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

Stratford College London Ltd

February 2014

Contents

Key findings about Stratford College London Ltd

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 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 its 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**:

- effective tutorial support for students (paragraphs 1.8 and 2.10)
- a lesson observation process which is used to enhance teaching and learning practice (paragraph 2.5)
- comprehensive and effective use of student feedback (paragraph 2.6).

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:

- develop a formal strategy for teaching and learning (paragraph 2.4).

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

- embed employer engagement activities in the curriculum (paragraph 2.9)
- enhance website information on the student learning experience (paragraph 3.1).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Specific Course Designation](#)[1] conducted by [QAA](#) at Stratford College London 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 a programme of study that the provider delivers on behalf of Pearson. The review was carried out by Mr Allan Davies, Mrs Dorothy McElwee (reviewers) and Dr Heather Barrett-Mold (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 self-evaluation, student submission, samples of student work, annual reviews, external examiners' reports, further documentation supplied by the provider 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)
- regulations of the College's awarding organisation
- Investors in People Quality Mark
- ISO 9001.

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 is an independent college of further and higher education established in March 2002 with the aim of providing education to meet student expectations in terms of a choice of programmes consistent with the needs of the contemporary job market, and the assurance of quality with a view to offering value for money. Since March 2004, the College has supported over 400 students at level 7.

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

Pearson
- HND in Business (level 5).

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College's responsibilities in relation to its awarding organisation are clearly defined through formal agreements. The College is responsible for recruiting students, learning and teaching, student support and learning resources. There is a shared responsibility for assessment, public information and some resources.

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[1] www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/designated-providers/Pages/default.aspx
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx

Recent developments

In 2013 the College had to relocate from its Stratford location and is now based in Highbury and Islington with reduced room availability. As a result, the number of programmes on offer has reduced to one with a current student number of 23. When the College's own building in Stratford becomes available again in late 2014, it intends to increase the range of programmes.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the College produced a written submission for the review team. They received help from the College in developing this submission. Student representatives held various class discussions to gather individual and whole class feedback. There was also a questionnaire which informed the document. The team found this helpful and explored student views in meetings with students to gain a clear picture of the student learning experience. In addition, a meeting was held with students, including student representatives, at the preparatory meeting.

Detailed findings about Stratford College London Ltd

1   Academic standards

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

1.1   The College manages academic standards effectively through the Director of Studies, assisted by the Deputy Principal and in collaboration with the Academic Committee for planning, reviewing and scheduling academic activities. The Director of Studies oversees the operational management of the provision and chairs the Strategic Planning Committee, reporting to the Academic Committee. Quality assurance reports are submitted to the Academic Committee which is required to assure itself that standards are being met.

1.2   The College has a number of committees for the oversight of its provision. This is reflective of its former context of operating as a larger provider. These committees remain in place to manage current provision and in preparation for future expansion. Documented committee structures have clear responsibilities, membership and terms of reference. Because of the small number of staff currently employed by the College, the same staff serve on a number of these committees, which meet both formally and through informal communications. The Deputy Principal has a significant role to play both strategically and operationally in the dissemination of information.

1.3   The Academic Committee has a significant role in reviewing and approving academic programmes and has the final authority on approval. A number of other committees report to it for approval of their decisions. The Academic Committee meets monthly and reviews the progress of current provision termly and annually. The core activity of the Academic Committee and Senior Management Team is the review and formulation of policy and strategy to advise the Board of Directors on corporate direction.

1.4   The Academic Committee is guided in its oversight of academic standards by the quality manual which acts as the central source of information. Its policies and procedures are used to underpin practices and processes to assure quality in the management of higher education, including academic standards. This is a reference document which details College policies, awarding organisation regulations, management audit processes and relevant framework requirements. There is a range of other policies aside from the quality manual to guide staff and students in maintaining academic standards

1.5   The College fulfils the requirements of and its responsibilities to its awarding organisation through its quality assurance processes. This is achieved principally through the Academic Committee which has formal oversight of all committees dealing with the management of academic activities.

1.6   The quality of teaching is assured through the appointment of professionally qualified staff who are observed through a classroom observation process. These observations are complemented by the annual appraisal process and arranged both formally and informally. Staff maintain occupational competence through staff development to maintain academic standards.

1.7   The current provision is limited to one higher education programme, with other programmes on hold until late 2014. The College became an approved Pearson centre in late 2012 with the first cohort of students joining the HND Business in May 2013. The College adheres to the awarding organisation requirements in terms of standards, assessment and resources.

1.8   Students are drawn from diverse social backgrounds and are largely mature returners to study. They have an effective induction programme which covers academic standards and are provided with a programme handbook and programme specification to confirm academic standards. To facilitate this widening participation cohort an extensive tutorial system is in place which offers academic and pastoral support and supports learning and achievement. Students confirm the strong support received from the College for both their academic and personal wellbeing. The effective tutorial support for students is **good practice**.

1.9   Programme evaluation is undertaken within an annual cycle. It begins with termly subject evaluation involving class representatives, feedback from the student group and an evaluation of student performance in relation to the particular subjects. The annual review considers external examiners' reports, results, staffing and other pertinent curriculum matters. Ultimately the Academic Committee has the overall monitoring role in shaping the curriculum.

1.10   The team concludes that the arrangements the College has in place to fulfil its responsibilities for managing academic standards are effective, with the Academic Committee having overall responsibility for the oversight and approval of all academic programmes.

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

1.11   The College considers the Quality Code, the FHEQ and the Qualifications and Credit Framework in its programme design and quality assurance processes. The College takes guidance from external quality marks, including ISO 9001 and Investors in People, to guide its quality assurance. The College continues to hold the Investors in People Quality Mark.

1.12   The College complies with the requirements of its awarding organisation and the external moderation process and through doing so is satisfied that it meets the requirements of this external reference point. The Deputy Principal plays a key role in disseminating information on the Quality Code and has provided a workshop specifically on this. The College is increasingly engaging with the Quality Code and recognises that through satisfying awarding organisation regulations it is adhering to some aspects of the Quality Code. Guidance documentation from the awarding organisation for programme delivery and assessment is used effectively. This includes the programme specification, module syllabuses and a handbook.

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

1.13   The College engages appropriately with external moderation, verification and examining to support the maintenance of academic standards. The College has an internal verification process, the outcomes of which are checked by the awarding organisation's external verification processes for considering assignment briefs, assessment decisions and certification. At the end of the academic year the review of outcomes undertaken by the Academic Committee recommends new areas on which to focus and possible changes to the programme, which are in turn communicated to the students.

1.14   The College has specific policies in place to deal with academic issues, including assessments, appeals, examinations and attendance to which students are required to adhere. The College assessment policy is based on the need to ensure quality systems of assessment and that practice is consistent with the policies of partner awarding

organisations. The assessment policy details the requirements needed for assessment, the elements that constitute malpractice and the consequences thereof. Students confirm that they understand the assessment process and find it clear and supportive.

The review team has **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 coherent structure for managing academic standards applies equally to managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. Staff have a clear understanding of the management structure. All tutors produce the appropriate schemes of work before sessions begin. These are the responsibility of the Deputy Principal who ensures that they are reviewed. He reports to the Academic Committee on whether the requirements of the awarding organisation, in terms of subject coverage and curriculum content, have been met. This information is also available in the awarding organisation programme handbooks.

2.2 Tutors manage classroom activities effectively. This includes gathering aspects of feedback from students. Tutors subsequently report their observations to the Deputy Principal in relation to resources, discipline, learner performance and other matters in planning future academic sessions. The outcomes and plans are forwarded to the Academic Committee for consideration and approval. The current student cohort benefits from the focus of the single programme. Both staff and students find this promotes a conducive learning environment.

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

2.3 The College is making efforts to ensure that its policies and procedures are in line with the Quality Code. The College used the review process as an opportunity to engage all staff with the Quality Code with particular reference to the sections relevant to their teaching responsibilities.

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

2.4 College managers stress the need to communicate their expectations for teaching and learning to all members of staff and students. Documents are provided on both general policy and specific teaching and learning issues. The learning and teaching policy document is comprehensive and used in separate sections to make it more accessible for users. The policy is reviewed annually. There is no separate learning and teaching strategy document which serves to explicate and underpin the College's broad approach to learning and teaching. It is evident from discussions with staff and students and examination of other documentation that there is an implicit yet discernible teaching and learning philosophy supporting the student experience. It is **advisable** that the College develops a formal strategy for teaching and learning.

2.5 Teaching observation is used effectively to create a consistent approach to teaching. It is part of the quality monitoring of curriculum delivery and serves to ensure that

the appropriate support is given where indications reveal areas of weakness. For example, an identified lack of consistency of teaching approaches led to the introduction of teaching folders and improved lesson planning. This process now forms part of the staff induction programme. The lesson observation process which is used to enhance teaching and learning is **good practice**.

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

2.6   The student feedback system is effective and is a key aspect of monitoring quality of teaching. Class representatives are inducted and then assisted in carrying out discussion forums. These are used to gather data on student views of the quality of teaching and support. Results are analysed with findings explained statistically and used to plan academic provision and resources, staff training, tutor recruitment and broader student support. It was noted that a number of mature students had regular childcare responsibilities which conflicted with classroom attendance. The College made the appropriate adjustments which included extra support and material to compensate. The comprehensive and effective use of student feedback is **good practice**.

2.7   Comprehensive policies exist for academic, pastoral and learning support for students. They include admissions, induction, tutorials, study skills, placements, assessment and examinations, staff development and academic misconduct. These are well understood by staff and students.

2.8   Students are clear about the standard of work required and confirm that the support for study skills and independent learning provided by the staff aids their understanding. Tutors relate their teaching and teaching materials to specific learning outcomes and assessment requirements. Formative feedback to students occurs on all modules. It is well structured and students have commented on how effective the process is in helping them understand the standard and range of work required in the module.

2.9   The College has offered sporadic engagements with external employment resources including a planned visit to a national supermarket chain. A strategy for employer engagement and work placement has been developed recently and the College plans to carry this out in the near future. A minority of students indicated that their learning could be further enhanced through more contextualised readings and stronger links with employers such as visits to local companies. It would be **desirable** for the College to embed employer engagement activities in the curriculum.

2.10   Attendance is monitored effectively and follow-up actions on lateness and absence are seen to be prompt, relevant and supportive, not least through the considerable academic and pastoral tutorial provision. The backgrounds and needs of current students are wide ranging. The tutorial approach reflects this by providing a caring and successful understanding of these needs. Students value this support very highly.

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

2.11   The Deputy Principal plays a pivotal role in providing focused staff development based on classroom observation, staff appraisal and student feedback. He actively seeks out good practice to disseminate among staff. He provides in-house training on classroom management, planning and teaching lessons and the appropriate use of learning resources to enhance access to the curriculum for all students and their individual needs. Feedback from tutors on the benefits of such training is documented and the extent to which such training enhances their professional development is noted to inform future decisions on staff development.

2.12   Tutors have appropriate academic qualifications in their respective areas of expertise, and are helped to develop their professional teacher qualification by sponsoring all tutors to acquire Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector awards and, to date, two others to acquire Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector awards.

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

2.13   The College has limited library resources although books essential to achieving the learning outcomes are supplied. Teaching accommodation is good. The College ensures that e-books, electronic journals and articles as recommended by the tutors are available. Tutors support students by recommending access to other libraries. The Learning Resources Committee plans the acquisition and provision of learning resources and seeks approval from the Academic Committee. The majority of students consider the learning and teaching resources to be adequate for their needs.

> 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 has a limited range of mechanisms for communicating information to students and other stakeholders. The website provides key information in relation to programmes on offer, basic programme outlines and how to apply, but provides little insight into the student learning experience at the College. A quality manual with a substantial range of individual documentation relating to policies and procedures is used but not publicly available through the website. It would be **desirable** for the College to enhance website information on the student learning experience.

3.2   With the current cohort of students enrolled on a single programme, staff, management and students are in close communication, which is frequent and student-focused. Students find it easy to access support and this can include their quest for information about any aspect of their programme.

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

3.3   The Director of Studies is responsible for marketing and ensuring marketing materials are accurate. Information on programmes is based on what is approved by the Academic Committee and takes account of the Quality Code, *Part C: Information about higher education provision*. The College requires all information on its provision to be approved by the Academic Committee and to be compliant with the College's public information policy. Programme descriptions are consistent with awarding organisation requirements and information is confirmed as appropriate with the awarding organisation. Students verify that the information provided to them is consistent with the programme.

3.4   All subject benchmark statements used are consistent with awarding organisation information, the FHEQ and the Qualifications and Credit Framework. Adverts are drafted, checked for accuracy and approved by the Academic Committee before publication**.**

3.5   Information is provided both electronically on the website and in hard copy. The website information is checked and outsourced to another company to upload. Students confirm that the website is easy to navigate but do not report wide use of it. The College does not have a virtual learning environment but plans to implement this in the near future. Currently strategies to support students with virtual learning activity include using external libraries and web links.

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

Action plan[3]

Stratford College London Ltd 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:						
• effective tutorial support for students (paragraphs 1.8 and 2.10)	Students achieve consistency and clarification of opportunity in tutorial Students have individual and specific tutorial support Identify below-average achievers and direct more effort to support them	Format a tutorial structure common to all departments Format should indicate opportunities for students in relation to support in their individual and specific learning challenge Design individual record sheets to record contact with tutors and outcomes and further scheduling agreements between tutors and students Review individual support and progress weekly in the	30 May 2014	Quality Nominee and programme leaders	Management Committee and Academic Committee	End-of-year student feedback analysis End-of-term student feedback analysis End-of-term review of College tutorial system

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[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.

		redesigned College tutorial records format				
		Separate individual tutorials support records from group tutorial records				
• a lesson observation process which is used to enhance teaching and learning practice (paragraph 2.5)	Improvement of observation structure in terms of relevance to current staff and student needs A more supportive feedback system established upon systematised colleague support Observation system to be part of teaching and learning strategy	Revise the current lesson observation system and template Identify and record good practice Indicate significance to teaching and learning on the prescribed College format Design new feedback forms to indicate areas of good practice and areas for improvement Feedback should be constructive and recorded in the specific column on the college-prescribed form Lesson plans should incorporate recommendation from feedback Monitor and record progress on	30June 2014	Deputy Principal and Programme Leader		Annual Programme Review Report End-of-year staff feedback analysis End-of-term subject review

		lesson observation sheets				
		Design class observation system on term basis with specific dates				
		Indicate timeline for feedback				
		Revise lesson plans and indicate action taken on recommendations from class observation feedback				
• comprehensive and effective use of student feedback (paragraph 2.6)	A clear understanding of College feedback system among staff and students	Design a student feedback system which indicates specific timelines for the collection, analysis and actions in relation to findings	30 June 2014	Quality Nominee and Programme leaders	Management Committee and Academic Committee	End-of-programme student feedback analysis
		Indicate type of feedback conducted as tutor-initiated feedback and student-initiated feedback activities				Annual Programme Review Report
	Encourage ownership of College feedback system by all staff and students	Revise student feedback policy to state timelines and timeframes for action on feedback				Staff feedback analysis
		Incorporate feedback findings in teaching and learning activities				
		Identify and record in the College format elements of improvement in relation to				

Advisable	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date(s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
		student welfare, teaching and learning and student achievement				
The team considers that it is **advisable** for the College to:						
• develop a formal strategy for teaching and learning (paragraph 2.4)	Staff become aware of when to indicate the relevance of theory to specific aspect of business practice Students take the opportunity to investigate theoretical frameworks at individual and group level sharing of ideas in class and group discussion as part of critical evaluation and review of their individual and group findings on specific subject matter Student understanding of the different ways for individual learning and the use of appropriate and effective study skills	Design a formal teaching and learning strategy which addresses the following actions: Formulate a comprehensive teaching and learning policy Formulate subject policy Design systematised subject/department meetings to discuss and evaluate teaching and learning Incorporate learner academic and future career goals in teaching and learning strategy which focuses on integration of academic theory and relevant professional and vocational practice Review recruitment system to	30 July 2014	Deputy Principal and Heads of Department Committee	Academic Committee	End-of-programme student feedback analysis Annual Programme Review Report Subject Review Report External reports

	An enhancement of the use of research methodology and the relation between theory and practice	ensure that learners are admitted to specific courses that are linked to their potential as identified at initial assessment stage Review students' tasks and design individual and group tasks that enhance creativity and innovation as related to industry and product/service design				
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:						
• embed employer engagement activities in the curriculum (paragraph 2.9)	A well-structured term-based system to involve employers in curriculum delivery Opportunity for learners to gain workplace experience Opportunity for learners to enhance skills and employability	Redesign the employer engagement policy to indicate a step-by-step approach to establishing relationship and agreement with employers Design an employer engagement programme and indicate in a template form employer activity and timelines Record outcomes and give feedback to employers Record student feedback and use findings in subsequent	30 May 2014	Director of Studies and Programme Leaders	Academic Committee	End-of-year employer feedback analysis End-of-year student feedback analysis

		planning of future activity in employer engagement				
• enhance website information on the student learning experience (paragraph 3.1)	More detailed communication with learners and stakeholders on the student learning experience at the College and what to expect Make essential documents in relation to quality of provision, policies and prospectus publicly available through the College website	Review website information on policies, prospectus and programme details Advise Academic Committee on elements for improvement of information on policies, prospectus, social activities and programme details Academic Committee to conclude on possible changes for improvement and recommend final changes Director of Studies advises website designer to effect the changes	30 May 2014	Director of Studies	Academic Committee	End-of-year student feedback analysis Analysis of outcomes: questionnaire exercise for prospective students and applicants

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.

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

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

programme (of study) An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

programme specifications Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes** of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

provider(s) (of higher education) Organisations that deliver higher education. In the UK they may be a degree-awarding body or another organisation that offers programmes of higher education on behalf of degree-**awarding bodies** or **awarding organisations**. In the context of Review for Specific Course Designation the term means an independent college.

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

quality See **academic quality**.

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of reference points for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the Expectations that all providers are required to meet.

reference points Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured. Internal reference points may be used by providers for purposes of self-regulation; external ones are used and accepted throughout the higher education community for the checking of standards and quality.

subject benchmark statement A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

threshold academic standards The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic award. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks for higher education qualifications** and **subject benchmark statements**. See also **academic standards**.

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