visiting speakers. Students have the opportunity to publish papers in the in-house student research journal and are also encouraged to present their research at external events. The cultivation of a strong student research ethos in the College is **good practice**.

2.4 Assessment and moderation are the responsibility of the College and effective procedures are in place to ensure consistency and transparency of second marking and internal moderation in line with University procedures. Samples of work are sent to external examiners.

2.5 A wide range of assessments are used, such as presentations, discussions, researched essays and quizzes. For coursework submissions, students are able to submit draft assignments through the virtual learning environment (VLE) to receive formative feedback. Draft submissions also allow students to check referencing using the plagiarism-detection software. The quality of summative feedback for undergraduate assessments

varies and does not always match the grades awarded. This issue was raised by external examiners and the College is putting measures in place to improve the quality of feedback provided to students.

2.6 Coursework assignments are generally agreed with the lecturer with few written briefs provided to students. The College does not use marking schemes. There is a generic grading scheme for each piece of marked work, but this is used inconsistently. This means that it is sometimes difficult to relate the mark awarded for a piece of work to the grading criteria, a comment also made by external examiners.

2.7 Students state that while they feel their work is marked fairly and accurately and that appropriate support is given through formative feedback, summative work is often not handed back to them within the College's own published schedules. Staff acknowledged that there might sometimes be delays due to external moderation requirements. It is **advisable** for the College to establish robust procedures for the timely return of student work and the provision of summative feedback to students.

2.8 The College strictly adheres to its policy of no late submissions except for extenuating circumstances. Students who do not submit within the deadline, and who have not been granted an extension through extenuating circumstances, will be allowed one opportunity to submit the work as a retake but the mark will be capped to 40 per cent. Students are fully aware of this policy.

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

2.9 The College makes direct and indirect use of external reference points. The relationship with the University ensures that appropriate reference points are used as set out in paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5.

2.10 Module descriptors state learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and skills with a clear indication of which learning outcomes each assessment element is addressing. Module learning outcomes clearly relate to the programme learning outcomes specified in the programme specifications, which in turn relate to the FHEQ.

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

2.11 The College uses a range of effective mechanisms to monitor and enhance the quality of teaching including student feedback, staff appraisal and classroom observation. Students are invited to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in end-of-module feedback forms. Results are reviewed by the Director of Education and discussed with module leaders and at Boards of Study. They also form part of the annual monitoring report. Student representatives at Boards of Study also comment on the quality of teaching. Updates on any matters arising are provided at the next meeting. Students are satisfied with the quality of teaching.

2.12 Academic staff are appraised annually through a Performance and Development Review. In addition, the Director of Education monitors staff performance during lectures. There is currently no formal peer observation process to allow for pedagogic development of staff, although some staff undertake peer observation on an ad hoc basis.

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

2.13 The College supports its students well. The low student-to-staff ratio enables effective and proactive academic and pastoral support which is largely provided by academic

staff. Students are highly satisfied with the support, and praised the open-door policy adopted by the academic staff involved in their education. Students are also aware that the College can provide an external counsellor should they wish to discuss personal issues.

2.14 Additional English and Arabic language support is available free of charge for those who need it. The College also provides appropriate support for students with recognised learning disabilities, and makes modifications to assessments through facilities such as extra time in examinations or extensions to assessment submission deadlines, should these be necessary. It can also refer students to the University's support services to facilitate diagnosis with learning disabilities.

2.15 Personal development planning is through student journals used in some modules and weekly workshops, some of which have external speakers. In general, key skills development is embedded in the modules. Career development is somewhat limited and largely focuses on further study of the field.

2.16 Bursaries are available for students on the MA courses. For undergraduate students the College can temporarily waive fees if a student's funding application is delayed. In addition, students on the Arabic foundation programme have their fees refunded if they do exceptionally well in the first year of their undergraduate studies. In addition, high-performing undergraduate students are awarded bursaries towards the MA programmes.

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

2.17 The College has an effective staff induction programme and all new academic staff are given a mentor. Staff are normally mentored for their first teaching semester.

2.18 The College has an academic staff development policy and in-house training is provided for staff to acquire the knowledge and skills to competently fulfil their roles, including tutor development and good practice sessions throughout the year. Academic staff are also encouraged to register for postgraduate qualifications and undertake research and scholarly activities. Financial support is available for those wishing to register on doctoral programmes. College staff are invited to the annual Learning and Teaching Conference at the University as well as workshops on learning and teaching run by the University. However, there is no formal requirement or expectation for academic staff development in teaching, learning and assessment. It would be **desirable** for the College to extend its staff development activities to include pedagogic development.

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

2.19 The College's Strategic Plan 2012-2016 outlines the framework for fulfilling its responsibilities towards students regarding the provision of learning resources and infrastructure. The College's well-defined management structure with clear delineation of responsibilities puts responsibility for overall strategic development in relation to providing learning resources with the Principal, who reports to the Trustees.

2.20 The College has recently developed a new block to house some of its learning provision. This has been built in anticipation of expanded student numbers at the College and to ensure that current students have the best facilities possible. Students state that the classroom facilities are good in the new building and 'functional' in the old building.

2.21 Students are positive about the learning resource provision at the College, and are particularly pleased with the recently expanded library facilities, which are sufficient for their

academic requirements. They praise the range of texts and resources available in the library. Students are also entitled to use the library facilities of the partner university, and the College reimburses joining fees paid at another external library.

2.22 The College has a VLE which is also available outside the College online. The College makes extensive use of this medium when distributing lecture materials and other learning resources. The VLE is also the main communication portal between the College and students, although some undergraduate students prefer other means. For distance education students the VLE is supplemented by webinars and other open video conferencing software.

2.23 Students are positive about the VLE. They are trained to use it and report that teaching materials such as presentation slides, reference material and lecturer correspondence are placed on the system promptly and the system is reliable and useful. There is also a Dropbox linked to the plagiarism-detection software and a discussion area for students and academic staff, assessment and other learning tools.

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 provides effective distribution of information to students and other stakeholders through multiple avenues. The College's website is comprehensive and is the primary means for external stakeholders to access information on courses, fees and entry requirements. Information for current students is also easily accessible from the website and the VLE.

3.2 The College also provides hard copy prospectuses for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes upon request that contain relevant and high-quality information for prospective students. The prospectuses are submitted to the University for approval before publication and distribution. The College makes extensive use of its prospectuses for publicising its programmes at conferences, academic events and community and religious occasions, as well as providing them to prospective students who make direct enquiries to the College.

3.3 Handbooks for each programme are readily available to students online and in hard copy. They contain important information required by students to engage successfully with their studies, such as programme specifications and module details, College policies, information on assessment and other practical details of the programme such as procedures for appeals, extenuating circumstances, fee refunds, student representation, quality assurance and administrative arrangements. Student handbooks are reviewed annually but will be updated in advance of the annual review if there are major changes to the programme or other circumstances at the College in the interim that would justify a change to the published documentation.

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

3.4 The College has effective processes in place to ensure the information it provides is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. All published information on programmes is first created by the academic departments concerned and then approved by the Director for Public and International Affairs and the Principal. Through this process the College also ensures congruity between the different media. Major changes to programmes that result in changes to published information require pre-publication sign-off by the University.

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

Irshad Trust t/a The Islamic College action plan relating to the Review of Specific Course Designation February 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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the mutually supportive relationship with the awarding body (paragraph 1.3) 	<p>Continue the supportive relationship with the awarding bodies</p> <p>Propagate such a supportive approach to other community-related projects</p>	<p>Maintain close links with awarding body link tutors</p> <p>Continue attending awarding body training days</p> <p>Attend workshops on the promotion of Islamic education</p>	As set in the calendar and as and when events arise	Link tutor and Head of Education	Academic Board and Principal	Annual Monitoring Report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the interdisciplinary approach to curriculum design and delivery (paragraph 2.2) 	<p>Expand interdisciplinary approach further when designing modules as and when necessary</p> <p>Ensure that interdisciplinary approach is delivered</p>	<p>Review at validation events</p> <p>Continue reviewing module delivery</p>	Validation dates during the next academic calendar	Module leaders	Academic Board & Head of Education	Validation Event and other external reports

³The 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 body.

	throughout the College's programmes	Continue supportive classes for students				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the strong student research ethos (paragraph 2.3). 	Promote students' research ethos	<p>Mentor students and staff with the research ethos</p> <p>Publish high-quality student research</p>	Throughout each academic year	Supervisors, Group Leaders and Head of Education	Academic Board	<p>Assessment Board and External Examiners' Reports</p> <p>Publication of academic articles</p>
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 the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that level descriptors are fully incorporated in programme design and assessment (paragraph 1.5) 	<p>Full incorporation of level descriptors in designing programmes</p> <p>Ensure appropriateness of level descriptors within each module assessment</p>	Training on understanding, use and implementation of level descriptors	By academic year 2015-16	Module Leader and Group Leader	Academic Board and Head of Education	Validation Event, Assessment Board and external examiner reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> establish robust procedures for the timely return of student work and the provision of summative feedback to students (paragraph 2.7). 	Adhere to the set academic calendar dates	Training on timely collection of student work, distribution for grading, marking and incorporation of feedback and release of grades	Beginning academic year 2014-15 and throughout each academic year	Registry, Module Leaders and Group Leaders	Academic Board and Head of Education	Board of Studies and external quality assurance events

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:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fully embed its quality procedures in the context of the Quality Code (paragraph 1.6) 	Understand and incorporate Quality Code in quality procedures	Attend training by awarding body, workshops by Quality Code experts and host in-house workshop on quality assurance	End of academic year 2014-15	Head of Education together with Middlesex University link tutor	Academic Board	Annual Monitoring Report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> extend staff development activities to include pedagogic development (paragraph 2.18). 	Have a higher level of staff development to include pedagogic aspects	Encourage staff to attend pedagogic training events, programmes and aim for Higher Education Academy membership	End of academic year 2014-15	Group Leaders	Head of Education	Academic Board

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/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/designated-providers/Pages/default.aspx.

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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