QAA

Institutional audit

Rose Bruford College

MARCH 2009

Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To this end, QAA carries out Institutional audits of higher education institutions.

In England and Northern Ireland, QAA conducts Institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector, to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council in England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations to assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills (now the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills). It was revised in 2006 following recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, a representative group established to review the structures and processes of quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland, and evaluate the work of QAA.

Institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework established in 2002 following revisions to the United Kingdom's approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the revised Institutional audit process is to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges of higher education in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree-awarding bodies in a proper manner

- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications

- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and feedback from stakeholders.

Institutional audit results in judgements about the institutions being reviewed. Judgements are made about:

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of awards

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes

- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research

- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

If the audit includes the institution's collaborative provision. the judgements and comments also apply unless the audit team considers that any of its judgements or comments in respect of the collaborative provision differ from those in respect of the institution's 'home' provision. Any such differences will be reflected in the form of words used to express a judgement or comment on the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

The reports of quality audits have to be useful to several audiences. The revised Institutional audit process makes a clear distinction between that part of the reporting process aimed at an external audience and that aimed at the institution. There are three elements to the reporting:

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students

- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences

- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary and the report, without the annex, are published in hard copy. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Handbook for institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland 2006* - Annexes B and C refer).

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Rose Bruford College (the College) from 2 to 6 March 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the College offers on behalf of the University of Manchester and on behalf of London Metropolitan University.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the College and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the College manages the academic aspects of its provision.

In Institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the United Kingdom (UK). The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the College is that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers on behalf of the University of Manchester and on behalf of London Metropolitan University

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

- Overall, the audit team found that the University's institutional approach to quality enhancement was informed by clear strategic direction and was leading to systematic improvements in learning opportunities.

Postgraduate research students

- At the time of this audit the College had no postgraduate research students. It was working with a partner institution to develop its postgraduate research provision and the appropriate support for that provision. The groundwork for this development had made reference to the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

- The audit found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the rapid and effective embedding of the College's new academic and committee structure (paragraph 13)

- the system for biannual programme monitoring and its contribution to quality assurance and enhancement (paragraph 15)

- the interrogation and analysis of the dataset of management information at programme and institutional level (paragraph 22)

- the comprehensive and structured arrangements for student feedback for on-campus programmes, including the Student Semester Review process (paragraph 27)

- the College's focused approach and initiatives in support of a diverse student body, with particular reference to students with disabilities (paragraph 36).

- the level of support for sessional staff, including their access to staff development and research opportunities and the provision of a part-time tutors' coordinator and handbook (paragraph 43)

- the cohesive community of the staff and students (paragraph 47).

Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that the College consider further action in some areas.

The team advises the College to:

- keep under careful review the capacity of its human and physical resources in the context of its many strategic and operational objectives (paragraph 10).

It would be desirable for the College to:

- consider whether the positive contribution of the student community to the College's quality assurance and enhancement processes could be further strengthened by providing appropriate support to the Students' Union (paragraph 29)

- expedite the implementation of those aspects of its Learning and Teaching Strategy relating to online learning support (paragraph 33)

- strengthen the pro-active management and co-ordination of resources with particular reference to the library, information technology, Technical Support and Estates (paragraph 34)

- reinforce the leadership and strategic coordination of its student services (paragraph 36).

Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by the College of the Academic Infrastructure, which provides a means of describing academic standards in UK higher education. It allows for diversity and innovation within academic programmes offered by higher education. QAA worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure, which are:

- the *Code of practice*

- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland

- subject benchmark statements

- programme specifications.

The audit team found that the College took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Report

1   An Institutional audit of Rose Bruford College (the College) was undertaken during the week commencing 2 March 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the College's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers on behalf of the University of Manchester and London Metropolitan University and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2   The audit team comprised Professor B Anderton, Dr G Bradshaw, Professor H Grainger and Professor P Maher, auditors, and Mr G Clark, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr P J A Findlay, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   The College is a specialist institution offering programmes in theatre practice and theatre education within a unified curriculum. Its philosophy continues to be shaped by the inspiration of its founder, which was to further the community of theatre and the role of theatre in the community, and to widen the opportunities for study beyond that of conservatoire education. Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are validated by the University of Manchester (the one exception being the Organising Live Arts Foundation degree, which is validated by London Metropolitan University). Where appropriate, the College's programmes are accredited by the National Council of Drama Training (NCDT). The College is a member of the Conference of Drama Schools (CDS) and one of eight specialist art, design and performing arts colleges comprising the Consortium of Arts & Design Institutions in Southern England (CADISE).

4   The College now has just over 650 students following full-time BA Hons programmes on-campus, with a further 300 students following part-time BA Hons programmes by distance learning. There are 20 students studying for taught master's awards. The College also offers a Foundation Degree and a number of non credit-bearing programmes for youth and the community. The College is located in a variety of buildings, including two theatre spaces, on a single site in Sidcup, Kent.

5   The mission statement of the College is expressed as the 'ambition is to inspire and equip people to create and challenge, through a distinctive and diverse approach to theatre and performance'. Following from the mission statement, the College's declared purpose is to:

- 'inspire students, staff and industry professionals to study, create and advance theatre and performance in a national and international context

- equip our students with the skills for successful, sustained careers, using a curriculum that reflects and informs industry practice

- create theatre and performance in a practical, collaborative environment, enabling people to explore, research and experiment

- challenge and contribute to society and communities using these arts'.

6   The last QAA audit conducted in 2003 found that broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the College's current and future management of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The audit team found evidence that the College had addressed all five recommendations from the 2003 audit. The major actions involved undertaking a complete review, rationalisation and reworking of its committee structures and terms of reference. The College has also redefined the flow of information relating to quality and academic standards in the reporting arrangements between committees. It was notable that the majority of these developments were of recent date and responsiveness to the audit recommendations had been slow between 2003 and 2007, in part due to uncertainties relating to the College's future status. The College has built further on the areas of good practice identified in the 2003 audit.

7   A number of significant developments have taken place since the last QAA audit. The College's main validating and awarding partner institution, the University of Manchester, accorded the College greater freedom to manage its own quality assurance arrangements. In response the College has defined and implemented its own academic infrastructure in collaboration with its validating partners. During the period 2005 to 2007, the College also achieved successful reaccreditation of a range of its degrees by the National Council for Drama Training, a review without conditions of its validation partnership link with the University of Manchester, and a validation/review of Foundation Degree programmes, with conditions, by London Metropolitan University.

8   The College has sought to assume active responsibility for its own quality management framework, within the parameters of validation, rather than depending on that of its validating and accrediting partners. Accordingly, it has established a framework which incorporates its own academic regulations, procedures for programme approval, modification and termination, processes for annual monitoring and periodic review of programmes, including the collection of student feedback and policies on assessment, admissions, student appeals, complaints and discipline. This development is ongoing, with further activity scheduled for 2008-09.

9   Since the last audit the College has also carried out organisational restructuring, established three schools and creating new head of school posts; it has also made new staff appointments relating to the management of quality and standards. After the resignation of the Principal in 2008, the Vice-Principal (SQA) became Acting Principal, supported by a consultant vice-principal. A new principal has been in place since February 2009.

10   The audit team concluded that despite progress towards addressing the recommendations of last audit having been slow between 2003 and 2007, it was able to discern a distinct momentum and higher levels of activity thereafter. This coincided with the appointment of a new Vice-Principal with responsibility for quality and standards, and followed the implementation of the new committee structure in January 2008. The intensity and speed of activity in the organisational and academic developments over the recent period were clearly to be welcomed. At the same time, the team identified a number of aspects of the College's work where the cumulative effect of operational pressures and strains on its staff and its systems was becoming evident. The team considered that, if not carefully monitored and managed, this could have potentially damaging results. Given the additional future ambitions outlined in the College's strategic and operational plans, the team recommends that it is advisable for the College to keep under careful review the capacity of its human and physical resources in the context of its many strategic and operational objectives.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

11   The formal responsibility for managing academic standards and the quality of provision for learning and the student experience is shared between the College and its validating university partners. Within the College, the responsibilities are shared between the Academic Board and the senior management team. The Academic Board is supported by two college-level subcommittees, Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee and the Learning and Teaching Development Committee. In 2008, school boards were created to report directly to the Academic Board and these are seen as representing the interests of the specific academic field and acting as a counterweight to the cross-college committees. Programme committees exist for all programmes and are seen as the means through which it maintains a 'strong dialogue' with its students and provides a forum within which student concerns may be raised. Also in 2008, the College's school examination boards replaced individual programme examination boards.

12   The College sets the standards of its awards by defining the intended learning outcomes of its programmes against *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), the subject benchmark, the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, and relevant

professional requirements. These outcomes are then examined by internal quality approval processes before submission for external validation. The College then assesses the achievement of the standards that it has set for programmes through external examiner reports, which comment on student achievement set against national standards; through academic adviser reports; through professional body reports, and through the regular monitoring by programme teams.

13   The College now has considerable autonomy in managing its own affairs, afforded by the recent formal devolution from University of Manchester of the authority to conduct reviews of its programmes. The College has developed new systems to address this responsibility and the audit team reviewed good evidence to support the effectiveness of the new framework. There was further evidence to support the College's claim that it now operating a coherent and integrated committee structure involving significant members of staff from different levels of the organisation, thereby ensuring vertical and horizontal alignment for reporting, communication and enhancement. The review, development and implementation of the new committee structure and the effectiveness of its operation was considered by the team to be good practice.

14   In general, the audit team found the College's processes for the development and approval of programmes to be clearly articulated. However, the team noted that the entire approval process may be completed as a paper exercise without the University requiring a validation event; nor does the College include within its process any formal preparatory internal validation event. The team took the view that as the College continues to develop its academic infrastructure it may wish to consider whether such an event with external input to a scrutinising panel would be a useful adjunct to its new procedures.

15   All validated programmes are monitored each semester; discussion at a programme committee meeting forms the review of the programme and the minutes and an action plan form the report of the review. Feedback from students on their modules is a major input to programme committee meetings. The primary inputs related to academic standards are the reports of external examiners (and when available, those of academic advisers); and statistics on admissions, student demographics, progression awards and employment. In its consideration of the monitoring documentation available to it through the audit trails, the audit team noted the comprehensive and regularly updated action plans produced by programme committees and the careful and constructive review of and feedback on the outcomes of biannual monitoring by school boards and by QAEC, which was ensuring effective embedding of the new process and identification and discussion of cross-institutional issues. Student representatives, particularly those from on-campus courses, also generally responded positively when asked about the biannual programme meetings: monitoring was seen as effective in resolving issues and prompting changes. The team found that the College had adopted an approach to monitoring which was structured, dynamic inclusive and responsive, and which made good use of student input both in terms of representatives' written feedback and their contribution to programme committee meetings. The College's development and implementation of its biannual monitoring process, and its analysis and use of the outcomes, were considered to constitute a feature of good practice.

16   The College has developed and implemented its own process for five-yearly periodic review of programmes to replace the previous process of periodic review last conducted by a University of Manchester panel in 2003. The process is school-based and all the taught provision (with a few programmes excepted) in each of the three schools was reviewed during 2008. The purpose of the review is for the College to satisfy itself that the school and its constituent programmes have the necessary quality assurance structures in place; that those structures and processes for quality management and enhancement are effective; and to make a recommendation to the University of Manchester on the renewal of approval. The validating university receives the review report, the College's response to it and an action plan, in which the reviewed school responds to issues raised by the panel with time-limited actions. The audit team found that periodic review was effective, and that it included an appropriate use of external members and consultation with students.

17   The College ensures external input to its approval and review processes in a number of ways. The College's validating partners nominate members of academic staff to act as advisers to programme teams. The University of Manchester's academic advisers are required to make regular reports on the programmes they advise and specifically to comment on new programme proposals. In addition, the College nominates external advisers to comment on new course proposals and to serve on periodic review panels, while the Learning and Teaching Development Committee has an external adviser as a member. Reports of external examiners are a major input to the process of programme monitoring.

18   The external examiners who work with College programmes are appointed by and report to the relevant validating university. The College has its own policy defining the role and functions of external examiners. External examiners are appropriately briefed for their task and make an annual report to the relevant validating university. Reports are also fully considered within the College's own committees, together with an overview report that summarises each external examiner report and draws out general conclusions. The College's policy sets out procedures for ensuring that a response is made to external examiner reports. The audit team found that the College's use of external examiners made an effective contribution to the assurance of academic standards on its programmes

19   The College has in place a framework for assessment which consists of a documented set of procedures, together with three sets of academic regulations (assessment and progression) which relate, respectively, to full-time undergraduate, distance-learning undergraduate and master's programmes. The policy identifies a wide range of assessment modes consistent with performance and production-based disciplines. The framework provides guidance on assessment criteria, on marking practices at each level, including guidance on internal moderation requirements, the management of plagiarism and guidance on the assessment of students with disabilities. Staff awareness of assessment issues and regulations is assured through a range of staff development activities. Each school holds an annual assessment practice workshop, while the Head of School covers assessment practice as part of the induction of new staff. The Registrar provides training on the assessment regulations for administrate staff.

20   For each assessment, students receive an assignment brief which provides guidance. Students receive an assessment schedule showing assessment submission dates at the beginning of each level. The College's procedures provide guidance on giving feedback to students on assessed work, nevertheless students identified some variability in the timeliness of feedback.

21   The College has a two-tier approach to examination boards: programme assessment boards recommend marks for individual modules and are responsible for making judgements concerning mitigating circumstances, while school examination boards receive recommendations from the programme assessment boards and make award recommendations to the validating university. External examiners moderate student work and confirm marks and overall achievement at school boards. The College is allowed a high degree of autonomy by its validating universities in the management of assessment, and the boards are run and chaired by College staff, albeit with university academic advisers present. Overall, the audit team found that the College had developed an effective framework that ensured consistent practice in the assessment of students across the institution. It was also willing to look critically at its current practice and seek to improve it.

22   The College uses management information relating to the maintenance of academic standards very effectively. Annually updated, five-year data by programme on admissions, demographics, module marks, progression, award and employment, and student satisfaction are available on the College's document control centre and can be accessed by staff and students. The Vice-Principal (Systems for Quality and Administration) produces an annual overview of data on student demographics, completion, progression, award and employment for the Academic Board and points out key areas for further consideration. The data available to programme teams is easily accessible and clearly presented, and the overview document sets out a clear agenda of items for discussion at the Academic Board and other committees. Consideration of data had

therefore informed programme monitoring and had also identified specific issues at the institutional level, where the data had been used both to develop strategic objectives and to inform decisions on performance. The audit team found that the College had developed its use of management information significantly. This constituted a feature of good practice.

23   The audit team found that confidence could be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the academic standards that it delivers on behalf of the University of Manchester and behalf of London Metropolitan University.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

24   The College was alert to external reference points, professional, legal and academic, in framing its policies and procedures. The College had made use of the *Code of practice* in developing its academic infrastructure, and this was reflected in recent College policies. There was evidence of the College instituting systematic checks on the alignment of its polices and procedures with the *Code*. One area where more work may be necessary is in the consideration of the *Code, Section 8: Career education, information and guidance*.

25   Support for student learning is given full attention in the range of quality assurance procedures within the College. Programme approval involves the production of a programme structure document to include programme and module specifications, and information on teaching, learning and assessment methods, support for students with additional needs and arrangements for placement/study abroad. In monitoring its programmes biannually and ensuring structured student input through its student semester review, the College ensures that the learning opportunities in each programme are kept under regular review. The College's school-based periodic review process also addresses the student learning experience. Among the programme documentation required for review are the programme structure document, programme and module specifications, and student handbooks, and the results of biannual monitoring. The review panel, which includes a student and external members, interviews a group of students studying the reviewed programmes during the course of the review. These activities all make a significant contribution to the College's management of learning opportunities.

26   The College carries out two annual institution-wide student surveys: a 'first impressions' survey of new students and an end-of-year satisfaction survey of all students. The results of each survey and issues arising from them are summarised in reports to the Academic Board and Senior Management Committee. The audit team noted the comprehensive, evaluative and widely available summaries of survey data and confirmed that due consideration was given to programme and module survey results as a standard item on programme committee agendas. Survey data informed institutional key performance indicators and college-wide issues were discussed and action taken at institutional level.

27   The College also obtains student feedback on modules through its biannual programme monitoring. Student representatives complete the review form after a meeting with their fellow students to discuss a standard list of questions. The audit team reviewed a number of completed pro formas and noted the comprehensiveness, quality and robustness of the feedback supplied by the students, the openness of the system, and the care which had been taken by some members of programme teams to answer as fully as possible the points that students were making. A different but comparable system is in place for distance learning because of more difficult communication issues. Notwithstanding these differences in methodology between types of programmes, the team found that the comprehensive and structured arrangement for student feedback was a feature of good practice.

28   Students are represented on the Board of Governors; every committee within the academic stem, including the Academic Board; periodic review panels; and some subcommittees of the Senior Management Committee. Programme committees include up to two representatives from each level of the programme. There is a Students' Union but no sabbatical

officers. The student written submission reported that the student representative system works well at programme level, but was less sure what action had been taken as issues moved 'further up the committee chain'. On-campus student representatives whom the team met expressed greater confidence in the effectiveness of the committee structure; for them, the programme-level system of regularly updated action points provided evidence of issues that they had raised being discussed and sometimes resolved, at higher levels, including the Academic Board. A student feedback forum convened by the Director of Quality, had been set up partly in response to student survey feedback about communication between management and students. It is intended to provide direct two-way communication between senior management and all those with a representative capacity in the student body.

29   The audit team recognised the laudable reasons for the College to set up the Student Feedback Forum. However, the team took the view that it was too soon to assess the Forum's effectiveness and whether it would prove to be a worthwhile addition to the College's means of involving students in quality assurance, and attract reasonable levels of attendance from representatives. Action points from the first meeting of the Forum had been forwarded to the Students' Union; however, student officers were unsure about their role in dissemination of those points to the student body generally, and were concerned about a possible further time commitment. They pointed out that the executive officer role could be very time-consuming for the students concerned, in the absence of sabbatical officers, and would become more so if the College wished to involve the Union more fully in its quality assurance and enhancement processes. The College may therefore wish to consider whether the positive contribution of the student community to those processes could be further strengthened by providing appropriate support to the Students' Union.

Resources for learning

30   The College has not yet established a formal strategy for planning and review of learning resources, but there was evidence that the setting and delivery of resource-related priorities are achieved through the learning resources and information technology operating plans. The overall responsibility for the provision and allocation of learning resources resides with the senior management team, which considers programme and central services' requests arising from the operating plans, as well as from periodic review and biannual programme monitoring. A cyclical planning process is in place, whereby bids are submitted and reviewed in a cross-College context.

31   The College's accommodation is now located on one site grouped around a Grade 2 listed building, and comprises an extensive range of specialist studios, workshops, rehearsal and performance spaces, which include two theatres. However, pressures in terms of dedicated space have led the College to seek some off-site rehearsal accommodation nearby, and staff considered that spaces available to meet the needs of distance-learning students 'may require review if student numbers continue to increase'. Space allocation varies across programmes with, for example, Production having dedicated space, while other programmes access cross-college provision. Wider access issues have been addressed in response to disability legislation.

32   The College's learning resources centre caters for full and part-time undergraduates, a small number of postgraduates, staff and visiting tutors, distance-learning students and visitors to the College, and is home to a number of specialist collections of national and international interest, information technology facilities and the Study Support Team. The library collections are focused on theatre and related subjects, to support both the curriculum and research, and include a collection of over 45,000 specialist books; a large collection of periodicals; sound, video and DVDs; recordings and slides and a stock of audiovisual equipment available for loan to staff and students. Students had expressed dissatisfaction with noise levels, opening hours and the numbers of copies of books. The audit team found evidence that the College was currently seeking to resolve these issues, particularly through provision of social space and the team would strongly encourage an expeditious solution.

33   The College's Information Technology Operating Plan 2008-09 to 2012 makes no reference to development of a College online virtual learning environment, although this had been a recurrent theme in both institutional and periodic reviews. As yet, the College has no e-learning strategy, although the audit team found evidence of consideration of the issues surrounding online delivery. Given the potential benefits for distance learning, an area of planned expansion for the College, the team recommended that the College address the issue of the development of a virtual learning environment and expedite the implementation of those aspects of its learning and teaching strategy relating to online learning support.

34   The National Student Survey showed a deteriorating trend in levels of student satisfaction with all areas of the College's learning resources over the last three years, with barely half the final-year students showing satisfaction with information technology and specialist resources. The audit team noted that actions were being taken to address these concerns and it was able to see some evidence that the overall provision of resources for learning was sufficient for current needs. The evidence suggested, however, that should student numbers increase in the College the adequacy of current learning resources would be in question. To achieve this, it would be desirable for the College to strengthen the proactive management and coordination of resources with particular reference to the library, information technology, technical support and estates.

35   Admissions are administered centrally within the Admissions Office of the Registry on the basis of decisions made at programme level. The Registrar assumes overall responsibility for admissions. All applicants are assessed against common entry requirements, while distance-learning programmes are open-access and encourage applications from students with non-conventional academic backgrounds, and those who might have difficulty undertaking study at this level via the more traditional full-time mode. Each programme has specific admissions criteria and takes account of the needs of industry. Given the size of the College, it is possible for staff to interview or audition all potential students. The audit team found that the College's admissions policy was comprehensive, covered all relevant areas, and was professionally implemented.

36   At the time of the audit, the College was working towards a better integration and coordination of study and student support services. In the view of current students, this was a strong and effective area of support to them and they praised the level of student access to staff. Notwithstanding this, the audit team welcomed the College's initiative to review its study support arrangements in 2009. It would be desirable now for the College to strengthen the leadership and strategic coordination of its student services, so that it can reinforce its support for both full-time and distance learners, especially in view of the planned increase in postgraduates, taught and research. The team considered that the College had adopted a focused approach in support of a diverse student body, particularly with reference to disability. This particular area of support was underpinned by a raft of positive and innovative initiatives. The team considered that the College's approach to disability was a feature of good practice.

37   The College Student Handbook contains a large section on personal development planning and the involvement of students therein. Undergraduate students recognised the process, but it was clear that provision varied across programmes. Distance-learning students had not heard of personal development planning arrangements, and this is an area that might be explored further by the College.

38   The 2003 audit report encouraged the College to check how its procedures on placements might be aligned with the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. Documentation provided in the audit trails suggested that there was a satisfactory procedure in place governing placement arrangements for hosts and students. Although some students reported variable practice in terms of support while on placement, the audit team found no further evidence of lack of support, and heard that tutors were always available if necessary. The team would however encourage the College to adopt a clearer institutional framework for placements.

39   The 2003 audit report had noted student concerns about the lack of careers guidance, and endorsed the College's intention to establish a set of institutional mechanisms, which would ensure that its practice was closer to the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 8*. Progress appeared to have been slow in this area, regrettably so, since equipping students for successful and sustained careers is a key part of the College's mission. The audit team took the view that there is still a need for a greater sense of a clear College policy in terms of student entitlement, and a clearer indication of an institutional framework in support of career planning and placements. The team would therefore encourage the development of a clear institutional framework for placements, careers, and personal development profiles, in compliance with the *Code of practice*.

40   In part as a result of recommendations in the previous audit, the College has put in place formal procedures for the recruitment, induction, appraisal, promotion, development and reward of its staff. In part, in response to the 2003 audit that the 'College's plans for rewarding staff in relation to performance were 'underdeveloped', a College pay and reward strategy has been agreed. The College has drawn up a proposal for peer observation scheme to be piloted in 2009.

41   The College has a staff development policy covering all permanent and fixed term employees working under a contract of employment. It does not cover fee-only employees. The policy addresses training and development needs; internal and external training, comprising statutory/mandatory courses; conferences and seminars, and skills information workshops. Courses leading to recognised professional qualifications and development activities are considered where it can be established that this is of benefit to the staff team as well as the individual. The audit team found evidence of a strengthening of the internal staff development programme with a focus on both teaching and learning and on academic infrastructure matters. The team learned that a database was under construction, in order to track the pattern of staff development and support and to ensure transparency and equality in deciding how to prioritise funding.

42   Experienced staff are supported in applying to become Fellows of the Higher Education Academy and the College is working towards meeting the 2010 target for a professional teaching qualification. It has developed an internal credit-bearing course, 'Reflecting on Theory & Practice in Higher Education', as part of a continuing professional development framework aligned to professional standards. The audit team judged this to be a very positive initiative. In addition, the College has introduced a number of funding initiatives, which serve to support teaching-related projects, such as an inclusivity audit, and to encourage research-informed teaching

43   The audit team concluded that demonstrable progress had been made in the area of staff support since 2003 and that there was evidence of a commendable, inclusive approach to staff development. The team found the level of support for sessional staff, which included the provision of a part-time tutors' coordinator, the publication of a handbook and the tutors' access to staff development and research opportunities, to constitute a feature of good practice.

44   The audit team concluded that confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

45   The College has an explicit approach to quality enhancement in which strategic and cross-college initiatives are accompanied and complemented by those that are operational in nature and programme-specific in origin. School action plans, following periodic review, include enhancement recommendations and a learning and teaching development committee monitors the implementation of the College's Learning and Teaching Operating Plan. Recent examples of college-wide enhancement initiatives include the strategy to improve the retention of first-year students, and the development of guidelines for feedback on assessment. The audit team saw evidence that regular student feedback and representation mechanisms, and their use in operational enhancement activity, were effective.

46   The audit team found that the College, through its twin-track approach, had developed an ethos and an infrastructure that expects and encourages the enhancement of learning opportunities. There were many examples of good practice being systematically identified and disseminated across all three schools within the College.

47   The College has been successful in supporting change and development through a range of effective communication initiatives involving staff and students, and also because of its institutional culture which reflects a close, mutually supportive and inclusive community. The team took the view that the staff and students worked together to create a cohesive academic community within which open debate and discussion would support enhancement. The team considered that this was a feature of good practice in the College's work.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

48   At the time of the audit, the College did not have any collaborative arrangements for delivery of higher education provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

49   At the time of the audit, the College did not have any students following postgraduate research degree programmes. However, as part of the College's expansion of provision for professional development it intends in the future to offer theoretical and practice-based research degrees. A memorandum of agreement has been drawn up to support this development of research-degree programmes with Goldsmiths, University of London. The agreement is intended to cover research-degree opportunities for MPhil, and PhD levels by full, part-time or distance-learning study.

50   The creative environment of the College, together with the clearly articulated memorandum of agreement established with Goldsmiths, suggests that the College is well positioned to admit students to undertake research degree programmes. All aspects of the *Code of practice* governing postgraduate research programmes are addressed under the memorandum of agreement. The College intends to limit the number of students admitted initially, to ensure quality of experience. The audit team formed the view that the proposed investment in staff development for research supervision, together with the careful management of facilities and physical resources, will be the keys to the success of this development.

Section 7: Published information

51   The audit team had access to a wide range of information published by the College. This included prospectuses, programme handbooks and student handbooks. The team was provided with full access to the College website and also to its intranet document control centre, where a large body of publications and regulations are available.

52   The College identified three 'gatekeepers' responsible for management of different aspects of its published information. The Director of Quality has responsibility for definitive programme documents and the College academic infrastructure; the Publicity Coordinator and Marketing Office have responsibility for the prospectus and accompanying DVD, together with the College's external website; and the College has established a document control centre as a central online repository for the most important of its formal documents for use by staff and students.

53   The College prospectus and accompanying DVD are published by the Publicity Coordinator and Marketing Office. This material is subject to annual updating and responsibility for signing off the final version of the prospectus lies with the Principal or Vice-Principal. The College also publishes a range of course-specific promotional material, as well as publicity material relating to student performances and graduate guides showcasing graduating students. Course-specific material is signed off by the relevant programme director.

54   A new College website had been launched at the beginning of 2009. The website provides links for prospective applicants to get external and independent information about the College and its courses from the UNISTATS and National Student Survey websites. However, the audit team did find that a number of links within the College website of relevance to prospective students were not yet functioning, including linkages to accommodation services, disability support and the learning centre. The College acknowledged that there were parts of the website that were not providing potential students with the information which it would wish them to have.

55   The College's document control centre is a central online repository for key College documentation. A particular feature is that students have full access to the full range of content, apart from material relating to examination boards. Students with whom the audit team met confirmed they found this facility both useful and informative. While the team considered this in principle to be a constructive aid to good communication, it found evidence that procedures for managing and updating content were weak and believed that the College would enhance the value of its document control centre by developing a systematic approach to content management and deletion.

56   Distance-learning students confirmed they received a programme handbook, module guides and an assessment schedule. On-campus undergraduate students also confirmed they received a programme handbook, but indicated aspects of it were out of date, as were parts of the College website which they accessed. The audit team saw evidence of variability in the degree of comprehensiveness of information provided to students at the programme level and was of the view that the College could, with advantage, review the consistency and renewal of material that it supplies to all students about their programme of study and assessment requirements. The College publishes programme specifications for each of its academic programmes on its external-facing website, and the team was able to verify that students and potential students are able to access these through a link from each course entry on the College website. The Briefing Paper stated that programme committees verify the accuracy of these documents annually, but the team were not able to find any evidence of this process taking place from its examination of the minutes of these committees for 2007-08.

57   The audit team met with two groups of students during its visit to the College: students on distance-learning and postgraduate programmes, and students on on-campus undergraduate programmes. Distance-learning students identified personal contacts and recommendations as the key source of information about the College and its programmes, with advertising in theatre and opera programmes and trade publications a frequently cited source, reflecting a group of mainly mature students, many of whom indicated they were studying for leisure interest reasons. On-campus students cited the website as their most important source of information, but also frequently mentioned word-of-mouth recommendations. The prospectus was considered to be informative and gave a clear insight into what was required by their programme of study. Students felt the information they had been given about their programme had been broadly accurate and their expectations had been met by their experience at the College. The student written submission concluded that the information given to potential students was accurate and useful, at the institutional level, but was sometimes less reliable at the level of detail, and in consistency between sources and currency of information This view was confirmed by some of the students with whom the audit team met, but they nevertheless regarded the College as honest in its portrayal of the student experience.

58   Overall, the audit team found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

59   The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the cohesive community of the staff and students

- the rapid and effective embedding of the College's new academic and committee structure (paragraph 13)

- the system for biannual programme monitoring and its contribution to quality assurance and enhancement (paragraph 15)

- the interrogation and analysis of the dataset of management information at programme and institutional level (paragraph 22)

- the comprehensive and structured arrangements for student feedback for on-campus programmes, including the Student Semester Review process (paragraph 27)

- the College's focused approach and initiatives in support of a diverse student body with particular reference to students with disabilities (paragraph 36)

- the level of support for sessional staff, including their access to staff development and research opportunities and the provision of a part-time tutors' coordinator and handbook (paragraph 43).

Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that the College consider further action in some areas.

60   Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- to keep under careful review the capacity of its human and physical resources in the context of its many strategic and operational objectives (paragraph 10).

61   Recommendations for action that is desirable:

It would be desirable for the College to:

- expedite the implementation of those aspects of its learning and teaching strategy relating to online learning support (paragraph 29)

- strengthen the pro-active management and coordination of resources with particular reference to the library, information technology, technical support and estates (paragraph 33)

- reinforce the leadership and strategic coordination of its student services (paragraph 34)

- consider whether the positive contribution of the student community to the College's quality assurance and enhancement processes could be further strengthened by providing appropriate support to the Students' Union (paragraph 36).

Appendix

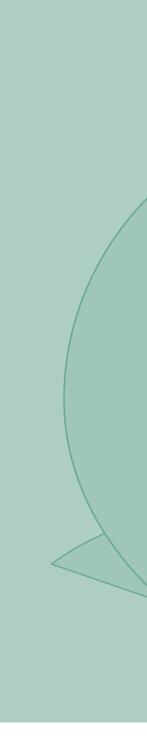## Rose Bruford College's response to the Institutional audit report

Rose Bruford College welcomes the outcome and report of the QAA's 2009 Institutional Audit. The College has devoted considerable energy and resources, since 2003, to its quality systems, committee structures and to the continued embedding of these mechanisms in the academic life of the institution.

We are pleased in the confidences expressed for the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of its awards and the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. The College is particularly delighted that the audit highlights seven areas of good practice, citing programme management and support of a diverse student body as key elements. The 'cohesive community of the staff and students', which the audit team noted, is something this institution strives to maintain. As a small specialist HEI, concern for the welfare of staff and students is something we value highly.

In respect of those recommendations considered both advisable and desirable, the College's strategic and master plans call for an increase in its human and physical resources, future support for a growing Student Union, the establishment of a Virtual Learning Environment to encourage greater online teaching and learning support, and the reinforcement of student and institutional resources throughout the College. New directions in the senior management of the College will foster greater changes in these areas.

The constructive comments made by the audit team are helpful and considered. The entire auditing process was welcomed by the College as a means of demonstrating its institutional maturity since the last QAA findings. The report, which has arrived as the College prepares to take its summer break, will be considered by the Academic Board in autumn 2009. Furthermore, various College committees will monitor recommendations that relate to teaching and learning and resourcing.

Overall, we see the report as very useful guidance as the College begins the process to achieve Taught Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP) in the future. The confidence placed in the institution encourages us in this direction.