

# Degree awarding powers assessment (DAPs) report for LTE Group

**New degree awarding powers assessment**

**Provider legal name:** LTE Group

**Provider trading name:** UCEN Manchester

**UKPRN:** 10023139

**Assessment conducted:** 24 June 2024 to 23 December 2024

**Reference** OfS 2025.11

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# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction and background</b>	<b>6</b>
Context	6
<b>Assessment process</b>	<b>9</b>
Information gathering	9
<b>Assessment of DAPs criterion A: Academic governance</b>	<b>10</b>
Criterion A1: Academic governance	10
Subcriterion A1.1	10
Subcriterion A1.2	20
Subcriterion A1.3	24
<b>Assessment of DAPs criterion B: Academic standards and quality assurance</b>	<b>28</b>
Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks	28
Subcriterion B1.1	28
Subcriterion B1.2	32
Criterion B2: Academic standards	36
Subcriterion B2.1	36
Subcriterion B2.2	40
Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience	44
Subcriterion B3.1	44
<b>Assessment of DAPs criterion C: Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff</b>	<b>57</b>
Criterion C1: The role of academic and professional staff	57
Subcriterion C1.1	57
Criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement	67
Subcriterion D1.1	67
<b>Assessment of DAPs criterion E: Evaluation of performance</b>	<b>76</b>
Criterion E1: Evaluation of performance	76
<b>Degree awarding powers overarching criterion</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Specified changes required to the New DAPs plan</b>	<b>83</b>
Criterion A1: Academic governance	83
Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks	83
Criterion B2: Academic standards and quality assurance	83
Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience	83
Criterion C1: The role of academic and professional staff	83
Criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement	83
Criterion E1: Evaluation of performance	84
<b>Annex A: Abbreviations</b>	<b>85</b>

# Executive summary

<b>Type of assessment:</b>	Quality and standards assessment for new degree awarding powers
<b>For:</b>	LTE Group

1. This report represents the conclusions of an assessment for degree awarding powers (DAPs) at LTE Group. LTE Group is seeking non subject-specific authorisation for New DAPs for taught awards up to and including Level 6.
2. To carry out the assessment, the Office for Students (OfS) appointed an assessment team, which included three academic experts and one member of OfS staff. This report contains the advice and judgement of the team following its assessment.
3. The team concluded that the group is ready to operate with New DAPs (see Table 1). The team also concluded that specified changes are required to the group's New DAPs plan, to ensure this will provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment (see Table 2). This report does not, however, represent any decision of the OfS to authorise these powers.

**Table 1: Summary of advice against the DAPs criteria**

Criteria	The provider has a credible New DAPs plan	The provider has demonstrated a full understanding of the DAPs criteria
Criterion A1: Academic governance	Not met	Met
Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks	Not met	Met
Criterion B2: Academic standards	Met	Met
Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience	Met	Met
Criterion C1: Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff	Met	Met
Criterion D1: Environment for supporting students	Met	Met
Criterion E1: Evaluation of performance	Met	Met
<b>The standards set for the proposed courses are at an appropriate level</b>		
Met		

Overarching New DAPs criterion	
The group is an emerging self-critical, cohesive academic community with a clear commitment to the assurance of standards supported by effective (in prospect) quality systems	Met

**Table 2: Summary of specified changes to its New DAPs plan identified to ensure this will provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment**

Criteria	Specified changes
Criterion A1: Academic governance	An update to the New DAPs plan to include milestones for the review of the terms of reference for the Academic Board and relevant sub-committees to include responsibilities for the awarding of credit and degrees.
Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks	An update to the New DAPs plan to include the timescale and process of forming an independent examination board.
Criterion B2: Academic standards	No specified changes identified
Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience	No specified changes identified
Criterion C1: Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff	No specified changes identified
Criterion D1: Environment for supporting students	No specified changes identified
Criterion E1: Evaluation of performance	No specified changes identified

### What are new degree awarding powers?

A provider that is registered with the Office for Students (OfS) and has been delivering higher education for less than three years does not have a sufficient track record to apply for a full degree awarding powers (Full DAPs) authorisation. It can instead apply for a new degree awarding powers (New DAPs) authorisation.<sup>1</sup>

A New DAPs authorisation is granted on a probationary basis and will normally be limited to four years. At the end of the four-year probationary period, the provider will normally be eligible to apply for time-limited Full DAPs.

<sup>1</sup> For a summary of different types of degree awarding powers, see [Degree awarding powers - Office for Students](#).

A provider may seek authorisation for New DAPs for the following awards:

- foundation degrees only
- awards up to, and including, bachelors' degrees
- all taught awards.

Providers may apply for these authorisations on a subject-specific basis or covering all subjects. When choosing to apply for a New DAPs authorisation, the provider must meet the criteria set out in paragraph 221 of the OfS regulatory framework for higher education in England (the OfS's regulatory framework).<sup>2</sup>

### **Assessment and decision-making process**

Before making a decision about whether to award a New DAPs authorisation, the OfS will undertake a New DAPs test. The purpose of a New DAPs test is to gather evidence to inform a judgement on the extent to which a provider:

- has a credible New DAPs plan which demonstrates how it will be able to meet the DAPs criteria, including the overarching criterion for New DAPs, by the end of the probationary period
- demonstrates a full understanding of the DAPs criteria
- has or will set academic standards for the proposed courses at an appropriate level / has arrangements that can take effect from the date of the New DAPs authorisation, to make awards at the level for which it has applied.

A provider that is granted New DAPs will be required to implement its agreed New DAPs plan and to engage in monitoring and scrutiny activities during the probationary period.

The criteria for authorisation for DAPs are designed to ensure that a provider with DAPs demonstrates a firm guardianship of academic standards, a firm and systematic approach to the assurance of the quality of the higher education that it provides, and the capacity to contribute to the continued good standing of higher education in England. The DAPs criteria are the reference point for the DAPs assessment process and assessment teams will assess a provider against these criteria. The detailed requirements of the DAPs criteria are set out in Annex C of the OfS's regulatory framework.<sup>3</sup>

OfS officers first undertake an eligibility and suitability assessment of the provider. This initial assessment determines whether the provider is eligible and suitable for the New DAPs test, including the scope of the assessment.

DAPs assessments are conducted by teams with membership which includes academic experts that the OfS has appointed. The outcome of the assessment is typically a report, compiled by the assessment team, summarising its findings.

The report is then considered by the OfS's Quality Assessment Committee (QAC). QAC has responsibility for providing advice to the OfS under section 46 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) on the quality of and standards applied to the higher education

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<sup>2</sup> See Regulatory framework for higher education in England - Office for Students.

<sup>3</sup> See the OfS's regulatory framework: Annex C – Guidance on the criteria for the authorisation for DAPs - Office for Students.

being delivered by providers for which the OfS is considering granting, varying (or in certain circumstances revoking) authorisation for DAPs.<sup>4</sup> After considering the assessment report, QAC provides advice to the OfS regarding quality and standards.

In making its decision about whether to authorise DAPs on the basis sought by the provider, the OfS will have regard to the assessment report and QAC's advice. The OfS will also consider its own risk assessment of the provider and will have regard to advice received from others where this has been sought. It will also take into account other relevant considerations, such as the OfS's general duties under section 2 of HERA.<sup>5</sup>

### **Further information**

We have published further information about authorising New DAPs in Regulatory advice 12.<sup>6</sup>

4. LTE (Learning, Training and Employment) Group ('the group') is an integrated education and skills group created in 2017 and registered with the OfS in 2019. LTE Group consists of several operating divisions: The Manchester College, MOL, Novus, Total People and UCEN Manchester, the group's higher education provider.
5. In accordance with the OfS's regulatory framework and the guidance on how to apply for DAPs,<sup>7</sup> the group is eligible to be considered for New DAPs for all taught awards (up to and including Level 6) because it meets the eligibility criteria set out in paragraph 221 of the OfS's regulatory framework.
6. The OfS appointed an assessment team on 23 May 2024 to undertake a New DAPs test, including a desk-based assessment of the group's New DAPs plan and supporting evidence, followed by a visit to the group. The team was asked to give its advice and judgements about the quality of, and standards applied to, proposed higher education courses at the group and whether the group has a credible New DAPs plan which demonstrates a full understanding of the DAPs criteria, including the overarching criteria for a New DAPs authorisation.
7. This report will be considered by the OfS's Quality Assessment Committee (QAC) at its meeting of 22 January 2025. QAC will formulate its advice to the OfS regarding quality and standards at LTE Group, having considered this report.
8. This report does not represent any decision of the OfS in respect of whether the New DAPs order the group is seeking should be granted.
9. The OfS will consider the assessment report, and QAC's advice in deciding whether to grant the group's New DAPs order on the basis requested. The OfS will also consider its own risk assessment for the group and have regard to the advice received from others where this has been sought, as well as other relevant considerations such as the OfS's general duties under section 2 of HERA.

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<sup>4</sup> See [Higher Education and Research Act 2017, section 46](#).

<sup>5</sup> See [Higher Education and Research Act 2017, section 2](#).

<sup>6</sup> See [Regulatory advice 12: How to apply for degree awarding powers - Office for Students](#).

# Introduction and background

10. This report represents the conclusions of an assessment for DAPs at LTE Group.
11. The group is seeking authorisation for New DAPs for taught awards up to and including Level 6. This assessment is referred to as the 'New DAPs test'.
12. The OfS's Quality Assessment Committee will consider the report and formulate its advice to the OfS regarding the quality and standards at the group.
13. The OfS will consider this assessment report, and QAC's advice in deciding whether to grant the group's New DAPs authorisation on the basis requested. The OfS will also consider its own risk assessment of the group and will have regard to advice received from others where this has been sought. It will also take into account other relevant considerations, such as the OfS's general duties under section 2 of HERA.

## Context

14. LTE Group ('the group'), originally called The Manchester College, was created in 2017 as a result of a merger between existing further education colleges.
15. The group is an education and skills group and registered with the OfS in 2019. The group comprises five business units:
  - UCEN Manchester, higher education provider
  - The Manchester College, further education provider
  - MOL, professional corporate development provider
  - Novus, education, training and employability within the justice sector
  - Total People, apprenticeship and work-based learning provider.
16. On 27 April 2017, it was decided to create a separate identity for higher education provision within The Manchester College, using the title UCEN Manchester.
17. UCEN Manchester was launched in January 2018 and all higher education provision was moved from further education departments elsewhere in the LTE Group to UCEN Manchester, creating higher education-specific faculties and schools.
18. The UCEN Manchester Divisional Board is separate to The Manchester College and reports directly to the LTE Group Board.
19. The group offers a range of undergraduate degree courses in theatre, creative arts and digital media; make-up artistry and special effects; film, business and management; criminology and social justice; computing; construction; sport and exercise science; health and wellbeing; counselling and teaching. These are delivered through UCEN Manchester, the higher education entity of the group.

20. LTE Group is currently delivering higher education provision through its validating partners, Sheffield Hallam University, and Manchester Metropolitan University. It also delivers higher education programmes through awarding body, Pearson.
21. The group delivers its higher education provision at its City and Openshaw campuses. City campus hosts arts, media and make-up, Manchester Film School, the Arden School of Theatre, business, computing and cybersecurity. Openshaw campus hosts construction and engineering, criminology, sport, health and wellbeing and access to higher education.
22. LTE Group's mission is to 'deliver first-class technical and professional higher level skills to meet the priorities of the Greater Manchester region and beyond'.
23. Based on the information from the group, UCEN Manchester has a student population of 1,111 students. This includes:
  - 645 BA/BSc (Hons) students, of whom 135 are on top-up programmes
  - 286 foundation degree students
  - 134 Higher National Diploma (HND) and Higher National Certificate (HNC) students
  - 40 Certificate in Education (Cert Ed) and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students
  - six masters' students.
24. According to information supplied to the OfS by the provider, the group currently employs 165 staff to deliver its higher education programmes. This includes 132 teaching staff, of whom 18 are freelance and 18 are sessional. The group employs 33 professional staff at UCEN Manchester to support its higher education provision.
25. On 10 February 2023, the group submitted an application for New DAPs at bachelors' level, up to and including Level 6, using the application method specified in regulatory advice 12.
26. In accordance with the OfS regulatory framework and the OfS's guidance on how to apply for DAPs, the OfS undertook an initial eligibility and suitability assessment of the provider. It decided that a New DAPs test should be undertaken in order to gather and test evidence to inform a judgement about whether the group has:
  - a credible New DAPs plan
  - demonstrated a full understanding of the DAPs criteria
  - set standards for the proposed courses at an appropriate level.
27. The OfS appointed an assessment team on 23 May 2024 that consisted of three academic expert assessors and a member of OfS staff in the following roles:
  - Francine Norris – committee chair and lead assessor
  - Dr Mark Readman – deputy committee chair and assessor



- Professor Joel Mills – deputy committee chair and assessor
- Katherine Davis – committee member and assessment coordinator.

28. The team was asked to give its advice and judgements about the quality of, and standards applied to, proposed higher education courses at the group and whether the group has a credible New DAPs plan which demonstrates a full understanding of the DAPs criteria, including the overarching criteria for a New DAPs authorisation.
29. The assessment team considered a range of information submitted by the group in support of its application for New DAPs authorisation.

# Assessment process

## Information gathering

30. In accordance with the operational guidance on assessment for degree awarding powers, LTE Group submitted a detailed New DAPs plan and supporting evidence on 14 June 2024, setting out how it will meet the DAPs criteria in full, by the end of the probationary period, and its arrangements to make awards at the level for which it has applied from the intended start date of the probationary powers.
31. To support the statements made in the New DAPs plan and self-assessment document, the group submitted a range of documentary evidence. This included programme documentation and information relating to academic policies, procedures, governance structures and CVs for academic and senior staff.
32. Following its initial analysis of LTE Group's New DAPs plan and evidence submission, the assessment team requested further information from the group. The group submitted a response to this request on 3 September 2024.
33. The assessment team also agreed the programme of activities for the New DAPs test visit (see paragraphs 37-41 for full details). The OfS assessment coordinator shared the proposed visit programme with the group on 6 September 2024.
34. Following the on-site visit, the team requested further evidence from LTE Group. The group submitted a response to this request on 18 October 2024. The team was also granted access to areas of UCEN Manchester's virtual learning environment (VLE).
35. The assessment team reviewed the additional evidence submitted by the group and sought further clarification on one area. The group submitted a response to this on 23 October 2024.
36. The assessment team requested further evidence from the group, which was submitted on 21 November 2024.

## Visit and observations

37. The assessment team conducted a two day on-site visit to UCEN Manchester, LTE Group's designated higher education entity.
38. The team visited both UCEN Manchester campuses, Openshaw and City, on 9 and 10 October 2024.
39. Prior to the on-site visit to UCEN Manchester, the assessment team observed the UCEN Manchester Teaching, Learning and Enhancement Committee on 27 September.
40. The visit consisted of meetings with senior staff, academic and support staff, students and tours of both campuses.
41. Following the visit, the assessment team observed the following meetings:
  - UCEN Manchester Quality and Standards Committee on 11 October 2024
  - UCEN Manchester Academic Board on 31 October 2024.

# Assessment of DAPs criterion A: Academic governance

## Criterion A1: Academic governance

### Advice to the OfS

42. The assessment team's view is that LTE Group's New DAPs plan is mostly credible in relation to criterion A1: Academic governance. However, the assessment team has identified specified changes the group will need to make to its New DAPs plan for effective monitoring in its probationary period.
43. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion A1.
44. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows in summary that the group is developing an effective academic governance, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities. It has designed a comprehensive range of processes to ensure that oversight of its higher education provision is conducted in partnership with its students. The group is also developing robust mechanisms to ensure the effective oversight of its work with other organisations to deliver learning opportunities.
45. This view is based on specific consideration of the New DAPs plan and supporting evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

### Subcriterion A1.1

**A1.1: An organisation granted degree awarding powers has effective academic governance, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities.**

### Advice to the OfS

46. The assessment team's view is that the group's New DAPs plan is mostly credible in relation to criterion A1.1 because it has in place well established academic governance and management arrangements with clear and appropriate lines of accountability. The group has identified appropriate actions and processes for the monitoring and review of its existing arrangements to ensure that they continue to develop effectively during the probationary period. However, the team identified that a specific milestone should be added to the New DAPs plan to set out the new responsibilities for awarding credit and degrees to relevant policies and committee terms of reference and how these will be monitored.
47. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion A1.1 because it is developing effective academic governance, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities.

48. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the group's New DAPs plan and evidence which shows that the group can be reasonably expected to meet the evidence requirements for A1.1 in full by the end of the probationary period.

## Reasoning

49. LTE Group ('the group') was created in 2017 as a result of a merger between existing further education providers and is now an education and skills group comprising of five separate business units, one of which is UCEN Manchester, its higher education provider. The group has an overall governing body, the LTE Group Board of Governors and each business unit has its own 'Divisional Board' which reports into this. To assess whether the group's higher education mission and strategic direction and associated policies are coherent, published, understood and applied consistently, the assessment team examined the group's academic governance arrangements and reviewed a range of documentary evidence. This included:
- the group's Constitution which contains the Articles of Association and Scheme of Delegation
  - Board minutes for the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board
  - Governance Review
  - Governor Training Plan and records
  - a brief for an External Board Review for the LTE Group Board of Governors.
50. In summary, these show that the overall governing body, the LTE Group Board of Governors, is responsible for the determination and periodic review of the educational character and mission of the institution and the oversight of its activities. Specific responsibility for the implementation of the higher education strategy is delegated to the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board, which is responsible for monitoring performance, approving higher education policies and ensuring that the group is ready to assume the responsibilities of degree awarding powers.
51. The group's mission is 'to improve lives and economic success through learning and skills.' The assessment team found that UCEN Manchester's mission reflects this through its focus on vocational programmes, developed with reference to local employment needs. The UCEN Manchester 2027 strategy describes the intent for UCEN Manchester's curriculum offer to be employer focused and local, directed at specific sectors and focused on graduate destinations. The assessment team found that the curriculum portfolio is informed by local industry and employers and is aligned to the Greater Manchester local skills improvement plan which centres on the creative, culture and sports industries that make up a large part of the Greater Manchester economy. During the on-site visit to UCEN Manchester's Openshaw and City campuses, the assessment team heard evidence of this in practice from academic staff who shared examples of local industry alignment in relation to curriculum development in health, social care and criminology. The team also heard about new programmes in athletes' wellbeing which are being designed in direct response to emerging specialisms in professional sport. The UCEN Manchester 2027 strategy additionally sets out a series of enabling actions that are intended to support the implementation of the strategy. These include achieving degree awarding powers alongside maintaining validating partnerships with

current university partners where there is an advantage to do so. These actions will then develop the portfolio which will include business-to-business upskilling and training, increasing internal progression and implementing a one-stop-shop approach to student support, specifically aimed at the group's diverse learners.

52. The assessment team found that, to ensure alignment of both strategy and implementation, there is common membership between the Boards. At least two members of the LTE Board are members of the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board, one of whom takes the role of Chair of the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board. The current membership of the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board includes external members with extensive higher education experience alongside senior managers from LTE Group, including the principal, staff and student representatives.
53. The team reviewed minutes of both the LTE Group Board of Governors and the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board which showed the relationship between the two boards in practice. For example, the LTE Group Board of Governors has responsibility for strategy planning for the group, which is then disseminated to the group's various business units, including UCEN Manchester. This was demonstrated, at a briefing with the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board in November 2021. The Deputy CEO of the LTE Group outlined the process whereby the group's strategy would be re-tested for suitability against a new timeline and UCEN Manchester Divisional Board members had the opportunity to input into the discussion. An example of the areas discussed were changes in the demand for higher education following the Covid pandemic. The team found evidence of how this discussion directly influenced a change in UCEN Manchester's strategy regarding internal progression and the development of new curriculum areas focused on employment and employer-led learning such as cyber security. The assessment team concluded that this provides evidence that the group's higher education strategy is coherent and consistent with the overall strategic direction of the group.
54. The specific objective to achieve degree awarding powers and the range of subjects and levels to be offered was approved by the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board in March 2021. The responsibility for implementing this was delegated to the UCEN Manchester Academic Board, as the senior academic authority for higher education reporting directly to UCEN Manchester's Divisional Board. The Academic Board's proposed curriculum strategy was scrutinised by Divisional Board members, who gave feedback in relation to the inclusion of higher technical qualifications and market visibility to inform the strategy and portfolio review in September 2021. Both the proposal and minutes of meetings where this was discussed demonstrated to the assessment team that the higher education mission is consistent with the group's strategic direction, and understood at all levels of the governance structure. For example, Divisional Board members discussed the need to balance growth in student numbers with supporting access, in debates about programme length and structure, providing evidence that the challenge of delivering the educational mission is understood by the Board. The strategy has been widely disseminated: all UCEN Manchester staff were introduced to it as part of annual professional development events, to embed a sense of ownership and shared commitment to deliver the objectives. The strategy is also published on the group's website where it is accessible to staff, students and external stakeholders. This evidences the group's approach to ensuring that its mission and strategic direction are coherent, published, understood and applied consistently.

55. Both the group and UCEN Manchester Divisional Board requested a mid-point review of the UCEN Manchester strategy in 2024, intended to provide assurance that the 'UCEN Manchester brand and curriculum portfolio remain relevant and appropriate.' The assessment team found this to be evidence of alignment between the work of the two Boards, as well as of their oversight of the higher education mission and strategic direction. Following the mid-point review, an interim report was presented to the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board in March 2024. This report stated that the improvements in recruitment set out in the strategy were not being achieved to date and indicated that a curriculum portfolio review may be necessary in light of the changing higher education landscape.
56. The team reviewed minutes of the discussion which showed that the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board is fulfilling its oversight role effectively by providing robust scrutiny of the strategy and is critically reflective in its approach. In meeting with senior staff, the team found that there is a shared understanding of the group's strategic direction and its strong and responsive relationship to local needs, and that this is actively informing its portfolio and curriculum development. For example, the team found evidence of detailed consideration by the Board, senior managers and curriculum staff of the drivers behind new course developments in the sports area, related to athlete wellbeing, providing internal progression opportunities for further education students aligned to emerging employment opportunities.
57. The assessment team concluded, therefore, that the evidence demonstrates that the group's higher education mission and strategic direction are currently coherent, published, understood and, through its developing academic policy framework, will be applied consistently if it awards its own degrees.
58. To consider whether the group's academic policies support its higher education mission, aims and objectives, the assessment team reviewed the group's existing higher education policies. The team found that the group currently operates in accordance with the regulatory frameworks of its validating partners and it operates some of its own policies which reflect the group's role in delivering programmes in partnership with validating universities. These are focused on the group's existing areas of responsibility, within these current arrangements, specifically in relation to student experience and support. The team found that the group is developing a new regulatory framework in preparation for awarding its own degrees, the approval of which is specified in the New DAPs plan for completion in autumn 2024. The group's new framework is set out in its drafted Higher Education Academic Regulations document, which the team reviewed and found to be a sound basis for the group's procedures and regulations as it includes its admissions policy, accreditation policy and assessment policy.
59. The assessment team found that the group has three overarching academic strategies that provide a framework for its responsibilities to students:
- the Teaching and Learning Strategy
  - the Student Engagement Strategy and
  - the Student Support Strategy.
60. The three strategies are aligned with and supported by a range of established policies, including:

- Admissions Policy and Procedure
- Recognition of Prior Learning Policy
- HE Fees Policy
- Student Bursary Policy
- Assessment and Moderation Policy
- Academic Appeals Policy
- Academic Integrity Policy
- Continuing Studies Policy
- Research Ethics Policy
- Sexual Harassment and Misconduct Policy
- Complaints and Compliments Policy
- Student Status Policy.

61. The Complaints and Compliments Policy is shared with The Manchester College, a further education provider which is another of the business units within the LTE Group. The remaining policies, which are currently in use, are specific UCEN Manchester policies relating to the group's higher education provision. Some existing policies necessarily take account of the requirements and responsibilities of the range of validating partners, as well as the group's own internal processes and procedures and so do not yet reflect the changes in scope and responsibility that will be required if the group begins to award its own degrees. For example, the Complaints and Compliments Policy contains reference and links to the complaints procedures of all validating universities and explains when these can be accessed by students.
62. The assessment team found that the policies and procedures that have been put in place by the group to date support the group's higher education mission, aims and objectives. For example, the team observed that the HE Fees Policy and Student Bursary Policy have been designed to support widening participation and the development of higher-level skills, recognising that many students come from the most socioeconomically deprived wards in the region. The assessment team considered that this linked to the strategic ambition to make programmes leading to vocational outcomes accessible across the provision.
63. A Break in Study Policy approved by Academic Board in February 2022 was designed to support students to complete their courses in the face of difficult personal circumstances and was developed through a ground-up process of consultation and input from sub-committees prior to recommendation to the Board. This process promoted awareness and understanding at different levels. Evidence from Academic Board meeting minutes seen by the team confirm that the consistent application of new policies is discussed, applied and understood. For example, in the case of the Break in Study policy, the scope of the policy is to apply to Pearson Higher National Diplomas with the exception of counselling, and all UCEN Manchester courses if it commences awarding its own degrees. This was agreed by the Board.

64. The assessment team learned that all new policies have to be approved by the Academic Board. When presented to Board, a policy must include a statement on the cover sheet specifically setting out how it aligns with and makes contribution to the delivery of the group's strategy. At a meeting of the Quality and Standards Committee on 11 October 2024, the assessment team heard a proposal to implement a 'Policy on Policies' to manage the process for policy approval going forward to ensure that it is timely and robust. This supported the assessment team in reaching the conclusion that the group has in place processes to ensure that, as it develops further policies and frameworks, they will be consistently applied, published and understood in order to support effective academic governance at all levels.
65. In readiness for the group seeking New DAPs, the Director of Academic Standards is leading the development of a new regulatory framework for higher education for approval in autumn 2024 by the Academic Board. The process of development has involved selecting best practice from the regulatory frameworks of the group's current validating partners to create a framework that meets the requirements of the curriculum and, in accordance with the strategy, best supports students. At the meeting of the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) on 11 October 2024, the assessment team saw how the developing regulatory framework was subject to consultation and debate, ensuring that it reflects requirements across the range of subject areas. Specifically, the application of mid-level recognition of prior learning (RPL), compensation in relation to instances of physical injury, and the calculation of final awards were discussed in detail prior to an agreement to recommend approval to the Academic Board. The team concluded, therefore, that the development of the regulatory framework and new policies to date, along with the actions set out in the New DAPs plan for the probationary period (including the implementation of equality impact assessments on all policies), provide evidence that the group is working towards ensuring its academic policies effectively support its higher education mission, aims and objectives.
66. The assessment team reviewed evidence to understand whether there is clarity and differentiation of function and responsibility at all levels in the organisation in relation to its academic governance structures and arrangements for managing its higher education provision. The group has established a deliberative committee structure for UCEN Manchester: the Academic Board is the senior academic committee, which reports into the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board. The Academic Board has a single sub-committee, the QSC. The QSC has two sub-committees: the Teaching, Learning and Enhancement Committee (TLEC) and the Curriculum Management Panel (CMP). Each of these committees has clearly defined areas of responsibility for academic provision. Programme Committees also report into the QSC. The assessment team agreed that this committee structure provides clarity and differentiation of function between responsibilities for quality and standards, curriculum management, and teaching and learning.
67. The team found that the committee structure was reviewed and simplified for academic year 2023-24. The changes were informed by an effectiveness review, which looked at the operation of committees and cross-referenced the terms of reference and membership. The intention was to provide greater clarity of purpose and differentiation of function. This new structure has enabled pedagogic discussions at TLEC to inform QSC's policy development work; this was demonstrated, for example, through the addition of inclusivity checks for assessment briefs in the revised Assessment and Moderation Policy. The new structure has been monitored during the year 2023-24 and some further changes made to reporting lines of the TLEC as a result. The assessment team agreed that these changes were effective in



providing greater clarity of purpose and minimising repetition. The terms of reference for the Academic Board have been reviewed with reference to the Advance HE Academic Governance Effectiveness Framework and the membership extended to include representation by academic staff from all schools. The New DAPs plan includes an annual review of the effectiveness of the committee structure in providing effective academic governance. This, along with the changes made in the last year to the governance structure and committees, provided assurance to the assessment team that the group has given consideration to the clarity and differentiation of function and responsibility in the organisation in relation to its academic governance structures.

68. Furthermore, to ensure the separation of effective operational management of the higher education provision, leadership team meetings are held fortnightly, ensuring clarity and differentiation from academic governance structures. The membership includes the Vice Dean for Higher Education, the three curriculum directors, the Director of Student Engagement and Experience and the Director of Academic Standards. During the visit, the assessment team heard how the group supports internal communication and parity through cross-membership between teams, committees and boards. For example, the assessment team heard how senior managers sit on quality panels for other business units within the group to provide challenge and to enable the sharing of good practice. Meetings observe the relevant terms of reference, have structured agendas and provide opportunity for critical engagement and discussion, alongside robust scrutiny of data. For example, in the TLEC meeting on 27 September 2024, the assessment team heard staff discuss student experiences of assessment to inform future practice, evidencing this approach in practice.
69. The assessment team found that students are included in the membership of all committees and boards, either by cohort student representatives or the students' union executive officers. A review of the role of student representatives is specified in the New DAPs plan for the end of the first year of probationary monitoring. There has also been increased numbers of student representatives so that the Board is better able to provide oversight of, and develop the educational character of, UCEN Manchester. This led the assessment team to conclude that the group operates its academic governance committees and management structures in an open and critically reflective way, intended to encourage appropriate and informed input from all levels in the organisation. Through observing meetings of the QSC and TLEC, the assessment team reached the view that the committee structure works effectively. The evidence reviewed of the group's academic governance structures in place demonstrate to the team that there is currently clarity and differentiation of function and responsibility at all levels in relation to its academic governance and management of its higher education provision. The team is assured this will continue if the group is awarded New DAPs.
70. The team considered evidence to confirm if the function and responsibility of the group's senior academic authority is clearly articulated and consistently applied. The team found that the Academic Board is the senior academic authority and has delegated responsibility from the Divisional Board to approve academic regulations and associated policies, to give final approval of course validation and to oversee quality and standards. For example, at the Academic Board meetings during 2022-23, policies for safeguarding (November 2022), and student status (July 2023) were approved; in 2023-24, policies for academic appeals and academic integrity were approved, alongside the routine approval of progress on actions in the annual Quality Enhancement Plan. The Academic Board has not yet exercised its responsibilities with regard to approving new courses. The team found evidence of the

Academic Board planning and overseeing curriculum development. Examples are: the proposed development of seven new degree courses to be implemented if the group is successful in achieving New DAPs; the consistent monitoring of academic standards through oversight of student attainment and external examiner reports. These demonstrate how the function and responsibility of the Academic Board is clearly articulated and applied.

71. The assessment team noted that the terms of reference for the Academic Board were updated in June 2024. The team found that the terms of reference were clear and appropriate for its current responsibilities, setting out the Board's primary functions as follows:
- determination of academic strategy and planning
  - approval of the HE Regulatory Framework and constituent parts
  - approval of documents prepared for institutional reviews
  - approval of substantial revisions to any of the above
  - approval of changes to terms of reference and composition of the Board's committees and panels.
72. However, the team found that the revised terms of reference did not yet fully reflect the full range of responsibilities that will be required if the group begins to validate and award its own degrees, specifically the confirmation of awards. The team recommended that the group address this and amend the terms of reference to reflect these additional responsibilities and the timeline for this revision should be specified within the New DAPs plan. Through consideration of this evidence – including the updated terms of reference, minutes and associated papers and observation of meetings – the assessment team concluded that the function and responsibility of the senior academic authority is consistently applied in practice in relation to the group's current responsibilities. However, to evidence the extended responsibilities of the Academic Board in respect of degree awarding powers, revised terms of reference, and further documentary evidence showing these responsibilities in practice, will need to be provided during the probationary period.
73. To confirm whether the group has in place an appropriate depth and strength of academic leadership, the assessment team reviewed the group's updated organisational structure, together with published profiles of members of the governing body, job descriptions and CVs of the senior managers and academic staff. Board members have extensive professional experience in the education sector including within degree awarding institutions. The Dean of Higher Education for UCEN Manchester is the deputy principal for the whole of The Manchester College, reporting to the overall Principal who is also a member of the Divisional Board. The Dean is supported by a Vice Dean of Higher Education and five directors, one for each subject area, academic standards and student experience. There are also heads of department for academic services and student advice. In the view of the team, the Dean, Vice Dean and directors are appropriately qualified to lead the academic direction of UCEN Manchester because of their experience in education management, understanding of higher education and their subject-specific sector knowledge. CVs seen by the team confirm that UCEN Manchester's leadership have extensive experience of working in senior roles in higher education in further education environments. They hold appropriate academic and teaching qualifications and have undertaken roles as governors and trustees in relevant

organisations. This led the team to conclude that, in addition to their professional expertise, senior managers have a working knowledge of academic governance in higher education.

74. A new role of programme leader has been developed to devolve management responsibility through the organisation and support growth. According to CVs seen by the team, programme leaders appointed to date are appropriately qualified in terms of subject expertise and academic level and are active in terms of professional practice in their specialist areas. According to the group's New DAPs plan, a review of the current staffing structure is scheduled for year 2, quarter 4, of the probationary period, which will consider if further structural change is necessary. During the visit to the group, in its meeting with senior staff and academic teaching staff, the team found that staff at all levels were supported to develop and maintain their management, teaching and professional skills. One example of this was the development of a Leadership of Learning programme intended to support middle managers to develop as academic leaders and deliver curriculum innovation. The team formed the view that the evidence reviewed demonstrated that the group has in place appropriate strength and depth of academic leadership to support its academic functions and has also considered how to embed academic leadership throughout its staffing structure to support future development.
75. To understand whether the group develops, implements and communicates its policies and procedures in collaboration with its staff and students and external stakeholders, the assessment team reviewed evidence from meeting minutes and development events. These confirmed that policies are developed in consultation with staff and students through the formal committee structure and consistently disseminated through publication on the intranet. For example, the group's strategy was developed through a two-stage process of consultation including staff involvement. An iterative process of working groups focused on different themes, resulting in reports that informed a draft strategy. This was subject to further input and scrutiny involving deliberative committees and the Divisional Board. The strategy has clear objectives and sets out appropriate enabling actions in order to support their achievement; for example, the implementation of a staff development strategy to underpin the development of a higher education ethos. In May 2024, the Higher Education Assessment and Moderation Policy and Procedure was approved by the Academic Board following a similar iterative process of input from staff which informed, for example, guidelines for the timing of assessments in order to avoid the bunching of deadlines.
76. Policies are disseminated through weekly team meetings and allocated continued professional development (CPD) days held throughout the year, which provide opportunities for all staff to come together and receive updates on policies and procedures to support their consistent application. The consistency of application is monitored through regular management meetings, staff appraisals, programme committees, and student voice feedback. Leadership and Management Days and all-staff briefings also provide an opportunity to outline the high-level strategic intent and developments behind this. Students are made aware of relevant policies through induction, via student and programme handbooks, and through the Future U team and all policies are published on the group's intranet and website. The UCEN Manchester website clearly differentiates between the group's policies and those of the validating universities, with links being provided to the relevant regulatory frameworks and policies for each partner. Examples of the group's specific policies including assessment and admission currently in operation show that where

the group has its own procedures and that those of the validating partner are also signposted within the policy document.

77. During the on-site visit to the provider, and through meeting observations, the assessment team heard how staff were engaged in the development of policy and regulation. Staff were also able to input their own expertise to inform them along with industry and sector perspectives from external stakeholders, ensuring the suitability of policies in supporting the specific needs of the student cohort and subject specialisms. Further, in addition to the examples of student consultation set out below in criterion A1.2, the assessment team heard during its observation of the Academic Board meeting on 31 October 2024 that, to date, there had been two rounds of student consultation on the developing regulatory framework. The New DAPs plan identifies a milestone for year one, quarter four, whereby the methods and processes around stakeholder consultation to inform the development of effective policies is reviewed. The assessment team concluded, therefore, that the group currently has mechanisms for how it develops, implements and communicates its policies and procedures in collaboration with its staff and students and external stakeholders. The team is satisfied that these mechanisms will continue to be effective if the group is awarded degree awarding powers.
78. The team considered that the academic governance and management structures in place, and planned for development during the probationary period, provide credible assurance that the group will successfully manage the responsibilities vested in it were it to be granted degree awarding powers. The group is confident in its ability to manage its degree awarding responsibilities as it has an established track record of working in partnership to deliver and manage degrees over the last eight years, and expects to demonstrate this further through the probationary period.
79. The group's track record includes experience of managing change while protecting student interests, for example when changing validating partners. The assessment team found that the group has been delivering higher education courses since before the 2017 merger of further education colleges that brought about its creation and that it developed and maintained validating relationships with a number of partners, most recently Sheffield Hallam University, Manchester Metropolitan University and, up to 2024, the University of Huddersfield. At the Curriculum Management Panel (CMP) meeting in August 2023, it was proposed that validation for the teacher education programme move from the University of Huddersfield to Sheffield Hallam University to enable blended rather than solely face-to-face delivery modes. This change was then agreed by the Academic Board and the teacher education programme was delivered using teach-out arrangements until 2024. CMP minutes reviewed by the team show the process by which this change was made and documents that enabled the CMP and Academic Board's decision. It is the team's view that this constitutes evidence that the group will manage its responsibilities that would be invested in it if it awards its own degrees, as it already manages its responsibilities in awarding degrees through its validators.
80. In a meeting with senior staff, the assessment team heard that there are robust arrangements for providing and managing data and quality assurance across the group, providing a high level of objectivity and critical oversight. The team heard examples of how this operates to provide both challenge and, where required actions were identified, support for the group's staff. The assessment team reached the view that this mature and reflective approach

provides evidence of the group's ability in prospect to successfully manage its degree awarding responsibilities.

81. The group is also building governance and management capacity through expanding its team of higher education experienced staff and focusing on supporting and developing existing staff. This includes, for example, appointing new Divisional Board members and the appointment of the Director of Academic Standards. Other recent new appointments within the central Group Quality Team are: an Advanced Practitioner Quality Improvement whose role is to promote good practice in pedagogy and scholarly activity across the higher education curriculum teams; and an Advanced Practitioner Tutorial and Academic Support whose role is to work with teams to identify students at risk and offer appropriate interventions. An additional Academic Services Officer has also been recently appointed to oversee the operational management of the validation process and committee structure. The Student Experience and Engagement Department has been repositioned to provide a central student support service called Future U, intended to operate as one-stop-shop for student support. The New DAPs plan sets out that the effectiveness of roles in these areas will be reviewed in year one, quarter four of the probationary period. The assessment team formed the view that the group is actively identifying opportunities to strengthen its academic management and governance capacity across the governing body, academic and support functions. This led the assessment team to conclude that the group is developing its academic governance structures to successfully manage the responsibilities that would be vested in it were it to be granted degree awarding powers.
82. In conclusion, the assessment team reached the view that the group mostly meets criterion A1.1 as the evidence demonstrates that it has put in place structures to support effective governance with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities. The New DAPs plan sets out how the effectiveness of these arrangements will be monitored and reviewed during the probationary period. The New DAPs plan should be expanded, however, to include timelines for specific updates to Committee terms of reference, policies and the new Regulatory Framework to reflect the additional responsibilities that the group will need to put in place to award its own degrees.

## Subcriterion A1.2

**A1.2: Academic governance, including all aspects of the control and oversight of its higher education provision, is conducted in partnership with its students.**

### Advice to the OfS

83. The assessment team's view is that the group's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion A1.2 because it has in place mechanisms to enable its students to engage effectively, individually and collectively, with the management and governance of its higher education provision and it is planning further steps to increase participation in these during the probationary period.
84. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion A1.2 because it has designed a comprehensive range of processes to ensure that oversight of its higher education provision, is conducted in partnership with its students.

85. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the group's New DAPs plan and evidence which shows that it is likely to meet the evidence requirements for A1.2 by the end of the probationary period.

## Reasoning

86. The team found that the group has in place a specific higher education Student Engagement Strategy for students, which sets out ten objectives, aligned with the OfS Student Engagement Strategy 2023, and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Quality Code. The objectives are intended to enable 'students to go beyond just involvement and consultation and reach towards students being producers and change-agents'. The objectives include:
- Ensuring all students have the opportunity to engage in their own academic and personal learning and are viewed as valued and equal partners in our operational processes and approaches.
  - Encouraging and enabling students to take ownership and responsibility of their independent learning and enhanced academic development.
  - Providing structures that allow students to engage with and shape the direction of their learning, creating a culture where students feel they are making a valued contribution to planning and developments.
  - Reviewing student engagement and the impact of student voice on both a termly and annual basis.
  - Using dedicated systems and formal structures that allow student representatives to be trained appropriately and work in continuous partnership with the group, to enhance the student experience for quality and governance purposes on a wider and future vision scale.
87. The Student Engagement Strategy is updated every two years and is currently being reviewed through a process of consultation with students. The implementation and impact of the strategy is monitored by a Student Experience and Support Panel, which reports into the QSC. The panel uses key performance indicators (KPIs) and evidence from internal quality reviews. For example, at the meeting of the committee in January 2024, the KPIs indicated differing levels of engagement from students from the two UCEN Manchester faculties (Higher Technical and Professional Industries; and Creative Arts and Media Industries). The committee discussed this issue and agreed actions to address it: the committee agreed to include a student voice standing item onto its agenda; and to update the proforma for module review to improve participation. The strategy and associated monitoring reports provide evidence to the team that the group is working towards the key milestones in its New DAPs plan as outlined in relation to criterion A1.2.
88. The team considered the group's academic governance structures and found evidence that students are engaged at all levels, either through the student representative system or the student union executive officers. There are up to two student members on the overall LTE Group Board and the institution's approach to student engagement is set out in the Constitution, Articles of Governance and Scheme of Delegation. Responsibility for

engagement with specific student representative bodies is delegated to the relevant Divisional Board. The terms of reference for the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board confirm the board's responsibility for learner voice and engaging with the UCEN Manchester student union. A student union governor is appointed to the Divisional Board and Academic Board, with representation further expanded to include a student from each faculty. There is also student representation on the QSC and the TLEC which is set out in the terms of reference. The team reviewed:

- minutes of the LTE Group Board
- minutes of the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board
- minutes of the UCEN Manchester Academic Board
- minutes and papers of the QSC
- minutes and papers of the TLEC.

89. The team observed that the student union representatives were active participants in meetings; for example, the student union president co-presented proposals to the Divisional Board concerning the group's response to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on students. Similarly, there are examples of representatives providing feedback to the Academic Board about the level of IT provision and training for student representatives.
90. The student union has been established since 2016 and is managed by several salaried roles including student union president. In addition to its focus on developing clubs and societies, the student union takes a lead role in student consultation groups, including the Access and Participation Working Group and the preparation of student submissions, such as for the recent Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) submission. The assessment team found that the student union is visible and accessible to students and has a prominent physical presence on both campuses to encourage engagement from all students. There is an established student representative system which is set out in a Student Representative Guide, published on the VLE, that details the mechanisms that the group has in place to engage with, collect and respond to student voice feedback. Student representative roles are advertised during induction and are elected if required. There is a comprehensive training package offered online and student representatives met by the assessment team confirmed that they had access to training.
91. At programme level, the team found that student representatives are engaged in the operational activities of the group through membership of programme committees and revised terms of reference and agendas. There are three programme committee meetings a year, each with an agenda specifically aligned to the stage of the academic year. In addition to covering academic quality and standards issues, programme committee meetings are focused on receiving and responding to student feedback and are not quorate without the attendance of students.
92. In addition to representation on formal academic governance and management committees, cohort representatives also attend student representative forums whose remit is to discuss the wider student experience. Discussions and feedback given at the representatives' forums are collated in a central quality rolling log, along with feedback from schemes and reviews

(see criterion E, paragraph 321 below) and actions allocated to appropriate departments. The team found that issues addressed in the 2023-24 academic year are wide-ranging in scope and include concerns with access to software, preparation for employment, environmental issues with teaching spaces, catering and welfare support. This provides evidence to the assessment team that the system was effective in practice. However, the group has identified that though the student representative roles are popular initially, there is a drop-off in engagement subsequent to being appointed and that only 50 per cent of representatives complete the training. Similarly, only 35 per cent of student representatives are regular attendees at representatives' forums. Therefore, the group is looking at introducing a wider range of roles, with differing levels of commitment, and incentivising engagement to widen participation and make sure it is hearing the voice of all students. Action to improve the training and engagement of representatives has been identified as an area for development in the New DAPs plan for year one, quarter four. The team concluded from this that the group is critically reflective of the processes it has in place and is committed to continuing to develop its practices, to ensure that students are supported to be able to engage effectively.

93. The group also provides students with a comprehensive range of ways of feeding back about their individual experiences, in addition to the external National Student Survey (NSS). These include student experience reviews, induction reviews and module surveys. To follow up on feedback gathered through these mechanisms, two internal schemes have been developed, the 'U Make It Happen Campaign' and the 'Pat on the Back' scheme. These highlight to students the actions, improvements and changes made in response to their feedback. In 2023-24, 23 actions were recorded and 25 members of staff nominated for good practice by their students. Student feedback is formally shared through regular termly student voice reports to Academic Board and programme committees. Examples of actions taken in response to student feedback cover academic issues such as assessment tasks, resource issues such as the need for improvements in the IT provision, and broader student experience issues including responses to the increased cost of living (such as subsidised food). In 2023-24, in addition to surveys, the range of approaches to encourage direct student voice feedback included 'Food for Thought' events at each campus and online focus groups to enable student input into the developing regulatory framework and Harassment and Sexual Misconduct policy.
94. The award of TEF Silver acknowledged the wide-ranging and systematic approach to student voice and noted the approach was, 'clear, robust and impactful'. Further, external support for the group's approach was highlighted in a recent Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre (CDMT) accreditation report which described a 'culture which is inclusive and promotes the advocacy of staff and students.' The team concluded that the evidence reviewed demonstrates the wide range of ways in which the group makes it possible for students to engage in its governance and management. This evidence, together with the external recognition of its effective approach, assured the team that the group is already successfully providing structures that allow students to engage with and shape the direction of their learning and that students individually and collectively are engaged in the governance and management of the organisation and its higher education provision.
95. To further evidence the effectiveness of the group's engagement of students in its governance, the team met with student representatives and students from both UCEN Manchester campuses, City and Openshaw, to understand how they are engaged with the management and governance of the group. The team found that students are well informed



about the mechanisms in place to feedback and hear about actions taken by the group in response. For example, students from the Arden Theatre School explained how they had influenced staff to organise an event to support professional style collaborative working opportunities for students across different courses. Students confirmed that the group is successful in creating a culture where students feel they can make a valued contribution to planning and developments. Further, the team heard from experienced student representatives stating that they had been provided with sufficient training and understood the requirements of their role. Newly appointed student representatives expressed that they were sufficiently informed about how and when they would be able to access training and support. This feedback from student representatives led the assessment team to conclude that students feel they can make a valued contribution to the governance and management of the group and its higher education provision.

96. The evidence considered supports the team's view that many students are actively involved in the governance and management of higher education within the group. This is demonstrated through both the student representation within the group's academic governance committee structure and through the way in which the group values student feedback and acts upon it. However, the group continues to develop and review its approach recognising that engagement is not consistent across all cohorts and that low participation rates in surveys and training are areas for attention. Currently, a new module feedback approach is being piloted in the Arden Theatre School which has increased participation rates from 50 per cent to 69 per cent. A review of this approach and the potential rollout of this across the provision will take place at the beginning of the probationary period and is specified in the New DAPs plan, while the new programme leader role will be specifically responsible for ensuring module tutors encourage students to complete feedback surveys.
97. The team concluded that the group can be reasonably expected to meet the evidence requirements for A1.2 in full by the end of the probationary period. The evidence demonstrated there are already various mechanisms in place to enable students to individually and collectively engage in the governance and management of the group and its higher education provision, with further actions planned to increase participation and ensure students are further supported to be able to engage effectively.

## Subcriterion A1.3

**A1.3: Where an organisation granted degree awarding powers works with other organisations to deliver learning opportunities, it ensures that its governance and management of such opportunities is robust and effective and that decisions to work with other organisations are the result of a strategic approach rather than opportunism.**

## Advice to the OfS

98. The assessment team's view is that the group's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion A1.3 because its governance and current management arrangements ensure robust and effective oversight of its work with other organisations to deliver learning opportunities.

99. The assessment team's view is that the group demonstrates a full understanding of criterion A1.3 and that, should the group propose to work with further organisations in the future, it would adopt a strategic approach to ensure arrangements are robust and effective and would be the result of a strategic approach rather than opportunism.
100. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the group's New DAPs plan and evidence, which shows that the group can be reasonably expected to meet the evidence requirements for A1.3 in full by the end of the probationary period.

## Reasoning

101. The assessment team considered current arrangements and the New DAPs plan in order to confirm that this criterion is met: where the group works with, or proposes to work with, other organisations to deliver learning opportunities, the arrangements are based on a strategic approach, informed by the effective assessment of risk including the carrying out of due diligence. The team found that the group does not propose broadening its strategy to work with other organisations to provide learning opportunities beyond its current arrangements with its existing validating universities and this was confirmed during meetings with senior staff during the on-site visit. Current arrangements are based on a strategic approach, informed by the effective assessment of risk, including the carrying out of due diligence, and monitored in operation through the group's deliberative committee structure. For example, during the visit the assessment team heard from senior staff about how the group intends to continue to work strategically with validating partners where there is a benefit in terms of subject expertise but to seek to award its own degrees in new areas, for example BA (Hons) Fine Art.
102. The team assessed whether the arrangements with other organisations are defined in a written legal agreement and are subject to the same robust oversight and governance as the rest of the organisation's provision. It reviewed the group's Collaboration Agreement, 2024, which sets out the terms of the group's collaboration with Manchester Metropolitan University. The agreement sets out the legal basis of its collaboration, including operational and financial obligations. Further, the assessment team met with senior staff at the group who stated that partnerships are defined in a written legal agreement and are subject to ongoing oversight and governance. For example, during meetings with senior staff, the team heard how the group's central legal team oversees the current partnership arrangements with Sheffield Hallam University, Manchester Metropolitan University and (up to 2024) University of Huddersfield. The assessment team also saw how the terms of reference for QSC have been updated to include specific responsibility for confirming that the provision is operating in accordance with the partnership agreements.
103. The group works with a range of other organisations for the provision of work placements and other work-related activities for higher education students, including, for example, at Cisco, Palo Alto. It also collaborates with a series of small creative and media companies in the Greater Manchester area. UCEN Manchester works with other business units, for example Novus, within the broader group. These arrangements are driven and managed by individual curriculum teams and vary in nature. These opportunities are monitored at programme level through the annual programme review process. The proforma for this process specifically asks programme staff to comment on how employers or external industry professionals contribute to maintaining the vocational relevance and currency of programmes. They are also asked to state how many external stakeholders provide work experience opportunities

and support with final year students' major projects on their programme, and where applicable, feedback from students and employers on these opportunities. During the visit, the assessment team heard many examples from both staff and students of how the group is currently working with relevant industry partners, formally and informally, to deliver student learning experiences with a focus on ensuring professional currency. The group is, however, intending to review its overall processes for the management of placements and work-related activity during the probation period and has scheduled this in the New DAPs plan for year one, quarter three.

104. Overall, the assessment team's view is that, as the group currently operates effective and robust governance and management structures and adopts a strategic approach to ensure arrangements are robust and effective after due consideration of risk, the assessment team is satisfied that should the group decide to work with other organisations to provide learning opportunities, it would continue to do so.

## Conclusions

105. The assessment team concluded that the group has effective academic governance and management structures that demonstrate clear and appropriate lines of accountability in prospect. The group has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion A1 and has clearly differentiated the function and responsibilities of its boards and committees.
106. The assessment team also found, however, that the extended responsibilities that will be required for the awarding degrees are currently not reflected in the emerging policy framework, regulations or committee terms of reference.
107. The assessment team also concluded that the group actively engages students as partners in the academic governance and management of academic standards and quality and has plans in place to continue to address the effectiveness and consistency of this during the probationary period.
108. The assessment team concluded that the group's academic governance demonstrates appropriate oversight to ensure that if it decides to work with other organisations, these arrangements will be led by a strategic and curriculum-led approach and the management of such opportunities will be robust and effective. Oversight of existing arrangements will be monitored during the probationary period.
109. The assessment team recommends that the group provides more detail about the particular focus and operation of the following:
- The methods and processes for stakeholder consultation in the development of policies
  - The development of effective training of student representatives and engagement of students across the provision
  - The processes for the management of placements and work-related activity.
110. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside observations of deliberative committee meetings and discussions with staff and students as part of the site visit.

111. Therefore, the team concluded that the group can be reasonably expected to meet the evidence requirements for A1.1 in full by the end of the probationary period and that the group's New DAPs plan is broadly credible in relation to criterion A1: Academic governance.

### **Specified changes to New DAPs plan**

112. The team's view is that the following specified changes are required to provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment of criterion A1.

- An update to the New DAPs plan to include milestones for the review of the terms of reference for the Academic Board and relevant sub-committees to include responsibilities for the awarding of credit and degrees.

# Assessment of DAPs criterion B: Academic standards and quality assurance

## Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks

### Advice to the OfS

113. The assessment team's view is that LTE Group's New DAPs plan is mostly credible in relation to criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks. However, the assessment team has identified specified changes the group will need to make to its New DAPs plan for effective monitoring in its probationary period.
114. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion B1.
115. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows in summary that the group is developing transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it will award academic credit and qualifications.
116. This view is based on specific consideration of the New DAPs plan and supporting evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

### Subcriterion B1.1

**B1.1: An organisation granted degree awarding powers has in place transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications.**

### Advice to the OfS

117. The assessment team's view is that the group's New DAPs plan is mostly credible in relation to criterion B1.1 because it has begun to develop a transparent and comprehensive academic framework which will govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications. However, the team identified that specific milestone should be added to the New DAPs plan to describe changes to the constitution and operation of independent assessment and award boards in preparation for degree awarding powers.
118. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion B1.1 because it has begun to develop transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations in readiness of how it will govern the award of academic credit and qualifications.
119. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the group's New DAPs plan and evidence, which shows that the group can be reasonably expected to meet the evidence requirements for B1.1 in full by the end of the probationary period.

## Reasoning

120. The assessment team considered the group's existing practices to determine whether the academic frameworks and regulations governing the group's higher education provision (covering, for example, student admissions, assessment, progression, award, appeals and complaints) are appropriate to its current status and are implemented fully and consistently. The assessment team found that the group has been delivering higher education courses since before the 2017 merger of further education colleges that brought about its creation. It has developed and maintained validating relationships with a number of partners, such as Sheffield Hallam University, Manchester Metropolitan University and, until 2024, the University of Huddersfield. Consequently, the group has an established track record of working in partnership to deliver and manage degrees over the last eight years, and is intending to continue to do so through the probationary period. The group's track record includes experience of managing changes of validating partner organisations while maintaining consistency of the student experience.
121. The assessment team found that the group has considerable experience of developing its own higher education provision in partnership with validating bodies and has created a Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook. This is a detailed document that sets out the group's guidance to staff on approving and validating new programmes, the periodic review of programmes and modifying existing programmes. The purpose of this document is to ensure effective governance over the process of course development. The Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook also includes a proforma for new programmes and those previously validated by another higher education provider; however, the group has not indicated how or if this will be revised when it has autonomy to design its own courses, without oversight from validating bodies. Neither is it clear how the approval process will continue when courses are designed and approved with partners, such as the BSc (Hons) in Athlete Wellbeing, which is currently being developed with Sheffield Hallam University. The team concluded that information about any changes to the group's approval processes should be included in the New DAPs plan.
122. The assessment team considered the specific areas of the provision which are the group's responsibility under its current validation arrangements with partners. These fall predominantly within the areas of admissions, student conduct and student support, where the group has developed its own frameworks and policies. The group's Admissions Policy, for example, is based on principles of fair admission and transparency, which include:
- Enabling higher education providers to select students who are able to complete the programme as judged by their achievements and their potential
  - Striving to use assessment methods that are reliable and valid
  - Seeking to minimise barriers for prospective students
  - Being professional in every respect and underpinned by appropriate institutional structures and processes.
123. These principles are operationalised in the Admissions Handbook, which sets out a clear and rigorous approach to admissions and acknowledges the significance of admissions on retention, achievement and continuation. There are, for example, clearly delineated

responsibilities for the admissions team, which include the Admissions Manager, Admissions Officer and Admissions Tutor, key dates are identified and offer types are clearly described. The formal cut-off time for choosing interview and audition dates is driven by the commitment to inclusivity (enabling all potential students to plan ahead) as well as establishing a system which is more likely to result in greater acceptance of places. The prescribed four-week turnaround time for application and interview applications, with six weeks for entry by audition similarly operationalises principles of professionalism and minimising barriers to entry. The inclusion of UCAS admissions principles as a point of reference also ensures that the practice of admissions is conducted fairly and transparently. The group's Admissions Policy is also set out in the drafted Academic Regulations document, which will be adopted once it is approved (as advised in the New DAPs plan). The team concluded that the Admissions Policy and associated processes evidence that the group's own academic frameworks and regulations are appropriate to its current status, are implemented fully and consistently, and will continue to be implemented in the future.

124. The group's New DAPs evaluation document outlines its current academic framework with regards to awards and assessment boards. The initial process for assessment awards includes course team pre-boards and module boards as first checks; they are then presented to the Award and Progression Boards. These boards are chaired by the Director of Academic Services and attended by the Head of Academic Services, to ensure consistency across all qualifications.
125. As the group awards degrees through its validating partners, the group currently does not have responsibility for examination boards, which are chaired by the validating partner and adhere to the validating partner's terms of reference. It is the responsibility of the central Academic Services Office (ASO) to ensure that departments follow the correct regulations for their validating partner.
126. Internal Boards of Examiners are currently used as secondary moderation, to identify assessment areas that are subject to increased risk, and are organised by the ASO with accompanying documentation. The UCEN Manchester Self-Evaluation Document and Quality Enhancement Plan notes that, 'To ensure quality assurance, assessment pre-boards are undertaken for all assessment boards to ensure the accuracy of all data and completeness of marks, recording of mitigation and academic misconduct as an extra tier of check prior to assessment boards. This is not a HEI [higher education institution] requirement but undertaken by Academic Services as an additional quality assurance process and recognised as good practice by both Sheffield Hallam University and Manchester Metropolitan University. Sheffield Hallam University often refers to our approach to assessment boards as rigorous and effective providing confidence in our processes.'
127. The group has considerable experience in participating in examination boards run by its partners, and the award of credit, but has not yet been responsible for organising and running its own examination boards. The group has stated that it is currently developing its own examination board documentation and terms of reference but has not outlined the timescale for this. It is the assessment team's view that a specified change is needed to the group's current New DAPs plan. The assessment team concluded that a specific milestone should be added to the New DAPs plan to describe changes to the constitution and operation of independent assessment and award boards in preparation for degree awarding powers. This should be in place before the probationary period commences.

128. The assessment team also reviewed the group's appeals and complaints policies, including:
- Complaints and Compliments Policy
  - Complaints, Mitigating Circumstances, RPEL (Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning) and Appeals paper to Academic Board
  - Complaints, mitigating circumstances, RPEL and Appeals paper to UCEN Manchester Divisional Board.
129. The team found a detailed five-stage complaints policy, which includes detailed information about process, timescales, forms of responses, and responsibilities. The policy explains that the feedback team would initially review the complaint to determine whether the complaint can be swiftly resolved informally or a more in-depth investigation is needed. The New DAPs plan indicates that a new complaints policy and procedure will be implemented in year one of the probationary monitoring period, to bring about a more 'effective and user-friendly complaints process'. This shows that these policies are regularly reviewed and updated (the last review date is given as August 2024). The assessment team concluded that the group's appeals and complaints policy is fit for purpose and implemented fully and consistently.
130. To determine whether the group has created, in readiness, academic frameworks and regulations which will be appropriate for the granting of its own higher education qualifications, the team considered the draft Academic Regulations. The group has produced these regulations to regulate its own provision as an institution, should it be awarded degree awarding powers. The regulations set out the group's approach to the setting and maintenance of academic standards and the assurance of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They are the product of consultations with curriculum staff and students and designed to be accessible, simple, and easy to follow, committed to the maintenance of academic standards without creating unnecessary obstacles for students.
131. The regulations have been explicitly aligned with sector standards and the document includes the statement: 'Our Academic Regulations and the standards of our awards are informed by and align with national and European higher education standards including the 2024 UK Quality Code, the Framework for Higher Education, the Higher Education Credit Framework and Subject Benchmark Statements and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area'. The team agreed that this statement was borne out in practice, for example by the regulations' stipulation of pass marks, credit, retrieval of failure, and academic integrity. The team also acknowledged that, as this was the first iteration of the group's Academic Regulations, they were likely to be augmented as the group grows in maturity as a higher education provider.
132. The Director of Academic Standards confirmed that students had been consulted on the regulations and that they had agreed that they were clear and accessible. The group's Academic Regulations include general detail on regulations regarding admissions, attendance, assessment, progression and award, academic appeals and withdrawal from studies. More detailed policies in each area are either currently operational, such as UCEN Manchester Admissions Policy and Procedure (as discussed above), or have been included in its New DAPs plan, for example, the development of a process for appointing external examiners, scheduled for the end of its first year of probationary monitoring.



133. During UCEN Manchester's QSC meeting on 11 October 2024, the team observed a rigorous discussion about the Academic Regulations, which covered such topics as categorical marking, mitigating circumstances, constructive processes for dealing with failure, and the day on which results should be issued. The discussion of the Academic Regulations at the Academic Board was thorough and made it clear that the regulations were integral to the emerging character of the institution. It was also pointed out by the Vice Dean, during the meeting, that the mission of the group is distinct from its current validating partners, and it was agreed that its regulations needed to reflect this. The QSC approved the regulations, with some provisos (such as the regulations around the recognition of prior learning), for deliberation by the Academic Board. The team observed the subsequent discussion of the Academic Regulations at the Academic Board meeting on 31 October 2024, in which the key issues from the QSC had been translated into proposals regarding recognition of prior learning, condonement of marginal fails, trailing of modules, the definition of awards, and support for academic appeals and complaints. The approval of the Academic Regulations framework is scheduled in the group's New DAPs plan for the end of the group's first quarter of New DAPs probationary monitoring and will be reviewed annually. The team agreed that, based on its experience of the higher education sector, the Academic Regulations were comparable with those across the sector; the Director of Academic Standards confirmed that they had been informed by research into regulations at a range of other institutions. The team concluded, therefore, that the group will have, in readiness, a robust academic framework and regulations appropriate for awarding its own higher education qualifications, which have been subject to a detailed critical review process and which will continue to be evaluated.
134. The assessment team concluded that the academic frameworks and regulations governing the group's higher education provision are appropriate to its current status and are implemented fully and consistently. The group is experienced at implementing the academic regulations of its partner institutions and has produced a set of its own regulations which are currently subject to considerable ongoing critical review. The assessment team considered, therefore, that the group has in place, in prospect, transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it will award academic credit and qualifications. The assessment team is confident that the group's developing academic framework and regulations will be ready to be implemented at the start of the probationary period.
135. The assessment team concluded that, based on its review of the New DAPs plan and evidence, the group can be reasonably expected to meet the evidence requirements for B1.1 in full by the end of the probationary period.

## Subcriterion B1.2

**B1.2: A degree awarding organisation maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification that it approves (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.**

## Advice to the OfS

136. The assessment team's view is that the New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion B1.2 because the group has in place definitive up-to-date records of each qualification to be awarded by the group. These records will be used as the basis for the delivery and assessment of each programme and for the provision of records of study for students and alumni.
137. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion B1.2 because it has established processes for maintaining a definitive record of each programme and qualification that it offers (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.
138. The assessment team's view is based on its review of LTE Group's New DAPs plan and evidence, which shows that the group can be reasonably expected to meet the evidence requirements for B1.2 in full by the end of the probationary period.

## Reasoning

139. To determine whether the group maintains a definitive and up-to-date record of each qualification to be awarded and each programme being offered, the assessment team reviewed the group's Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook. This states that, in respect of programmes approved by validating partners, a 'full and comprehensive record of all changes made is kept by the Academic Services Office' (ASO). The ASO maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification which constitutes the reference point for delivery, assessment and monitoring of the programme. The group has stated within its New DAPs plan that it intends to hold full records of each programme that it approves itself, through an online filing system in a central repository. The records will be stored as PDF files, which will be version controlled to ensure that they are up-to-date. Revised versions will only be added to the repository if they have either: gone through formal programme amendment procedure (outlined in its UCEN Manchester Programme Approval Review and Modification Handbook); or have been revalidated at the end of a five-year validation period.
140. To consider whether the group has systems in place to support the provision of records of study, for students and alumni, the team observed a demonstration of a number of data management systems. These were accessed via a central portal called the Hub, which has been in place for approximately two years. The demonstration included the group's student record system, Education Business System (EBS). Data from EBS feeds into further systems such as EBS OnTrack, ProMonitor and Power BI. EBS OnTrack is used as a curriculum view of student data; curriculum teams use it to look at individual student records (for example, attendance or previous achievements). Power BI is a dashboard which is used to display summary information on outcomes such as continuation and completion; teams, use it to look at attendance overall or continuation over several years.
141. Student information is initially drawn through from UCAS applications or, in the case of part-time students, the online application portal from UCEN Manchester's website. At enrolment this information is reviewed by the student for accuracy and to complete any additional data. To ensure that the programme information is correct on EBS, validation meetings are held

between Data Services and curriculum teams throughout the Curriculum Planning Process. Meetings are held in February at which the programme and module titles and information for the following academic year are checked for accuracy and completeness. The Group Quality Director informed the team during the online demonstration (on 24 October 2024), that all students are already on the system and that all tutors have log-in details.

142. The EBS system allows courses to be searched by code, enrolments to be accessed, as well as start and end of course dates. It is the team's view that this constitutes a definitive record as it includes every course, as well as information about staff, and student registers. EBS also provides access to each student's profile – every module they are enrolled on, their academic history, grades, and credits. The team observed that when a course is modified it is given a different course code so that variations and modifications can be tracked, which it considered to be a robust method of record-keeping. These records are used as the basis for the delivery and assessment of each programme. The team saw transcripts which included data on modules, marks and credit for students at Level 4, Level 5 and Level 6 – these show evidence that students and alumni are provided with records of study within an established student records system.
143. The Group Quality Director stated that, currently, in relation to validating partners, mark sheets are received from that partner, then grades updated by the group. Grades are then sent to the validating body which generates a report. In the future this process will be streamlined – tutors will be able to enter marks into the system, and all checks (for categorical marking, for example) will be done by the group. The assessment team concluded, therefore, that the group already maintains definitive and up-to-date records of each qualification being awarded and that these are readily available to students and alumni should they request them.
144. The team concluded that the group maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification that it offers and that these records constitute the reference point for delivery, assessment, monitoring and review of each programme. The team noted, however, that the group's New DAPs plan includes a review of the EBS higher education module functions within its first probationary year to ensure that its processes are still appropriate for accurate recording of student information and achievement.

## Conclusions

145. The assessment team's view is that the group has in place transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it will award academic credit and qualifications. However, the team identified that a specific milestone should be added to the New DAPs plan to describe changes to the constitution and operation of independent assessment and award boards in preparation for degree awarding powers.
146. The assessment team have further concluded that the group maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification that it offers (and subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and it plans to extend these processes to programmes it approves during the probationary period. It has also stated within its New DAPs plan that it will review the higher education functions of its student records system within its probationary period.

147. Based on its findings, the team concluded that the group has a credible New DAPs plan in prospect and demonstrated a full understanding of criterion B1 which can be reasonably expected to enable the group to meet this criterion in full by the end of the probationary period.
148. The assessment team recommended revising the group's current course approval process to reflect its transition to approving courses independently from its validating partners.
149. This view is based on specific consideration of the New DAPs plan and supporting evidence requirements for this criterion.

### **Specified changes to the New DAPs plan**

150. The team's view is that the following specified changes are required to provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment of criterion B1:
- An update to the New DAPs plan to include the timescale and process for changes to the constitution and operation of independent assessment and award boards in preparation for degree awarding powers.

## Criterion B2: Academic standards

### Advice to the OfS

151. The assessment team's view is that the group's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion B2: Academic standards.
152. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion B2.
153. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows in summary that the group will have clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications.
154. It is also the assessment team's view that the group will be able to design and deliver courses and qualifications that meet sector-recognised standards and the FHEQ. The group will also have in place processes to enable it to set and maintain standards above the threshold that are reliable over time and reasonably comparable to those set and achieved by other UK degree awarding bodies.
155. This view is based on specific consideration of the New DAPs plan and supporting evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

### Subcriterion B2.1

**B2.1: An organisation granted degree awarding powers has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications.**

### Advice to the OfS

156. The assessment team's view is that the group's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion B2.1 because it sets out plans for how the group will achieve clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications, during its probationary period.
157. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated an understanding of criterion B2.1 because it has developed policies and procedures which will enable it to have clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications.
158. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the group's New DAPs plan and evidence which shows that the group is making progress in meeting the evidence requirements for B2.1 and can be reasonably expected to meet the evidence requirements for B2.1 by the end of the probationary period.

### Reasoning

159. To determine whether the group's higher education qualifications will be offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications

(FHEQ), the assessment team reviewed evidence of the programmes the group is currently delivering in partnership with validating institutions. The group's portfolio includes degree courses in theatre, creative arts and digital media, counselling, make-up artistry and special effects, film, health and wellbeing, which are currently validated by Sheffield Hallam University. The group also offers business and management, criminology and social justice, computing, sport and exercise science courses validated by Manchester Metropolitan University. The group's construction courses are awarded by Pearson and the validation of the teacher education course was moved from the University of Huddersfield to Sheffield Hallam University in 2024.

160. As stated by the group in its New DAPs plan, if it is awarded DAPs it intends to offer the following programme with a September 2025 start:

- BA (Hons) Fine Arts.

161. It has also stated that it intends to validate the following two programmes in the second quarter of its probationary monitoring period:

- BA (Hons) Film Production and Content Creation
- BSc (Hons) Cyber Security (Defensive Threat Detection).

162. The group has also stated its intention to validate 15 other programmes in its probationary period, including the following:

- BA (Hons) Music Production and Composition
- BA (Hons) Make-up Artistry
- BA (Hons) Special Effects Make-up Artistry
- BSc (Hons) Game Art and VFX
- BSc (Hons) Graphic Design and Branding
- BA (Hons) Photography and Social Practice
- BA (Hons) Fashion and Textiles
- BA (Hons) Jewellery
- BSc (Hons) Computer Networking, Automation and Management
- BSc (Hons) Software Development.
- BA (Hons) Musical Theatre
- BA (Hons) Acting
- BA (Hons) Dance and Performance
- BA (Hons) Theatre and Performance
- BA (Hons) Vocal Studies and Performance.

163. The group has been designing its own courses and is secure in its ability to do this successfully as these courses have gone through validation processes by its validating partners. This demonstrated to the assessment team that the courses are designed at the appropriate level. Sample documentation provided for a BSc (Hons) in Athlete Wellbeing – a

course which is in development with Sheffield Hallam University – provided evidence to the team that courses and modules are clearly aligned to levels on the FHEQ and that learning outcomes are mapped accordingly. The group intends that, when it begins to approve its own degrees, courses and qualifications, proposals will go through a similar structured process as already set out in its Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook. The team considered this policy and observed how it requires courses to be aligned to the range of external benchmarks, such as the FHEQ level descriptors and also relevant requirements from professional bodies, such as the Council for Dance and Musical Theatre (CDMT), which accredited the Arden School of Theatre in 2023. Accreditation from the CDMT involved a rigorous inspection of the Arden School of Theatre and concluded that it met all requirements, stating, ‘students achieve professional standards of attainment commensurate with stated objectives at the start of the course’. The New DAPs plan states that the group intends to further develop its advice and guidance on the development and validation of programmes in its first year of probationary monitoring.

164. The team assessed whether the setting and maintaining of academic standards will take appropriate account of relevant external points of reference, and of external and independent points of expertise (including students). The assessment team again reviewed the group’s Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook, as this sets out the validation process and responsibility of approval at each stage of the process. The group’s New DAPs plan states that, for a programme to be validated and approved, course creators would have to consult with both industry representatives and students. The approval process also sets out the requirement for feedback from external academics and employers as panel members at validation events.
165. The group has stated in its New DAPs plan that its higher education provision will be developed through Portfolio Development Teams (PDTs), which were piloted in 2021 and 2023 and are intended to be used if the provider awards its own degrees. It is planned that PDTs will consist of industry experts and curriculum teams and be chaired by a member of the senior management team. The group reported that PDTs will oversee Industry Advisory Groups (IAGs), also planned to be introduced across the provision in 2024-25. These consist of industry experts, professional partners and employer stakeholders and will play a key role in programme creation. The assessment team reviewed draft terms of reference for both PDTs and IAGs which set out their respective responsibilities and structure. Students will also be consulted throughout the process as evidenced in the Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook. Though the process of consultation is not specified, an ‘evidence file’ is prescribed which will include evidence of the consultation. However, there is no detail within the group’s New DAPs plan table on when PDTs will be formed. It is the team’s view that this should be added to the table for probationary monitoring purposes.
166. Further, the team observed a BA (Hons) Film Production class in which the students were seen to operate in a manner close to, and at times indistinguishable from, professional practice, and to work at a level which was at, or exceeded, standards on comparable courses in the sector. All students present had defined roles within the project and were closely monitored by teaching staff. The high academic standards set was reflected by the comments of the external examiner for this course, ‘I want to highlight the production facilities available to the students really are excellent to see for college based HE [higher education], and I would suggest that with a continued investment plan and improved marketing they could easily rival some of the best degrees in the UK and substantially differentiate themselves from

the likes of Salford, BIMM, and SODA who are in close proximity.’ In this regard the team was satisfied that the group has experience of delivering programmes that maintain academic standards. This evidence supports the team’s view that the group will set and maintain academic standards which will take appropriate account of relevant external points of reference and independent points of expertise: it is already creating and delivering programmes that meet these standards, even though these programmes are currently validated by other providers.

167. The assessment team examined whether the group’s programme approval arrangements will be robust, applied consistently, and ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with its own academic frameworks and regulations. The team considered the proposed Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook, and found that this document demonstrates that the group will operate a clear process for the validation of new programmes of study and the modification (both minor and major) of existing ones. Each stage of approval has been designed to provide judgements from management, peers, students and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRBs). New programmes will go through an approval process which includes a contextual rationale, market analysis, QAA benchmarking, learning outcome mapping, learning resources, and the opportunities for research and scholarship to be embedded. It is evident from the Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook that various factors of programme validation have been considered, including how the new programme aligns with the group’s strategic objective to develop employability skills and employer engagement activities. Mandatory documentation for new programmes approval includes a strategic planning approval (SPA) document, programme specification including outcomes and map of modules, module specifications, programme student handbook, staff CVs and confirmation of progression opportunities.
168. The team also reviewed a draft of the BA (Hons) Fine Art Programme Proposal document to observe the use of this guidance in practice. The proposed programme outlined in this document clearly addresses the validation requirements specified in the group’s handbook. It is the team’s view that the group’s programme approval guidance offers staff a clear and structured process, with robust measures in place to ensure that academic standards are currently aligned with the UK threshold standard and will remain so if the group begins awarding its own degrees.
169. During the visit to UCEN Manchester in October 2024, the assessment team had the opportunity to hear about the programme approval process in action. The rationale for the proposed FdSc and BSc (Hons) Athlete Wellbeing programme was explained to the team and how the group considered input from students, employers and other relevant stakeholders. For example, one stakeholder, the CEO of Rugby League Cares, is quoted in the proposal programme document, commenting that the course is “unique, innovative and very much needed within sport”. Similarly, a student who had been consulted commented “It sounds like a very relevant and different degree. With the increasing focus on mental health and athlete support, a specialised program like this could open up many career opportunities in sports.” A comprehensive set of documentation for the approval of the new programme was submitted as evidence; this demonstrates that the group has experience in being an active partner in the process of programme validation through its partners. The documentation includes a detailed mapping document of modules and learning outcomes which is clearly benchmarked against the FHEQ – for example, the ‘systematic understanding’ required of a BA (Hons) is



matched with the requirements to: 'Critique underlying theories and concepts in relation to Athlete Wellbeing theory and practice' and 'Critique the development of Athlete Wellbeing and evaluate its contribution to society, practice and the sustainability of the discipline'. The team did not have an opportunity to see a programme approval event or to see documentation from a previous event. However, the process prescribed in the Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook together with evidence of the detailed research, testing, and resourcing undertaken for the Athlete Wellbeing programme, led the team to conclude that the group's programme approval arrangements are, and will continue to be, robust and applied consistently and will 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.

## Subcriterion B2.2

**B2.2: Organisations with degree awarding powers are expected to demonstrate that they are able to design and deliver courses and qualifications that meet the threshold academic standards described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).**

**Organisations with degree awarding powers are expected to demonstrate that the standards that they set and maintain above the threshold are reliable over time and reasonably comparable to those set and achieved by other UK degree awarding bodies.**

## Advice to the OfS

170. The assessment team's view is that the group's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion B2.2 because the group will be able to design and deliver courses and qualifications that meet the threshold academic standards described in the FHEQ. The group will also be able to demonstrate that the standards that it sets and maintains above the threshold will be reliable over time and reasonably comparable to those set and achieved by other UK degree awarding bodies.
171. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion B2.2 because it will be able to design courses and qualifications that will meet the threshold academic standards described in the FHEQ and which are reasonably comparable to those set and achieved by other UK degree awarding bodies.
172. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the group's New DAPs plan and evidence which shows that the group can be reasonably expected to meet the evidence requirements for B2.2 in full by the end of the probationary period.

## Reasoning

173. The assessment team reviewed current practices and draft documentation the group has prepared in preparation for degree awarding powers, such as the Academic Regulations, to determine whether credit and qualifications will be awarded only where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes is demonstrated through assessment, and both the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant degree awarding body are satisfied.

The team reviewed a range of handbooks to ascertain whether external reference points are currently used to benchmark learning outcomes for programmes and modules, for example:

- Programme Handbook for Childhood and Youth Studies
- Programme Handbook for Dance and Performance
- Unit Handbook for Work Based Learning
- Module Handbook for Political and Sociological Perspectives
- Unit Handbook for Web Scripting.

174. In all cases, learning outcomes were clear and appropriate for the specified level in line with the FHEQs. For example, learning outcomes for the Level 6, BSc (Hons) Athlete Wellbeing course include: 'Critically evaluate key concepts and principles using the relevant underlying theoretical frameworks and local, national and global approaches'; and 'critique the development of athlete wellbeing and evaluate its contribution to society, practice and the sustainability of the discipline.' These align with the FHEQ benchmark statements at this level, stating that students should demonstrate 'a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline; and an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline'. The team found that this demonstrates that the group understands the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant degree awarding body, as even though this programme will be validated by Sheffield Hallam University, it has been designed and will be delivered by staff at the group.

175. The Assessment and Moderation Policy sets out the group's assessment expectations to ensure the 'effective quality assurance processes and the ongoing maintenance of academic standards are to be achieved without undue variance.' As part of this policy, it is stated that rigorous assessment practices should be implemented to ensure the standard is set for awards and maintained at the appropriate level. To support fair and appropriate assessment levels, a clear moderation process has been documented to ensure that assessment practices are 'valid and reliable and meet the requirements and standards of awarding bodies.' As the group has experience of internal moderation practices, it already has in place a timeline of internal moderation listed in UCEN Manchester's Assessment Policy. This detailed document sets out the process from course tutors and heads of department through to external examiners, specifying and including:

- clear principles of assessment
- the information which must be included in module briefs
- the moderation process
- procedures for late and over-length submissions
- mitigating circumstances
- formative and summative assessment
- marking and grading
- assessment boards
- feedback

- archiving
- responsibilities
- paperwork for the internal verification of assignment briefs, moderation of work, and sampling.

The team found that programme documentation and assessment processes were clear and credible and observed that, as part of a process of continuing enhancement in the New DAPs plan, the group intended to review the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy in operation.

176. The team reviewed a range of comments from external examiners to determine whether the policy the group has in place is effective in practice. For example, one external examiner stated that the moderation processes were extremely effective; another commented that they had seen consistent marking across a range of modules showing a clear standardised approach; a third commented that there is 'evidence of rigorous internal moderation'. It is the team's view, therefore, that the current processes in place for assessment are rigorous and applied consistently and the group has policies in place to ensure that credit and qualifications will be awarded only where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes is demonstrated through assessment. It is the team's view that this will continue if LTE Group begins to award its own degrees.
177. External reference points such as the FHEQ are used in programme creation and learning outcomes. Feedback to students is based on these learning outcomes, which has been evidenced through a sample of students' assessed work provided to the assessment team by the group. All student work seen by the team included annotated feedback linked to learning outcomes which demonstrated the policy in practice. Further scrutiny of assessment and moderation practices occur through boards of examiners, which confirm module passes by measuring them against the learning outcomes, therefore monitoring that credit and qualifications are only awarded where the UK threshold standards and the academic standards required by the individual degree awarding body are being maintained. The group's current practices regarding the setting of standards and assessment are clearly credible and its intentions in the New DAPs plan to monitor and enhance these is more than adequate.
178. The group's programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements are in prospect, but it has an emerging process that can be reasonably expected to be robust, applied consistently and will explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved. The group's proposed Programme Approval Handbook is detailed and covers processes including approval of validation of new programmes, revalidation of programmes and modifications to programmes. Stages of validation and integral documentation are emphasised within the handbook and membership of validating panels listed. The implementation of the group's programme development procedures will be monitored during the probationary period as the group develops its first programmes. To ensure that the UK academic standards required are maintained, the group employs an annual quality cycle that reviews all stages of the group's offering. The review process includes: programme reviews, school and directorate Self Evaluation Documents (SEDs) and Quality Enhancement Plan (QEPs) and UCEN Manchester's SED and QEP. As part of the Programme Approval Handbook, monitoring and review of programmes is set out, which feed into the QSC to ensure effective oversight of the group's provision.

179. In establishing, and then maintaining, threshold academic standards and comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level qualifications, the assessment team reviewed documents that evidenced input from appropriate external and independent expertise. The team viewed external examiner reports for a range of programmes. In addition, staff engage with other higher education institutions as external assessors and examiners, all of which brings a high degree of externality to the group's programme design and approval processes. It was the assessment team's view that this constituted credible evidence that the group took appropriate account of, and benefited from, external points of reference. The assessment team also reviewed the group's commitment to accepting input from external stakeholders, evidenced in 'The Alliance Model' – an infographic that indicates support external bodies might offer to be a 'partner' of The Manchester College, such as mentorship, live briefs, competitions, guest lectures, and placements. The New DAPs plan indicates that the group intends to develop a process for appointing external examiners, and monitor the effectiveness of the external examiner process. The assessment team agreed that the specifics of this development and monitoring should be further explicated in the New DAPs plan. The assessment team concluded that there is considerable credible evidence that the group's setting and maintaining of academic standards takes appropriate account of relevant external points of reference and external and independent points of expertise, including students. It is the team's view that the group will continue to set and maintain academic standards if it awards its own degrees.

## **Conclusions**

180. The assessment team concluded that the group consistently applies mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications.
181. The assessment team's view was that the group's experience with awarding bodies provides assurance that the group will be able to design and deliver courses and qualifications which meet the threshold standards described in the FHEQ.
182. The team found that the group is already implementing effective processes of course design and approval which meet sector threshold standards.
183. The assessment team recommends the group provides a timescale of when Portfolio Development Teams (PDTs) will be formed and that this be added to the group's New DAPs table within its plan.
184. The team further concluded that the group will set and maintain standards above the threshold, which will be reliable over time as reasonably comparable to those set and achieved by other UK degree awarding bodies.
185. The team concluded that the group meets criterion B2 as it has a credible New DAPs plan and demonstrates a full understanding of criterion B2 through its emerging programme approval and validation processes and its appropriate use of external and independent expertise.

## **Specified changes to the New DAPs plan**

186. The team's view is that no specified changes are required for criterion B2.

## Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience

### Advice to the OfS

187. The assessment team's view is that the group's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience.
188. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion B3.
189. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows in summary that the group will be able to design and deliver courses and qualifications that provide a high quality academic experience to all students and that the learning opportunities will be rigorously quality assured.
190. This view is based on specific consideration of the supporting evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

### Subcriterion B3.1

**B3.1: Organisations with degree awarding powers are expected to demonstrate that they are able to design and deliver courses and qualifications that provide a high quality academic experience to all students from all backgrounds, irrespective of their location, mode of study, academic subject, protected characteristics, previous educational background or nationality. Learning opportunities are consistently and rigorously quality assured.**

### Advice to the OfS

191. The assessment team's view is that the group's 's New DAPs plan for criterion B3 is credible as it sets out appropriate milestones to ensure that the design and delivery of courses and qualifications will provide a high quality academic experience to all students.
192. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of DAPs criterion B3 because it has a track record of providing a high quality academic experience to all students, from all backgrounds, irrespective of their location, mode of study, academic subject, protected characteristics, previous educational background or nationality. Learning opportunities are also consistently and rigorously quality assured.
193. The team noted that inclusion is a key strength of the group with its regionally specific provision, widening participation mission, and variety of campuses and delivery modes. There are strong quality assurance mechanisms in place and a responsiveness to feedback from external examiners.

### Reasoning

194. To inform the assessment team's consideration of the group's ability to deliver a high quality academic experience to all students from all backgrounds, the team reviewed the group's:
- Equality and Diversity Annual Report 2022-23

- Admissions Policy.

The team found that the group has a clear strategy to promote equality, diversity and inclusion, set out in the group's Admissions Policy, which states as one of its general principles that it 'is committed to providing a professional admissions service in order to allow fair and equal access to all who have the potential to benefit from higher education'. The Equality and Diversity Annual Report contains the group's equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) principles and sets out its EDI vision and strategy. Also outlined is 'The Deal' – students' contract with the group on entering the provision. This report also sets out expectations for both staff and students regarding EDI and the role of the group's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Group, which advises on legal compliance and best practice for all EDI matters.

## **Design and approval of programmes**

195. To assess whether the group operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes, the team examined a range of evidence, with a particular focus on the Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook. This document provides evidence of an effective process for the design, development and approval of programmes. After considering this document and discussing it with staff, the team was satisfied that the group will operate a robust process for the scoping, design, development and implementation of new programmes of study, as it currently follows these procedures in practice. The programme approval process begins with Strategic Planning Approval before moving into the Programme Proposal stage. This is then put before the Curriculum Management Panel (CMP), chaired by the Vice Dean. CMP meeting minutes seen by the assessment team provide an example of how the CMP scrutinises programme leaders on details of module content and the business case for new programmes. The team considered the Student Engagement Strategy and observed its commitment to 'engaging with students to go beyond just involvement and consultation and reach towards students being producers and change-agents to create a much richer and more valuable engagement.' During the on-site visit to UCEN Manchester, the team heard from a member of teaching staff who confirmed this when they spoke about the initial stages of programme development and the contribution students make to it in the early stages, before the programme goes to the CMP for approval.
196. The process requires new courses to be rationalised in terms of market need, external stakeholders (including PSRBs), student consultation, and EDI. Learning outcomes at the relevant FHEQ level are specified at this stage, along with mapping these to modules. The four-stage process ensures that responsibility, timescales and outcomes for programme design and development are clearly ascribed to different stakeholders. The team reviewed a draft Programme Proposal document for BA (Hons) Fine Art, which shows this process working in practice. The document includes a rationale for the programme and a section on how EDI will be promoted through diverse subject content and collaborations. It also states how the programme will align with the group's core objectives within its EDI strategy. The New DAPs plan indicates that the effectiveness of the design and approval of programmes process will be monitored in order to ensure that it is rigorous and effective, resulting in high quality programmes. The team concluded that this constitutes a robust process which will need no significant alteration for the design of programmes awarded by the group. Further, the team found that the group's plans to monitor these processes, as part of its New DAPs

plan, demonstrates its commitment to continuing to operate effective design, development and approval of programmes processes.

197. The team assessed whether relevant staff are informed of and provided with guidance and support on these procedures, and their roles and responsibilities in relation to them. The team first reviewed the Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook, which provides an overview for staff to understand the process of programme design and approval. This document sets out the programme approval process from stage one, strategic approval, to the final stage of full approval. The assessment team also reviewed evidence that showed that other guidance is provided to support staff in each stage of the process. For example, there is a Guide to Writing Learning Outcomes, which advises that outcomes 'should include an action verb', and gives examples of learning outcomes with advice to ensure scaffolding of outcome levels. Further guidance for staff designing programmes is provided by the Advanced Practitioner for Quality Improvement, to develop staff skills on writing effective learning outcomes and assessment strategies. The group's Assessment Policy offers staff further support on assessment, outlining the group's expectation regarding assessment and the process of moderation, marking and grading. The group has also stated in its New DAPs plan that it intends to offer staff further support in the form of workshops on programme planning and design and that these will be ready for staff before the start of probationary monitoring. It is the assessment team's view that relevant staff are provided with policies, guidance and CPD sessions to help inform and guide them on programme approval procedures and their roles and responsibilities in relation to them. It is also the team's view that the group will continue to review its guidance and support to staff if it starts awarding its own degrees.
198. The assessment team further examined the Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook to determine whether responsibility for approving new programme proposals is clearly assigned. The team found that the handbook provided good evidence of this. For example, for stage one of the approval process, a Strategic Planning Approval (SPA) form must be completed; this is then considered at the CMP meeting. Staff on the CMP include academic governance staff (such as the Vice Dean, Academic Services Manager, and Director of Academic Services), as well as professional services staff (such as the Head of Student Advice Support and Wellbeing, and the Recruitment Outreach and Admissions Manager). It is therefore clear that the group understands the holistic view to be taken when a new programme is designed and has ensured that staff beyond those with curriculum responsibilities are involved in its approval.
199. Further evidence that staff understand their role in programme approval can be found in the minutes of the CMP meeting where the introduction of a new suite of creative industry offers was discussed, starting with a BA (Hons) Fine Arts degree. The staff member proposing the programme had discussed it with Sheffield Hallam University, the potential validating partner (although it has now decided to validate the programme itself), and members of the panel had taken the opportunity to ask questions on the module content. It was concluded that the Research and Planning Officer would assist with market analysis to expedite the formalisation of the programme proposal. The assessment team found further evidence of this process in action through the sign-offs in the approval documentation for the Athlete Wellbeing programme proposal. The assessment team concluded, therefore, that the apportioning of responsibility for programme approval is effective and being implemented and includes the involvement of external expertise.

200. The Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook includes a section on the confirmation of progression opportunities, which states that progression mapping needs to be clear for students wishing to progress to a route that is external to the group. The group has stated in its New DAPs plan that it intends to scrutinise the mapping documents during the validation process which, it suggests, will ensure the 'coherence of programmes with multiple pathways'. It is not clear where in the process this will occur and it is the view of the assessment team this should be monitored during probationary period. The team has reviewed evidence that the group's computing and cybersecurity courses are designed so that students are able to explore different pathways within the provider, at the end of each level. For example, students who have completed an HND in Computing for England can move on to study a top-up BSc (Hons) degree in either Cyber Security or Software Development. Similarly, the group's BA (Hons) Film Production and Content Creation course offers students the opportunity to explore a specialism at Level 6, after experimenting with a range of specialisms such as directing, scripting or editing at Level 5. The team concluded that the coherence of programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways is secure and its mapping maintenance should be monitored during the probationary period.

201. Nine issues of EdUcate, the group's CPD journal, were reviewed by the team in order to determine whether close links are maintained between learning support services and the group's programme planning and approval programme. This internal publication provides accessible and engaging coverage of pedagogic issues, such as managing group work, developing 'mastery', and overcoming imposter syndrome. The publication embodies a commitment to disseminating good practice and involving all staff in a dialogue around higher education pedagogy. Issue three focuses on the inclusive curriculum and establishes core principles of inclusive teaching and learning. The team's view is that this publication contributes to a shared understanding about the effective design, development and approval of programmes. In addition, the minutes of the CMP meeting provides evidence of operational and strategic management of the curriculum, with consideration of student need, markets, and local competitors. Examples of such discussions are:

- a recommendation to explore alternatives to the Monday-Friday 9-5 delivery model
- a recommendation to ensure that appropriate blended learning materials, methods and support would be put in place for the HND in Digital Technologies (which uses a distance-learning model)
- questions about how students on the Certificate in Education course will be supported in securing placements.

Close links, therefore, are maintained between learning support services and the organisation's programme planning and approval arrangements.

202. The team considered that the links between curriculum development and student support were fully embedded and that the group has implemented robust structures to ensure that the needs of students are paramount in the design and implementation of the curriculum. This connection was also evident in the Student Status Policy, which is designed, among other things, to: 'provide an effective framework to ensure an appropriate and coordinated response by academic staff and the Future U team, to support students in cases where there is an adverse impact on the academic progress of themselves and/or others.' Future U is a



dedicated student support team covering areas such as: accommodation; academic support; counselling; careers advice; disability support; financial advice; health and wellbeing. Support services, such as the library team, are also involved in curriculum management to resource new programmes and they, together with members of the Future U team, sit on the CMP. Overall, the team concluded that close links are maintained between learning support services and the organisation's programme planning and approval arrangements.

## **Learning and teaching**

203. The team reviewed the group's higher education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy to determine whether it articulates and implements a strategic approach to learning and teaching which is consistent with its stated academic objectives. The strategy, based on its vision, as stated in the group's New DAPs plan, is to be 'an inclusive, diverse learning community that is committed to equality of opportunity and progression towards student autonomy' and 'a leading provider of flexible, affordable, career-relevant, university education.' The strategy includes five core strategic objectives that are linked to its guiding principles. These principles are focused on: the student experience; curriculum offering; assessment strategy; staff CPD; and employability. These strategic objectives set out how the principles can be operationalised and the assessment team found that these were aligned with other areas of the academic framework, including the Student Support Strategy and the Student Engagement Strategy.
204. The group has stated that it intends to review its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy to ensure that it aligns to the overarching strategy. To further ensure that the group takes a strategic approach to learning and teaching, it has formed a new Teaching, Learning and Enhancement Committee (TLEC). Members of the TLEC include the Vice Principal Adult and Vice Dean, Director of Academic Standards, and the Head of Student Advice Support and Wellbeing, as well as teaching staff at different levels. The president of the student union is also a committee member. The assessment team observed a committee meeting and also reviewed an example of how this works in practice in the TLEC minutes from its meeting in October 2023. Here, the Vice Principal Adult and Vice Dean highlighted the need for a greater focus on skills and behaviours in the group's assessment framework. A set of features was listed to inform how this would be operationalised. There followed a discussion and recommendations from other committee members including a comment by the president of the student union regarding the suggestion to enhance briefings, stating that 'there had been times where there was a disconnect between the work that was being produced and tutorial given'.
205. Further evidence that the group articulates and implements a strategic approach to learning and teaching is evidenced through the group's higher education Communities of Practice (CoPs). As outlined in the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, one of the group's core principles is to provide opportunities for staff to 'undertake continuous professional development that promotes learning and improvement.' CoPs are where communities of teaching staff can work together on small scale 'research and action projects'. This research is based around the needs of the students and is intended to develop staff scholarship. The assessment team reviewed a PowerPoint presentation showing an example of how CoPs work in practice. The presentation was from a cross-curricular collaboration from the FdA Film and Television production programme, BA (Hons) Film and Television Production programme and the BA (Hons) Photography programme, and was exploring the logistics, benefits and

difficulties of cross-curricular collaboration. Another example of CPD was from a Teacher Education and Professional Development CoP where research had been used to inform best practice in response to student feedback. It is clear from this evidence that there is a strategic approach to learning and teaching which is consistent with its stated academic objectives. The Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy is based on the group's academic objectives and it is reviewed and scrutinised by the TLEC. It is the assessment team's view that the group's strategic approach to learning and teaching is based on its academic objectives and permeates through the organisation.

206. During its on-site visit, the team was able to assess whether the group maintains physical, virtual and social learning environments that are safe, accessible and reliable for every student, promoting dignity, courtesy and respect in their use. The team observed a student population using the social areas of the physical environment of both the City campus and Openshaw campus to meet in a safe and accessible environment. The team also observed the learning environments of a variety of subject areas, such as the Manchester Film Schools, the Art Media and Make-up School and the Arden Theatre School, where students were seen to be making full use of the spaces which were appropriate to the size of the cohort. It was also evident in the signage on both campuses that the group is keen to promote dignity, courtesy and respect, where principles of freedom of speech and 'British values' were captured effectively. Students have access to a range of in-person services offered through Future U and are also able to discuss activities with the student union, whose staff maintained a permanent presence on campus. Further, the team were given access to the group's VLE which is delivered through Microsoft Teams. This provides evidence that students have a safe and reliable method to receive information about their course and to ask their lecturers and tutors questions. Students are also able to contact their personal tutors and Future U if they have any issues and also have access to Pam Assist, a wellbeing app. It is the team's view that this collective evidence shows that the group maintains physical, virtual and social learning environments that are safe, accessible and reliable for every student.
207. To assess the group's structures and policies to ensure the ongoing safety, accessibility and reliability of the group's learning environments, the team reviewed a range of evidence including the Student Engagement Strategy, which commits the group to producing 'accessible information and communication to students'. The team observed this commitment in action during a discussion at the QSC, on 11 October 2024, around the group's Academic Regulations. The team considered that this demonstrates an inclusive approach to a diverse student body and that it aligns with a philosophy of widening participation and commitment to supporting students from diverse backgrounds. Further evidence reviewed by the assessment team was a response to the OfS 'statement of expectations' contained in the Sexual Harassment and Misconduct Mapping document, which includes many planned actions. The EDI Policy is ethically grounded and includes practical strategies for implementation. Similarly, the Freedom of Speech and Expression Policy is legally grounded and translates core principles into practice. The Data Protection Policy is in line with GDPR, although some parts of it talk about what the group must do in order to be compliant, rather than explaining what it actually does; for example, 'Accountability means that we must have adequate resources and controls in place to ensure and to document GDPR compliance'. The Health and Safety Policy details a set of principles, and the assessment team observed its implementation in learning spaces, during the site visit. The Safeguarding Policy is comprehensive and connects with an anonymous reporting tool. Similarly, the Trans Identities

presentation and Autism presentation include valuable information about how to address and accommodate diverse identities. The group has also produced a draft set of Higher Education Academic Regulations, which were reviewed by the team. Although the group is currently subject to the regulations of its partner institutions (such as Sheffield Hallam University and Manchester Metropolitan University), these regulations have been developed in order to create an autonomous set of principles and processes which will underpin an institution with degree awarding powers. It is the team's view that the regulations represent an authentic and rigorous approach to recognising achievement, and equitability. The assessment team took part in discussions with staff and attended meetings at which the promotion of dignity, courtesy and respect for students were clearly paramount. Therefore, the assessment team is confident that the group maintains safe and accessible learning environments.

208. The assessment team reviewed evidence to determine whether the group has robust arrangements for ensuring that effective learning opportunities are provided to those of its students who may be studying at a distance from the organisation. Distance learning is not currently part of the group provision but courses are offered on a part-time basis and some include work placements. A set of placement forms for Healthcare Practice was reviewed, which were rigorous and detailed and a placement log was available for the Manchester Film School students for monitoring purposes. Further evidence to show the group's consideration of students who may be learning from a distance can be seen in its Programme Proposal document. The proposed BA (Hons) Fine Arts Programme Proposal document is an example reviewed by the team which includes a section on how e-learning opportunities will be developed and implemented. It states that there will be a variety of resources made available electronically such as live guest speakers and video demonstrations. This shows that, although distance courses are not currently offered by the group, those students who are on placement or participating in work experience have learning opportunities provided to them through e-learning methods.
209. To understand how the group ensures every student is enabled to monitor their progress and further their academic development, the team reviewed a range of evidence. The Student Status Policy provides guidance and procedures to ensure that every student's progress is regularly monitored and that they are involved in this monitoring. During the on-site visit meetings, the team found that students understood this process and its importance. The assessment team were also given an online demonstration of how marks and grades for assessments are entered into the Pro Monitor system, and how students are able to access their marks and grades through this portal. This provides every student with the means to access their grades and to monitor their own progress. The Student Status Meetings Review 2022-23 and 2023-24 demonstrate how student status (attendance, punctuality, meeting deadlines) data is monitored and how new actions are developed. For example, in response to a high number of students needing extra academic support, the Future U team planned to provide extra support over the summer break. The assessment team also noted the Future U Student Support Strategy which is dedicated to: 'Delivering and providing a seamless and inclusive student-centred support system and structure that enables all students throughout their journey to develop and achieve successful and rewarding academic and professional outcomes based on identifying and mitigating barriers to learning.' The assessment team found that the group has in place arrangements to enable every student to monitor their progress and further their academic development. It is the team's view that the group will continue to provide students with this level of portal access to monitoring their own learning.

## Assessment

210. The assessment team considered evidence to understand whether the group operates 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. The assessment team reviewed the group's draft Higher Education Academic Regulations and observed the discussion of these at the QSC meeting on 11 October 2024. The team found that these regulations made specific provision for the recognition of prior learning and that the implementation of the regulations would be managed so that students' existing learning would be validated without compromising standards. The team found that the regulations and discussions around the quality and quantity of credit provided evidence that the group is developing reliable and valid processes of assessment regarding the recognition of prior learning.
211. The assessment team also observed robust discussion around categorical marking, accreditation of prior learning, and the calculation of awards. It was evident that recommendations were made with the student in mind and all were keen to ensure that students were not disadvantaged by any technical decisions made around academic regulations. The Committee also showed effective governance in that the strategy was approved with some provisos before being presented to the Academic Board at its meeting on 31 October 2024, which the team also observed.
212. The assessment team reviewed a process of internal moderation of briefs, evidenced by the document Internal Moderation Paperwork for Unit Handbooks. This template specifies that all assessment tasks are subject to peer scrutiny and that aims, outcomes and clarity of tasks are all given attention. Completed examples of this paperwork provided evidence to the assessment team of this quality assurance in practice. The NSS Action Plan provides evidence that the group is a self-critical community, using data to drive specific improvements in its approach to assessment. All of the actions specified in this document are justified by NSS scores and the impact of particular measures is considered. The team view is that the documents it reviewed, and committee discussion, exemplified the group's commitment to developing 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.
213. The assessment team reviewed evidence of staff and students engaging in dialogue to promote a shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made. An issue of EdUcate, the group's higher education journal, outlines the role and responsibilities of personal tutors in encouraging active dialogue between staff and students. It sets out eight approaches to effective tutoring, including building a rapport with students, active listening and open communication. To support staff in this role, a CPD package was delivered offering various sessions together with a 'Good Practice Guide'. The assessment team's view is that this promotes a shared understanding of the basis for academic judgements, as it provides a mechanism to discursive engagement.
214. External examiner reports provide further evidence of staff and student engagement in dialogue to promote a shared understanding of the basis of academic judgements. For example:

- 'The team is very supportive of students and are always contactable via Teams or email for academic support. Learners have a full induction and have a course handbook which contains college policies and course information.' (Pearson external examiner report for Business)
- 'Students all meet their personal tutor twice per year, and can give feedback during these meetings.' (CDMT accreditation report)
- 'Feedback is consistent and well written with emphasis on improvement in the future.' (External examiner report on FdA and BA Make-up Artistry)
- 'A particular area of focus will be to ensure all tutors align feedback by ensuring feedforward is also included to aid student progress throughout the course as this enables them the potential to improve work in line with higher grade bands and supports their overall learning and enhancement.' (External examiner report on BA Business Management)

215. In a meeting with the assessment team, students discussed their experience of assessment and they confirmed that their learning was well-supported, that they understood the group's 'student status' processes, and that they regularly received feedback on their work. Assessed work adheres to the '15-day turnaround' policy and includes advice on how to improve. The team felt that this added to the evidence that the group provides a high quality academic experience to students from all backgrounds. The team concluded that this constitutes valid evidence that the group facilitated a dialogue between staff and students to promote a shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made.
216. The assessment team considered evidence to assess whether the group provides students with opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice. Section two of the Complaints, Mitigating Circumstances, RPEL and Appeals paper to Academic Board states, 'Re-enforcement of these referencing and study skills needs to be pervasive in all modules across all the provision, with a cohesive team approach which is also supported by personal tutors.' This indicates, in the view of the assessment team, an awareness of the importance of academic literacy. This is particularly crucial when students are receiving their assessment feedback; the personal tutor will interface with the module tutors in order to acquire the generic feedback from the assessments in order to work with the student on their academic skills.
217. The Assessment Framework 2024-25 'provides guidance to programme teams on approaches to assessment to assure standards and enhance the student experience' and the team observed how this policy outlines core principles of assessment design, which includes an emphasis on 'project-based and industry informed design'. It is the team's view that there is a commitment to quality enhancement in this document which ensures that the group is continually reflective about, and responsive to, assessment processes and their impact on students. This was also evident in discussions which took place during the QSC meeting which the team observed on 11 October 2024. It is the team's view, therefore, that the group provides students with opportunities to develop their academic practice as there are strong lines of communication between module tutors and personal tutors, and then personal tutors to students.

218. To confirm that the group operates processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice, the assessment team evaluated the Academic Integrity Policy – designed for the group’s students, with links for those on Manchester Metropolitan University and Sheffield Hallam University validated courses. The policy clearly sets out the group’s expectations of academic integrity and outlines its definition of misconduct. As the Academic Integrity Policy is a document for programmes validated by other higher education providers, it contains links to validating partners’ misconduct procedures. In preparation for the group to award its own degrees, it has created its own policy, which is embedded in its Higher Education Academic Regulations, currently in draft form. The team found that the emphasis on integrity as opposed to misconduct demonstrates a mature approach to assessment and inclusive student support. The team also reviewed a PowerPoint presentation on generative AI which sets out acceptable uses for AI but also where its use can be considered academic misconduct. Therefore, the team is satisfied that the group operates effective processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice as it has defined academic integrity and has set out its academic integrity policy. It has in place plans to operate its own processes regarding unacceptable academic practice, independently from its validating partners.
219. The assessment team reviewed a range of assessed work to determine whether processes for marking assessments and moderating marks are clearly articulated and consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process. The team found that marking of student work is fair and consistent across subject areas and students receive feedback in line with learning outcomes. The Internal Quality Reviews report to the QSC provides evidence that all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment are regularly reviewed, feedback from external examiners addressed, actions determined, and actions reviewed. The Assessment and Moderation Policy clearly articulates processes and concepts relating to assessment, moderation and second marking. The Assessment and Moderation Handbook provides a robust set of procedures and principles for internal and external assessors. External examiner reports are also valuable sources of evidence: BA Vocal Studies and Performance, BA Film Production and Content Creation, BA Acting all provide evidence of external scrutiny. The team concluded that internal mechanisms for marking and moderating were clearly articulated and implemented.

### **External examining**

220. To establish if the group makes scrupulous use of external examiners, including in the moderation of assessment tasks and student assessed work, the assessment team reviewed the scope and operation of existing practices under current validation arrangements. The team also looked at the plans in prospect for when the group is responsible for its own awards. The assessment team considered a range of external examiner reports across Bachelor of Arts (BA), Foundation Degree (FdA) and Higher National Diploma (HND) courses. These confirm that the levels of student achievement are in line with FHEQ benchmarks, and that they show evidence of the application of external benchmarking. Reports seen by the assessment team include samples from across both faculties and for different validating partners, including from sport and exercise science, theatre and performance, healthcare practice and business.
221. External examiners regularly comment on the high quality of work and student support. For example:

- 'The team is very supportive of students and are always contactable via Teams or email for academic support. Learners have a full induction and have a course handbook which contains college policies and course information.' (Pearson external examiner report for business)
- 'Students all meet their personal tutor twice per year, and can give feedback during these meetings.' (CDMT accreditation report)
- On the approach to assessment and feedback: 'Feedback is consistent and well written with emphasis on improvement in the future'. (External examiner reports for theatre courses)

222. During a meeting of the Academic Board on 31 October 2024, the assessment team observed a discussion about the consistency of external examiner feedback and noted that across the provision external examiners commented on the high standard of work. It was discussed whether this was an indication of an unnecessarily harsh assessment approach within the group and whether action was required. The team concluded that the evidence shows that existing external examiner processes, for courses delivered in partnership with validating universities and bodies, show that the group is making scrupulous use of external examiners and that they are moderating both assessment tasks and student assessed work.

223. To assess whether the group gives full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiners' reports and provides external examiners with a considered and timely response to their comments and recommendations, the assessment team reviewed current external examiner reports with a specific focus on the responses made. The assessment team found evidence of responses by course leaders as part of the external examiner process of all validating partners. For example, the theatre and performance external examiner from 2022-23 commented that, 'Assessment feedback from visiting staff this year was not as robust as the permanent lecturers' to which a robust response is given: 'To address the disparity in feedback between permanent and sessional staff, a training programme is currently under development to provide sessional staff with a comprehensive understanding of the courses assessment and feedback structures [...] there is now a very clear benchmark of quality for the programme that will become part of the course's culture'. The assessment team considered that the response indicated a willingness to address criticism and to develop a strategy for improvement. Similarly, in the business subject area, the assessment team saw a range of responses to issues raised. For example, 'A particular area of focus will be to ensure all tutors align feedback by ensuring feedforward is also included to aid student progress throughout the course as this enables them the potential to improve work in line with higher grade bands and supports their overall learning and enhancement.'

224. External examiners are asked to confirm that any issues raised in previous reports have been addressed and the assessment team found statements in the reports seen that confirmed this was the case. As such, the assessment team concluded that current processes for responding to external examiner comments and giving full and serious consideration to comments and recommendations, as well as providing examiners with timely responses, provide a strong basis for the development of the group's own processes during the probation period.

## Academic appeals and student complaints

225. The assessment team reviewed evidence to determine if the group has effective procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of the academic experience, and whether these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement. The team found that the group has in place a Complaints and Compliments Policy which sets out clear processes for the handling of complaints and provides detail of scope, process, responsibility and timescale. A complainant may be a student, applicant, former student, parent of a student under 18, or 'service user'. It is clear from the policy how it relates to other relevant policies and procedures including: academic appeals; behaviour; disciplinary and expectations; human resources; or data protection. The Complaints and Compliments Policy aligns to 'The good practice framework: handling student complaints and academic appeals' published by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).
226. The Director of Academic Standards and Academic Services Manager keep abreast of developments and engage in the OIA training offered to ensure that the policies and their implementation have regard to the good practice framework. The assessment team reviewed two examples of complaints, showing the process in action: one complaint was not upheld; the other was partially upheld. In one case, there was a complaint about the conduct of a member of teaching staff in which the complainant's issues were addressed, point by point, and the response clearly followed the process set out in the group's Complaints and Compliments Policy. The other complaint took issue with the quality of tutors and teaching and, again, the response enumerated the issues and addressed each of them, providing a judgement and mode of escalation if the complainant were dissatisfied. Both complaints were at stage two, which indicated the policy had been put into practice to provide progression from stage one.
227. To assess whether the group takes appropriate action following an appeal or complaint, the team reviewed the Annual Complaints Paper to the Academic Board, which provides data on complaints, appeals, and RPL applications. It indicates that complaints substantially decreased in 2022-23 and identifies issues in relation to access to higher education and counselling courses. The assessment team noted that complaints were routinely monitored and evaluated through this report, and also reported to the Divisional Board. This led the assessment team to conclude that there was a robust approach to ensuring that action could be assigned at an appropriate level and inform enhancement. Two specific examples of complaints were reviewed. The assessment team found that these had been dealt with appropriately and in line with the group's Complaints and Compliments Policy as set out above. The New DAPs plan indicates that a new complaints policy and procedure will be implemented in year one of its probationary monitoring period to bring about a more 'effective and user-friendly complaints process'. The team concluded that the group ensures that appropriate action is taken following an appeal or complaint and that its new process will be appropriate when it is implemented.

## Conclusions

228. The assessment team's view is that the group meets criterion B3 because it has a track record of providing a high quality academic experience to all students and aims to develop this further through the probationary period. The New DAPs plan is credible, and includes a range of reviews to be conducted during the probationary period, but it is recommended that more detail is included to aid the monitoring during this time.



229. The group demonstrates that it is able to design and deliver courses and qualifications that provide a high quality academic experience to all students from all backgrounds, irrespective of their location, mode of study, academic subject, protected characteristics, previous educational background or nationality. Learning opportunities are consistently and rigorously quality assured.
230. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that the group effectively designs the curriculum, learning, teaching, assessment and feedback in a way that provides a high quality academic experience for all students and has in place robust quality assurance measures to ensure that strategies and policies are adhered to in practice.
231. The assessment team further concluded that learning opportunities are consistently and rigorously quality assured and that the group designs the curriculum, assessment and feedback in ways which give students the best chance of achieving their desired outcomes.
232. The assessment team recommends full scrutiny of mapping of alternative pathways documents during the validation process to ensure coherence of programmes with multiple elements or pathways.
233. This view is based on specific consideration of the New DAPs plan and supporting evidence requirements for this criterion.

#### **Specified changes to the New DAPs plan**

234. The team's view is that no specified changes are required for criterion B3.

# Assessment of DAPs criterion C: Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff

## Criterion C1: The role of academic and professional staff

### Advice to the OfS

235. The assessment team's view is that the group's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion C1: The role of academic and professional staff.
236. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion C1.
237. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence and the New DAPs plan which shows, in summary, that the group can reasonably be expected to assure itself that it has appropriate numbers of staff to teach its students and ensure that everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning, and in the assessment of student work, is appropriately qualified, supported and developed to the level(s) and subject(s) of the qualifications to be awarded.
238. This view is based on specific consideration of the New DAPs plan and supporting evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

### Subcriterion C1.1

**C1.1: An organisation granted powers to award degrees assures itself that it has appropriate numbers of staff to teach its students. Everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning, and in the assessment of student work, is appropriately qualified, supported and developed to the level(s) and subject(s) of the qualifications being awarded.**

### Advice to the OfS

239. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of subcriterion C1.1 and is, in fact, already meeting evidence requirements for this subcriterion.
240. This is because it has established that the group continually invests in and values the scholarship and pedagogical effectiveness of its staff, and that it has appropriate numbers of staff to teach its students. Additionally, the team is assured that staff involved in the teaching or supporting student learning and in the assessment of student work are appropriately qualified, supported and developed to the level(s) and subject(s) of the qualifications to be awarded.
241. The team also considers the group's New DAPs plan to be credible in terms of how it will operate and further develop in this area through the probationary period.
242. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the group's New DAPs plan and relevant evidence.

## Reasoning

243. To understand if relevant learning, teaching and assessment practices are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship, the assessment team considered a range of evidence. This includes the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, which outlines the group's approach to scholarship. The introduction of this document states that, in order to deliver its strategic aims, the group relies on 'the professionalism, enthusiasm and practice of all those staff who teach or support student learning and assessment' and goes on to emphasise the group's commitment to 'provide inspiring and engaging development programmes for all staff who support learning and assessment.' One of the group's strategic objectives is to provide an 'innovative, flexible and enterprising curriculum' and the strategy document lists how it will deliver this, including a commitment to 'the provision of a supportive environment so that staff can further enhance student-centred learning, scholarship-informed teaching and teaching-informed research'. This is supported by the UCEN Manchester Academic Board's terms of reference, which require the Academic Board to 'promote research and scholarship within UCEN Manchester and report on such activity'. The assessment team considered that these terms of reference provide assurance that the strategic approach to scholarship is embedded throughout the structure of UCEN Manchester.
244. The assessment team also considered policies that operationalise the group's strategic aim to deliver an inspiring curriculum through its support of academic and professional development. The team's view was that the Learning and Development Policy 2023-24 outlines clearly the commitment to staff CPD. This document sets out how staff are encouraged to participate in CPD activity, including mandatory training and professional study, and also explains how to identify development needs. It was evident to the team from this document that there are clear procedures to ensure that staff members' professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship are developed – for example, through induction, the appraisal process and one-to-one meetings with line managers. Section 9.2 of the Learning and Development Policy 2023-24, states that staff are expected to commit to a minimum of 100 hours CPD (pro-rated for part-time staff) and this CPD should include scholarship and research (section 9.3), and evaluation and reflection on such activities (section 9.5).
245. Section 10 of the policy, Professional Study, also evidences the group's commitment to supporting professional development. This section sets out how staff can apply for support for professional study and what support is available, including financial support and time to complete studies. It includes the scope of what the group defines as professional study and shows staff how to identify professional development priorities, what is likely to be supported and at what level. In meetings with teaching staff, the team saw evidence of the policy being applied in practice, as several staff indicated they had been supported to undertake masters' or PhD level study by the provider. This support included both time to complete the qualification (sections 10.3, 10.9) and financial support (section 10.4). Section 11 of the Learning and Development Policy 2023-24 specifically outlines in detail the group's commitment to research and scholarship in order to ensure learning, teaching and assessment practices are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship.
246. The assessment team also found examples and outputs from the research and scholarship activities of staff that evidence these policies and processes being applied in practice. These

showed how the group supports staff to disseminate their work at internal development events, including the Festival of Learning, and the UCEN Manchester HE CPD Conference 2024. It is stated in the group's New DAPs plan that staff engage in ten higher education CPD days a year, which are a combination of days planned by the group's central Group Quality Team, schools and faculties curriculum development, and colleague planning days. A review of the group's CPD in 2019 highlighted the need for more higher education-based CPD and so, in 2024, it launched the Festival of Learning. This is described in the group's New DAPs plan as 'a three-month celebration of knowledge, growth and professional development'. The festival includes weekly themed bulletins and a two-day conference. Examples of relevant CPD include a presentation during the 2024 festival by AI specialists on generative AI and assessment, as part of a whole week of focus on AI. It is the assessment team's view that this shows how the group is taking the impact of AI on education seriously, is invested in understanding current issues in higher education, and is sharing good practice across the staff team. The assessment team concluded that the group ensures learning, teaching and assessment practices are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship.

247. To understand the academic and professional expertise of staff, the assessment team considered a range of job descriptions and staff CVs, including those for heads of departments, senior leaders and lecturers. The assessment team found that minimum role requirements set out at the point of recruitment in clear job descriptions were, in its view, appropriate. For example, the job description for a lecturer role required, as a minimum, a degree, current and valid industry experience, a Cert Ed or PGCE qualification, a minimum Level 3 occupational qualification and English and Maths GCSEs. Additionally, experience of delivering outstanding teaching and learning was required in the essential experience section, along with a proven track record of delivery in a subject specialism or current valid industry specialism. This required combination of industry and academic experience was evidenced in practice through the discussions with staff during the assessment team's site visit. The assessment team heard several accounts from creative arts staff who were actively engaged with professional careers in the arts alongside their teaching career. The review of staff CVs demonstrated that staff were appointed in line with role requirements. The role of the dual-professional was discussed during the site visit and is defined in the UCEN Manchester Learning and Development Policy 2023-24 (specifically section 14, Dual Professionalism – Industry Updating). In addition to examples of ongoing professional practice in the creative arts courses, in other curriculum areas it was the team's view that staff are supported to undertake further study in their subject. This was evidenced through meetings during the site visit and in the document UCEN Manchester Professional Study (Long Course) Application Form - Completed. For example, the assessment team heard that one programme leader was currently undertaking masters'-level study, fully supported by UCEN Manchester.
248. To understand how the group supports staff to engage with the pedagogic development of their discipline knowledge, the assessment team considered a new digital platform called Thrive, which supports staff in the tracking and completion of CPD activities. Thrive allows for tailored and bespoke CPD, with a planned development path. The New DAPs plan explains how Thrive allows managers and staff to track their CPD more effectively and design specific, pedagogic development opportunities. Thrive is available to all the group staff and accessed through a secure login, enabling training to be accessed remotely. It reportedly contains unlimited access to 80,000 CPD modules for staff and is delivered in a variety of formats.

During a demonstration of Thrive, the team saw how training in progress, training due and training completed was recorded, and how line managers could specify required training and monitor its completion. In addition to mandatory training in areas such as health and safety and safeguarding, the team saw how Thrive provides access to a wide range of specialist subject-specific modules – which is a new initiative for the group – aimed at extending its capacity to develop staff across professional as well as educational areas.

249. To further understand how the group supports staff in this area, the assessment team reviewed the job description for the role of Advanced Practitioner (Quality Improvement). This new role was developed to provide ongoing support to teaching staff in improving their teaching practice in relation to pedagogic developments in their subject. The assessment team met with the person appointed to this role during the site visit, and learned how this role was intended to operate as a ‘critical friend’ to the teaching staff. The team heard how this role facilitated and supported staff to actively engage with their personal pedagogic development and was able to provide bespoke CPD support. In addition, in meetings with the staff during the site visit, staff discussed a wide range of experiences of CPD and the team heard that they were allocated time and funding for courses to enhance their professional development. CPD activities were provided for staff during the Festival of Learning event and the team heard how departments benefitted from sharing their experiences and found the sessions meaningful and fulfilling. The assessment team heard about a specific example of how an internal CPD session created by staff was recognised as good practice and evolved into a conference paper, which was then delivered externally – this shows effective progression from CPD to scholarship.
250. The assessment team also heard how data is used in the enhancement process as a tool for support and the role of the Advanced Practitioner in helping colleagues reflect on what was working and what wasn’t. The approach, known internally as ‘Measure, report, support’, was discussed by staff in meetings with the assessment team. Staff confirmed “there’s a lot of trust in this environment”, and the Advanced Practitioner was referred to by one member of staff as their ‘education therapist’. This evidence led the assessment team to reach the conclusion that the group effectively supports staff to engage with the pedagogic development of their discipline knowledge.
251. To understand whether the group’s staff are supported to understand current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline, and how such knowledge and understanding informs and enhances their teaching, the assessment team considered a range of evidence. The team found there were a number of initiatives described in the documentation, and evident in practice during the site visit, that demonstrated appropriate support for this. An example is the teaching Community of Practice process (CoP), which clusters staff in groups of linked subjects together and actively encourages discussion across a range of common themes that affect higher education. This allows staff to share experiences and identify good practice. Recent examples of CoP themes provided in the New DAPs plan include ‘Exploring the issue of over assessment’, ‘Blogging for assessment’ and ‘Project-based assessment’. Staff indicated during discussions with the assessment team during the visit that the work done in the CoPs then fed into scholarship. One CoP CPD session on assessment, where staff created a presentation to deliver to UCEN Manchester, led to a conference paper which was delivered externally. The team also heard about a drive in the CoPs to work on enhancing assessment, which was reflected in the CoP presentations seen by the team. Examples of scholarship being applied to practice include the work delivered in generative AI during the

Festival of Learning (referred to above). This led to a tutor developing work on the use of AI in scriptwriting, and a scholarship exchange being set up between the photography degree and the Open Eye Gallery.

252. In addition, the assessment team reviewed the group's TEF panel statement from the 2023 exercise, which covered the provision delivered at UCEN Manchester. The team saw that the TEF panel considered 'SE3: Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement' to be 'a very high-quality feature', based on the level of scholarship and academic practice demonstrated by the evidence. This supported the assessment team's findings that there was considerable evidence that the group's staff understand current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline, and that such knowledge and understanding directly informs and enhances their teaching through multiple initiatives. These were both evident in the documentation and in practice as outlined above.
253. The assessment team considered a range of evidence to determine if staff are able to engage in reflection and evaluation of their learning, teaching and assessment practice, including documentation about the higher education Review of Learning (RoL). This is an enhancement process, designed to encourage and support staff to reflect on their practice. The team reviewed the RoL for Business and Law for 2023-24 and saw that staff had identified three areas for enhancement:
- improving their relationship with their current validating partner
  - improving their work in their CoP to include increased professional practice
  - bringing in more guest speakers to liven up the module.
254. This was then followed up with a 12-week action plan, which, in the assessment team's view, was realistic and appropriate. It concluded with a reflection on the actions taken in relation to the three areas for improvement:
- the programme leader recognised that it was challenging to meet with module leaders from the validating partner, so sought support from the Director of Academic Quality at UCEN Manchester to make that happen
  - the CoP target was achieved through the publication of a symposium poster
  - four guest speakers were arranged for the module, so the plan was achieved in this area.
255. The RoL process is overseen by the Group Quality Directorate, which is a centralised quality team operating across the group. It works in conjunction with the UCEN Manchester quality team to provide critical reflection and oversight of their activities. In the team's view, through the RoL process, the Group Quality Directorate provides staff at UCEN Manchester with a supportive space to reflect and then, plan for and make changes to drive improvements in their learning, teaching and assessment practice. Through its review of the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board minutes from the meeting on 14 March 2023, the team saw evidence of how this reflective process feeds up to the senior leadership teams to inform further action, in this instance through an RoL report which fed into the overarching strategic review of learning, teaching and assessment. Related actions were communicated back down

through the structure, indicating strong lines of communication across the group and UCEN Manchester.

256. The staff at UCEN Manchester also contribute to an annual Self-Evaluation Document (SED) at both programme and business unit level. This is part of the annual monitoring cycle, which provides opportunities for them to identify areas for enhancement. For example, in 2023-24, suggested enhancements included: increasing the proportion of students getting a distinction grade at Foundation Degree level; addressing inconsistencies in the implementation of the personal tutor model; and further developing programme-level leadership. This recognition and acknowledgement of areas for enhancement is evidence of the approach to reflection encouraged by the group in practice. In addition, in the New DAPs plan the team observed how the group identified understanding the impact of AI on assessment as an emerging area for improvement from this year's higher education RoL. The assessment team concluded that there was strong evidence that the group provides many opportunities for, and engages effectively with, reflection and evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment at all levels in the organisation.
257. To understand whether the group provides sufficient development opportunities aimed at enabling staff to enhance their practice and scholarship, the assessment team reviewed documents that, in its view, show that there is comprehensive support for programme leaders' development across the provision. This includes the opportunity to attend the Leadership of Learning programme, which is available to both academic and non-academic staff. The team considered the appointment of an Advanced Practitioner (Quality Improvement) to show commitment to the enhancement of academic practice for teaching staff. This was evident from a range of examples the team saw of bespoke CPD support offered for teaching staff and the impact they have on individual members of staff. For example, it saw an email exchange between a member of staff and the Advanced Practitioner discussing the use of feedforwards (a development tool) and how MS Forms could be used as a way of gathering student feedback. Discussions with staff during the visit reinforced the team's view that the Advanced Practitioner role was providing valuable support in this area.
258. Further, the New DAPs plan outlines how staff are encouraged to undertake various other development opportunities, such as fellowships with Advance HE. In the team's view, this shows that the group has a commitment to professional development of teaching and learning against a nationally recognised scheme. As stated in the group's New DAPs plan, 14 current staff have achieved Fellowship and six Senior Fellowship; a further seven have signed up to complete Fellowships for the 2023-24 academic year. Additionally, staff are allowed five days per year in industry to support their subject specialism practice and this time is discounted from their teaching commitment. It is also stated in the New DAPs plan that, to enhance teaching staff's scholarship, they are encouraged and supported to undertake higher education programmes. The plan goes on to say that the group has supported three staff to study at doctoral level, five at masters' level, and two to undertake Certificate of Education and PGCEs. At the site visit, the assessment team heard from one member of teaching staff who had undertaken a masters' study programme which was fully supported by the group, and one was given time away from teaching in order to perform in shows in their professional capacity. It is the team's view, therefore, that there are sufficient development opportunities aimed at enabling staff to enhance their practice and scholarship at the group.

259. The assessment team considered whether staff have opportunities to gain experience in curriculum development and assessment design and to engage with the activities of other higher education providers, for example through becoming external examiners, validation panel members or external reviewers. In the group's New DAPs plan, it states that staff within the group have substantial experience of curriculum development with a number of validating bodies, including Leeds Beckett University, Manchester University, University of Salford, Teesside University, and its current partners (Sheffield Hallam University and Manchester Metropolitan University). The group has ten staff who act as external examiners for other institutions and it encourages staff to apply for positions as external examiners and validation panel members by forwarding relevant adverts. Academics from a different school also sit on internal validation panels to gain experience, which supports them to gain external posts. Through discussions with the teaching staff and the Advanced Practitioner at the site visit and from the evidence supplied by the provider, the assessment team learned that the staff have opportunities to engage in curriculum and assessment design and development. During a meeting with teaching staff on site, it was clear to the assessment team that the staff also have a high degree of externality in their vocational capacity through involvement with educational consortia, relevant industry research projects and events, and that this informs their curriculum and assessment design activities. As such, the assessment team concluded that there is sufficient evidence to confirm that the staff have opportunities to gain experience in curriculum development and assessment design and to engage with the activities of other higher education providers.
260. To assess whether staff have expertise in providing feedback on assessment that is timely, constructive and developmental, the assessment team reviewed a sample of Communities of Practice documents (CoPs). The CoP presentation from the Arden Theatre School on 'Reviewing the Marking and Feedback Process' included a deep dive into assessment and feedback practices within the department. It concluded that, through the development of a feedback framework structure, the quality of the feedback improved. Some key highlights from their findings were that there was greater depth and rigour, that it removed subjectivity, that there was greater continuity and consistency, and that it provided clarity for students. This was also reflected in the Assessment Framework 2024, which the team found is designed to ensure that all aspects of assessment – moderation, feedback and grade input – are completed in a timely manner. At the site visit, the team heard confirmation of this happening in practice in discussions with both staff and students. Staff were all aware of the 15-day turn-around deadline for assessment and they were committed to this. The students met by the assessment team also reflected that they received feedback on their work which was both constructive and within the agreed timescales; so was 'timely' in accordance with the Assessment Framework 2024.
261. The group also offers in-house CPD on assessment practice. For example: the new DAPs plan states that the Advanced Practitioner has supported staff to identify assessment strategies; day two of the Festival of Learning focused on revising assessment strategies and models. It is the team's view that the evidence submitted, as well as information gained from the New DAPs plan and testimony from staff at the visit, demonstrated a commitment to developing a range of feedback strategies that both supported the student and provided opportunities for feedforwards in a constructive and timely manner. The assessment team concluded that there was expertise in providing feedback on assessment that is timely, constructive and developmental, with some pockets of outstanding practice within the group.



262. The assessment team reviewed notes taken from the group's curriculum planning sessions to determine whether the group's staff have skills in curriculum development and assessment design. As noted earlier in this section, the New DAPs plan states that staff have had significant experience in developing curricula and assessments in partnership with their current validating partners. The New DAPs plan also outlines the important role that the Advanced Practitioner will play moving forwards in developing these skills further in staff. The assessment team explored this area further with staff on site, where discussions took place around the curriculum design process with Sheffield Hallam University and the limitations that came with that. Staff felt that, if granted degree awarding powers, they could apply the experience of curriculum and assessment design they had gained working with Sheffield Hallam to develop a more bespoke curriculum tailored to the need of the group's student body.
263. It was evident to the team that the group has invested in CPD aimed at curriculum development and assessment design, through several pieces of evidence (including the previously mentioned CoP presentation from the Arden Theatre School on standardising departmental feedback for faculty and the CoP presentation on Blogging for Assessment). This latter document showed how staff were using blogging on the Level 5 Counselling programme and sharing best practice, including rationale, expectations and method. The assessment team concluded that staff have experience of curriculum and assessment design and that the group is invested in staff CPD in curriculum development, and current practice in assessment design. The team found staff to be highly reflective and self-evaluating, and to have significant professional and vocational experience which contributes to and is evident in their curriculum planning and design. Given that the group's current experience in curriculum development is in conjunction with its validating partners, it is the assessment team's view that curriculum development and design is an area that requires ongoing monitoring throughout the probationary period.
264. To understand whether the group's staff have engagement with the activities of providers of higher education in other organisations, the assessment team reviewed the New DAPs plan. As previously mentioned, the plan states that there are currently ten staff acting as external examiners at other institutions, active during 2024-25. The plan also states that, staff are encouraged and supported to gain membership of external networks such as the Greater Manchester Colleges Group, Advance HE college-based higher education group and the Association of Colleges HE Group. In addition to this, the group has an experienced member of staff who was a QAA Quality Reviewer and is now an OfS Quality Assessor. In the team's view, this demonstrates that staff have opportunities to gain sector-wide experience and use this to enhance the quality of the group's offering. The team is therefore satisfied that the group's staff have an appropriate level of externality and that they engage with the activities of providers of higher education in other organisations.
265. The assessment team also reviewed the group's New DAPs plan to determine whether the group has made a rigorous assessment of the skills and expertise required to teach all students and the appropriate staff/student ratios. The plan outlines a new process that was introduced in September 2024, whereby new tutors have to be approved by the Curriculum Management Panel before commencing delivery on higher education programmes. This process involves the panel reviewing the qualifications and experience of proposed tutors and recommending appropriate support where it considered this to be required. In the team's view, the Business Planning Guidelines ensure consideration of appropriate staff to student

ratios, as the first requirement under the general process is that budgets for teaching staff 'will be derived by reference to the curriculum plan'. In addition, the New DAPs plan highlights how the programme validation process provides assurance that courses have sufficient staffing levels with staff holding appropriate qualifications and experience. This starts at the strategic planning approval stage at the Curriculum Management Panel, where the proposal will identify any additional staffing needs. For example, the team saw an example of a curriculum planning document, Athlete Wellbeing CMP Proposal which articulated how the resourcing of the new course would require additional staffing based on the proposed intake. Also, the New DAPs plan states that 'Staff workloads are managed by the Heads of Department who ensure the matching of skills to modules and student/staff ratios.'

266. The team found that staff CVs show that staff have considerable vocational experience and the necessary teaching qualifications to deliver relevant and high quality provision. This, in the team's view, aligns very well with the Lecturer job description, showing that the group plans for and recruits high quality staff with appropriate skills and expertise. During the site visit, the assessment team met highly qualified staff both professionally (up to PhD level in some cases) and vocationally (practising film producers, dancers, actors). As a result, the assessment team considered that the group has demonstrated it makes rigorous assessments of the skills and expertise required to teach all students and the appropriate staff/student ratios.
267. To understand whether the group has appropriate staff recruitment practices, the assessment team considered the group's Fair and Safe Recruitment Policy. This policy sets out the legal basis for the group's recruitment practices and also outlines roles and responsibilities within the group. The recruitment process is conducted by a central recruitment team and all staff undergo mandatory induction training. The team also reviewed example recruitment guides and found that, in its view, the need for experienced staff was clearly articulated. It was also evident in the staff CVs that staff have considerable vocational experience and the necessary teaching qualifications to deliver relevant and high quality provision. The assessment team is therefore of the view that the group currently has robust recruitment practices in place. The New DAPs plan outlines a proposed action plan which mentions introducing new requirements for minimum qualifications for new staff, and the delivery of this plan is something that the team recommends reviewing during the probationary period. The assessment team is therefore of the view that the group currently has robust recruitment practices in place.

## Conclusions

268. The assessment team concluded that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of subcriterion C1.1 and is already meeting evidence requirements for this subcriterion because everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning, and in the assessment of student work, is appropriately qualified, supported and developed to the levels and subjects of the qualifications that will be awarded. The team has established that the group continually invests in and values the scholarship and pedagogical effectiveness of its staff, and that it has appropriate numbers of staff to teach its students.
269. The team also considers the group's New DAPs plan to be credible in terms of how it will operate and further develop in this area through the probationary period.

270. As mentioned in the team's reasoning for its conclusions, curriculum development and design is an area it considers to require ongoing monitoring throughout the probationary period as the group's experience to date has been in conjunction with its validating partners.

### **Specified changes to the New DAPs plan**

271. The assessment team's view is that no specified changes are required for criterion C1.

## Criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement

### Advice to the OfS

272. The assessment team's view is that the group's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement.
273. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion D1.
274. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows in summary that the group can reasonably be expected to have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.
275. This view is based on specific consideration of the New DAPs plan supporting evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

### Subcriterion D1.1

**D1.1: Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.**

### Advice to the OfS

276. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of subcriterion D1.1 and is, in fact, already meeting the majority of evidence requirements for this subcriterion. This is because the group has in place policies and procedures which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.
277. The team also considers the group's New DAPs plan to be credible in terms of how it will operate and further develop in this area through the probationary period.
278. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the group's New DAPs plan and relevant evidence.

### Reasoning

279. To consider whether the group takes a comprehensive strategic and operational approach to determine and evaluate how it enables student development and achievement for its diverse body of students, the assessment team reviewed minutes from the Divisional Board meeting held on 9 March 2023. In the team's view, these minutes show awareness and engagement with issues of student development and achievement at a strategic level. For example, in the meeting, the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Progress Report (2022-23) was discussed, and specifically the achievement gaps between different ethnic groups. The group's Areas for Improvement identified an increased gap between black and white students' achievement rates. The minutes recorded that a deep dive into achievement rates was in progress and that early reports indicated that this was not a blanket issue across all schools and faculties. It

was decided that an enhanced monitoring action was required, including an in-year analytical report, to ascertain causation, to inform management practice going forward.

280. The assessment team saw in the minutes consideration of other issues affecting the diverse population of students, such as the cost of living crisis, welfare and mental health issues, and the student work-life balance. In addition to discussion of these issues, action plans were put in place to address identified challenges. The assessment team observed, via three years of Academic Board minutes, how this proactive approach was embedded at all levels through the organisation. This evidence was supported by minutes of the QSC meetings over the same period, where student achievement is a standard agenda item, and associated progression and attainment data is tracked and discussed with both academic and support staff. The team agreed that this aligns with the UCEN Manchester Student Engagement Strategy, which clearly outlines the commitment to working with students in partnership throughout the learning journey, as part of its comprehensive strategic and operational approach to determine and evaluate how it enables student development and achievement.
281. The assessment team found that the group designs some of its courses which currently go through a validation process in partnership with validating bodies. The group's intended processes, should it award its own degrees, is set out in the group's drafted Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook. Part of this process focuses on the teaching and learning assessment strategies, which include pedagogic practices that support student development and achievement for the group's diverse body of students. It is evident from this document that the group intends to build on this process if it awards its own degrees. The team found an example of this in the Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook with regards to the revalidation of programmes, which will involve an in-depth critical evaluation every five years to ensure that, among other factors, the programme continues to meet the needs of all key stakeholders. It has also been stated, as part of the group's New DAPs plan, that going forward, the group's validations will have a specific focus on how courses facilitate the development of independent learning to build confidence and skills, while 'acknowledging different starting points'. An example the group provided to illustrate how it enables student development and achievement is through the Arden School of Theatre, where the development of skills is set out across all levels of learning. At Level 4, the content of courses is designed so that students move from 'dependency to interdependency'; at Level 5, so that students go from 'interdependency to independency'; and finally at Level 6, from 'independency to professional practice'.
282. Additionally, the assessment team found that the group has a comprehensive and strategic approach to enable student development through its student support systems. An example of this is the Future U initiative (see paragraph 202) which runs through the core of the higher education provision at both UCEN Manchester campuses. At both Openshaw and City campuses, Future U has a permanently staffed presence with support teams that could be either booked or available through drop-in sessions, to discuss any issues students might have. During the site visit, the assessment team saw the effectiveness of the day-to-day operation of this initiative permeating through the higher education provision. Future U was well signposted, resourced and available to all students. In discussions with students, they were clearly able to articulate the support that Future U provided for their studies, development and achievement. They particularly expressed how helpful it was that Future U staff were available all day on campus. Future U was also highlighted as a strength by the

CDMT accreditation panel, which stated in its accreditation report that 'the Future U team offers a robust structure of support for students, including for their psychological wellbeing'.

283. During the on-site visit, the assessment team heard evidence from students about how they felt supported to develop and achieve at an operational level. Therefore, the assessment team's view is that the student experience is at the heart of the group's approach. One student told the team, "Knowing your tutor and having consistency is better and they get to know us as students". Another stated, "It is helpful to have one tutor per module to know who to go to for support". Samples of external examiner reports also support the view that the group has comprehensive strategic and operational approaches to student development and achievement. For example, an external examiner commented that the 'management of the programme was excellent', which echoed their comments from the previous year, indicating a consistently high standard of management is delivered by the programme team. This in turn is a good indicator of supporting students to develop and achieve. The same examiner also commented that the standard of work reviewed was very high, again reflecting the support for students to achieve and that the course they were examining was an example of good practice – stating that 'the core team members obviously know and understand their student groups very well and take time to offer pastoral as well as academic support.' The assessment team therefore reached the conclusion that the group takes a comprehensive, strategic and operational approach to determine and evaluate how it enables student development and achievement for its diverse body of students. This approach is set out in its policies and procedures, and outcomes are evidenced by its students and external examiners.
284. The team assessed whether the group has a comprehensive induction strategy to ensure students are advised about, and inducted into, their study programmes in an effective way, and account is taken of different students' choices and needs. The team reviewed the group's induction tutorial support materials and its induction checklist and found that these supported staff to deliver effective inductions. For example, the induction tutorial support materials scaffold the conversation with the students through a series of practical examples and ideas which help the students develop a sense of belonging. They demonstrate how the induction process puts the student first and develops a bond between the student and the teacher from the outset. The UCEN Manchester induction checklist for 2023-24 is a useful tool in ensuring that all aspects of an effective induction are covered and signed off. It is designed to provide tutors with a series of steps around the induction process to complete and ensures that tutors are thinking about the whole process. It also is generic so ensures that there is a consistent approach to induction at a base level. The checklist is comprehensive in the view of the assessment team and provides a solid foundation for inducting new students into programmes. The assessment team also reviewed the personal tutor model documentation. This outlines the package of support that each tutor provides for the student to meet their different choices and needs. The guide opens with how important the personal tutorial model is in 'enhancing students' academic, personal, and social development and is essential in ensuring the students make the most of their time at UCEN Manchester.' In the team's view, this indicates a focus on the students' choices and how best to meet their needs on their academic journey.
285. The assessment team also reviewed the Student Status Policy which, in the team's view, outlines a clear strategic approach to supporting students' diverse needs and introduces the Future U initiative. The team felt that the Student Status Policy provides clear evidence of

support structures for managing student risk around concern and/or the perceived seriousness of the situation affecting the student. It was the view of the team that the UCEN Manchester induction checklist shows the application of the policy and that it is a practical, operational resource. In the team's view, there is constructive communication between the support teams and the students. This is evidenced in the PowerPoint presentation from the Disability Officer on disability support allowance (DSA), which shows a positive student engagement from the Disability Officer supporting the students in their induction phase with a detailed and welcoming list of support channels and methods for students to get in touch. The DSA presentation was one example of how the team put together comprehensive information on an aspect of support, which was clear, informative and supportive. The UCEN Manchester induction presentation 2023-24 also aligns to the strategic approach outlined in the policy, providing further evidence of institutional and consistent support.

286. It is therefore the assessment team's view that the group has a comprehensive induction strategy to ensure students are advised about, and inducted into, their study programmes in an effective way. It feels that account is taken of different students' choices and needs, and that this is effectively deployed across the higher education provision at UCEN Manchester. During the assessment team on-site visit, which took place at the start of the academic year, new students fed back to the team that they felt confident in navigating the UCEN Manchester's systems, such as assessment practices and the VLE, and were also able to tell the team where they could go to for support if needed. The team's view is that the group's induction procedure is well planned, well documented and implemented in an effective way.
287. The assessment team considered the group's New DAPs plan to assess the group's approach to student support services. It found evidence that there are effective student and staff advisory, support and counselling services in place, and that these are monitored and any resource needs arising are considered. At pre-entry to study, students are asked to complete a one-page profile which provides the group with information on how to support student's individual needs through a Personal Learning Plan. This enables the group to have support systems in place for students that might need access to such services as learning support and disability services. The group's Disability Officer can then meet with the Admissions Officer to advise Future U and ensure that support is in place for individual students.
288. The assessment team found that the group has a structure of support for students when they arrive at the provider and Future U provides a range of academic and non-academic support. There is a wellbeing officer and the Head of Student Advice, Support and Wellbeing has a presence on the Academic Board. To understand the work done by the Future U team, the assessment team reviewed a Mental Health and Wellbeing report. It listed the remit of Future U and how it intended to engage staff to help them improve the wellbeing of their students, through engagement with personal tutors and delivering wellbeing workshops during tutorial sessions. As stated in the group's Mental Health and Wellbeing report, students are offered three areas of engagement: face-to-face meetings with the Wellbeing Officer; face-to-face sessions with the Counselling Team; and access to the PAM Assist digital platform, which is an app that offers students digital advice on how to improve their mental health. It is stated that 100 students engaged with this app at the beginning of academic year 2022. The group provided evidence of a plan to check in with students before the Christmas break to offer financial and pastoral advice and support. The team also found that the group intends to build

on its current offering by joining Student Minds' Mental Health Charter programme during the academic year 2024-25.

289. The effectiveness of student and staff advisory and counselling services are monitored through the group's Self Evaluation Document (SED) and Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which are reviewed by the central Group Quality Team to ensure their integrity. The SED contributes to, and is monitored at, the Quarterly Business Review. Through its review of the records from the Quarterly Business Review, the assessment team could see that areas of good practice are discussed, and areas for development are addressed through an action and enhancement plan. As part of the Quality Business Review, the group collates self-evaluation documents for all of its schools and faculties and RAG rates each focus area according to whether requirements are being met. For example, in the academic year 2022-23, the Manchester Film School considered that it exceeded requirements in academic standards and teaching, learning, assessment and feedback but only meets requirements with conditions for student engagement. From this, a higher education review of learning summary was created and areas of strength and enhancement identified. The group also maintains a risk register as part of its Quarterly Business Review which, although broad and covers the entire group, does cover aspects relating to this criterion such as strengthening the safeguarding structure and roles, and delivering in-person and online CPD. This, in the team's view, indicates the commitment to effectively monitor the student support process and the resources required to deliver it.
290. The team also found evidence of effective monitoring, in the minutes of a meeting of the Curriculum, Quality and Standards Committee (CQSC) held on 7 May 2021. During a discussion on UCEN Manchester's quality enhancement and quality assurance arrangements for 2021-22, departmental SEDs and QEPs were considered, and specific actions identified and incorporated into an action plan to be completed and reviewed by the next CQSC. The Business and Computing QEP considered at the meeting reflected on action taken previously to ensure students' needs were being met through effective resourcing and timetabling. It notes, 'Good practice is being shared in team meetings and is being encouraged to be reviewed across the classroom-based activities where possible. In the CoP we are looking at sharing the best delivery/pedagogy that is being used to support our learners to ensure that new provision is developed whilst giving others the opportunity to adapt into current courses; such as the availability of resources and the flexibility of sessions to suit our student's needs in terms of timetabling with resource.' The overarching SED QEP reviewed by the assessment team, which contains an evaluation across all schools and faculties, highlights strengths as well as areas for enhancement, such as student engagement. The SED QEP also includes a review of previous targets and objectives, and if and when they have been achieved. For example, an update was provided showing that there was an increase in the student knowledge of the library service's offer of referencing, proofreading and support for academic work, showing how the actions of the team in response to a previously identified objective had a positive impact. In the team's view, this example demonstrates that the effectiveness of student and staff advisory, support and counselling services is monitored and actions are taken to improve quality and provide resource where required.
291. The assessment team reviewed documentation provided by the group to consider whether its administrative support systems enable it to monitor student progression and performance accurately, and whether it provides timely, secure and accurate information to satisfy academic and non-academic management information needs. From the team's review of the



Academic Services Structure document, it considers there to be a well-resourced academic services team. Under the directorship of Academic Services, there is an Academic Services Manager and three Academic Services Officers, with a total equivalent of five full-time posts aligned exclusively to higher education academic services. The assessment team observed how the Academic Services team leads and coordinates the reporting processes around quality and standards for UCEN Manchester, including on student progression and performance, and feeds into the group. The QSC minutes between 2021 and 2024 indicate, in the team's view, that the quality and effectiveness of administrative support in providing oversight of student progression and performance represents continuous good practice. Standing agenda items include, on a cyclical basis, a student satisfaction NSS report and student performance/data, as well as the various internal quality reviews and action plans, and reports from validation panels. In the view of the team, the group's TEF panel statement and the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board minutes provide further evidence of the group's comprehensive and robust administrative processes and the quality of its data reporting.

292. The student record system used by the group is Education Business System (EBS). Student data flows from EBS to other systems such as EBS OnTrack, ProMonitor and Power BI. A document providing student record system information sets out how EBS is currently used and monitored. To ensure the accuracy of EBS, validation meetings are held between Data Services and Curriculum teams to check programme and module information is correct. Additionally, Academic Services Officers work with the Data Services Officer to ensure that programme and student information is correct and current. The assessment team was given a demonstration of how the EBS system worked along with the tutor facing portal, OnTrack, and Pro Monitor, a system which provides narratives and reports on individual students for tutors and lecturers. This software is recognised by the sector as being secure, robust and well-supported by the vendors. The team considers these systems and processes to be appropriate and to demonstrate the requirements around security and accuracy of information are being met. Additionally, according to the group's New DAPs plan, the Academic Services Office is running trials of new software, MarkBook, to see if there are any business efficiencies to be made around data input. The assessment team viewed this as demonstrating an ongoing commitment to improve systems used to measure student data.
293. The team therefore concludes that, through its use of industry-standard student records systems, combined with robust academic quality procedures and structures, that the group has demonstrated it has in place administrative support systems that enable it to monitor student progression and performance accurately and provide timely, secure and accurate information.
294. To assess whether the group provides opportunities for all students to develop skills that enable their academic, personal and professional progression, the assessment team considered a draft Employability, Employment and Enterprise Policy and Procedure from 2021, which sets out the direction of travel for the provider in its probationary period, if successful in its application for New DAPs. The draft document effectively sets out the opportunities that would be available to students to gain experience to prepare them for employment and/or further study to ultimately enhance their graduate outcomes. The assessment team recommends that the implementation of this policy is monitored throughout the probationary period. The team also considered documentation about the Future U initiative, which – in the team's view – provides comprehensive support and resource for students to develop skills aligned to their future career and academic development. Examples

of career resources were submitted by the group to show the support Future U gives students in practice. One example provided is that of a careers and employability workshop which would provide students with support and guidance in: career planning; CV skills; interview skills; and self-employment and freelancing. As described previously, during the site visit, the assessment team were able to see Future U in operation, with a very visible presence, signage and information on how to contact advisers available throughout student communal areas.

295. Combining this evidence with the robust academic quality monitoring through the academic services team and the high quality of professional standard resources seen in operation during the site visit, the team concluded that, with the implementation of the Employability, Employment and Enterprise Policy and Procedure during the probationary period, the group can reasonably be expected to provide opportunities for all students to develop skills that enable their academic, personal and professional progression.
296. Throughout the site visit and tour of the campus, the assessment team observed a wide range of opportunities and high quality specialist facilities available to students:
- In the Photography Visual Lyrics Project and the School of Creative Arts and Media Student Work Public Spaces, the students were able to place their work in live scenarios, exhibitions and gallery spaces.
  - State-of-the-art resources for students in the creative arts, nursing and sports science were developed in consultation with industry professionals and PSRBs to provide professional surroundings in which the students could develop their skills and increase their vocational skills and employability opportunities. Examples included: a dedicated and fully operational theatre with professional standard lighting desk and lighting rigs; a modern ward for nursing students with resuscitation dummies and monitoring equipment; and continued investment in nursing with the development of a 'care home' room for practising simulated care in the community.
  - In a film production lesson, the students used state of the art film cameras, monitors and lighting set-ups, along with well-designed and built sets which were produced by the students and the technicians. There were also sets that were donated by professional external production units so that students could see and use industry-standard sets.
  - In animation, students used high-spec PCs and industry standard software to create 3D models and animations.
297. In addition, the appointment of well-qualified, active and dual-professional teaching staff, it was the team's view that students can develop skills and are well supported to use industry standard equipment and resources to a professional level. A comment heard by the assessment team in the meeting with students at the City campus was: "Facilities they offer here are just extreme". These findings were also supported in the New DAPs plan which made special mention of the dedicated performing arts facilities, specialist special effects make-up equipment, and in the computing department which was supported by CISCO.
298. There was also substantial evidence of the group providing opportunities for all students to develop skills to make effective use of the learning resources provided, including the safe and effective use of specialist facilities, and the use of digital and virtual environments. The

assessment team observed that there were appropriate health and safety notices in equipment handling areas across the provision and that these areas were supported by professional technicians, who maintained the equipment to safe working standards and in accordance with regulations. The team also met several of the technicians who were active in supporting the students to get the best out of this equipment and maintain it. On the site visit, the assessment team saw several technical departments and specialist facilities (including make-up and wigs; cameras and filming equipment; prop stores; dedicated computer facilities provided by CISCO; and recording studios with both digital and analogue recording facilities), and could see students being supported to use these effectively. This confirmed to the assessment team that the group provides opportunities for all students to develop skills to make effective use of the learning resources provided, including the safe and effective use of specialist facilities, and the use of digital and virtual environments.

299. The assessment team reviewed the EDI Policy, which outlines the group's approach and commitment to equity. The team found that this policy seeks to embed EDI throughout the core of the higher education offer, and is linked to and reflected in multiple policies, practices and procedures. These include:

- Single Equality Strategy
- Access and Participation Plan
- Disciplinary Policy
- Visual ID Policy
- 'The Deal'
- Dress Code Policy
- Compliments, Concerns and Complaints Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Guest Speaker Policy
- Sanctuary Policy
- Fitness to Study Policy
- At Risk Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

300. The EDI policy is operationalised and overseen by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Group. In addition, minutes of the deliberative committees, including Academic Board and the QSC, regularly evidence monitoring of attainment between different groups of students.

301. The Future U student handbook demonstrates the group's commitment to EDI in its handbook for students, and references the Access and Participation Plan, which the team agrees clearly outlines improvement plans for EDI across UCEN Manchester. Evidence of the impact of this in practice was heard from the students at the site visit. Students at the City campus articulated how student representatives were involved in student representative meetings: Programme Committee Meetings with the programme leader, with actions then passed up to the Academic Regulations meetings and finally to Academic Board. Similarly, students from

Openshaw campus expressed how they were able to have their voice heard and why this was important to them. Many students at Openshaw campus are studying part-time, along with working in industry and told the team that they felt they needed tailored support to accommodate this. In addition, the team has reviewed the New DAPs plan and found that the action plan for review of student support includes plans to review equality impact assessments. Based on the above, the assessment team concluded that the group's approach is guided by a commitment to equity.

## **Conclusions**

- 302. The assessment team concluded that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of subcriterion D1.1 and is already meeting the majority of evidence requirements for this subcriterion. This is because the group has in place arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The group also has effective mechanisms to monitor and evaluate these.
- 303. The team also considers the group's New DAPs plan to be credible in terms of how it will operate and further develop in this area through the probationary period.
- 304. As mentioned in the team's reasoning for its conclusions, the implementation of the group's Employability, Employment and Enterprise Policy and Procedure will be key to it fully meeting the requirements for this criterion and this should be monitored during the probationary period.
- 305. This was the assessment team's view based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for criterion D1.

## **Specified changes to the New DAPs plan**

- 306. The team's view is that no specified changes are required for criterion D1.

# Assessment of DAPs criterion E: Evaluation of performance

## Criterion E1: Evaluation of performance

### Advice to the OfS

307. The assessment team's view is that the group's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion E1: Evaluation of performance.
308. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion E1.
309. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows in summary that the group takes effective action to assess its own performance, to respond to identified weaknesses and to develop further its strengths.
310. This view is based on specific consideration of the New DAPs plan and supporting evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

**E1: An organisation granted degree awarding powers takes effective action to assess its own performance, respond to identified weaknesses and develop further its strengths.**

### Advice to the OfS

311. The assessment team's view is that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of subcriterion E1.1 and is already meeting the majority of the evidence requirements for this subcriterion. This is because the group has in place effective mechanisms to enable it to assess its own performance
312. The team also considers the group's New DAPs plan to be credible in terms of how the group plans to continue to monitor, review and refine these mechanisms during the probation period.
313. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, including annual monitoring data and reports across all levels of the organisation, associated action plans, and meetings with staff.

### Reasoning

314. To inform the assessment team's view of the group's mechanisms to monitor and evaluate its performance, the team considered how the group has developed its internal and external monitoring processes. The team found that there is an annual quality review cycle across the group, built on self-reflection and evaluation. This is consistently applied from programme level, through schools and directorates, up to an annual self-evaluation document and quality enhancement plan for UCEN Manchester as a business unit within the group. These quality assurance and enhancement processes are well established and understood, and are routinely reviewed for effectiveness on behalf of the Divisional Board. Responsibility for

review is assigned to the Dean and the Directors of Quality, Academic Standards and Curriculum and takes place annually.

315. There is a common proforma for programme annual review which the team considered effective in helping identify the strengths and weaknesses of individual programmes. The evaluation method across all review documents and quality enhancement plans supports the process of critical reflection and is structured into five sections:
- academic standards
  - teaching and learning
  - access and participation
  - student engagement
  - leadership.
316. This structure is consistent across programme, school, directorate and business unit-level reviews and makes it clear how actions are assigned and monitored across the provision. The format of the review proforma is currently being updated to ensure improved alignment with the requirements of OfS condition of registration B3 in terms of a focus on student outcomes. The team found that, overall, the UCEN Manchester self-evaluation document (SED) is thorough, analytical and based on sound statistical information, centrally verified and provided by the LTE Group data team. The associated action plan is regularly reviewed and updated, enabling progress to be monitored on an ongoing basis through the academic year.
317. There is evidence of the provision being benchmarked against external standards including, for example, national averages from the National Student Survey, and of strengths and weaknesses in terms of retention and attainment of individual courses being scrutinised. For example, differences in levels of student achievement and low retention rates in health programmes were identified during academic year 2022-23; interventions were planned and carried out, which focused on providing support for staff. In meetings with senior staff, the team heard how the actions taken had been effective in addressing the issues and the positive impact of this on student experience was evidenced in feedback from students met by the team during the visit. The team, therefore, concluded that critical self-assessment is integral to the group's operation of its higher education provision and that appropriate action is taken in response to matters raised through internal monitoring and review.
318. As mentioned under criterion D, the group has a central Group Quality Team that oversees the internal quality cycle and validates SEDs and QEPs at school, directorate and business unit level. The team learned that the Group Quality Team, while internal to the group, provides a level of objective externality to the quality cycle by sitting outside individual business units and is therefore able to monitor performance and standards across the group's range of educational activities. The UCEN Manchester SED is presented internally to the Academic Board and Divisional Board and additionally at quarterly business reviews chaired by the CEO of the group. Quarterly business reviews look at a wider range of quality measures including the SED, progress against actions, NSS results, recruitment, financial performance, TEF and student outcomes. The quarterly business review for June 2023 seen by the team demonstrates this process in practice: it provides a comprehensive report which is effective in assessing UCEN Manchester's performance overall. Action areas highlighted include recruitment, safeguarding and the impact of the cost of living crisis on student mental

health. There is evidence of clear reporting on attendance and retention against benchmarks. For example, retention was 95.8 per cent against 90 per cent benchmark; attendance was 87.82 per cent against 85 per cent benchmark. In addition to these self-evaluation-based processes, thematic higher education internal quality reviews are conducted by the Group Quality Team with the theme agreed by the Vice Dean of Higher Education. Themes might be selected due to a specific issue arising or on a risk basis if performance indicators identify an area of concern.

319. Following an internal quality review, an action plan is put in place to address any issues which are identified. The team look at an example of an internal quality review from September 2022 on the theme of assessment. The theme was identified in response to a lower NSS score in this area in 2021-22, and in order to contribute to the development of the new assessment framework. The internal quality review led to recommendations to include specific information in the new policy about standardisation processes, the review of assessment briefs to ensure sufficient opportunities for students to achieve top grades, and the publishing of specific dates when feedback would be returned to students in handbooks and assignment briefs. RAG-rated progress reports on actions arising from internal quality review were introduced in 2022-23, enabling the QSC to monitor progress; and in this case it recorded satisfactory progress. The team concluded that this evidence further demonstrates that overall critical self-assessment is integral to the operation of the group's higher education provision and that action is taken in response to matters raised through internal or external monitoring and review.
320. The team considered relevant evidence to establish if clear mechanisms exist for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny and monitoring of the group's academic provision. Action plans with responsibility and timelines are put in place at all levels throughout the institution. These are monitored at the corresponding committee levels through programme committees, and the QSC, with the Academic Board having overall responsibility and oversight of the institutional-level action plan. For example, eight improvement objectives were identified in the 2022-23 self-evaluation document for action during 2023-24. The format of the document clearly identifies who is responsible for discharging action and sets three review points during the year to monitor progress and/or record completion. Evidence from an updated version of a quality enhancement plan from May 2024 shows progress at the second review point and the way RAG ratings are used to monitor progress against objectives. All objectives were deemed to be on track at this point and therefore amber-rated. In the team's view, this provides a clear example of progress tracking and appropriate assigning of actions.
321. In addition to the monitoring of programme and institutional actions, there is a rolling action log which records issues raised by students through student voice activities and student representative meetings. These include issues related to student life and their broader experience. The log assigns responsibility at the appropriate level in the organisation and is monitored through the committee structure up to and including Academic Board. Feedback to students about actions taken in response to the issues they raise is provided through a range of means, including a U Make it Happen poster scheme. Students met by the team were positive about how their input and suggestions were responded to and gave examples including the development of an event designed to support students to find collaborators for projects from across different programmes. As part of the New DAPs plan, a review of the effectiveness of the rolling action log will be undertaken by the Vice Dean and Director of

Quality by the final quarter of the probationary period. The team concluded that the evidence shows that the group has in place clear mechanisms for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny and monitoring of its academic provision and, through ongoing review, will continue to develop these during the probationary period.

322. The team considered whether ideas and expertise from within and outside the organisation are drawn into the group's arrangements for programme design, approval, delivery and review. It found the evidence to demonstrate that the group is developing a strategic approach to engaging with internal and external expertise, beginning with the design and approval of its courses and continuing through delivery and review. The group's self-evaluation document sets out how, in developing courses, there is consultation with employers, staff, students and external speakers, as well as with employed staff – many of whom are practitioners, particularly in performing arts, computing and counselling. During the visit, the team heard from teaching staff who had contributed their professional knowledge and experience to inform curriculum design. For example, changes to practice in theatre in response to the Covid pandemic led to advancement in techniques for live digital performance. This was incorporated into the curriculum for the Arden Theatre School, leading to a module on performance video and an increased emphasis on developing student's skills in both developing and performing their own work, which is increasingly common in the sector.
323. The UCEN Manchester Strategy Plan sets out the aim for all Schools to have Industry Advisory Groups, employer-sponsored programmes and work placements as part of its curriculum strategy. Industry Advisory Groups were piloted in 2022 in the areas of digital technology and construction and are intended to be implemented formally across the provision in 2024-25 as part of the work of portfolio development teams. The team recommends that an update on this implementation is provided by the group in the first quarterly self-assessment submission during the probationary period.
324. The minutes of Industry Advisory Board meetings seen by the assessment team, for construction and engineering and digital curriculum areas (from June 2024), showed employers contributing to subject-specific curricula as well as to broader employability skills such as customer service and time-keeping. The team found strong evidence of instances of industry engagement across most areas of the provision. Employer engagement starts with initial market research to identify gaps, followed by employer consultation regarding content and assessment methods, which ensures industry alignment. To ensure currency and relevance, course teams employ a variety of methods to engage with employers, including using industry contacts, employers of their students, alumni, engagement with professional bodies and sector groups, and part-time students who are working in the industry. Additionally, real-life briefs are used in assessment. The team heard about recent examples of this including, in the subject area of criminology, how Novus (part of the group) facilitated visits for students to prisons, to understand the practical application of criminal justice theory. The team heard how students' understanding of purposeful activity for lifers in prison was supported by these visits and the opportunity to meet prisoners.
325. The group is active in responding to the Greater Manchester local skills improvement plan which has a focus on developing skills in digital, construction, engineering and health. The group leads on digital skills across a group of nine colleges and aims to support progression, promote careers, develop short courses and build staff capacity. It has developed strategic



partnerships with employers including Cisco, Manchester Digital and Microsoft and developed a range of short courses in areas such as AI. During the visit, the team heard from students about the benefit they had experienced in relation to their future employability in being involved with curriculum and competitions supported by these digital industries. Other recent examples that provided evidence to the team of how UCEN Manchester engages externally to inform the currency of the curriculum include The Arden School of Theatre's accreditation by the Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre (CDMT); the support given to healthcare practice students to undertake placements with care and nursing homes around the Greater Manchester area; and the computing team's work with Palo Alto Networks on cyber security, which directly informs the taught programmes.

326. The team heard evidence of changes to courses in response to external feedback and consultation. Examples include: in FdA and BA Childcare and Youth Studies and the name change from the BSc Computer Networking to Network, Automation and Management. The rationale for this was that the name was more relevant to industry standards and was better aligned to providing prospects in the sector for graduates. The faculty of higher, technical and professional industries has been developing a suite of programmes that lead to higher technical qualifications (HTQs) to meet the local skills gaps within Greater Manchester. It has also received external funding to support the development of enhanced teaching facilities, which were evident to the team during the visit. Students met by the team confirmed that across all subjects there were opportunities to engage with relevant industries that gave them confidence in the currency of their programmes. UCEN Manchester is intending to monitor the continued effectiveness of its use of external and internal expertise in the design, approval, delivery and review of programmes through a comprehensive review by the Director of Standards in year 2, quarter 4 as part of its New DAPs plan.

## **Conclusions**

327. The assessment team concluded that the group can be reasonably expected to meet criterion E1 by the end of the probationary period because the evidence shows, in summary, that the group already has effective mechanisms to enable it to assess its own performance, respond to identified weaknesses and develop its strengths further. The New DAPs plan for this criterion is credible and includes plans to continue to monitor, review and refine these mechanisms during the probation period.
328. The assessment team also reached the view that the group has demonstrated a full understanding of DAPs criterion E1 and found that the group makes extensive use of both internal and external expertise in programme development and delivery to ensure that its programmes are up-to-date and have professional currency.
329. The assessment team recommended that the implementation of Industry Advisory Groups across all curriculum areas should be monitored during the probationary period and the group should provide an update on progress with this in its first quarterly self-assessment submission.
330. This view is based on specific consideration of the New DAPs plan and supporting evidence requirements for this criterion.

## **Specified changes to the New DAPs plan**

331. The team's view is that no specified changes are required for criterion E1.

# Degree awarding powers overarching criterion

**New DAPs: An emerging self-critical, cohesive academic community with a clear commitment to the assurance of standards supported by effective (in prospect) quality systems.**

## Advice to the OfS: credibility of the New DAPs plan

332. The assessment team's view is that the group meets the overarching criterion for New DAPs because it can be reasonably expected to meet the underpinning criteria in full by the end of the probationary period.
333. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the group's New DAPs plan and evidence, which shows in summary that the group has an emerging self-critical, cohesive academic community with a clear commitment to the assurance of standards supported by effective, in prospect, quality systems.
334. The assessment team's view is that the group has a credible New DAPs plan, but specified changes are required to ensure the plan will provide a suitable basis for monitoring and assessment.
335. This view is based on consideration of the evidence requirements for the DAPs criteria alongside any other relevant information.

## Reasoning

336. The assessment team found that the group has an emerging cohesive academic community as evidenced in its commitment to developing staff professional expertise and scholarship. The assessment of the group's emerging cohesive academic community is discussed under criteria A1 and C1, which provide further detail on these points and the evidence considered by the team.
337. The assessment team found that the group has demonstrated that it is a self-critical community as it has in place clear mechanisms to critically review its own performance. The assessment of the group's development as a self-critical community is discussed under criteria C1 and E1, which provide further detail on these points and the evidence considered by the team.
338. The group has demonstrated a commitment to the assurance of standards. The evidence shows in summary that the group has begun to develop regulations, policies and procedures that are robust and support the setting and maintenance of academic standards and the award of credit and qualifications. The assessment of the group's commitment to the assurance of standards is discussed under criteria A1, B1 and B2, which provide further detail on these points and the evidence considered by the team.
339. It is the assessment team's view that the group has clear and effective quality systems in place. A particular strength is its quality assurance structure that permeates from its central quality team down through its business units. The assessment of the effectiveness of the

group's quality systems is discussed under criteria A1, B1, B2 and E1, which provide further detail on these points and the evidence considered by the team.

## **Conclusions**

340. The team therefore concluded that the group meets the overarching DAPs criterion as the evidence demonstrates that the group has a self-critical, cohesive academic community with a commitment to the assurance of standards supported by effective quality systems in prospect.
341. The team therefore concluded that the group's New DAPs plan is mostly credible but specified changes are required to ensure the plan will provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment, and should therefore enable the group to demonstrate that it will meet the overarching DAPs criteria in full by the end of the probationary period.

# **Specified changes required to the New DAPs plan**

## **Criterion A1: Academic governance**

342. The team's view is that specified changes are required to provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment of criterion A1. This is because the group's current academic governance arrangements do not take account of its responsibilities in prospect for the awarding of credit and degrees when it achieves degree awarding powers.

343. Therefore, the team identified specified changes which the provider should make to its New DAPs plan. These changes are:

- An update to the New DAPs plan to include milestones for the review of the terms of reference for the Academic Board and relevant sub-committees to include responsibilities for the awarding of credit and degrees.

## **Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks**

344. The team's view is that specified changes are required to provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment of criterion B1. This is because the group's current assessment arrangements do not take account of its responsibilities in prospect for the assessment of its own awards when it achieves degree awarding powers.

345. Therefore, the team identified specified changes which the provider should make to its New DAPs plan. These changes are:

- An update to the New DAPs plan to include the timescale and process for changes to the constitution and operation of independent assessment and award boards in preparation for degree awarding powers.

## **Criterion B2: Academic standards and quality assurance**

346. The team's view is that no specified changes are required to provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment of criterion B2.

## **Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience**

347. The team's view is that no specified changes are required to provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment of criterion B3.

## **Criterion C1: The role of academic and professional staff**

348. The team's view is that no specified changes are required to provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment of criterion C1.

## **Criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement**

349. The team's view is that no specified changes are required to provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment of criterion D1.

## **Criterion E1: Evaluation of performance**

350. The team's view is that no specified changes are required to provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment of criterion E1.

## Annex A: Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
ASO	Academic Services Office
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BSc	Bachelor of Science
CDMT	Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre
CEO	chief executive officer
COP(s)	Community(ies) of Practice
CMP	Curriculum Management Panel
CPD	continued professional development
CQSC	Curriculum, Quality and Standards Committee
DAPs	degree awarding powers
DSA	disability support allowance
EBS	Education Business System
EDI	equality, diversity and inclusion
FdA	Foundation Degree in Arts
FdSc	Foundation Degree in Science
FHEQ	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
HERA	Higher Education and Research Act 2017
HND	Higher National Diploma
HTQs	higher technical qualifications
IAGs	Industry Advisory Groups
KPIs	key performance indicators
LTE	Learning, Training and Employment [Group]
NSS	National Student Survey
OfS	Office for Students
OIA	Office of the Independent Adjudicator
PDT	Portfolio Development Team
PSRB	professional, statutory and regulatory body
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QAC	[OfS's] Quality Assessment Committee
QEP	Quality Enhancement Plan
QSC	Quality and Standards Committee

Abbreviation	Meaning
RAG-rated	Rating system using red, amber and green (RAG) indicators
RoL	Review of Learning
RPEL	recognition of prior experiential learning
RPL	recognition of prior learning
SED	Self-Evaluation Document
SPA	strategic planning approval
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
TLEC	Teaching, Learning and Enhancement Committee
VLE	virtual learning environment



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