



# Higher Education Review of Tameside College

September 2014

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Tameside College. The review took place from 16 to 18 September 2014 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Marian Stewart
- Dr Andrew Walker
- Dr Steve King
- Sarah Mullins (student reviewer)

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Tameside College and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code)<sup>1</sup> setting out what all UK [higher education providers](#) expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of threshold academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the 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 7.

In reviewing Tameside College the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)<sup>4</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode).

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106).

<sup>3</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Tameside College

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

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Tameside College.

- The range of mutually beneficial employer partnerships (Expectations, B1, B3, B6 and Enhancement).
- The wide-ranging institutional support for the development of all academic and support staff, especially relating to curriculum design and enabling student development and achievement (Expectations B1, B2 and B3).
- The College's responsiveness to the needs of part-time students, thereby facilitating their progression and achievement (Expectations B3 and B4).
- The Learner Voice database which tracks issues and actions arising from multiple sources of student feedback (Expectations B5, B9 and Enhancement).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Tameside College.

By January 2015:

- for all programmes, ensure the consistent application of monitoring processes for the timely return of assessed work in accordance with the published deadline schedules (Expectations B3 and B6)
- revise the process of recording Boards of Studies minutes so that the withdrawal of student representatives for specific closed agenda items is made explicit (Expectation B8).

By April 2015:

- revise the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy so that it includes, where appropriate, reference to the RPL policies and procedures of awarding universities (Expectation B6).

### Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The actions being taken to implement in full a distinctive higher education student engagement system (Expectation B5).

- The steps being taken to further secure the accuracy and completeness of public information (Expectations C and A2.2).

## Theme: Student Employability

Tameside College (the College) has a commitment to employer engagement that is articulated in its mission and demonstrated through its practice. Employers are involved in the design and delivery of its higher education provision. The College offers a variety of higher education programmes that aim to develop higher-level vocational skills which are required by a range of employers, particularly those within the region.

The College's links with employers allow students to enhance their skills by working and studying in a situation that enables them to draw appropriately upon their practical experience. The development and delivery of the Work-Based and Integrative Studies programme is a particularly effective mechanism by which this industry-orientated higher education provision is made possible. The student support services of the College are also industry-orientated, with the particular requirements of a largely part-time higher education student body informing its careers-related provision.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Higher Education Review](#).

## About Tameside College

The College is a medium-sized further education college formed in 1998 as a result of a merger between Tameside College of Technology and Hyde Clarendon Sixth Form College. It is located eight miles east of Manchester city centre in the borough of Tameside, which has a population of 219,700. Post-16 participation in Tameside is currently lower than the national average: 21 per cent of working-age residents are qualified to NVQ Level 4 or above, compared with 32.9 per cent in Great Britain.

The College Mission is to be dedicated to transforming lives by offering first-class education and training to improve employability and generate economic prosperity. The College's Higher Education Strategic Plan 2013-2016 strives to develop and provide high-quality, responsive programmes embedded in employability and widening participation. The key priorities are to:

- provide learning opportunities that meet the skill needs of local people and businesses
- improve progression for level 3 learners
- equip local people with the skills to become lifelong learners
- provide outstanding teaching and learning
- generate an alternative income stream.

Responsibility for the quality of higher education provision lies with the College's Curriculum, Quality and Standards Committee, a subgroup of the Corporation Board that meets each term. The Deputy and Assistant Principals (Curriculum) have oversight of higher education, with the operational responsibility for the quality of programme delivery residing with heads of departments who, with their curriculum leaders, are responsible for all aspects of the management and performance of their areas. The Higher Education Quality Managers Group meets once a month to review the performance of all higher education programmes offered across the College. Twenty-one teaching staff are involved with higher education delivery, with the College noting that the majority also teach on a range of further education courses.

All higher education is delivered on the College's main site at Beaufort Road, although some level 4 and above work-based learning modules are based at the Tameside Centre for Enterprise which is located in the centre of Ashton. In 2013-14 the College had 218 directly funded and five indirectly funded enrolments, with a total of 209 students having part-time status. Headline statistics for 2013-14 show a 100 per cent overall achievement rate for higher education (compared with 92.1 per cent for 2010-11), with 92.4 per cent completions from the start of enrolment (showing a 7.2 per cent increase on 2010-11). Destination data from 2012-13 show that 88 per cent of graduates progressed to employment or further study.

The College works with one awarding organisation (Pearson) and has partnership agreements in place for validated programmes from two awarding bodies: the University of Chester and Manchester Metropolitan University. A partnership arrangement with the University of Huddersfield ended in 2013-14, with the College completing an exit procedure without disadvantaging the final cohort of students who completed their programmes of study.

The current higher education portfolio includes six HNC and two HND programmes spanning the subject areas of Construction, Building Services, Mechanical Engineering, and Electrical/Electronic Engineering. There are three Foundation Degree awards in Sport Coaching and Fitness Therapy, Teaching Assistance, and Early Years, in addition to a Certificate and Professional Graduate Certificate of Education. Two honours programmes are offered in Education and Work-Based and Integrative Studies, with Certificate and top-up pathways from level 4 and 5 attainment. The College is in the advanced planning stages for Certificates of Higher Education and HNCs in Business, Leadership and Management, Computing and Systems Development, and Hair and Beauty Management. The College also delivers a significant range of level 4/5 Skills Funding Agency-funded professional non-prescribed higher education qualifications such as ILEX, CIPD and AAT.

The College has continued to build on those areas of good practice highlighted in the QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement (IQER) review of 2010 through establishing the Higher Education Student Forum and completing the detailed annual review of the Staff Handbook. Other ongoing developments since the last review include extending the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) with the involvement of Excellence Coaches, minimum standards being set for websites, and the creation of an e-enthusiasts group. The review team also noted the very favourable comments from students, staff and employers about good links with industry.

The College has devised and implemented an action plan for systematically addressing the eight advisable and desirable recommendations arising from the previous QAA visit. New management structures alongside quality cycles with clear calendars and terms of reference allow for the successful distinction of responsibilities for higher and further education. Professional development is evident for higher education lecturers and support staff, with detailed records of activities and achievements. Two examples are the Teaching and Learning Day aimed solely at higher education staff, and the completion of a series of cross-college quality days that have higher education-specific agenda items to ensure the tracking and monitoring of staff performance.

The College has also responded to the QAA recommendation for more consistent monitoring of Higher National programmes, which are now aligned with the same quality assurance procedures and systems used with other higher education courses and awards. This includes the rigorous use of module evaluation surveys, the consistent circulation of course handbooks and programme specifications, and the operation of set procedures for the management and operation of Boards of Studies. Another action point has addressed the need for more student involvement in the programme review process, with students

commenting that their input is heard and valued, with a student representation system in place for all programmes. In accordance with suggestions from the previous QAA visit, the College has also devised an explicit process for the systematic checking of published information, supported by an appropriate reporting mechanism and a published version of a higher education prospectus.

The College is aware of a small number of ongoing difficulties indicated at the previous QAA review, and these are being tracked by monitoring and review processes. They include the need to encourage all students to use the VLE, the exploration of alternative ways to gather student feedback from part-time learners who cannot attend meetings, and the ongoing requirement for checking the accuracy and comprehensiveness of website information. The review team noted that these challenges are being rigorously and systematically addressed by the College.

## Explanation of the findings about Tameside College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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](#) is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.

# **1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisations**

**Expectation (A1): In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:**

**a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* are met by:**

- **positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications**
- **awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes**

**b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics**

**c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework**

**d) consider and take account of relevant subject benchmark statements.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards**

## **Findings**

1.1 The College's higher education programme provision is mapped against external benchmarks, including the FHEQ, through the awarding bodies. The College states that this entails internal and external procedures for programme design and approval with learning outcomes on all programmes employing language that is appropriate to the level of the FHEQ.

1.2 Each programme's FHEQ level is included within the relevant programme handbook and specification. All Higher National qualifications conform to awarding organisation standards with the College indicating that account is taken of QAA guidance on qualification characteristics. The College also states that relevant Subject Benchmark Statements are addressed during the validation process with each awarding body. Programme titles for Higher National and higher education qualifications are set by the awarding organisation and awarding bodies. The College's processes with regard to the Expectation in Chapter A1 meet all relevant component elements and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

1.3 To test this Expectation, the review team considered programme specifications and examined the extent to which their contents were in alignment with the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. It also considered external examiners' reports. The extent



to which the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements were employed by programme teams in the development and delivery of programmes was explored in meetings during the review visit.

1.4 The review team notes that all programmes are mapped to the FHEQ through validation processes with the FHEQ level stated in programme handbooks, module handbooks and programme specifications.

1.5 External examiners' reports indicate that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptors and that methods of assessment link appropriately to learning outcomes. The HE Staff Handbook provides staff with information regarding the application of the Quality Code. During the review visit, reviewers learnt of staff development activities that have taken place to ensure familiarity with the FHEQ and 'levelness' with key staff members. This information cascades to other academic staff during staff development events.

1.6 The College is aware that ultimate responsibility for this Expectation lies with the validating partner and demonstrates its own role in promoting the FHEQ. The College takes account of QAA guidelines for qualification characteristics in addition to using relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.7 On the basis of the evidence reviewed it was concluded that the College meets, with low risk, the requirements of reference points for UK and European academic standards.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A2.1): In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards**

**Findings**

1.8 The College is required to adhere to awarding body regulations and requirements when delivering, assessing, moderating, monitoring and reviewing validated programmes, with the use of relevant systems for entering and confirming results. It asserts that the regulatory frameworks of each awarding body determine academic standards for each programme. These are designated in the partnership agreements and are regularly reviewed. The process undertaken by the College meets the requirements of the Expectation in Chapter A2.1, the responsibility for which rests with the degree-awarding body.

1.9 The review team considered the relevant partnership agreements and evaluated the extent to which these were upheld through consideration of external examiner and annual monitoring reports. The transparency of these frameworks and key aspects of these regulations were tested through consideration of the student submission and discussions with students.

1.10 The review team notes that relevant agreements with awarding universities are in place regarding regulations and requirements for delivery, assessment, moderation, monitoring and review of programmes. Appropriate approvals for the Higher National programme from the awarding organisation are also in place, although no formal documented institutional agreements with colleges are issued by the company. Instead, a centre approval has been awarded to the College with a revised process of approval at programme level being implemented from March 2015.

1.11 External examiners' reports indicate that this Expectation is met appropriately. The student submission reports that students find academic frameworks to be transparent. Students confirmed that key aspects of academic regulations are communicated and discussed, thereby supporting the transparency of regulations within the College.

1.12 The College is aware that the ultimate responsibility for meeting this Expectation lies with the awarding bodies and the awarding organisation. Within this context the review team concludes that the College meets, with low risk, the Expectation for its own role in ensuring transparent and comprehensive frameworks and regulations for governing how academic credit and qualifications are awarded.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards**

1.13 The College notes that it is the responsibility of each of the awarding bodies or organisation to maintain definitive records (in the form of programme specifications) for each approved programme and qualification. It is the College's responsibility to ensure that these specifications are used as the reference point for the programmes, and to provide specifications to students.

1.14 Awarding bodies have templates for programme specifications, and they include aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements. In the College's processes for the delivery and assessment of programmes and for monitoring and review, programme specifications are used as a reference. The specifications and templates allow the Expectation in Chapter A2 to be met, and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

1.15 In testing this Expectation, the team reviewed the self-evaluation document, the student submission, programme specifications, partnership agreements and programme handbooks. The team also met senior, teaching and support staff and a selection of students, and looked at documentation available on the VLE and the College website.

1.16 Programme specifications are used by internal and external examiners as reference points for the programmes. There is also evidence that monitoring and review processes make appropriate use of programme specifications.

1.17 The team heard that only one current programme had been updated in such a way that a mid-life change in the programme specification was required. In this case, the students were duly informed and the revised programme specification was made available on the VLE and the website, after approval by the awarding university.

1.18 Although the awarding bodies and awarding organisation keep definitive copies of programme specifications, these are also available, for almost all programmes, on the College's website, where they are accessible to both current and prospective students. In addition, current students have access to module websites on the VLE, where the programme specification is part of the minimum documentation required for each programme. Thus, even where specifications are not publicly accessible on the website, they are provided via the VLE. The availability of all programme specifications on the website is discussed further in the affirmation within paragraph 3.7 for Expectation C of this report.

1.19 The team concludes that the College's meets, with low risk, responsibilities for the Expectation regarding the proper use of definitive programme records being offered, and for making them available to students.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.20 The approval of taught programmes at the College is the responsibility of each awarding body, and it is their processes that ensure that the approved programmes are set at the correct level and are in accordance with the academic frameworks and regulations of the awarding bodies.

1.21 The College schedules internal validation events prior to any external validation. The internal validation process is aligned with the processes of the relevant awarding body, thus ensuring that external validation events run as smoothly as possible. The College is also responsible for ensuring that programmes are delivered in accordance with what was agreed at validation and uses appropriate quality processes. The processes and responsibilities allow the Expectation for Chapter A3 to be met, and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

1.22 The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing documentation supplied, including the self-evaluation document, course validation paperwork and the HE Staff Handbook. The team also held meetings with the Principal and senior staff.

1.23 The College holds internal validation events that are tailored to fit the subsequent external validation of the relevant awarding body. The documentation prepared is based on that required by the awarding bodies, but with additional College-centred issues considered - such as the business case and projected student numbers. The review team notes that procedures provide a robust and effective way to prepare for validation panels with the awarding bodies. There is appropriate consideration of the FHEQ, with explicit consideration of the level of qualifications and subject benchmark statements.

1.24 Revalidating existing programmes is the responsibility of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation with revalidation by awarding bodies taking place every five years. The partnership with the University of Chester is too recent to have involved any revalidation, but the Sports Coaching and Fitness Therapy programme was recently revalidated by Manchester Metropolitan University. Representatives of the College participated in the event, and the documentation shows that concern for UK threshold standards was an important part of the revalidation, with alignment to the awarding body's academic framework.

1.25 The review team concludes that the College meets, with low risk, the Expectation for effectively discharging its own responsibilities for helping to ensure that the degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes. In so doing, academic standards are set at a level that meets the UK threshold standard and are in accordance with the academic frameworks and regulations of those awarding bodies.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.2): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:**

- **the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit) and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment**
- **both UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant degree-awarding bodies have been satisfied.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.26 Higher education programmes implement the principles of assessment set out in the regulatory frameworks of their awarding body or organisation. The College has an Assessment Policy used for both further and higher education, supported by the Induction, Academic Misconduct, Recognition of Prior Learning and Academic Appeals Policies. Assessment procedures for awarding bodies are approved during the validation process while Higher National programme assessment briefs are internally prepared at module tutor level and subject to the College's internal verification procedures. Learning outcomes and associated assessment strategies are clearly defined at programme level for all higher education programmes via module specifications. These policies and processes allow the standards outlined in Expectation A.3.2 to be met, and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

1.27 The team reviewed academic regulatory frameworks, programme and module specifications with learning outcomes, assessment briefs, internal verification/moderation, minutes of the Higher Education Quality Management Group, Boards of Studies meetings and university partner Assessment Boards, and external examiner reports. Evidence confirmed that the College follows the assessment regulations of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. All higher education programmes have College-based Assessment Boards, where student grades and progression are confirmed. Staff from these higher education programmes are required to participate in College Examination Boards prior to attending awarding body Examination Boards.

1.28 The team notes that assessment activity for collaborative partners is approved by awarding bodies during the validation process. Pearson Higher National programmes' assessment briefs are internally prepared at module tutor level and are subject to the College's internal verification procedures. Learning outcomes and associated assessment strategies are clearly defined at programme level for all university collaborative partners and Pearson programmes via module specifications.

1.29 The team recognises that procedures have been put in place by the College and the University of Chester for the assessment of negotiated modules within the Work-Based and Integrative Studies programme, taking careful account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and FHEQ level descriptors. Assessment, internal verification and moderation processes are subject to rigorous internal and external checks.

1.30 The team met local employers who are actively engaged with the higher education programmes offered by the College and recognised the College's long tradition of engaging employers in the design of assessment activity. This aspect of enhancement is discussed in more detail in paragraph 4.5 of Expectation Enhancement in this report.

1.31 The evidence shows that the College effectively manages the assessment process on behalf of its awarding bodies and organisation through the implementation of university partner assessment regulations, and a suite of internal, College-based policies and procedures. The introduction of a higher education-specific Assessment Policy in October 2014 will further support the assessment process by providing an overview for all awarding organisations and awarding body procedures and expectations.

1.32 The processes for managing assessment are considered to be robust, valid and reliable with effective procedures in place to manage and resolve issues. The team concludes, therefore, that the College meets, with low risk, the Expectation for the achievement of relevant learning outcomes through assessment, in accordance with the standards of degree-awarding bodies and the awarding organisation.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.3): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.33 The College states that annual monitoring procedures of awarding bodies and the awarding organisation are in place, using prescribed cycles for the periodic review of higher education programmes in partnership. These systems and procedures allow the standards outlined in Expectation A3.3 to be met, and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

1.34 The team tested the operation of monitoring and review processes by reviewing minutes of Higher Education Quality Managers' meetings, Boards of Studies and Programme Committees and reviewing annual monitoring reports, College Self-Assessment Reports and particular documentation. The team also met College staff to understand how these processes worked.

1.35 Evidence confirmed that the Assistant Principal Academic and Higher Level Programmes has responsibility for ensuring that the College's internal higher education management and committee structure carries out cycles of internal and external review in accordance with the expectations of the awarding bodies and the awarding organisation.

1.36 The team notes that oversight of the higher education development and academic standards is a function of the College Corporation and senior management. The College's Higher Education Quality Managers' meetings effectively monitor academic standards, student learning opportunities, actions identified in the Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan and external examiner reports.

1.37 The annual monitoring process considers data from, for example, student progress and achievement, the College's Student Voice, external examiner reports, and module evaluations. The formal involvement of employers in the College's review processes is currently under review. Annual Monitoring Programme Reviews feed into the Higher Education Self-Assessment Report and, as noted under Expectation A3.4, formal validation panels include external members from 'sister colleges'.

1.38 The review team concludes that the College's use of periodic and annual monitoring processes is reliable and fit for purpose, thereby ensuring that its higher education provision meets, with low risk, UK threshold standards as set out in the awarding organisation and awarding bodies' academic frameworks and regulations.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.4): In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:**

- **UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved**
- **the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.39 External examiners are appointed by the relevant awarding partner with their reports commenting on whether UK threshold academic standards have been set, delivered and achieved. External examiners and assessors are also asked to identify whether the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained. The awarding bodies and organisation also have responsibility for the recruitment and training of external examiners and assessors associated with programmes delivered at the College. These processes and responsibilities outlined by the College allow the standards outlined in Expectation A3.4 to be met, and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

1.40 The review team tested the implementation of the College's processes associated with this Expectation by consideration of external examiners' reports, scrutiny of the collated report produced by the Quality Compliance Manager, the minutes of the HE Quality Managers' Group, minutes of the programmes' Boards of Studies and the student submission, and review visit meetings with academic staff and students.

1.41 The review team confirms that externality is used appropriately to advise on whether the academic standards of the awarding body are set and maintained. The College employs colleagues from other further education colleges with higher education provision in its annual self-assessment reporting process. External examiners' reports indicate that issues raised are addressed and that learning outcomes are being assessed appropriately.

1.42 The review team was presented with the Quality Compliance Manager's summary of external examiners' findings and was assured that sufficient attention is paid to action points where appropriate. Boards of Studies' minutes demonstrate clearly that external examiners' reports are considered under a standing agenda item. Student representatives attend these meetings, with the student submission indicating that students have access to external examiners' reports. The summary report is also considered in detail by the Senior Leadership Team.

1.43 Supplementing the input of external examiners and assessors, the College's monitoring processes also draw upon external reviewers from other further education colleges that deliver higher education programmes. Staff reported that reciprocal arrangements are in place that enable an additional layer of externality to be employed in curriculum-orientated annual monitoring processes through the use of staff input from other 'sister colleges' offering higher education in the further education sector.

1.44 The team concludes that the College - in partnership with its awarding bodies and organisation - meets Expectation A3.4 with low risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**



## The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.45 The College's responsibilities relating to the UK expectations detailed in *Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards* of the Quality Code have all been met with low risk. There are no findings of good practice, and the team does not make any recommendations or affirmations.

1.46 The review team confirms that the College, in partnership with its two awarding bodies and awarding organisation, maps higher education provision to programme outcomes and external benchmarks associated with the FHEQ. Transparent and coherent academic frameworks and regulations are used to govern how credit and qualifications are awarded.

1.47 The team notes that definitive records for each programme and qualification approved by the respective awarding body or organisation are maintained, and these records constitute the reference point for all subsequent delivery, assessment, monitoring and review of higher education provision. These records are available to students and alumni.

1.48 Programmes are approved through the use of processes that ensure standards are set at appropriate levels within institutional frameworks, and academic credit is awarded where relevant learning outcomes are achieved through assessment.

1.49 Consistent monitoring and review processes are evident for all higher education provision, using relevant external frameworks and regulations as well as internal processes developed by the College.

1.50 On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with staff and students, the review team concludes that the maintenance of threshold academic standards at Tameside College **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

**Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.**

### **Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme Design and Approval**

#### **Findings**

2.1 The College has recently made a strategic decision to reduce the number of higher education partnerships to two awarding bodies, and to maintain its Higher National programme partnership with one awarding organisation. The College's internal design, development and approval processes for new programmes culminate in an internal validation event, which, if successful, is later followed by a validation visit by the awarding body. Before the internal validation, the suggestion for new programmes may have arisen from curriculum teams or employer advice. Under the College's Higher Education Strategic Plan, consideration is given to the needs of the local area when considering new provision.

2.2 The College's process for internal validation requires the production of programme specifications which refer to Subject Benchmark Statements (including that for foundation programmes) and FHEQ level descriptors. The internal validation event examines student demand, programme structure and whether appropriate reference has been made to the Quality Code. The College's Higher Education Staff Handbook lays out the principles by which programmes are designed and developed, and it is made clear that programmes should meet demand from both students and employers and should fit with the College's strategic plans. The importance of programme design of the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and meeting the Expectations of the Quality Code is also emphasised in the Higher Education Staff Handbook. These strategies and systems allow the Expectation for Chapter B1 to be met, and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

2.3 The review team examined documentation associated with programme design, development and approval, including examples from the different awarding bodies and the awarding organisation. The review team also met senior management, teaching and support staff representatives and had discussions with students and local employers regarding their involvement in programme design and approval.

2.4 The team noted that proposals for new programmes have emanated from teaching groups as well as interactions with employers who also provide advice about the content of programmes, thus ensuring the relevance of the programme offering to local industry. Employers also take part in internal validation panels where appropriate, and advise on the choice of units on Higher National programmes. The College's relationships with local employers for programme enhancement are discussed further as an example of good practice in paragraph 4.5 for Expectation (Enhancement).

2.5 Internal validation panels, chaired by the Deputy Principal, decide whether a new programme proposal is sufficiently well developed to go forward to the appropriate awarding body or organisation for external validation. There are no students on the internal validation panel; however, the team notes evidence that the College has responded positively to student demand for particular higher education programme areas as progression from level 3 and encourages the College to consider further ways of involving students in the programme design and approval process.

2.6 Support staff are involved at an early stage of programme development to facilitate the planning and provision of learning resources. When conditions are set for programme approval, time limits are imposed and a panel member is selected to check that conditions are met. On the basis of this evidence, the team considers internal processes for the design, development and approval of new programmes to be robust and effective.

2.7 As part of the partnership with one of its awarding bodies, the College has recently introduced a number of programmes through a Work-Based and Integrative Studies (WBIS) framework. This offers students a flexible, work-based learning degree which is negotiated between the student and the Personal Academic Tutor. The team is satisfied that robust internal and external processes are followed for the development and approval of programmes within this framework, with appropriate reference to the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. While some students follow fully negotiated pathways (which need individual approval from the awarding body), others are on pre-negotiated routes that require no further approval. The awarding body has worked with the College to implement staff development for the application of negotiated learner agreements and recognition of prior learning (RPL) to ensure that robust practices are carefully followed. On the basis of the evidence reviewed, the team considers the practice in WBIS programme design and approval to be effective.

2.8 The College's commitment to staff development for underpinning the effectiveness of the design, development and approval processes for new programmes is evident. One example involves the dissemination of clear knowledge about the Quality Code within staff communities associated with the teaching and support of higher education programmes. This observation, aligned with WBIS support, is discussed as an example of good practice in paragraph 2.24 for Expectation B3.

2.9 The review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B1 and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B2): Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.**

**Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission***

**Findings**

2.10 The College's Educational Advice and Guidance Policy provides clear guidance for higher education admissions. The College is responsible for enrolment of appropriate students on to all courses with awarding university policies available to aid development of appropriate processes.

2.11 Admissions are administered by the Student Support Team and referred to the appropriate curriculum departments. Department heads conduct formal interviews which are intended to assess prospective students, provide essential information and determine the offer for admission. The Assistant Principal Learner Services is the official point of contact for appeal and complaints are referred through the College complaints procedure. Relevant information is supplied to students through the Higher Education Prospectus, open days, programme specifications and the College website. The admissions procedures outlined meet Expectation B2 and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

2.12 The review team tested the operation and effectiveness of the admission, recruitment and selection procedures by talking to students and academic and support staff; they also examined the information produced for students and the guidance produced for support staff.

2.13 The College's Equality Duty was noted, with a declared commitment to ensuring 'that everyone should have an equal opportunity to meet their aspirations, realise their full potential and improve their life chances'. Communication of standard and non-standard entry requirements, the RPL policy and discussion with students and support staff confirm that opportunities are available to all students. Effective procedures are in place for identifying and supporting additional needs before admission, at interview, during enrolment and throughout the programme.

2.14 The Higher Education Student Charter sets out what students can expect of the College with regards to pre-course information and guidance. The College holds Matrix accreditation and all student-facing staff in its Student Services Team are qualified advice and guidance practitioners. There is a programme of development to ensure that all information and guidance staff achieve the new level 6 diploma within two years. This good practice with the provision of wide-ranging institutional support for the professional skills and competences of staff is discussed in more detail in paragraph 2.24 of Expectation B3.

2.15 Discussion with students showed an easy-to-use admissions process and appreciation of the high levels of support, in particular to students with additional needs. Currently data is collected centrally via UCAS and part-time data is collated by departments. The review team notes that the College recognises the need for specific data on diverse student populations and intends to create a central database.

2.16 The review team concludes that Expectation B2 is met with a low level of risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.**

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching***

#### **Findings**

2.17 The College provides a detailed outline of systems and procedures for providing teaching and learning opportunities that lead to student development. The College's approach to learning and teaching is informed directly by its Higher Education Strategic Plan both to encourage widening participation and to provide local opportunities for students - most of whom are studying part-time and who may not otherwise aspire to higher education. The College emphasises that the employability of students is key to the curriculum choice, content and mode of delivery of higher education at the College. Teaching and learning methods include project work, live briefs, industrial visits, coaching seminars and work placements as well as more traditional tutor-led delivery.

2.18 The College states that higher education programme delivery, learning support and assessment are undertaken by its own staff. Extensive use is made of the College's VLE to support students. The College's Learning and Teaching Policy states that the institution aims to provide effective delivery of learning and teaching by ensuring that staff are supported and developed in their professional practice.

2.19 The College seeks to promote high-quality teaching through the operation of a robust observation of teaching and learning process. This use of peer observation aims to support the sharing of good practice, which is also facilitated through the use of Excellence Coaches. In addition, the College seeks to develop further best practice through the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Group and the use of Learning Circles, through which cross-departmental peer observation is undertaken. All tutors have 10 days per year of professional development for developing their pedagogical and professional practice, enabling staff to engage directly with the workplace and explore links between theory and practice. These systems, policies and procedures allow the Expectation for Chapter B3 to be met, and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

2.20 The review team examined the effectiveness of the College's approaches through discussions with employers, students, teachers and support staff, in addition to a demonstration of the VLE by students and then exploring its contents. A range of documents was also consulted, including the College's Teaching and Learning Policy, evidence for the observation of teaching and learning, records of staff development activity, notes of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Group meetings, and the operation of the inter-departmental Learning Circles.

2.21 In the student submission, students commented favourably on the high standard of teaching and learning and noted that through teaching observations the standards of teaching are maintained and improved by the College. Students informed the review team that their experiences of support for learning within the College were very positive.

2.22 Opportunities for students to develop as independent learners are particularly well evidenced through the undergraduate WBIS programmes, within which students can negotiate learning outcomes in partnership with tutors and employers.

2.23 In both the student submission and the review team's meeting with students, however, some concerns were raised about the sometimes late return of feedback. Consequently, the review team **recommends** that, for all programmes, the College should ensure the consistent application of monitoring processes for the timely return of assessed work in accordance with the published deadline schedules. This observation is also discussed in paragraph 2.47 of Expectation B6.

2.24 The review team considers the support offered by the College for tutors delivering the WBIS programmes - which involved their undertaking an master's level version of the same qualification - to be particularly effective. The impact of the College's Excellence Coaches in enhancing the effectiveness of other tutors was evident, as was the noteworthy work of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Group and the Learning Circles' encouragement of reflexive pedagogical practice. The review team identifies as **good practice** the wide-ranging institutional support for the development of academic and support staff, especially relating to curriculum design. This finding is reinforced further by commentary in paragraph 2.8 for Expectation B1, and paragraph 2.14 for Expectation B2.

2.25 Discussions with employers clarified their contributions to learning and teaching provision through involvement in curriculum development and the provision of learning opportunities in the workplace. A number of employers also play an important part in extending the range of learning and teaching resources available within the College. The College has a significant number of employer partnerships with a range of reciprocal benefits including a negotiated curriculum, the use of state-of-the-art technologies and the development of advanced skills informed by regional employer needs. This range of mutually beneficial employer partnerships is seen by the review team as deliberate and strategic enhancement, as detailed in paragraph 4.5 when referring to good practice in Expectation (Enhancement) of this report.

2.26 With regard to this Expectation overall, the College's responsiveness to the needs of part-time students, thereby facilitating their progression and achievement, is considered to be thorough and comprehensive; this observation is highlighted as good practice in paragraph 2.34 for Expectation B4. The review team concludes that the College meets, with low risk, Expectation B3.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement**

**Findings**

2.27 The College details a variety of arrangements and resources for supporting students with their learning and personal and professional development. The College's Higher Education Strategy prioritises the development of student employability aligned with the College's declared commitment to widening participation and the tailoring of provision to meet local and regional needs, particularly in the workplace.

2.28 The higher education student body is principally composed of part-time learners. The College states that its student support mechanisms have been designed with the particular needs of this student constituency in mind. Higher education students with additional learning needs are provided with access to tailored support through the College's Additional Learner Support Team.

2.29 All prospective higher education students are interviewed by the appropriate programme tutors or Department Heads and through this process any particular additional learning needs can be assessed and, where necessary, appropriate additional sources of support can be identified. A personal tutor oversees the student's personal and academic development during their time in higher education. Personal tutors have responsibility for tracking their students' progress and identifying particular support needs.

2.30 The College's student induction process is reviewed annually. During the induction process the College states that students are provided with a programme handbook and information relating to timetables, assessment schedules and key contacts.

2.31 The College states that its higher education students are supported by the provision of an effective Learning Resource Centre, with substantial library resources, both on-site and remotely accessed. The College's provision of student support facilities is geared towards the particular needs of a largely part-time higher education student cohort. These systems, arrangements and procedures allow the Expectation for Chapter B4 to be met.

2.32 The review team evaluated the extent to which this Expectation was met through discussions with students, academic and support staff and local employers. A range of documentary sources were also consulted, including the student submission, student surveys and Programme and Boards of Studies minutes. A summary of the College's estate strategy was also consulted, outlining the future plans for extending and enhancing the physical provision for the institution's higher education students.

2.33 The student submission drew attention to limitations with the provision of Student Services for part-time students, particularly in career development advice. However, these points were not reflected in the meetings with part-time students during the review visit.

2.34 The review team found that students were very positive about both the processes and resources in place at the College for supporting their learning. The majority of students interviewed were studying part-time and all spoke positively of the tailored support they were offered. Students noted that opportunities for disabled student support are made evident from interview and induction onwards, with diagnostic testing available at an early stage. Students were complimentary about the personalised and thorough interview process. They noted that the initial induction process is comprehensive, though no systematic re-induction is offered for returning students. The team recognises the bespoke provision for

higher education students by the Learning Resources Centre, with an assigned librarian with experience of higher education. While Student Services offer more generic support across the College, higher education-orientated initiatives are being undertaken, such as the work of careers staff in engaging with local employers to provide part-time employment opportunities for higher education students. Students commented that learning resources and specialist equipment provided by the College are of an appropriate standard and, in the main, are up to date. The students were particularly positive about the recent addition of the Active Learning Zones, which provide dedicated resource spaces for higher education students. On the basis of this detailed and varied evidence, the review team identified as **good practice** the College's responsiveness to the needs of part-time students, thereby facilitating their progression and achievement. This finding is reinforced further by commentary in paragraph 2.26 for Expectation B3.

2.35 The review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B4 and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**



**Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement**

**Findings**

2.36 The College states that its Learner Voice Policy shows a commitment to encouraging formal and informal student feedback and participation. The College's Student Voice and Engagement Matrix and Student Charter outline the mechanisms for engaging students in assurance and enhancement.

2.37 Student engagement includes feedback gathered through various methods such as Learner Voice Surveys, the National Student Survey (NSS), the HE Forum Questionnaire, and module and programme evaluations. The student representative system includes involvement in Boards of Studies, Boards of Internal Verification and Assessment, the Student Forum and programme team meetings. Student representatives are allocated a staff mentor and undertake training to ensure they are able to perform their role appropriately. The opportunities outlined in the documents meet Expectation B5.

2.38 To test the operation and effectiveness of student engagement at the College, the review team considered the Student Charter, the Higher Education Student Voice and Engagement Matrix and minutes from Boards of Studies. The team also talked to students and staff and analysed the materials the College uses to train student representatives.

2.39 The review team recognises the College's new approach to student engagement for the 2013-14 academic year, based around the student journey. The College is aware that NSS information is currently statistically insignificant, and is in the process of developing an action plan to collect and analyse more meaningful and representative data. The review team **affirms** that deliberate actions are being taken towards the full implementation of a distinctive higher education student engagement system.

2.40 A range of methods have been used to increasing accessibility and participation of students in quality assurance and enhancement. The Student Engagement Matrix outlines the mechanisms put in place, including the recently implemented Higher Education Student Forum which discusses issues affecting the student body. By way of illustration, the effectiveness of the Forum was evident when catering issues resulted in the catering team being invited to the following meeting and issues being addressed directly.

2.41 The review team recognises that students consider themselves to be appreciated as members of committees and forums, and feel that their voice is heard and acted upon. The College intends to increase student involvement further by giving them the opportunity to take part in annual processes such as the audit of public information. The College has designed and implemented a database where staff record issues emanating from the Student Voice, with actions being tracked through to completion and sign-off by the originator of a concern or issue within a 15-day timeframe. Progress and outcomes are reported to the Senior Leadership Team. Feedback of action is communicated to students through the student representative system, a student newsletter, action plan and 'you said, we did' posters. This systematic and sustained use of a Learner Voice database is **good practice**. See also paragraph 2.70 (Expectation B9) and paragraph 4.11 (Enhancement).

2.42 The team concludes that the College meets, with low risk, Expectation B5.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B6): Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning**

**Findings**

2.43 Assessment activities are varied according to the nature of the programme, and reflect the need to develop students' vocational/professional skills and knowledge base. The College applies RPL procedures to recognise and acknowledge students' existing qualifications, experience and knowledge base. The application of these RPL procedures is particularly important in supporting students undertaking the University of Chester WBIS programme. These assessment processes and procedures allow Expectation B6 to be met, and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

2.44 The team tested the College's approach to assessment by examining documentation describing assessment principles and practice, and speaking to students and staff. Evidence included notes of consortium meetings and policies and procedures for Assessment, Academic Misconduct, and Academic Appeals. This information supported the view that the assessment process is fit for purpose, but generic to both further and higher education programmes. The planned introduction of the Higher Education Assessment Policy in October 2014 acknowledges the particular characteristics of higher education assessment activity.

2.45 The College's RPL Policy specifies Higher National programmes although there is no specific reference to awarding bodies. The team noted, however, that teaching staff showed awareness of RPL requirements of the two universities. The review team **recommends** that the College revise the current RPL policy so that it includes, where appropriate, reference to the RPL policies and procedures of its awarding bodies.

2.46 All university partner programmes and Higher National programmes produce assessment schedules. The team noted that despite variability in the amount of detail issued to student cohorts, all of the schedules made reference to formative assessment timeframes, with assignment briefs providing clear linkage between learning outcomes and assessment activities. The team recognised that the WBIS programme gives students opportunities for the development of negotiated modules and associated assessment.

2.47 The College has robust procedures in place for the internal verification and moderation of assessed work in line with regulatory frameworks and the College's Assessment Policy. Student feedback suggests that assessment is undertaken equitably and with clarity. All programmes have procedures in place for the timely return of assessed work by tutors, with 2013 NSS data showing an 83 per cent satisfaction score for assessment and feedback. The team observed variations across programmes on precise time limits, with the issue of very late returned coursework - discussed further as a recommendation within paragraph 2.23 for Expectation B3 - being identified and addressed by the College.

2.48 The team recognises the confirmation from external examiners of the College's appropriate application of assessment processes. Students can access information on assessment from a range of sources, including module and programme handbooks which are stored on the VLE.

2.49 Information on study skills is contained in the programme handbooks and is also available via online portals to university partner websites, and the College's internal VLE. Additional support is also available from personal tutors, academic tutors and library staff. The College uses module evaluations for gathering information on assessment activity, including clarity of assignment briefs and helpfulness and timeliness of feedback. NSS data, while limited by small sample sizes, confirms a high level of satisfaction with assessment and tutor feedback.

2.50 The College has a long tradition of engaging with employers in the design and assessment of programmes to enhance students' knowledge and skills and improve their employability. This involvement is discussed in more detail as an example of good practice within paragraph 4.5 (Enhancement) in this report.

2.51 The evidence provided to the review team confirms that students can demonstrate the extent of their attainment of learning outcomes for credit or qualifications provided by the College's awarding bodies or organisation, and that the College therefore meets Expectation B6 with low risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## **Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.**

### **Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

#### **Findings**

2.52 The College states that the awarding bodies and organisation for higher education programmes are responsible for the appointment and training of external examiners and assessors who then prepare annual reports using the awarding body or organisation's proforma. These reports provide formal feedback to the College regarding the operation of its programmes. External examiners are asked to comment within their reports on the standards set for the awards, student performance and the quality of assessment. The College indicates that the external examiners' reports are collated by the Quality Compliance Manager, who provides information about their content to the Higher Education Quality Managers Group and the Senior Leadership Team. Curriculum teams are then provided with the reports and good practice and areas for improvement are identified and action plans devised and implemented. Course specific points are actioned through programme reviews, and recurring themes are summarised in the HE self-assessment review. These arrangements and responsibilities allow Expectation B7 to be met, and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

2.53 The review team examined evidence that supported the claim that external examiners' reports are used to feed into a variety of review processes and tested the College's processes relating to external examiners through an extensive consideration of a number of documentary trails. This process included analysis of the external examiners' reports, the notes of the HE Quality Managers' Group, programme Boards of Studies' minutes and monitoring reports, the Higher Education Self-Assessment Report (SAR), and the Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan. In addition, the reviewers questioned staff and students about the way in which the external examiners' reports were employed within the College's quality assurance processes.

2.54 Relevant contributions inform the production of programme review reports and the SAR at an implicit level. The College makes good use of external examiners' reports through identifying areas of good practice and areas requiring improvement. A detailed collated report of external examiners' reports is produced by the Quality Compliance Manager, indicating how programmes are responding to external examiners' recommendations through the implementation and tracking of action plans.

2.55 The team notes that external examiners have indicated consistently that they are receiving an appropriate range of work to consider, and that responses have been made by the College to their recommendations. Their reports feature as a standing item on the agendas of programmes' Boards of Studies and the Higher Education Management Group with the minutes of these meetings recording brief notes of discussion supplemented by action planning via the Quality Compliance Manager's composite report.

2.56 Students report that they can access external examiners' reports via the VLE and this is also noted in the student submission. In addition, student representatives consider external examiners' reports in programmes' Boards of Studies.

2.57 The review team concludes that the College engages fully with its external examiner community and meets Expectation B7 with low risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.**

### **Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review**

#### **Findings**

2.58 The College states that it relies on its awarding bodies and organisation to plan and implement monitoring and periodic reviews of the programmes the College delivers on their behalf. Manchester Metropolitan University completed a periodic review of its collaborative Sports programme during the academic year 2013-14. More recent University of Chester programmes were validated in 2012 and are not yet due for review. The College is introducing a wider review of higher education courses which will act as a periodic review of its higher education provision. The emphasis will be on enhancing the delivery and quality of programme performance, and optimising staff performance.

2.59 Annual monitoring documentation is reviewed internally by the Quality Compliance Manager and the Assistant Principal Academic and Higher Level Programmes prior to distribution to the awarding body. Higher National programmes follow the College's internal procedures for termly performance review and annual programme-level self-assessment. The College's Higher Education Quality Management Group meets every month and interfaces with the Senior Management Team and the Corporation Board as well as Heads of Department and Curriculum Programme Committees. These systems and procedures allow the Expectation for Chapter B8 to be met, and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

2.60 The team reviewed the effectiveness of the College's programme monitoring and review processes by looking at a selection of Higher Education Programme Reviews, module evaluations, minutes of the Higher Education Quality Managers' Meeting and programme-level Boards of Study through discussions with senior and teaching staff. The team also discussed with teaching staff and students the efficacy of the College's Student Voice.

2.61 The team recognises that the College uses a range of activities to monitor programme performance - for example, setting and monitoring performance indicators and targets, module evaluations, internal Study Boards and Higher Education Quality Management Group meetings.

2.62 At programme level, the three times a year Performance Management Review process analyses the efficiency of programme management, quality assurance, delivery and learning opportunities and generates action planning if required. External examiner reports, Student Voice and module evaluations are also an integral part of the annual reviews of programme management, quality assurance and delivery.

2.63 There are a range of mechanisms to engage the Student Voice in the programme review process. Examples include student representation on Boards of Studies, module evaluations, higher education student forums, questionnaires and online feedback. The review team notes, however, that the minutes for all Boards of Studies included a standing agenda item for more confidential personal student-related issues, but was assured that student representatives were not present for these discussions. The team **recommends** that the College revise the process of recording Boards of Studies minutes so that the withdrawal of student representatives for specific closed agenda items is made explicit (B8).

2.64 Based on the collated annual programme review data for each higher education programme, the Higher Education Self-Assessment Report is prepared and reviewed by a panel composed of internal and external board members including representatives from a consortium of 'sister colleges' who work together to enhance the performance and quality assurance of a range of higher education programmes. Once approved, the Higher Education Self-Assessment document feeds into the College Self-Evaluation Report. Actions arising from the College's review processes feed into the Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan.

2.65 The team concludes that the College meets Expectation B8 and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints**

**Findings**

2.66 The College complaints procedure outlines the steps students can follow if they have an issue or complaint. The College's Academic Appeals Policy sets out the necessity to ensure students are able to raise matters of concern without fear of disadvantage. The College states that complaints and appeals policies and procedures are communicated to students through course handbooks, the Student Charter, the VLE and via the induction process. Support for students is available through student support services.

2.67 The College outlines an open door policy that endeavours to ensure all complaints are dealt with quickly and efficiently through communication with course tutors, curriculum managers and service area managers. Formal complaints are sent to the Customer Care Unit and students are given clear timeframes for acknowledgement and response. The appeals procedure for Higher National students outlines the appeals process and students undertaking programmes through an awarding body will also be subject to awarding institution appeals procedures. The procedures meet Expectation B9 and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

2.68 The review team tested the operation and effectiveness of the complaint and appeals procedures by talking to students and academic and support staff, reading course handbooks and the Student Charter and examining various mechanisms for collecting the Student Voice that enable effective resolution of issues and concerns.

2.69 Discussion with students and academic staff confirmed that the College has various mechanisms in place to address issues before the need for a formal complaint. Tutor relationships are often sufficient to address concerns raised through the various mechanisms for listening to the student voice. These include module evaluations, 'Ask an AP' and relevant Boards of Studies where issues are addressed quickly and efficiently. Students endorsed heavily the accessibility of opportunity for the effective resolution of issues, the open door policy and the staff commitment to improvement through feedback.

2.70 Reference to both complaints and appeals procedures are included in course handbooks, on the VLE and in the Student Charter. The review team notes that students are aware of how to access the relevant policies, procedures and support, stating that information was given during induction. Support staff confirmed their availability to offer guidance and support to students, including representation at a formal appeals panel. Complaints and appeals are reported to the Senior Leadership Team and Governors. As noted in paragraph 2.41 when referring to good practice for Expectation B5, student issues are also reported through the Learner Voice database, with actions being tracked through to completion.

2.71 The review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B9 with low risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B10): Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others**

**Findings**

2.72 The College's arrangements for delivering learning opportunities in partnership with other organisations involve work-based learning opportunities. Work placements were a component of the FdA in Sports Coaching and Fitness Therapy until 2012-13, but have now been withdrawn from the programme, and, at the time of the review, there are no other work placements. However, there are work-based learning opportunities under the WBIS framework and in Education programmes.

2.73 While the College does not have a work-based learning policy as such, it has appropriate procedures and policies in place for curriculum areas where work-based learning opportunities are available to students. These arrangements and procedures allow Expectation B10 to be met and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

2.74 The review team considered the policies outlined in programme and module documentation, and discussed their operation in practice with staff, employers and students. Work-based learning appeared to be treated differently according to specific curriculum areas. Under the WBIS framework, there are specific modules dealing with learning in the workplace - such as the Skills and Approaches for Work-Based Learning, and Negotiated Experiential Learning modules. There are templates for learning agreements for recording information, for example obligations and responsibilities, the consideration of ethical issues, and health and safety. The team notes that students value the flexibility of the WBIS framework and employers are positive about the open and constructive relationship with the College and the support available to them to enable the delivery of work-based learning opportunities.

2.75 In the education area, work-based learning procedures are focused on the assessment of practical teaching, which is carried out by approved tutors, and the use of subject-specialist mentors. Again, students are positive about the management and value of these aspects of work-based learning.

2.76 When work placements were part of the Sports Coaching and Fitness Therapy programme, the College managed them by applying the *Code of Practice on Placements and Work-Based Learning* from the awarding body, and this was an effective method of oversight in the circumstances. In the eventuality that work placements were to be re-introduced into this programme (or any other), the College may wish to consider whether it would be beneficial to develop its own policy, referring where appropriate to the guidelines or regulations of appropriate awarding bodies.

2.77 Although procedures vary significantly in different curriculum areas, the review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B10 and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**



**Expectation (B11): Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.**

**Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees***

**Findings**

2.78 The College does not deliver research degrees.

## The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.79 The College's responsibilities relating to the UK expectations about the quality of learning opportunities as detailed in *Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality* of the Quality Code have all been met, with low risk being recorded throughout.

2.80 The review team confirms that the College operates effective processes for designing and developing programmes in partnership with its employer communities and awarding bodies and organisation. Student recruitment and admission procedures are aligned to transparent and inclusive procedures that are embedded within the College's organisational structures. The same principles apply to the operation of fair, timely and accessible appeals and complaints procedures by students enrolled on programmes.

2.81 The College succeeds in articulating and systematically reviewing a wide range of teaching practices that enhance learning opportunities, supported by a responsive and proactive resourcing infrastructure for higher education students. Documentary evidence alongside discussions with staff and students supports the view that student engagement is present for all programmes, with the College exploring new methods for ensuring that part-time learners participate within representation structures and processes. The team further notes that assessment practices allow students to demonstrate their achievements and potential in flexible ways, including the use of negotiated learning outcomes for work-based learners and the application of effective RPL procedures. Arrangements are in place for delivering learning opportunities to higher education learners through partnerships with organisations offering work placement and work experience opportunities.

2.82 The team finds the use of external examiners to be scrupulous for programme assessment, with the College responding to suggestions and feedback annually. Their comments feed into systematic and frequent monitoring and review processes, overseen by the College's effective leadership and committee structure for the management of higher education programmes.

2.83 There are three features of good practice linked in particular to learning opportunities: the professional development of teaching and support staff (B3); the responsiveness of the College to the needs and interests of part-time learners who are in employment (B4); and the sustained development of a tracking system for a database of concerns and issues raised by students, with associated action points emerging from College management (B5).

2.84 The review team also makes three recommendations. There is a need for more consistent application of monitoring processes for the timely return of assessed work in accordance with the published deadline schedules (B3). The College's RPL Policy should include reference to awarding body requirements and procedures. The College should also revise its processes for recording Boards of Studies minutes, so that the withdrawal of student representatives for specific closed agenda items is made explicit (B8). These three observations refer to minor omissions or oversights and do not, individually or collectively, present any serious risks to the management of higher education learning opportunities. The College has acknowledged the need for action - with appropriate timescales - through amending details for procedures and documentation without necessitating major structural, operational or procedural change.

2.85 There is also one affirmation based on the team's recognition of the College's awareness of difficulties and planned actions for working with part-time learners: the actions being taken to implement in full a distinctive higher education student engagement system (B5).

2.86 On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with staff and students, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at Tameside College **meets** UK expectations.

### 3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

**Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.**

#### **Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision**

#### **Findings**

3.1 The College publishes a range of information about the higher education it offers, both in hard copy and online (publicly on the College website and internally on the VLE). An 'advisable' recommendation in the 2010 IQER was that the College should 'develop an explicit process for the systematic checking of published information, where appropriate information is approved by validating bodies - before publication - in accordance with partnership agreements'.

3.2 Processes for checking the accuracy of various forms of information are in place: for the contents of the Higher Education Prospectus, for reviewing IAG resources in Student Services and for public information audits by Student Services and the Learning Resource Centre. The documentation for internal audits of public information is comprehensive and Public Information and Marketing is a standing item on Board of Studies agendas. The College is, however, self-critical of its progress, with the SED and student submission acknowledging that there are issues with the accuracy of some of the College's public information. These systems, policies and procedures allow the Expectation for Part C to be met, and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

3.3 The review team tested this Expectation by reading published information about the College's higher education provision, both on paper and online. The team also compared the processes for checking this information with comments from students and employers and with senior and teaching staff.

3.4 The College provides information to prospective students through several routes. The College website contains a higher education-specific section which describes the provision on offer. Details of the various programmes are given, including, for almost all programmes, a programme specification. Building on commentary in Expectation A2.2, the team noted the possibility of the College's consideration of the further standardisation of programme specifications with particular reference to the WBIS Education, Leadership and Management, Business Studies and Fully Negotiated Pathways.

3.5 The team reviewed the College's relaunch of the Higher Education Prospectus as another important source of information for prospective students. This contains much useful information, particularly the contextual information about employment prospects for each programme area, but the team noted some errors and omissions. Examples include the prospectus being undated, and a BA (Hons) in Education and Management programme that can apparently be achieved in just one day per week over three weeks.

3.6 The team notes the important information delivery role of the VLE for students enrolled at the College. Students are directed to the VLE for module-specific information (on module websites) and for more general information and guidance within the Student Zone area, where they can find College policies and the Student Charter. The review team heard from students that programme and module information, particularly for new provision, was sometimes inaccurate or not detailed enough, but that this was quickly rectified when the

issue was raised. The team also recognises the College's use of a marketing information system produced by curriculum teams and stored on a Management Information System, from which various forms of publication could be generated. This helps to ensure consistency of public information, but relies on the accuracy of the original information.

3.7 The review team recognises the College's introduction of policies and procedures for checking public information before publication and auditing it after publication as important steps towards making the College's information accurate, and noted an acknowledgement that the College 'was not there yet'. The team **affirms** the steps being taken to further secure the accuracy and completeness of public information about the College's higher education offerings, and further acknowledges the efforts being made to embed a culture where a concern to ensure the quality of this public information is spread throughout the College, rather than being limited to a specific programme or cohort.

3.8 The review team concludes that the College's extensive processes for checking and auditing - and the ongoing concern from senior management to ensure the rigorous implementation of those processes - meet Expectation C with a low level of risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The quality of the information about learning opportunities: Summary of findings

3.9 The College's responsibility relating to the UK expectations about information about learning opportunities has been met, with low risk.

3.10 The team concludes that the College consistently identifies its awarding bodies and organisation when providing accessible information for the public about its higher education portfolio. The College has developed systems and procedures for designing and publishing information for a variety of stakeholders, leading to the availability of paper-based and electronic information for employers and current and future students. The review team recognises this information as being for the most part clear and appropriate.

3.11 The team notes some minor omissions and oversights in public information about the College's higher education provision. In its review documentation, and during the review, the College displayed awareness of ongoing difficulties that are being addressed through the development of systems for audit, including new management responsibilities for overseeing the quality assurance of public information. The team does not consider any further major structural and procedural changes for the auditing and publication of information at institutional levels to be warranted. There is instead a need for completing activity already underway in a small number of areas that will allow the College to meet the Expectation more fully.

3.12 The team also recognises the potential impact of ongoing difficulties with public information on future student recruitment and the reputation of the College, and therefore affirms the steps being taken to further secure the accuracy and completeness of public information.

3.13 On the basis of the documentation provided, the meetings with staff and students, and the self-critical awareness of the College regarding the importance of ensuring further improvements in the quality of public information, the review team makes the judgement that the quality of information about learning opportunities at Tameside College **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

**Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.**

### Findings

4.1 The enhancement of student learning opportunities is embedded in the College's Higher Education Strategic Plan 2013-14 to 2016-17, and involves local employers with other stakeholders. Through its sustained and mutually beneficial relationships with local employers, the College is able to ensure that its higher education student cohort have the opportunity to develop up-to-date specialist professional/industrial skills and knowledge to secure employment within the local community. The College has therefore developed a suite of higher education programmes that enhance the employability of its student cohort while meeting local employer staffing skill needs.

4.2 The College has implemented a discrete higher education management structure to support the evolution of its higher education programmes. This is facilitated by the appointment of an Assistant Principal Academic and Higher Level Programmes and through the operation of an effective committee structure ranging from Corporation Board to Programme Committee level for supporting all aspects of enhancement. These plans, policies, procedures and procedures allow the Expectation for Enhancement to be met, and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

4.3 The team tested the College's strategic and operational approach to enhancing students' learning opportunities through a review of the College's strategic documentation, policies and procedures, minutes of meetings, programme specifications and the student submission. Discussions with staff, collaborative partners, employers and students demonstrated a thorough understanding of the activities being undertaken by the College to enhance student learning opportunities.

4.4 The College has reviewed its position within the higher education market and has made substantial changes to its collaborative provision to more fully respond to prospective student academic and professional/vocational career needs. In September 2013 the College launched the Work-Based Integrated Studies Negotiated Degree Pathways to provide a route to a degree for those who wished to study while remaining in employment. Four pathways are available, and although numbers are still relatively low, students enrolled on the programme are satisfied with their progress and the College's responsiveness to their unique student needs - with examples including the amendment of library opening hours and holding classes on Saturdays.

4.5 The College has established mutually beneficial relationships with a wide range of local employers and employment-focused organisations, including the Tameside Chamber of Commerce, Tameside Enterprise Board, the Greater Manchester Skills and Employment Partnership Board and the Engineering Industries Association. The College's engagement with local employers is sustained, in some instances over two decades, with employers actively engaged in the design of Higher National curricula through the selection of employment skills development modules and associated assessment activity. The strength of the relationship between the College and local employers is further demonstrated by the donation and sharing of access to specialist equipment installed at the College and in local employer premises. While the College does not have a formal cross-College employer panel, there are employer forums within the Early Years and Beauty departments. The review team concludes that the College's achievement of mutually beneficial and

sustained relationships with local employers has greatly enhanced student learning opportunities and employability skills, and the team regards this as **good practice**. This finding is reinforced further by commentaries in paragraphs 2.4 for Expectation B1, 2.25 for Expectation B3 and 2.50 for Expectation B6.

4.6 The College's higher education provision is located within curriculum areas, but the College is also proactive and strategically supporting a distinctive higher education student identity. For example, students' learning opportunities have recently been enhanced through the creation of the Active Learning Zone (ALZ). The College has also appointed a specialist Higher Education Facilitator to the ALZ to support students' study skills and enhance their learning opportunities - thereby building on a recommendation from the IQER in 2010. Study skills support is provided through group sessions at programme level, the ALZ and a dedicated Higher Education Librarian. Students also have the opportunity to access support through a drop-in service offered by the library. Students are complimentary about the level and standard of online resources and support available to them including access to both College and awarding body resources.

4.7 The College, working closely with its employers, is proactive and diligent in ensuring that students have access to the latest technology, for example in the case of engineering students, the use of 3D printing equipment. Building work has commenced on new premises for engineering and construction which will provide students and employers with access to state-of-the-art technology.

4.8 The College has differentiated its observation of teaching and learning procedures to acknowledge the specific characteristics of higher education skills and knowledge acquisition to support the development of independent learning skills. A team of Excellence Coaches has been appointed by the College, one of whom is qualified to provide specific support to higher education teaching staff in the development of higher education-related teaching and learning strategies. During 2013-14 the College carried out a successful Higher Education Wider Review to evaluate teaching, learning and assessment. NSS data confirms students' high levels of satisfaction with the teaching they receive at the College.

4.9 The College acknowledges scholarly activity as an important element of higher education academic teaching with the Scholarly Activity Policy providing guidance for staff development, including details for remission of teaching hours. The College also enables staff to maintain their professional currency through a range of staff development activities and an annual allowance of 10 development days within their professional sectors.

4.10 The team considers the quality assurance cycle of programme monitoring to be robust and vigorous, ensuring a clear oversight of enhancement activity through the integration of learning resources with staff development. Student involvement is encouraged through student forums, questionnaires and student representative attendance at a range of College committees. The College has an excellent range of Student Voice opportunities to elicit student views on their studies and experiences at the College, including module evaluations, annual programme evaluations, student forums and student representative attendance at Departmental Boards, programme meetings and participation in NSS questionnaires. Student engagement has also led to the development of new Higher National programmes in response to students' requests, with examples including new Higher National Hair and Beauty Management and Computing and Systems Development programmes.

4.11 The College has developed a Learner Voice database. Staff have responsibility for entering issues or concerns and signing off final actions that have been overseen by senior management. The Learner Voice database was piloted before being implemented



throughout the College over a two-year period and is discussed further in paragraph 2.41 as an example of good practice for Expectation B5.

4.12 The College's strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities is effectively supported by a wide range of embedded systems, procedures and initiatives which are employer and student led and focused. The College is proactive in supporting and training College teaching staff to develop the appropriate skills and knowledge necessary to undertake higher education teaching and work-based student support.

4.13 Overall, the review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B5 and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.14 The review team concludes that the College has located enhancement as a deliberate and strategic process for improvement within its overarching Higher Education Strategic Plan, supported by management structures and systems that promote cycles of action planning and feedback to enhance a range of student experiences.

4.15 The team links the consideration of enhancement achievements with the good practice identified for the achievement of learning opportunities within Part B of the Quality Code, with Expectation B3 on staff development in particular being viewed as an effective method for underpinning continuous improvement.

4.16 The team identifies the College's range of mutually beneficial partnerships as a key component of enhancement for part-time students and the wider employer community. This achievement is sustained and recognised by stakeholders as a strategic core component of the College's higher education mission; the review team therefore considers employer partnerships to be an example of good practice for enhancement activity.

4.17 On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with staff and students, the review team concludes that the enhancement of learning opportunities at Tameside College **meets** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

#### **A Innovations in promoting the employability of students**

5.1 Tameside College's integrated approach to prioritising the employability of its students is a distinctive feature of its higher education provision. The College's commitment to students' employability and employer engagement is articulated in its mission and demonstrated through its practice.

5.2 All of the College's higher education provision is explicitly and determinedly vocational in nature. The College places much emphasis on providing higher education opportunities that meet the needs of a local and regional job market. This is achieved through well-developed links with employers, a number of which are of significant standing.

#### **B How employers are involved in the delivery and development of the curriculum**

5.3 The review team finds that there is considerable evidence of the engagement of employers in the development and delivery of the curriculum. Local employers are centrally involved both in the offering of placements and the delivery of some aspects of the curriculum. Employers' views are regularly sought in the review of programmes. The College offers a variety of programmes that aim to develop higher-level vocational skills that are required by a range of employers, particularly those within the region. New curriculum areas have emerged as a direct result of employer demand and, in some instances, the development of such provision has been facilitated by key pieces of equipment and facilities by employers.

5.4 The College's links with employers allow students to enhance their skills by working and studying in a situation that enables them to draw on their practical experience. The development and delivery of the Work-Based and Integrative Studies programme is a particularly effective mechanism by which this industry-orientated higher education provision is made possible.

5.5 The review team notes a variety of methods used for employer engagement, tailored to the needs of the partners involved, which allow a variety of types of partnership to prosper. This is achieved without the need for an underpinning formal structure, such as a regular employers' forum.

5.6 Students place great value on the College's links with employers and these provide them with confidence that their studies are meeting the requirements of the local employment market. The flexible approach to study that is characteristic of the College's higher education provision is also highly regarded by students as a result of the institution's engagement with local employers.

5.7 The student support services of the College are also industry-orientated with the particular requirements of a largely part-time higher education student body informing its careers-related provision. The College's support staff reported to the review team a number of ways in which local employers provide part-time employment opportunities without which a number of students would not have had the opportunity to study.

5.8 The review team finds that the College has a very strong commitment to developing employability skills that is clearly much valued both by students and local and regional employers.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 27 to 29 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality).

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

### Blended learning

Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

### 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.

### Degree-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).

### Distance learning

A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'. See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

### **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 our review processes.

### **Expectations**

Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations. See also **distance learning**.

### **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* (FHEQIS).

### **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 audit and 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.

### **Multiple awards**

An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

### **Operational definition**

A formal definition of a term, establishing 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.

### **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.

### **Reference points**

Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

### **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.

### **Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)**

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

### **Threshold academic standard**

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** and **subject benchmark statements**.

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

### **Widening participation**

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

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