



**A Comparison between the Competency Framework of  
the Corporate Social Responsibility Academy**

**and**

**The National Subject Benchmarks for Business & Management of  
the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education**

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## *Introduction*

The National Subject Benchmarks for Business & Management were developed by the Association of Business Schools (ABS) on behalf of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The benchmarks for Undergraduate degrees were published by QAA in 2000 and the Postgraduate degree benchmarks followed in 2002. The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Academy published its Competency Framework document in year 2004.

On the basis that the term 'Corporate Social Responsibility', and the acronym 'CSR', have only recently been adopted in the language of business, neither were specifically included in the older QAA benchmarks. Therefore, for the purposes of this mapping exercise, the other phrases and descriptions used in the six main characteristics of the CSR Framework, are used as the basis for comparison with the QAA documents.

## *Understanding Society*

### CSR FRAMEWORK

- Understanding the role of each player in society—government, business, trade unions, non-governmental organisations and civil society.
- Understanding business in the broader context and the social and environmental impacts business has on society.

### QAA BENCHMARKS

- The study of organisations, their management and the changing external environment in which they operate.
- This includes: ...economic, environmental, ethical, legal, political, sociological, and technological factors, together with their effects at local, national and international levels upon the strategy, behaviour and management of organisations.
- A range of contemporary and pervasive issues including sustainability, globalisation, business ethics, values and norms.

## *Building Capacity*

### CSR FRAMEWORK

- Building internal and external partnerships and creating strategic networks and alliances.
- Building the capacity of others to help manage the business effectively.
- Suppliers understand the business approach to the environment and employees apply social and environmental concerns in their day-to-day roles.

### QAA BENCHMARKS

- People—the management and development of people within organisations
- Effective performance within a team environment, including: leadership, team building, influencing and project management skills.
- Markets—the development and operation of markets for resources, goods and services.

## *Questioning Business as Usual*

### CSR FRAMEWORK

- Being open to new ideas, challenging others to adopt new ways of thinking and questioning business as usual.
- Questioning business in relation to a more sustainable future and to improve people's quality of life and the environment.

### QAA BENCHMARKS

- The encouragement of positive and critical attitudes towards change and enterprise, so as to reflect the dynamism and vibrancy of the business environment.
- Understanding and responding to change and the consideration of the future of organisations and the external environment in which they operate.

## *Stakeholder Relations*

### CSR FRAMEWORK

- Identifying stakeholders, building relations with internal and external stakeholders, engaging in consultation and balancing demands.
- Stakeholders are those who have an impact on, or are impacted by, your business.
- Understanding the opportunities and risks they present and working with them through consultation, taking their views into account.

### QAA BENCHMARKS

- Organisations: ...the internal aspects, functions and processes of organisations including their diverse nature, purposes, structures, governance, operations and management, together with the individual and corporate behaviours and cultures which exist within and between organisations and their influence upon the external environment.
- Business Policy & Strategy: ...the development of appropriate policies and strategies within a changing environment, to meet stakeholder interests.

## *Strategic View*

### CSR FRAMEWORK

- Taking a strategic view of the business environment.
- Ensuring that the social and environmental concerns are included in the overall business strategy so that CSR becomes 'business as usual'.
- Providing leadership so that everyone in business is aware of social and environmental impacts in their day-to-day roles.

### QAA BENCHMARKS

- Business Policy & Strategy: ...the development of appropriate policies and strategies within a changing environment, to meet stakeholder interests.

## *Harnessing Diversity*

### CSR FRAMEWORK

- Respecting diversity and adjusting your approach to different situations.
- Respecting that people are different, and harnessing this diversity.
- Reflecting this in fair and transparent employment practices. Promoting the health, well-being and views of staff resulting in everybody feeling valued.

### QAA BENCHMARKS

- Self awareness, openness and sensitivity to diversity in terms of people, cultures, business and management issues.
- The management and development of people within organisations.

## *Conclusions*

From the comparison above, it can be seen that there are indeed many overlaps and similarities in the words and descriptions used within the CSR Academy Framework and the QAA benchmark documents.

Naturally, the Academy document is specific to CSR; whereas the QAA documents are more general and cover a much wider range of business and management areas. The CSR components in the QAA documents are more disparate. However, when viewed in combination, they appear to map very closely with the CSR Framework.

The main difference between the two is that the Academy framework is competency-based, with five levels of attainment (awareness, understanding, application, integration and leadership) and related behaviour patterns.

The QAA benchmarks are based upon the acquisition of relevant knowledge, understanding and skills at pre-determined, national, levels of achievement.

It appears that students who successfully complete a qualification, based on the QAA benchmarks, would have awareness, understanding and integration of CSR issues related to the Academy's five levels of achievement.

However, they may not have had the opportunity to actually apply these in practice nor lead an organisation in terms of CSR.