



# Higher Education Review of Teesside University

May 2016

## Contents

<b>About this review .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Key findings.....</b>	<b>2</b>
QAA's judgements about Teesside University .....	2
Good practice .....	2
Recommendations .....	2
Affirmation of action being taken .....	2
Theme: Student Employability.....	3
<b>About Teesside University .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Explanation of the findings about Teesside University .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1 Judgement: The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards.....	5
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities.....	13
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities .....	27
4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities .....	30
5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability.....	32
<b>Glossary.....</b>	<b>33</b>

## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at [Teesside University](#). The review took place from 23 to 26 May 2016 and was conducted by a team of six reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Steve King
- Professor Debbie Lockton
- Dr Ann Read
- Ms Penny Renwick
- Dr Victoria Korzeniowska (professional support reviewer)
- Mr Alam Mahbulul (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Teesside University 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 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 5.

In reviewing Teesside University 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 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,<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.

---

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

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859).

<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 Teesside University

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Teesside University.

- The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards **meet** 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 Teesside University.

- The University's highly valued and well-attended annual Further and Higher Education Conference for partner college staff, which enhances student learning opportunities (Expectation B10).
- The University's strategic engagement with local and regional employers, which works to the benefit of its students and supports its position as a valued contributor to the local economy (Enhancement).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Teesside University.

By September 2016:

- ensure that the Threshold Quality Standard for Student Support is consistently implemented (Expectation B4)
- ensure that all assessed work is returned within the specified time frame (Expectation B6).

By June 2017:

- address and resolve the problem of poor performance in a minority of partner colleges (Expectation B10)
- ensure that all postgraduate research students study within a research environment that offers an appropriate baseline entitlement, and effectively supports their desired academic outcomes (Expectation B11).

### Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The University is reviewing annual monitoring with the aim of strengthening its contribution to quality assurance and enhancement (Expectation B8).
- The University is addressing its obligation to provide transparent information about all additional programme costs (Expectation C).

## Theme: Student Employability

The University engages strategically and proactively with local and regional employers in a manner which both works to the benefit of its students and supports its position as a valued contributor to the local economy.

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

## About Teesside University

Teesside University's origins date back to 1930; the institution subsequently evolved into Teesside Polytechnic, gaining university status as the University of Teesside in 1992, and taking its current title in 2009. The University now employs 600 full-time equivalent academic and almost 1,000 full-time equivalent non-academic staff, and has campuses in Middlesbrough and Darlington, the latter being the site of its business management operation.

In addition to some 7,000 students taking their award at a partner college in the UK or overseas, the University offers degree programmes to almost 18,000 on-campus students, of whom 89 per cent are undergraduates and 10.5 per cent are taught postgraduates; its research degree population totals 162. The University points to its reputation for contributing to widening access and social inclusion, citing the average age of this predominantly undergraduate population as 26 and the fact that a substantial minority of its students are reading for their degree on a part-time basis.

The University's recently developed vision is to be 'a leading university with an international reputation for academic excellence that provides an outstanding student and learning experience underpinned by research, enterprise and the professions'; its mission is that it 'generates and applies knowledge that contributes to the economic success of students, partners and communities we serve'.

The University was subject to QAA Institutional Audit in December 2009. This had positive outcomes, identifying five features of good practice and making two recommendations. A mid-cycle follow-up report in December 2012 confirmed that these recommendations had been addressed in full, and identified two areas as likely to be of particular interest to the present review: the impact of the revised mission and strategy, and the training of postgraduate research students.

The changes implemented since this review, which accelerated following the arrival of a new Vice-Chancellor in May 2015, include a strategic realignment of roles and responsibilities at executive and deanery levels; structural changes to central departments; a merger of two academic schools; a major estates development programme; changes to assessment regulations; several initiatives to improve the student experience; an increased focus on employability; and a rationalisation of its collaborative partnerships, which it aspires to expand in a careful and staged manner.

In addition to the challenges facing the sector as a whole, the University identifies its own main challenges as maintaining recruitment in a location with a less than buoyant labour market, further improving its research performance, and continuing to strengthen student engagement.

## Explanation of the findings about Teesside University

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 setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards

**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 (FHEQ)* 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 University Academic Board is responsible for ensuring that the academic standards of all programmes leading to the awards of Teesside University, irrespective of where or by whom they are delivered, are at the appropriate level of the FHEQ, and that outcomes are mapped to Subject Benchmark Statements and all other relevant external expectations. External examiners are required to confirm that these criteria are met.

1.2 Detailed guidance is in place on the naming of awards, naming conventions, and on using alternative award titles for similar programmes of study. National guidance on qualification characteristics is included in course approval; credit awarded is aligned to the Higher Education Framework for England and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area; and FHEQ level, Subject Benchmark Statements and relevant external reference points are included in all programme specifications.

1.3 On the basis of extensive documentary study supported by discussion, the review team confirms that these procedures are operationally effective, albeit that later reference (with an associated recommendation: see paragraph 1.15) is made to the fact that programme specifications do not routinely include the learning outcomes for intermediate exit awards. Overall, however, policies and procedures make appropriate use of all relevant reference points. The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**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**

1.4 The University Academic Board is, as noted in paragraph 1.1, responsible for all aspects of academic standards. It is aided in the discharge of this responsibility by a suite of subcommittees, while commercial, financial and contractual issues are separately and independently managed by Legal and Governance Services, and Finance and Commercial Development. These arrangements appear fit for purpose.

1.5 The regulatory framework for all taught provision is described and maintained in a detailed Quality Handbook, while for research degrees a Combined Framework and Regulations for the Award of Higher Degrees by Research is in place. Both sets of documents make appropriate reference to external expectations and internal regulations for degree titles; arrangements for the award of credit and the recognition of prior learning; assessment, progression and award rules; the conduct of assessment boards; and the role and use of external examiners. All student-relevant information is readily available in hard copy and online.

1.6 The academic frameworks and regulations which govern the award of academic credit and qualifications are appropriate and readily available. The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**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**

### **Findings**

1.7 Approval guidance documents contain advice on the completion of programme and module specifications. The University describes programme specifications as the definitive record of an individual programme. Both sets of specifications, which are maintained and updated in catalogues and available online, as well as being presented in a more engaging but still accurate way in relevant handbooks, set out the aims, learning outcomes, assessment methods, modules, structure, student support and any distinctive features, as well as specifying their alignment with relevant external expectations. These arrangements were scrutinised in detail by the review team and found in all significant respects fit for purpose.

1.8 The University provides award certification and diploma supplements for all graduates.

1.9 The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**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**

1.10 The University Academic Board delegates operational responsibility for the approval of taught courses and research degree programmes to, respectively, the Academic Quality and Standards Policy Committee (AQSPC) and the University Research Degrees Subcommittee, which exercises oversight of all research degree students and the research element of professional doctorates. The Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research complements the Framework and Regulations for the Award of Higher Degrees by Research in constituting the regulatory framework for research degrees. All procedures, including those for partner colleges, are described in the Quality Handbook, which details the institutional approach to academic standards and quality assurance and enhancement, all aspects of which have been mapped against the Quality Code, and meet all relevant external expectations. In considering this Expectation, the review team examined a range of relevant documentation and discussed the issues with staff and students.

1.11 Programme approval is a phased process involving the annual planning cycle, in-principle approval by the Portfolio Development Policy Committee, and an approval event undertaken by the relevant subcommittee on behalf of the AQSPC. Approval panels, which are chaired by a trained staff member with delegated responsibility to sign off the programme specification following approval, receive detailed guidance. They always include external academic representation, and may include an independent employer or practitioner, one or more professional, statutory or regulatory body representatives, and a student. Review reports are thorough, include stakeholder comments, and potentially contain conditions, recommendations and good practice, the meeting or strengthening of which is assiduously monitored prior to institutional sign-off. A fast-track process used for short awards, involving co-delivery by an employer partner, also addresses all external expectations, and minor, intermediate and major change procedures for both on-campus and collaborative delivery are competently logged.

1.12 The review team found these procedures fit for purpose and aligned with all relevant external expectations. The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**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 their own academic standards have been satisfied.**

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

**Findings**

1.13 The University has comprehensive assessment regulations, including generic marking criteria. Its Assessment and Feedback Policy is mapped against the Quality Code and requires module assessment to relate to programme learning outcomes; details of how this is achieved are included in programme specifications. Most, but not all of the handbooks seen by the review team included grade descriptors; while this is a matter which the University may wish to consider, all students who met the team stated that they knew what had to be done to achieve a particular grade, and the review team confirms from documentary study and meetings that the arrangements in place are fit for their purpose.

1.14 An institutional review of undergraduate assessment regulations undertaken in academic year 2013-14 found that module, progression and award boards were exercising their discretion in a variable manner. In consequence, new procedures limiting discretion were phased in and evaluated. A review of taught postgraduate regulations is due for completion by the end of the present academic year.

1.15 The review team noted from the Programme Catalogue that intermediate awards are available to some students who do not proceed to take their degree: these include a Certificate, Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education, each of which has specified learning outcomes. In addition, the structure of one integrated master's degree permits students who do not progress to level 7 to receive a bachelor's degree. While the Academic Regulations state that such awards are made on the basis of credit, the University confirmed that credit is awarded only when specified learning outcomes have been achieved and that the regulation concerned is being amended to clarify this point.

1.16 On the basis of extensive documentary study and meetings with relevant University staff, and given the relative seriousness of this recommendation, the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**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**

1.17 The University Academic Board delegates operational responsibility for the monitoring and review of taught courses and research degree programmes to, respectively, the AQSPC and the University Research Degrees Subcommittee. The procedures, which are described in the Quality Handbook, meet all relevant external expectations. In scrutinising this Expectation, the review team examined a range of documentation and discussed the issues with staff and students before confirming that current arrangements are fit for purpose.

1.18 Annual monitoring is a detailed procedure involving extensive data gathering, analysis and reflection on external examiner reports (which confirm that the standards set at approval are maintained and achieved), and other external evidence or advice. It involves review at module, programme, subject and school levels, with peer discussion of a draft report, and culminates in the University Academic Board's approval of the Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Report, which brings together separate reports for collaborative provision, central departments and research degrees, and has an associated action plan.

1.19 A procedural variation is operational for franchised and validated provision. In the case of validated partners with fewer than five distinct awards in any one school, reports are incorporated into standard annual monitoring at programme, subject and school level, while those where provision crosses schools or involves more than five distinct awards in any one school are required to produce a Collaborative Provision Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Report on a template that invites reflection on matters which include external examiner comments, and reports of any external reviews and student survey data. Formal confirmation that academic standards have been met or that there is alignment with all relevant external expectations is undertaken at validation and not repeated in annual monitoring.

1.20 Sexennial periodic review requires programmes to align with the expectations of the Quality Code, to incorporate relevant qualification characteristics and Subject Benchmark Statements, and to satisfy all applicable professional or regulatory requirements. The programme evaluation document identifies any changes in Subject Benchmark Statements and other external reference points, and includes reflection on feedback from external examiners, employers and students. Programme review panels, the membership of which is subject to Academic Registry approval, are chaired by a trained staff member and include external academic representation and, as deemed appropriate, an employer and one or more professional, statutory or regulatory body representatives; student panel members are increasingly being included. The review team found a sample of periodic review reports to be detailed and comprehensive.

1.21 These procedures operate effectively, being aligned both with institutional regulations and all relevant external expectations and guidance. The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**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**

1.22 The University requires programme teams to use both external examiners and other relevant independent external expertise in programme development and review; approval and review panels are required to include an external academic. On the basis of its scrutiny of approval and review documentation and meetings with both senior institutional staff and employers, the review team found that this requirement is fulfilled and that appropriate consultation with external stakeholders is undertaken. The team also confirms that alignment with the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements is assured at approval, monitoring and review, and that the associated guidance and training are both appropriate and valued by their recipients.

1.23 The procedures for nominating, appointing, inducting, supporting, training, responding to and (where necessary) removing external examiners are clear and detailed. Records are centrally maintained and updated to avoid reciprocity, and the process is effectively overseen by the relevant subcommittee.

1.24 The review team found that staff engaged in programme approval and review are well supported, that alignment with all relevant external reference points is a feature of these events, and that external input is universal in scope. The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

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

## The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.25 In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.26 The University is generally assiduous in ensuring the alignment of its procedures for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its awards with all relevant external requirements and expectations. As an institution that devolves considerable operational responsibilities to schools, its centrally managed procedures ensure that these responsibilities are discharged both responsibly and consistently with institutional policy.

1.27 The University is well placed to assure itself that the academic standards it sets for its credit and awards are secure, both for on-campus students and for those studying in a partner college locally or overseas. The review team concludes, on the basis of extensive documentary study and meetings with all relevant stakeholders, that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the University **meet** 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, Development and Approval**

#### **Findings**

2.1 As noted in paragraph 1.10, operational responsibility for the approval of taught courses and research degree programmes rests with, respectively, the AQSPC and the University Research Degrees Subcommittee, which contains student representation. The review team, having examined an extensive range of relevant documentation and discussed the issues widely, confirms that procedures are appropriate in scope and fit for purpose.

2.2 Programme approval is managed centrally by the Academic Registry, and the associated procedures, which are universal in scope, are set out in the Quality Handbook. Planning the institutional academic portfolio of provision is a feature of the annual planning cycle, beginning with the submission of school annual plans to the Portfolio Development Policy Committee, and new programme proposals being notified to the Academic Registry for specialist design advice. The chair and members of school academic standards committees, which oversee approval events, are trained and supported, and a critical-read procedure within schools aims to ensure that the documentation meets requirements.

2.3 Panels include a range of internal and external representatives, including an external academic subject expert and, increasingly, a student drawn from a pool of students who attend approval events. Students and staff spoke positively to the review team about student members' preparation, involvement, and influence on outcomes.

2.4 Approval documentation is detailed and extensive, and includes examples of fruitful consultation with students. Approval reports demonstrate that panels pay close attention to the documentation; they make appropriate reference to external expectations and reference points, including programme-specific requirements from professional or other sources, and address such institutional priorities as technology-enhanced learning, employability, research-informed teaching and pedagogic innovation. Best practice is captured in school academic standards committees' annual reports, which are presented to the AQSPC and subsequently disseminated. Decisions from programme approval are reported through the deliberative committee structure, with final approval the ultimate responsibility of the Academic Board.

2.5 The procedures are robust and make appropriate use of externality. The Expectation is met and the 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 to Higher Education**

**Findings**

2.6 The University's recently revised Admissions Policy is aligned to the Quality Code and overseen by the Admissions Policy Committee; an appeals procedure is in place. The Admissions Policy refers to the University's values of 'embracing diversity and actively opposing prejudice', and lays out principles of transparency, inclusivity, reliability and validity, stating that processes should minimise barriers to prospective students and be subject to regular monitoring and review. The review team found these procedures sound and fit for purpose.

2.7 Taught programme admissions criteria are set by schools and specified on the University website. For direct provision, admissions decisions are made by trained admissions tutors within academic schools. In collaborative provision, decisions are made either in the partner college or in the school, depending on the form of collaboration and criteria agreed at approval, and overseen by the link tutor. In employer-led provision admissions are a joint responsibility, with the final decision resting with the University. For research students, initial decisions are made by a small panel including the potential Director of Studies, with final approval at University level.

2.8 The review team finds that the University has effective recruitment, selection and admission procedures. The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**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**

2.9 The University's approach to learning and teaching is articulated in its recently extended Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, which aims to deliver a learner-centred, research-rich and internationalised curriculum supported by professional or other external accreditation where possible. Based on this Strategy, each school develops a detailed implementation plan, which is overseen by the relevant school learning and teaching committee and includes an evaluation of student learning opportunities in alignment with the University's Threshold Quality Standard for Student Evaluation. On the basis of documentary study and discussion with groups of stakeholders, the review team confirms the fitness for purpose of these arrangements.

2.10 The Higher Education Academy-accredited Professional Development Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education facilitates continuing professional development and permits the University to award fellowship titles. Senior and academic staff told the review team that research-active academic staff are encouraged to bring their research into their teaching; that excellence in teaching is rewarded in honours, financial incentives and promotion possibilities; and that the Peer Review of Learning and Teaching Scheme is a valuable enhancement tool. Academic staff from partner institutions spoke positively of the support they receive.

2.11 Student learning opportunities are evaluated in annual monitoring and periodic review. The reports deriving from these procedures appear detailed and enhancement-oriented; where relevant they include submissions from collaborative partners and placement feedback from students. The University complements monitoring and review with regular quality audits (for example to ensure that the requirements specified in Threshold Quality Standards are maintained) and enhancement-focused reviews.

2.12 Applicants' experience of learning and teaching is taken into consideration when new academic staff are appointed, and, other than in specified cases, those new to higher education are required to take the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education; relevant staff who met the review team confirmed that this had been beneficial and that mentor support had been provided. Mandatory training is in place for all postgraduate research students who undertake teaching.

2.13 The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**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**

2.14 Responsibility for the institutional oversight of student learning opportunities rests with the Learning and Student Experience Policy Committee, which also receives school implementation plans for approval. Policies and resources that define or provide services and guidance to support students in developing academic, personal and employment skills include the Threshold Quality Standard for Student Support, which specifies baseline expectations of schools, and requires students to have an academic staff member to turn to for support, be this a personal tutor, year tutor or route leader.

2.15 The review team, which confirms the fitness for purpose of these arrangements, explored the operation of the personal tutoring function, and identified differences in operation as well as in nomenclature. Academic staff confirmed that the Standard permits schools to implement student support in locally appropriate ways, and, while the team was told that the University exercises institution-level oversight of these arrangements, it is not wholly confident that they operate consistently. The team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the University ensures that the Threshold Quality Standard for Student Support is consistently implemented.

2.16 Information about support services is available in handbooks, on the website, through the virtual learning environment, and from the Learning Hub, which also offers academic and employability skills development in workshops and one-to-one sessions. Students who met the review team spoke particularly positively of the Learning Hub's value.

2.17 The University has invested, and continues to invest, in the learning resources provided by the Library and Information Services. This Department is subject to annual monitoring and periodic review, and also takes into consideration feedback from external surveys, the Students' Union, the Library Users' Forum and outputs from funded project work. Its operations are fit for purpose. The Careers Service's employability schemes, focusing on mentoring and volunteering, are also available to recent graduates, and employers spoke positively of their involvement with the University and their experiences of students (see also paragraph 4.4).

2.18 As an overarching personal support department, Student Services offers facilities which include pastoral and diagnostic support, support for disabled students and training for staff on pastoral welfare needs, including mental health, autism, disability, dyslexia and pastoral care. The review team, having noted the increasing number of students requiring support and the challenges this places on support mechanisms, was told that the University is responding to the withdrawal of the Disabled Students' Allowance by developing a more inclusive and flexible approach to student support. Currently this is work in hand.

2.19 Notwithstanding the recommendation contained in this section, procedures are on the whole implemented soundly. The Expectation is met and the 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**

2.20 The University is committed to working with students, both individually and collectively. It engages closely with the Students' Union, which is represented on all institution-level committees relevant to this review, and, overall, mechanisms for student representation and engagement are well developed. Students are consulted in programme approval and review, and increasingly serve as members of review panels. These arrangements appear appropriate, and are largely identified by students as such.

2.21 The University places heavy emphasis on gathering, analysing and using student evaluations of modules, programmes and their overall experience, and acknowledges the importance of achieving high levels of student satisfaction in internal and external surveys. The review team found evidence of student feedback contributing to school-level planning and programme development.

2.22 The University has structures, mechanisms and evaluative methods in place to achieve effective student engagement, and makes opportunities available for students to participate in quality assurance and enhancement. It meets its aim of empowering students to shape their own learning and future direction of programmes by mechanisms which include programme liaison meetings, a feedback roadshow, school fora and buddy systems. It acknowledges, however, that in some respects full engagement with a diverse and geographically dispersed student population remains work in progress: student engagement in programme design, for example, is variable; work continues to be undertaken to strengthen students' membership of approval, monitoring and review panels; and the optimal participation of students based in some partner institutions has yet to be achieved. Students themselves, while valuing both their learning opportunities and the contribution to enhancing them which they are able to make, drew attention to areas where communication could be improved, and where variable practice across schools can lead to an uneven quality of experience.

2.23 On the basis of documentary study and meetings with campus-based students and those studying in partner institutions in the UK and overseas, the review team found that, overall, arrangements for engaging students in quality assurance and enhancement are fit for purpose. The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**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**

2.24 The University's Credit Accumulation and Modular Scheme specifies the requirements for taught awards, and is aligned with all relevant external reference points. Undergraduate programmes are based on 20-credit modules, other than in one school where a 10-credit structure applies (for reasons which were explained), and Higher National Diplomas, which have a 15-credit structure. The Recognition of Prior Learning Policy is clear but under review. These arrangements, which were scrutinised in documentation and were the subject of discussion with academic staff and students, are fit for purpose.

2.25 The two-tier assessment board system involves module assessment boards followed by progression and award boards. Mandatory training for chairs and secretaries is in place, and boards are observed by staff of the Academic Registry, which produces a report for the University Academic Board. Assessment and progression regulations for undergraduate, foundation and integrated master's awards have been revised, and a similar review of regulations for taught master's programmes is nearing completion. Regulations for extenuating circumstances and extensions are aligned with advice from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

2.26 Implementation of the Assessment and Feedback Policy is a school responsibility. The policy, which was well understood by staff who met the review team, details the requirements for external examiner approval of assignments and for internal and external moderation, specifies the generic marking criteria, and states that students should receive feedback on assessed work within 20 working days. Since the student submission to this review states that 'many students feel that this does not happen', the review team pursued the issue with students, who confirmed this position, and with academic staff, who acknowledged the likelihood of inconsistency. The team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the University ensures that all assessed work is returned within the specified time frame.

2.27 While the student submission states that not all students understand what they have to do to achieve a particular grade, this was not so with the campus-based students who met the review team. From its scrutiny of a sample of student handbooks, the team found that while all programme handbooks contain programme outcomes, not all provide grade descriptors or module learning outcomes, and not all module handbooks contain grade descriptors.

2.28 Despite omissions from some handbooks and variability in the return of assessed work, the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.29 The University operates a system of module and award external examiners. As noted in paragraph 1.23, its procedures are robust. Nominations are formally approved at school level and submitted for institutional scrutiny prior to approval on behalf of the University Academic Board. Induction is delegated to schools, both for their own and for validated provision; in the case of the latter this is supplemented by partner colleges themselves, with the support of materials produced by the University Registry. External examiners receive a handbook and have access to a dedicated website; a mentoring system is in place.

2.30 The external examiner report template invites the identification of good practice and serious concerns: specific module-based issues raised must be addressed directly in the relevant module leader report form. This form contributes to, and is in consequence addressed by, annual monitoring by way of the report from the school academic standards committee concerned.

2.31 The review team found, on the basis of documentary study and meetings with academic staff, that procedures for responding to external examiner reports and addressing any concerns expressed therein are understood and in place at school level, and that institutional oversight is thorough. While students in international partner colleges who met the team understood the role of external examiners, other students, including some representatives, were less clear; no student whom the team met had read an external examiner report. The team is satisfied, nevertheless, that the University makes concerted efforts to make all necessary information available – through the representative system, handbooks and the virtual learning environment – but it will doubtless wish to review its approach in the light of this finding.

2.32 The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**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**

2.33 The University's arrangements for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities for research students are as described at paragraph 2.51; for taught programmes they are as described at paragraphs 1.4-5, 1.10 and elsewhere, and involve sequential and detailed discussion at module, programme and subject levels, based on module and programme leader reports. The former are evaluative; the latter, which are clearly structured, include external examiner, student and, where possible, alumni/ae and employer comments, external reference points, trends in progression and completion (particularly in critical modules where mark profiles or progression rates cause concern), and external survey data benchmarked against school and University performance. The review team explored these arrangements by examining a wide range of documentation, and discussing monitoring and review with staff and students.

2.34 The University is currently reviewing, with a view to strengthening, the nature and level of students' currently variable contributions to monitoring and review by means which include a quality audit of the Threshold Quality Standard for Student Evaluation, to align its approach with best practice. Periodic review itself is a thorough procedure which makes appropriate use of externality and which will continue to be strengthened by increased student involvement (see also paragraph 1.20).

2.35 The University aims to strengthen its current approach to annual monitoring: it has recently commissioned a review by the AQSPC, and introduced an early-stage peer review element which has contributed constructively to a productive and well received annual monitoring and enhancement away day. Nevertheless, since the current procedure remains overly complex, and pays, in some cases, insufficient attention to the speedy resolution of concerns, particularly in some partner colleges, the steps being taken to review annual monitoring with the aim of strengthening its contribution to quality assurance and enhancement are **affirmed**.

2.36 The Expectation is met and the 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**

2.37 Responsibility for handling academic appeals and complaints lies with the Office for Student Complaints, Appeals and Regulations, which also undertakes staff training and liaises with officers of the Students' Union to ensure that students are well supported. While the student submission suggests students' awareness of the procedures is variable, both the formal policies and more accessible (but still accurate) versions of them are available online, with helpful and appropriate links provided.

2.38 Appeals and complaints involve multi-stage procedures, beginning with informal resolution and moving sequentially to higher levels of formality. Both policies are comprehensive in scope and detail. They include students at partner organisations and make clear that no student will be disadvantaged for making a complaint or an appeal. While some students comment that the informal stage of complaint or appeal is swift and satisfactory but that the formal stages are unduly prolonged, this view is not shared by the Students' Union, which considers the timescales appropriate.

2.39 The Office for Student Complaints, Appeals and Regulations meets schools, support departments and the Students' Union annually to review, evaluate and, as necessary, update procedures, taking on board advice from the OIA. In the light of this meeting it prepares a report for, ultimately, the University Academic Board. Examples of consequential changes made are the introduction of the early resolution stage and the incorporation of research student appeals into a single, unified set of regulations. The Office is also progressively introducing a case management system to facilitate a more detailed analysis of the numbers and types of appeals and complaints being made.

2.40 All relevant procedures are overseen at institutional level, operate effectively and without excessive delay, and are routinely reviewed and well publicised. The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**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**

2.41 The University's collaborative partnerships, which may be franchised or validated, currently consist of a local Higher Education Business Partnership, comprising five local colleges with more than 2,000 students; 11 partnerships with other northern colleges, with almost 5,000 students; 17 overseas partnerships with some 1,700 students; and 57 employer partnerships. The University also offers certificates in partnership with public sector and commercial employers, which, if 60 credits or fewer are involved, are subject to fast-track approval, but standard monitoring and review. The arrangements are described in the Quality Handbook, which includes a comprehensive typology of partnership categories, all of which are aligned with relevant external expectations.

2.42 The Corporate Plan 2015-20 anticipates a rationalisation of collaborative provision based on fewer but more strategic partnerships; this will involve a withdrawal from most or all UK partnerships other than those under the Higher Education Business Partnership umbrella. This procedure was underway at the time of the review visit, when the University confirmed its commitment to supporting all affected students. Procedures for managing the teach-out of programmes are satisfactorily specified in programme approval and outlined in the Quality Handbook.

2.43 The AQSPC's delegated responsibility for quality management extends to collaborative provision, with the Programme and Partnership Approval Subcommittee approving new partnerships, and the Academic Registry maintaining the Collaborative Provision Register and playing a coordinating role. At school level, Assistant Deans are responsible for day-to-day management, with link tutors (for UK College provision) and centre leaders (for overseas provision) serving as main partner contacts.

2.44 Partnership approval involves an application for initial authorisation to proceed followed by due diligence, both of which are subject to high-level institutional scrutiny and agreement. A partnership approval panel is then constituted, culminating in a report for the Programme and Partnership Approval Subcommittee, leading, in successful cases, to a memorandum of agreement. Programme approval follows, in a similar manner to campus-based events but augmented by the submission of the curricula vitae of relevant teaching staff and a critical read by the partner. When all conditions or recommendations have been addressed the process is complete.

2.45 As a generality, programmes are subject to the same approval and review procedures as campus-based provision, albeit that annual monitoring is supplemented by annual quality enhancement visits to enable link tutors or centre leaders to review all aspects of the partnership. Other exceptions include a more elaborate process for complex providers, entailing a detailed Collaborative Provision Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Report procedure (see paragraph 1.19). These arrangements are fit for purpose.

2.46 The extensive opportunities for learning in the workplace which the University provides, mainly in health but also in engineering and business, are valued by students and employers alike. Approval and periodic review focus on preparation and support for credit-bearing placements, including student and provider handbooks, checklists, learner

agreements and audit tools; collectively, these facilitate sound judgements as to the appropriateness of any given placement. Monitoring and evaluation are effectively undertaken, both institutionally and at school level.

2.47 Schools maintain operational oversight of partners through academic quality committees, annual quality enhancement visits, the work of link tutors or centre leaders, external examiner reports and annual monitoring. Both external examiners and annual monitoring have identified poorly performing courses which have not been effectively addressed: these affect, however, a small number of students in a minority of colleges. Examples include a low pass rate in certain modules and what one external examiner described as 'general poor performance overall'. It is **recommended** that, by June 2017, the University addresses and resolves the problem of poor academic performance in a minority of partner colleges.

2.48 The extent of institutional support and guidance available to partners was emphasised by the University and commented on positively by partner staff. This particularly includes the Further and Higher Education Conference, which is regularly oversubscribed and demonstrably helpful to participants. The University's highly valued and well-attended annual Further and Higher Education Conference for partner college staff, which enhances student learning opportunities, is **good practice**.

2.49 Given the University's effective management of collaborative provision, notwithstanding the recommendation contained in this section, the Expectation is met and the 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**

2.50 The University offers both research degrees and a suite of professional doctorates; the degree MPhil or PhD by Completed Works is open to all staff. Most of the roll of 162 students are part-time, and some are staff; students may read for their degree remotely, but very few do so.

2.51 Since its QAA Institutional Audit of 2009, the University has restructured its framework and regulations for the award of higher degrees by research; established the Graduate Research School (to provide central support and training); joined the North East Collaboration Group for Researcher Development (to give students free access to generic research training at other regional universities); streamlined admissions (the Admissions Policy is clear and appropriate); developed an online progress monitoring system; and introduced mandatory training for students who teach (the policy permits a maximum weekly load of six hours, though interpretation remains the subject of discussion).

2.52 The internal framework is aligned with all relevant external reference points, albeit that it makes erroneous reference to the former Higher Education Qualifications Framework 2001. The oversight of research degree programmes is delegated to the Research Degrees Board, the Research Degrees Subcommittee and the Research Ethics and Integrity Subcommittee; the respective responsibilities of each are clearly delineated and collectively comprehensive.

2.53 Research students are enrolled in a school, where they are supported by a postgraduate tutor and assigned to a research institute. They have ring-fenced supervisory time and a baseline entitlement of training courses, which those who met the review team described as satisfactory. Supervisory teams include a minimum of two supervisors and often three, all trained and at least one, normally the Director of Studies, with a specified prior supervisory achievement record. Supervisory workloads are monitored and limited to six students. Student progress is assessed by a progression board at the end of the first year and subsequently by annual monitoring; appropriate examining is in place. All arrangements were understood by students who met the review team.

2.54 Membership of a research institute was valued to a mixed degree by students who met the review team, not all of whom regard themselves as part of a research community, and several of whom described the University as focusing on undergraduates and offering a variable PhD experience. Not all students present regard their study space or support for conference attendance as satisfactory, and a minority stated that they have neither been encouraged to present their research at conferences nor to network. While academic staff informed the team that students are only placed in research-rich areas, they acknowledged that the institutional strategy of expanding the volume and quality of research remains work in progress.

2.55 Provision and entitlements for part-time students are identical (or pro rata) to those of their full-time counterparts, but the University acknowledges the impact of practical

constraints on participation and engagement, both on the students themselves and on the institutional research culture, a point also made by students who met the review team.

2.56 While the issue of comparability of experience was raised in both the 2015 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the University's Graduate Research School Monitoring and Enhancement Report for 2014-15, the University has yet to meet all the challenges posed by a small and mainly part-time research student population in an institution where research performance is variable and most operational priorities relate to undergraduate teaching. It is **recommended** that, by June 2017, the University ensures that all postgraduate research students study within a research environment which offers an appropriate baseline entitlement, and effectively supports their desired academic outcomes.

2.57 Given the context and nature of the recommendation contained in this section, the Expectation is met and the risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

2.58 In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.59 This judgement area contains one feature of good practice (relating to an annual conference for partner college staff); one affirmation (of progress being made in respect of strengthening its annual monitoring procedure); and four recommendations (relating to personal tutoring, the timely return of assessed work, the performance of a minority of partner colleges, and the research environment for research students). Of the 11 Expectations in this section all were met, and all but one were assigned a low level of risk; the exception was categorised moderate.

2.60 Overall, the University provided sound evidence of good support for students and of regarding them as partners in their educational journey. Procedures meet all external expectations and are generally implemented consistently and well. In the minority of instances where this is not so, the institutional structures scrutinised by the review team appear sufficiently robust to ensure that any necessary adjustments are made.

2.61 While most students are taking their degree or other qualification on the main campus in Middlesbrough (or a subsidiary one in Darlington), significant numbers are doing so in a partner college at home or abroad. The University exercises sound oversight of these arrangements: the recommendation affects only a small number of students, and the good practice relating to institutional support for partner college staff potentially improves the learning opportunities of all students studying at such colleges.

2.62 The University is strengthening its research environment by academic recruitment and building on its excellent partnerships with local industry and the professions, where further potential exists for part-time doctoral study. At present, while it faces some challenges in providing consistent support for its small cohort of research students, it is taking steps to continue developing this area of activity.

2.63 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University **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.**

#### Findings

3.1 The University's Public Information Policy sets out the principles under which such information is to be managed. It should be accessible and understandable; published documents should be stored in one place but accessible from multiple points; partner information should be monitored; information should be comprehensive, correct and up to date; and the University should be aware of, and in a position to meet, all external requirements for information. In the case of the ambitious principle that published documents should be stored in one place only, the review team found examples of two versions of part of regulations being available online and two formats of a strategy being stored.

3.2 The University makes information for the public available in a clearly delineated area of the website. While the review team found this area large, complex and not always easily navigable, the information it contains appears comprehensive, and meets the requirements of charity law, Freedom of Information and the Higher Education Funding Council for England's Wider Information Set.

3.3 The University publishes printed prospectuses for applicants for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Online, the website contains extensive details, mapped against the Quality Code, which enable potential applicants to drill down into the contents of individual programmes, entry requirements and other relevant information. It also publishes three generic student handbooks (for on-site UK students, international students and students in transnational education) and a statement for students taking a University-validated programme in a UK further education college. The handbooks contain practical and regulatory information appropriate to their intended audience.

3.4 School, programme and module handbooks have specified minimum contents, though some students report that it is not always simple to identify which of the four levels of handbook contains the information they require. Other methods of publishing information for current students include an online facility for students to access an immediate and continuing record of progress once marks have been ratified, and a virtual learning environment containing module information. Award certificates and diploma supplements, which meet all external expectations, are provided to all graduands and diplomates.

3.5 The University has recently, in collaboration with the Students' Union, completed a document to complement its current Student Protocol, which it describes as a legal document, with a more accessible one which emphasises the collaborative nature of the University-student relationship. This has received formal approval and will be launched for academic year 2016-17.

3.6 While information for applicants and students is basically sound and well understood, in a minority of cases, as noted in paragraph 1.15, programme specifications in the online programme catalogue do not contain learning outcomes for intermediate exit awards. In addition, information about programme costs additional to fees is not clear; the University is, however, addressing this issue, and the review team **affirms** the actions it is taking to meet its obligation to provide transparent information about all additional programme costs.

3.7 The review team found the procedures for reviewing and approving marketing information are well understood and carefully implemented by University and partner college staff, concluding that, while some areas for improvement exist, the information provided is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

3.8 In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.9 The University operates generally robust procedures for ensuring the accuracy and trustworthiness of the information it publishes at both institutional and school levels. This includes online information for the public and potential applicants, and internal information for students, whether online or as hard copy, and whether by the University or by a collaborative partner. The students whom the review team met spoke generally positively of the information provided for them, albeit that some drew attention to certain complexities deriving from the existence of four levels of handbook.

3.10 The University is aware of, and currently addressing, the need to provide transparent information on any additional costs payable on specific programmes. Its actions in this respect are affirmed by the review team, which also noted a small number of operational deviations from stated policy. Overall, however, the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the University **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 institutional approach to enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities is reported in its Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy and monitored by its executive and deliberative structures. The University describes its approach as strategic, and based on the principle that enhancement arises from an evaluation of practice informed by an evidence base of qualitative and quantitative data. This necessitates structuring, capturing and sharing the development and outcomes of enhancement initiatives to ensure that they form part of an integrated approach. It follows that the University aims to drive its quality enhancement initiatives by management information and performance data, which enable it to adopt an evidence-based approach at modular, programme, school and institutional levels.

4.2 Central to this strategic approach is the University's employability agenda. All schools involve employers in curriculum development, programme delivery, providing work placements, and in a range of school-level and locally relevant initiatives supported by the University as a whole. Central departments, in particular Student Services, the Careers Service and Library and Information Services, offer integrated support to schools' work in embedding employability in their curricula. The Careers Service, for example, provides a link adviser for each school for this purpose as well as to promote relationship building with both academic staff and students.

4.3 The University has a long history of working with local and regional employers. Many teaching staff are recruited from industry and the professions, and the University has built an excellent relationship with local, regional, national and multinational companies by delivering professional, and professionally relevant, programmes.

4.4 Student employability is therefore critical to the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy's approach, which involves clarifying what employability means within the sector, and translating it into a coherent policy framework. This framework defines the University not only as a provider of students in possession of appropriate attitudes and behaviour and current knowledge and skills, but as benefiting the local and regional economy by contributing cutting-edge knowledge and expertise to industry and the professions. The University's strategic engagement with local and regional employers, which works to the benefit of its students and supports its position as a valued contributor to the local economy, is **good practice**.

4.5 The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

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

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

4.6 In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.7 In any institution, the enhancement of students' learning opportunities derives from deliberate steps being taken at the most senior level to ensure steady improvement across the piece. Teesside University speaks of 'a whole-institution enhancement culture' which is carefully monitored and evaluated on the basis of information derived from multiple sources. The review team found that, broadly, the University takes a data-driven approach in that it draws on different sources to discern the views and experiences of students and employers in particular, and enlisting their contributions to help ensure that programmes are current in content and effectively delivered.

4.8 A particular strength of Teesside University is the strategic and embedded nature of its approach to employability. This is buttressed by both internal efforts to embed employability in the curriculum and offer students a range of employment-related experiences both within and outside the curriculum, and by external engagement with local and regional employers. This engagement, which aims to benefit both students and the local economy, is identified as good practice. The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 Student employability is critical to the University's Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy. Its maintenance and development lie within the remit of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) in conjunction with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Enterprise and Business Engagement), and its strategic centrality is epitomised in recurrent documentary references to employer engagement and the professions.

5.2 Each school embeds employability in its curricula, but beyond this different approaches are taken, with some schools developing discrete innovations and others taking a more holistic approach. One school, for example, launched the ambitious mission of 'developing the problem solvers, innovators and leaders of the future'.

5.3 The institutional approach to employability has developed significantly over the last decade. The University offers, for example, a well-established suite of initiatives providing business start-up advice and support, involving entrepreneurs, professional support agencies and its enterprise alumni network. The graduate intern programme, launched in 2012 in response to an increasingly competitive graduate job market, aims to provide graduates with work experience, improved key employability skills, information about career choices, and assistance in achieving graduate-level employment. The University also, primarily through Student Services, provides and rewards a range of cocurricular employability activities for current students, including volunteering and summer placements. It makes determined and continuing efforts to communicate the opportunities provided by these initiatives to the full range of its diverse student population.

5.4 The University aims to embed employability at every level by helping all students gain employability skills within and outside the curriculum. Overall, the review team found that awareness of the importance of employability is embedded in institutional structure and culture, and that evidence exists of the successful introduction, management and evaluation of a range of well-received initiatives.

## 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 30 to 33 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* (FQHEIS).

### **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.

## **QAA1708 - R4651 - Aug 16**

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2016  
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557 050  
Web: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)