



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of ThinkSpace Education

May 2018

## Contents

<b>About this review .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Key findings.....</b>	<b>2</b>
Judgements .....	2
Good practice .....	2
Recommendations .....	2
Affirmation of action being taken .....	3
<b>About the provider .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Explanation of findings.....</b>	<b>5</b>
1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations.....	5
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities.....	16
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities .....	37
4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities.....	40
<b>Glossary.....</b>	<b>44</b>

## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at ThinkSpace Education. The review took place from 21 to 23 May 2018 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Mike Coulson
- Ms Mandy Donaldson.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provision and to make judgements as to whether or not 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 (Alternative Providers) 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
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#)<sup>2</sup> and explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).<sup>3</sup> 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> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education).

## Key findings

### Judgements

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies **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 is **commended**.

### Good practice

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

- The extensive use of taster weeks enables potential students to make fully informed choices and ensures they are well prepared for future study (Expectation B2).
- The employment of experienced and often award winning practitioners as tutors creates a cutting edge learning environment and prepares students to succeed in the music industry (Expectation B3).
- The innovative use of in-house technology to develop interactive learning resources and identify requirements for student support (Expectation B4).
- Ongoing and unrestricted access to learning materials for all courses allows students staff and alumni lifetime access to resources (Expectation B4).
- The availability of one-to-one tutorials with industry practitioners and their positive impact on student attainment (Expectation B4).
- Assessments linked to real work projects help prepare students for employment and to understand the realities of professional feedback within the creative industries (Expectation B6).
- The wide range of enhancement activities supports the development of students' professional skills (Enhancement).
- The strategic and well embedded approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities resulting in a dynamic learning environment (Enhancement).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations**.

By October 2018:

- review the deliberative structure and terms of reference of all committees and meetings to ensure effective and systematic monitoring and oversight of academic standards at programme and institutional level (Expectation A2.1)
- ensure that the minutes of deliberative committees formally record detailed discussions, actions agreed, responsibilities allocated and reviewed (Expectation A2.1).

By January 2019:

- review the assessment process in order to improve the transparency of marking and to ensure students understand how marks and grades are awarded (Expectation B6)
- make more explicit the correlation between learning outcomes, assessment instruments, assessment criteria and feedback given to students (Expectation B6).

By March 2019:

- introduce a structured system for staff review and appraisal (Expectation B3)
- consider ways of formalising student representatives' training and include them in membership of the deliberative meetings (Expectation B5).

### **Affirmation of action being taken**

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions already being taken to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to students:

- the steps being taken to provide more depth, rigour and focus in assessment feedback given to students (Expectation B6)
- the action being taken to allow students to further develop their research skills and understanding of the academic aspects of the creative process (Expectation B6)
- the activities in progress to ensure the systematic monitoring of actions arising through the review and evaluation process (Expectation B8)
- the actions being taken to establish a policy and practice for the annual review of information for stakeholders (Part C).

## About the provider

ThinkSpace Education (TSE) is a specialist provider of higher education in the field of music composition for film, television and video games, and orchestration and sound design. Although based near Chichester in West Sussex, it operates entirely online with students and teaching staff based in 27 countries around the world. It is wholly owned by Music For Television Ltd, a company actively engaged in the business of film, games and television music production. The provider began offering unaccredited non-degree distance learning programmes in 1995, with accreditation by the Open and Distance Learning Quality Council in 2000.

TSE's mission is to: provide an exceptional professional education in the fields of film, television and video games music composition, orchestration and sound design; make academic contributions that will enable greater understanding and appreciation of the role that music and sound plays in film, games and television; develop new ways of delivering higher education in an online learning environment, and to use the experience and insight of experienced professional practitioners to inform new generations of composers, orchestrators and sound designers.

In May 2014, TSE became a validated institution of the University of Chichester (the University), working in collaboration with the University's music department and Academic Quality and Standards Service. TSE currently offers the six master's degree programmes validated by the University. They fall into two groups; music composition and orchestration, and games music and audio. Currently there are 87 students enrolled.

All students study online, accessing their course materials, webinars, support, assignments and assessment through the virtual learning environment (VLE). The full-time MA students schedule takes 12 months, and the MFA students 24 months. TSE also offers two part-time schedules with two student intakes each year in January and September. Students work a 46 week academic year based on the expectations of a professional working environment.

## Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

### 1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other 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* (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 ThinkSpace Education (TSE) is not an awarding body and threshold academic standards for the awards delivered are the primary responsibility of its awarding body, the University of Chichester (the University). Programmes are validated and awarded by the University, aligned with the Expectations of the Quality Code and are set at an appropriate level on *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and are informed by the Master's Degree Characteristics Statement.

1.2 Ultimate responsibility for the overview, maintenance and enhancement of academic standards, including arrangements for external examining, annual monitoring, periodic review and other quality assurance procedures rests with the University as defined in the Memorandum of Agreement and the Handbook for Academic Partnerships. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.3 The review team examined the Memorandum of Agreement and other documentation and held meetings with senior staff, the University's Director of Quality and the Standards and the University Liaison Tutor.

1.4 TSE implements appropriate procedures to maintain academic standards on behalf of the University. In accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement, it has appointed the Course Director as the person responsible for liaising with relevant University staff to ensure the smooth running of partnership.

1.5 TSE refers to the University's academic regulations, policies and procedures relating to standards and is aligned with the University's requirements as set out in the Memorandum of Agreement and related documentation. The University is responsible for monitoring TSE's adherence to these requirements.

1.6 TSE has worked in conjunction with the University in developing the programmes and achieving their successful validation. As there is no specific subject benchmark statement for level 7 music, TSE, in agreement with the University, uses a combination of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Music: Bachelor's Degree with Honours and the Master's Degree Characteristics Statement as points of reference. Compliance with relevant subject benchmarks is taken into account by the University and external advisers when approving programmes.

1.7 Programme specifications, approved by the University, are downloadable from TSE's website. They state clearly that the programme operates at level 7 of the FHEQ and meets the appropriate criteria set out in QAA guidance. This is confirmed by reports from external examiners.

1.8 Overall, TSE's adherence to the requirements and procedures of the awarding body ensures that programmes are effectively aligned with the appropriate external and sector reference points. TSE is aware of its responsibilities for maintaining threshold standards, and is fulfilling them effectively. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the level of 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**

1.9 The University has ultimate responsibility for the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities for the programmes it approves. TSE has established an internal academic framework to oversee academic standards and ensure adherence to the Memorandum of Agreement, and the University's academic regulations. It seeks to maintain academic standards through monthly meetings of the Academic Management Committee (AMC), meetings with head tutors and student representatives, regular meetings between the Course Director and the University Liaison tutor, plus the annual monitoring procedures, and through periodic review.

1.10 The AMC functions as the overarching academic authority within TSE. Its terms of reference include monitoring the effectiveness of assessment arrangements, ensuring sufficiency of students learning opportunities, the development of new and existing programmes and reporting to formal external bodies. The AMC oversees the annual monitoring process and considers appropriate reports.

1.11 Programme specifications, which are approved by the University, include a section describing how TSE assures the quality of the programme. This includes descriptions of the role of external examiners, and the composition and role of the Programme Board. The award of academic credit is the ultimate responsibility of the University's Board of Examiners. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.12 The team examined minutes of formal meetings and other documentation supplied by TSE and held meetings with senior staff and the University's Director of Quality and Standards.

1.13 TSE relies significantly on the University's academic regulations to assure standards. All relevant regulations are made available to staff and students on the virtual learning environment (VLE) as well as on the website. Specifications for every programme, approved by the University annually, are also made available to staff and students on the VLE.

1.14 The AMC was formed in January 2018, meets monthly and acts as the overarching academic authority. Terms of reference covering its composition and activities are in place, although these do not contain details of which other academic meetings report to it, or fully describe all aspects of its work. There is little evidence within AMC minutes of consideration of formal reports from other academic committees. There are no formal detailed terms of reference for the deliberative bodies and meetings which take place as required, and which include meetings of student representatives, the monthly meetings between the Course Director and the University Liaison Tutor and meetings of senior tutors.

1.15 The specifications for the six programmes offered describe a specific Programme Board comprising all relevant teaching staff, student representatives and others who make a contribution towards the effective operation of the programme. However, in practice the boards and meetings do not take place as constituted, and TSE consider that their role is subsumed within that of the AMC. The composition of AMC fails to meet the requirements

for a Programme Board, as given in the programme specifications, as it does not include all staff teaching on each programme or student representatives. It fails to meet the requirements of the University's External Partnerships regulations requiring the attendance of the Liaison Tutor. Minutes of AMC meetings, while they contain some indication of improvements being made to programmes, do not include systematic, detailed scrutiny of individual programmes and do not fully reflect the terms of reference.

1.16 The review team **recommends** that, by October 2018, TSE reviews the deliberative structure and terms of reference of all committees and meetings to ensure effective and systematic monitoring and oversight of academic standards at programme and institutional level.

1.17 Records of AMC meetings are brief and do not contain ratification of previous minutes, systematic consideration of matters arising, evidence of detailed discussion, nor formal consideration of minutes from other academic committees. While records contain a list of actions agreed, these are not allocated to specified individuals, and there is no record of actions previously assigned having been carried out. To address this inadequacy senior staff have recently appointed a full-time course administrator to use project management software to record and monitor all agreed actions and ensure their completion. This process is currently ongoing to address actions identified from previous meetings and through the student support system. While actions are marked as completed within the project management software, there is currently no obvious process in place to link this activity with the formal records of academic meetings to provide a clear audit trail of actions agreed and carried out.

1.18 Records of other academic meetings have similar issues to those of AMC, being brief and lacking systematic consideration of matters arising. While notes are kept of meetings of head tutors, these are not formalised or systematic. There is no comprehensive timetable of committees and meetings.

1.19 Daily responsibility for ensuring smooth running of the partnership with the University is delegated to the Course Director, who holds regular monthly meetings with the Liaison Tutor to fulfil this responsibility, and discuss issues relating to academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. However, formal recording of these meetings is not systematic undertaken. The review team **recommends** that, by October 2018, TSE ensures that the minutes of deliberative committees formally record detailed discussions, actions agreed, responsibilities allocated and reviewed.

1.20 TSE abides by the University's Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students. Assessment strategies are scrutinised at programme approval and later checked by external examiners. Any changes required are discussed and approved by AMC. Academic awards and qualifications are ultimately approved by the University's Board of Examiners, with input from the TSE internal examiners. Senior staff meet with external examiners prior to results being considered by the Examination Board, as required by the University. The Course Director attends an interim meeting of the board where module credits and awards for students are discussed. These results are subsequently considered and confirmed by the University's Board of Examiners.

1.21 The TSE internal academic structure is insufficiently formalised and does not fully reflect that described in programme specifications. Minutes of deliberative committees are insufficiently detailed and do not record a clear audit trail of actions agreed, responsibilities allocated and reviewed. Therefore, the Expectation is not met as there are weaknesses in the operation of part of the provider's academic governance structure, and that the level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Not met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

1.22 Responsibility for maintaining a definitive record of each programme approved and delivered by TSE ultimately rests with the awarding body, who lists the programmes on its website. TSE provides programme specifications as approved by the University. A record of each programme, from initial proposal through to approval by the University, is held by TSE.

1.23 Programme specifications for each new programme, or changes to an existing programme, are approved by the University prior to publication, in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement. Under the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement TSE is responsible for complying with the University's framework of regulations and procedures governing the operation of assessment including, misconduct, plagiarism and appeals. Ultimate responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards, annual monitoring and periodic review rests with the University. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.24 The team examined programme specifications, minutes of formal meetings and other documentation supplied by TSE and held meetings with senior staff and the University's Director of Quality and Standards.

1.25 Programme specifications are revised and approved annually by the University, and are made available to staff and students through the VLE. Module outlines specify the learning outcomes, credit value, the level of study and assessment strategy. There is clear evidence of the University approving the original programme applications, and initiating action plans which have been subsequently addressed by TSE.

1.26 There is a well understood process for making and gaining approval for minor changes to existing programmes. Tutors complete a minor change form detailing whether the amendment is to an assessment, module title, description, learning outcome or other change. Changes are discussed with the external examiners for the relevant programme and at AMC. The form is then approved by the Course Manager and passed to the University for approval.

1.27 An annual programme monitoring and review process is in operation. The AMC receives feedback from senior tutors, student representatives, the Liaison Tutor and students, along with academic data and module feedback and responses to examiners' comments. This information is used to compile a programme monitoring report which is approved by AMC and submitted to the University. Actions identified in the reports generated for each of the six courses were very similar. Actions arising from the report are compiled into an ongoing list following discussion by AMC, although senior staff admitted that recording of these discussions is inconsistent. This matter is also addressed with recommendations, under Expectation A2.1.

1.28 TSE meets its limited responsibilities for designing and developing provision by working closely with its awarding body. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the level of 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**

1.29 TSE follows the processes and procedures of the University for the approval of its taught programmes and delivers six postgraduate MA/MFA programmes. All programmes are validated by the University. Responsibility for the approval of modifications to programmes, for the approval of new programmes and for keeping records related to the approval and modification of programmes rests with the University, as set out in the Memorandum of Agreement.

1.30 The policies and procedures of the University for the approved programmes are outlined in the University's Handbook for the Enhancement of Quality and the Maintenance of Standards, requiring approval by the University's Academic Standards Committee prior to delivery of the programme. These guidance documents and regulations produced by the University would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.31 To review the effectiveness of these processes the team examined documents from the various approval activities, particularly assessment, external examiners' reports and programme specifications, and discussed their operation with staff. The team scrutinised approval and review handbooks, the new policy discussion document minutes, programme approval reports and a full audit trail of the programme approval processes for 2014 and in 2016. The team also explored the processes within meetings with the Course Director, senior staff and students.

1.32 Approval of the composition and orchestration programmes took place in 2014 and for the games, music and audio programmes in 2016. TSE followed the processes outlined in the University's guidance documents and all conditions were signed off prior to delivery of the programmes. External industry specialists were consulted during the design of the programmes and external academics from within the University supported TSE during the initial development. TSE is now working with an external academic to develop a more robust and rigorous academic focus within the programmes and plan to submit a new elective research module and minor changes to assessments, following the minor modifications process. Previous minor modifications to programmes have followed the University processes.

1.33 Internally, there is no formal process for approving proposals for new programmes, although the AMC terms of reference indicate that this body is responsible for overseeing the design and development of programme proposals and modifications. Minutes of these meetings are informal and lack detail. This matter is discussed as a recommendation further under Expectation A2.1. There are plans to develop a more formal internal processes, although these are not yet fully embedded.

1.34 TSE works effectively in partnership with its awarding body and operates successful practices for the approval of taught programmes and any modifications made to them. Despite the absence of internal procedures for programme approval, the existing processes of the awarding body for programme approval ensure that the academic standards of the

programmes meet UK threshold standards. The Expectation is, therefore, met and the level of 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**

1.35 TSE follows the University's processes and procedures to ensure that credit and qualifications are appropriately awarded. Learning outcomes are specified at programme and module level and approved by the University at the time of validation, revalidation or modification. The overall assessment strategy for the programme is set out in the programme specifications. Module handbooks contain details of assessment tasks and module specific assessment criteria, and reference the postgraduate generic assessment criteria, outlined in programme specifications. These criteria are also available on the online tutor dashboard. The University's Liaison Tutor and the external examiner have oversight of the assessment process. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.36 To test the effectiveness of these arrangements, the team scrutinised the University's Academic Regulations, programme and module handbooks, the online learning and assessment environment and external examiner reports. The team also discussed assessment procedures with the senior staff, students, teaching staff and the professional staff.

1.37 At the time of validation of the programmes, the University did not require explicit mapping of intended learning outcomes to assessment criteria. However, TSE staff explained clearly how assessment criteria map to the intended learning outcomes, ensuring that these are all assessed. TSE intend to make these links more explicit at the time of programme revalidation in 2019. This is further discussed within a recommendation under Expectation B6.

1.38 Two external examiners are appointed by the University. Examiners confirm that the standards set on the programmes are appropriate to the level of the award that they are comparable to awards at other institutions, and that students achieve appropriate standards. One external examiner raised concerns and recommendations about assessment on the games programmes. These recommendations have been taken seriously, discussed with the academic Liaison Tutor and responded to through the annual monitoring processes.

1.39 Module achievement is recorded on the University management software system and all transcripts are checked for accuracy by the Course Manager prior to awards being confirmed. The University does not require TSE to hold internal module boards although staff from TSE attend the University's subject examination boards which formally approve grades. The University holds an award board at which TSE's candidates for award are presented.

1.40 TSE works effectively in partnership with its awarding body and operates successful practices that ensure credit and qualifications are awarded only where learning outcomes and the academic standards of the awarding organisation have been met. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the level of 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**

1.41 TSE engages with the University's requirements for annual monitoring and review of the programmes as set out in the University's Handbook for the Enhancement of Quality and Maintenance of Standards Part C. It produces annual monitoring reports for each programme, which are submitted to the University

1.42 Programmes are validated by the University for a five year period, and are then subject to a periodic review and revalidation. TSE's first two postgraduate programmes, the MA in Professional Media Composition and the MA in Orchestration for Films, Games and Television are both due for periodic review in 2019. These processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.43 The review team tested the effectiveness of TSE's processes by examining the annual monitoring reports, action plans produced as a result of annual monitoring and the annual monitoring flowchart. Programme monitoring and review was also discussed with the Course Director, senior staff and teaching staff.

1.44 There are a wide variety of ways in which programmes are internally monitored and reviewed. Feedback is gathered systematically from students and tutors, through both formal and informal methods including module feedback surveys, student social media groups, regular communication with tutors, student representatives, online scoring for modules and online student feedback forums. There is now an emerging internal structure that will provide a more formal basis for scrutiny of this feedback, together with comments made by the external examiners and University Liaison Tutor. This emerging internal structure is intended to formalise how feedback will feed into programme monitoring, without impeding the swift responses that TSE are currently able to make to minor issues that arise.

1.45 The AMC terms of reference indicate that this body is responsible for overseeing the programme monitoring and review processes. Minutes of these meetings are informal and lack detail. This matter is addressed as a recommendation under Expectation A2.1. TSE meets its obligations to report annually to the University and to construct an action plan based on feedback from stakeholders. Its reports are accepted and approved without concern by the University.

1.46 The review team concludes that TSE current and emerging processes for monitoring and reviewing programmes, are fulfilling the requirements of its validating body, and ensure that threshold academic standards are achieved. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of 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**

1.47 TSE uses external and independent expertise to ensure threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved, and aligns to the University's policies and procedures on externality. The University's Handbook for the Enhancement of Quality and the Maintenance of Standards requires that an independent external advisor is appointed to assist in the development of any new programmes and TSE has demonstrated commitment to this requirement.

1.48 TSE makes use of two external examiners employed by the University as part of the process for setting and maintaining academic standards. External examiners' duties include participation in programme monitoring and review, and confirming the assessment processes. External examiners' comments feed into the annual monitoring report submitted to the University. TSE is responsible for responding to the external examiners' reports and for ensuring that appropriate consideration is given to the feedback provided on the management and delivery of programmes. These processes would allow for this Expectation to be met.

1.49 The review team considered the external examiners' reports, responses and action plans for 2016-17 and validation documents and reports. The team discussed the external examining process with senior staff, delivery staff and students. Information on the use of external consultants was also considered.

1.50 TSE ensures that external advice is sought when developing new elements of programmes. An example of this is the engagement of an external industry specialist and academic adviser in the development of new research modules for the MA programmes. This development has not yet been submitted to the University for approval but the external adviser has been guiding the development of the modules with the team.

1.51 TSE has a multitude of international external industry specialists who act as tutors. Their currency and industry expertise ensures that programmes are cutting edge and prepare students for work within a highly competitive industry. This is discussed further within the good practice identified under Expectation B3.

1.52 The review team noted a number of recommendations resulting from the 2016-17 external examiner's report for games. These have been carefully incorporated into the internal annual monitoring reports and into the action plans submitted to the University and TSE staff are tracking their implementation, for example, by developing research modules.

1.53 The review team considers that TSE makes effective use of external and independent expertise in meeting the requirements of its awarding body. The Expectation is, therefore, met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

1.54 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.55 Six of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated level of risk is low in these areas. There is one expectation A2.1 which is not met and where the level of risk is considered moderate. There are two recommendations relating to ensuring effective and systematic monitoring and oversight of academic standards at programme and institutional level, and ensuring that deliberative committees formally record detailed discussions, actions agreed, responsibilities allocated and reviewed.

1.56 The review team notes that the primary responsibility for much of this judgement area lies not with TSE but with its awarding body. TSE has an effective relationship with its awarding body, the University, and responds appropriately to its requirements. TSE has developmental and emerging structures, policies and processes to ensure that it can meet its responsibilities to the awarding body.

1.57 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies at the provider **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, Development and Approval**

#### **Findings**

2.1 TSE aligns its processes for the design, development and approval of programmes with those of the awarding body. There is no formal internal process to manage the design and development of programmes, although the AMC terms of reference indicate that this body gives internal approval for new programmes and modifications. Given the size of the provider the processes are proportionate and allow for the expectation to be met.

2.2 TSE's first programmes were designed informally with the University and this experience is now being used to develop a more formal internal process. TSE is at an early stage in designing a Programme Development Manual to support internal discussions about the process to be followed. A discussion document has been initiated which outlines requirements for the development and design of new programmes, ensuring that consideration is given to student demand, strategic fit, the availability of resources and the suitability for online delivery. The proposal sets out the process to be followed internally, prior to requesting validation from the University.

2.3 The University's programme approval reports for MA Orchestration for Film, Games and Television and the MA Professional Media Composition and for the 2016 approval of MA Composing for Video Games and MA Sound Design for Video Games, demonstrate that the approval process has been followed effectively. Student, employer and external examiners' feedback had been sought during the development of the proposals and external advisers from industry had contributed to the vocational aspects of the programmes. The reports highlighted actions to be taken to ensure that the documentation fully complied with University expectations. TSE worked through extensive action plans which were completed prior to delivery of the programmes. Minor modification applications follow University regulations and illustrate that the correct procedures were followed and student feedback was sought.

2.4 TSE meets the requirements of its validating university by effectively following the processes and policies required for programme design, development and approval. Given the size of the institution, the lack of a formal internal procedure does not detract from the effectiveness of the process, although TSE are planning to develop a handbook to increase the rigour of this activity. The Expectation is, therefore, met 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 to Higher Education**

**Findings**

2.5 TSE follows the admissions policy of the University. The entry criteria for individual programmes are clearly described on the website and the admissions process and individual admissions decisions are managed internally, in line with its agreement with the University. Decisions on admissions are made in accordance with the principles set out in Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice (2004). Consistent criteria are applied to all applicants through use of a standardised application form, application tests and requirements for portfolio materials. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.6 The review team examined documentation provided by TSE, carried out scrutiny of the VLE and met with senior staff and students in person and online from a range of worldwide locations.

2.7 TSE aims to recruit students with the creative, technical and academic potential to make a significant contribution to the profession. It holds open days and taster weeks to help applicants make informed choices, understand the standard of work required, and align their ability with TSE expectations. Students who had attended taster weeks were highly enthusiastic about its benefits in enabling them to walk through a sample assignment and receive feedback on their work. This gave prospective students a sound perspective on the demands of the programme, and enabled them to make appropriate choices about their study options. The review team considers the extensive use of taster weeks enables potential students to make fully informed choices and ensures they are well prepared for future study, and is **good practice**.

2.8 The academic background of potential students is established at an early stage to ensure that they fulfil the admissions criteria of having an undergraduate degree.

2.9 Applicants without a first degree can apply to join a master's programme through the recognition of prior experiential learning (RPEL). Staff look for evidence that students have fulfilled the criteria for entry, including that they have reflected on the experience they are offering as part of their application. Applicants' written and language skills are assessed through a test and they are required to demonstrate satisfactory expertise, and suitability for study at master's level. TSE makes recommendations for the admission of students to the University, which makes the final decision. TSE has, at times, experienced a high number of potential applicants requesting admission through RPEL, particularly as many may have previously taken one or more of TSE's pre-degree courses. As a result, although the University's regulatory limit for RPEL is 50 percent per intake, senior staff have decided to operate a self-imposed limit of 15 percent of each cohort.

2.10 Following initial enquiry, potential applicants are offered a video conference or telephone call to enable them to discuss their options and allow staff to ascertain that they have the time, finance and motivation to complete the course. TSE staff provide detailed responses to email correspondence from potential students. Students confirm that they receive clear and detailed responses to questions that time commitments required for the

programme are made very clear to them and the information provided regarding entry requirements is clear.

2.11 Potential applicants are required to purchase an application pack from the online store. As well as completing the application form and learning agreement they are also required to submit a small technical or creative task. Applicants for whom English is not their first language are required to provide evidence that they meet minimum requirements.

2.12 Applications are initially checked by the Course Manager to determine if any additional tests are required, and are then reviewed by a small team of senior staff to decide the outcome. The progress of each application is recorded. Following the admissions process, candidates are enrolled as TSE students and registered with the University TSE applies the University's policy on admissions complaints and appeals. At January 2018, there had been no admissions appeals or complaints.

2.13 TSE work within the awarding body's requirements and makes information about its admissions processes and procedures clear to students through a range of methods. Students confirm they are happy with the quality of information they received from staff prior to enrolling. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of 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**

2.14 TSE's strategic approach to learning through its Education Strategy and Mission Statement, seeks to find innovative ways of developing students' academic, creative and professional potential through using real-world professional experience to enrich academic enquiry. It communicates its online approach to teaching and learning to potential and current students through its website, open days, taster weeks and course handbooks. TSE provides a range of programmes for students entering the music for film, games and television industries into contact with professional working composers, orchestrators and sound designers. All tutors are also currently involved as professionals within the music industry.

2.15 All programmes use a distance and online learning model for students and for tutor training TSE has developed its own customised VLE and course reader software, which allows students to access all their learning materials, course text, video, audio, links to external resources, assignments and feedback. The majority of learning resources are videos featuring professionals who are expert in their field, including interviews, demonstrations, tutorials and webinars. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.16 The team examined documentation provided by TSE, carried out scrutiny of the VLE and met with senior staff, delivery staff and students in person and online from a range of worldwide locations.

2.17 Teaching takes place primarily through the provision of a range of online webinars by experienced subject practitioners. Students are able to attend a range of live online workshops and webinars where staff and colleagues from the wider industry share their knowledge and insights, participate in group discussions, answer questions and give feedback on their work. Teaching sessions are delivered at different times of taking account students living in different time zones. This approach equalises the demands of the timetable for all students and allows all to participate in a number of live discussions. All webinars are recorded, enabling those students who were unable to watch the live broadcast to catch up at a convenient time to fit in with other commitments. Webinars from previous academic years and other programmes are available to all students on the VLE, resulting in a helpful library of learning resources covering a wide range of topics delivered by a variety of practitioners.

2.18 Delivery relies heavily on technology, as both tutors and students are located worldwide. TSE's premises form the base for a virtual lecture theatre, with high quality video and audio recording and streaming facilities. Tutors and support staff emphasise that a recent change in video platform has resulted in noticeable improvements, enabling staff and students to communicate interactively online and in person. Recent improvements to the course reader software allow students to raise areas within the course text that they don't fully understand, in order to receive appropriate support from senior tutors. The recent appointment of a member of staff to oversee development of digital assets has strengthened

the quality of video learning resources and ensures the ongoing monitoring and updating of software to maintain TSE at the cutting edge of relevant technology.

2.19 Learning outcomes at programme and module level are clearly detailed and mapped to assessment criteria in the programme handbooks. Students confirm that outcomes are reinforced by tutors when discussing their assignments during tutorials. Work is currently under way to strengthen assessment in the research module, focusing on working at level 7.

2.20 TSE employs senior staff and tutors who are also working as creative professional practitioners on film, games and TV projects and who also have an academic background. The majority are qualified to master's level, with a small number holding or working towards a PhD. This approach maintains currency with the industry, and enables staff to reflect the latest developments through their teaching, as well as through feedback and advice given to students.

2.21 TSE is responsible for the recruitment of all teaching staff, with appointments subject to approval by the University. All staff curriculum vitae are reviewed annually by the University liaison tutor. The majority of teaching staff work remotely and teach part-time, with about half based in the UK and the remainder in the USA and Europe. All tutors have professional credits within the film, music, television and games industries, although no senior staff currently act as external examiners. Some academic staff have presented papers at professional conferences, published books and articles and lecture at other institutions. Several have won recognised awards for their work. TSE has also appointed a well-qualified academic adviser.

2.22 The review team considers the employment of experienced and often award winning practitioners as tutors creates a cutting edge learning environment and prepares students to succeed in the music industry and is **good practice**.

2.23 A range of online resources is available to enable tutors to adhere to academic expectations. These are predominantly video-based and include a guide to the VLE, a tutor training course and guidance on holding webinars. The tutor training course provides guidance for teaching at level 7 in a creative subject, support on providing feedback to students, tutor roles and responsibilities and an explanation of the programmes offered. Tutors are also provided with course handbooks, relevant extracts from the Quality Code, and examples of appropriate projects for students and the provision of feedback on assessment tasks. Tutors have found the recent introduction of Tutor TV, with short training videos on a range of topics, very helpful in their development. TSE's academic adviser has recently submitted a proposal for staff development, which includes a mentoring scheme, to strengthen academic approaches although this has not yet been fully actioned.

2.24 An embedded system of formal lesson observations is in place, and the Course Manager observes all webinars and other teaching sessions, providing feedback to staff as needed, although this is not formally recorded. The Course Manager also uses these observations to informally identify training needs. There is an informal system of peer observation in operation, as many tutors view other teachers' webinars retrospectively to improve their own learning. Senior tutors do not observe teaching sessions, although they do spot-check feedback given by tutors to students on a weekly basis. There is currently no structured system of recorded staff appraisals in operation, and thus no formal system of identifying training or development needs or areas of individual good practice. The review team **recommends** that, by March 2019, TSE introduces a structured system for staff review and appraisal.

2.25 Appropriate arrangements are in place to 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 and enhance their capacity for creative thinking. The Expectation is met and the level of 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**

2.26 TSE has developed a framework to support and enhance student achievement in an online environment, the success of which is evidenced by high levels of retention and completion. This support includes open days and taster weeks, the induction programme, an online support ticket system and optional tutorials with experienced professional practitioners. The AMC is responsible for ensuring the sufficiency of students' learning opportunities and promoting improvements. A designated member of staff sits on AMC and provides support for students. These procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.27 The team examined documentation provided by TSE, carried out scrutiny of the VLE and met with senior staff, senior tutors, tutors and students in person and online from a range of locations worldwide.

2.28 Open days and taster weeks provide potential students with the opportunity to sample the teaching, support and resources available to them during their programme. A three day induction at the start the course is broadcast live from the virtual lecture theatre, allowing students to interact with contributors in real time, although some students attend in person.

2.29 All students complete a detailed online profile providing information to teaching and support staff about their musical strengths and weaknesses and the technical equipment they have available. Key information from the student's application is imported into this profile by staff. In response to feedback from students asking for more personalised feedback from tutors, a student goals panel has been recently added to the profile, which summarises the student's aims regarding achievement in four areas: creative, technical, professional, personal. This approach allows tutors to provide more relevant feedback to further develop the student towards achieving their stated goals.

2.30 Students find the induction to their course helpful. This includes course requirements, assessment, academic misconduct, resources and support as well as the creative research aspects of the provision. Students are able to attend this either in person or online, and all sessions are recorded on video enabling wider access.

2.31 As students are located worldwide, staff have devised an online support ticket system to provide help and advice on any issue who require support on any issue. Students are well aware of this system and use it whenever they need assistance. Support requests from students range from clarifying their understanding on technical and academic aspects through to use of the VLE, or issues relating to marking and assessment. Support tickets are checked daily by the Student Support Manager and prioritised according to urgency and often dealt with rapidly. All issues raised by students are entered in to the project management software so that progress is tracked.

2.32 To provide better support to students within its online environment, TSE has developed an innovative in-house engagement management system (EMS) to monitor online student activity and alert support staff when this drops below a pre-determined threshold. The system takes account of log ins, accessing course materials and posting in the student forum, to produce an engagement score. Monitoring students' involvement enables staff to ascertain their progress, detect possible issues and provide appropriate

support before deadlines are missed. Support staff intervened with a student with a particularly low EMS score having discovered that he was having serious problems at work that made studying difficult. The Course Manager was able to help re-arrange the study schedule to temporarily ease his workload. Where another student had experienced a close bereavement, staff were again able to provide appropriate support. Technical staff confirmed that the system uses an adaptive learning system to allow for different rates of student progress. While the EMS system is working well, further development is ongoing in regard to the scoring mechanism and analysis of the data collected, with the aim of further improving the detection of issues and the effectiveness of interventions by staff. The review team considers the innovative use of in-house technology to develop interactive learning resources and identify requirements for student support to be **good practice**.

2.33 The method of course delivery allows students with additional needs to participate equitably. The flexible schedule, including options to change from full to part-time study, provides opportunities for students to continue their studies, rather than withdraw. In appropriate cases the Course Manager can also approve an intermission in students studies for up to two years. Students are able to declare any physical or learning needs within their application. The course reader software offers a choice of fonts appropriate to students with dyslexia, and can also provide the text in audio form.

2.34 All teaching webinars, and interviews with practitioners, are recorded and made available on the VLE. Technical staff ensure that the technology is kept up to date and accessible by all students, irrespective of the speed of their internet connection. Students commented that the quality and content of resources is good, but they would find it helpful to be able to alter the video playback speed to focus on more relevant sections. Irrespective of the programme on which they are registered, students and alumni have ongoing lifetime access through the VLE to all video resources for all TSE programmes including premium courses. Students find this very helpful as it allows them to broaden their knowledge and expertise beyond their chosen specialism. Senior staff confirmed that students also have access to the University's online resources and are provided with core bibliographies as well as their course, and their cost. The review team identified as **good practice** the ongoing and unrestricted access to learning materials for all courses allowing students staff and alumni lifetime access to resources

2.35 A student forum area on the VLE provides opportunities for discussion on academic and practical topics, as well as sharing music and providing mutual support. Students prefer to receive support from their peers through a closed page on social media, created by a student representative, which enables them to discuss creative and academic issues, including assessments and grading, in a student-only environment.

2.36 Students receive developmental feedback from tutors on their written and practical assignments. Although this can often be honest and frank in respect of their creative efforts, students appreciate that it prepares them effectively for the creative music industry. All students can access half hour one-to-one sessions with a tutor every week, which they book directly with them as required. Around half of the students take advantage of this facility. Tutorials are either carried out online or in a virtual classroom, and are tracked on the VLE to enable staff to monitor usage. The availability of one-to-one tutorials ensures that no student normally has to wait more than a week to get feedback on their work. Students confirmed that they find these sessions with tutors extremely helpful, as they are all experienced practitioners within the industry. Students are also able to approach the Course Manager and support staff, all of whom are also professional musicians, for help and advice. Tutors find that tutorials enable them to get to know the students and their abilities well, which aids them in providing effective support. The review team considers the availability of one-to-one tutorials with industry practitioners and their positive impact on student attainment to be **good practice**.

2.37 TSE aims to develop students potential for future professional employment by encouraging their creativity and focusing their musical output within a current commercial environment. To further aid this, senior managers have formed a production company, ThinkSpace Productions (TSP), allowing students the opportunity to actively seek paid and unpaid professional work during their course and begin active engagement with the industry through obtaining published credits. TSP also facilitates collaborative work which, although not part of the programme assessment, provides students with the opportunity of engaging in professional practice with other similar academic bodies. Several students have undertaken work with TSP and have found it extremely helpful in aiding their professional development and employability.

2.38 TSE has a framework for enabling student development and achievement that is comprehensive in its scope and effective in practice, and monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources. The focus on teaching and learning is effective in enabling students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Therefore, the Expectation is met 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**

2.39 The needs of current and former students are firmly embedded within TSE's strategy, which aims to continue to find innovative ways of developing the academic, creative and professional potential of students, using real-world professional experience to enrich academic enquiry.

2.40 TSE takes deliberate steps to engage its distance learning students as individuals and collectively in the development of learning opportunities. There is an established student representation system, whereby a student representative is elected from each course. Student representatives consult with their peers in a variety of ways and engage in formal and informal meetings with the senior staff to give feedback on their learning experience. Students are also involved in the development of new modules, assessment practice and changes to the online learning and environment. Student feedback is considered by the AMC. These systems and processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.41 The team explored the ways in which TSE engages with its students by scrutinising a range of documentation, communications, notes from meetings with students, newsletters, student feedback reports, and screenshots of online forums. The team also discussed the matter with students and staff during the visit and staff.

2.42 TSE engages with its students many ways which effectively overcomes the barriers that exist when students live and study worldwide. Engagement methods include social media groups, the support ticket system, numerous videos featuring TSE staff, interactive webinars, online forums, the use cutting edge communication technology, online surveys, module feedback forms and feedback buttons. The processes used by TSE to engage with students continually evolve as they develop more options. For example, a feedback button, consisting of a thumbs up or thumbs down, now allows students to give quick and immediate feedback on online material, with a comments box opening up if a thumbs down is chosen. TSE aims to respond swiftly to student feedback and act immediately where possible. Feedback needing more serious consideration is considered by the AMC.

2.43 Students are satisfied with the responsiveness of TSE to their queries and concerns and gave many examples of how their feedback has been addressed. Students state that TSE listens to their views. They appreciate the opportunity to be involved in testing courses before they are released. Students gave examples of how module content or processes had been modified in response to their feedback, including the introduction of a work and money non credit-bearing online module. This was in response to students' and graduates' requests for more support when working in industry. Students are very satisfied with the student representative system and feel that they are part of a culture of continuous improvement.

2.44 TSE's engagement with students has evolved over time and the outgoing student representative has been instrumental in developing support systems for her successors, including writing a job description for student representatives and creating the online social media group for students. However, no formal training has been provided by TSE to support the students in their representative roles and engagement with students is currently limited to asking for and responding to feedback. Student feedback is considered at the AMC although students are not currently formally involved in the deliberative committee structure.

The review team **recommends** that, by March 2019, TSE considers ways of formalising student representatives' training and including them in membership of deliberative meetings.

2.45 TSE engages its students effectively in the enhancement of their learning opportunities. Students are overwhelmingly positive about their experiences at TSE and consider that they are listened to, and that their opinions matter. However, student engagement could be further developed by introducing formal training for student representatives and by including students in the membership of deliberative committees. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.46 TSE follows the University's regulations on assessment as articulated through the Academic Regulations, and fulfils its requirements as set out in the Responsibilities Flowchart. The University maintains oversight of the assessment process through the use of its Liaison Tutor, external examiners and examination boards. This framework for assessment would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.47 The review team examined programme and module specifications and handbooks, academic regulations, minutes of examination boards, external examiners' reports, examples of tutor feedback and records of programme approval events. The team also discussed assessment with the Course Director, senior and teaching staff and students.

2.48 Assessment practice has evolved effectively as a means of assessing intended learning outcomes. Students are supported to achieve good grades through the systematic use of formative work prior to submitting a summative assessment. Tutors give detailed and constructive feedback on formative work. Students consider this enables them to improve their work, positively impacting on their final module grade. A wide range of tutors, all actively working in the creative industries, assess formative work, and feedback has historically focused on its value within the profession. In response to requests from students, and comments from external examiners, TSE have introduced headings for tutors to use when giving feedback, guiding them to provide supportive feedback on the academic, as well as creative, aspects of the work. The senior tutors have also written feedback guidelines for the tutors although TSE acknowledge this work is in progress. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to provide more depth, rigour and focus in the assessment feedback given to students.

2.49 Tutors are prepared for assessing at postgraduate level through an online tutor training course. This provides a detailed summary of TSE's approach and suggests that tutors download and read the Quality Code. There is a financial bonus for staff who undertake the online training. The Course Manager is also available to answer any questions and tutors confirmed that he is accessible and prompt in his responses.

2.50 Students reported that they are sometimes confused about how their work is assessed and how grades are decided. Module specific assessment criteria and instruments are approved by the University at validation and published in module handbooks and online. Postgraduate generic assessment criteria published in the programme specifications are also used by tutors. A mark out of ten is assigned to each section of the postgraduate assessment criteria rubric at both formative and summative assessment. However, students do not fully understand the relationship between these marks and the final mark awarded and currently it is not possible for students and tutors to see both sets of criteria together. TSE acknowledges that this has caused some confusion for students and tutors. The review team **recommends** that, by January 2019, TSE reviews the assessment process in order to improve the transparency of marking and to ensure students understand how marks and grades are awarded.

2.51 Although staff are able to explain the links between individual module intended learning outcomes, assessment instruments, assessment criteria and feedback given, these links are not explicit for students and this complexity of approach adds to their confusion around assessment. The review team **recommends**, that by January 2019, TSE makes more explicit the correlation between learning outcomes, assessment instruments, assessment criteria and feedback given to students.

2.52 All assessment tasks are based on real-world projects from within the music composition, orchestration and games industry. Tutors marking assessments provide feedback on the professional and academic standards of the work. Students state that this gives them highly effective preparation for work within the music sector. The review team considers that assessments linked to real work projects help prepare students for employment and to understand the realities of professional feedback within the creative industries, and are **good practice**.

2.53 Following feedback from external examiners and students, TSE is committed to supporting students to undertake higher level study and to better understand the role of academic practice within creative work. The senior team recognises the limitations of the current assessment instruments in allowing students to highlight the research and academic activities that take place when they create a unique piece of music. TSE is currently taking steps to strengthen the academic rigour by extending the word count of, and providing headings for, the written submission for each module, so that students can focus on demonstrating academic practice more explicitly within the creative process. The review team **affirms** the work being undertaken to support students to further develop their research skills and to gain an understanding of the academic aspects of the creative process.

2.54 To minimise the impact of subjectivity when assessing a creative piece, all summative assignments are second marked by a senior tutor. The Course Manager then confirms the final grade for the assessment. A sample of work is moderated by the University's academic liaison tutor and a further sample reviewed by the external examiner. Feedback given to students is also spot-checked by the senior tutors as TSE continues to support its tutors to assess and give feedback at level 7. The assessment process is therefore effective and rigorous.

2.55 Assessment deadlines are indicated on a student calendar, which is available on the VLE and in the programme specifications. TSE follows the University's policy on extenuating circumstances, as outlined in the academic regulations. Claims for circumstances to be taken into account must be made prior to the assessment date by completing a form and providing independent documentary evidence.

2.56 All students complete an authenticity statement, which sets out the definition and consequences of plagiarism. TSE follows the University's policy on academic malpractice. There is currently no specialist software to help tutors identify academic malpractice in a creative piece of music, and to overcome this difficulty TSE carries out random interviews and requests for students' working files.

2.57 All marks are presented to the University's Academic Board of Examiners for confirmation of award or progression. There is no requirement from the University for TSE to hold its own module boards. Instead, the Course Manager checks all transcripts sent from the University prior to the Board of Examiners meeting and attends the Board to confirm awards and progression.

2.58 TSE follows the University's policy on the Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) and will recommend admittance to a programme following a review of an application by a potential student. Many students enter the postgraduate course without a first degree

through the RPEL process with the University making the final decision about whether to admit the student.

2.59 Assessment practices are sound and provide a fair and equitable basis for achievement of learning outcomes. However, the lack of transparency in aligning the learning outcomes with assessment instruments and criteria, and the lack of clarity for students about how their grades are decided, poses a moderate risk to the rigour of assessment. Steps can be taken to further improve the processes, as already outlined in this section. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

### Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

#### Findings

2.60 TSE has two external examiners for the composition and orchestration programmes, and for the games programmes. Responsibility for the appointment, induction and role of external examiners sits with the University. External examiners check academic standards through the verification of assessments and student awards, and through consultation on minor and major modifications to the programmes. Examiner may visit TSE to moderate, or conduct their role remotely. An annual report is submitted from each external examiner which requires confirmation that the standards set for the award are in accordance with the FHEQ and that students are achieving comparable standards with those from other similar courses.

2.61 The annual report is completed using the University's template and this is considered by the University, who then share it with Course Manager and Course Director. TSE will then prepare a response to the report, outlining any actions they will take to address recommendations made. The response is submitted to the University, who then share it with the external examiner. External examiners are invited to attend Award and Progression Boards of Examiners at the University and their reports are published on TSE's intranet, accessible by staff and students. This framework would allow for the Expectation to be met.

2.62 The review team scrutinised external examiner reports and responses, minutes for Boards of Examiners, communications between TSE and the external examiners, and checked the Memorandum of Agreement. The team also discussed externality with senior managers, teaching staff and students.

2.63 The external examiner for orchestration and composition in 2016-17 reports satisfaction with the standards achieved by students, the thorough and fair assessment, the feedback and support given by tutors at TSE, the way that intended learning outcomes are assessed, and the online aspects of the programmes. The external examiner for the Games programmes in 2016-17 raised some issues about the academic content of the programmes, specifically, feedback on academic achievement and how well the programmes meet the master's level descriptors. These concerns have been addressed by TSE in their response, with a more robust focus on research elements of each module, guidance for tutors on how to identify and give feedback on academic endeavour within a creative piece, and a new elective research module currently being prepared for approval by the University. This activity demonstrates that TSE's response to external examiners' comments is thorough and effective. This matter is also addressed as an affirmation under Expectation B6.

2.64 Students confirmed that the external examiners' reports are available to them on the VLE. Consideration of the external examiners' reports is currently undertaken by the senior team in an informal but effective way, resulting in actions considered as part of the annual monitoring process. TSE plans to formalise this scrutiny within its AMC meetings, where more robust recording of discussions will help to inform action planning as TSE grows. This matter is also addressed as a recommendation under Expectation 2.1.

2.65 Overall, there is a well-established and effective system of external examining in place that is demonstrably helping TSE to maintain and develop its provision. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the level of 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**

2.66 The annual monitoring of TSE's programmes is conducted jointly the University, which provides guidance and a template for the annual monitoring report. The University exercises oversight of the annual monitoring process by receiving and approving reports. The obligations of TSE in this regard are set out in the Memorandum of Agreement, which states that they must comply with the Handbook for the Enhancement of Quality and Maintenance of Standards. TSE is expected to produce an action plan for each programme annually, with evidence drawn from a range of sources such as external examiners' comments, student feedback and data.

2.67 The annual monitoring flowchart outlines the annual process and indicates that the AMC considers feedback from students, staff and the University liaison tutor, retention and academic achievement data and module feedback forms and surveys. An annual monitoring form is then completed and submitted to the University. These systems would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.68 The review team examined how the arrangements work in practice by considering relevant policies and procedures, annual monitoring reports, minutes of AMC, external examiners' reports; and through meetings with staff, students and recent graduates.

2.69 Feedback is gathered from students, external examiners, tutors and former students. This information is analysed by the senior team at AMC to inform the annual monitoring reports submitted to the University. Although the recording of minutes at the AMC is not detailed TSE has recently started using project management software to manage actions resulting from feedback and planning. The use of this software to monitor actions that arise from any meeting or feedback from any stakeholder demonstrates that a commitment to continual improvement. This approach was instigated recently and a member of staff employed full-time to incorporate its administration into his job description. The software assigns a timeframe to each action and a person responsible, automatically sending out reminders and updates to users. TSE is now working on more formally embedding this monitoring of actions within the academic oversight obligations of the AMC, as outlined by its terms of reference. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to ensure the systematic monitoring of actions arising through the review and evaluation process.

2.70 There are currently informal and formal processes that support the production of the annual monitoring report. TSE uses a wide range of methods to gather tutor and student feedback, which is then discussed both formally in AMC meetings and informally among the small management team which meets regularly. Internal reports are then produced which set out the actions TSE wishes to focus on. TSE has a dynamic approach to dealing with student feedback and responds quickly and effectively wherever possible. Students gave several examples of changes and enhancements introduced quickly as a result of their feedback, including changes to the timing of formative feedback to allow improvements to be made before summative assessment. An analysis of the risks involved for students is made by TSE to decide what can be implemented quickly and what needs more thoughtful consideration. Where actions need to be more carefully planned, they are included in the internal annual monitoring reports, discussed at AMC meetings and then implemented and

monitored carefully. An example of this is the response made to external examiner and to student feedback related to rigour in academic assessment and feedback. TSE have planned several actions to address this, including improvements to the tutor training course, the introduction of headings for students' written submissions and a new focus on research within modules. These actions have formed part of their internal annual monitoring reports and the reports submitted to the University. No programmes have yet be subject to revalidation, although the planned partnership re-approval in 2019 will lead to further development and consideration of the programmes.

2.71 Overall, the team concludes that the University operates effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and review of the programmes it delivers on behalf of its awarding body. The affirmation included in this chapter recognises the new systems introduced as part of this year's annual monitoring. While actions are not yet fully embedded, they are already contributing to a more robust and effective evaluative cycle. The review team concludes that the Expectation is, therefore, met and that the 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**

2.72 TSE adheres to the academic appeals and student complaints processes of the University, as outlined in the Academic Regulations. Programme specifications direct the students to these and further information is available on TSE's website, with hyperlinks to the University policies and procedures. The responsibilities flowchart indicates that TSE is responsible for trying to resolve complaints informally and that the University is responsible for dealing with formal complaints and academic appeals. These systems would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.73 The review team tested TSE's approach to student appeals and complaints through meeting with senior staff and discussion with students about how appeals and complaints are handled. The team also examined the relevant policies and procedures of the University, TSE programme specifications and website.

2.74 There have been no formal student complaints or appeals. TSE determines that this is due to the close association of staff and students in their day-to-day work. Matters get resolved quickly and effectively, and in consequence do not escalate. In meetings with the review team, students confirmed this. TSE's approach is to act swiftly on student feedback and to be responsive to their needs, to address any issues before they become complaints or appeals. An example of this is where students felt disadvantaged by a change in the University regulations that meant they would be awarded a merit rather than a distinction. As the change was being applied retrospectively, the students felt this was unfair. Students raised the issue with the Course Manager who having consulted with the Director of Quality and Standards at the University recommended that the situation might be resolved by chair's action at the next examination board, and the grades were subsequently changed. The effective communication between TSE, the University, and the students ensured a fair and satisfactory outcome. Additionally, TSE is currently in the process of applying to become a subscriber to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

2.75 TSE operates fair, accessible and timely processes for handling complaints and academic appeals. Policies and processes are clearly communicated to students. The review team, therefore, concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of 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**

2.76 The provider does not deliver learning opportunities with other organisations, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

**Expectation: Not applicable**

**Level of risk: Not applicable**

**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**

2.77 The provider does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

**Expectation: Not applicable**

**Level of risk: Not applicable**

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

2.78 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook

2.79 All Expectations are met and the associated level of risk is low in most areas. However, Expectations B5 and B6 are considered moderate risk. The review team identified six areas of good practice. These include: under Expectation B2, the extensive use of taster weeks; Expectation B3, the employment of experienced and often award winning practitioners as tutors ; Expectation B4, the ongoing and unrestricted access to learning materials for all courses allows students staff and alumni lifetime access to resources; Expectation B4, the availability of one-to-one tutorials with industry practitioners; Expectation B4 the innovative use of in-house technology to develop interactive learning resources and identify requirements for student support; and Expectation B6, assessments linked to real work projects help prepare students for employment and to understand the realities of professional feedback.

2.80 There are four recommendations. Under Expectation B3, to introduce a structured system for staff review and appraisal; Expectation B5, to consider ways of formalising student representatives' training; Expectation B6, to make more explicit the correlation between learning outcomes, assessment instruments, assessment criteria and feedback; and Expectation B6 to review the assessment process in order to improve the transparency of marking.

2.81 The team affirmed three areas where action is already being taken. Expectation B6, the steps being taken to provide more depth, rigour and focus in assessment feedback; Expectation B6, the action being taken to allow students to further develop their research skills and understanding of the academic aspects of the creative process; and Expectation B8, the activities in progress to ensure the systematic monitoring of actions arising through the review and evaluation process.

2.82 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the provider **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 TSE is committed to providing information that is accurate, accessible and trustworthy and has developed procedures to ensure that the information shared publicly gives an accurate and fair impression of the programmes it offers.

3.2 TSE is responsible for producing the marketing, publicity and other promotional material relating to its programmes. Materials referencing the University or validated provision is also subject to approval by the University. A copy of TSE's publicity materials is supplied to the University annually as part of the annual monitoring process. The University is responsible for ensuring that the information on its own website about TSE courses is in agreement with that provided by TSE. The design meets the Expectation in theory.

3.3 The team reviewed documentation, including a wide range of information available electronically, websites, handbooks and programme specifications. In addition, the review team met staff and students to verify its findings.

3.4 The website forms the main source of information about courses, staff, applications and admissions. Other sources of information are the downloadable course brochure, the VLE and social media pages. All course information, teaching and resource materials are available to all students throughout the duration of their course. The website and the brochure both clearly name the awards available and that these are granted by the University of Chichester. Students confirmed that all information provided to them, whether online or in response to their enquiries, was accurate. The Course Manager confirmed that TSE has produced a privacy statement and has considered and acted on all requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

3.5 TSE monitors its publicity materials and reviews its website and other information in the light of feedback from stakeholders. For example, an unusually high number of RPEL applicants in September 2016 resulted in a review of the publicity, following which the decision was made to add further detail to clarify the limited number of RPEL places and the high level of competition for them. Following a query raised by a student concerning a statement in the brochure concerning the availability of a live orchestral session for students on non-orchestration courses, where the text reflected a policy that had since been changed, senior managers agreed to honour the incorrect statement for that student and decided to institute an annual accuracy check of all publicity following the September intake of new students. The review team **affirms** the actions being taken to establish a policy and practice for the annual review of information for stakeholders.

3.6 A thorough review of all publicity by an external consultant, in line with Part C of the Quality Code, was commissioned in January 2018. An action plan to address issues highlighted by this was drawn up and all points have either been addressed effectively or are in process.

3.7 One action arising from the review is the addition of a page on the website

containing TSE's governing policies, terms and conditions and mission statement. Admissions, applications, complaints and appeals all come under the University's regulations. The policies covering terms and conditions, refunds, enhancement and the student contract are all specific to TSE. It has recently started to produce a short monthly newsletter to keep students up to date with developments.

3.8 Information produced by TSE for its intended audience about the higher education it offers is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy and the Expectation is met. Completion of the activity already underway will allow the provider to meet the Expectation more fully and the level of risk is low.

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

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

3.9 The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

3.10 Information published by TSE is fit for purpose and trustworthy. Processes for the development and verification of information are understood by staff. Students confirm that information is comprehensive, accessible and helpful to them, and that they are provided with sound information to support their learning. The team affirms the actions being taken to establish a policy and practice for the annual review of information for stakeholders.

3.11 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the provider **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 Enhancement is embedded within the TSE vision and is identified as a clear a strategic priority and is a fundamental part of the organisation's culture. The Enhancement Policy confirms that TSE takes deliberate steps to identify areas where there is potential to improve learning opportunities. The Enhancement Policy sets out ten deliberate steps that TSE will take to enhance its provision, including listening to students and staff, acting swiftly and appropriately to feedback, informing staff and student of actions taken, and finding innovative approaches to learning. An annual enhancement review takes place, where the progress made over the previous year is assessed and targets set. The strategic approach to enhancement would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.2 The review team tested how TSE interprets its strategic approach to enhancement operationally by examining its strategies, policies and procedures, annual monitoring reports, student feedback, minutes of the enhancement review, VLE including the engagement management system and key performance indicator data. The team also met staff, students and former students.

4.3 Student engagement in the enhancement of provision is widespread and supported. Students have a clear voice on all aspects of provision and they feel listened to and heard. TSE acts decisively on their feedback and suggestions, and they are supported during their studies and into their careers, for example by giving them access to all course materials, for all courses, in perpetuity.

4.4 Opportunities for enhancement arise from several sources and include: analysis of data; feedback from students, alumni and tutors active within the industry; external examiners' reports: external academics working with TSE; and discussions at AMC.

4.5 There is clearly a well-embedded culture of continuous improvement, which engages both staff and students. The first annual enhancement review took place in May 2018 and included input from senior staff, tutors, students, former students and the University. This allowed all concerned to reflect on different aspects of provision and identify actions to be taken to enhance learning opportunities. Contributions from all stakeholders ensures that actions planned meet the needs of all involved with TSE and that enhancement activities are a collective and cohesive priority.

4.6 Staff in all roles are committed to enhancing the student experience, through swift responses to questions and issues, and a commitment to a continual development of the online learning environment. Students stated that there is a genuine partnership between staff and students in the pursuit of excellence and they are particularly appreciative of the support they receive related to their future employability. Students give feedback in numerous ways and confirm that many changes have been implemented, often in response to their comments. This has including changing the online document accessibility from PDF to a course reader style allowing students to change fonts or views to accommodate different learning styles. The availability of one-to-one tutorials and ongoing technical updates have also enhanced the student experience. This strategic and well-embedded approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities resulting in a dynamic learning environment is considered by the review team to be **good practice**.

4.7 TSE recognises the importance of creating a community for its tutors, who work online from many different locations across the world. An online tutor training programme outlines information about teaching and assessing at level 7 in a creative subject and provides support for award-winning industry experts to teach and assess at postgraduate level. Tutors are incentivised to complete the online training by a financial bonus, payable on completion. Online provision for tutors has been further enhanced by the introduction of tutor TV, which offers short videos to support different aspects of teaching and assessing, based on requests from tutors and the identification of needs by the Course Manager, who observes every webinar. Further videos are planned on topics such as barriers to learning, a skills matrix updating and tutor resources. Tutors also have access to all programme materials and can use these to enhance their own skills and knowledge. Furthermore, a mentoring scheme for tutors has been proposed by TSE's academic adviser and there are plans to roll this out over the next year.

4.8 TSE has developed its own virtual learning environment, called the engagement management system (EMS). Analysis of the data produced by the EMS allows staff to identify students at risk of disengagement and to intervene to offer support, intermission or advice and guidance. It allows for an adaptive learning model, where students can progress at their own speed with the support and oversight. This responsive approach contributes to the extremely high retention levels for an online provider of 100 percent since it began offering postgraduate awards.

4.9 Students' learning opportunities are enhanced significantly by teaching and assessment focused on future career opportunities. Assessments are based on real work projects and therefore afford the opportunity for students to receive feedback on their professional and creative work from world renowned and award-winning tutors from within the industry. Students are highly appreciative of this and recognise the positive impact it can have on their employability. In addition, students are offered opportunities to work through Thinkspace Productions, a production company owned by TSE. Getting a first professional credit, is a major barrier to entry for many composers and sound designers. ThinkSpace Productions is designed to help students overcome that barrier. Many students have successfully found work through this route. In addition, students on the orchestration and composition programmes are offered the opportunity to have their work performed by a live orchestra as part of their programme. The review team consider that the wide range of activities which support the development of students' professional skills is **good practice**.

4.10 In response to feedback from students and graduates through a graduate employment survey, TSE developed and introduced a work and money module, available to all students on all courses and all former students. This is currently not credit-bearing, although there are plans to re-develop it as a postgraduate elective module on the programmes. This module supports the transition from student to graduate employee, and students have found this very useful, and is supplemented by webinars on different aspect of the music business.

4.11 Senior staff recognise the academic aspects of creating an individual piece of music, and plan further enhancements to the programmes to support the students to value and recognise the academic processes they go through when writing music. Building on comments from external examiners and the academic advisor, a new format for students' written submissions is in development and will be submitted to the University for approval shortly. A new research-based dissertation module is also in development, designed to support those who wish to go on to further study.

4.12 The review team concludes that TSE has developed a culture of continuous improvement, where the needs and concerns of students lie at the forefront of its innovation and practice. There is a commitment to supporting the academic and professional

development of its students and it has developed a myriad of ways to achieve this. The Expectation is, therefore, met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

4.13 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.14 TSE has a well embedded culture of enhancement, and many improvement activities are taking place. The team identified two areas of good practice, the wide range of enhancement activities which support the development of students' professional skills, and the strategic and well embedded approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities resulting in a dynamic learning environment. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

4.15 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the provider is **commended**.

## 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 21-24 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

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.

### Awarding organisation

An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications.

### 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.

### **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.

### **Self-evaluation document**

A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

### **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.

QAA2217 - R9940 - Aug 18

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2018  
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557050  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)