

# **Guildhall School of Music & Drama**

## **Institutional audit**

**JUNE 2010**

### **Annex to the report**

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## Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Guildhall School of Music & Drama (the School) from 14 to 18 June 2010 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 School offers on behalf of City University London.

## Outcomes of the Institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama is that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards it offers on behalf of City University London
- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

## Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The School is committed to ensuring and developing the quality of learning experiences, but at present does not have a planned and strategic approach to, or agreed definition of, enhancement, relying on a range of formal and informal processes based on a shared ethos for improving the learning opportunities of its students.

## Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The supervision and support arrangements for postgraduate research students are satisfactory and meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*.

## Published information

Reliance can largely be placed on the accuracy of the information the School publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

## Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the scope and content of the research training programme for the MPhil/DMus (paragraphs 24, 65)
- the annual School-wide staff re-induction event (paragraph 54).

## Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that the School considers further action in some areas.

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- review the adequacy of its present deliberative structure to ensure the systematic, comprehensive management and effective discharge of its responsibilities for quality and standards (paragraph 10)
- establish formal and systematic module-level monitoring as a requirement in annual programme evaluation (paragraph 15)
- develop a comprehensive induction and training programme for external assessors (paragraph 21)
- ensure that external examiners' moderating role is never compromised by direct participation in any element of assessment (paragraph 22)
- develop and implement a set of policies and procedures which ensures the broad equivalence of student learning opportunities across the institution as a whole (paragraphs 27, 48, 50)
- ensure that annual monitoring invariably involves the comprehensive and rigorous analysis of all relevant information (paragraph 30)
- ensure that careful consideration is given to all aspects of student feedback, and the outcome of that consideration effectively and appropriately communicated to all students concerned (paragraph 34)
- ensure the fitness for purpose of its English language admission requirements and their consistent and comprehensive implementation (paragraph 45).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- strengthen its procedures for assuring a systematic and comprehensive engagement with the Academic Infrastructure (paragraph 25)
- establish clear reporting lines to a higher institutional level for the Staff/Student Liaison Committee (paragraph 35)
- ensure that publicly-available admissions criteria accurately reflect its admissions policy (paragraphs 44, 69)
- establish and implement a policy for the systematic training of staff appointed to teaching roles (paragraph 51)
- take a more strategic approach to improving the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 59).

## **Section 1: Introduction and background**

### **The institution and its mission**

1 The School's origins lie in 1880 when, as the Guildhall School of Music, it opened its doors to 62 students in a disused warehouse in the City of London: it took its present title in 1935 in recognition of its extended educational scope. The School has always been owned by the City of London Corporation and has no legal personality: accordingly, when it was designated a directly-funded higher education institution in 2006, in order to meet the requirements of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) it was agreed that its Board of Governors would operate as an autonomous body within the confines of a discretionary framework laid down by the Corporation's Court of Common Council. An earlier QAA enquiry, which took the form of an institutional audit (the designation report - see paragraph 5), was also undertaken at this time.

2 The School does not have degree awarding powers, and programmes of study leading to degrees and diplomas are validated by City University London (the University; the validating institution). It is situated in the Barbican, where, in the wake of a successful application to the HEFCE Strategic Development Fund in 2009, it created the Barbican Campus (now the LINK Alliance) with the London Symphony Orchestra and the Barbican

Centre (see paragraphs 9 and 42). With the Centre for Young Musicians and Junior Guildhall, the School is the largest provider of specialist music education in the United Kingdom: its educational provision, which touches over 32,000 students annually, ranges from Key Stage 1 to doctoral level. The present campus's serious space limitations inevitably impact on the student experience (see paragraph 42). The School anticipates that this problem will be resolved at the start of academic year 2013-2014, when an £84 million expansion project will be completed: this will involve a state-of-the-art building adjacent to the present campus, with a concert hall and two theatres; in the meantime the School is taking interim measures in an attempt to mitigate the difficulties.

3 The School is divided into two academic directorates, Music and Drama, both of which are further divided: in the case of Music, the wide range of instrumental and vocal teaching available has led to the creation of a large number of mainly small (sometimes one-person) departments; Drama is subdivided into Acting and Technical Theatre. Both directorates offer taught degrees at undergraduate and postgraduate levels; Music also offers two doctoral programmes, one of them jointly with the University (see paragraphs 60-64). The School has 509 undergraduate and 216 postgraduate students on validated degree programmes in Technical Theatre, Acting and Music (including Music Therapy and Opera). Its cohort of permanent staff is complemented by a wide range of fractional, predominantly specialist, teachers, many of them eminent in their field.

4 The School's Strategic Plan articulates an overall aim for the School to become an international centre of excellence and a global leader of creative and professional practice in music and drama. Its five strategic aims involve (in summary): training and educating outstanding young students to the highest international standards; building a reflective conservatoire promoting innovation, leading practice and experimentation; maximising its impact through local, national and international partnerships; providing world-class professional services and facilities; and contributing to building a creative and sustainable environment. The School has begun to put in place a research infrastructure (it received quality-related funding for the first time in 2009 following its submission to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise) and, as noted in the preceding paragraph, now offers opportunities for doctoral study in a validated programme.

## **The information base for the audit**

5 The School provided a briefing paper and supporting documentation. The index to the briefing paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate its approach to managing the security of the academic standards of awards and the quality of its educational provision. The audit team had access to the unpublished QAA report (June 2006) which took the form of an Institutional audit and formed part of the process leading to the School's designation as a directly-funded higher education institution. The School made this designation report available to the team and referred to it in its briefing paper: it is accordingly discussed here also. The team received copies of all documents referenced in the briefing paper and other documentation requested, often in electronic form.

6 The Guildhall School of Music & Drama Students' Union (the Union) produced a written submission, setting out students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, their experience as learners and their role in quality management. The team thanks the Union for its helpful submission.

## **Developments since the last audit**

7 The designation report judged that broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of awards. It identified four features of good practice (in summary: responsiveness to student feedback; contact with the professions; careers guidance; and student support). It made no 'advisable' recommendations but

identified four areas where change would be desirable (in summary: quality enhancement; module-level annual monitoring; appointment procedures for external assessors; and the utilisation of management data).

8 The present audit team found that, with one exception, the School has continued to perform strongly in the areas identified as features of good practice: its response to student feedback, identified positively in 2006, emerges from the present audit as a recommendation (see paragraph 34). The team found that the 2006 recommendations have not on the whole been satisfactorily addressed, and the recommendations of the present audit include aspects (though not always the same aspect) of all four areas identified in 2006 (in particular a different point is made about external assessors, where the recommendation itself has been satisfactorily addressed (see paragraph 21)).

9 Since the previous audit the School has produced a revised Strategic Plan and two sub-strategies (Teaching & Learning, and Research & Knowledge Exchange); it has created and developed the LINK Alliance (see paragraph 2), jointly appointing a Director of Finance, Resources & Infrastructure with the Barbican and securing efficiency and economic gains by the sharing of services; it has streamlined its Executive Directorate and created a new alignment of student services, bringing marketing, communications, registry services, quality assurance, statutory reporting, student services, library, alumni, and development into a single Directorate of Student & Corporate Affairs.

10 Of particular significance for the audit is the streamlining of the School's committee structure. This has involved amalgamating Academic Board and Teaching & Learning Committee into a new Teaching & Learning Board, which has also absorbed the remits of the former Equality Committee and Information Services Committee. The School acknowledges that the epiphenomena associated with this rationalisation, which it considers to be working well, include what it calls daunting agenda. The audit team, having studied these agenda and the associated minutes, notes that Teaching & Learning Board gives variable attention to significant items (for example, while it has discussed all annual programme evaluation reports, it has not always done so in great depth), and the wide-ranging nature of its responsibilities means that some strategic issues, a number of which are the subject of comment in this annex, receive only limited attention. For example, the School would benefit from: taking a more strategic approach to quality enhancement; identifying the most effective means of disseminating good practice; and employability, particularly though not exclusively in fields other than the performing arts. In consequence, this senior body's attention is focused more on administration than on proactive strategic planning. It is advisable for the School to review the adequacy of its present deliberative structure to ensure the systematic, comprehensive management and effective discharge of its responsibilities for quality and standards.

## **Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities**

11 The School's quality management framework is subject to University requirements and approval. Within the School, Teaching & Learning Board is responsible to the Board of Governors and, as appropriate, the University, for the quality of teaching provision, academic standards and academic reputation: this includes setting the internal governance framework for programme management and the context for programme development, and monitoring all formal submissions to the University. Operational responsibility for programme development and review falls to the two programme boards (Music and Drama): each board is chaired by a senior member of staff from the other academic directorate, with the aim of facilitating cross-school understanding and the sharing of good practice. This arrangement operates satisfactorily.

## **Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards**

### **Approval, monitoring and review of award standards**

12 For ease of reference, all matters relating to approval, monitoring and review are considered in this section, whether they relate primarily to academic standards or to assuring the quality of students' learning opportunities. Ultimate responsibility for the procedures rests with the validating institution; responsibility for the exercise of those aspects of the activities which fall to the School lies with the Teaching & Learning Board.

13 Programme approval, the procedures for which are clear and widely available, involves executive pre-approval followed by a full approval procedure. The process, which is conducted with due regard to externality, includes consideration of full programme and module specifications; contextual information about programme development; and evidence that appropriate learning resource and support arrangements exist. The audit team studied one programme approval in each directorate, and confirms that the School's operation of the procedure is robust and professional. The team, noting also that the School engages constructively with any professional bodies involved (notably the National Council for Drama Training and the Health Professions Council), confirms that the School discharges its programme approval responsibilities with due regard to external reference points and the need to assure both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

14 Annual monitoring (annual programme evaluation) is undertaken on academic programmes; a parallel procedure operates for non-academic departments (culminating in reports which are generally both detailed and helpful). Annual programme evaluation is based on reports incorporating management data on admissions, withdrawals, progression and assessment; external examiners' and (in summary form) external assessors' reports; feedback from other external sources (including the National Student Survey); and feedback from students, including programme and module questionnaires.

15 The audit team confirms that the School operates annual programme evaluation generally conscientiously, and that the Teaching & Learning Board has given proper consideration to the results of the most recent National Student Survey. The team also noted, however, that (i) in spite of the terms of reference of the bodies concerned, not all annual programme evaluation reports receive detailed consideration by programme boards and the Teaching & Learning Board; (ii) while an instance was found, in a common module in the BMus, of sound and reflective monitoring, the School does not require module-level annual monitoring: this lack of institutional oversight results in inconsistent implementation; (iii) the format of annual monitoring questionnaires at both module and programme levels is still under review in the light of both the 2006 recommendation that they should be more formalised and of the most recent National Student Survey; (iv) a variable degree of formal attention is devoted to discussing external assessors' reports; (v) in the pro formae made available to the team, destination data were not considered by all units within the Drama Directorate. The team, accepting that steps are being taken to increase the response rate to programme and module-level questionnaires, believes the School should take a more consistent, rigorous, and documented approach to the use and reporting of data to be derived from them. Reflecting a 2006 recommendation, it is advisable that the School establishes formal and systematic module-level monitoring as a requirement in annual programme evaluation.

16 Arrangements for periodic review, which occurs quinquennially at discipline level and is linked to University revalidation, are clear and widely available. The School first conducts an interim review under the auspices of the Teaching & Learning Board and the relevant programme board, after which the procedure follows the arrangements of the validating institution. The School's interim review panels have external involvement, and the procedure involves meetings with students (who are not panel members), programme and

institutional staff; and advice-taking from professional bodies. The audit team confirms that the system is properly conducted, and is a helpful precursor to the revalidation procedure.

17 While acknowledging the recommendation in this section, overall the School's contribution to programme approval, monitoring and review is thorough in design and execution, and contributes to the assurance and management of academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities.

## **External examiners**

18 For ease of reference, all matters relating to external examining are considered in this section, whether they relate primarily to academic standards or to the quality of students' learning opportunities.

19 The validating institution has direct responsibility for the academic standards of the awards made in its name; the School's assessment regulations (including academic appeals), therefore, supplement those of the University. External examiners are appointed by the University on the recommendation of the School, and attend both the relevant programme assessment board and the School Assessment Board. The arrangements for inducting, briefing and supporting such examiners are also prescribed by the University, as are reporting procedures. The audit team confirms that external examiners are engaged for all programmes and appear to discharge their duties satisfactorily; on the rare occasions where problems have arisen the School has sought and followed guidance from the University on how to proceed. Overall, the School discharges those administrative and professional assessment responsibilities required of or devolved to it in a competent and professional manner.

20 In addition to (and not to be confused with) external examiners, the School, in common with other higher education institutions concerned with the performing arts, makes extensive use of specialist external assessors in Music. In contrast to the situation with external examiners, where the validating institution reserves powers of appointment, external assessors are appointed by the Music Programme Board under delegated powers from the Teaching & Learning Board. The audit team confirms that the appointment process, modified in response to a recommendation of the 2006 audit, is now robust and transparent. External assessors bring an expert and independent dimension to a panel of otherwise internal examiners (not all of which will have the same level of specific, particularly instrumental, expertise) responsible for marking performance. Their duties are: attending specified assessment events; contributing to panel discussions and arriving at an agreed final mark; submitting written feedback for the student being assessed; and submitting a monitoring report on the assessment process for consideration by the Programme Board.

21 The audit team confirms that: (i) external assessors are clear about the marking criteria; (ii) their written feedback to students is constructive and appropriate; and (iii) their views form part of annual programme evaluation (see paragraphs 14-15), albeit to a variable degree across the Music Directorate. Nevertheless, (i) they are not formally trained (nor does the School plan to introduce such training); (ii) no formal induction system is in place, and in some cases they receive only a cursory introduction to their role; (iii) they are, again in some cases, unclear about the completion, purpose or destination of their monitoring report. It is advisable for the School to develop a comprehensive induction and training programme for external assessors.

22 The audit team learned of two cases of external examiners (one in Music, one in Drama) also serving as external assessors (or, in the case of Drama, in an assessment capacity) in undergraduate programmes. The Drama examiner contributed to the assessment of a module constituting 15 per cent of the final award; in Music the examiner was appointed to oversee the pathway; examine students' portfolios; and participate in viva voce examinations. In addition (though this is incidental to the main point), the fact that the



pathway concerned, Composition, lacks a performance component means that the assessor's duties involve the primary marking of written work: this does not sit comfortably with the duties of external assessors generally, as specified in paragraph 20. The audit team accepts that: (i) the marking responsibilities of the Music external examiner relate only to a minor aspect of the programme, which also has two other external examiners, either of which could oversee the pathway concerned: this is not possible in the case of Drama, where the programme has only one external examiner; and (ii) both external examiners properly reported their dual role in their annual report to the validating institution. Nevertheless, it remains the case that both directorates are using external examiners to discharge internal examining duties: this is inappropriate, should be unnecessary, and potentially compromises academic standards. It is advisable for the School to ensure that external examiners' moderating role is never compromised by direct participation in any element of assessment.

## **Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points**

23 The Academic Regulatory Framework requires that: (i) all awards are aligned with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*; (ii) all programmes leading to an award at level 7 or below are aligned with the higher education credit framework for England; (iii) degree programmes take account of national benchmark statements where applicable; (iv) regulations and policies reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice*; (v) all taught programmes have a programme specification and all modules a module specification; (vi) programme review ensures the explicit use of the Academic Infrastructure and other relevant frameworks; (vii) external examiners judge the appropriateness of the standards set by reference to published national subject benchmark statements (where applicable), national qualifications frameworks, institutional programme specifications and other relevant information; (viii) due regard is paid to the rules of any validating or external professional accrediting body.

24 The audit team confirms that the School's approach to the requirements of associated professional or regulatory bodies is active and engaged, and in particular that research methodology training in the MPhil/DMus takes account of (and transcends) the Research Councils' joint statement on skills training (see paragraph 65). The team also notes, however, that whereas staff members stated that revisions to the *Code of practice* would normally be sent to the relevant person or body to ensure institutional engagement, they were not always agreed as to which person or body that would be: the School will no doubt wish to clarify this point.

25 Overall, the audit team found that institutional-level engagement with higher education's external infrastructure is, though broadly satisfactory, less confident or developed than discipline-level engagement with the requirements and expectations of professional and regulatory bodies; in particular, the School does not yet have an overarching institutional-level framework for deliberating on the nature of its engagement with the Academic Infrastructure. It is desirable for the School to strengthen its procedures for assuring a systematic and comprehensive engagement with the Academic Infrastructure.

## **Assessment policies and regulations**

26 While responsibility for assessment rests with the validating institution, the specialist nature of the disciplines involved requires the School to ensure that assessment is aligned not only with the University's requirements but also with conservatoire norms. The Academic Regulatory Framework specifies relevant principles, requirements and methods; the two programme assessment boards oversee procedures and make recommendations to the School Assessment Board (chaired by the University's Dean of Validation) on final awards, classifications, reassessment and progression; in Music an Interim Assessment Board ensures the propriety and accuracy of the process. A programme-level annual report incorporating some statistical analysis is now submitted to the Teaching & Learning Board: the audit team notes the Board's suggestion on receiving the first such report that the

detailed analysis of key components of the BMus could helpfully be extended to Drama programmes, and expects that the School will give it careful consideration.

27 Students, while confirming that the School ensures that the rules on such assessment issues as appeals and extenuating circumstances are clearly communicated and well-publicised, reported: (i) inconsistent implementation of late submission penalties; (ii) difficulties in understanding the assessment criteria in Music; (iii) concerns about the impartiality of marking arrangements, also in Music; and (iv) on some occasions a lack of sensitivity or confidentiality in giving feedback on performance. These concerns resonate with aspects of the student written submission, the National Student Survey and/or external examiners' reports. The audit team confirms that discussions are taking place as to how best to address them, and that several approaches are being developed, including a proposed pilot to test the feasibility of adding innovative performance to Principal Study Practice Assessment in the BMus. Nevertheless, the issues highlighted here are symptomatic of disparities between the opportunities offered to students in the two directorates, and the team found that the School has yet to distinguish fully between legitimate discipline-level differences and arbitrary practices based on custom or tradition, which lead to unnecessary and unjustifiable inconsistencies and inequalities. It is advisable for the School to develop and implement a set of policies and procedures, which ensures the broad equivalence of student learning opportunities across the institution as a whole (see also paragraphs 48 and 50).

28 The audit team concludes that the School, as a validated institution, properly discharges its assessment duties, and is taking steps to address legitimate student concerns in respect of any aspect of these duties for which it is responsible.

## **Management information - statistics**

29 The School states that a student data system is firmly embedded, with experienced administrators providing training for other users. It adds that its streamlined structure situates responsibility for all aspects of management information in a single location which produces and distributes comprehensive data sets and analyses covering, inter alia, enrolment, assessment, the National Student Survey, research and returns for both the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey (HESES). It identifies effective coordination as contributing significantly to fundraising.

30 The audit team noted that the listing of data sets with which it was supplied and the associated distribution timetable do not include the graduate destination data required by HESA: no reference to such data appears in the Teaching & Learning Board's standing orders, and the team could find no record of their having been discussed there. This is of concern since, as stated earlier (see paragraph 15), this data is not considered consistently or systematically in annual programme evaluation. The team noted similar variability in departmental consideration of progression and achievement data in annual programme evaluation: there the range was between detailed, reflective consideration of available data in one report and a brief unannotated quotation from an external examiner's report in another. The team concluded that the School is some way short of extracting maximum value from its evaluation of statistical data: it is advisable for the School to ensure that annual monitoring invariably involves the comprehensive and rigorous analysis of all relevant information.

31 Overall, confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards it offers on behalf of City University London.

## **Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities**

32 All aspects of external examining, programme approval, monitoring and review and institutional engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points have been described in Section 2.

### **Management information - feedback from students**

33 Students are invited to complete an annual programme and module evaluation form (in the one programme where anonymity is impracticable an exit interview is substituted); users of the Student Affairs Department (see paragraph 47) are invited to complete a satisfaction survey; the School participated in the National Student Survey for the first time in 2008 and a high response rate has been achieved. Nevertheless, the School acknowledges that it has had limited success in obtaining student feedback internally, and an audit of student surveys had identified operational problems and recommended a coordinated approach to questionnaire distribution and more question standardisation. This audit has provoked potentially beneficial changes, including the institution of a group to draw up standard questions for universal use and to redesign questionnaires. The School also acknowledges that current procedures for informing students of the results of surveys and the institutional response (end-of-term meetings and reports to programme boards) are no longer fit for purpose and should be replaced by the greater use of electronic methods, including uploading questionnaire comments and the institutional response to the intranet.

34 The audit team, while acknowledging the potential value of these changes, is unconvinced that they will by themselves be sufficient to achieve the desired objectives. In particular, the proposed reliance on student committee representatives to disseminate the information is undermined both by low attendance levels and an unclear process for briefing the wider community. The team also learned that many students, whose priorities lie elsewhere, are selective in the attention they pay to electronic communications, reading them only when they believe important information is being conveyed - a decision which, unfortunately, can normally be made only after the reading has taken place. This conundrum presents the School with a hitherto unaddressed cultural challenge. The team accepts that in a small, collegial institution many issues are resolved informally and satisfactorily as they arise, and also that students appreciate staff's attentiveness to hearing and meeting their concerns: nothing here seeks to detract from this. Such an approach, however, while it facilitates fire-fighting, does not offer a holistic perspective on students' views of their educational experience of a kind that could influence policy development. The team considers that the School should ensure that it takes a strategic and proactive approach to its engagement with the views of the whole community of students. It is advisable for the School to ensure that careful consideration is given to all aspects of student feedback, and the outcome of that consideration effectively and appropriately communicated to all students concerned.

### **Role of students in quality assurance**

35 Students are represented on all deliberative groups concerned with academic quality; it is confirmed that external examiners' reports are made available to such representatives. The comprehensive *Student Representative Handbook*, which the audit team found clear and relevant, is complemented by a training programme offered jointly with the Students' Union, though not all the representatives who met the team had taken the programme, and those present at the meeting did not know of any representative who had. The School-level Staff/Student Liaison Committee, chaired by the Principal, enables representatives from all departments to discuss non-artistic and non-academic matters with senior staff. While this Committee discusses a wide range of important issues, seemingly in a lively and forthright manner, the team considers its value and status, particularly to students,

would be increased were it to have formal standing within the deliberative structure, perhaps along the lines of the University's annual meeting with all departmental representatives, a seemingly effective forum where a wide range of issues is both raised and trailed. It is desirable that the School establish clear reporting lines to a higher institutional level for the Staff/Student Liaison Committee.

36 The School acknowledges that its strategy for involving students in quality assurance is only partially effective; students, while generally satisfied with the representation system, stated that some representatives do not engage effectively with their constituents and that many are unable to attend meetings as a result of timetable clashes. The audit team accepts that the School, in conjunction with the Students' Union, is currently working to remedy this problem.

## **Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities**

37 The Research & Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2009-2013 aims to develop the School's emerging research strategy and create a supportive research environment for staff and students: this includes increasing the quality and quantity of research-led teaching in a manner which acknowledges the complexity of differentiating performance and research in the performing arts. Arrangements to promote staff research include grants; sabbatical leave; a research seminar and workshop series open to staff and students; support for pedagogic as well as discipline-based research; and a triennial international conference on the theme of the reflective conservatoire.

38 In its briefing paper, the School drew attention to a number of initiatives as indicative of its commitment to drawing on research (including performance research) in its pedagogy; it cited in particular a book, produced in conjunction with overseas educational organisations, as an instance of research impacting on the curriculum. The audit team, while confirming the legitimacy and usefulness of these endeavours, found that there remains scope for the further development of a systematic, deliberate and explicit approach to the use of research in teaching: there exists widespread enthusiasm among staff for the School's plans to do so.

## **Other modes of study**

39 Although face-to-face delivery is the dominant mode of study, the School has also produced a thoughtful draft e-learning strategy which suggests, inter alia, that its use of the virtual learning environment, the current purpose of which is mainly information-giving, would be enhanced by a centrally-managed system with functionality across a range of activities, including learner support and assessment. The School is currently considering the most apposite means of policy development.

40 The School makes widespread use of placements, and some students are permitted to substitute professional work for School-based tuition by following a scheme of study devised to ensure the academic equivalence of the activity. Placements are organised and managed variably by departments, but the audit team examined a range of guidance documents for supervisors and students, which it found clearly set out, effective in explaining the nature of placements and aligned with the precepts of the *Code of practice: Section 9*.

## **Resources for learning**

41 The Information Strategy aims not only to support the School's information and knowledge management needs but also to enhance provision to a world-class level: the School acknowledges that, in general, the aims of the Information Strategy are aspirational. The team learned that the management of learning resources has been devolved to the academic directorates, but in close liaison with the Information Technology Manager and

Senior Librarian, both of whom also sit as members of almost all School-level committees. The team confirms that this arrangement, which is supported by an effective and interactive annual and interim reporting system, enables the School to assure itself that resources are managed appropriately and with students' needs in mind. With access not only to the School's library but also to those of the University and the Barbican Centre, students reported general satisfaction with both library and information technology facilities.

42 The School's performance-related resources include theatres, practice rooms, musical instruments and recording studios: in relation to many of these there is currently a significant surplus of demand over supply of which the School is acutely aware (see paragraph 2). Pending the opening of the new building in 2013, the School has attempted to ameliorate the situation for students by a range of interim measures, and its development of the LINK Alliance as a platform of shared services with the Barbican Centre and the London Symphony Orchestra to create what it describes as the world's leading centre for performance, training and education in the arts, has significant enhancement potential.

43 While the audit team found the School's management of learning resources satisfactory, without decisive remedial action students will continue to experience what they currently consider an inadequacy of learning spaces until academic year 2013-2014.

## **Admissions policy**

44 The School's admissions policy states that selection is based purely on talent: applications from potential candidates whose qualifications fall outside or below those prescribed are therefore encouraged. This position, though consistent with statements contained in the Teaching & Learning Strategy, Strategic Plan and Artistic & Educational Strategy, is not articulated in the documents most likely to be read by candidates, such as the prospectus and the website (which states that candidates without standard entry requirements will be admitted only in exceptional circumstances). In addition, the School is committed to interviewing (where necessary by telephone and, when appropriate and possible, overseas) all those it deems able to meet the admissions criteria. Overall, there can be no questioning the School's commitment to widening participation: a significant minority of non-standard candidates is admitted, and the School has meticulous procedures for considering their cases, monitoring its decision-making, and, where appropriate, referring cases to the University for determination. The School will, however, wish to ensure that its information to potential candidates is accurate and up to date: it is desirable that the School ensure that publicly-available admissions criteria accurately reflect its admissions policy.

45 Understandably given the School's dual emphasis on Music and Drama, English language admission criteria differ by programme: when the audit team explored the manner in which the School assures itself as to the fitness for purpose of the criteria concerned, it noted that whereas written work is assessed within the MA/BA Acting programme, candidates' language competence prior to admission is assessed only orally. Associated with this, the Teaching & Learning Board has expressed concern that some students have insufficient English language skills on entry and that some candidates are admitted without having taken a language proficiency test. Whether this is done for practical reasons or (as has occurred on some occasions) because the necessity has been waived on cost grounds, it is clear both that the School is not enforcing its own requirements and that the requirements themselves are in need of further consideration. While the School is beginning to address the regulatory problem by reinforcing its rules, it has yet to review the consistency and appropriateness of its language admission requirements as a whole. It is advisable for the School to ensure the fitness for purpose of its English language admission requirements and their consistent and comprehensive implementation.

46 The Executive Directorate and the Teaching & Learning Board monitor admissions: the former receives progress reports throughout the cycle and a retrospective report also submitted to the latter, which, in addition, receives an analysis of each intake by gender,

ethnicity, age and disability; relevant data is supplied to the programme boards and the University. The audit team confirms that the School has a sound procedure for monitoring, reviewing and responding to admissions data.

## **Student support**

47 That the School gives high priority to student support is evident in the careful and appropriate consideration given to the topic in annual and periodic review. The Student Affairs Department offers a wide range of services, including counselling, financial advice and study skills. It takes steps, in collaboration with academic staff, to identify and act upon the needs of individual students; it has a noteworthy case conference system at which staff review and evaluate such support with the student concerned; a student questionnaire conducted in 2009 showed a high degree of satisfaction with the Department's services (albeit on the basis of a 12 per cent response rate); programme boards pay close attention to the contents and implications of the Department's Annual Report. Students who met the audit team praised the services provided, but found the Department somewhat lacking in visibility and accessibility: some specialist services were insufficiently well-known, including the out-of-hours service, likely to be particularly valuable given the extensive contact hours involved in some performance arts.

48 Students, who were similarly unaware that a formal induction programme is universally available, drew attention to what they regarded as operational disparities, including the fact that some, but not all, students have access to a valued 'buddy' system. While the students were unclear as to why different students have different opportunities for induction and support, the team identified the issue as a further dimension of an earlier recommendation (see also paragraphs 27 and 50).

49 Academic support is available from personal tutors and the head of department: students reported academic staff as accessible and helpful; they saw tutoring, arrangements for which vary from programme to programme, as useful and supportive. The School takes particular steps to protect the interests of the very small proportion of its higher education students below 18 years of age: their entry is individually approved by the University, and staff members who teach them are subject to Criminal Records Bureau checks and made aware of their responsibilities. The School provides special schemes of study for students such as non-standard entrants and those who intermit: these schemes, which are provisionally approved by the programme board, reported to the Teaching & Learning Board and submitted to the University for ratification, aim to help such students achieve learning objectives and outcomes on a basis of parity with their peers.

50 Employability is fundamental to the School, which aims to equip students to be successful professional practitioners working to professional standards by embedding employment demands within the curriculum. Whereas Drama students spoke highly of the benefits of the networking opportunities arranged for them, including visits by agents and established professionals, Music students expressed disappointment at having what they saw as fewer such opportunities (see paragraphs 27 and 48). The audit team was also unable to find evidence of the School giving formal consideration, in annual monitoring or elsewhere, to the implications of the annual survey of First Destination Statistics for its careers guidance strategy. Overall, however, the team confirms the appropriateness of the School's oversight of student support.

## **Staff support (including staff development)**

51 Procedures for staff recruitment, selection, appointment and induction are those of the City of London Corporation, enhanced by the School's requirements, which are designed to be both rigorous and directed towards maintaining excellence in teaching. The audit team, which was informed that only excellent teachers are appointed, particularly notes that in

Music the selection process normally includes leading a master class. The team confirms the view expressed by academic staff that induction is appropriate; it will be enhanced by the inclusion of the forthcoming Academic Handbook, which appears likely to contain a comprehensive introduction to the School and guidance on good practice in teaching and the use of learning resources. Although the School does not offer structured training in teaching and assessment for newly-appointed staff, several such staff members have been supported in taking an award-bearing programme elsewhere. The team noted that the School, in spite of relying heavily on visiting and fractional teachers, does not have a policy or strategy to define the categories of staff required or expected to undertake such study, anticipating, however, that an increased, but unspecified, number of staff will do so. It is desirable for the School to establish and implement a policy for the systematic training of staff appointed to teaching roles.

52 The School adopts the City of London Corporation's staff appraisal scheme, which teaching staff report as offering appropriate opportunities for self-reflection, feedback and discussion of staff development needs. Appraisal is linked to progression and pay. After a pilot scheme within the School, the Corporation approved the use of the Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA) for all academic roles, to create a clearer path for career development, promotion, the recognition of esteem and the production of a career development and promotion process for hourly-paid teaching staff. The audit team learned that the School's continuing development of HERA has been constructively handled and well-received by many teaching staff.

53 The School does not have a universal peer observation scheme, though there exist informal opportunities to observe the work of colleagues through team-teaching and participation in assessment panels.

54 The audit team examined the opportunities available for staff development; these include away-days; an annual re-induction day; mentoring development; enrolment for postgraduate qualifications; training for research supervisors; and support for research projects and conference attendance. These opportunities appear fit for purpose, though take-up is variable. The team particularly noted the re-induction day for all teaching staff, which takes place close to the start of each academic year and was found to be effective in furthering academic staff members' awareness of the breadth of work carried out in the School; facilitating the sharing of practice and experience in such areas as co-teaching and co-mentoring; and enabling exploration of the potential for joint working in other areas. Noting also the enthusiasm shown by staff members who have attended these events and the examples they provided of the impact of the day on their work, the annual School-wide staff re-induction event is identified as a feature of good practice.

55 Teaching staff reported that the quality of their teaching is recognised by heads of department, and that they consider themselves appropriately valued. Subject to the recommendation contained in this section, the School has generally effective systems for supporting its teaching staff and enabling them to maintain high levels of professional development.

56 The audit team confirms that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the School's present and likely future management of the learning opportunities available to its students.

## **Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement**

57 Although the School does not offer an explicit definition of quality enhancement, its approach is described in the Teaching & Learning Strategy and, in particular, in an associated action plan, which outlines proposals with wide-ranging implications for enhancement. The School regards enhancement as involving 'the pursuit of excellence' and believes an ethos of enhancement is embedded in all its educational activities. The School

describes the direction for enhancement as embodied in (in summary): (i) the forthcoming new building (see paragraphs 2 and 42); (ii) extending and deepening (particularly practice-led) research; (iii) the development of structural partnerships with a view to enhancing learning through increased coaching from professionals, more performance opportunities and an expanded research culture; and (iv) opening the School to a broader range of people, as new audiences and future practitioners. The audit team confirms that the staff is aware of and engages keenly with these themes, which contribute to enhancing the quality of provision.

58 The audit team notes that the annual programme evaluation template provides for the identification of good practice in the programme concerned; at present, however, this section of the form is variably well completed, and, where good practice is identified, little discussion takes place, either at programme boards or Teaching & Learning Board, as to how it might best be disseminated or used to serve any strategic purpose.

59 While the School aspires to become an international centre of excellence and a global leader in music and drama training (see paragraph 4) and engages in a wide range of activities designed to develop its educational mission, it lacks a clear conceptualisation of quality enhancement and has yet to focus on identifying opportunities for developing one. It follows that while it is committed to ensuring and developing the quality of learning experiences, it does not have a planned and strategic approach to, or agreed definition of, enhancement, relying on a range of formal and informal processes based on a shared ethos for improving the learning opportunities of its students. It is desirable for the School to take a more strategic approach to improving the quality of learning opportunities.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

60 The School has no collaborative provision as defined in the *Code of practice: Section 2*, nor does it offer flexible or distributed learning.

## **Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students**

61 The School's research tradition has undergone significant recent development. The School did not participate in the 2006 special review of research degree programmes but did enter the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, as a result of which it received quality-related funding for the first time (see paragraph 4). It has developed its research infrastructure particularly by producing a strengthened research strategy and appointing an Assistant Principal for Research and Development, and its research environment by adding its own validated research degree programme (MPhil/DMus) to the pre-existing Masters/Doctorate in Musical Arts (MMA/DMA), offered jointly with the University. It aims to expand research degree numbers significantly by 2016, mapping its research programmes on to research clusters identified in the Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy: at present the audit team confirms a correlation between the fields of study embraced by the postgraduate research degrees and staff members' research activities.

62 University and School share responsibility for the selection, admission and induction of students for the MMA/DMA, with the University mainly responsible for induction. For the MPhil/DMus, operational responsibility resides with the School, which follows the procedures established for admissions to taught degrees in composition. For both programmes applicants are normally required to have completed a relevant taught master's degree.

63 Following admission, the primary supervisor takes responsibility for induction. The supervisor for the MMA/DMA is a member of University staff supported by an adviser from the School to provide principal study teaching in a pattern decided in consultation with the supervisor. Day-to-day research, supervisions and assessment events take place on both



campuses. In the case of the MPhil/DMus the School appoints two internal supervisors and a personal tutor on the basis of eligibility criteria agreed and used by the University. The responsibilities of supervisors for both programmes are broadly similar and confirmed as satisfactory.

64 For both programmes, students initially register for the associated master's-level degree, leading to a formal process of review and suitability for upgrading at the end of the first year; slightly different procedures exist, reflecting the different nature of the degrees: the audit team confirms both are fit for purpose. Research skills training, a core element of both programmes, is provided by the University for the MMA/DMA and by the School for the MPhil/DMus: the latter comprises three seminar-based modules in each of the three years of study, developing skills relevant and appropriate to the stages of progress. The team, noting the carefully-planned and incremental approach to this training programme, the extremely positive comments from students familiar with it, and the extent to which it not only reflects but also considerably transcends the requirements of the Research Councils' joint statement on skills training, identifies the scope and content of the School's research training programme for the MPhil/DMus as a feature of good practice.

65 The University has overall responsibility for the management of feedback for the MMA/DMA; for the MPhil/DMus the Assistant Principal (Research and Academic Development) is developing feedback mechanisms for students, supervisors, review panels and examiners in accordance with validation requirements, though as a new programme only in its second year of operation, many aspects of these mechanisms have yet to be fully implemented. For both programmes, assessment is a University responsibility.

66 The supervision and support arrangements for postgraduate research students are satisfactory and meet the expectations of the *Code of practice*.

## **Section 7: Published information**

67 The School, which is committed to maintaining a strong corporate image in externally published information, has identified the Marketing & Communications Manager as a single control point for the prospectus, website and some internal materials. The Registry is responsible for other materials designed for students, including the Applicant Portal, the *Before You Leave Home Handbook* (which the audit team found likely to be very helpful) and the *Student Handbook*. The production of programme handbooks is the responsibility of the department concerned, with the Head of Registry Services ensuring the consistency of programme-specific information with programme and module specifications. Programme handbooks, which are included in annual programme evaluation, specify the requirements for passing a module and for progression; they are complemented by departmental handbooks and intranet literature, which provide additional detailed and practical information.

68 To facilitate liaison among the main producers of information for publication, a Communications Working Group, with representation from across the School, gathers feedback from departments on all forms of communications and their content, discusses developments, and monitors website usage statistics and other statistics.

69 Students confirmed to the audit team that the handbooks are clear, concise and accurate, and provide all necessary information about the organisation of teaching, access to resources, staff contacts, and module content and assessment. They also confirmed the completeness and usefulness of the website, in particular the information provided for applicants, thereby confirming the results of an internal survey which showed that 92 per cent of newly-enrolled students found the prospectus and website contained all the information they needed to apply, and 89 per cent found them easy to understand. The team, subject to the previously-mentioned qualification concerning the consistency of presentation of the School's Admissions Policy (see paragraph 44), endorses this view.

70 Each year, the School publishes an authoritative (Gold Copy) internal document for each programme to act as the key reference point and to incorporate all amendments approved for that year. In response to past inaccuracies it has instituted rectification procedures, the effectiveness of which it will doubtless monitor with care.

71 It is confirmed that the externally available information required by the Higher Education Funding Council for England guidelines is published on the School's website, and that in the absence of evidence to the contrary the teaching quality information on the Unistats website appears accurate and complete.

72 Reliance can largely be placed on the accuracy of the information the School publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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