QAA

Royal Academy of Music

November 2007

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

An audit team from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Royal Academy of Music (the Academy) from 5 to 9 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 Academy offers.

Outcomes of the institutional audit

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

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Overall, the audit team found that the institution was engaging in enhancement activities, but considered that there is scope for a more proactive and strategic approach at the institutional level.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the institution's arrangements for its postgraduate research students met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA, and secured appropriate academic standards and quality of provision for its postgraduate research programmes.

Published information

The audit team found that reliance could reasonably placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution published about its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the inclusion of non-academic areas in annual monitoring (paragraph 58)

- the work of the Open Academy/York Gate, including in particular the provision of community and industry facing activities (paragraph 84)

- the degree of monitoring of student progress and the interaction between academic and pastoral support (paragraphs 85 and 89).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- streamlining the responsibilities and reporting lines of the formal committees and working groups with oversight of academic standards and quality, to ensure they each play a necessary, specific and unambiguous role (paragraph 25)

- reviewing the Academy's internal procedures for the guarantee of academic standards to ensure they are fit for purpose and are properly observed (paragraphs 27, 31, 35)

- identifying a reliable means of ensuring that action resulting from the Academy's quality assurance procedures is carried out in a timely and effective manner (paragraph 42)

- making more effective use of management information in monitoring and review procedures (paragraphs 49 and 50).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- developing institutional-level mechanisms to ensure deliberate and systematic enhancement of the student learning experience (paragraphs 96 and 103).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   The Academy was founded by Royal Charter in 1882 to offer a range of educational and training opportunities to prepare students for a successful career in music, according to the evolving demands of the profession. The Academy's mission is to 'provide pre-professional, undergraduate and postgraduate musical training of the highest national and international standards; to engage in concert, operatic and research activities related to the education of the institution; to create and perform new music; and to preserve and enrich national and international music culture'. The Academy aims to produce musicians at the highest level as soloists, orchestral and chamber players, singers and composers, with knowledge of the whole art of music; its performance, history, theory and understanding of the context within the humanities.

2   Since 1999, the Academy has been a full member of the University of London and currently offers the following University of London awards: BMus, MMus, MPhil and PhD. In addition, under the terms of its Royal Charter, the Academy awards the Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music, postgraduate diplomas and a Foundation Programme for international students. Students registered at the Academy are internal students of the University of London as well as being registered students of the Academy.

3   At the time of the Audit, the Academy had 735 taught students, 310 of whom were studying on the BMus and 15 students who were registered on research programmes.

4   The Academy has 383 teaching staff. The majority of the teaching staff are professional musicians, composers or conductors, a large percentage of whom are appointed on part-time, hourly-paid contracts to provide one-to-one teaching to students in their specialist area of music.

The information base for the audit

5   The information available for this audit included the following documents:

- the report of a Review of research degree programmes (unpublished 2005-06)

- the Academy's one-year-on response to the Institutional audit report, September 2004

- the report of the Institutional audit, conducted by QAA, March 2003.

6   The Academy provided QAA with a series of documents and information including:

- an institutional briefing paper (the Briefing Paper), with appendices

- access to the Academy's intranet.

7   In addition, the President of the Students' Union of the Academy prepared a student written submission on behalf of the Academy's students. The audit team is grateful for the students' engagement with the process.

8   During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was given access to a range of the Academy's internal documents. The team identified one area for which a sampling audit trail was requested, to illustrate further aspects of the Academy's provision, and more documentation was provided for the team during the audit visit.

Developments since the previous audit

9   The Academy underwent its previous Institutional audit in March 2003 and received a judgement of broad confidence in the quality of its provision, provided 'that it continues to use its core quality assurance processes well and integrates them properly'. A judgement of broad confidence was also given in regard of the academic standards of the Academy's provision, provided 'it continues to make more explicit links between intended outcomes and assessment expectations in course curricula'. The Academy responded to the report the following year and the response was accepted as satisfactory by QAA. In 2006, the Academy underwent an external review in preparation for the award of degree awarding powers.

10   The 2003 Institutional audit report advised the Academy to 'give priority to the development of a management information system for its academic function'. At the time of the present visit, the Academy was in the process of rebuilding RAM Central, its intranet system. In addition, the Academy had recently created the post of information analyst to help with the collation and analysis of management information, to support the work of the Senior Management Team. However, the audit team found that, while positive steps have been taken, the effective use of management information was still not embedded in all of the Academy's quality assurance procedures, particularly the annual monitoring process (see below, paragraphs 29, 49, 50 and 57).

11   The 2003 Institutional audit report also advised the Academy 'to give priority to dealing with the expectations set out in [the Higher Education Funding Council for England] HEFCE's document 02/15'. At the time of the visit, the Academy was in the process of integrating aspects of the intranet into the publicly available material on the Academy's website.

12   The 2003 Institutional audit report advised that the Academy develop 'a strategic approach to staff development that covers the whole of its mission'. In 2006, the Academy created the post of Academic Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Adviser to construct proposals for a CPD framework and help staff with development issues. At the time of the visit, however, the Adviser had resigned the post. The Academy had subsequently created the post of Chair of Continuing Professional Development with responsibility for the newly formed CPD Board. In addition, it is planned that support for CPD activities would be provided as part of the remit of the new position of programmes coordinator. The provision of development and training opportunities for teaching is identified as one of the main objectives in the Human Resources Strategy of May 2007 and, at the time of the audit visit, the Senior Management Team had also just agreed the establishment of a working group, called the Training Group, to keep CPD 'high on the Academy's Agenda'. At its meeting in October 2007, the Teaching and Learning Board (TLB) approved an enhanced structure for CPD, including pilot proposals for a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education.

13   The Institutional audit report further advised the Academy 'to make better use of ICT in all its strategies for development'. In this context, the Academy is developing, through RAM Central, the provision of extra advice for staff on policies and procedures and also new induction packages on the use of ICT. An enhanced capacity for electronic communication with students is also being developed as part of the ongoing rebuild of RAM Central. It is noteworthy that there has also been development in the use of ICT in teaching, in particular in the area of creative technology.

14   The Institutional audit report, of 2003, recommended that the Academy might benefit from further action to streamline its committee structure, which was perceived as complex and which might hinder communication. In spring 2007, the Academy introduced some

modifications to its committee structure. The key changes in this context were the creation of a TLB board that incorporated the work of three previous committees: the Educational Development Committee, the Taught Programmes Board and the Library Board. In addition, the Academy has created a Student Services Committee, subsuming the work of the Student International Liaison Subcommittee and the Welfare and Disability Working Group. Over the same time period, however, there had been an expansion in the number of working groups, including the Training Group, Student Liaison Group, Curriculum Development Group and the CPD Board, in addition to the existing, long-standing groups such as the BMus Working Group, Research Dissemination Group, Educational Technology Steering Group and the Artistic Working Group.

15   The 2003 Institutional audit team also recommended that for the Academy might benefit from further action 'using the good practice that exists in the wider academic community for the purpose of identifying ways of improving its own practice'. At the time of the briefing visit, the Academy was in the process of developing its links beyond the Association of European Conservatoires (AEC), for example, by rejoining Conservatoires UK and also initiating moves to strengthen its links with the Higher Education Academy.

16   In 2005, the Academy launched the Open Academy, which is extensively engaged in outreach and community work. The activities of the Open Academy have expanded rapidly and that it is increasingly drawing on all areas of the institution to enhance its role in community engagement, including the development of areas of the core curricula, enabling students to complement their training.

17   In 2006, the research degree programmes of the Academy were reviewed by QAA. To this end, the Academy produced a submission for QAA's Review of research degree programmes. This was drafted at first by the Head of Research and subsequently approved by the Research Degrees Board (RDB) before submission in February 2006. The submission was considered satisfactory by QAA, with only minor queries that the Academy addressed through additions to the Research Degrees Code of Practice.

18   The audit team found that, over the previous year, the Academy had moved significantly towards meeting the recommendations arising from the 2003 audit, but before that there had been little significant progress in this regard. Although there had been a move to slim down the formal committee structure, with some streamlining, the team concluded that the potential benefits were offset by the progressive proliferation of working groups (see below, paragraph 25).

The institution's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

19   Formal responsibility for quality assurance lies with the University of London, to which the Academy makes an annual return. The University publishes a summary of the reports for dissemination.

20   The Governing Body holds ultimate responsibility within the Academy, but delegates academic responsibility to the Academic Board. In turn, the Academic Board delegates day-to-day quality assurance responsibility to its Standing Committee (SC), including programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review. The remit for the SC includes 'to maintain a broad oversight of quality assurance initiatives at a national level…'. In this context, the SC receives reports from the TLB, the RDB, the Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music Board and the examinations boards.

21   There is a documented list of the Quality Assurance Procedures (QAP) that acts as a quality manual for the Academy. At the time of the audit visit, the Academy had recently published a revision to the QAP Manual, in the form of the seventh edition, which incorporates updates to reflect the recent revisions to the committee structures and reporting lines. The Manual sets out, in detail, the processes to be followed on the key quality assurance procedures, including programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic programme review, as well as providing template forms for these procedures.

22   The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy, implemented in June 2007, is seen as an important tool for establishing academic standards and expectations of students. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy sets out expectations and grade descriptors, for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, that are linked to external reference points, including the *Code of practice* and the relevant subject benchmark statements, and to internal references such as the Teaching and Learning Strategy. In this context, the Briefing Paper stated that the Academy is 'seeking to place more emphasis on referring to external benchmarks, such as QAA's subject benchmark statement, *The Framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, (FHEQ), and those of the Association of European Conservatoires (AEC)'.

23   The Teaching and Learning Strategy covers the period 2006-07 to 2008-09 and sets out aims for the Academy. These aims are set against specific targets for each of the academic years. At the time of the audit visit, most of the aims for 2006-07 had been met or were in progress, including, for example, the development of proposals for a staff development programme and for a qualification for teaching in higher education, developing the use of the internet-based resources on RAM Central and publication of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy. However, it was not clear to the audit team how progress against the aims of the Teaching and Learning Strategy was monitored on an ongoing basis.

24   The MPhil and PhD research degrees are awarded under the University of London's regulations, which are incorporated into the Academy's own Research Degrees Code of Practice which is also 'cross-referenced to the QAA's CoP'. Responsibility for quality assurance and standards of the research degrees is delegated to the RDB that reports to the SC and the University of London's Research Degrees Committee. The work of the RDB is also overseen by the Music Subject Panel of the University of London. The Academy's research coordinator is a member of the University of London's Research Degrees Committee and there is further representation on the Music Subject Panel.

25   The work of the key committees is supported by a complex, and expanding set of working groups (see above, paragraph 14), some of which apparently have an open-ended working life and, in some instances, appear to report through more than one committee. Staff appeared to be unclear about the roles and responsibilities of some of the groups and of the authority these groups had for decision-making. The audit team found that some of the communications and reporting lines between committees and working groups were convoluted and unclear, giving rise to the potential for decision-making to be delayed and a lack of systematisation of tracking progress of action points and ensuring compliance with the procedures set out in the QAP Manual (see below, paragraphs 27 and 31). Because of this the Academy is advised to streamline the responsibilities and reporting lines of the formal committees and working groups with oversight of academic standards and quality to ensure they each play a necessary, specific and unambiguous role.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

Programme approval

26   The programme approval process, as set out in the Quality Assurance Procedures (QAP) Manual, requires all proposals to be accompanied by a 'resource statement'. The resource statement indicates the agreement of the Senior Management Team to make available the necessary human and financial resources. Variations of this basic procedure, and different forms, are used for new programmes, amendments to programmes, amendments or new courses in the 'academic' area, amendments or new courses in a 'performance' area, and a new principal study or amendment to an extant principal study. The most important difference between the forms is that, for some proposals, external opinion is optional (and in such cases the external opinion may

be that of the external examiner), whereas for other proposals, in particular in principal study areas, or in respect of the approval of new programmes or amendments to existing programmes, external specialist opinion is required from a source other than the external examiner pool. In the case of approval of new courses, the route for approval comes through 'the relevant programme board' to the Standing Committee (SC). New principal study areas take a slightly different route, from the Head of Study (after discussion with relevant academic staff) through the Teaching and Learning Board (TLB) to the SC. The audit team took the view that a basically straightforward procedure had been made overcomplicated by subtle variations on the requirements for external opinion and the kind of external opinion required, and differences in the routes for approval. When asked, staff did not show a secure grasp of these differences.

27   In the papers considered by the audit team, no new principal study area or programme was sent for approval, but there were many approvals of new 'courses' (or modules) and amendments to principal study areas. It was noticeable that resource statements were almost never completed as per the requirements of the QAP Manual, and in one set of minutes it was indicated that they would be sought after the meeting. It was not clear how the SC satisfied itself that resources were available without the presence of these resource statements. Moreover, in most instances, the necessary external opinion had not been sought. The team saw no minutes that recorded the SC dissatisfaction with this state of affairs, and indeed saw no example of approval being stalled by the absence of this material.

28   The audit team took the view that not only was the procedure unnecessarily complicated, it was not in fact observed in practice, even in some of its key respects, and the Standing Committee took no steps to enforce its requirements (see below, paragraph 35).

Programme monitoring

29   The arrangements for annual monitoring were last revised by the SC in November 2006, when it approved a revised and more detailed template, indicating what reports should include. The first monitoring reports produced under the arrangements described in the QAP Manual, 2006, did not rigorously follow the template. The report for undergraduate programmes 2005-06, for instance, includes information about the classifications achieved within the BMus degree, and breaks them down by departments. However there is no information about the number of students who applied, or enrolled, what progression there was between the years, staffing structure and numbers, or any significant information about resources, all of which are invited by the template. The report is vague and makes no reference back to plans for the previous year. The plans for the year are lacking in the necessary detail described by the template. The audit team noted that while this report was an improvement on those produced for previous years, and to that extent the introduction of a template appeared a sensible step, the procedures for annual monitoring reports for programmes as a whole were not being properly observed. The minutes of the SC meeting that received the report make no comment on the report's variation from the template.

30   On the other hand, senior Academy staff drew attention to the procedure for annual planning, which involved meetings between heads of departments and senior institutional managers, informed by a set of paperwork which included much of the material missing from annual reports. This planning procedure required reflection on the previous year by the head of department concerned, explicit reference to recruitment targets and the extent to which they had been achieved, clear statements about targets for the year to come, references to such matters as staff planning and training, and detailed information about student achievements, including progression and employment destinations. These are all matters apparently required by annual monitoring, but not produced or demanded by the SC. It appeared to the audit team that almost all the other material included in the planning procedure could be adapted for the annual monitoring report. The team was aware that the current monitoring reports feed conveniently into the requirements of the University of London and the planning process was focused on the department rather than the 'programme'.

Programme review

31   Periodic programme review is focused on the BMus and postgraduate programmes. The process is carried out every four years by a team of internal members of staff, with input from external reviewers and students. The QAP Manual specifies a comprehensive list of preliminary paperwork. However, the audit team found that the documentation provided for the BMus Review (May 2006) did not contain all the material listed in the QAP Manual. One of the external reviewers from the review panel commented that 'an extensive array of documentation was made available in advance of the review day', but oddly this documentation did not include the programme specification, programme handbook or the proposed course amendments, which were tabled. The outline of the day provided to the review panel described the purpose as being 'to examine the Proposal Forms for new and amended Performance Study areas and the Proposal Forms for new and amended Academic Studies courses'. This bears little resemblance to the outline agenda provided to the Review panel agreed in advance by the TLB under the declared procedure. The outline indicated that the major meeting of the review team was planned to last for two hours only, and the proposals emerging from it were then the subject of a further and more general two-hour meeting with a larger group of students and staff. The institutional report of the BMus Review does not indicate consideration of the extensive range of information described by the QAP manual, and there is no discussion of the success of the course in achieving its objectives since the last review. If, as the Briefing Document stated, one of the objectives of the review was 'to compare standards between different practical departments/faculties' it is not reflected in the report of the event. The audit team noted that the chair of the panel was the head of the programme under review, which did not seem likely to guarantee objectivity.

32   One area in which the Academy seemed to have generally exceeded expectations in the BMus review was in the use of external panel members. Only one is required by the process, but three had been appointed, and each had written a report. The Academy's readiness to engage external expertise in the consideration of its programmes was characteristic and strongly evident in most areas of its activities. However, it appeared to the audit team that the Academy had in other regards not followed its own procedure.

33   The Academy's Briefing Document also draws attention to its process of 'internal departmental audit'. Under this process each practical department or faculty is audited about once every six years by a small group of internal academic staff, who produce a report on their findings. Like the annual planning process, the process of internal departmental audit is strongly action-focused, and from the reports produced, seems to be analytical and penetrating. The latest versions of the reports clearly identify who has considered the reports, who is responsible for actions, and when the actions are to be completed, features largely absent from the procedures based on programmes.

34   The audit team took the view that the real foundation for academic standards at the Academy was in the extent and commitment to engagement with external expert opinion, including external examiners, which went beyond being 'strong and scrupulous'. The current procedures for course approval, annual monitoring, and periodic review seemed cumbersome, were rarely carried out in the manner intended, and made little use of extant management information. On the other hand, the Planning Process, not advanced by the Academy in its Briefing Document or the QAP Manual as an element of its routine quality assurance procedures, seemed in practice to work to the benefit of both departments and students, and to offer real opportunities for easy adaptation to the needs of the Academic Board committees. The internal departmental audit had some of the same qualities, and in the view of the team could be modified to replace internal periodic review, if the external expertise currently invited but not exploited within the periodic review process were applied to the audit process.

35   It appeared to the audit team that, in fact, the BMus and MMus programmes were not so much 'programmes' as frameworks for credit and progression. It was noticeable that the procedures that seemed least effective were those based on the programme, and those that were most effective based on the department or faculty. The team considered it advisable for the Academy to review its internal procedures and to ensure that the resultant procedures are fit for purpose and properly observed.

External examiners

36   The Academy makes use of two kinds of independent external expertise in the maintenance of academic standards through assessment. External examiners in the conventional sense are engaged for all programmes, and exercise a relatively conventional set of responsibilities at the level of the degree scheme. In addition, the Academy engages 'visiting specialists' to help with the establishment of individual marks for the 'final recital', which forms much the most important part of the overall assessment of any individual student. In 2006-07, the Academy engaged more than 260 of these visiting specialists from a variety of industry and academic contexts.

37   Papers of the SC indicated that procedures for nomination and appointment of external examiners are clear and comprehensive. All visiting specialists are subject to formal approval by the SC on an annual basis. The audit team confirmed from the papers of SC that this procedure had been followed in a rigorous way that followed due process throughout. External examiners' reports make it clear that they are briefed thoroughly, and while the team had no evidence from which to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of briefing for visiting specialists, the Academy's Guidelines for External Examiners clearly sets out requirements and responsibility for their briefing.

38   The Academy publishes regulations that define the roles of external examiners and visiting specialists. There are two documents which supplement the Regulations: Guidelines for External Examiners; and *Examination Procedures*. A programme level external examiner may attend the recital, but takes no part in the individual mark for the recital. Examination Procedures takes pains to distinguish the roles of the visiting specialist and the external examiner but underplays the importance of the visiting specialist. The booklet insists that visiting specialists are 'subject to the regulations applying to internal examiners', and distinguishes the role of the visiting specialist in assessment only to the extent that they should be 'asked to lead the discussion'. However, in discussion with staff, it became clear that the visiting specialist is seen as essential to the definition and maintenance of standards, both between conservatoires and between the Academy and the industry at large. While the Guidelines give the visiting specialist no more mathematical weight than the internal examiners, staff clearly considered it unthinkable for the visiting specialists' contribution to be averaged out.

39   External examiners' reports go to the SC, where they are seen by student representatives, and go also to chairs of programmes for reference in annual reports. Visiting specialists are invited to report on their experiences, but a minority in practice do so. The reports of those who do are summarised and put to the SC. The Academy also holds 'Consolidation Days', which are meetings for all chairs of final recital panels and others engaged in the assessment process, including external examiners if they are available. Reports of these days are taken as set items of business at examination boards, as are annual monitoring reports from programmes, and by these means among others, external examiners are told about the action taken in response to their reports.

40   The Briefing Paper stated that 'visiting specialists, as well as external examiners, have a key role in the institution's management of academic standards'. It appeared to the audit team that this was an understatement; the Academy put a considerable amount of resource, effort, and attention into the inclusion of external voices in the assessment of its students, and that this admirable openness to external informed opinion was the mark of the institution and its most important guarantee of academic standards. However, in the view of the team, the Academy could find more efficient and effective ways of dealing with the outcomes of the contributions made by these external specialist voices.

41   The audit team saw evidence from various Academy committees and boards that reports from external examiners are taken seriously and matters raised by the external examiners acted upon, but the annual reporting process as it exists at present does not in fact deal with them. Moreover, the team considered that Consolidation Days seemed capable of being an effective way of capitalising on the information gathered from external examiners, and there was no lack of attention, or even failure of will about taking action; but the complexity and number of committees and other groups (see above, paragraphs 25), and the lack of clarity of their terms of reference and reporting lines (see above, paragraphs 26 and 31) inhibited the timeliness and effectiveness of action in practice.

42   The audit team found that reports of Consolidation Days did not distinguish clearly between decisions that are being disseminated and matters on which consultation is being sought. Examination board minutes sometimes refer to Consolidation Day reports as if they determine procedure rather than merely discuss it or communicate it. It appeared from recent consideration in the Academy that the status of Consolidation Days was being debated. As a result of comments made in external examiners' reports, the SC had determined that an extra moderation exercise should be carried out in the year 2006-07 to gather evidence on the significance of the fact that very high marks were more common in some departments than in others. This was undertaken by the Vice Principal, who reported on his findings with recommendations to that committee. The minutes of the SC, September 2007, indicate that it had determined that it ought to take a 'more active approach to taking decisions on the way in which assessment protocols operate, rather than carrying it out through Consolidation Day', and soon afterwards, at the Academic Board, this intention was restated, when the Board was told that there would be an extraordinary meeting of the SC 'to determine ownership and accountability' for the actions identified in the report. The audit team noted that the SC extraordinary meeting found that no such ownership or accountability had in fact been identified, and on the contrary, the report was to be 'flagged up as a priority at the next Consolidation Day'. This appeared to the team to illustrate how actions could be lost in the Academy's deliberative groups (see above, paragraph 25). The team considered it advisable for the Academy to identify a reliable means of ensuring that action consequent on the Academy's quality assurance procedures is carried out in a timely and effective manner.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

43   In relation to the setting of standards, the pro forma for the approval of new programmes and amendments to existing programmes requires new programmes to align with FHEQ. A proposer of a new programme must declare its level by reference to FHEQ. When the SC considers new proposals, the pro forma requires the chair to confirm that the SC is satisfied that it is appropriate in level to the relevant qualification descriptor in the FHEQ. The QAP Manual also requires that a new programme or amendment to an existing programme must align with the *Subject benchmark statement* for music where relevant. The recently developed Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy maps the subject benchmark against the various elements that make up the totality of student attributes expected of a student at the Academy. Programme specifications are available in the handbooks for the various awards.

44   However, mapping of standards of individual programmes or programme elements, and measurement of actual achievement of standards by reference to the Academic Infrastructure are less developed. Approval forms showed no specific indication of the relationship of the proposals either to the FHEQ descriptors or to the subject benchmark statements. The Academy has introduced a set of boxes on the forms on which the chair of the committee is supposed to indicate whether or not the SC had discussed the relationship of the approval proposal to these elements of the Academic Infrastructure. However, the approval pro forma does not require specific mapping against the subject benchmark. External examiners are not referred to the subject benchmark in formulating their judgements on the standards of programmes, and are not asked routinely to comment on the adequacy or accuracy of the programme specifications.

45   The Academy has devoted some considerable attention to attempts at European level to define standards for degrees in music, and is actively involved in the Association of European Conservatoires (AEC). However the audit team formed the view that the Academic Infrastructure is noted but does not have a prominent role in the Academy's setting and maintenance of academic standards, in part because the Academy's reference points are outside the world of higher education altogether, in the music industry at large (see below, paragraph 53).

Assessment policies and regulations

46   The Academy publishes a set of regulations which clearly sets out the assessment requirements. The handbooks for the various degrees spell out details of the structure and organisation of the programmes including the distribution of credit and the weight given to assessment items, and also summary information about particular courses or modules.

47   The Academy's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy defines the set of 'student attributes' expected of all composers and performers at the Academy and is cross-referenced to the external and internal benchmarks provided by QAA and the AEC. It includes definitions of standards in terms of generic class descriptors and level descriptors. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy notes the importance of one-to-one teaching in the Academy, and the briefing document refers to the role of 'Professorial reports', written by individual tutors (professors) to record the progress of their students. Professorial reports play primarily a formative function in student assessment, and also, critically, allow staff with student management roles at the programme and departmental levels to keep a regular and frequent check on the progress of individuals. The audit team found that individual close attention of this kind was pervasive in the Academy's dealings with its students and prospective students from audition onwards.

48   It is a distinctive feature of the Academy's experience of assessment that it must distinguish between performances of 'outstanding' and 'phenomenal' quality regularly, if not commonly. It appeared to the audit team that the seriousness with which such distinctions are considered is characteristic of the staff of the Academy and their approach. However, there was a downside to this in that assessment could be over-elaborate. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy provides a significant step forwards in making the standards achieved by the Academy's students explicit. However, evidence was not yet available about how the policy was being used to define standards by individual departments.

Management information - statistics

49   A range of statistical information is specified for inclusion in the procedures for annual monitoring and periodic review. In practice, however, statistical information is not used routinely and extensively, although this omission was more marked in the case of the undergraduate programmes than the postgraduate programmes. Papers for examination boards did not include statistical data for comparison and trend analysis. The audit team noted that the Vice Principal's internal moderation report contained no statistical information on the relative number of very high marks awarded by individual departments, the starting point of the moderation exercise.

50   The discussion above of the material used for annual monitoring and periodic review shows that in its routine quality assurance procedures, the use of management information at the Academy is not well developed. On the other hand, the discussion of annual planning indicates that the problem does not lie in the availability of statistical information, or the willingness of the Academy at certain levels to use it. The audit team considered it advisable that the Academy make more effective use of management information in monitoring and review procedures.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

51   The Academy is seeking to place more emphasis on referencing to external benchmarks through the new Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy. The audit team was advised during meetings with the staff that the Policy reflects external benchmarking and described the new Policy as a useful and outward-looking tool.

52   Adherence to the *Code of practice* is overseen by the Academic Secretary through the dissemination of information to all relevant staff both formally and informally. The role of the Academic Secretary is the key in relation to the *Code* and that changes to it are discussed at the Standing Committee (SC) of the Academic Board before dissemination through the minutes of those meetings which are placed on RAM Central. The SC minutes are now placed on RAM Central and the audit team observed that those minutes make reference to the *Code*.

53   The Academy expects the new role of Academic Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Adviser to strengthen links with the Higher Education Academy and the Performing Arts Learning and Teaching Innovation Network (PALATINE) and curriculum development group within the Conservatoires UK (which the Academy has recently rejoined). The Academy intends to work more closely with PALATINE, with organisations such as the Association of European Conservatoires, and to develop collaborative links around the world and at home. There are also links to a school in Bosnia.

54   The Research Strategy Committee is charged to be kept informed of potential collaborative research links with other educational institutions, particularly within the University of London and the Institute of Musical Research. In addition, the Committee is charged to receive reports on significant conferences, research colloquia, research study events and other institutional research initiatives and to suggest ideas for such events as appropriate. Discussion at the Research Strategy Committee had taken place about attendance at international conferences, projects, funding applications, links with King's College London and relationships with PALATINE.

55   The audit team concluded that the Academy was taking steps to strengthen external links and was placing greater emphasis on external reference points in higher education, although more work is yet to be done (see above, paragraph 44).

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

56   The Academy's arrangements for programme approval, monitoring and review are discussed in detail in Section 2 of this annex under 'Approval, monitoring and review of standards'. In relation to the management of learning opportunities the procedure for approval and amendments to programmes and courses as set out in the Quality Assurance Procedures (QAP) Manual are comprehensive. No recent programme or course approvals have taken place, however, the audit team noted a number of amendments to courses had been made and saw that the forms used were not exactly the same as the ones set out in the QAP Manual. The team noted that in most cases the sections relating to FHEQ and benchmarking statements had not yet been signed off by the Chair of the SC and resource statements were incomplete. The team considered that small differences in the procedure and forms between the different course/areas of study may cause confusion and could be made more consistent (see above, paragraphs 26 and 27).

57   The audit team confirmed that the reports from the annual monitoring process had been received and briefly discussed by the SC and the Academic Board. The team also confirmed that the annual monitoring reports are normally received by the progression examination and final examination boards. Also, the team noted that improvements had been made to the level of detail included in the annual monitoring reports. However, the audit team was not clear how actions from the annual monitoring process were reported, monitored and evaluated. The team

considered that the Academy would benefit from a more rigorous, consistent and coordinated approach to the using and reporting of information across the academic departments and a more systematic approach to dealing with actions (see above, paragraphs 29, 30 and 50).

58   The annual monitoring reports for non-academic departments contained quite detailed information. For example, the York Gate report (2005-06) contained reflection on events held, the number of events held; changes as result of the previous review; innovations; areas for improvement; feedback from visitors; plans for the coming year; staff development and other support needs; resource requirements; issues relating to welfare and disability, forecasts and targets. The audit team observed that the most recent Open Academy Report (2006-07) provided a similar breadth and depth of information. The team considered that the inclusion of non-academic areas in annual monitoring was a feature of good practice.

59   The process of review is carried out through programme periodic review and department internal audit. The audit team considered the documentation that related to the periodic programme review for BMus in 2001 and 2006. The team learnt that the Academic Board endorsed the report and programme changes have been made. However, the team was not convinced that the documents received by the panel members (external and students) or reported in the BMus review report were as comprehensive as required by the QAP Manual (see above, paragraph 31). The Academy also conducts internal departmental audits. An internal audit of the Vocal and Opera Department took place in February 2007 and the final report was presented to the SC in November 2007. The draft report was self-evaluative, outlined features of good practice and an action plan. The team considered that the departmental audit process was generally thorough and consistently applied.

Management information - feedback from students

60   As described in the Briefing Paper, the Academy has a number of mechanisms for capturing student feedback. These include formal feedback from students through feedback forms at institutional and programme level, and participation in the National Student Survey annual monitoring. Gathering formal feedback from all students is undertaken on an annual basis through institutional and programme feedback forms. Feedback at institutional and programme level is received by the Student Services Committee (SSC), the Teaching and Learning Board (TLB) and the Standing Committee, other committees or working groups as appropriate and the Senior Management Team.

61   Analyses of student institutional feedback for 2006-07, programme feedback for 2006-2007 and the National Student Survey results for 2007 had been undertaken and received by the SC. The minutes of the SC noted that actions had been added to the reports which would be monitored at the Student Liaison Group (SLG). At the time of the audit, the SLG was a new group, therefore it was not possible for the audit team to confirm how this new process would work in practice. Student feedback had been discussed at the SSC and matters relating to student representation had been discussed at the TLB. However, the team found little evidence that the collated results had been received by the junior committees (the TLB and the SSC), an apparent inconsistency in the responsibilities of the junior committees as set out in the QAP Manual (see above, paragraph 25). The Registry conducts an annual survey of ex-students, which started in 2003, and feedback from the survey is being used to inform plans to extend CPD to ex-students. Former students are asked to complete a three-page questionnaire.

62   Feedback from the students is also captured through the annual monitoring process and reported to the SC. The evidence base for the report includes feedback from current students and alumni. The audit team confirmed mechanisms were in place to collect feedback through examination of the monitoring reports and during a meeting with the students, although little evidence could be found that feedback from alumni is reported as part of the annual course monitoring process.

63   The audit team noted that the level of detail captured from student feedback was extremely variable, with some areas providing quite detailed results from questionnaires and others more descriptive of the process. The team learnt that systems for student feedback are under review. The team was told that one aspect of the new process will be a more systematic pulling together of this information for annual monitoring.

64   Internal feedback processes are complemented by making use of the National Student Survey results which are considered annually by the SC and compared to those of other institutions. During the visit, the audit team confirmed the consideration of the National Student Survey results at the SC and the Academic Board and discussions continued at the SLG. The team considered that changes to the student experience had been made as a result of those deliberations, for example the introduction of a revised system for booking practice rooms.

Role of students in quality assurance

65   The QAP Manual describes the role students play in the Academy processes for managing quality and standards. The Manual also outlines the variety of engagement and consultation methods used which include: the SLG; student representatives on academic committees; institutional and programme feedback forms; principal-study (or course) level feedback and participation in the National Student Survey..

66   The Students' Union president is a member of all the key institutional committees, with undergraduate student representatives appointed members on the SC and the TLB ,and postgraduate student representatives on the Academic Board, the SC, the TLB and the Research Strategy Committee. In addition, two research degree students are appointed members of the Research Degree Board. The audit team noted some ambiguity between the terms of reference and the student handbooks in relation to student membership. However, the team was advised by the students that the student representative system works well and the level of representation was appropriate to their needs.

67   Student engagement and consultation methods also include formal feedback on an annual basis through an institutional feedback form and a programme feedback form. The QAP Manual described the importance of getting information on the quality of the students' learning at principal-study (or course) level and noted that because of the distinctive nature of the individual principal-study area, feedback is to be obtained by a method appropriate to the department.

68   The Briefing Paper commented on involvement of students in course approval and amendment at committee level and the periodic review process. The terms of reference for both the TLB and the SC include the consideration of proposals for new programmes of study and amendments to programmes of study. The audit team confirmed the attendance of the student representatives at those committees from their respective minutes, where items relating to course amendments had been discussed.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

69   The Research Strategy Committee oversees research activity and sees its role as including the development of the learning opportunity. The Research Strategy Committee is also charged to receive reports about (and report on, as appropriate) institutional research initiatives (for example, the Research Assessment Exercise, funding bids) and oversee their dissemination. Research Strategy Committee activity includes reporting on good practice and plans for development of a generic statement about the Academy's Knowledge Transfer Policy. The Academy cited examples of the relationship between research and scholarly activity which included partnerships with the Royal College of Art and Bristol School of Animation and links with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

70   The Academy described the use of research fellows who actively lead in new course development and the recently introduced role of research coordinator to cross fertilise between programmes and research. The research coordinator is also a postgraduate tutor and as such has been involved in the preparations for the Postgraduate Periodic Programme Review. At the time of the audit, it was not possible to confirm the extent to which this role will work in practice. However, the audit team confirmed the role of the research fellows and how their contracts include an extended allowance for research and allow for closer links with taught areas (undergraduate and postgraduate) based on their research interests. The team also noted the use of an open-coaching system for postgraduate students. The open-coaching sessions are not assessed and allow students the opportunity to try out preparatory as well as 'performance-ready' materials and enhance their professional portfolio. The team heard that these sessions were valued by the students.

71   The Academy hosts an extensive series of performance research seminars, lecture recitals, workshops, concerts and exhibitions. These provide opportunities for staff and students to showcase their research interests and current research projects at York Gate events. The Academy's research facilities include the Creative Technology Lab, Museum and Collections (York Gate), Library and Archives and the Performance Research Collections and APOLLO, (a database), which are used regularly for MMus seminars and Research Skills Seminars. The Briefing Paper also cited connections between both York Gate and the Creative Technology Lab with the Soundbox elective and the new creative technology elective which starts in 2007-08. Students on the MPhil/PHD programmes also contribute to the York Gate events. The audit team confirmed, through an examination of documentation and meetings with staff and students, the integration of performance and research as evidenced by the creative opportunities presented by York Gate and electives such as Soundbox.

Other modes of study

72   The Academy is seeking to develop new flexible modes of delivery, to include pre-induction packages for students in waiting, individual pathways as add-on and plug-ins and distance-learning opportunities to include e-portfolios. To support the Academy's e-Learning vision, 2006-07 strategic objectives include the customisation of RAM Central and the development of e-learning programmes for staff. There is an evolving e-learning strategy and investment in the infrastructure has helped the current content management platform, RAM Central, to support lessons. The team learnt of the new upgrading tools for RAM Central designed to help the development of e-portfolios and aspirations in the area of podcasting.

73   The Academy has a range of professional placements stemming from collaborations started by the students' practical departments or faculties, the Open Academy, concert departments or institutional research projects. The Academy also offers institutional exchanges with Juilliard School in New York and Beijing Central Conservatory. The audit team was advised during the visit of the importance of the Open Academy, the creative opportunities provided by York Gate events and the collaborative links around the world.

Resources for learning

74   The core tuition for all the students is based around one-to-one lessons provided by the Academy. In this respect, the Academy employs in excess of 300 visiting 'professors', who represent a major learning resource to supplement the teaching provided by the small number of full-time academic staff. While the students recognise the inevitable variability in style of teaching provided through such a personalised system, they greatly appreciate the opportunities and the overall quality and significance of this style of tuition and of the staff providing it. The students can change their principal tutor, not only in instances where they have experienced problems but also when they felt a different approach would help their own development. In addition, the Academy provides a regular programme of master classes, which affords the students the opportunity of observing and working with the world-leading professionals in their specialism.

75   Management of the educational resources falls within the remit of the TLB. In this context, the audit team noted that the minutes of recent meetings of the TLB have recorded discussion about library resources and the developments of RAM Central. Specific resource allocation and financial issues are decided by the Senior Management Team. Resources also have to be considered as part of the programme or course approval processes (see above, paragraph 26).

76   The Academy's library stocks a wide range of texts and music scores as well as subscribing to periodicals. In addition, the library holds a stock of compact discs which may be borrowed overnight or listened to in the Listening Room. Recordings of many items can also be downloaded through RAM Central. The Academy also has special collections that are available for research, including through virtual representation. These collections, including manuscripts, are made available for all students. Students also welcomed the access they have to the libraries of the University of London and to the British Lending Library.

77   The Academy has a stock of more than 100 rooms available for teaching, rehearsals and practice, but it is recognised that there is always significant pressure on space for the students to practice in. Currently there is an online booking system with rooms being made available on a rolling basis. Students reported that this online booking represented a significant improvement on the previous systems for booking, which had been revised following analysis of the National Student Survey data, and that the Academy had been responsive in terms of amending the system in response to student feedback. The Academy is in the process of constructing a further 20 practice rooms in the library area.

78   Information technology support is provided through RAM Central. The internet resources include an internal website with an expanding information base. There was no virtual learning environment at the time of the audit visit. The Creative Technology Lab offers students the opportunity to explore aspects of the use of technology in music development. Students reported that, in general, they were satisfied with the online provision of information, although there were sometimes problems with off-site access.

79   The Academy operates a variety of orchestras, chamber groups and ensembles and active participation is an expectation of all students, providing an important extra element of tuition and also experience of performance. To this end, the Academy manages a full calendar of public events. Additional specialist resources are available through the Museum and the Open Academy, for example, in the form of the collections of period instruments and special collections of documents. These are actively used as a living resource for student research at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Admissions policy

80   The admissions procedures for application and audition are clearly set out in the prospectus and on the external websites. The Academy states that there is an 'open admissions policy', with all applicants being auditioned. There are set criteria for the auditions, the key criterion being a demonstrable potential to succeed as a professional musician, and students reported having been clear as to these expectations when they applied. The Academy does afford potential applicants the opportunity to participate in consultation lessons with its professors.

81   The auditions are normally undertaken by three examiners and include an interview and written examination, as well as the performance elements. For overseas auditions, the panel only comprises two examiners, but the auditions are recorded and re-assessed by the instrumental specialists as part of the Admissions Board process. Discussion and dissemination of admissions procedures among relevant staff is part of the agenda for the Admissions Consolidation Days.

82   A significant proportion of the Academy's students are international. In recognition of this, the Academy is working to develop its admissions and support processes for international students. Overseas students are required to demonstrate a satisfactory level of competence in English. The audit team was assured that students would not be admitted onto programmes without having attained the appropriate qualifications. Students with insufficient English can be admitted to the Foundation year, which includes intensive courses in English.

83   Admissions targets are set for individual departments. Within each department, there is the capacity to move between individual specialisms, for example specific instruments within woodwind, so to ensure the admission of the best-quality students in any academic year. Bursaries and scholarships are available for home and overseas students. The audit team concluded that the admissions process, in general, appeared to be both rigorous and consistent in operation.

84   The Academy is extensively engaged in outreach and widening participation activities, particularly through the activities of the Open Academy and York Gate, which include engagement of staff and students with the neighbouring community, with local schools and, recently, through the development of links with schools overseas. The audit team considered the work of the Open Academy/York Gate, including, in particular, the provision of community and industry-facing activities as a feature of good practice.

Student support

85   There is a very close link between the teaching staff and the students, in particular through the one-to-one principal study classes (see above, paragraph 74). In addition, there is a tutorial system that aims to provide both academic and pastoral support. This system is programme-based, with two tutors being allocated for the BMus programme (one with responsibility for years one and two, the second for years three and four) and a tutor for each of the taught postgraduate programmes. The role of tutor includes that of monitoring overall progress, and acting as a link between the student and the Principal-Study teacher, Head of Study and Head of Programme. Specific surgery times are published when the tutors are available for consultation and the students, met by the audit team, were particularly appreciative of the support and guidance received from their tutors. The students also stated that they perceived the role of Head of Department as being very important in provision of support. Student progress is a standing item for discussion at the weekly meetings of the programme working groups and this includes specific identification of any 'at-risk students'.

86   Students have access to a welfare support system comprising counselling and disability advice, as well as a specific dyslexia tutor. There is also extensive support related to music, for example, the provision of psychology-based performance classes to help with the management of performance nerves, and tuition in the Alexander Technique. The Academy also has links with the Paddington Green Health, Centre which has expertise in treating musicians' injuries.

87   In meetings with students, the audit team learnt that the students were fully aware of the range of support services available to them through the handbooks and information on RAM Central, and were appreciative of these, particularly highlighting the health support provided through the special links with Paddington Green Health Centre.

88   The Academy employs a careers adviser and noted in the Briefing Paper that it intended 'to raise the profile of the Careers Advisor within the Academy'. Students commented positively on the guidance provided by this adviser. The Principal Study Tutor and the External Bookings Office are also identified as playing a vital role in linking students with the world of employment. Students are aware of the range of careers options open to them, particularly through contacts through their principal study tutors and they receive directed guidance through the Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music and through study modules that include topics such as business for musicians. Students also benefit significantly from opportunities to work with leading professionals in their specialisms.

89   The audit team considered that the degree of monitoring of student progress and the interaction between academic and pastoral support represented good practice in facilitating the high quality of the educational experience of the students.

Staff support (including staff development)

90   The Academy's Human Resources Strategy includes strategic aims in terms of attracting, retaining and developing staff and these are set against clear action points, with identified processes for monitoring that progress. The Strategy also includes detailed review of progress against the action points from the previous strategy.

91   The Academy operates an annual process of appraisal. The process is managed by the Human Resources Department and the procedures set out in the Staff Policies and Procedures Manual. The appraisal process includes the agreement of performance objectives and training needs and staff appreciated the value of the appraisals. The appraisal policy also sets out the procedures to be followed in the management of poor performance.

92   The Human Resources Department has published guidance about induction of new staff that sets out plans for both full-time and hourly-paid staff and includes checklists for the line managers to complete to ensure that the process is followed through. The Academy is also planning significant expansion of the induction and appraisal processes, including the production of new written and online induction guides. The Academy has discussed the issue of provision of mentoring for new staff but this was not current policy. Discussions with recently appointed full-time staff, however, revealed that they had received significant mentoring guidance in terms of marking practices, having marked alongside experienced staff as second-markers, before taking responsibility for their own marking as first-markers. Likewise, the Academy is also building up its pool of principal supervisors for research degrees through the system of mentoring of subsidiary supervisors.

93   In 2004, the Human Resources Department published an interim staff training and development policy that iterated the significance placed on staff development, for all staff, as a means of ensuring effective and efficient operation of the Academy, and this was subsequently confirmed in the current strategy document. In this policy, development needs are linked to appraisal and the Personnel Manager is charged with identifying needs and drawing up an appropriate training programme for each year. The Human Resources Department is also developing new training programmes for staff to improve working quality, including, for example, courses in stress management and management training for senior staff. In January 2007, the Teaching and Learning Board endorsed a proposal to introduce a voluntary scheme of peer observation of teaching, to be introduced to the majority of staff over a period of years. Exemptions were put in place for experienced practitioners. The audit team was told that, at the time of the visit, the peer observation system had not formally begun.

94   At the time of the audit visit, there was still limited provision of staff development courses, but there was an ambitious plan for developing a range of courses. In October 2007, the TLB received proposals setting out an enhanced structure for CPD. Consolidation Days were identified by academic staff as one mechanism for staff development and dissemination of current practice about assessment and admissions, and the Academy plans to introduce a further Consolidation Day on an academic theme.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

95   The Academy's approach to quality enhancement is encapsulated in two recent key initiatives: the appointment of a Head of Academic Development, and the establishment of a Teaching and Learning Board (TLB). The Head of Academic Development was appointed to provide essential leadership in educational development, reporting directly to the Vice-Principal, who, with the Head of Academic Development and the Academic Secretary manage the Academy's quality assurance and enhancement activity at institutional level. The TLB is charged with ensuring the balance between managing the quality of core educational activity and encouraging enhancement initiatives. Themes of enhancement run through the Learning and Teaching Strategy in six areas: professional development; learning environment; curriculum design; collaboration; and quality assurance; and access.

96   The TLB and the Standing Committee (SC) are '…designed to work in complementary ways…providing a link between processes of quality assurance and quality enhancement …'. While a number of individual examples of good practice was noted by the audit team in discussions with students and staff, it was unclear from the minutes of the TLB and the SC how the link between quality assurance and quality enhancement was achieved in practice. It was, therefore, unclear how the enhancement agenda was identified, monitored and driven from the Academic Board to its key subcommittees. Minutes of both boards and of the SC in particular, were found to demonstrate a focus on key issues which are predominantly practical in nature, rather than a concentration on taking forward the intentions of the Corporate Planning Statement in relation to the enhancement agenda.

97   Another example of the Academy's enhancement agenda is its search for ways to widen the student experience. This includes: placement learning; continuing professional development (CPD) initiatives; and e-learning provision. The CPD initiative involves a widening of the student body to offer new learning and teaching possibilities to ex-students, lifelong learners, and 'students in waiting'. The expansion plans for RAM Central, e-portfolios and RAM Line will allow the development of newly flexible ways of delivery. The audit team recognised that these plans are still at an embryonic stage.

98   According to the Briefing Paper, the proactive role of external examiners complemented the Academy's approach to quality enhancement. External examiners are invited to attend Consolidation Days (see above, paragraphs 39 and 42). From notes of the Consolidation Days, it is clear that staff attendance is high, although the emphasis of discussion centred primarily around regulatory matters.

99   The Briefing Paper stated that management information is provided by the Registry, including information compiled from internal surveys, for example, annual student surveys and alumni career surveys. It is also stated that all statistical information on student achievement now feeds into the annual monitoring and periodic programme review processes, though the audit team found examples of review reports where the statistical information was incomplete or absent, and where there was little analysis of the data provided (see above, paragraphs 49 and 50). It is intended that in future, much of the data will be made available on RAM Central. There is still work ongoing to improve management information, and at the time of audit it was not yet being analysed in a way that could inform enhancement activities.

100   It is noted in the Briefing Paper that the Student Union President provides '…the leading link between students and the enhancement agenda, working with staff to encourage students to sit on the various committees and to complete the National Student Survey as well as internal questionnaires' (see above, paragraphs 60 and 61). A decrease in attendance by student representatives at committees was noted and at the time the Briefing Paper was prepared, the problem was being discussed by the Students' Union President and the Academic Secretary. The evidence of decreased attendance was raised in the Briefing Paper as part of the continued monitoring of the Academy's good practice points from the 2003 QAA audit report. During the visit the audit team heard that student attendance at meetings had improved.

101   There is evidence that student feedback through questionnaires is used to enhance the physical environment, for example, the refurbishment of the bar and student common room, and the installation of improved practice facilities. Papers for the SC in September 2007 included an analysis of student feedback 2006-07, and it was noted that as a result action points had been added to the feedback reports which would be monitored through the Student Liaison Group. The rebuild of RAM Central is viewed by the Academy as a means to allow a more immediate gathering of feedback, instead of merely relying on an annual cycle. It was clear to the audit team that student feedback was taken seriously, and this was confirmed by the students.

102   The TLB has responsibility for the management of systems for sharing and presenting good practice, both internally and externally. The Quality Assurance Procedures Manual includes a variety of corporate methods for the dissemination of good practice. For example, annual monitoring is intended to publicise and share good practice across the institution. The Academy

is also seeking to disseminate the outcome of its York Gate education and research events and Consolidation Days among all teaching staff. Discussions with staff suggested that such dissemination would be welcomed

103   The audit team concluded that, while they found examples of good practice, it would be desirable for the Academy to monitor actively the systematic use of its existing quality assurance procedures, and institutional-level initiatives, to ensure deliberate steps are taken towards enhancement of the student learning experience.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

104   The Academy has a number of collaborative links with other institutions that affect discrete elements of students' programmes (for example orchestral placements, compositional projects and Open Academy placements) which do not appear to attract credit awarded by another institution, and neither does the Academy award credit to external partners.

105   The long-standing reciprocal teaching arrangement, whereby students can attend certain elective classes at King's College London in return for one-to-one tuition offered by Academy staff or postgraduate students, does not involve credit transfer.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

106   Provision for postgraduate research students at the Academy is recent in origin, only having been introduced in 2000, following the Academy's attainment of full membership of the University of London. There are currently two programmes offered: MPhil/PhD in Performance Practice and MPhil/PhD in Composition, both being awards of the University of London. At the time of the audit, the provision was small with 15 students in total.

107   The programmes and the progress of the students are overseen by the Academy's Research Degrees Board (RDG) that reports to the Standing Committee, with the regulations, as approved by the University of London, being set out in the Academy's Code of Practice. The practical arrangements for the programmes are managed by the Academy's Registry, which coordinates with the University's Research Degrees Examinations Office, particularly about appointment of external examiners and arrangements for the final examinations. The Academy also has representation on the University of London's Research Degrees Committee and Music Subject Panel.

108   Admission to the research programmes requires a minimum entry standard of an Upper Second class honours degree or equivalent, and is based on a formal interview process involving the Head of Programme and at least one other member of the Academy's supervisory team. Following successful enrolment, new students are inducted into the Academy and provided with documentation, including the student handbook and the Research Degrees Code of Practice.

109   Appointment of the Principal Supervisor is by agreement with the Head of Department and is approved by the RDG and students meet with their supervisor at least twice per term. In addition, each student is allocated a subsidiary supervisor and the Senior Postgraduate Tutor acts as a personal tutor for the research students.

110   At the start of each academic year each student and their supervisor complete an assessment of research needs, as a part of personal development planning, and this is complemented by a formal end-of-year report by the supervisor outlining the student's progress and position for the transfer from MPhil to PhD, or to final submission and examination. The Academy offers specific seminars in research skills and the students are also encouraged to attend the seminars offered by the University of London. The progress of each research student is also monitored by the RDG at its twice-termly meetings.

111   The Academy's Code of Practice for Research Degrees sets out the assessment criteria for transfer and for completion, and these are endorsed by the University of London which also approves the appointment of the external examiner and oversees the examinations process. The audit team concluded that the Academy's arrangements for its postgraduate research students meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes,* published by QAA, and secure the appropriate academic standards and quality of provision.

Section 7: Published information

112   The Academy provides a variety of information for prospective and current students, visitors and the general public. Key publications are the prospectus and the website, supported by a twice-yearly news document, The Bulletin, and a seasonal diary of events. The Academy also publishes a variety of handbooks which students receive on registration according to their particular study level and topic, including a student handbook and a separate international students' handbook, both of which are the responsibility of the Registry.

113   The Academy regards its published information as an important element in its communication systems both internally and externally, ensuring that students and staff are fully aware of academic requirements, obligations and responsibilities. The annual prospectus is produced, both in hard copy and online, and goes through a rigorous checking process before the final proof is signed off by the Vice-Principal. The process is overseen by the Communications Manager. Student-specific information on the Academy's website is sourced from the same text as the approved prospectus. Any amendments made during an academic year are subject to approval by the relevant Head of Department, Departmental Administrator, Registry and the Communications Manager, who is also responsible for approving all other website information.

114   Departmental handbooks are updated every year and made available on RAM Central. They contain programme-specific information, including where appropriate, a programme specification, and responsibility for accuracy of the information therein lies with the individual department, with updates and changes made by chairs/heads of programmes and collated by departmental administrators. Responsibility for the accuracy of programme handbooks rests jointly with the chairs/heads of programmes and the Academic Secretary. Significant changes, such as changes to assessment processes, are passed through the committee structure of the Teaching and Learning Board, or a working group reporting to it, and the Standing Committee.

115   It was noted in the Briefing Paper that the handbooks generally attain good feedback in the annual student questionnaire exercise, and that in 2007 they scored noticeably well. The departmental handbooks are not provided in hard copy, which was a matter of concern in one of the questionnaire responses. The Academy has responded by publicising more widely that the handbooks are available on the Academy intranet.

116   As a result of its sampling of published information, and from what it heard from students and staff, the audit team formed the view that overall reliance can be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information published in various formats by the Academy.