

# Initial Review of Oldham College, March 2013

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## About this review

This is a report of an Initial Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Oldham College (the College). The review took place on 12-14 March 2013 and was completed by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Danny Saunders
- Mr Kevin Kendall
- Ms Lucy Bannister (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Oldham College and to make judgements on the likelihood that the College's policies and procedures (some of which may still be under development) will meet UK expectations for academic standards and quality. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - threshold academic standards<sup>1</sup>
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the quality of information
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the [key findings](#) can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>2</sup> Background information about Oldham College is given on page 4 of this report. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for [Initial Review](#) and has links to the review guidance and other informative documents.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an explanation of terms, see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/rche/pages/initial-review.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/rche/pages/initial-review.aspx)

## Key findings

This section summarises the QAA review team's key findings about Oldham College.

### QAA's judgements about Oldham College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Oldham College.

- The policies and procedures at Oldham College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in maintaining the threshold academic standards set by its awarding body.
- The policies and procedures at Oldham College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in the quality of the student learning opportunities.
- The policies and procedures at Oldham College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in the quality of information produced for students and applicants.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at Oldham College:

- the helpful and clear information in student course and module handbooks (paragraph 1.8)
- the development of vocational and academic skills within courses, especially those linked to employer engagement (paragraph 1.14)
- staff make a very effective contribution to student learning through their accessibility, academic expertise and vocational networking (paragraph 2.1)
- the Academic Skills Unit provides valued and effective support in enabling students to achieve learning outcomes through close liaison with the subject tutor (paragraph 2.5).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Oldham College. The College should:

- standardise terminology for describing levels of study by July 2013 (paragraph 1.2)
- explore with the awarding body ways that external examiner reports can provide feedback about programmes at Oldham College, by the start of the academic year 2013-14 (paragraph 1.5)
- develop a higher education staff development plan, to include teaching and learning, scholarly activity and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, by the start of the academic year 2013-14 (paragraph 2.2)
- formalise the leadership and coordination of teaching and learning scholarship and research by the start of the academic year 2014-15 (paragraph 2.2)
- ensure opportunities for comprehensive, consistent and representative student engagement on College higher education groups and committees by the start of the academic year 2013-14 (paragraph 2.10)
- develop information systems for recording and analysing quantitative and qualitative student perception data, by the start of the academic year 2014-15 (paragraph 2.12)

- develop the virtual learning environment for all subject areas to meet the needs of a diverse range of higher education students, by the start of the academic year 2014-15 (paragraph 2.26)
- build on excellent informal employer links to create a formalised system for enhancing work-based learning by the start of the academic year 2014-15 (paragraph 2.27)
- finalise and publicise the student charter, in partnership with the student body, by the start of the academic year 2013-14 (paragraph 2.28)
- develop formal systems and processes for ensuring information that is fit for purpose, accurate and complete, by the start of the academic year 2013-14 (paragraph 3.1).

## Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that Oldham College is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students:

- the development of a bespoke learning and teaching strategy for higher education (paragraph 1.6)
- the development of the remit and membership of higher education management committees and groups (paragraph 1.10)
- the development of the Principles and Guidelines about Peer Observation of Teaching (paragraph 2.3)
- the College's continuing efforts to build on international connections in the local community for the recruitment of international students from 2013 (paragraph 2.25).

## About Oldham College

Oldham College is a further education college in Oldham, Greater Manchester, and was founded in 1893. Its mission is 'changing people's lives'; its vision is 'a great place to learn'; and its values are 'People, Excellence and Responsiveness'.

Prior to 2005, Oldham College offered full-time and part-time higher education courses validated by the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), and through franchise partnerships with the Universities of Huddersfield, Hull, Bolton and Central Lancashire. Between August 2005 and July 2012, higher education in Oldham was delivered by University Campus Oldham (UCO) as part of the University of Huddersfield, under its 'Towns Like Us' initiative. During this time, student numbers increased from 523 full-time equivalents in 2005-06 to a peak of 943 full-time equivalents in 2010-11.

In August 2012, higher education was transferred back from the University of Huddersfield to Oldham College, which continued to deliver higher education programmes in Business Management, Law, Health and Community Studies, Early Years, Psychological Studies, Construction, Teacher Education, and Digital Games Art.

Oldham College recognises that the continuing success of UCO is dependent on its ability to be responsive to the needs of the local and regional communities, and to increase social mobility in a deprived area through widening participation. To meet this challenge, Oldham College has identified a set of principles that higher education in Oldham should:

- make a positive impact on the comparatively low level of engagement in higher education in North and East Manchester; this includes UCO's key catchment areas - Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside
- drive up the standards of the College's further and higher education in relation to employer relationships, approaches to teaching and learning, and vocational education
- build strong progression routes from the College's vocational further education portfolio through higher education to employment
- develop innovative curriculum pathways, and become a hub for the development of high-quality post-14 teaching and learning
- align its research and scholarly activity to support the future development of towns like Oldham
- develop its international profile in line with College activities.

## Explanation of the findings about Oldham College

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.<sup>4</sup>

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#)<sup>5</sup> is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the [Review of College Higher Education handbook](#), also on the QAA website.<sup>6</sup>

### 1 Academic standards

#### Outcome

The policies and procedures at Oldham College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in maintaining the threshold academic standards set by its awarding body. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

#### Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 All higher education programmes within the scope of the review have been allocated to the appropriate level of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

1.2 The team found that the terminology used in student handbooks and programme specifications was inconsistent and potentially confusing for students, particularly with regard to descriptions of the level of study. The review team **recommends** that the College should, by July 2013, standardise terminology for describing levels of study.

1.3 Programme specifications and module specifications indicate that there is sufficient volume of study to demonstrate that learning outcomes can be achieved.

#### Use of external examiners

1.4 The appointment and induction of external examiners is the responsibility of the University of Huddersfield (the University), as the degree-awarding body. Details of the procedures are set out in the Collaborative Partnership Agreement. External examiners' reports and responses to them are a part of the Annual Course Evaluation process. The outcomes of the Annual Course Evaluation process are reported to the College Higher Education Quality Improvement Group, before being reported to the College's Senior Management Team.

1.5 The College works with external examiners at course level through support for assessment and the production of action plans in response to external examiner reports. The College and the University have defined operational systems and procedures for dealing with serious concerns raised by external examiners, however, there is currently no overview of external examiner feedback about specific courses at institutional level. The team heard from staff that such feedback would be valuable in informing future teaching, learning and assessment. There is inconsistent awareness of external examiner reports among student

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<sup>4</sup> The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However, it is available on request for inspection; please contact QAA Reviews Group.

<sup>5</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx)

<sup>6</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx)

representatives. The review team **recommends** that the College should explore with the awarding body ways that external examiner reports can provide feedback about programmes at Oldham College, by the start of the academic year 2013-14.

### **Assessment and standards**

1.6 The College adheres to the assessment requirements approved by the University. There are effective monitoring and review processes which ensure that students have the opportunity to demonstrate learning outcomes. The conduct of assessment complies with the regulations of the awarding body and is monitored effectively by the College's delivery and support staff. Assessment strategies in programmes are linked to learning outcomes. This information is communicated clearly through the use of course and module handbooks, as well as programme specifications. However, the current College Teaching and Learning Strategy does not provide sufficient detail for guiding assessment policies, although this is currently being revised. The team **affirms** Oldham College's development of a bespoke learning and teaching strategy for higher education.

1.7 Assessment activities are conducted rigorously by College academic staff, with effective support from administrative staff, underpinned by good use of information systems. This ensures the integrity of the assessment process.

1.8 Summaries of assessment regulations are included within handbooks and guideline documents. The amount and timing of assessment is communicated effectively to students through programme specifications and course handbooks. This information is reviewed annually at module and course levels. However, information provided to students in other formats about coursework submission deadlines and grading categories is occasionally inconsistent. The helpful and clear information in student course and module handbooks is a **feature of good practice**.

1.9 Feedback to students is provided in accordance with assessment guidelines and regulations, and work is marked and returned within three weeks.

1.10 The College makes effective use of boards and panels for assessment, and is proactive in developing their procedures, remit and membership further. The Senior Management Team is developing an overarching higher education assessment policy linked to teaching, learning and staff development, and is developing more appropriate procedures for implementing regulatory frameworks and for measuring value-added achievements of students, as well as employment destinations. The team **affirms** Oldham College's development of the remit and membership of higher education management committees and groups.

### **Setting and maintaining programme standards**

1.11 Standards are effectively maintained through the College's systematic monitoring and review of programmes, including the use of external reference points, the linking of policy with practice, and through the further development of its higher education management structure and the introduction of new data management systems.

1.12 The University is responsible for the design of programme specifications, while the College negotiates curriculum content and delivery. This is achieved in accordance with clear learning outcomes and strategies, but with few references to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) Expectations around standards. Programmes are monitored, reviewed and evaluated effectively in accordance with the University's regulations.

1.13 Standards are managed through an overarching Higher Education Management Group, supported by the Quality Improvement Group and Teaching, Learning and Assessment Group, which oversee the design, monitoring and review of programmes at course and module levels.

1.14 In line with the College's general strategy for engagement with local communities and employers, work-based learning is integrated into the design of higher education programmes. This is overseen by the recently established Work Placement Group, and underpinned by tutors' vocational experience and the provision of academic and vocational skills development. This emphasis on vocational skills development is appreciated by students. The development of vocational and academic skills within courses, especially those linked to employer engagement, is a **feature of good practice**.

### **Subject benchmarks**

1.15 Subject benchmark and qualification statements are used effectively in the delivery of courses and modules by the College. Subject benchmark statements are also integrated into programme specifications, and summaries are provided for students. These are then included in course and module handbooks.

1.16 Where formalised links are in place with professional bodies and associations - for example in Law, Construction and Early Years - connections are made between standards and subject benchmark statements.

## **2 Quality of learning opportunities**

### **Outcome**

The policies and procedures at Oldham College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in the quality of the student learning opportunities. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

### **Professional standards for teaching and learning**

2.1 College staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities, as set out in their role descriptions, and make an effective contribution to learning through their accessibility, academic expertise and vocational networking. Teaching staff are suitably well qualified and are regarded by students as approachable and helpful. Students also value their credibility and vocational expertise. There is a collaborative training schedule which enables the sharing of good practice between the University and the College. Teaching staff are proactive in undertaking staff development and developing their research, and 70 per cent are members of the Higher Education Academy. The very effective contribution of staff to student learning through their accessibility, academic expertise and vocational networking is a **feature of good practice**.

2.2 There is currently no higher education staff development plan, although formal leadership and coordination of staff development is planned through the establishment of a Staff Development and Planning Strategy and a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College should develop a higher education staff development plan, to include teaching and learning, scholarly activity and the Quality Code, by the start of the academic year 2013-14. The team also **recommends** that the College formalise the leadership and coordination of teaching and learning scholarship and research, by the start of the academic year 2014-15.

2.3 The College has recently started a process of peer observation of teaching - with an early emphasis on new teachers to ensure that they can perform to the required standard - and encourages staff to obtain a teaching qualification. The team **affirms** Oldham College's development of the Principles and Guidelines about Peer Observation of Teaching.

### **Learning resources**

2.4 The resources available to the students are effective in supporting their learning, as demonstrated in the documentation provided by the College and in the views of students, both those who met the review team and in the student submission.

2.5 The College is responsible for resourcing both the management and the delivery of learning. Students feel very well supported in their learning by both academic and support staff, and particularly value the Academic Skills Tutors, who are effective in supporting writing skills and preparation for assessments. The library receives reading lists for modules in order to ensure it has them in stock, and liaison between the library staff and academic staff is effective. The University of Huddersfield 'Unilearn' virtual learning environment is widely used by staff and students to support teaching and learning, and is also a platform for the University's plagiarism software. The valued and effective support provided by the Academic Skills Unit in enabling students to achieve learning outcomes through close liaison with the subject tutor is a **feature of good practice**.

2.6 Teaching staff are proactive in undertaking staff development and make valuable links with industry. Staff knowledge and skills are further developed through workshops delivered by the University of Huddersfield Registry to Oldham College academic and support staff on collaborative provision and University regulations.

2.7 Students also have access to recently built higher education accommodation. The Campus is well equipped with appropriate learning spaces, a library and IT facilities, supported by specialist library and IT staff who are available during the evenings when students are in college. These staff possess appropriate qualifications and engage in development opportunities. The College provides students with an IT and library induction.

2.8 The College does not have a clear strategic approach to the continuous improvement of its facilities for higher education students, however, a resource plan is under development.

### **Student voice**

2.9 Students are represented on some groups and make a valuable contribution, although there is no comprehensive and consistent student representation on higher education groups and committees. There is much informal feedback on student satisfaction, but the College should consider introducing a more formal way of gathering quantitative and qualitative data on student perceptions.

2.10 All courses have a student representative, who contribute to quality assurance through Course Committees and the Student Panel. Student Panel Rolling Logs have sections on resources, enrolment, induction, assessment and feedback, and equality, which inform the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Group. Students are invited to the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Group and the Quality Improvement Group, but none have yet attended. They will be invited to the first meeting of the Higher Education Management Group, which is planned for April 2013. The review team **recommends** that the College should ensure opportunities for comprehensive, consistent and representative student engagement on College higher education groups and committees by the start of the academic year 2013-14.

2.11 Students feed back their views informally through their tutors and teachers, who are readily accessible and operate an open-door policy. This enables staff to respond to student concerns promptly and effectively, and is valued by students.

2.12 A College overview of student views is hampered by the absence of a formal system for monitoring student perceptions, and there are no results from internal surveys available, although course feedback is gathered annually. Additionally, the College cannot currently use National Student Survey data as its students cannot be identified as a separate cohort to the University's. The review team **recommends** that the College should develop systems for recording and analysing quantitative and qualitative student perception data by the start of the academic year 2014-15.

### **Management information**

2.13 The University held all management information data before the transfer of higher education back to the College in August 2012, and continues to hold centralised data for student registration and for assessment and module grades. Since higher education was transferred back to the College, the College is planning to develop its own systems of recording data, which it will use to inform its management of higher education.

2.14 Recruitment, retention rates, completion rates and rates of student success at achieving high grades are reported in the Annual Course Evaluations, which are then reported to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Group and the Quality Improvement Group. This enables the College to establish an overview of trends and patterns. Course leaders analyse this data at course level and take immediate action if there are areas of concern.

### **Admission to the College**

2.15 Students are applying directly to the College for the first time for 2013-14 entry. The information supplied by the College is accurate, the policies and procedures are fair, and there are clear and transparent entry requirements.

2.16 The College has registered with UCAS and Student Finance to enable students to apply directly to the College for 2013-14 entry. Students state that pre-admission information is supportive and accurate, and that entry requirements and standard offers are clear and transparent. The College is keen to attract more students into higher education from the Oldham area, in line with its principles. To achieve this, it has published a Widening Participation Statement, reduced tuition fees, and delivers a range of outreach activities to raise aspirations and awareness. An example of this commitment is the development of the 'Oldham Family' of providers, which links primary schools and secondary schools to the College.

2.17 There are progression routes in most subjects from level 3 programmes at the College, and an increasing number of students follow this route into higher education. An Accreditation of Prior Learning Procedure exists and is available to current students at the College and other potential students. Recognition of prior learning admissions decisions are devolved to tutors and approved by the awarding body, however, there is no staff training and development for advising on and assessing experiential learning submissions.

## Complaints and appeals

2.18 Although a Complaints Procedure exists, student awareness of it is patchy.

2.19 The College currently uses the University's Complaints Procedure. The responsibility for registering and progressing complaints sits with the Assistant Principal of University Campus Oldham, working closely with the Higher Education Quality and Administration Manager. No instances of recent complaints were identified; however, in meetings with the team, most students were not aware of the Complaints Procedure.

## Career advice and guidance

2.20 The approach to career education is currently adequate. There is much informal guidance, however, a more formal approach to careers education, advice and guidance in a specific work context could capitalise on the considerable experience of subject tutors.

2.21 The College employs a dedicated Careers and Employability Adviser from the University for two days per week, and delivers careers and employability sessions to students. Course teams have a considerable number of professional contacts and networks, and have extensive experience of successfully placing students and giving careers advice. Staff recognise that the accreditation of careers education, information, advice and guidance, and personal development files, offer much potential for reinforcing employer engagement activities. The College plans to establish a Work Placement Group to facilitate the sharing of good practice in the management of student placements.

## Supporting disabled students

2.22 Students with disabilities are very well supported in their learning; however, the lack of discreet quantitative and qualitative information hampers an analysis of how students with disabilities perform relative to other students.

2.23 The College has an Equality and Diversity Policy and a Disability Policy, which provide a clear statement of intent. The College has also produced a Disability Procedure Flowchart, which usefully supports implementation of the Disability Policy, but contains no information on tracking and monitoring students.

2.24 A range of services is provided to support students with specific needs, which are outlined in their Personal Learning Plans. Students have direct access to disability support and guidance through one-to-one interviews with the Disability Support Officer, but there is currently no data on the relative performance of students with a disability to inform the management of quality of learning opportunities and enable the entitlements of disabled students to be met.

## Supporting international students

2.25 Although the College does not currently have any international higher education students, it has recently gained UK Border Agency Highly Trusted Sponsor status, and will begin recruiting international students for higher education programmes in 2013-14. The College is currently preparing systems and auditing processes in preparation for the arrival of international students. In line with its higher education principles, the College plans to work with the local community to capitalise on existing international contacts and ensure that the quality of learning opportunities for international students is appropriate. The team **affirms** Oldham College's continuing efforts to build on international connections in the local community for the recruitment of international students from 2013.

## Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.26 The quality of learning opportunities delivered through flexible arrangements at the College is managed effectively. The 'Unilearn' virtual learning environment offers a range of features that enable students to engage with their programmes off-site, such as online submission, storage of summative and formative feedback, and access to course materials while on placement. The virtual learning environment has been widely implemented by most courses within the College, although a minority of areas do not use it. The College has plans to develop a work placement area within the virtual learning environment to enhance its work with local employers. The team **recommends** that the College should develop the virtual learning environment for all subject areas to meet the needs of a diverse range of higher education students, by the start of the academic year 2014-15.

## Work-based and placement learning

2.27 The College has good links with local employers, which inform both the curriculum and the management of the curriculum. Students met by the team were satisfied that they receive the support they need when seeking or attending work placement as part of their programmes. Students receive clear and accurate information on important aspects of employment, such as Criminal Records Bureau checks and health and safety issues. The College currently has an informal approach to arranging work placements, which works through staff relationships with individual employers. There is no formal College overview of work placements or placement learning. The review team **recommends** that the College should build on excellent informal employer links to create a formalised system for enhancing work-based learning by the start of the academic year 2014-15.

## Student charter

2.28 A draft student charter currently is awaiting approval from the College's Quality Improvement Group. The draft charter is specifically for higher education students at the College, and once approved, will be revised annually and made available through the College website and course documentation. Students have not been involved in its development. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College should finalise and publicise the student charter, in partnership with the student body, by the start of the academic year 2013-14.

# 3 Quality of information for students and applicants

## Summary

The policies and procedures at Oldham College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in the quality of information produced for students and applicants. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

3.1 The information provided by the College about their higher education provision is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Currently, materials associated with the University have to be given approval by the awarding body as part of the Collaborative Partnership Agreement. Information about the College's areas of responsibility are checked by academic and support staff associated with individual programmes and the Designated Academic Liaison Officer, but there is no formal process for the College to assure itself that information is fit for purpose. The team **recommends** that the College develop formal systems and processes for ensuring information that is fit for purpose, accurate and complete, by the start of the academic year 2013-14.

3.2 The College has previously contributed data for the University's Key Information Set (KIS) in accordance with their Collaborative Partnership Agreement; however, since 2012-13, the College is responsible for its own KIS data. This will contribute to the information available to the College's stakeholders.

3.3 Until 2012-13, students have not had access to University external examiner reports. This was due to their generic content, with a lack of differentiation for issues from specific groups of students within partner colleges. For the academic year 2012-13, arrangements have been made for differentiation within external examiner reports, and the College plans to make these reports available to students.

## Glossary

Initial Review is very similar to Review of College Higher Education (RCHE). The guidance note for Initial Review is intended to be read in conjunction with the RCHE handbook. The RCHE handbook gives formal definitions of terms such as 'threshold standards' and 'learning opportunities' (pages 17-20). This glossary provides a quick reference to the terms.

The guidance for Initial Review can be found on the QAA website at:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/initial-review-guidance.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/initial-review-guidance.aspx)

The RCHE handbook can be found on the QAA website at:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx) .

If you require formal definitions of other terms, please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx).

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **glossary** on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx).

**academic standards:** The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

**credit(s):** A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

**enhancement:** Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

**feature of good practice:** A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution or College manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

**framework:** A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

**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*.

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

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

**operational definition:** A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

**programme (of study):** An approved course of study which 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.

**public information:** Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

**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.

**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 standard:** The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications **frameworks**. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

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

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