Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts

April 2009

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts from 30 March to 3 April 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the Institute offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA or the Institute) is that:

● confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that are validated by Liverpool John Moores University

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

In the Briefing Paper, LIPA states that reviewing the level to which individual programmes achieve the goals and priorities determined with the Strategic Plan is central to enhancement. The methods used include: embedding enhancement within the strategic planning process; the professional development of staff and support of staff research; membership of and input from organisations that have a direct link with the performing arts economies; visiting lecturers attached to each discipline; employer/professional engagement with programme delivery; annual review cycles and periodic programme reviews. The team was able to confirm that the main drivers for quality enhancement were both internal and external review. However, the team noted that, in some instances, in order to work in a collegial manner and in an attempt to agree a collective view, some initiatives to enhance quality had become protracted and could perhaps be brought to a swifter conclusion.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

At the time of the audit, the Institute had no postgraduate research students.

Published information

The audit found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the Institute publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of the awards that are validated by Liverpool John Moores University. However, internal programme and module information published to students could benefit from a more rigorous and consistent approach.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

● the annual review days held in November which draw upon the annual programme review process as part of finalising the Institutional Quality Report (paragraph 74)

● the attention given, as part of the undergraduate admissions process, to providing auditions which reflect current practice and course content (paragraph 112)

● the Institute's proactive strategy towards enhancing the development of staff through their engagement with the Higher Education Academy and support for research and scholarly activity (paragraph 139).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- ensure that the Institute's accreditation status with Liverpool John Moores University (as the degree awarding body) is subject to a written, legally-binding and regularly reviewed contractual agreement signed by the two institutions (paragraph 11)

- develop further the management and organisation of its formal boards and committees, and the exchange of information between them, to ensure each is discharging its responsibilities for the management of quality and standards effectively and transparently (paragraphs 18, 19, 20, 22, 36, 59, 91, 101, 113)

- implement, in collaboration with the University, revised procedures in the Institute that will enhance the role of external examiners in securing the standards of awards (paragraphs 29, 35, 38)

- undertake with the University (as the degree awarding body) a review of the Institute's degree classification profile across its undergraduate programmes with due regard to national comparators across the sector (paragraphs 53, 55).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- engage with the *Code of practice* in a systematic way at institutional level to develop further its policies and procedures for the assurance of academic quality and standards (paragraphs 60, 62)

- keep under review the annual monitoring process to ensure that the deliberative structure meets the Institute's aspirations for overall consistency of reporting, the implementation of action plans and the achievement of targets (paragraphs 59, 73, 75, 77, 84, 87)

- take steps to improve the effectiveness of formal student representation and participation on boards and committees (paragraph 89, 91)

- improve the timeliness of enhancement initiatives in order to have greater impact on the experience of current students (paragraphs 87, 120, 142, 145, 148).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   The Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts (LIPA) is a small specialist higher education institution. It began teaching students in 1996 and was designated as a higher education institution (HEI) in 2006. Its focus is the performing arts through collaborative working and one of its aims is an outcome of sustained employment. Its mission, as described in its most recent strategic plan, is 'to provide exemplary and distinctive vocational performing arts and related education and training'. It provides a range of pre-higher education programmes which lead to LIPA diplomas. At undergraduate level it provides eight full-time BA honours programmes on which there are 598 students registered in 2008-09 and four MA programmes on which there are 73 students registered. One of the MA programmes is full-time and the remaining three integrated MAs are part-time. Thirteen per cent of the student population are international students.

2   The Institute's higher education programmes are validated by Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) as the awarding body which confers the qualifications. This arrangement has been in place since the Institute's inception. The relationship between the Institute and the University is managed by the University's Partnerships Quality and Standards Panel which, on a

periodic basis, undertakes a formal institutional review. The audit team was advised that, since 2002, the nature of the relationship with LJMU was that of an accredited institution to the University and that this relationship was defined in Appendix 1 to a document published by the University, Accreditation of collaborative provision guidance manual. The Institute acts as a shadow school of LJMU and reports to the University's faculty of Media, Arts and Social Science. When the Institute became directly funded in 2006 a service-level agreement was introduced, the detail of which is reviewed annually on an operational basis via meetings and emails.

The information base for the audit

3   The Institute provided the audit team with a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The index to the Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the institution's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of the programmes validated by Liverpool John Moores University and the quality of its educational provision. The team had a hard copy of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper; in addition the team had access to the institution's intranet.

4   A group of student representatives produced a student written submission (SWS) setting out the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management. The audit team found this a helpful contribution and referred to it during the course of the audit.

5   In addition, the audit team had access to:

●   reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example, the report of the 2008 institutional review conducted by LJMU, and the Joint Audio Media Education Services (JAMES) accreditation report of 2008)

●   the institution's internal documents

●   the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

6   This was the first QAA Institutional audit undertaken of the Institute. Key external reviews prior to this include the HEFCE commissioned QAA review in 2002, and the LJMU institutional reviews of 2003 and 2008. In addition, reference to the Institute is included in comments in the report of the QAA Collaborative provision audit of LJMU in March 2006.

7   Prior to designation as an HEI, HEFCE requested QAA to undertake a review which took place in December 2002. The outcome of this review comprised five recommendations. Actions in response to these recommendations were described in the Briefing Paper and they include: the rationalisation of deliberative and executive committee structure and establishment of the LIPA Quality Committee and the Teaching and Learning Board; review of reciprocal membership of LIPA and LJMU committees; professional development in subject expertise up to and including master's level and in national quality and standards matters. HEFCE designation was granted on 1 August 2006.

8   Institutional reviews (see paragraph 13) by LJMU have taken place in 2003 and 2008. The institutional review of December 2003 approved the partnership between the Institute and the University to continue for three years (to December 2006). Recommendations to be addressed by the Institute were:

●   to ensure that their investment in resources (staffing, accommodation and learning resources) continued to match their aspirations in the development of the postgraduate area, as it had already impacted on the experience of current undergraduate students

- to keep under review its policies to encourage widening participation from disadvantaged groups.

In addition, LIPA was to continue to be kept aware of LJMU action plans in response to the *Code of practice*, published by QAA.

9   The subsequent institutional review of LIPA, which took place in May 2008, confirmed the following outcomes for the Institute's attention:

- to review the way in which external examiners function in programmes across the provision, with particular regard to the issue of attendance at and input into module assessment boards, and the way in which subject external examiners are represented at programme assessment boards. This was to align the Institute with the University's practice and provide an effective external perspective, thus ensuring security of standards

- to continue the implementation of the new workload model that has been developed and keep its operation, and the way in which it is affecting staffing levels, under review

- to resolve as quickly as possible the issue of timeliness of written feedback to students

- to formalise LJMU membership on LIPA committees by inclusion in the terms of reference of those committees.

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

10   As noted in paragraph 2, the Institute is in a validation partnership with LJMU and has accredited status. The audit team was provided with a copy of the legal agreement between the Institute and the University dated 31 March 1995 which was binding for a period of eight years. This states that 'All aspects of this Agreement are subject to annual evaluation and review' and that the Agreement can only be varied in writing between the persons authorised by the parties: the Provost at the University and the Chief Executive of the Institution. In addition, the team was provided with an undated Service Level Agreement with various aspects annotated 'no longer applicable'. The institutional review of LIPA undertaken by the University in 2003 recommended that the partnership between the Institute and LJMU should continue for three years (without reference to accredited status). The report of the 2008 institutional review conducted by the University recommended to the LJMU Academic Board that the Institute be approved as an accredited status institution for a further five years. The team was left uncertain with respect to the formal status of the Institute between 2006 and 2008 and of the nature of any contractual agreements with the University after 2003.

11   It was not clear to the audit team how changes, such as outcomes of the re-accreditation process in addition to the approval of the renewed 5-year accreditation, are reflected in a legal or institutionally agreed document. No current contractual agreement with LJMU as the Institute's awarding body appeared to exist. The team recommends that it is advisable to ensure that the Institute's accreditation status with LJMU (as the degree awarding body) is subject to a written, legally-binding and regularly reviewed contractual agreement signed by the two institutions.

12   The Institute's relationship to the University is governed and managed by three sets of policies and documents which outline how standards are set and managed:

- the LJMU Accreditation of collaborative provision guidance manual in which institutional level responsibilities are defined, including processes and protocols related to quality assurance

- the service-level agreement in which the level of operational service is quantified and contracted

- validated programme documentation which includes programme specifications.

The Briefing Paper states that the benefits of accredited status include the following:

- the Institute is permitted to design its own programmes that lead to a University award

- the provision of staff development opportunities between LJMU and LIPA

- participation in teaching and learning developments with LJMU

- a proactive and collaborative approach to quality assurance.

13   On a periodic basis, the University undertakes an institutional review (IR) of the Institute, the purpose of which is to assure the University that the standards and quality of programmes leading to a University award are being maintained and that there is an appropriate learning environment for the students. The focus of the IR process is to examine and evaluate the relationship between the accredited institution and the University and the operation of the processes that have been devolved to the accredited institution. The IR is intended to be a two-way process, offering the opportunity to discuss the operation of the partnership and to provide feedback on areas that may require further attention. The audit team found that the partnership with the University, as evidenced in the 2008 IR report, has been a supportive and effective relationship. An important part of the IR is that it should lead to the enhancement of the quality of the provision, the sharing of good practice and, where appropriate, dissemination to colleagues. As noted in paragraph 8 above, two IRs have been undertaken by the University. Although the recommendations are acted upon, the audit team noted that, on occasion, it took some time before appropriate action was implemented by the Institute (for example the ongoing issue of timeliness in providing students with feedback and the ways in which external examiners function). The team was of the view that a critical review of the timeliness of responses to the IR recommendations would be beneficial.

14   All programmes have been designed and operate within LJMU's Modular Framework (UMF) which comprises structural, award and assessment regulations. In agreement with the University, the Institute is permitted to vary the UMF in a number of ways; the variations are set out in the LIPA Principles and Procedures for Higher Education which is issued annually. Variations which have thus far been permitted concern arrangements for modules with multiple assessments, the profile of permitted credit ratings, arrangements for the late submission of course work and referrals, the rules of compensation in the case of failed modules, the role of the Chief External Examiner, and the appeals procedures.

15   According to the LIPA Principles and Procedures for Higher Education, the Institute is regarded, in the context of the UMF, as a school of the University and its Director of Higher Education is regarded as a Director of school. It reports to the LJMU Faculty of Media, Arts and Social Science (MASS).

16   The LIPA Council is responsible for the determination of the educational character and mission of the Institute and has oversight of its activities. The primary internal committee for the maintenance of standards and the quality of learning opportunities of LIPA's higher education provision is the Teaching and Learning Board (TLB), a formal subcommittee of the LIPA Council, chaired by the Principal. The TLB annually monitors the strategic development of teaching and learning, reviews existing and new partnerships and qualifications, and confirms honorary awards.

17   The primary subcommittee of the TLB is the Institute Quality Committee (IQC), chaired by the Director of Higher Education, which has delegated responsibility for the operational management of the principles, procedures and systems for the maintenance of quality and standards.

18   The audit team found that the range of committees generally worked well together on an informal level but would advise that the record of meetings should be strengthened in order to capture the debate and interplay of decision-making between committees in respect of both quality and standards. An improved record was advisable in order to support both the security

and transparency of decision-making. The context of the meeting, the items discussed and the decisions reached on occasions were difficult to track by the audit team. In addition the team was of the view that the frequency of meetings might benefit from review in order to expedite business.

19   There are also Directorate (strategy) and Directorate (operational) meetings. The audit team, on occasion, was unclear as to the different functions which the executive and deliberative structures were each expected to perform. Furthermore, the IQC exercises key responsibilities with respect to quality and standards under powers delegated from the TLB and reports directly to the LJMU MASS Faculty Quality Committee via the Institutional Quality Report (IQR). At this level, the team was unable to distinguish clearly a differentiation of roles relating to governance and executive (operational) functions in terms of assuring quality and standards. For example, the Director of Higher Education is not only responsible for producing the IQR and its recommendations but also for presenting them to a committee which he chairs. The team was of the view that it would be advisable for this potential conflict to be avoided.

20   The Director of Higher Education is directly accountable to the Principal for the quality and standards of LIPA higher education provision and line manages the programme leaders and the administrative and registry teams. In the course of the audit, the audit team learnt that the Director of Higher Education's responsibilities include: chairing the following committees (as identified in the LIPA Committee Handbook): Module Assessment Boards, Programme Assessment Boards, the HE Operational Planning Group, the Institute Student Advisory Board, the Institute Accreditation Committee, and the IQC; vice-chair of the TLB; membership of the Directorate (strategy) meeting, the Directorate (operational) meeting and the Professional Development Committee; writing the IQR and presenting it both to the IQC and to the to MASS Faculty Quality Committee; and involvement in approving the Institute's prospectus. In the team's view, this range and level of involvement (as evidenced through documentation and discussion) may represent an over-reliance on a single individual in both governance and executive (operational) aspects of quality assurance and standards. The Institute may wish to consider ways of revising some internal responsibilities to produce arrangements less dependent on a single post-holder.

21   A programme leader/subject head leads each programme or cognate group of programmes. Programme boards are responsible for the overall effectiveness and quality of individual programmes of study, including delivery, coherence and standards. Specifically, programme boards ensure that the programme operates in accordance with procedures set out in LIPA's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook and approves the annual programme review report for submission to the IQC. The procedures in the LIPA Programme Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook operate within the LJMU quality framework.

22   The audit team concluded that the institutional framework for managing standards had the capacity to be effective but the team recommended that it was advisable to develop further the management and organisation of the Institute's formal boards and committees, and the exchange of information between them, to ensure each is discharging its responsibilities for the management of quality and standards effectively and transparently.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

23   As noted in paragraph 14 above, the Institute operates within LJMU's Modular Framework (UMF). In addition to programmes being designed and developed consistent with UMF requirements, programme approval is conducted according to the LJMU Validation of a new programme procedures manual culminating in a validation event chaired by the University and including external members. Standards are monitored through the annual programme review (APR) cycle which leads to the production of the Institutional Quality Report (IQR), a process which the University has approved for LIPA on a bespoke basis. The interrogation of academic standards also forms an important component of the periodic review of programmes which is conducted in accordance with the LJMU Programme Review Procedures Manual.

24   Award standards are also monitored through the operation of the module and programme assessment boards which are conducted in accordance with the UMF.

25   As the majority of the mechanisms listed above are also concerned with the management of academic quality, they will be discussed in more detail in Section 3. Mechanisms most closely associated with academic standards are discussed below.

External examiners

26   The regulations of the validating institution (LJMU) require external examiners to be associated with all major assessments and module results that contribute to the final mark of any target award. Directors of schools are responsible for the nominations of external examiners using criteria for appointment which are prescribed by the University. These criteria ensure an appropriate balance is achieved between academic and professional practitioners in securing examiners of appropriate standing and expertise. The LIPA Director of Higher Education is responsible for the nomination of external examiners which are then considered by the University via the Media, Arts and Social Science (MASS) Faculty Quality Committee and the Quality and Standards Committee, acting on behalf of Academic Board. Similarly, the arrangements for briefing and supporting external examiners are prescribed by the the University which carries ultimate responsibility for the assurance of standards in all LIPA programmes for which they are the validating authority.

27   The University requires all external examiners to be supplied with the UMF assessment regulations and other documentation which briefs and prepares them for their role, including a copy of the annual monitoring report of the relevant programme of study/route. In accordance with the requirements of the UMF, the Institute is responsible for ensuring that each external examiner is suitably briefed on the relevant programme of study.

28   External examiners are required to moderate a sample of assessed material from a selection of modules at level 2, level 3 and M level, to attend at least one Module Assessment Board (MAB) at the final level of a programme of study per academic year, and also attend the programme assessment boards (PABs) (or the relevant subcommittees) prior to level 3 recommendations for awards. Since a significant proportion of the work assessed for such awards involves live practical work, LIPA considers it especially important for external examiners to be present at such examinations. To compensate for these extra demands on external examiners in assuring standards at the module level, the University has approved a modification to the normal expectations of the validating institution that there is compulsory attendance of external examiners at PABs. The absence of externals examiners at PABs is compensated for by the presence of a chief external examiner, an appointment which has now been in place for four years.

29   External examiners are required to report annually on the conduct of the assessments just concluded and on issues related to assessment. The purpose of the report is to enable the LJMU Academic Board to judge whether the programme is meeting its stated objectives and to make any necessary improvements, either immediately or at the next review as appropriate. The external

examiners have authority to report directly to the chair of the Academic Board if they are concerned about standards of assessment and performance, particularly where they consider that assessments are being conducted in a way that jeopardises either the fair treatment of individual students or the standard of the University's awards. The audit team noted that whereas some external examiners provided useful feedback in their reports, other reports were less satisfactory, in some instances providing no more than one word (yes/no) responses to the specific questions asked. It would be beneficial in this context for the Institute, in partnership with the University, to review the arrangements for the induction and training of external examiners, with a view to receiving more informative reports which might also contribute to enhancement.

30   The reports of external examiners are reviewed at programme boards and reported on by the Institute Quality Committee (IQC) as part of the annual IQR which is in turn considered by the Teaching and Learning Board (TLB). These reports, however, are not currently made available to students and it is suggested that the Institute should develop a suitable mechanism for communicating this information to student representatives.

31   The report on the 2008 institutional review of LIPA by the University included two recommendations specific to the context of external examining. The first was a recommendation to review the way in which external examiners function in programmes across the provision, with particular regard to the issue of attendance at and input into MABs, and the way in which subject external examiners are represented at PABs. The stated purpose of this recommendation was to align the Institute with University practice and to provide an effective external perspective, thus ensuring security of standards.

32   This recommendation was discussed by the Institute in July 2008. The Institute felt that the existing process was robust and that the minutes of assessment boards had not reflected the actual practice and this was likely to have given rise to the concern of the review panel. It also agreed that the process would be fully articulated in the forthcoming annual IQR.

33   The 2007-08 IQR re-affirmed the current arrangements for both module and programme assessment boards. However, despite the action plan for the University's 2008 institutional review indicating that the Institute would respond to the recommendation on external examining via the 2007-08 IQR, the IQR does not appear to make progress, beyond acknowledging poor communications with external examiners and differing understandings of the external examiners' role on the part of programme leaders, in addressing the University's concerns about the patterns of attendance at assessment boards and its consequent recommendation that there should be a review of the way in which external examiners function. The University's report of the 2008 institutional review had already noted that the Institute recognised that it was important to reflect the input of the external examiners within the MAB minutes and that the Institute would, in future, ensure the minutes recorded their input. The current status of the Institute's responses to the first of the recommendations in the 2008 institutional review report concerning external examiners is thus unclear.

34   The audit team confirmed from its study of the minutes of assessment boards for 2006-07 and 2007-08 that there was not always evidence of the presence of the associated external examiner nor a record of their views submitted by other means. Furthermore, the reports of both the former and current chief external examiners point to concerns about the attendance of external examiners at assessment boards and to the lack of supporting information (or otherwise) at PABs from the subject-specific external examiner.

35   Given the evidence in the University's institutional review report of a lack of shared understanding among programme leaders within the Institute about the precise role of, and expectations for, external examiners agreed with University, and the evident concerns as to whether the attendance patterns were optimising the contribution of external examiners, the audit team came to the view that the Institute's considerations to date do not meet the expectations of the recommendation of the 2008 institutional review. It recommends that, in

order to secure a more effective external perspective in line with precept 3 of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, it is advisable for the Institute to implement, in collaboration with the University, revised procedures in the Institute that will enhance the role of external examiners in securing the standards of awards.

36   In addition, the team recommended that the procedures for recording the business of exam boards in the associated minutes are reviewed to ensure more thorough reporting of the actions taken in the case of special circumstances, the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), and the exercise of any discretion in accordance with the provisions of the UMF.

37   The second recommendation specific to the context of external examining in the 2008 institutional review, identified as an action point for the University, was to revisit the membership of PABs at the Institute with respect to the inclusion of a member of staff who is not associated with any of the programmes being considered by the board. The audit team noted that the LJMU MASS Faculty Quality Committee (FQC) has agreed that in future the chair of the FQC will attend the LIPA PABs. At the time of the audit, the team was informed that the Institute was in the process of requesting that representation from the University should also be extended to MABs.

38   Although the system in place for external examiners clearly has the capacity to deliver what is required in this context in accordance with the *Code of practice*, the audit team shares the concerns of the University that the ways in which external examiners attend and input into MABs and PABs needs to be reviewed in order to maximise their contribution to securing standards.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

39   The audit team learnt that the Institute was reliant on the University in making use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in the context of the core framework documents which had been developed by the University. The Institute confirmed in meetings with the audit team that it had not itself consistently engaged with revisions to the Academic Infrastructure. The Institute did state, however, that *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) is used as a core reference point for a range of policies and practices within the Institute. It forms a central part of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and of the processes leading up to programme reviews and new validations.

40   The LJMU validation and programme review procedures expect the FHEQ to be used by programme teams to ensure that programme outcomes are appropriate for the intended award and that the qualification title conveys accurate information about each programme of study. Recent LIPA programme review documentation seen by the audit team demonstrated a more informed and appropriate engagement with the FHEQ than hitherto.

41   The University's procedures require programme teams to use available subject benchmark statements in the design and development of provision and its review. The programme rationale in the validation and review documentation should contain information about why and how the statements have informed development. In discussion with staff, the audit team learnt that there had been limited discussion of subject benchmark statements, discussion only taking place at the time of course review and not on a routine annual basis. Benchmark statements are, however, referenced on all LIPA programme specifications; in some cases multiple benchmark statements are referred to. Programme leaders confirmed in discussion with the team that revisions to subject benchmark statements are discussed at programme level and that appropriate revisions are made to relevant course documentation. However, the team could not identify an institutional approach to oversight of engagement with revisions to subject benchmark statements and the identification of any changes which might flow from these.

42   Programme specifications viewed by the audit team were clear and comprehensive, and include reference to aims and programme outcomes. Programme specifications clearly outline the programme structure, including modules, credits and award requirements. The programme specifications are reviewed and approved by the validation/review panel as part of the event and subsequently approved by IQC. However, in discussion with students they were unclear about their usefulness.

43   In respect of professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs), one of the Institute's programmes, BA Sound Technology, has been accredited for the third time (for the period 2008-2010) by the Joint Audio Media Education Services (JAMES). The Institute is in the process of seeking further accreditation from the Conference of Drama Schools (CDS) and the Council for Dance Education and Training (CDET); however, at the time of the audit, final confirmation had not been received. At the current time the Institute does not involve PSRBs in the formal process of programme development and approval or review.

44   External expert opinion is required by LJMU procedures in the institutional review process, new programme approval (2 external advisers), and programme review processes (2 external advisers) in order to assure academic standards. External advisers are used consistently across the Institute as evidenced by outcome-based reports.

45   The audit team found that the Institute took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards but were of the view that institutional oversight of engagement with revisions to subject benchmark statements would be beneficial.

46   The Institute confirmed that it understood that the LJMU UMF conformed to the FHEQ which itself was aligned to the European Standards and Guidelines. No additional alignment has been undertaken by LIPA.

Assessment policies and regulations

47   The overarching policies and regulations for assessment are those of the validating institution (LJMU) and are detailed in the UMF. Variations specific to the Institute are detailed in the LIPA Principles for Procedures for Higher Education. These are interpreted and enhanced with level indicators, assessment criteria and moderation procedures in the LIPA Teaching Learning and Assessment Handbook (TLAH). The permitted variations to the UMF regulations are designed to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the student's learning experience at the Institute and to ensure clarity of the programmes regulatory framework within the context of the Institute as a separately constituted institution. These permitted variations are reviewed annually by the IQC and the LJMU MASS Faculty Quality Committee acting on behalf of the University.

48   As noted in paragraph 15, a key principle of the partnership arrangement between LIPA and LJMU is that the Institute should be regarded as a school of the University and likewise the Institute's Director of Higher Education should be regarded as the Director of a school. The close working relationship between the Institute and the University permits the Institute to operate its appeals procedures as if a school of the University and not as either a local or distant franchise. Where committee or board quora require 'members of university teaching staff', the Institute's teaching staff are considered as such.

49   The primary source of information on assessment policies and regulations for students is to be found in The Green Book. This document reproduces the relevant information provided in the TLAH and also expands upon other aspects of the learning experience, including the scope and nature of the feedback that is to be provided to students.

50   In terms of the implementation of assessment policies and regulations, the team reviewed the minutes for module and programme assessment boards, along with additional documentation provided as part of the two sampling trails, the comments of external examiners, and the consideration of issues arising in the context of the annual IQR, its approval by the IQC and its subsequent consideration by the LIPA TLB and the LJMU MASS Faculty Quality Committee. Whereas external examiners are generally satisfied with the procedures followed there were a few exceptions which have required corrective action. It was possible to confirm that specific issues concerning assessment arising from external examiners' reports are appropriately addressed as part of the processes of annual programme review.

51   The audit team was less convinced with the Institute's engagement with assessment issues that invite proactive reflection that goes beyond the information specifically provided in external examiner reports. Whereas the latter provide the key measure of quality assurance, there are other aspects which merit further consideration by the Institute prior to the annual monitoring and approval of the assessment processes by the University (examples of which are discussed in the following paragraphs).

52   It is noted, for example, that as the result of recent developments in terms of improving the value of student feedback it is proposed to articulate assessment criteria to a higher degree of granularity, both in terms of the specific level of assessment and also module-specific considerations. The audit team concluded that the development and implementation of these additional criteria have implications for the marking of work, and their possible impact in this context would need to be carefully evaluated; however, there was no evidence that these implications have yet been recognised and appropriately considered.

53   In particular, the audit team also noted the wide variation in the proportion of First class degrees awarded by different programmes, ranging from 6.9 per cent for Theatre and Performance Technology in 2007-08 to 40 per cent for Performing Arts Music in 2006-07. Although the external examiners confirm that the standards of student performance are comparable with similar programmes and subjects in other UK institutions with which they are familiar, it does not appear that these significant differences between degree classifications have been subject to further investigation to ascertain the reasons for the differences. As part of these processes of reflection and evaluation, consideration could usefully be given to a systematic and suitably embracing survey of the award profiles of similar degrees in comparator institutions.

54   In a related context, the audit team noted that the report from the Chief External Examiner for 2006-07 observed that, in the case of students found to be on a borderline, especially for a 'first' or 'upper second' it would have been helpful to have evidence of support or otherwise from the subject-specific external examiner. This observation adds further weight to the recommendations made in paragraphs 30-38 above specifically concerned with external examining, but it clearly has a bearing on the procedures used to confirm or otherwise the award of a borderline 'first'.

55   Whereas responsibility for the assurance of standards ultimately rests with the University, the specialist nature of the degree programmes at the Institute underlines the value of the Institute taking a more proactive role in this context. The team recommends that it is advisable for the Institute to undertake with the University (as the degree awarding body) a review of the Institute's degree classification profile across its undergraduate programmes with due regard to national comparators. It should also reflect more proactively on the issues arising from assessment at an institutional level, perhaps as part of the annual review day where, in the context of enhancement, it is possible to share views with representatives of the University.

Management information - statistics

56   Management information is collected across the life-cycle of a student. This includes recruitment and enrolment, progression and achievement. These are holistically reviewed through the APR process and more regularly by the directorate and the programme teams. The data informs decisions to be made about admissions, recruitment, quality assurance and enhancement.

57   The evaluation of statistical data is integral to the APR process and the outcomes of these deliberations and any action points arising form part of the annual IQR. Specific consideration is given in this context to the admissions data for each programme, student progression and achievement, the NSS, data from professional bodies and associations, and degree classifications, in accordance with the procedures articulated in the LIPA Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook. Employment data is generated from an annual survey of graduates three years after they leave with a typical success rate of 80 per cent. The outcomes of this survey are published in an in-house produced magazine which also includes articles on selected groups of students. Despite being specified as a prescribed part of the IQR in the LIPA Principles and Procedures for Higher Education, student employment data appeared not to be analysed as part of the IQR. In the view of the audit team, this might be remedied given the the importance of student employment as an indicator of the success of the LIPA strategy.

58   From September 2008, all student records have been maintained using the Institute's own student records system (SITS). Prior to this, student records data were exclusively maintained on the University's OSS system. The rationale for the transfer was, as a designated higher education institution, the Institute's responsibility for managing statistical returns to HEFCE and HESA and also the requirement of an in-house system would make effective use of both internal and external statistical data.

59   From a scrutiny of the documentation provided, the audit team can confirm that comprehensive statistical data is generated for the APR process, and that relevant data is also available for consideration by programme boards. There is evidence that areas such as the outcomes of the NSS are subject to close scrutiny, providing useful evidence to support initiatives such as improving the arrangements for assessment feedback, and that admissions data is used to identify significant features and trends. In the case of other areas, however, notably student progression and degree results, it would appear that the significance of statistical data in identifying trends and anomalies is not being explored to maximum advantage. A more proactive engagement with such information would also secure improvements more generally to the deliberative structures which underpin APR in terms of the quantitative aspects of implementing action plans and meeting targets.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

60   It is not clear that the Institute regularly reviews the various sections of the *Code of practice*; it would appear that the Institute relies on the University for implementation of many aspects of the *Code*. No systematic ownership at Institute level would appear to be in place to map and review the various sections of the *Code of practice* routinely.

61   For example, the Institute does not currently have a policy on work-based and placement learning. As employability is high on the Institution's agenda this lack of a consistent approach would appear to be at odds with the institutional intentions. The audit team heard in discussion with staff at meetings that many programmes have some element of work-based or placement learning built into them and which, from the examples discussed, appeared to provide very real benefits providing students with an insight into the world of work. The relevant section of the

Code could fruitfully be used as a reference point in the further development of its arrangements for work-based and placement learning.

62   The audit team found that the Institute took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students, but recommended that it was desirable that the Institute engages with the *Code of practice* in a systematic way at institutional level to develop further its policies and procedures for the assurance of academic quality and standards.

63   As noted in paragraph 44, the BA Sound Technology programme is accredited by the Joint Audio Media Education Services (JAMES). The JAMES report is used by the programme team to place the programme in its external professional context and to encourage student preparation for future employment.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

64   Approval, monitoring and review processes are clearly described and communicated to staff and external advisers. In respect of students, there is some level of variability in understanding of the various processes. Appropriate external participation takes place both in the approval and review processes and requirements are effectively implemented and are used consistently across the institution.

65   In respect to programme design, the key principles outlined in the University's documentation are adhered to, criteria for approval and documentary requirements are met. In addition, modifications and minor changes to programmes are reported annually at institutional level through the Institutional Quality Report (IQR).

66   Programme approval at the Institute is conducted in the context of the University's standard process for approval of new programmes as detailed in the LJMU validation of new programmes procedures manual involving a process of peer review through a panel. All programme approval events leading to decisions are independently chaired by a representative from the University with appropriate external membership. LIPA staff are included on the panel but must first undertake appropriate approved training provided by the University. It would appear from outcome reports reviewed by the audit team that conditions of approval are routinely considered and concluded.

67   A new programme or course starts with an initial pro forma for consideration by the LIPA directorate. Each new programme proposal must be based upon production of a business case, which covers market analysis, planning projections, risk assessment, resource requirements and costs; this is developed by the LIPA Director of Higher Education in partnership with the proposing head of subject. The Founding Principal/CEO must determine whether new proposals are in line with the LIPA strategic plan. The LIPA directorate judge the viability and risk implications of the proposals and confirm that, subject to validation, the programme can be introduced within existing resources or will grant approval for those requiring additional resources to proceed to validation. The LJMU validation of a new programme procedures manual requires that the detailed business plan must also be approved by the relevant Dean of Faculty who is then responsible for obtaining final confirmation of approval from the University. There appeared, however, to be no formal institutional academic approval of a proposed programme prior to its submission to the University for validation.

68   The audit team noted, however, that the number of new programme developments was limited; the last new degree to go through the validation process was BA Community Drama which was approved, without condition, in 2006. The audit team found that the processes for approval of new programmes and amendments to existing programmes are understood and applied in accordance with the University's requirements. The audit team noted that, as only a small number of new programme validations had taken place, the Institute's engagement with

the approval process had not been thoroughly tested and there was insufficient evidence to indicate how it contributed to the quality of learning opportunities.

69   The Institute Quality Committee (IQC) regularly receives minor changes to course programmes. A clear, consistent and documented process is in place which is consistently applied. Modifications and minor changes to programmes are reported annually via the IQR and this process appears responsive. The audit team learnt that the MA programmes were to be withdrawn from the 2009-10 entry; staff confirmed that measures had been taken to protect the interest of current students. In discussion with students, those currently on courses were disappointed by the decision but had been informed of the proposed withdrawal to new entrants. The audit team could not identify a formal process for the discontinuation of courses and programmes; the Institute may wish to consider identifying an appropriate process.

70   With the agreement of the University, the Institute has developed its own quality assurance procedures that are detailed in the LIPA Quality Assurance and Enhancement Procedures Handbook. The Institute describes this as an active system where issues are isolated and actions determined at the appropriate level.

71   The Institute's annual programme review (APR) process works on three levels: module, programme and Institute. It is based on team assessment of a range of data with the external examiners' reports at the core. The procedures operate on a continuous cycle and use both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data includes cohort statistics, module statistics, National Student Survey (NSS), occasional surveys and reports, data from professional bodies and associations (CDS/JAMES/CDET). Qualitative data includes module feedback summaries, student advisory boards, the Institute student advisory board and external examiner reports.

72   Programme boards are charged with monitoring the quality assurance and enhancement of their programme. At least three times a year, each programme presents a short oral report to the IQC. At the end of the teaching year, each programme produces a detailed APR report which is presented to the IQC. The Institute describes this as a team document, including student input. The review is evaluative, reflective and results in a document that highlights areas of good practice, areas/issues of concern, action plans to address concerns and plans for enhancement.

73   The audit team found that, for the most part, the APR reports covered the areas listed but not all reports systematically covered the analysis of material required. For example some reports refer to the consideration of module feedback, the NSS and Student Advisory Board, whereas other reports do not. The audit team's view was that it would be desirable for a greater level of consistency in the content and coverage of APR reports to be achieved and for this to be monitored more effectively at institutional level.

74   The Institute operates annual review days in November each year which are devoted to the collective review and evaluation of the APR reports by representatives of programmes and service areas at the Institute, together with two representatives from the University. Each member of the panel is asked to investigate and evaluate a specific strand of activity across all reviews. As an outcome of review days, each report is either accepted, rejected, or further clarification is sought. For each programme, areas of good practice or institutional concern are flagged. The audit team considered that the coming together of staff for the annual review days was a feature of good practice.

75   The Director of Higher Education produces the Institute Quality Report based on the APR reports and the outcomes of the review day. A summary of key themes and issues is developed into an action plan, which identifies clear actions, timescales and accountabilities. A detailed report on the previous year's action is included in order to demonstrate progress. Plans appear to be implemented effectively and consistently across the institution although the audit team noted that some actions were ongoing between years leading to an extended period for the completion of particular pieces of work (such as the review of learning guidance tutorials and feedback to student on assessment).

76   Once the IQR, together with the approved APR reports have been approved by IQC, the reports are passed to the LJMU MASS Faculty Quality Committee and to the LIPA Teaching and Learning Board (TLB). Feedback from both these sources is passed back to IQC for appropriate action and dissemination to programme boards in order to complete the quality cycle.

77   The audit team found that the processes for annual programme monitoring at Institute and programme level are understood and applied in accordance with both the University's and, broadly, with the Institute's requirements. The audit team considered the APR process to be generally robust, ensuring that no significant issue is overlooked. It was noted, however, that actions sometimes recurred in the following year's APR report, therefore leading to a protracted period before these were completed. The audit team recommended that it was desirable that the Institute keeps under review the APR process to ensure that the deliberative structure meets the Institute's aspirations for overall consistency of reporting, the implementation of action plans and the achievement of targets.

78   Programme review normally takes place every five years and ensures that independent scrutiny of the programme provides the Institute with assurance of the quality and standards of the programme. It is conducted in accordance with the LJMU Programme Review Procedures Manual. The approach is one of peer review, the panel drawn from within and outside both the University and the Institute. A review panel is established for each review event and is chaired by a senior member from the University, with representatives from LIPA, representatives from another LJMU faculty and two external advisers who provide the subject expertise on the panel. LIPA staff must undertake appropriate approved training provided by the University. In preparation for programme review, a critical evaluation document is produced which contains an evaluation of the programme since validation or the last review event. The programme specification is reviewed and re-approved as part of the review event.

79   The recent review of the BA Dance programme provided evidence that the processes of review were followed and adhered to. The audit team also had access to the documentation for the forthcoming review of the BA Acting programme which, it was noted, had paid more attention to aspects of the Academic Infrastructure and subject benchmark statements than hitherto. The team found that the processes for review of programmes at Institute level are understood and applied in accordance with the University's requirements. The team confirmed that the evidence available suggested the process of periodic review was generally robust but noted that the timeliness and consistency of reporting could be improved.

Management information - feedback from students

80   As described in the Briefing Paper, the Institute has a number of informal and formal mechanisms for capturing student feedback. For example, the fact that both the Principal and Director of Higher Education teach on programmes, that there are high staff-student contact hours, and shared refreshment areas, enable students to have many informal opportunities for direct communication with staff at all levels. Formal feedback methods include module feedback, the NSS (and prior to 2005 the institute-wide survey) plus focused surveys on issues such as assessment feedback. Two persistent and recurring issues found in the module feedback forms include concerns that module handbooks were not always available and the poor quality and lack of timeliness of assessment feedback.

81   The student written submission (SWS) acknowledges that the Institute reacts to comment; similarly, the audit team noted that subject areas were generally responsive to informal undergraduate and postgraduate (full and part-time) student comment. The team was further able to confirm that feedback to students takes place at the modular level through meetings with the students, the review of the APR reports and in the context of programme review.

82   The IQR of November 2008 makes reference to '…evidence of good practice in the way in which students are invited to evaluate individual modules. There is also evidence from some programmes,that student module evaluation has been less rigorous with students being invited to evaluate a large range of modules simultaneously, leading to limited consideration on their part and the production of data of limited value'. The Briefing Paper recognises that there have been problems with obtaining feedback consistently. The audit team were assured that steps had been taken to improve the process and that a new centralised system for the collection of module reviews was being trialled.

83   Opinions from students are also sought as part of the programme review process. The audit team was able to confirm that students (from level 1 and level 2) had been consulted via a questionnaire as part of the review of the BA Dance Programme in April 2008. The team further confirmed that students (from level two and three) were invited to provide commentary, and that feedback had been obtained from graduates, in preparation for the programme review of the BA Acting.

84   NSS findings are considered at the IQC as part of the IQR. The LIPA Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook notes that APRs will review NSS results and that employment data will form part of the IQR. Neither are evidenced in the respective reports. The IQR of November 2007 notes, 'Of the six areas explored in the NSS survey the Institute compared well or favourably to national and sector benchmarks in four and poorly in two'. The two areas were 'Assessment and Feedback' and 'Organisation and Management'.

85   Actions to address those two areas included 'a detailed survey of student concerns and review practices to ensure greater positive response. Implement pilot projects' and 'Develop strategies to ensure stable timetables and clearer management of student learning'. The IQR of November 2008 provides a report on their implementation and continues to note that both are recurrent actions/themes of the NSS results. Recommendations as a result of the Institute's survey which 'mirrored the opinions on the student responses to assessment feedback in the NSS' were discussed at IQC in June 2008 where it was agreed that assessment training should be provided for part-time and/or visiting lecturers. The audit team was able to confirm that part-time staff/visiting lecturers have received training on assessment feedback.

86   Assessment feedback was further discussed during a Development & Planning Day in July 2008, and the IQC, in October 2008, approved a revised Assessment Strategy and a paper outlining the objectives for an external review of assessment and feedback practice by a consultant (the final report on which was published in January 2009). The IQR of February 2009 included an Assessment Practice Action Plan 2009 and reflected that 'Feedback is getting better - still a bit confusing as there is no definitive system of getting the information back to students'. As part of the Assessment Practice Action Plan 2009, a working group was established to produce a report in response to the external assessment review.

87   The audit team noted, through meetings with students, that feedback continues to present difficulties. For example, the team learnt of 'some slippage' of official marks reported to students during the course and changes to scheduled deadlines for the return of feedback. The audit team were concerned that, overall, limited progress had been made with regard to the findings of the 2007 NSS. The Institute confirmed that it aims to complete their work on assessment by June 2009, submit a new assessment policy to IQC for implementation from September 2009, followed by a departmental review from September to January 2010. The team took the view that, although considerable efforts had been made to improve feedback mechanisms, the Institute could have had a greater impact on the student experience if steps had been taken in a more timely manner.

Role of students in quality assurance

88   LIPA has no students' union nor are there any sabbatical officers. The LIPA Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook describes the role that students play in the Institute's processes for managing quality and standards. Student representation is provided through programme Student Advisory Boards (SABs) which comprise student representatives from every year, the Institute Student Advisory Board (ISAB) which comprises all student representatives, and membership on a range of committees (for example the TLB, Health and Safety Committee, Equality and Diversity Committee and the LIPA Council).

89   The audit team confirmed that, although provision for student representation was made on the Institute's committees, attendance was inconsistent. The Briefing Paper acknowledges that there is some variability in the arrangements for electing student representatives to the SABs, and some difficulties have been experienced in securing student involvement in the ISAB. Although the students had experienced different approaches in the operation of the SABs, the audit team was reassured that they were a useful mechanism to talk through problems.

90   The SWS note that some departments encourage students to attend programme boards. The audit team confirmed the practice to be variable but recognised that this was not a requirement. Students attended annual review days for the first time in 2008.

91   The audit team learnt that programme boards are expected to meet at least four times a year and SABs are expected to meet at least three times a year prior to each programme board. Through an examination of the minutes of those meetings the team noted a degree of variability between programmes in the number of times they met with some programme boards meeting only twice a year and some SABs only meeting once a year. The team took that view that the variability in the schedules for both programme boards and SABs, the alignment of those boards and differences in perceptions of attendance requirements at the programme board could contribute to difficulties in engaging student attendance at the appropriate meetings. The team appreciated that the Institute was aware of these difficulties but recommended that it was desirable that the Institute should take steps to improve the effectiveness of formal student representation and participation on boards and committees.

92   When asked about training for student representatives, the students who met the audit team during the briefing and audit visits confirmed that they had not received any induction or training but did not feel that training would enhance their ability to represent the programmes on boards or committees.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

93   The Institute's research is generally focused on professional practice in the areas taught. Staff engagement in professional practice has a direct link to the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students by ensuring the currency and reliability of the curriculum, and by fostering links with other industry practitioners who in turn contribute to the delivery of the programme.

94   The overview of research and professional development activities undertaken during the academic year is detailed in the IQR. Staff outcomes and key actions are noted in the APR process indicating impact on programme activities as evidenced by the Dance, Performance Arts and Community Drama APRs for 2007-08.

95   Full-time teaching staff currently have up to 35 research/professional development days each year. The activities undertaken by teaching staff are agreed as part of the annual appraisal process with their line manager within a framework that prioritises four interrelated areas: teaching; administration; subject knowledge; and professional practice. The exact relationship between the areas is negotiated between the staff member and their line manager. Research and professional development outcomes are reported by programmes through the APR process and individually through the appraisal process.

96   The audit team concluded that arrangements for promoting links between research or scholarly activity and teaching and learning were embedded at programme level.

Resources for learning

97   The institute recognises the importance of effectively using resources as set out in their third strategic goal 'Maintain and develop resources to meet teaching, learning, support and business process needs'. Within this context, the Briefing Paper reports on the provision of teaching accommodation and other learning resources in the two main buildings located in Hope Street and Mount Street. The SWS expressed some concerns over the condition of the Hope Street building in terms of cramped conditions and noise problems. The SWS also noted some uncertainty over the use of Hope Street in the long term, a concern which was re-iterated during the audit visit.

98   The audit team was advised that the Institute has been planning strategically for new teaching accommodation and that the LIPA Council had received building options papers in the week prior to the audit visit and had taken a decision to invest heavily in the Hope Street building.

99   The Director of ISTS has oversight of the Learning Services, Information Communication Technology (ICT), Technical Services and Productions Services departments providing one integrated service. The range of resources available to staff and students, supported by the ICT Department as described in the Briefing Paper include a fully distributed computer environment of networked workstations, corporate information applications (Student Records (SITS); Finance (Agresso); Telephony (Avaya); virtual learning environment (VLE), web servers and intranet.

100   The Briefing Paper provides a number of examples of the effectiveness of the ICT evaluation process (for example, early adoption of the Microsoft Vista and Office Professional 2007, upgrading PC stock, extending WiFi access across the whole building, acquiring SharePoint 2007 to replace the current document management system, new finance and student records systems).

101   The Briefing Paper claims that the ICT Department is steered and monitored through key performance indicators at termly meeting of the ICT committee, the minutes of which are presented to the Finance Committee which reports to the LIPA Council. The audit team, however, found little evidence that the termly meetings had systematically taken place.

102   The Briefing Paper is confident that LIPA meets the varied requirements and learning needs of the students through the Learning Resources Centre (LRC) facilities (books, journals, CDs, DVDs, special collections, IT user guides, PCs), various online information resources (for example, LRC website, the VLE, and blog) and external resources (Libraries Together: Liverpool Learning Partnership and the LJMU Library). The audit team was informed during the briefing visit of the wide selection of resources in the LRC and its good responses to individual student requests and of the value of the extra resources accessible at LJMU.

103   The Briefing Paper notes that students provide feedback on service levels through the SABs and that these opportunities are available throughout the year. The LRC and ICT Department receive feedback and monitor resource issues affecting delivery through attendance at programme board meetings where staff present issues raised at the SABs.

104   The audit team further learnt from discussions with staff, and evidence in reports, that the APR process indicates matters of concern relating to resources. Resources for new courses and programmes would be discussed at programme boards and if the resource was seen as particularly significant would be referred to the Directorate.

105   The Briefing Paper notes further formal feedback mechanism to include a mystery shopper exercise (carried out in 2005 for Libraries Together) and the LRC annual student satisfaction survey via the VLE. The 2008 survey was positive with 89 per cent of respondents happy with the service received, while 87 per cent said the LRC met their needs. The survey also notes that 69 per cent of the students use the LJMU library. Informal day-to-day feedback from students is also encouraged.

106   The audit team reached the view that steps were being taken to improve physical resources while both ICT and LRC resources effectively met the needs of the Institute and made a positive contribution to the learning opportunity available to students.

Admissions policy

107   The Institute manages its admissions process completely independently of the University and has a detailed admissions policy, which is reviewed on an annual basis. The Briefing Paper notes the Institute's fourth strategic goal is to 'maintain and develop inclusive recruitment of talented students'. To achieve this goal, LIPA's Widening Participation Strategy embraces objectives to be achieved over the period 2008 to 2012 in pursuit of 'ensuring talented students from a wider range of backgrounds can be encouraged to apply to our courses'. The Widening Participation Strategy is monitored through the Equality and Diversity Committee.

108   The admission procedures for auditions and interviews are clearly set out in the LIPA Admissions Policy. The admissions criteria can be found on the Institute's website within the pathway guidelines and as part of the programme specifications. The IQC sets the minimum entry requirements annually and reviews any recommended changes to individual programmes submitted collectively by the Admissions Team, individual Programme Leader and Admissions Tutor.

109   The Institute also provides the opportunity for Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) to enable access or accelerated entry to programmes. The Institute follows the APEL procedure prescribed in the UMF and the LIPA Committee Handbook.

110   The Institute interviews or auditions a large proportion of their applicants (in 2007-08, 3,400 of 5,300 applicants were interviewed/auditioned and usually this encompasses all international students). During the briefing visit, the audit team was informed that this process is managed through the involvement of part-time staff for first round interviews and full-time staff for the second round. The team was also advised of the variation of requirements depending on the discipline. For example, music applicants first submit a CD, followed by invitation to an audition, whereas dance applicants have an initial audition and then are recalled if they are selected for a second audition. The team further learnt that these experiences matched the students' expectations and those applicants invited to attend an audition/interview are provided with comprehensive guidelines on the process to help them prepare for the day.

111   The LJMU institutional review report of 2008 comments favourably on the system of admissions. 'The auditions and interviews are valued by students and were very favourably compared with experiences at other institutions. Students praised the inclusion of existing third year students in the audition process'. The IQR of November 2008 comments on the 'Good feedback from students/prospective students, regarding auditions and open days'. The audit team was informed by the students during the audit visit that the audition day gave them a very clear insight into the programme and both undergraduate and postgraduate students valued the experience.

112   The audit team was impressed by the detailed support provided prior to the audition/interview. The team considered the attention given, as part of the undergraduate admissions process, to providing auditions which reflect current practice and course content to be a feature of good practice.

113   Comprehensive admissions statistics are compiled (age, gender, disability and ethnicity) at programme level as part of the APR and similar statistics (age, gender, disability, socioeconomic and ethnicity) as part of the IQR cycle. However, the audit team noted some variability in reflection on this data at the programme level. The team also noted limited discussion of admission data at the programme board meetings.

Student support

114   The students are provided with a student handbook (The Green Book) which provides guidelines and explains responsibilities. The audit team learnt from meetings with students that The Green Book was not regularly used but was seen as a helpful tool for the clarification of regulations. Students tended to be guided by tutors to relevant documentation or would use the VLE to access course information.

115   The SWS comments that a number of departments have well structured induction weeks for all years, outlining the format of the year to come and modules to be completed. Induction week comprises introductory seminars, shows put on by the more senior students, generic and subject specific talks and the handing-out of student handbooks. The induction week is also used by some departments to give lectures on subjects that will be key to a number of modules in the forthcoming year.

116   The LIPA Strategic Plan commits to 'institutional agreement of the Learning Guidance Tutor system'. Within that context all students (undergraduate and postgraduate) are supported through their studies by the allocation of a Learning Guidance Tutor (LGT). The LGT is also there to provide support for Personal and Developmental Planning (PDP) as delivered in the module Personal and Professional Development. The system is set out in the Learning Guidance Tutorials Handbook and includes arrangements for at least two meetings a year with the LGT to monitor progress on the programme of study and support career plans.

117   The Institute acknowledges that the LGT system has been interpreted in different ways by subject teams and students also have the opportunity to circumvent the system. The audit team confirmed from their meetings that the students' experiences were variable and further noted that, although students could locate help if they needed to, some were not aware of an obvious structure for help through the LGT system.

118   The audit team further noted that the IQR of November 2007 required clarifcation of the LGT role and proposed awaiting the outcome of the PDP/LGT review (identified in the LIPA Strategic Plan 2007-2012) which took place in January 2008. The review report published in April 2008 concluded that the Institute needed a root and branch re-invigoration of the LGT process and needed to place LGT and PDP as a high development priority. The review recommended the creation of a senior teacher to manage and coordinate the LGT/PDP strategy across the Institute from September 2008.

119   The IQR dated November 2008 notes that (partly as an outcome of the above review and partly as a result of the broader strategic plan) it was agreed that the core elements of the Institute's programmes (performance/context/professional development) be reviewed via a consultation exercise and revised for implementation from September 2009. The audit team confirmed progress on the consultation exercise through an examination of the development of a draft Personal Development Planning/Learning Guidance Tutorial Policy and Implementation Strategies 2009-10 which was currently under discussion.

120   The audit team took the view that considerable effort had taken place to provide an improved LGT system but the current student experience could have been enhanced through more timely interventions. The team recommended that it was desirable that the Institute improve the timeliness of enhancement initiatives in order to have greater impact on the experience of current students.

121   Careers guidance is outlined in The Green Book and in the LIPA Teaching Learning and Assessment Handbook. The vocational nature of the curriculum provides students with detailed and specific information on career options and opportunities in programme-specific areas. Careers guidance for programme-specific options and opportunities is also provided within the programme. Because of this, the Institute does not employ dedicated careers advisers; instead, careers information is provided by subject staff. Students can expect one-to-one tutorials with

specialist module tutors and their LGT. Within each full-time programme, there is a module designed specifically to support the students' transition into the workplace.

122   The audit team was further informed that careers advice and guidance is additionally provided through the graduate conference in the second year, professional interviews and auditions, work placements, external speakers, involvement in local projects, alumni and advice from programme and module leaders or their personal connections.

123   The audit team viewed the level of career advice to be dependent on the individual programme teams and as far as they could tell did not go beyond the specialisms of the institution. The team appreciated that students valued the current level of career support but was of the view that consideration could be given to a more generic approach or more proactive collaboration with the University's careers service for non-specialist advice.

124   The Briefing Paper describes support for all current and prospective students through the Learner Support Services (LSS) which is coordinated by a manager and a support team of ten freelance staff. Examples of their provision include specialist language support for international students, study skills tutors, note-takers, examination scribes and readers, musicianship coaching, counselling, attention and deficit disorder/hyperactive disorder coaching. Procedures for supporting deaf and disabled students are set out in the LIPA Procedures for Supporting Deaf and Disabled Students Handbook. Additional support is arranged as the need arises, for example through educational psychologists and ICT trainers.

125   The service operates seven days a week and during unsocial hours if necessary. The availability of this service is promoted via the prospectus, pre-enrolment packs, face-to-face meetings with student groups and the LSS notice-board. This service is outwardly proactive to the extent of being willing to meet/communicate with prospective students, parents and, where relevant, carers and support workers.

126   Reflection on their work is coordinated through twice-yearly meetings between the LSS manager and an external supervisor/facilitator. Policy development and the exchange of ideas take place at meetings between the LSS manager and teaching representatives from the seven programme areas three times a year. The activities are futher informed through membership of the Equality and Diversity Committee.

127   Overall, the audit team considered the support available to the students contributed positively to the learning opportunities and that systems were in place to monitor the appropriateness of the support.

Staff support (including staff development)

128   The professional development of staff was considered as part of the QAA review of the Institute in 2002, leading to recommendations to assure an appropriate range of experiences, skills and qualifications to deliver postgraduate awards and also staff awareness of national developments in relation to quality and standards matters.

129   In the light of these recommendations, the Institute made staff development a renewed priority, achieving 'Investors in People' accreditation in 2004, renewed in 2007. A twin approach has been adopted in the context of teaching staff professional development, embracing the enhancement of teaching skills and the enhancement of subject knowledge/expertise. A specific objective is recognition of all teaching and teaching support staff by the Higher Education Academy (HEA). So far over 80 per cent of permanent teaching staff and support staff with significant teaching responsibilities have become fellows of the HEA, and there has been a significant take-up of these training opportunities by assistant lecturers and teaching fellows. New teaching staff with limited teaching experience are expected to join the LMJU PGCert Learning and Teaching and HE programme.

130   The policies and procedures for staff support are articulated in the LIPA document Supporting Individual and Organisational Learning. These cover the key areas of induction, staff appraisal, staff development, professional development, management development, and Investors in People.

131   The Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF) funding is also used to support a range of initiatives to enhance professional development. This includes allocations of 35 days for a specified programme of professional development activity, sabbaticals and the development of conferences related to teaching and curriculum development. The sabbatical programme is specifically designed to provide teaching staff with the opportunity to maintain and develop their skills as practitioners, teachers and/or subject specialists through a period of paid absence from work.

132   One key consideration for the Institute in recent years has been the development of a suitably robust workload model for all staff. A pilot version of the model was implemented in music in 2006 and has since been rolled out across the Institute. One of the recommendations of the 2008 LJMU institutional review was to continue the implementation of this model and keep its operation and the way it is affecting staffing levels under review; work on this objective is continuing.

133   With few exceptions, all staff newly appointed to the Institute are subject to a probationary period of twelve months. Responsibility for mentoring and appraising probationary staff lies with their line manager leading to a final report that is passed to the Director of Administration and Personnel for approval. During probation, new members of staff receive three-monthly reports on their progress, to include further advice and support (including any additional training requirements) should such steps prove necessary. The effectiveness of these procedures was confirmed by staff in a meeting with the audit team.

134   The staff appraisal process, normally carried out by the staff member's line manager, requires teaching staff to consider and articulate their requirements for professional development, informed by teaching observations undertaken by their line managers. As part of this process, staff are encouraged to develop professional development plans (PDPs). The 35-day programmes of professional development to support research and scholarly activity are managed through the appraisal process, to be agreed by the line manager, and the outcomes presented to the Director of Human Resources.

135   The appraisal guidelines were modified in 2007 with the specific aim of simplifying and streamlining the process and including the requirement for staff to develop PDPs. In addition to recording progress in achieving or continuing membership of the HEA these plans review training and developmental activities in the year prior to appraisal, including a teaching observation report from the programme leader, and establish an action plan for the next twelve months.

136   The Institute has also operated a peer review process whereby teaching staff observe each other in order to identify, evaluate and share good practice in teaching. The 2006-07 IQR notes considerable variability in its use, working well in some parts of the Institute and badly in others. In the light of this, it was agreed that the peer-review process (as opposed to a line manager review) should be dropped as a formal quality assurance process of the Institute and replaced by alternative processes of staff development starting with an external review of teaching. Seventy-five per cent of all teaching staff were observed as part of this review, leading to a number of key recommendations. These include the further development of feedback skills, a strengthening of the demands and challenges addressed in academic (as opposed to practical) areas of the curriculum, and more opportunities for shared and co-constructed knowledge, peer feedback and discussion.

137   There is a staff reward scheme for permanent staff on submission of a satisfactory PDP. In terms of promotion, whereas in the past it has been possible to seek promotion to senior lecturer on the basis of performance and achievement, the current policy is to limit appointments at senior lecturer and principal lecturer levels to those of a strategic nature based on the model of one principal lecturer and one senior lecturer per department, the former fulfilling the role of programme leader.

138   Staff professional development activities are incorporated in the APR cycle and are considered and evaluated by the Professional Development Committee and the TLB.

139   It was clear to the audit team from a scrutiny of supporting documents and meetings with staff that the Institute's proactive strategy towards enhancing the development of staff, in particular through their engagement with the HEA and support for research and scholarly activity, should be commended as a feature of good practice.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Management information - quality enhancement

140   In the Briefing Paper, the Institute states that the central approach to enhancement is the practice of reviewing the extent to which individual programmes achieve the goals and priorities determined with the Strategic Plan. The methods used are: embedding enhancement within the strategic planning process; the professional development of staff and support of staff research; membership of and input from organisations that have a direct link with the performing arts economies; visiting lecturers attached to each discipline; employer/professional engagement with programme delivery; annual review cycles and periodic programme reviews. Relevant management information is clearly used in the annual programme review process but there is little evidence of it being used to inform strategic institution-wide steps for quality enhancement.

141   An example of a deliberate step at institutional level to enhance the students' learning experience which emerged through internal review is the work on Learning Guidance Tutorials (LGTs). An internal survey reported variation in practice and concluded that LIPA needed a root and branch re-invigoration of the LGT process, to place LGT and PDP as a high development activity and assign/create a senior teacher to manage and coordinate the LGT/PDP strategy across the Institute from September 2008. This progressed to further research involving representatives across the Institute's programmes (starting in February 2009) which resulted in a discussion document making proposals for the enhancement of the LGT. However, at the time of the audit, the position had not been resolved.

142   There is evidence of the Institute taking deliberate steps to secure enhancement in response to external reviews in its series of actions to tackle dissatisfaction with assessment feedback (as described in paragraphs 85-87). The issue of timeliness of feedback was raised in the 2007 NSS and action was also recommended as an outcome of the institutional review held in 2008. The Institute acknowledged that the timeliness of student feedback was an area that needed improvement within the Institute and organised an internal survey and an external review of assessment feedback. As a result, a working group has been established which will produce a report for implementation prior to January 2010. The audit team concluded that although the approach was rigorous and thorough, the Institute was slow in securing improvements to the current student experience.

Staff development and reward

143   The Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF) has been used to support a range of initiatives to enhance professional development, as described in paragraphs 131 and 132 above. Teaching and support staff who achieve prescribed aspirations gain a financial supplement. The Institute confirmed that funding for these activities would continue beyond the lifetime of the TQEF. During 2006-07, teaching staff were observed and mentored by a specialist teaching and learning consultant and during 2008-09 a specialist consultant on assessment strategies has been retained to evaluate and develop practices in assessment across a range of programmes.

144   LIPA's staff development policies and procedures referred to in paragraph 131 above identify the ways in which the Institute collaborates with staff to improve their effectiveness. Evidence presented to the audit team verified that this is an effective strategy at institutional level to support quality enhancement initiatives.

145   The work on the development of the new staff workload model, as described in paragraph 133 above, is an example of a deliberate step at institutional level to enhance quality in relation to staff. Following the implementation of the initial pilot in 2006, a further internal workload review has been conducted and another external benchmarking exercise to determine the norm for the sector. A memorandum of February 2009 proposed a model but the documentation left the audit team unclear as to the progress and timescale for implementation of the model which was referred to in the 2008 institutional review. The team encourages the Institute to conclude their response to the recommendation of the 2008 LJMU institutional review.

Good Practice

146   The Briefing Paper states that good practice in all areas related to learning and teaching is formally recognised and disseminated through the annual programme (APR) review process. APR reports are discussed, via allocated themes, at the annual review days which are attended by programme leaders and the chair of the LJMU Media, Arts and Social Science (MASS) Faculty Quality Committee; in this way practice is shared among programme leaders. However, the team did not find any evidence of deliberate identification of good practice which could be systematically rolled out across all programmes at LIPA as part of an enhancement approach.

147   The enhancement of academic quality is a developing agenda for the Institute and not yet fully embedded by academic and academic support staff. The audit team would recommend that LIPA adopt a coordinated approach to quality enhancement and the systematic embedding of evident good practice across the Institute.

148   The audit team was able to confirm that the main drivers for quality enhancement were both internal and external review. However, the team noted the length of time spent on certain initiatives and that, in some instances, in order to work in a collegial manner and in an attempt to agree a collective view, some initiatives to enhance quality had become protracted. It recommends that it is desirable that the Institute improve the timeliness of enhancement initiatives in order to have a greater impact on the experience of current students.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

149   At the time of the audit the Institute did not have any collaborative arrangements for delivery of higher education provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

150   At the time of the audit, the Institute had no postgraduate research students.

Section 7: Published information

151   The responsibility for checking the accuracy of the information provided by the Institute to potential students and other interested parties via the prospectus lies with the Director of Higher Education. A LIPA appointed web editor is responsible for ensuring the smooth running and content accuracy of the website, which is designed by an external company. The Briefing Paper explains that the Director of Marketing keeps abreast of changes to programmes through membership of the Institute Quality Committee (IQC) and by attending relevant programme boards. While this was evidenced from a review of the minutes of IQC, this was not apparent from a review of the minutes of the programme boards.

152   The audit team reviewed the prospectus website and a range of the Institute's promotional material as well as the entry on the Unistats website. Students told the team that the current prospectus is more informative than previously but that the Institute was underselling some aspects of provision. MA students reported on the inadequate information in the prospectus with respect to the MA provision. Students were aware that the website is under redevelopment; their view is that the current website does not reflect the quality of the Institute compared with competitor institutions and that it does not capture the 'LIPA experience'.

153   The audit team found that external examiner reports are not currently made available to students and it is suggested that LIPA should develop a suitable mechanism for communicating this information to all student representatives as part of annual review and in accordance with the expectations of HEFCE.

154   The LIPA Teaching Learning and Assessment Handbook states that all module handbooks must specify the timings and nature of formative and summative assessment feedback which will be given to students. During the discussions with students, the audit team was told that feedback to students did not, in all cases, meet student expectations gained from documentation. A review of module handbooks provided to the team demonstrated that not all module handbooks provided to students publish the information required by the LIPA Teaching Learning and Assessment Handbook particularly in respect of feedback to students. In terms of programme specifications, students reported that documentation for year three was often confused, that, in particular, confusion arose in the transition between revisions of programmes and that delivery of programme modules did not always follow what students were given in published documents. The team concluded that greater institutional oversight of module documentation could be exerted in order to ensure that the information requirements specified by the Institute could be more accurately and consistently implemented in internal documentation published to students.

155   The audit found that, overall, reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the public information that the Institute publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of the awards that are validated by LJMU. However, the audit team found no evidence that the Institute was making publicly available the documentation suggested in Annex F of HEFCE circular 2006/45, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*. The team also concluded that internal programme and module information published to students could benefit from a more rigorous and consistent approach.