



Post-accreditation monitoring report: Royal Academy of Dance

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Introduction

Regulating external qualifications

Responsibility for regulating external qualifications lies jointly with three regulators:

- the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)
- the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), the body for Wales
- and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), the authority for Northern Ireland.

Following the accreditation of a qualification, the regulators systematically monitor awarding bodies against the requirements set out in the statutory regulations. The aim of this activity is to promote continuing improvement and public confidence in the quality of external qualifications.

Where an awarding body is found not to comply with relevant criteria, the regulators set conditions of accreditation. Even if an awarding body is compliant, the monitoring team may make observations on ways that the awarding body could change its systems and procedures to improve clarity or reduce bureaucracy.

Accreditation conditions and observations arising from this monitoring activity are specified at the end of each section of this report. Awarding bodies are required to produce an action plan to show how they will deal with accreditation conditions imposed as a result of a monitoring activity. The regulators will agree the action plan and monitor its implementation.

The regulators will use the outcomes of monitoring and any subsequent action taken by awarding bodies to inform decisions on the re-accreditation of qualifications, or, if necessary, the withdrawal of accreditation.

Banked documents

As part of their awarding body recognition processes the regulators require awarding bodies to submit certain documents to QCA for the purposes of 'banking' centrally. Information from

banked documents will be used to inform monitoring activities and may also affect the awarding body's risk rating.

A suite of documents has been identified as suitable for banking and are those that are considered to be the most crucial in supporting an awarding body's ability to operate effectively. To maintain the currency of the banked documents, awarding bodies are responsible for updating them as and when changes occur. They are also reminded to review them at least annually at the time of completion of the self-assessment return.

About this report

This is the second monitoring activity on the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) and was carried out between December 2007 and March 2008.

The monitoring focused on the regulatory criteria relating to the following key areas:

- corporate governance
- resources and expertise
- application of assessment methods: quality
 - assurance and control of independent assessment
- determination of results
- registration and certification.

The monitoring activities included desk research of information already held by the regulators, including the previous monitoring report and most recent Awarding Body Recognition Update (ABRU) submission, visits to teachers at centres, attendance at awarding body meetings and scrutiny of its website. The monitoring team visited the RAD's head office to conduct interviews with staff and review documentation.

This report draws together the regulators' findings from these monitoring activities.

About the RAD

The RAD was founded in 1920. The awarding body of the RAD is accredited to offer five qualifications in dance. For more information on the RAD and its awarding body visit the website at www.rad.org.uk .

Corporate governance

This is subject to The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004), paragraphs 5, 6 and 7.

Findings

1. The RAD is a company incorporated by Royal Charter and registered as a charity. It is governed by a board of trustees who delegate operational authority to a chief executive and directors.
2. The chief executive is the single named point of accountability for maintaining the quality and standards of all accredited qualifications but there is nothing in that person's job description which refers to this responsibility. At an operational level, it is not clear where the overall responsibility for quality assurance lies. Individuals are expected to take on this role in the area for which they are responsible. There is not a dedicated position for overall quality assurance within the awarding body, although there are proposals (see below) to address this issue to some extent by means of a quality assurance working group.
3. The information on governance that was provided to the regulatory authorities' team ahead of the central systems audit raised a number of initial questions. Many of these were answered by information relating to new arrangements that were provided to the team just prior to the central systems audit.
4. The new arrangements placed the director of finance and administration at the head of a number of awarding body activities. A new committee structure was being set up. Two new working-groups, individually responsible for operations and quality assurance, would sit beneath the existing committee structure. At the time of the central systems audit, these working-groups had not yet met.
5. The regulators' monitoring team told the director of finance and administration that it would take time to judge the impact of the new quality assurance arrangements.
6. The regulators' monitoring team had concerns over the operations in four overseas countries that issue the same design of certificates to their candidates as are provided to candidates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. These four overseas countries have

their own quality assurance managers. The regulators' monitoring team examined the monthly management reports from these countries.

7. The regulators' monitoring team accepted that, in theory, everyone operated to the same standards but there was no evidence of the RAD exercising sufficient monitoring of these overseas countries' activities. There needed to be more evidence that the RAD was ensuring that the countries' operations were complying with the regulatory criteria.
8. The RAD acts as a teaching organisation and provides texts that are recommended reading for its own qualifications. Examiners are sometimes also teachers. The regulators' monitoring team looked at the potential for conflict of interest within the RAD. The new governance arrangements provided ahead of the central systems audit addressed some of the potential conflicts (e.g. the principal of the RAD's dance school was no longer the director responsible for examinations). The regulators' monitoring team investigated these issues and was satisfied that the potential for conflict of interest was properly managed.
9. The RAD provided the regulators' monitoring team with ready access to its records, including full details of fees. They also provided two self-assessment reports, both of which were excellent in identifying areas that the RAD needed to address. Given the apparent lack of clarity over responsibility for quality assurance, these were remarkably well-drawn-up documents.
10. The regulators' monitoring team examined the documents that the RAD had banked. Clearly, some of these had been superseded by the recent documentation provided to the regulatory monitoring team. A list of amendments was agreed with the RAD in respect of:
 - customer service statement
 - malpractice procedure
 - enquiries and appeals
 - equality of opportunity
 - reasonable adjustments and special consideration.

Accreditation conditions

- 1 The RAD must clarify its governance arrangements, particularly operational responsibility for quality assurance, and also evidence its supervision of overseas operations (*The*

statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004), paragraph 5a).

- 2 The RAD must update its banked documentation (The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004), paragraph 6c).

Observation

- 1 The chief executive's job description should contain reference to the responsibility for maintaining the quality and standards of all accredited qualifications.

Resources and expertise

This is subject to The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004), paragraphs 8 and 10.

Findings

1. The examinations department is the main staff resource for the awarding body functions. There is approximately 20 full-time staff in the UK, with additional staff overseas, to support the delivery of the accredited qualifications. The RAD registers candidates and certificates their results worldwide, with the exception of four countries, which are responsible for their own registration and certification. Twenty-four per cent of the certificates issued in respect of accredited qualifications offered by the RAD are awarded by these four countries.
2. The awarding body employs temporary staff during peak periods to meet its targets for issuing results. However, the RAD has identified the issuing of results as an area which requires improvement and recognises that it must publish the timescales for issuing certificates. To date results issue has taken priority over the actual issue of certificates.
3. There is an annual appraisal process for staff at head office, which facilitates objective setting for the future and identifies any continuing professional development requirements.
4. There are documented procedures in place for recruiting examiners. The arrangements specify the expertise and qualification requirements for each role but also require a minimum age of 25 years. The awarding body should review the job specifications so that they are in line with current age-discrimination legislation.
5. The arrangements for examiner training are documented and suitable. All new examiners complete a minimum of two weeks training before shadowing an experienced examiner for a further two weeks. Examiners are accepted onto the panel of examiners when they have successfully completed all of the following:
 - initial training
 - probationary period
 - one tour of assessments
 - standardisation seminar
 - standardisation visit.

6. The RAD has approximately 200 contracted examiners worldwide. All examiners have to commit to a minimum number of weeks per year, for example six weeks for vocational graded qualifications or nine weeks for graded qualifications. Tours are arranged up to a maximum of five weeks. The awarding body generally expects examiners to carry out tours of assessment in their own country; where there are insufficient examiners in a particular country, visiting examiners are sent.
7. Examiners have contracts and a code of conduct, which requires them to declare any potential conflicts of interest and attend standardisation seminars.
8. When examiners are seen to be marking outside of the recognised tolerances, the RAD monitors these examiners more closely to discover the reasons and offers additional training where necessary to ensure that marking is more consistent. There is a pool of experienced examiners available for this task, which may include accompanied visits.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

2. The RAD should publish the timescales for issuing certificates.
3. The RAD should review the job specification for examiners to ensure that it meets current age-discrimination legislation.

Application of assessment methods: quality assurance and control of independent assessment

This is subject to The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004), paragraphs 13, 36, 38–42 and 56–58.

Findings

1. The RAD keeps records of its assessments for at least two years. By the nature of its assessments (observation) there can be no permanent record of the candidates' performance. The RAD does not video live examinations. Some dance is videoed for standardisation purposes but this is specially performed for the camera.
2. The regulators' monitoring team attended one day of a three-day standardisation seminar for examiners. This activity was carried out thoroughly and to a high standard. Similar seminars are conducted by the same person throughout the world. The filmed material provides realistic challenges, discussion and, ultimately, a basis for agreement amongst examiners.
3. The syllabus on which the assessments are based is relatively unchanging. There is continuity of examiners. Provision over time is monitored by a combination of these factors.
4. In the absence of regular revision of the tasks, assessment criteria and mark schemes, there was no readily available evidence that such matters were evaluated by appropriately qualified individuals not involved in their development. The regulators' monitoring team accepted the RAD's assertion that this was in fact the usual practice but a procedure would have given the assertion some support.
5. Assessment is by practical demonstration of the knowledge and skills required. Prior knowledge of the exercises to be performed is, therefore, of no advantage to a candidate since it is performance that is being judged. The RAD has created a mark scheme that the examiners use to complete a mark sheet as they watch the dance.
6. Guidance is provided to examiners but not all in a single document. The regulators' monitoring team noted that the examiner guidelines document is in the process of being updated.

7. The awarding body had not yet produced fully documented procedures to monitor the work of its examiners although, in practice, it did so to some extent by means of standardisation seminars, accompanied visits and constant monitoring of marking trends.
8. The question of plain language usage was an interesting one. The regulators' monitoring team accepted the RAD's argument that the use of French terms was an internationally accepted convention for students of classical ballet. Consequently, its documentation was in plain language in the context of classical ballet.
9. Assessment was carried out by performance although such instruction as was required by the examiner was usually communicated in English. The use of other languages would not have any material effect on the standard of assessment. For example, signing had been used for deaf candidates. If there is demand, the RAD is willing to translate its documentation.
10. The qualifications offered by the RAD fall into two categories: graded, typically for children, examined on the teachers' premises; and vocational graded, typically for people considering a career in dance, examined at a neutral centre. In the latter case the candidates would be unknown to the venue's staff and consequently an issue of identity arises. The RAD is aware of the dangers of impersonation but has not yet taken steps to prevent it. Candidates sign in but this is not used as a means of identification. It may be a low risk, given the nature of the qualification, but it needs to be addressed.
11. The assessments made by the examiners are not easily reviewed given the absence of any performance evidence but the awarding body does review the comments against the marks awarded to ensure that they match.
12. There were no issues arising from the number of examiners used by the RAD for its assessments. The number of examiners used for the graded examinations is higher than for the vocational examinations but this is justified by the larger number of candidates and greater geographical spread.
13. The RAD had a system of requiring examiners to report potential conflicts of interest. Nevertheless, situations could arise where an examiner might find that they were faced with a candidate that they had previously taught. The awarding body relied upon the integrity of their examiners to report such instances. There was a need for more detailed procedures on how to deal with such eventualities.

Accreditation conditions

3. The RAD must have procedures for monitoring the work of its examiners (The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004), paragraph 36).
4. The RAD must identify candidates to ensure that the evidence on which it awards the qualification is authentic (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 57a).

Observations

4. The RAD should evidence its arrangements for ensuring that the tasks, assessment criteria and/or mark schemes are evaluated by appropriately qualified individuals not involved in their development.
5. The RAD should produce an examiners' handbook that sets out the information they require, including the correct procedure for dealing with unexpected potential conflicts of interest.

Determination and reporting of results

This is subject to The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004), paragraphs 63–67.

Findings

1. Grade boundaries and how the results are determined are clearly indicated to all parties. The rules on how marks can be combined are clear. Where graded results are available, any user can understand their meaning from the information on the results slip, albeit not the certificate.
2. There is sufficient evidence obtained on a candidate's performance during assessment performance and the mark sheets contain a wealth of information in many cases. Unfortunately, sometimes the information can only be interpreted by the examiners, who use their own coding to record their views. This means that the basis on which the decisions have been made cannot be monitored in all cases without reference to the originator of the record.
3. The RAD provides technical and professional support to those involved in awarding. It moderates the results using statistical analysis. This aims at keeping standards comparable over time by reference to candidates coming from the same teachers and by comparison with the results produced by other examiners.
4. It is not clear how moderation is carried out without access to the original performance and intelligible mark sheets. Changes to the marks are made, if necessary, before certification occurs. The RAD had commissioned a report on this activity and the recommendations were being reviewed at the time of the central systems audit.

Accreditation conditions

5. The RAD must ensure that its mark sheets are completed in such a way that the bases on which decisions are made are open to monitoring by the regulators (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 63f).

Observations

6. The RAD should inform the regulators in confidence of the findings of the report on its technical and professional support to those involved in awarding.

Registration and certification

This is subject to The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004), paragraphs 11–12 and 21–22.

Findings

1. The RAD, in common with other graded examination awarding bodies, does not have centres as such. Candidates are entered by registered teachers and then attend examination venues for practical assessment. Nevertheless, the term 'centre' was construed to include such examination venues (relatively few of which are directly controlled by the RAD).
2. In respect of the awarding body's responsibilities to its candidates for access and health and safety, the RAD stipulates to its teachers the resources that are required for graded examinations and has responsibility for providing suitable venues, which it controls, for the vocational examinations. However, it does not formally inspect any of the premises it uses in a systematic fashion ahead of the examinations. The awarding body stated that a report would be submitted by the examiner if an unsatisfactory condition were observed.
3. The RAD has not clearly indicated in any of its contractual agreements that the regulators have the rights of access to premises, people and records, and that cooperation must be given to them in their duties.
4. The RAD's systems facilitate data collection on candidates and qualifications, and this can be provided, on request, to the regulators.
5. The same design of certificates is provided to candidates across the world. Each certificate states that the qualification is accredited for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
6. The regulators' monitoring team was provided with a specimen certificate. It was noted that the unique identifier would not differentiate if multiple copies of a certificate had been produced.
7. Rules regarding the provision of replacement certificates were insufficient and incorrect certification by this means was possible. In addition, the security of the working stock of certificate blanks was not assured overnight. Weaknesses in the control of certificates had been identified in the previous report of the regulators.

Accreditation conditions

6. The RAD must ensure for assessment purposes that candidates use buildings that meet relevant legislation, particularly health and safety and accessibility, as well as ensuring the right of access for the regulators, if required, to premises, people and records (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 11).
7. The RAD must ensure that the design of certificates meets the regulators' requirements and that there are adequate safeguards, including reasonable security measures, against fraudulent or mistaken claims for certification and replacement certificates (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 22).

Observations

7. The RAD should have confirmation of examination venues' suitability before allowing them to be used for assessment purposes.