

Leeds College of Music

November 2007

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance for Higher Education (QAA) visited Leeds College of Music (the College) from 26 to 30 November 2007 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 Leeds and the Open University.

Outcomes of the institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of Leeds College of Music 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 Leeds and the Open 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

The audit team identified that the College takes some deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the learning opportunities available to students. Some of the College's mechanisms for achieving this, notably the establishment of the Quality and Standards Unit, are of recent development.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The College has no postgraduate research students.

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 of good practice:

- the annual programme evaluation process as a mechanism for annual course review (paragraph 81)
- engagement with the music industry and expert professional practice (paragraphs 76, 96, 97)
- the pastoral support provided by the Student Services Unit (paragraphs 112, 114, 115).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- to keep under review recent changes to the terms of reference and operation of the College's committees, in order to assure itself that the new arrangements meet its aspiration to ensure timely implementation of action plans and achievement of targets (paragraphs 20, 21, 23, 29)
- to continue to develop institutional oversight of policies, processes, documentation and associated roles and responsibilities (paragraphs 21, 26, 29, 129, 130)

- to develop its framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, to enable the College to meet fully the requirements of the Open University's Handbook for Validated Awards (paragraphs 53, 58, 59, 65)
- to develop the management of assessment marks (paragraph 57)
- to develop a set of comprehensive assessment regulations clarifying the arrangements for the classification of Open University validated awards, progression from these awards, the consideration of borderline cases, and the application of compensation; and communicate these arrangements consistently to staff, external examiners and students (paragraphs 59, 62, 65, 66, 144, 145)
- to improve the timetabling of learning activities (paragraphs 102, 105).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- to consider the development of internal periodic review in order to promote greater College ownership of programme development (paragraphs 36, 78)
- to develop and express more clearly the links between intended learning outcomes, generic grading criteria and assignment marking criteria (paragraphs 50, 54, 55)
- to develop mechanisms to ensure that it can draw and reflect upon qualitative and quantitative data from the institution and the wider sector in order to benchmark and to monitor institutional performance (paragraph 72)
- to revise internal student feedback questionnaires, and other student consultation processes, to provide more and better information about the higher education student experience (paragraphs 83, 87)
- to take more effective action to address student concerns evident in the results of the National Student Survey (paragraph 91)
- to establish a focus for the development of pedagogical support and research for academic staff that takes more into account internal and external models of effective practice (paragraphs 94, 136).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 Leeds College of Music was established in 1971, having previously been known as the Leeds Music Centre, established in 1966. The mission of the College is that 'the College provides high quality music education, enhanced by research, and continually evolving to meet the needs of the profession and the community'. The College is an affiliated college of the University of Leeds and an accredited institution of the Open University. The College moved from the further education sector in August 2005 to become a higher education institution. The College is a member of Conservatoires UK, a consortium of the UK's music colleges.

2 The College offers a wide range of courses in music, music production and, for further education only, musical theatre. At the time of the audit the College had approximately 700 higher education European Union, full-time equivalent, undergraduate students and approximately 25 higher education European Union postgraduate students. Overseas enrolments are approximately 18. In addition, the College has approximately 330 students on further education courses and some 1,000 students on Access and outreach courses. The College recruits regionally and nationally for its higher education students. All teaching on full-time courses takes place at the city centre site. Some community education outreach classes are delivered at other locations in the region.

3 Most of the College's higher education provision is now validated by the Open University. Undergraduate provision has been validated by the University of Leeds, but this arrangement will cease by August 2008. Transition arrangements exist for the final teaching on these University of Leeds validated courses, and a final review by the University of this part of the College's provision took place in October 2007.

4 The College offers two Foundation Degrees in the area of music production, five honours degrees in music, jazz, popular music studies, music production, and an honours-level progression award for Foundation Degree students in sound design. The College currently offers three MA courses in music, jazz and music production.

5 The College has clear progression routes from Access and outreach community education courses to further education, from further education to undergraduate, from Foundation Degrees to honours, and from undergraduate to postgraduate.

6 The College is organised in four academic departments: Music; Music Production; Access and Outreach; Research and Enterprise. The Music and Music Production Departments encompass the College's full-time higher education and further education provision. At the time of the audit, these two departments had one head between them, the Head of Music and Music Production, reporting to the Director of Studies.

7 At the time of the audit the College had 35 permanent full-time, and 184 part-time and fractional academic staff; 21 full-time and 82 part-time members of staff teach the higher education provision within the College.

8 The College has not previously had a QAA institutional audit or QAA subject review. The College's further education and adult and community education provision underwent a successful Ofsted review in May 2007. This inspection was a re-inspection following a previous, less favourable Ofsted inspection.

The information base for the audit

9 The College provided the audit team with a briefing paper and access to a wide range of internal and published documents, many of which were available on the intranet. In addition, the College provided the team with reports produced by external agencies on its activities.

10 The College also provided the audit team with an audit trail of recent programme-level reviews including all submitted documentation, the minutes of meetings, consideration by relevant College committees and the resultant actions. The College provided the team with access to the intranet during the briefing and audit visits. In addition, the audit team met staff and students of the College.

11 The Students' Union produced a student written submission setting out the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners, and their role in quality management. The audit team was grateful to the Students' Union for this contribution to the audit.

Developments since the last audit

12 The College has never previously undergone a QAA audit or subject review. The College moved from the further education college status to become a higher education institution in August 2005. It retains further education, Access and outreach programmes. The College has close links with the University of Leeds (which, until August 2008, validates some of the College's higher education courses) and previously enjoyed collaborative arrangements with Leeds Metropolitan University. These last franchise arrangements ended at the conclusion of the 2006-07 academic year.

13 The Open University is now the main validating body for the College's higher education programmes. The College is currently working towards achieving a level of delegated authority from the University as an outcome of the forthcoming University Institutional event in 2008-09.

14 The last decade has seen major changes in the accommodation occupied by the College. The College is housed in purpose-built accommodation, developed during three phases between 1998 and 2005, including a new teaching block, and a student hall of residence with 190 bed-spaces, which was opened in 2005. The College has an adjacent 350-seater auditorium, The Venue, physically linked to the main building. This plays a major role in expanding performance opportunities for College ensembles and other performers.

15 During 2005-06, an internal review of the Academic Board and its committees recommended that the terms of reference for the Learning and Teaching Committee and Quality and Standards Committee should be revised in order to improve the College's strategic management of standards and quality. Revisions include reducing the number of formal subcommittees, and re-introducing course-specific boards of studies, rather than the broader programme boards which, the College believed, were overburdened.

16 The College has chosen to reorganise its academic structure such that the higher education programmes are concentrated in two departments (Music; Music Production); these departments also offer the College's further education programmes.

17 The recently established Quality and Standards Unit aims to enhance, monitor and develop the College's learning and teaching, and to oversee and support the work of the Academic Board and its committees.

Institutional framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

18 The College's frameworks for the management of quality and standards in higher and further education share significant similarities, particularly in the roles of major college committees, senior executive and administrative staff, and support units. There is, nevertheless, evidence that the College is developing a more higher education-specific approach, for example in the introduction of dedicated processes, as expressed within the Quality Handbook.

19 The College sees itself as having 'largely devolved' responsibility for the maintenance of standards and quality in accordance with its agreements with the validating bodies (the University of Leeds and the Open University). It exercises this responsibility through its major internal committee, the Academic Board, supported by the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Quality and Standards Committee. It has also created other committees and groups to act on its behalf. These include boards of studies, which report to the Learning and Teaching Committee on matters relating to course development and evaluation. Others include those specific to research, examinations and results ratification, academic appeals, and those directly relating to academic issues. The College Governors also have a subcommittee, the Quality Monitoring and Standards Committee, in the area of the maintenance of standards and quality.

20 The Learning and Teaching Committee and the Quality and Standards Committee are central to the College's management of quality and standards. Their terms of reference were revised during 2005-06 as a consequence of organisational restructuring in the wake of the College becoming a higher education institution; further revisions to the operation of the two committees were approved in July 2007. The audit team heard from College managers that the structure of the committees was 'not yet right'; that there was need to ensure that work was done efficiently; and that the lines of dialogue between the Academic Board and the two committees were still the source of some 'confusion'. A proposal to merge these main committees reporting to the Academic Board was to be placed by the Director of Studies before the next meeting of the Board.

21 The audit team noted from its reading of Learning and Teaching Committee minutes for 2006-07 that the volume of business was such that extraordinary meetings had been necessary, and that certain items (for example, the setting of standards in the process of course approval) might be more suited to the Quality and Standards Committee's terms of reference. Also, the detailed complexity of business and potential overlap of agendas reduced the opportunity for focus on prioritising actions. The evident difficulties experienced in the processing of business through the committees in 2006-07, and the fact that the Director of Studies is chair of both committees, and the further fact that the head of both academic departments and the Head of the Quality and Standards Unit sit on both committees all provide a rationale for the merger proposal.

22 One feature of the College's framework is the existence of the Governing Body's Quality and Standards Monitoring Committee, a group established in the wake of a failed Ofsted inspection of further education provision in April 2005. Among its terms of reference are duties to monitor the quality assurance procedures of the College and to receive reports arising from external review of the College's quality assurance procedures. Despite its origins, this Committee has also concerned itself with higher education provision. The audit team learned that the College management's most recent approach to addressing the National Student Survey results had been received by this Committee, which had then requested further information on the theme.

23 At the time of the audit, the College was in the process of making significant adjustments to its committee structure. For example, recent changes to the terms of reference for boards of examiners, the abolition of the Results Ratification and Awards Classification Panel, and the establishment of module assessment boards have been designed to clarify the operation of assessment processes, and to enhance the authority of external examiners. In addition, the introduction of boards of studies and the proposed merger of the Learning and Teaching and Quality and Standards Committees demonstrate the College's concern to evaluate the effectiveness of its committees and make necessary changes. Noting that the volume and overlap of business, particularly at these Committees, did not contribute to an efficient tracking of action plans and targets (for example, the delay in 2006-07 in conducting a gap analysis against the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (Code of practice), published by QAA; the lack of progress on the issue of condonement; and the limited effectiveness of the original National Student Survey Action Plan), the audit team considered it advisable that these recent changes should be kept under review so that the College can assure itself that the new arrangements meet its aspiration to ensure timely implementation of action plans and achievement of targets.

24 The Heads of Music and Music Production (two posts held by a single individual at the time of the audit) carry strategic responsibility at institutional level for quality and standards, as well as prime responsibility at departmental level. Assistant heads oversee the quality of provision in a portfolio of higher education courses in each department, and have major line-management duties. Course leaders, supported by teams of module coordinators, have academic leadership in the context of a single programme, and chair course team meetings.

25 The roles of key posts (Director of Studies, Head of Department, Head of the Quality and Standards Unit, assistant heads, course leaders, module coordinators) were explored in some detail by the audit team. The role of Director of Studies carries substantial executive responsibilities for the quality and standards of all academic provision. These are largely but not exclusively exercised through membership of the Academic Board, the Board of Management (the members of which also include the Principal and senior academic and support heads), and the Senior Management Team, as well as through the chairing of the Learning and Teaching and the Quality and Standards Committees. The audit team noted some tension between executive and deliberative functions, occasionally leading to a lack of clarity as to where decisions were made. One example would be the route by which the new Learning and Teaching Strategy was approved. Although having its genesis in an Learning and Teaching Committee decision in early

2006-07 to set up a working group to produce such a strategy, the strategy itself was not discussed at a Committee meeting, but simply circulated to members before it went to the Academic Board, championed by the Director of Studies.

26 The role of course leader has recently been reintroduced in order to strengthen course management and to give an unambiguous lead academic contact for students on the course. The duties of the role include coordinating delivery, admissions process and assessment results; monitoring student achievement and attendance; maintaining up-to-date and accurate course information; and preparing the annual programme evaluation. These duties do not explicitly relate to leadership. Despite this, in a meeting with senior staff, the audit team heard that course leaders were expected to display significant academic leadership (rather than have any line-management responsibilities which, in departments, were largely held by assistant heads). This latter distinction was generally understood, although the view was put forward in one meeting that module coordinators should go through assistant heads on a matter of assessment design. In its recent reorganisation of committees, the College has aimed to engage more course leaders in the deliberative considerations of policy and practice; it has also invested more resource in module coordinators in order to formalise and recognise their role in course management. The College's view is that both developments will strengthen the framework for managing quality and standards. However, course leaders have been reintroduced with a deliberate emphasis in title on leadership, an emphasis almost entirely absent from the role description. There is risk of a gap between intention and implementation, caused by the discrepancy between title and duties. In the context of developing a firmer institutional oversight of how roles are changed and articulated, and given the pivotal position of course leaders, and the significant issues raised by students on course organisation and management, the College is advised to take further steps to emphasise the leadership role of course leaders in the management of quality and standards at course level.

27 The College's approach to the management of standards and the quality of learning opportunities is characterised by institution-wide procedures collated in the Quality Handbook (the Handbook) framed within an overall Quality Assurance Policy. In 2006-07, The Learning and Teaching Committee oversaw the production of a new paper version of the College's Handbook, covering both higher and further education provision. Its introductory pages lay out very clearly the College's Quality Assurance Policy, in particular the underpinning principles and practices. The Handbook was described in a meeting with those involved in its production as a 'compendium of original documents' with some prefacing for individual documents and for the Handbook itself. Just before the audit visit, a decision was taken by senior managers to improve its user-friendliness, its comprehensiveness and its currency. As a result, the Handbook is now available on the College's virtual learning environment, and is being refashioned to achieve the desired improvements, especially that of communicating the College's full procedural framework better to its staff, both full and part-time.

28 The responsibility for updating and communicating the Handbook, as well as other information on quality and standards, lies with the Quality and Standards Unit established during the summer of 2007. This Unit is led by the Head of Quality and Standards, and supported by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Manager, the Quality Assurance Manager, and the Quality and Standards Officer. The Unit aims to enhance, monitor and develop the College's learning and teaching, and to oversee and support the work of the Academic Board and its committees, including the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Quality and Standards Committee. In the proposed merger of these two committees, the Quality and Standards Unit would play an important role in organising the agenda of the new committee, and in planning the business across the various cycles of meetings. In their engagement with the audit team, members of the Unit demonstrated their commitment to the new central support role, their willingness to seek models of good practice within the higher education sector (and beyond specialist music higher education institutions), and their capacity to influence the College's approach to quality and standards. It was clear that their view of the Unit embraced a strong,

developmental role as well as an important administrative function. Although it is too early to assess the Unit's impact, the establishment of a dedicated central support unit adds significantly to the College's framework for the management of quality and standards.

29 The audit team concluded that the developing framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities was capable of addressing the concerns identified by the team, and largely shared by the College itself. The team judged it advisable, nevertheless, that the College should develop further institutional oversight of policies, processes, documentation and associated roles and responsibilities; and that it should keep under review recent changes to the terms of reference and operation of its committees in order to assure itself that the new arrangements meet its aspiration to ensure timely implementation of action plans and achievement of targets.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

30 Procedures for approval of new programmes through the Open University Validation Services, acting for the Open University, are articulated in the College's Quality Handbook. Following initial approval by the Academic Board, course documentation, including a programme specification, module documentation and sample handbook, is prepared by the course development team for consideration by the relevant board of studies. The audit team saw evidence of proposals being scrutinised through its review of boards of studies minutes, and it heard from students how they had contributed to changes as members of these boards. The proposal for a new programme is then submitted to the Learning and Teaching Committee for approval. The Learning and Teaching Committee, acting on behalf of the Academic Board, carries out an internal validation event with a panel of Committee members and at least one external member identified by the course development team. The internal validation includes scrutiny of documentation, and a question and answer session with departmental staff. The report of the internal validation panel, including any recommendations and revisions, is considered by the Committee. If approved by the Committee acting on behalf of the Academic Board, the proposal is forwarded to the Open University Validation Service, which convenes an external validation panel at the College to review the proposal. This validation event takes place over two days, and includes discussions with students and senior management as well as the course development team. Consideration by the Open University includes whether the course regulations meet Open University requirements and QAA guidance, and whether aims and objectives, teaching and assessment methods and curricular content are appropriate. The report of the Open University Validation Service indicates approval or non-approval, any conditions, and the period of validation.

31 The audit team saw evidence of the approval of programmes that followed the process described above. The process included consideration of assessment criteria, linking to learning outcomes and the level and timing of assessment. The College noted in the Briefing Paper that the proposal for a Foundation Degree in 'e-music' was rejected at the internal validation stage during 2006-07. Through examination of Learning and Teaching Committee minutes, the team was able to confirm that the reasons why the programme was not progressed to the Open University validation stage were the amount of work and the resources needed to meet the University deadlines for validation for courses to start in September 2007. The team concluded that the programme approval process was effective in ensuring the setting of appropriate award standards.

Monitoring of award standards

32 Programme monitoring at departmental level occurs through boards of studies which usually meet at least three times each year. The College's formal process of annual monitoring of each programme occurs through the annual programme evaluation as required by the Open University. The monitoring report contains quantitative data on new students, including

application numbers, places offered, number enrolled, number entering who have used the procedures for accreditation of prior (experiential) learning, educational qualifications, age and gender. Data given for students include ethnicity, disability, gender, progression and retention rates, and awards made, including classification, number of appeals and graduate destinations. Authors are also asked to comment on the data, and to compare classifications and awards made against the Higher Education Statistics Agency benchmarks. Also included in annual programme evaluations are commentaries on the management of standards; external examiner comments and action to be taken; student feedback on assessment; whether the aims are appropriate; how the assessment strategy enables learners to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes; action on feedback from the previous annual programme evaluation, revalidation and from external bodies; and an action plan. Course leaders are responsible for completing the reports, which are then considered by the board of studies, which subsequently monitors the action plan arising from the report.

33 From committee minutes, the audit team confirmed that annual programme evaluations were discussed by boards of studies, approved by the Quality and Standards Committee and, through boards of studies minutes, reported at the Learning and Teaching Committee. The Quality and Standards Committee also has responsibility for monitoring the action plans prepared as part of the evaluations.

34 The audit team saw evidence of annual programme evaluation working groups of the boards of studies which have operated from 2007-08. The team noted the College's expectation that such working groups would improve the effectiveness of their consideration, and reduce time spent on deliberation in the Quality and Standards Committee. Changes to programmes are included in the annual programme evaluations for approval either by the external examiner (minor changes) or by the Open University (major changes). An executive summary report of the evaluations is produced by the Head of the Quality and Standards Unit, approved by the Quality and Standards Committee and seen by the Academic Board and the Governors' Quality and Standards Monitoring Committee before submission to the Open University. The University reviews the report and provides a summary response which includes areas for immediate and longer term action by the College.

35 The audit team saw a range of annual programme evaluations, including the improved 2006-07 versions, and concluded that they were a comprehensive, evaluative and effective annual programme review process of standards and quality for individual programmes. However, the team found these evaluations and their summary little used at institutional level to enable sharing of the good practice identified in the reports, identification of common issues, or enhancement of the management of academic standards. This was confirmed by the minutes of the Learning and Teaching Committee for 21 November 2007, which identified the need for the Quality and Standards Committee to consider the executive summary report for quality enhancement issues and opportunities in addition to approval of the report for submission to the Open University.

Periodic review of standards

36 The College carries out periodic review through programme revalidation, as required by, and in accordance with, the validating bodies. These revalidation events aim to ensure that the programmes continue to meet the requirements for quality and standards of the validating institution for the awards in question. In revalidation, achievement of standards is demonstrated by examination of the programme achievements of students and the reports of external examiners. Periodic review carried out by the validating bodies indicates that the appropriate standards are achieved in practice. The College does not operate a system of periodic review that is entirely internal. The audit team considers it desirable that, as the College moves to a relationship of increased devolution with the Open University, and acquires greater ownership of programme approval and development, internal periodic review of programmes is developed, to

assist it in keeping a clear overview of the programme portfolio and of any developing strengths and weaknesses.

External examiners

37 The College identifies external examiners and instrument-specific assessors as central to how it develops the management of academic standards. The College stated in the Briefing Paper that its relationship with its external examiners and specialist external assessors is compliant with the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*. There is a clear understanding of how, when and where external examiner reports should be responded to, and how responses are monitored. External examiner procedures are clearly specified in the 'Procedures for external examiners' document. Course documentation is sent to external examiners by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Manager, with accompanying procedural information.

38 Both new external examiner appointments and extensions to existing contracts of external examiners are approved by the Learning and Teaching Committee for recommendation to the validating body, following recommendation from the board of studies. Specialist external assessors are also used in final-year performance recital examinations and are approved by the Learning and Teaching Committee. The audit team viewed minutes of the Learning and Teaching Committee which included descriptions of responses from the Open University regarding approval of external examiners. The team was able to confirm the effectiveness of the process.

39 The College uses the Open University external examiner regulations supported by its own Procedures for External Examining (Open University validated courses). The roles and responsibilities of external examiners are clearly specified in this document and include details of the procedures for appointment, briefing, information supply to external examiners, how examination papers are processed and sampling to be carried out, moderation templates for external examiners, and reporting details.

40 Briefing of external examiners is carried out by the validating body supported by programme-specific information and briefing carried out by the College at course level. The information pack sent by the College to external examiners is copious and includes previous external examiner reports, annual programme evaluations and student performance data.

41 Reports from external examiners are made on the Open University reporting template, which clearly describes what should go into each section, and gives details of when and to whom the completed report should be submitted. External examiners are asked to comment on 'whether the standards set are appropriate for the award, or award element, by reference to any agreed subject benchmarks, qualifications framework, programme specification or other relevant information'. The external examiner reports seen by the audit team confirmed that at intermediate, honours and master's levels the standards were appropriate and had been met.

42 The audit team saw clear evidence of the external examiner reports being evaluated within the annual programme evaluation, where responses to problems and any good practice were given. The external examiner receives a copy of this evaluation once it has been approved. These evaluations and copies of the external examiner reports are forwarded to the validating body, which responds with a detailed report of action to be taken, either urgently or for report in the following year. Any changes or developments are included in the evaluation action plan, which is monitored by the Quality and Standards Committee.

43 The College informed the audit team that external examiner reports were made available to students through their consideration at boards of studies and extraordinary meetings of the now disbanded staff-student consultative committee. The team considered the external examiner processes and reporting to be fit for purpose, and whilst there has been little central consideration or collation of external examiner reports, during the audit visit the College informed the team, and presented evidence, that the first annual summary of external examiner reports had been considered by the Quality and Standards Committee. Overall, the audit team

found the external examining process to be effective in assuring the academic standards of programmes and awards.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

44 Responsibility for coordinating use of the QAA Academic Infrastructure within the College's higher education provision falls within the remit of the Quality and Standards Committee. The validation procedures of the Open University state that it ensures that programmes have taken due regard of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and, in the case of undergraduate programmes, the relevant subject benchmark statements. The audit team viewed programme specifications for undergraduate and master's programmes and was able to confirm that the FHEQ had been used and that benchmark statements (Music; Communication, media, film and cultural studies) were not only referenced in undergraduate programme specifications, but that the learning outcomes from the benchmarks for both 'threshold' and 'focal' levels were stated.

45 The College is required by the Open University to undertake a gap analysis of its provision against the *Code of practice* published by QAA. The College's use of the *Code of practice* is monitored by the Quality and Standards Committee on behalf of the Academic Board. Although the College stated in the Briefing Paper that it believed that it followed the *Code of practice*, the College's analysis of autumn 2007 clearly identified where College practice departed from the *Code of practice*, further action was required, who had responsibility for the action, and the agreed date for fulfilment.

46 The College stated in the Briefing Paper that its relationship with its external examiners follows the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*. The recent gap analysis carried out by the College supports this affirmation, with the only action required being to utilise the good practice identified in reports. The audit team saw evidence that this action had recently been completed.

47 The College has identified a need to revise its current Student Appeals and Complaints Policy to meet fully the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters*. It has established a working group to carry out the work during 2007-08. The Learning and Teaching Committee had decided to wait until the revision of this section of the *Code of practice*, due in 2007-08, was available before proceeding with revising the College's procedures. The audit team found that the appeals procedure was not known by students or generally distributed to students. Course handbooks advised students to obtain the College's appeals policy from the student enquiries counter. The annual programme evaluation template requires identification of the number of student appeals made, and the team found that very few appeals in higher education programmes had been lodged with the College.

48 The College's gap analysis for the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*, identified action points for the development of a College assessment strategy, improvements needed to the quality and timeliness of feedback, the need to develop level-specific descriptors to differentiate outcomes between levels, the need to ensure that instrumental tutors and new academic staff are supported in assessment tasks, and the need to develop an academic malpractice policy.

49 The programme specification is a key document in the validation process with the Open University Validation Service, and the College has programme specifications following the Open University model across all of its provision. The programme specification is a key component of each course handbook, and is reviewed annually in the annual programme evaluation. Minor changes to the programme specification can be made with approval from the external examiner and the Open University; however, major changes may require a validation event or a delay for consideration at the next periodic review. The audit team found the College's programme specifications to be comprehensive and consistent across all higher education programmes.

50 Programme specifications include general assessment regulations, details of the management of assessments, marking schemes, and classification and assessment maps to support links between the curricula and assessment. For generic assessment criteria, readers are referred to a separate document that gives the College/University of Leeds generic descriptors for use in standardising assessment. The audit team found the programme specifications confusing in their giving of three sets of outcomes: the educational outcomes of the programme, and the 'threshold' and 'focal' outcomes taken from subject benchmark statements. It was not clear how these sets of outcomes were linked to each other, to module learning outcomes, to the assignment criteria specified in the assignment briefs or to the College/University of Leeds generic descriptors. The team considers it desirable that the College should give consideration to making these links more explicit in the programme specifications, and more generally to students.

51 External expert opinion is used by the College in both internal and Open University validation panels for new programme approval, through both the external examiner and specialist external assessors used in student assessment, and through their involvement in the Academic Board, Research and Enterprise Committee, Professional Conferment Committee and the Governors' Quality and Standards Monitoring Committee. None of the College's higher education programmes is accredited by a professional body.

52 The College informed the audit team that it was responding to the European Standards and Guidelines and the Bologna Process through its links with Conservatoires UK, which, in turn, is considering the guidelines in relation to the programmes of its members. Overall, the team found that the College was using the Academic Infrastructure and external expert input effectively.

Assessment policies and regulations

53 The Learning and Teaching Committee has overall responsibility for the development, implementation and review of assessment policies, and for monitoring assessment operations. The College stated in the Briefing Paper that it has no overall assessment policy or strategy, but plans to have one in operation by July 2008. The audit team was informed that the College did not think that there was any risk associated with not having a College assessment strategy, as any College strategy would be simply a collection of existing policies, and as the current assessment procedures had integrity. The minutes of the Learning and Teaching Committee indicated agreement to develop a higher education assessment strategy, coordinated by the Head of Quality and Standards. While the paper associated with this discussion related to an overall higher education assessment strategy, there was no reference in the document to the requirements of the Open University, which will be the sole validating body of such provision within the College from 2008-09. It is advisable that the College should ensure that it takes any such requirements into account during the development of an assessment strategy.

54 The audit team found clear descriptors of generic assessment criteria within programme specifications, course handbooks, and the College's generic descriptors for use in standardising assessment. The generic descriptors for undergraduate programmes describe assessment criteria for composition, performance, presentations, production and written work, whilst the generic descriptors for master's degrees include additional criteria relating to musicology. These descriptors are based on those of the University of Leeds, and in most cases do not distinguish between levels: the criteria for attaining an Upper Second mark are the same for work at level 1, 2 and 3. This characteristic has been raised as a problem by an external examiner in musical performance. The College indicated in its gap analysis that it needed to develop level-specific criteria, and the team also considers this action to be desirable.

55 Assignment briefs are well articulated, and generally supported by oral description by staff. However, the audit team was informed by students that more specific assessment criteria relating to level of achievement (for example, what is required to attain an Upper Second class degree as opposed to a Lower Second) within the assignment briefs would be useful. Following scrutiny of a number of assignment briefs, the team determined that assignment criteria were

very general, and that there was no indication of how marks were allocated across elements of the assignments. One external examiner also indicated that the feedback comments were similar for students attaining different grades. It is desirable that the College more clearly articulates assessment criteria within assignment briefs.

56 The College has clear procedures for internal moderation of assignments; these specify a sample of 10 scripts or 10 per cent of total, whichever is greater, across the full mark range, and including all Fails. The moderator is asked to comment on marks awarded, appropriateness of feedback, conformity to the generic mark descriptors, and timeliness of marking. The moderation forms are made available to the external examiner.

57 The audit team was informed that course leaders are responsible for recording marks on a departmental spreadsheet, and that, once the results are ratified, they are transferred to the central management information system. At its meeting in October 2007, the Learning and Teaching Committee discussed the risk, as identified by the Results Ratification and Awards Classification Panel, associated with previous incorrect inputting of marks. The team examined the minutes of this Panel and found that the difficulty had been one of inconsistent application of approved procedures to marks. The team advises the College to develop the management of assessment marks to ensure that approved procedures such as penalties and condonement are fully and accurately applied to marks.

58 Until shortly before the audit, to confirm results and awards, the College had operated boards of examiners, with external examiner representation, and a Results Ratification and Awards Classification Panel, without external examiner representation. The College informed the audit team that this system had been unsatisfactory, as decisions could be changed at this Panel, resulting in external examiners being asked to re-sign the mark and award-confirmation documents. From 2007-08, the College has approved a two-tier board of examiners system involving module and subject examination boards and the abolition of the Results Ratification and Awards Classification Panel. The team examined the terms of reference for the proposed module examination boards (Music and Music Production) and subject examination boards (higher education Music and higher education Music Production, and Master's) and compared them with what is stipulated in the Open University's Handbook for Validated Awards. The team found discrepancies between the external examiner membership of the proposed College examination boards and the requirements of the validating body. The College indicated external examiner involvement only at the subject examination boards, while the Open University requirements are that external examiners should be present at subject boards and any sub-boards. The College told the team that it had discussed the discrepancy with the validating body. The team considers it advisable that the College ensures compliance with the Open University requirement in external examiner membership of examination boards.

59 The audit team examined overarching assessment regulations for University of Leeds validated programmes, but no such College-authored regulations were available for Open University validated programmes. The Open University Validation Service regulations on assessment require associated and accredited institutions to develop institution-wide generic regulations to which programme-specific regulations cross-refer, and give 18 specific elements for inclusion. The College confirmed to the team that it had no such College-authored regulations for Open University programmes. The College was unable to indicate how examination boards considered compensation or borderline marks for the Open University validated courses. The lack of overarching assessment regulations had been raised in 2006 by one external examiner, who had indicated that such regulations would help to make academic judgements more consistent. The team noted that although this issue had been included in the action plan from the programme examination board meeting in 2006, there had been no follow-up of the action point in the programme examination board in 2007. The team considers it advisable that the College develops a set of comprehensive assessment regulations clarifying the arrangements for the classification of Open University validated awards, progression from these awards, the

consideration of borderline cases, and the application of compensation; and that the College communicates these arrangements consistently to staff, external examiners and students.

60 The College does have policies on the conduct of assessment; these include external examining procedure, procedure for the examination of third-year recitals, mitigating circumstances procedure, tolerance of assessment limits, procedure for staff assessing students with learning difficulties and disabilities, regulations and procedures for internal and external examinations, external instrument assessor procedure, academic malpractice, expulsion on academic grounds, and student appeals and complaints. The College is currently updating the last three of these procedures.

61 The audit team found the procedure document for staff assessing students with learning difficulties and disabilities to be a very practical and informative document for helping staff in setting and marking assessments. Policies on assignment deadlines, late submission, cheating and plagiarism are stated in course handbooks.

62 The regulations and procedures for internal and external examinations indicate that the anonymous code used in written examinations includes three letters which are equivalent to the first three letters of a student's surname. The audit team considers that, in developing a set of comprehensive assessment regulations clarifying the arrangements for the classification of Open University validated awards, it is advisable that the College should consider whether this practice assures anonymity in written examinations.

63 The College introduced specialist external instrument assessors for the final-year performance recitals in 2006-07, and is now expanding the scheme to all classical, jazz and popular music courses to cover final-year composition portfolios. It intends to extend their use to all areas. The procedure for the examination of third-year recitals covers the appointment, training, role and reporting of the assessors. The training is through standardisation sessions with the assessment panel prior to the recitals, and assessors are asked to report on the assessment procedures and standards compared with those of other institutions, in addition to their involvement in the assessment process. Their report on the process is considered by boards of studies, the Quality and Standards Committee and as part of the annual programme evaluation process. The audit team was able to confirm, through examination of the annual programme evaluations and Quality and Standards Committee minutes, that the process as described took place. Scrutiny of the assessor reports and external examiner reports indicated that the standardisation meeting of the panel was a key feature in ensuring a common understanding of the assessment criteria.

64 For each degree programme, the volume and timing of assessment are mapped in an appendix to the programme specification, which forms part of the submission for programme approval. The audit team heard from students that generally the assessment volume or timing turn around was helpfully planned.

65 Student progression rules are stated in the honours programme specifications and course handbooks; detail is given on the credits needed, and how honours classification is calculated. The audit team found that different Pass marks were in operation on different programmes. Foundation Degree course handbooks differed in the requirements given for progression to honours degrees. The audit team found examples of 'pass the degree', 'pass degree with an average of at least 50 per cent' and 'pass with an average of 50 per cent in level two'. These differences in both the honours and Foundation Degree regulations were not compliant with Open University requirements for consistency of assessment regulations.

66 The College has established a timetable for the review of all policies including those on assessment. The audit team advises that as the College moves towards Open University validation of all its higher education programmes through the Open University Validation Scheme, it should consider development of college-level policies in assessment rather than relying on those of the University of Leeds, the outgoing validating body.

67 Overall, the audit team considered the College's arrangements for the assessment of students to be satisfactory, with the proviso of the need to develop overarching assessment regulations.

Management information - statistics

68 The College uses quantitative student data at all levels of the management structure. The Board of Management receives a monthly update from the management information system on student numbers, and comprehensive statistical data provided by the management information system are used within annual programme review. These latter figures include data for the last three years on new students; applications rates, places offered, number enrolled and number using the accreditation of prior (experiential) learning procedures, educational qualifications, age, gender. The figures also include data on course progression and retention, awards made, classification, appeals, graduate destinations, ethnicity, disability and gender for students on the course. These data are critically analysed by the course leader.

69 The annual programme evaluations are considered by boards of studies and the Quality and Standards Committee, and then forwarded to the Open University along with the executive annual programme evaluation summary. In this way, the annual programme evaluation data are considered at all levels within the College. The audit team learned of changes to the final year of a programme, which were implemented as a result of poor student performance. In this case, subsequent greater student specialisation in the final year led to enhanced student achievement. The team was informed that individual staff have access to individual student records but not to cohort data; these data have to be requested from the central management information system service.

70 The Learning and Teaching Committee has responsibility for proposing enrolment targets to the Academic Board; to this end, the Committee analyses application, enrolment and retention data through its admissions working group. In response to questions about the excess in recruitment to the BA Music Production and BA Popular Music Studies programmes in 2005-06, the audit team was informed that admissions data were analysed by the Head of Department and the Director of Studies, and used to make recruitment estimates. For these courses, the ratio of students enrolled to offers made was out of line with that of other courses within the College; the resulting excess in recruitment could not have been predicted.

71 During the last two academic years, the College has noted some problems with the quality and availability of data for its higher education programmes. The audit team heard of the difficulties of using a single management information system system to support the different data needs of both further and higher education, and of the recent drive to improve data completeness and accuracy through weekly reports to course leaders. The team found evidence of external benchmarking only through the use of statistics provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency within the annual programme evaluations.

72 Overall, the audit team found the College's use of internal statistical information in the management of academic standards to be effective. However, the team considers it desirable that the College should develop mechanisms to ensure that it can draw upon and reflect upon quantitative and qualitative data from the wider sector in order to benchmark and to monitor institutional performance.

73 The audit team found that confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of awards that it offers on behalf of the University of Leeds and the Open University.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

74 The Quality and Standards Committee and the Learning and Teaching Committee jointly advise the Academic Board on matters arising from the monitoring of the College's use of and response to the Academic Infrastructure. The original *Code of practice* and second editions of sections have been considered through gap analyses of College practice compared with the section precepts. These analyses have been presented to the Academic Board and to the Open University by the Quality and Standards Unit. The first such analysis was conducted in 2004, and this was updated in 2007. The College acknowledges that there has been some delay in this monitoring, consequent upon the College's Ofsted Inspection in May 2007. The audit team saw proposals to encourage increased ownership of, and timely response to, the publication of section second editions. This will be achieved through a move from a centrally managed approach to one where working groups of committees would each monitor sections of the *Code of practice* relevant to their work. The Quality and Standards Unit administrative staff would support this work, updating sections on the Quality and Standards Unit section of the virtual learning environment.

75 The Briefing Paper noted areas where the College was not working fully in line with the *Code of practice*, such as in the assessment of students, where further work is needed concerning the timeliness and integrity of feedback to students. On the other hand, advice to staff appearing on the virtual learning environment concerning the assessment of students with learning difficulties was felt by the audit team to be extensive. The team also saw a revised work placement policy that was to go to the next meeting of the Academic Board, and which had addressed *Code* precepts.

76 The Quality Handbook 2007 requires that course handbooks meet the requirements of the FHEQ, and have appropriate programme specifications, written to a standard template. Programme specifications are provided as appendices to course handbooks. Course documentation for students studied by the audit team, and discussions with staff and students, confirmed a strong interaction with music professionals through the Centre for Jazz Studies and LCMselect. The latter is a partnership with business and industry to aid regional musicians, and is supported by the Higher Education Innovation Fund of HEFCE. Such external influences were viewed positively by students, who confirmed that they enhanced the quality of their learning. This engagement with the music industry and expert professional practice is considered by the team to be a feature of good practice.

77 College material reviewed by the audit team referenced the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in a consistent and appropriate way, and the team believes that the College uses these effectively in assuring the quality of learning opportunities and their effective management by the institution.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

78 Through its meetings, the audit sampling trail, and other documentation made available to it, the audit team was able to examine course life cycles from proposal, through approval, monitoring and review to discontinuation. The College has moved to validation of its higher education awards solely with the Open University, although two awards approved by the University of Leeds remain in validation until the end of the 2007-08 year. The Briefing Paper noted that the College does not have a system of internal periodic review, since periodic review is undertaken by the validating bodies. The only Open University periodic course review to date was incorporated within the Open University Validation Service institutional approval visit. In consequence, courses have the potential to run for the full period of Open University validation without any internal review other than the annual programme evaluation. While the annual programme evaluations themselves were thorough, the team considers it desirable that the

College considers the development of internal periodic review of programmes to assist it further in identifying developing strengths and weaknesses.

79 The internal process for course approval is well established, and the audit team heard of examples of courses that were not approved because of concerns over resource costs. The team heard from a student meeting how students contribute to the process of course development and approval.

80 The processes for course approval monitoring and review are prescribed to the College within the Open University Handbook for Validated Awards 2007-08. This outlines the stages of the process, the documents required, the design principles for awards and the use of external members in the process. The College's Quality Handbook 2006-07 outlines the Open University validation process, including documentation requirements and the role of external members. The process for briefing students as representatives was also explained to the audit team by staff. Minutes of course validation meetings confirmed the operation of this process, including the involvement of external members.

81 Through a sampling trail, the audit team scrutinised the annual programme evaluation process. Reports have a standard format and include actions taken as a result of previous monitoring, and actions taken as a result of student feedback. Detailed consideration of data includes those of National Student Survey outcomes. Annual programme evaluations are considered by boards of studies, which include student members, and approved by the Quality and Standards Committee which also monitors the implementation of the associated action plans. An executive summary of these evaluations prepared by the Head of Quality and Standards is submitted to the validating universities, along with external examiner reports; this summary is also received by the Academic Board and the Quality and Standards Monitoring Committee of the Board of Governors. The audit team saw the annual programme evaluation as a feature of good practice.

82 The audit team concluded that the College's processes for approval, monitoring and review are sound and contribute to the effective management of learning opportunities. However, it is desirable for the College to consider the development of internal periodic review of programmes to assist it further in identifying developing strengths and weaknesses.

Management information - feedback from students

83 Student views on courses are formally sought through two types of internal surveys: end of semester module evaluation questionnaires and a cross-college survey in the summer term. With the introduction of the new virtual learning environment, these can now be conducted more rapidly. The results from these internal surveys demonstrate high levels of student satisfaction. In response to student survey results the College produced a student leaflet, 'You said...We did', which informed students of what the College had done in response to feedback. However, the audit team found that College evaluations had too few questions, and that internal surveys did not secure sufficient data to allow the College to make comparison between internal survey results and those from the National Student Survey, a comparison that was of interest to the College because the results of the National Student Survey and internal surveys were significantly different. The team considers it desirable that the College revise its internal surveys to produce more and improved information about the student experience.

84 Following what the College describes as the 'disappointing National Student Survey results in 2006', which identified the College as having, overall, students less satisfied than those of comparable institutions, the College produced a detailed action plan which was commended by the Open University Validation Service in its summative response to the College's annual programme evaluation. College staff told the audit team that when students completed the 2007 National Student Survey it was too soon for them to have taken account of the improvements made from this action plan. Meetings with current students offered some support for this view,

as they were generally positive about the College. However, limited access to practice rooms was a significant matter of concern to students, notwithstanding a view in the student written submission that academic accommodation has improved considerably in recent years. Overall, the audit team found very little awareness of the National Student Survey survey, or of its previous National Student Survey results, among the students with whom it spoke.

85 In addition to use of the virtual learning environment to allow for more speedy feedback on matters of general concern, the College has introduced new processes to improve the student experience, partly in response to student views as conveyed through the various surveys. These include text messaging to alert students to timetable changes; the publication of staff availability; a performance studies administrator appointment; an information screen in the reception area; a proposed new mentoring scheme for experienced academic staff to support new staff; and a revised teaching observation scheme.

86 At the time of the audit, the College remained concerned about the National Student Survey results, and the audit team learned of the introduction of a shorter, more targeted action plan designed to produce a response that is both speedier and more focused on action at departmental and course level. This revised plan has also been presented to the Governors' Quality and Standards Monitoring Committee.

87 The audit team found evidence of extensive consideration of student feedback, including the National Student Survey, and a range of actions taken. Some of the most significant aspects of this activity, including the improvement in focus and timeliness of response, were still evolving at the time of the audit, and it was not yet possible to have evidence that they had made an impact. It is desirable that the College revise its internal surveys to produce more and improved information about the student experience

Role of students in quality assurance

88 In their meetings with students the audit team learned of the various formal and informal ways in which students believe that their feedback contributes to the management of learning opportunities. These mechanisms ranged from formal Students' Union representation on the College's key committees to participation in boards of studies, and formal and informal meetings with staff. Students are represented at boards of studies through elected course representatives and additionally at the Academic Board and the Board of Governors by the Students' Union President. Student representatives are given guidance on their role, prepared by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Manager. The virtual learning environment also has guidance documents for student representatives. During the audit, students identified clear understanding of the role of students on boards of studies and the response mechanisms available to them. Students also confirmed their involvement in the process of course design.

89 Boards of studies meetings allow for student consideration of the annual programme evaluation for their course. These evaluations include mentions of actions taken as a result of student feedback. Students reported to the audit team some instances of poor levels of attendance by student representatives at boards of studies meetings. Students also reported that the formal feedback mechanisms were often less effective than informal conversations with staff responding to matters raised by individuals.

90 The College's Quality Handbook includes a section on student feedback and also references the Student Charter that gives details on assessment and marking; data protection; complaints and guidelines; regulations; disciplinary procedure and code of conduct.

91 Students stated that the processes for communication between course representatives and the Students' Union were not entirely clear. The Students' Union President is not a full-time sabbatical officer, and, in a meeting with the audit team, the President noted the difficulties experienced both with attending College meetings and with understanding the business of the

senior committees. It is desirable that the College considers ways in which improvement to the student representation system might be addressed in order for the College to take more effective action to address student concerns evident in the results of the National Student Survey.

92 The College has established a new post of Student Liaison Officer and the audit team learn of recent developments in which this postholder works more closely with student representatives and the Students' Union in order to involve students with other students' unions across Leeds. The audit team concluded that the formal and informal opportunities for student representation in the College's committees and processes enabled students to make a useful contribution to quality assurance processes.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

93 The College's Research Strategy aims to develop research activities to underpin teaching and learning at all levels. The Research and Enterprise Committee oversees this, with terms of reference that include the support and promotion of good practice in research, scholarship, enterprise and knowledge transfer. All higher education staff are expected to engage in scholarly activities, research or professional practice in order to inform their learning and teaching. Annual programme evaluations identify staff development activities that include research projects, industry involvement and conference attendance. This inclusion in annual programme evaluations gives the College the potential to collate information to gain a central overview of the range of such activity, but the annual summary of these evaluations does not contain this material.

94 The Research and Enterprise Committee minutes show evidence of some central support for pedagogical projects, for which a reduction in teaching hours is given. Pedagogical research has included projects such as the externally funded 'Integrating Theory and Practice in Conservatoires'. Some staff have recently completed doctorates; others have disseminated research through conference papers, publication or performance. The audit team was told of plans to introduce a new teaching observation and mentoring scheme to assist in the dissemination of good practice in teaching and learning, and a new Annual Teaching Awards scheme to reward and celebrate good practice. Notwithstanding the activities identified above, there is limited engagement with the wider higher education sector beyond other specialist music higher education institutions, and little engagement in the work of the Higher Education Academy (HEA), either through individual fellowships or in project work. It is desirable that the College considers further strategies to promote such engagement in order to benefit more from national discussions on learning and teaching in higher education.

95 Support for research and scholarship projects is given to part-time as well as full-time staff, and the College has used HEFCE Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund monies to develop a bursary scheme that supports part-time academic staff with research activities in order for them to enhance their teaching. Given the relatively high proportion of part-time staff at the College, the audit team viewed this approach as well aligned to the specialist mission of the College.

96 The research strategy recognises the key role of research in enhancing professional practice and professional development. Hence, the Research and Enterprise Committee supports research applications that are practice-focused. Staff told the audit team that some staff were engaged in professional work in the areas of composition, performance and related fields. Additionally, the College promotes regular concerts in the Venue, and hosts two international conferences each year, these being the Leeds International Music Technology in Education Conference and the Leeds International Jazz Conference, with leading industry professionals, educators, composers and performers as contributors. Students confirmed their knowledge of this range of professional practice and were enthusiastic about the significant contribution that it makes to their learning.

97 Funding from HEFCE's Higher Education Innovation Fund has been used to enable the Research and Enterprise Department to develop knowledge transfer activities in partnership with business and industry. These include LCMselect.

98 The audit team concluded that the management of research and staff scholarly activity directly promotes the enhancement of students' learning opportunities and contributes to the management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Other modes of study

99 The College offers the majority of its higher education courses at undergraduate level through full-time study. It also has three taught postgraduate awards: the MA Music; MA Jazz and MA Music Production. The MA courses have a part-time study mode, with a total of 14 part-time students. Arrangements for the management, assessment, style of delivery and review of these awards are the same as for those offered full-time. The College has no awards offered by flexible or distributed learning. The audit team was able to view the development of the virtual learning environment and to note the College's plans to place more material in support of student learning on this site.

Resources for learning

100 There has been significant building development on the campus over the recent period, including the creation of The Venue auditorium. The College has commissioned a new estate strategy to operate 2007-08 to 2011-12. This has been developed against sector benchmarks for space utilisation in specialist higher education institutions, and a draft has been submitted to HEFCE for consideration. This estate strategy concurs with the student view expressed in the National Student Survey and at meetings that the College requires additional space to meet the needs of its current students and for future growth. In addition to specialist learning resource requirements, the strategy has also identified the need for infrastructure improvements, including enlargement of the library.

101 Some aspects of the learning resources at the College were praised by students in their written submission, where information technology provision and systems, the library and The Venue received overall approval. A library survey of student views confirmed this approval, and demonstrated an effective review process for the library, with evidence of follow-up on the previous year's outcomes. However, meetings with students identified dissatisfactions with access to practice rooms outside of taught course hours, particularly at master's level, and problems with timetables that included late publication and last-minute alterations. Staff acknowledged some past difficulties in these areas, but stated that additional rehearsal space had been acquired off-campus, and affirmed that rehearsal spaces are more widely available earlier and later in the day. It was also confirmed that new staff appointments had been made to improve timetabling. Developments include new post holders at assistant head of department level, the prioritising of one-to-one tuition timetables, and the incorporation of a formerly discrete technician staff group into the academic sections. The audit team was also told of plans to appoint a central timetabling officer from Easter 2008.

102 In considering the differing views of the College and its students, the audit team noted that student expectations were high, and that programme specifications did not state that unconditional access to practice rooms was guaranteed. It also noted that assessments often specified that ideas, rather than, for example, the professional sound quality of a recording available in a purpose-designed practice room, were the criteria for assessment. The team nonetheless recommends that it is advisable that the College continues to monitor the effectiveness of space allocation through the timetabling system, and, in particular, student access to practice rooms.

103 Learning resources for programmes are considered as part of validation, and development needs and outcomes are commented upon within boards of studies and annual programme evaluations. Approval for the purchase of additional capital resources and for additional staffing is given by the Senior Management Committee prior to a course proposal being presented to the Learning and Teaching Committee for its approval. External examiner reports read by the audit team commented favourably upon the professional standard of the College's resources.

104 The College is increasingly developing its virtual learning environment as a means of communication with students and as a point of reference for students to find key institutional documentation and materials for study. Although it was still too early to judge the effectiveness of this project, initial indications from students and scrutiny of the virtual learning environment by the audit team indicated that the initiative has the potential further to enhance student learning opportunities.

105 From its reading of documentation, and at meetings with staff and students, the audit team formed the view that the College had created a distinctive learning environment based upon the exploitation of accommodation, facilities and, increasingly, of the virtual learning environment. However, the effective deployment of accommodation through the timetabling system, and the pressure that would be placed upon it should higher education student numbers increase, require continued monitoring by the College. The audit team concluded that the management of learning resources makes an appropriate contribution to the overall management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Admissions policy

106 The College's Admissions Policy for Higher Education was considered by the Learning and Teaching Committee and approved by the Academic Board. The policy identifies criteria for eligibility to be admitted to the College, and aligns with section 10 of the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*. The policy sets minimum entry requirements for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, and these are consistent with the admissions requirements of the validating bodies. The College has no lower or upper age limit for entry. There are clear matriculation requirements measured against tariff points, in addition to a minimum of Grade VIII practical standard for undergraduate courses in music. The policy states a clear commitment to widening participation and equality of opportunity, and offers further education students at the College a guaranteed interview or audition for admission to the College's higher education programmes.

107 All applicants who meet the minimum entry requirements are invited for an audition/interview, which also includes a written examination. Admission requirements, including the written examination, are described in the current Prospectus. However, at a meeting with students, it was clear to the audit team that they had not all been made aware in advance of the written examination requirement.

108 The College has a separate higher education policy for the Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning. This attributes a credit value to Accreditation elements proposed by a student, and allows such elements to be counted towards the completion of a programme of study.

109 Application for music courses, apart from BA (Hons) Popular Music Studies, and including all postgraduate courses, is through the Conservatoires UK Admission Service, the UCAS scheme for music colleges. Applicants for undergraduate music production and popular music courses apply through UCAS. From summer 2007, the application process has been managed by a newly established admissions team within Student Services. Institutional oversight of the admissions process is undertaken at a monthly Board of Management meeting, which receives current data and comparisons with previous years. The Academic Board also reviews these data.

110 The College has an access agreement with the Office for Fair Access that provides financial incentives to encourage applicants from lower income households. Resources are also available to encourage applicants to nationally recognised shortage instruments, and applicants who have previously attended a designated centre of advanced training for young musicians. The access agreement also describes outreach work that supports the aims of widening participation from particular postcode areas, of increasing players of very rare instruments, increasing participation of women in the areas of jazz and music technology, and increasing participation by members of rural and isolated communities.

111 The audit team concluded that in its approach to admissions and access the College has well-established processes to review the application cycle and has achieved a good balance between maximising access to learning opportunities and minimising the likelihood of student failure. The team concluded that the College's Admissions Policy and practice contributed positively to the management of learning opportunities.

Student support

112 Support for students is available from a central Student Services Unit.. This Unit has responsibility for welfare advisers, student counsellors, the Student Fees and Funding Manager, the Careers Adviser, the Students' Union Liaison Officer and the Student Services Administrator. In meetings with the audit team, students expressed overall satisfaction with the Student Services Unit and acknowledged in particular the work of staff involved with counselling, learning support and support for students with disabilities. Careers support through the LCMselect project was also identified by students as a useful element of their student experience. The Careers Adviser offers guidance on career opportunities both within and outside the music profession, and specific careers advice in music is integrated into the undergraduate curriculum through the music industry modules undertaken by all students. Both staff and students confirmed that this work supports the integration of employability into the curriculum.

113 The students whom the audit team met were generally very satisfied with the levels of support available to them through the Student Services Unit. They spoke highly of the individualised support that is quickly made available to students. These comments confirmed the statement in the student written submission that the Student Services Unit provides 'excellent information and advice' and the view offered in the Briefing Paper that several areas of the Student Services Unit were examples of good practice.

114 Academic support at the College is through a personal tutorial system. All students are allocated a personal tutor who is normally the student's one-to-one principal study or studio production tutor. The personal tutor provides academic support, and is the student's first point of contact. Formal meetings occur twice each academic year; they are used to complete a formal academic progress review, and to discuss the student's personal development plan. This process requires that second-year students produce a business plan, a skills audit and a career development plan. Students confirmed the operation of this process. Several annual programme evaluation reports specifically comment upon the personal development plan process. The Learning and Teaching Committee approved this process for 2007-08, with revised guidance notes and supporting materials.

115 On the basis of what they learned from the students and staff whom they met, and from the other information available to them, the audit team concluded that the College provided good levels of support tailored to the needs of its student body, and that this forms a feature of good practice.

Staff support (including staff development)

116 The audit team heard from senior staff that the College is committed to the training and development of all staff. The team noted a Training and Development Policy which sees training and development as an integral element of business planning, and essential to every staff member's role. The Staff Development Committee is chaired by a senior academic, the Director of Studies, in acknowledgement of the importance of a policy that sees teaching, scholarship, research, practice and personal career progression as elements of equal importance for the development of College staff. Continuing professional development support for individuals, including part-time staff, includes funding for postgraduate and professional qualifications. In 2007, the Staff Development Committee gained increased strategic oversight of a central staff development budget. Meetings with staff confirmed College support for academics to complete doctoral study.

117 An academic promotion scheme has recently been introduced, and in August 2006, the College introduced a job evaluation scheme linked to a single pay spine. At the time of the audit, a new pay structure had very recently been introduced to include rewards for exceptional performance.

118 The main vehicle for identifying staff development needs is an individual annual appraisal. At the time of the audit, the College was moving away from a system triggered by the anniversary of appointment and subsequent occasional identification of training needs to one which will see all appraisals completed within the same four-month period each year. The new system will produce more timely collection of training needs requests that may then be built into budgeting. The Personnel Department will then collate all individual information to produce training needs data for the entire College.

119 From September 2007, all new teaching staff are expected to obtain a teaching qualification, or HEA accreditation, within two years of their appointment. Full or part-time academic staff appointed before September 2007 are being asked to achieve HEA accreditation or other higher education teaching accreditation

120 The College has operated for some while a peer observation of teaching scheme, using a model that has given grades and comments upon performance. This is being revised to place emphasis on mentoring, and to aid in the dissemination of good practice. The new scheme will be supported through a planned new annual teaching award scheme designed to reward and celebrate good practice in teaching and learning. An annual learning and teaching conference is also proposed. In meetings with the audit team, staff confirmed the recency of these developments; they acknowledged that some aspects of staff support were still in the process of evolution from a further education approach (based upon grading lesson observation) to a model which supports development and enhancement.

121 Documents seen by the audit team confirmed progress in other areas, such as the use of external consultancy to draw upon sector best practice in support of the evolution of academic staff promotion and progression schemes and the integration of part-time staff through use of Teaching Quality Enhancement Funding finance to support a bursary scheme for pedagogic research. The successful and effective integration of part-time staff into teaching and learning at the College was confirmed by students.

122 The audit team concluded that the College's processes for staff support, development and reward are developing in support of the effective management of learning opportunities.

123 The audit team found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the College's present and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

124 The College's strategic approach to quality enhancement is more fully recorded in the College's practice than in the general statement on enhancement made in the Briefing Paper, although the Quality Handbook does contain a definition of the purpose of enhancement that stresses improvement in processes and efficiency, as well as compliance with the changing expectations of the education sector. The Quality Handbook also explains that the Quality and Standards Committee and its subcommittees and occasional working groups develop and enhance quality processes and procedures through consultation, feedback and dialogue with staff and students. Evidence showed how examples of such an approach at institutional level had brought improvements. Examples include the development of the virtual learning environment, the extension of access to rehearsal rooms, and the greater involvement of students in the new boards of studies.

125 The Briefing Paper stated that the Learning and Teaching Committee 'oversees the College's strategies for learning and teaching and...encourages and promotes innovations in teaching and learning', while the Quality and Standards Committee has responsibility for 'the promotion of enhancement of the student experience'.

126 The Learning and Teaching Strategy was approved by the Academic Board in September 2007. Its four specific objectives concern: providing innovative and professionally relevant programmes of study enriched by research and professional practice; delivering excellent and inspiring teaching, as well as supporting and rewarding academic staff in developing learning and teaching; providing a supportive learning and teaching environment, making use of e-learning technology; and developing outstanding graduates prepared for employment or further study. The Strategy is underpinned by the allocations from HEFCE's Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (with specific reference to the first two objectives) and by use of the Higher Education Innovation Fund (with specific reference to the fourth objective).

127 The Learning and Teaching Strategy contains within it reference to the implementation of internal policies, such as the Qualified and Accredited Teacher Policy, a policy that sets out the steps by which all of the College's staff teaching in higher education will acquire HEA-recognised qualifications by July 2010. Currently, only three staff hold such status. This example of enhancement through the professional development of staff directly related to learning opportunities can be held to be an example of how deliberate institutional steps are being taken to achieve quality enhancement systematically. Two further examples are the establishment of Teaching and Learning Awards, and the decision to hold an annual teaching conference at which to showcase good practice. The audit team recognised that the College, through its learning and teaching strategy, was progressively moving towards a structured approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities, including a focus on improving quality assurance processes.

128 The College also affirmed that improvements were being made to programmes in curricular and other areas. One of the main aims of the new Learning and Teaching Strategy was to provide a stronger framework for these developments closely allied to the objectives of the College's Strategic Plan. Another significant development was the establishment of the Quality and Standards Unit, which seeks 'to enhance, monitor and develop the College's learning and teaching' and 'to reinforce the focus on enhancement issues'. In the future, the College affirms, the Quality and Standards Unit will provide the infrastructure to develop a more systematic, institutional approach. The audit team also noted that the College had recently taken several deliberate steps at the institutional level to enhance its learning and teaching infrastructure. These initiatives include: the introduction of a system for monitoring use of the *Code of practice*; the introduction of LCMSpace, and text messaging to improve communications with students; a new mentoring scheme focusing on new staff; recognition of the need for increased time for part-time module coordinators; and the development of a new Estate Strategy.

Management information - quality enhancement

129 Although the audit team concluded that the annual programme evaluation was an excellent process for reflective annual programme review of individual programmes, it noted that these evaluations and their subsequent summary are little used at institutional level to enable sharing of the good practice identified in the reports, identification of common issues or development of the management of academic standards. This lack was confirmed by the minutes of the Learning and Teaching Committee for 21 November 2007, which identified the need for the Quality and Standards Committee to consider the executive summary report for quality enhancement issues and opportunities in addition to approval of the report for submission to the Open University.

130 The audit team saw clear evidence of the external examiner reports being evaluated within the annual programme evaluation where departmental responses to problems and any good practice were given. The team noted that, until recently, there had been little institutional

consideration or collation of external examiner reports. During the audit, the College informed the team and presented evidence that the first annual summary of external examiner reports had been considered by the Quality and Standards Committee. The team advises the College to develop the use of external examiner reports as a means of identifying cross-College issues and good practice for dissemination in order to enhance the management of academic standards and learning opportunities.

131 An important vehicle for obtaining management information from employers and professionals is LCMselect. The potential contribution of this collaborative agency to enhancing learning opportunities and career prospects was clearly recognised by students in their meetings with the audit team. The College has used its Higher Education Innovation Fund monies to establish this strategically important means of enabling employer engagement and, thereby, improving its flow of management information.

Good practice

132 The College cites annual programme evaluations as a prime mechanism for the identification of good practice, whether the source be student feedback, external examiner reports or academic staff reflecting on course delivery. The audit team was able to confirm that annual programme evaluations were successful in identifying and recording good practice. The same was true of the summary of teaching observations in which a paragraph was devoted to observed good practice.

133 In the matter of dissemination, the College does not simply rely on the distribution or availability of papers and on web pages. College staff described how examples of good practice would come to the attention of the head of department and how they would be disseminated through the weekly meetings between the head and assistant heads, who would raise the matter with course leaders. It was claimed that, if the issues were significant, this dialogic, cascade model in a small institution was particularly effective. The audit team recognised that discussion did play an important part in the culture of the College. Nevertheless, evidence for the effectiveness of such relatively informal dissemination was neither easy to gather nor test.

134 The audit team noted the intention of the College to produce a Good Practice in Performance Learning and Teaching Handbook in October 2009. This publication would capture the outcomes of the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund-supported bursary scheme, which supports part-time academic staff with research activities in order to enhance their teaching and enables performance staff to attend workshops focusing on specific aspects of performance teaching.

135 The College signalled staff development days and the potential offered by the new observation and mentoring scheme to the audit team, as a means of spreading good practice. The team concluded that, overall, the various mechanisms for identifying and disseminating good practice are adequate.

Staff development and reward

136 The audit team heard that the College was keen, through its policy underlying the Academic Promotion Scheme, to reward staff in their career progression, and to give recognition to teaching excellence through promotion or accelerated increments. However, the team was unable to see from the College's documentation on academic promotion any significant elaboration of criteria that would signal to academic staff what the College understood by excellence in teaching. There was, for instance, no reference to demonstration of understanding of current best pedagogical practice. This omission relates to a more general observation by the team that the College did not demonstrate (with some exceptions around assessment of improvisation) a sharp awareness of pedagogical developments within higher education as a whole. The team recommends that it is desirable that the College provides an internal locus for the development of pedagogical support and research for academic staff that takes more account of internal and external models of effective practice.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

137 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

138 The College currently has no postgraduate research students. It is however seeking to become an Affiliated Research Centre of the Open University, which status will allow it to deliver doctoral programmes for the first time. The College's aspiration is that accreditation will be gained by 2010.

Section 7: Published information

139 Corporate publications are the responsibility of the Director of Development and Head of External Relations, supported by a marketing team. The Higher Education Prospectus is subject to final check by the Director of Studies and the Principal. Responsibility for the accuracy of information lies with those providing it (for the most part, course leaders and assistant heads). The audit team was not presented with any evidence of a formal signing-off process at the different stages of production, except at the final stage. The Open University has no requirement that College publicity is checked with the validating body. The same marketing team has responsibility for the College's website, and liaises with the Quality and Standards Unit to ensure that information is correct.

140 Responsibility for checking the accuracy and completeness of information that is given to students on courses through course handbooks and module handbooks lies with course leaders and assistant heads. Templates govern the format of the handbooks.

141 The College did not engage with the former Teaching Quality Information website, and offered to the audit team the explanation that that the College's transfer to the higher education sector coincided with the national announcement of a move away from the original Teaching Quality Information requirements. Responsibility for the submission of data contributing to the information set on the Unistats website lies with the Quality Assurance Manager located in the Quality and Standards Unit. The team was told that the required information had been submitted to Unistats by the College.

142 The audit team, through its reading of the Higher Education Prospectus and pages of the College's website, confirmed the accuracy and completeness of the information for prospective students.

143 The students written submission made no comment on the accuracy or completeness of published information. Some students who met the audit team thought that the pre-course information was accurate 'to an extent', with some reservations concerning notification of the change of validating university between the publication of the Prospectus and registration on the course. A further reservation concerned the interplay of information on, and expectations around, access to facilities at master's level. Other students were 'reasonably happy' with the accuracy and completeness of the information provided. There is evidence that the format of the admissions interview is not clear to applicants.

144 Course and module handbooks are now available only on the College's virtual learning environment, having previously been printed. Initial access problems to the virtual learning environment, reported to the audit team by a few students, are now being addressed. On the whole, students welcomed the availability of handbooks in electronic form, emphasising that access to lecturing staff made it easy to clarify points. Students raised the timely production of module handbooks as an issue. The team heard that it was a matter that, if not solved through

discussion with the module coordinator, could be raised by a course leader with the assistant head of department. Although neither the student written submission nor students had any critical comments to make about the content of course handbooks, the team was of the view that information on the classification of degrees was inadequate, nor was it given sufficient priority, being accessible only in an appendix to the main document. In one case, no relevant information on honours degree classification was available for a final-year student who had progressed from a Foundation Degree. Conflicting information on the requirements for progression from a Foundation Degree to an honours degree demonstrates that greater rigour is needed in checking the accuracy of handbooks and their appendices.

145 While, overall, reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of information that the College publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards, the audit team advises that, in developing a set of comprehensive assessment regulations, the College exercises greater rigour in checking the consistency and adequacy with which arrangements for progression from Foundation Degrees and for the classification of awards are described and drawn to students' attention in internal publications.

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