



# **Awarding body monitoring report for:** **Thames Valley University – *London college of music examinations department - (TVU)***

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# Introduction

## Regulating external qualifications

Responsibility for regulating external qualifications lies jointly with three qualifications regulators:

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

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

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

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

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

## Banked documents

As part of its awarding body recognition processes the regulators require awarding bodies to submit certain documents to Ofqual for the purposes of 'banking' centrally. Information from banked documents will be used to inform monitoring activities and may also affect the awarding body's risk rating.

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

## **About this report**

The monitoring activity for TVU was carried out by Ofqual on behalf of the qualifications regulators in April 2009.

The monitoring focused on the regulatory criteria relating to the following key areas but specifically those relating to the qualifications development process:

- corporate governance
- resources and expertise
- qualifications development
  - planning
  - content and design of assessment
- assessment arrangements
- independent assessment.

The monitoring activities included desk research of information already held by the regulators including the awarding body recognition update (2004), banked documents and scrutiny of the TVU website. The monitoring team visited the TVU head office to conduct interviews with staff and review documentation.

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

## **About TVU**

The London College of Music was founded in 1887 as an establishment devoted to musical education. In 1991 it became part of Thames Valley University (TVU). It is now part of the TVU's Faculty of the Arts. It offers a wide range of graded and diploma qualifications. For further information, please see <http://mercury.tvu.ac.uk/lcmexams>.

## Corporate governance

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

### Findings

1. TVU was last monitored in 2004. TVU remains the legal owners of the qualifications that are administered by the London College of Music Examinations (LCME). The LCME is the brand name under which these graded qualifications are marketed.
2. Since the previous monitoring the LCME department has been more formally brought into the TVU's Faculty of Arts. This change means that the director of examinations now reports directly to the dean of the arts faculty. This strengthens the governance arrangements with the LCME department as the external qualifications arm of TVU.
3. The work of the LCME department is overseen and monitored by the Graded Examinations Management Board (GEMB). The GEMB is responsible for managing the affairs of TVU and delegates the day to day responsibility to the director of examinations. The GEMB membership includes an independent chair, the director of examinations, examining staff, faculty representatives and other stakeholders.
4. The GEMB has a monitoring and appeals subcommittee, which considers any enquiries and appeals about results. It also has responsibility to monitor the use of procedures such as reasonable adjustments, special consideration and malpractice.
5. The single point of accountability remains the Director of Examinations. Documents banked at Ofqual include a staffing structure and description of job roles for key staff. Person specifications were seen by the monitoring team. TVU must submit these for the purposes of banking.
6. The TVU has a longstanding partnership with the Registry of Guitar Teachers (RGT), which administers TVU's guitar focussed qualifications. The governance arrangements are clearly laid out in the document *The Regulation of RGT by TVU*. This document includes the roles and responsibilities of each partner and how these arrangements are being monitored. The director of the RGT makes an annual report to and is a member of the GEMB.
7. The work of the awarding body falls under the budgetary domain of the TVU Faculty with financial planning managed by faculty accountants. There is a less formal methodology for

strategic planning with ideas for development being taken from forums such as the senior examiners meetings.

8. The monitoring team reviewed the remainder of TVU's banked documents and agreed them as meeting the statutory regulations.

### **Accreditation conditions**

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

### **Observations**

1. TVU is reminded to submit the person specifications for key staff to Ofqual for banking.

## Resources and expertise

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

### Findings

1. The awarding body is staffed by 10 fulltime office personnel. At the time of monitoring there were two vacant administrative positions which were being covered by temporary staff.
2. As well as the director of examinations, the other key roles are that of qualifications and marketing officer and the senior examinations officer. The qualifications and marketing officer assists the chief examiners in developing qualifications, facilitates approval of qualifications and syllabuses and supervises the work of the publications administrator. The senior examinations officer is responsible for arranging dates for examiners to visit centres (known as, examination tours) which includes liaising with examiners on availability and is the contact point for regional centres. This post also oversees the central administration.
3. The director of examinations is responsible for the appraisal of the awarding body staff, which is undertaken using the annual appraisal system of the wider university. Due to the small size of the awarding body this procedure is in practice relatively informal and issues are dealt with as they arise. There is a small budget for staff training.
4. The assessment team is made up of two chief examiners, 18 senior examiners and approximately 130 examiners. The chief examiners are responsible for assessment in the subject areas of music and drama respectively. They lead their assessment teams and are responsible for the overall performance of their examiners. They have responsibility for syllabus development, examination reports and confirmation of results for their subject area.
5. The senior examiners oversee a group of up to 10 examiners. It is the role of the senior examiners to train examiners and conduct annual performance reviews. This generally involves a senior examiner accompanying the examiner to a practical examination and reviewing their performance against pre-set criteria.
6. The senior examiner structure is a new initiative since the previous monitoring. It has been introduced to relieve some of the pressure of work of the chief examiners following the growth in demand for TVU qualifications. TVU staff believe it has been successful in improving the flow of communication between and across teams. TVU is developing criteria for the appointment and training of future senior examiners.

7. TVU maintains a list of expressions of interest received for examiner positions. There is a recruitment drive twice a year when a group of five or six potential examiners are invited to come in for a day. The day consists of face to face interviews and presentations after which they may or may not be selected to continue with their training.
8. On selection, trainee examiners are allocated to a senior examiner to commence a three day training programme. At the end of this period the senior examiner makes a report with a recommendation back to the chief examiner. Following this the trainee examiner may be accepted, accepted with training conditions or rejected.
9. The RGT makes its own initial selection of examiners. RGT examiners also attend TVU's annual seminar and other training events. The awarding body advised that it has trained some of its own examiners to be able to assess RGT examinations and vice versa. This seems to be part of a more symbiotic relationship between the two organisations. This flexible and holistic approach to working is further illustrated by some 'generic' examiners also being trained to assess 'specialist' examiners' work at lower grades.
10. Examiners are initially contracted for a three year period, after which there is an annual renewal of their contract subject to satisfactory feedback on their performance. TVU carries out formal performance reviews of its examiners but there is also ongoing review following each examination session. Performance reports go to the relevant chief examiner who follows up any issues. The chief examiner in turn is also subject to performance review on the same rolling basis as other examiners and the feedback from this is looked at by the director of examinations.
11. TVU relies heavily on its network of centre representatives, which are essentially area coordinators. There are over 100 TVU centre representatives worldwide. The centre representatives are a valuable resource for the awarding body in carrying out administrative work to do with collating entries and distributing results, setting up examination venues, liaising with teachers and carrying out marketing initiatives in their local area.
12. Centre representatives are commission based roles though there is no formal contract with them. Many have been in post for a number of years and there is rarely a need to advertise. The monitoring team was advised that in cases where advertising was necessary the awarding body wrote to a cross section of teachers in the area. The role of the centre administrators is comprehensively laid out in the *Representatives Handbook*.
13. Additionally there are a number of private examination centres such as schools and colleges who have their own centre representatives. These are not commission based

roles and are usually filled by the main centre contact being more aligned to that of an examinations officer.

14. The awarding body uses a bespoke database that was created some years ago. The database is located on the university's server and is backed up regularly. A backup server is also maintained overseas. The monitoring team was advised that the awarding body was looking at the possibility of online entry, which would reduce the administrative burden on head office staff.

### **Accreditation conditions**

There are no conditions for this section.

### **Observations**

There are no observations for this section.

## Qualifications development: planning

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 1, 4 and 43–44.

### Findings

1. TVU has an informal system and general principles for developing, revising or updating its accredited qualifications but this is only partially documented. TVU staff are aware that they will be required to formalise their procedures for the supplementary recognition process for the qualifications and credit framework (QCF).
2. Proposals for new qualifications come from a variety of sources. These can include feedback from customers, centre representatives or examiners. They may also arise from specific initiatives such as a recent request for graded examinations in Indian music. The sector skills council, Creative and Cultural Skills, are also involved in dialogue relating to future developments.
3. The majority of TVU graded examinations are endorsements to the Syllabus for Graded Examinations in Music Performance and as such conform to a standard format and marking scheme. They are single unit qualifications made up of a variety of components such as performance, sight reading and viva voce.
4. The standard qualifications format provides a consistency across the different qualifications but there is sufficient flexibility to adapt the components as applicable for the different subjects or to allow for reasonable adjustments to be made.
5. Qualification review and development is the responsibility of the relevant chief examiner assisted by the qualifications/marketing officer. There is a rolling programme for reviewing qualifications as they become due for renewal, usually three to four years. The process is overseen by the director of examinations.
6. Currently there is no documented process for the initial stages of a new qualification. Market research is carried out by the director of examinations. He also considers the impact of the qualification on the organisation before making a decision to proceed.

### Accreditation conditions

1. TVU must formalise its procedures for planning the development of new or revised qualifications (*The statutory regulation of qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 43).

## **Observations**

There are no observations for this section.

## Qualifications development: content and design of qualifications

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 33a and 45–55.

### Findings

1. The monitoring team was shown examples of procedures that TVU followed to develop qualifications. One example outlined the process for the development of a new syllabus to replace one due to expire. A second example was for the development of a completely new qualification.
2. Both examples describe initial meetings of relevant stakeholders including the director of examinations, qualifications and marketing officer and chief examiner before a decision was made to proceed.
3. This was followed by the appointment of specialists with subject expertise to write draft syllabus. The fundamentals of the new syllabus were agreed with the specialists through further meetings and discussions.
4. The draft syllabus went through several stages of review and amendment before the content of the components was agreed. All the stages of review were discussed and approved by the director of examinations and the qualifications/marketing officer.
5. Draft syllabus and handbooks were sent out for consultation and trialling with a selection of teachers. The example procedure for the new qualification also identified the need to train examiners.
6. These example procedures show that TVU has considered how it approaches the development of qualifications. However, TVU staff are aware that this is insufficient to meet the statutory regulations. The stages, including decision points and sign off, in these procedures must be brought together to form the basis of a formal process to meet the requirements of the QCF recognition application.
7. Once the qualifications have been developed they are made ready to be accredited by the regulators. TVU does not have any documented procedure for preparing, checking and submitting qualifications; nor does it have any procedure for reviewing the whole qualifications development system to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements.

## **Accreditation conditions**

2. TVU must formalise its procedures for developing the content and design of qualifications. These must detail the stages of the development process including decision points, sign off and checking arrangements (*The Statutory regulation of qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 45–55).

## **Observations**

There are no observations for this section.

## Assessment arrangements: independent assessment

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

### Findings

1. TVU has graded qualifications for performance in music, speech and drama as well as music literacy qualifications. They are all single unit qualifications assessed through practical or written examination. TVU also has a series of diploma qualifications, for example those for music teaching, which have a different assessment structure. They can include more theory work such as an essay or theory examination.
2. The structure of the practical examination usually includes the playing of a preset piece of music, sight reading, playing of scales and a viva voce. There may be some variance in the actual components depending on the specific subject; for example, the type of music or instrument the candidate is playing. For instance, an improvisation test may replace the standard sight reading test for jazz musicians. The components for the specific examinations are set out in the relevant syllabus. Practical examinations are taken on demand.
3. The mark scheme is broken down by four assessment domains of technicality, musicality, knowledge and communications. The assessment domains are weighted across the different components and different grades. This is standard for all instruments and music types. The mark schemes are clearly laid out in the syllabus together with grade descriptions.
4. During the practical examination the examiner will complete a report form for each candidate. The form includes space for the mark and for any specific comments about the candidate performance. The examiner uses a marking grid to allocate the grade and the mark. The method of awarding a mark is for the examiner to look at the criteria for the final result (merit, pass, etc.) and decide which band the candidate fits into using the criteria for guidance. Within each banding there are a certain number of marks available depending on the level of the performance within the banding, for example a high merit or a low merit.
5. The examiner also completes a results sheet which lists candidate names and final marks. At the end of the examination session the results sheet is returned to TVU for processing. The report forms are retained by the centre representative in a sealed envelope.

6. The results sheets are reviewed by TVU staff and entered onto the database. They can ask to see report sheets if there are any concerns over an examiner's marks. The TVU database will 'flag up' any deviance in marking away from the average. The centre's previous records and examining history can also be reviewed from reports on the database. Notes on specific issues affecting centres may also be entered. Once the result has been confirmed the centre representative is advised to release the report forms to the candidates.
7. Some of the qualifications require the candidate to complete an essay. This is submitted alongside the examination entry form. The essay is marked by two examiners and discussed with the candidate in a viva voce section of the practical examination. Discussing the essay with the candidate provides an assurance that they understand the content and should alleviate any potential plagiarism. The choice of essay questions and accompanying guidance notes are available from the syllabus.
8. Theory examinations must be taken on one of the three preset dates each year. All three papers for each grade are produced at the same time by question writers. The question writers are usually examiners. Each writer is allocated a paper which they put together and submit to the awarding body. A paper setting meeting is then held with the writers, chief examiners and awarding body staff where any changes are made.
9. The chief examiner is responsible for signing the paper off after which it is sent to an external typesetter. The awarding body does not have a confidentiality agreement with the typesetter and the monitoring team advised that it would be best practice to put one in place.
10. The process for writing, reviewing and producing the examination papers is not currently documented. It would be good practice to do this to enhance guidance on writing items to writers and to ensure the process can be followed to cover staff changes or absence.
11. The printing of the examination papers is done by the universities reprographics department prior to the examination period. Examination papers are then sent directly to the independent invigilator for each examination venue. TVU does not currently stipulate that examination papers must be stored securely prior to the examination. It is a requirement that TVU should be assured of the security of examination papers before, during and after assessment and the guidance must be amended to reflect this.
12. All theory examinations have invigilators who are appointed by the centre representatives. Spot checks are carried out by TVU staff to ensure that awarding body requirements are

being complied with at the examinations. Invigilators sign a declaration at the end of the examination that alerts the awarding body to any incidents.

13. Candidates are sent an attendance notice prior to the examination which states their personal details as well as details of the examination that they are entered for. The awarding body advised that this is produced as proof of identity at all theory and practical examinations. The monitoring team considered that whilst a significant proportion of TVU candidates may be of too young an age to hold any form of photo identification some form of further check was required on the part of the awarding body to satisfactorily identify candidates for examinations.
14. The monitoring team noticed that whilst examiners for both practical and theory tests are asked to inform the awarding body of any conflicts of interest, this could be seen as advisory. The monitoring team considered that TVU should strengthen its guidance to make it clear that it is a requirement.
15. Markers are standardised by attending an annual meeting to discuss outcomes of examination papers and to mark a sample paper. The same report form and results sheets are used to record marks.
16. The chief examiner checks a random 10% per cent sample from each examiner to ensure that marking is consistent. The marks are then entered onto the database and report forms are printed and issued to centre representatives for distribution to candidates.
17. The report forms for both the practical and theory examinations confirm the results to the candidates. Candidates have to achieve the overall pass mark to complete the qualification. Candidates may also achieve the following grades: below pass lower level 0–54%, below pass upper level 55–64%, pass 65–74%, merit 75–84%, distinction 85–100%. These grade boundaries are stated in the syllabus.
18. TVU is keeping sufficient records. Examination papers are archived and a sample of recordings is made of practical examinations which are also kept in an archive.

### **Accreditation conditions**

3. The awarding body must communicate the requirement to keep examination papers in a secure location prior to, during and after the examination to invigilators and/or any other people involved with handling examination papers (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 58f).

4. There must be a more secure form of identification provided from the candidate than the current attendance notice (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 57a).

## **Observations**

2. TVU should review the arrangements with the party involved in typesetting examination papers and consider any implications for security.
3. TVU should strengthen its guidance for examiners, requiring them to declare any conflicts of interest.
4. TVU should consider writing up their examination paper production procedure.