

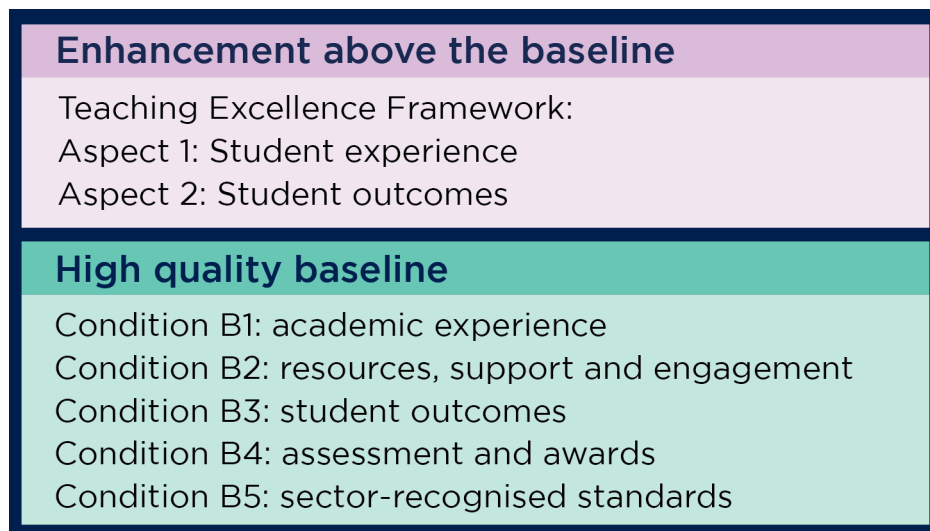
## Briefing note: How higher education quality is regulated in England

The Office for Students (OfS) is the independent statutory regulator for higher education in England. It registers universities and colleges and ensures they continue to meet its rigorous requirements for quality and standards; equality of opportunity; student protection; financial sustainability; and good governance.

This briefing note sets out the OfS’s approach to regulating quality and standards, which consists of the two integrated and mutually reinforcing parts shown in Figure 1:

- a high quality baseline that ensures students receive a high quality education and successful outcomes.
- the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) which incentivises universities and colleges to go beyond the high quality baseline, and deliver excellence for their students.

**Figure 1: the OfS’s quality system**



### High quality baseline

The bottom box in Figure 1 shows the OfS’s conditions of registration for quality and standards which are part of the regulatory framework – we refer to these as ‘the B conditions’. Conditions of registration impose legally binding requirements on a university and the OfS takes a risk-based approach to monitoring compliance with those requirements. Where the OfS is concerned that risk may be increased for a particular university or college, it can, and does, take action to establish whether a condition has been breached. If there is a breach, the OfS can impose a sanction and require a provider to take action to remedy the breach.

The B conditions secure a high quality baseline of performance for all universities and colleges. This means that all students – whether they come from the UK or overseas – can expect a high quality course and successful outcomes. The OfS’s regulation of quality includes courses delivered to students based outside the UK.

The OfS’s regulation of its high quality baseline has the following features:

- Risk-based assessment to identify areas and universities where intervention might be appropriate.
- Independent academic experts conduct assessments of individual universities as appropriate.
- Assessment reports, and any regulatory action for a university, are normally published.
- Advice from the OfS’s Quality Assessment Committee with a majority of independent members with experience of providing higher education to students.

## **Enhancement above the high quality baseline**

The top box in Figure 1 shows the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). This is the mechanism the OfS uses to drive improvement, or enhancement, beyond the high quality baseline. Universities and colleges with more than 500 undergraduate students are required to participate in the TEF.

The TEF has the following features:

- A cyclical assessment process which takes place every four years.
- Universities and colleges make a submission, as do their students if they wish.
- Judgements are made by independent academic experts and students who are integrated as full members of the TEF panel.
- The OfS expects to publish, for each participating university or college, the panel’s judgement and reasoning.

## **The OfS quality team**

The OfS’s quality team has extensive academic expertise and experience of working in the higher education sector in England and beyond. For more information about the OfS’s approach to regulating quality for the universities and colleges on its Register, please contact [regulation@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:regulation@officeforstudents.org.uk).

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