Enhancement-led institutional review

The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama

MARCH 2009

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Introduction
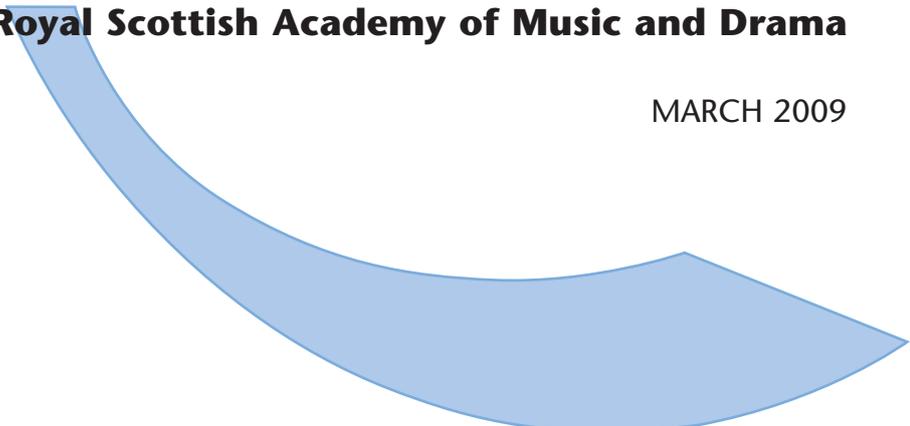
1   This is the report of an Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) of The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD or the Academy) undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). QAA is grateful to the Academy for the willing cooperation provided to the ELIR team.

ELIR method and report

2   The ELIR method was revised during 2007-08 following extensive consultation with the Scottish higher education sector. Full detail on the method is set out in the *Enhancement-led institutional review handbook: Scotland (second edition) 2008* which is available on the QAA website.

3   ELIR reports are structured around three main sections: the management of the student learning experience; institution-led monitoring and review of quality and academic standards; and a strategic approach to quality enhancement. Each of these three sections leads to a 'commentary' in which the views of the ELIR team are set out. The three commentaries, in turn, lead to the overarching judgement on the level of confidence which can be placed in the institution's management of academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience. A summary report is also available in print and from the QAA website.

Method of review

4   RSAMD submitted a reflective analysis, which provided the focus for the review. This reflective analysis was supported by a number of accompanying documents including a case study relating to the Academy's strategic Curriculum Reform project. The ELIR team also received the report of the Academy's previous ELIR which took place in 2004.

5   The reflective analysis was drafted by the Academy Secretary and informed by consultation with staff and students. The Academy's ELIR preparations were guided by an ad hoc Institutional Review Group, established by the Academic Board, which included student membership. The reflective analysis was approved by the Institutional Review Group and the Academic Board.

6   The ELIR team visited RSAMD on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 11 and 12 February 2009 and the Part 2 visit took place in the week beginning 16 March 2009.

7   The ELIR team comprised: Professor Anthony Dean, Mr Robert Jenkin, Professor Ian Pirie, Mr Martin Prchal, Professor Monica Shaw and Ms Rhiannon Tinsley. The review was managed on behalf of QAA by Ms Ailsa Crum, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland.

Background information about the institution

8   RSAMD is the only conservatoire, and one of four designated small specialist institutions, in Scotland. Its provision covers Music, Drama and (from 2009-10) Dance. Its structure comprises: the School of Drama, the School of Music, and the Central Departments and Learning Resources. RSAMD has its own taught degree awarding powers and, through a collaborative arrangement with the University of St Andrews, is able to offer research degrees. In 2008-09, it had 600 undergraduate and 156 postgraduate students.

9   In addition to the link with the University of St Andrews, the Academy has collaborative partnerships with: the University of Glasgow, the National Piping Centre and Scottish Ballet.

Context

10   Since the 2004 ELIR, the Academy has undergone two organisational reviews. The Academy described the first, which was carried out in 2004-05, as being concerned mainly with management and administrative structures and as having a relatively limited impact on the institution as a whole. The second review was carried out during 2007-08 with its outcomes coming into effect at the beginning of 2008-09. The Academy described that as a more fundamental restructure which affected all aspects of the institution's work.

Institution's strategy for quality enhancement

11   The Academy has an explicit quality enhancement strategy, which is intended to integrate a number of key institutional strategies.

Management of the student learning experience

Key features of the student population and the effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing information about its student population

12   The Academy has a small student population; in 2008-9, this comprises 600 undergraduate and 156 postgraduate students, the vast majority of whom are full-time and based on a single campus. The majority of undergraduate students come from Scotland (67 per cent) with 20 per cent coming from the rest of the United Kingdom (UK) and 13 per cent from overseas. The majority of undergraduate students perceive themselves to be white (97 per cent), 16 per cent were over 21 at the time of entry and 12 per cent are students with a declared disability. All postgraduate programmes are full-time except for the MA Arts in Social Contexts, (which had one student in 2008-09), and research degree programmes (10 part-time and three full-time students in 2008-09). In the School of Music, there are 114 taught postgraduates and 12 research students; and in the School of Drama there are 45 taught postgraduates and one research student. The postgraduate student population has a high proportion of European Union (EU) and international students (39 per cent) but most postgraduate students are drawn from Scotland (46 per cent) with 15 per cent coming from the rest of the UK.

13   The Academy has plans in place to expand its student population incrementally over the period to 2013-14. From 2009, there will be a modest growth (of around 13 per cent) in undergraduate numbers to accommodate the new BA Modern Ballet Dance and BA Musical Theatre, with a combined intake of 24 in each year. The Academy also intends to expand its international (non-EU) student numbers to represent 17.5 per cent of the total student population, three times the current number.

14   The Academy indicated that its central electronic student record system had been subject to considerable investment and was located in the new Academic Administration and Support Department.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to engaging and supporting students in their learning

Student representation and involvement

15   The Academy regards the Students' Union as providing a vital means of communication between the student body and institutional management. The Academy provides financial support for the Union and there is a supportive relationship between the senior management and the Students' Union President. Nonetheless, the Students' Union does not have a strong presence on-campus and the recruitment of a Student President, as the only sabbatical officer, is often difficult. There is, therefore, a heavy burden resting with the Students' Union President. Students expressed a wish for a stronger Students' Union and senior staff recognise that a review of the

Union's effectiveness and additional support are necessary. The Academy is encouraged to help develop the Students' Union further.

16   Students are represented on the Academy's academic committees, both centrally and in the schools, with the exception of the Academic Standards Committee. In a number of cases, representation is achieved through the Students' Union President who sits on the Board of Governors, the Academic Board, and the Learning and Teaching Committee. Staff confirmed that students are willing contributors but their attendance is normally better on programme and school committees than on institution-level committees. The Academy highlighted the active part played by students in a recent funding campaign and also highlighted student involvement in the extensive restructuring exercise (see paragraph 10). In addition, students are represented in the Academy's Curriculum Reform project (see paragraph 84) through the project steering committee and the various subcommittees. The Academy is considering ways of supporting student attendance at these discussions, including the careful scheduling of meetings, electronic solutions such as blogging, and possibly remuneration. The Academy is encouraged to continue developing these opportunities for students to engage with the project. Although groups of students are invited to become involved in discussions on strategic matters, in general, there is less evidence of systematic student engagement in strategic and policy matters within the Academy's formal structures. The Academy has stated that it is committed to developing this further, which is to be encouraged.

Gathering student views

17   The Academy's principal means of collecting student feedback is through its monitoring, evaluation and review process, which the Academy has described as central to its efforts in promoting enhancement of the student learning experience and engaging students in the development of their learning experience. Students liked the fact that the same student is a monitoring, evaluation and review representative throughout their time at the Academy. Although there is no official system in place for monitoring, evaluation and review representatives to collect the views of their peers, students did not regard this as problematic because of the relative closeness of students within a year group. Students confirmed that monitoring, evaluation and review is an effective and responsive system for discussing academic and more general issues at the programme level. Students do not always get feedback from the institution on the actions taken as a result of discussion during the monitoring, evaluation and review process, and the Academy should address this.

18   New students receive information about the monitoring, evaluation and review process during their induction and guidance for new student representatives is provided informally by existing representatives. A rolling programme of training, facilitated by the national Student Participation in Quality Scotland (sparqs) service, had commenced at the time of the ELIR visit. Students who had attended the first training session were enthusiastic about its value in helping them to carry out their roles effectively. The Academy is strongly encouraged to continue with a programme of sparqs training as a means of promoting effective student engagement, particularly in relation to policy and more strategic matters.

19   In addition to the monitoring, evaluation and review process, there are various opportunities for formal and informal dialogue between staff and students, and this frequent contact enables simple issues to be resolved quickly. Students confirmed that, when they had an issue, they knew the processes for having it addressed, and were positive about the many informal opportunities for them to give feedback about their programmes.

20   Since the 2004 ELIR, anonymous feedback module questionnaires have been introduced in the School of Drama, and there is evidence that issues raised through this mechanism are being addressed. The Academic Board has indicated that a similar system will be introduced in the School of Music in 2009-10 and the Academy is encouraged to pursue this.

21   While various surveys and other mechanisms for obtaining student feedback are in operation (see paragraph 25), the Academy does not currently have a means of obtaining an overarching view of student opinion. Having a more holistic and strategic view is likely to be of significant benefit in supporting the institution's self-evaluative and decision-making processes (see paragraph 64). The Academy is, therefore, encouraged to consider ways of addressing this.

Feedback to students on their assessed work

22   The Academy described its approach to providing diagnostic and formative feedback to students as continuous and immediate, resulting from the nature of conservatoire teaching and the focus on performance. Assessment criteria and learning outcomes are laid out in programme handbooks. Students highlighted examples of good practice in the School of Drama, including the use of self-evaluation and peer assessment.

23   In general, students were clear when and how they should receive feedback on examinations. However, they indicated that the arrangements for receiving feedback on assessed work varied across, and sometimes within, programmes. The Academy indicated that written feedback is always provided on assessed work in both schools. Students identified good practice in the School of Drama, such as the provision of oral feedback throughout a module with written feedback at the end; written feedback being provided prior to a tutorial; and the integration of assessment feedback with the personal academic tutorial system. Students indicated that, in the School of Music, written feedback on performance was given in some cases. The Academy has acknowledged that the School of Music has more to do in this area and changes are planned to its assessment practice for the start of 2009-10. There would be considerable benefit in the School of Music drawing on existing good practice within the School of Drama, in line with the 'One Academy' agenda (see paragraph 80). In particular, the Academy should address the current variability in practice to meet its own ambition of ensuring that all student assessment feedback is of a consistently high standard.

Support for learning

24   The Academy indicated that the supportive and personal nature of the induction experience sets the tone for each student's career at RSAMD. The induction week provides an opportunity for all students to meet the Counsellor and Disability Adviser. Compulsory cultural awareness sessions are provided as well as academic and artistic activities. Since 2006-07, the School of Drama has provided a credit-rated Creative Beginnings module, and the School of Music is considering introducing similar provision. Currently, all new Music students rehearse together and perform on the final day of their first week. Students value the opportunities the induction arrangements provide for interaction with their peers on different programmes, but noted that similar opportunities after the induction period were limited.

25   In 2008-09, the Academy created a centralised Academic Administration and Support Department, which has provided a 'one-stop shop' to enquirers, applicants, students and staff in respect of all aspects of academic administration. Students and staff confirmed that the new department is efficient and effective; students spoke positively about the clear referral and access mechanisms now in place. Staff expressed their intention to conduct an evaluation of the department six, and again 12, months after its establishment, which would be a useful development. Student support services are not yet evaluated systematically as part of an annual review process, although some localised surveys are used and student feedback is taken informally. The Academy is encouraged to adopt a more systematic and holistic approach to gathering student views as a means of evaluating the services provided and to assist with institutional planning (see paragraph 21).

26   The Academy considers that it offers a very challenging but also supportive learning environment. The counselling service offers confidential emotional and well-being support. The student welfare function, which covers advice on a range of matters including student loans and accommodation, is combined with the role of International Officer (see paragraph 43).

27   The School of Drama has a personal academic tutorial system which is closely integrated with personal development planning support and guidance, commencing with goal setting at induction. This development arose from a project undertaken by School of Drama staff on the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Arts Higher Education (see paragraph 46). In the School of Drama, each member of staff is assigned a group of students with whom they must meet at least once a term in the students' first and second years, reducing to once during their third year. In addition to this, students may meet their tutor as the need arises. From 2008-09, the School of Music has adopted the personal academic tutorial system for the first and second years of its programmes. The School of Music also has a formalised open-door policy whereby heads of department are available at identified times each week. Students are positive about the informal accessibility of staff, which they regard as a strong and supportive feature of close staff-student relationships in the Academy; they were less clear about the purpose of the personal academic tutorial system. This was particularly the case in the School of Music where the personal academic tutorial arrangements do not yet appear to link to personal development planning in practice and are not yet regarded as part of the culture. The Academy is encouraged to consider the uneven implementation of the personal academic tutorial system, clarifying its purpose in the School of Music to ensure the students gain maximum benefit (see paragraph 36).

28   The Academy is participating actively in the Erasmus exchange programme. In 2008-09, there was a considerable increase in the numbers of outgoing and incoming students compared to the previous year. Students identified a number of challenges associated with undertaking an exchange (including the costs and a fear of potentially losing their position in the competitive freelance job market) but also indicated that participation in international exchange was being encouraged by the Academy. Students were well informed about the opportunities available although information is not provided in the student handbooks. There is limited information on the Academy's mechanisms for recognising the exchange period in final honours degree classifications, although the Academy has stated that approval of an individual student exchange requires the assessment mechanisms to be confirmed in advance of the exchange taking place and final-year students would not normally be permitted to participate in an exchange. Nonetheless, students would welcome the Academy reflecting on the internal coordination of information relating to Erasmus exchange management. There would be benefit in the Academy addressing these matters.

29   The Academy has confirmed that, as well as performing in the institution, many students are offered opportunities to take performances on tour or to perform in professional venues, enabling exposure to a number of different audiences. Students value these opportunities and indicated that staff provide varying levels of support for these activities, but considered that help would be available if requested.

30   In a development that the Academy believes will impact positively and directly on the quality of the students' experience, a programme of International Fellows has been introduced over the last two years, with the intention of bringing internationally renowned practitioners to the institution. The Academy indicated that, even more recently, the role of Artistic Director has been introduced in Scottish Music and in Jazz. The new role is intended to enable performers of international standing to provide artistic leadership for specialist areas at the Academy while maintaining the other strands of their careers. The two current artistic directors are supported in their roles by full-time academic staff. Based on early positive feedback, the Academy is considering extending the role of Artistic Director to other provision.

31   Overall, students indicated that they enjoy their experience at the Academy and are enthusiastic about the lively, creative and supportive learning environment provided.

Research student support

32   The Academy recruited its first research students in 2000-01 and currently has a small research population of three full-time and 10 part-time students. The research degrees are awarded by the University of St Andrews and the Academy has stated that, with minor amendments, it has adopted the University's research degree regulations and Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors.

33   The Academy indicated that research training is tailored to meet the needs of individual students, which are reviewed informally on a continuous basis and formally through annual progress review. The Academy also indicated that, under its regulations, tailored research training is an integral part of the research student experience and its completion must be signed off formally by the Head of Research before a student can be presented for examination. A range of academic support is available including weekly training sessions, a study day each term, guest presentations, student and staff-led workshops and an annual away day to the University of St Andrews. However, students and supervisors considered that these activities are optional and indicated that not all research students attend. There was some uncertainty among students and staff concerning the support available for, and the uptake of, research-skills training. The Academy should ensure that the undertaking of research-skills training by research students is fully systematised.

34   The Academy is still considering the best way to provide research-supervisor training. There is a mentoring arrangement in place for new supervisors, approved by the University of St Andrews but formal training is not available currently. The School of Drama has, wisely, suspended new research-student registrations until a supervisor-training programme is in place. The Academy should give priority to ensuring that research supervisors in both schools receive adequate training (see paragraph 61).

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting the development of graduate attributes, including those relating to employability, in all of its students

35   The Academy provides highly vocational programmes designed and developed to meet the needs of the related professions. This is reflected in the appointment of part-time professional practitioners who the Academy described as providing 'a live link to those professions'. Using Scottish Funding Council (SFC) employability funding, the Academy has created the post of Career and Enterprise Co-ordinator, based in the School of Music. This post is filled currently by a practising musician who delivers workshops and seminars on career opportunities, as well as running an agency service to give students the opportunity to gain experience in professional environments outside the Academy.

36   Since the 2004 ELIR, the Academy has made some progress in developing personal development planning. The system is better established in the School of Drama where it is integrated with the personal academic tutorial system. Staff in the School of Music indicated that the use of personal development planning was less systematic than in Drama and students indicated that, although they see its potential benefits, they would appreciate greater support from staff in implementing it. The Academy has expressed its intention to consider the key attributes of an RSAMD graduate during its Curriculum Reform project. Linked to this, the Academy is encouraged to ensure that all students are able to benefit from personal development planning.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing the learning environment

37   Since the 2004 ELIR, the Academy has succeeded in releasing 1,000 hours per week of prime teaching and practice space as a result of centralising its administrative services. A timetabling post has been created to ensure the most efficient and effective use of available space. Students regarded these developments as very positive, indicating that, although space is still limited, it is well managed.

38   The Academy has acknowledged that there are issues in respect of the provision of social space for students. The creation of the centralised administration office meant that the size of the student common room had to be reduced. While students were unhappy with the reduction in size of their common room, they recognise that more students now use the upstairs café as a social gathering space, which has the benefit of students from different schools socialising together.

39   At the time of the last ELIR, the Academy was considering introducing a virtual learning environment. The Academy has recognised that limited progress has been made in respect of an Academy-wide virtual learning environment but pockets of good practice exist, particularly in the School of Drama. The Learning and Teaching Committee is advising on the implementation of a virtual learning environment platform across the institution, and is likely to recommend a bottom-up approach. While such an approach will be important in ensuring that the needs of different programmes are met, there would be benefit in the Academy monitoring progress more strategically, for example to ensure that all staff and students receive training to support their use of the virtual learning environment.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting equality of opportunity and effective learning for all of its students

40   The Academy is committed to cultural and social inclusion, and explained that this presents particular challenges for a conservatoire, especially in relation to Music which relies on early development. The Academy has established an extensive programme of pre-higher education initiatives in Scotland including a Junior Academy in the School of Music and a network of outreach projects through DramaWorks and MusicWorks, the latter developed on a national basis in collaboration with local authorities. In 2008-09, the Academy has 3,982 students enrolled on pre-higher education courses and the Strategic Plan envisages a steady increase in the YouthWorks programme. These are significant and positive aspects of the Academy's provision aimed at promoting equality of opportunity.

41   At the time of the current ELIR visits, the Academy was in the process of appointing an Equal Opportunities Officer to provide a focus for disseminating information and providing advice. The Academy intends that an early task for the postholder will be to review the effectiveness of the leadership and ownership of equal opportunities promotion at both the strategic and operational level. The Academy provides staff development sessions related to student disability and wider equal opportunities matters (including the compulsory equality and diversity workshops which are delivered as part of student induction and Academy-wide staff development events). Planning and evaluation of this activity is overseen by the Staff Development Committee.

42   The Academy indicated that 'bespoke' support is structured for students with a disability from the point of application until graduation, starting with arrangements for audition organised by the Counsellor and Disability Adviser and followed by individual learning agreements with successful applicants. These arrangements are subject to annual review and include identification of any necessary modifications to the examination arrangements. Students spoke positively about the support available to students with a disability, both from the Academy and from their year group.

43   The Academy has an International Student Task Group, which meets once a term to discuss topics such as cultural awareness, English language provision, and student support arrangements. It also oversees an annual International Student Survey. The Academy provides pre-entry and in-sessional English language classes and has appointed an International Officer to support its international students. The analysis of the International Student Survey 2007-08 identifies the need for an orientation programme and after-graduation support, which will be explored by the Task Group. It is clear that the Academy has improved its induction and support for international students, and this is reflected in students' positive views in this area.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to supporting and developing staff to promote effective learning for their students

44   The Academy has recently completed a two-year review of its staff development policies and procedures, a key outcome of which is a revised annual Career Review process. The revised process is intended to align individual development plans more closely with the Academy's Strategic Aims and Operational Objectives. Permanent staff are included in the Career Review process currently, with the intention of extending the process to other groups of staff in the future.

45   The Academy emphasised the benefit of institution-wide staff development events for disseminating information and stimulating debate relating to such matters as the recent restructure, preparation for ELIR and the Curriculum Reform project. However, it is intended that, in future, these events will be more departmentally based, with a more direct focus on learning and teaching. Part-time hourly paid staff are encouraged to participate and are offered payment for attending. The Academy also encourages membership of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and involvement with the subject centre for Dance, Drama and Music (PALATINE).

46   The Academy introduced an in-house, part-time HEA-accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Arts Higher Education in 2007-08. It was undertaken by 14 staff in 2007-08 and six staff in 2008-09, and is open to full and part-time staff. The programme was designed to meet the needs of teachers in a conservatoire context and its impact has been described by its first cohort as 'transformational'. In the School of Drama, staff attending the programme have shared their experience with colleagues through presentations and more informal means. A project, relating to student support and guidance, developed by two participants on the programme has subsequently been introduced in Drama (see paragraph 27). The programme has clearly been a significant and positive development, both for those attending the programme and for its wider impact.

47   The Academy has acknowledged the positive potential of the Erasmus programme to exchange academic and administrative staff, and has made some use of the scheme. The number of outgoing staff has increased from two in 2007-08, to five in 2008-09. Some teaching staff appeared to identify international exchange as providing opportunities for competitive comparison rather than focusing on the quality enhancement benefits associated with opportunities to broaden repertoire or gain experience of higher education in a different culture. There would be benefit in the Academy considering what it wishes to learn from its involvement with the programme.

48   The Academy has made two Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) submissions, in 2000-01 and 2008, both in Music. The Academy highlighted the 2008 outcomes, including that 85 per cent of the Music research was deemed to be of international quality and 40 per cent of that was assessed as world-leading or internationally excellent. The Academy is making progress towards developing a research community in which staff are encouraged to become research active and to attend and present at conferences. Staff are committed to informing their teaching with their research, facilitated by the largely practice-based nature of the Academy's research activity.

49   Overall, it is clear that the Academy has made good progress in establishing sound staff development policies, and has benefited from the clear and effective direction provided by the Staff Development Committee which is planning and monitoring a wide range of initiatives. The Academy has also identified a range of further development needs, including support for staff taking on new leadership and management roles.

The effectiveness of the institution's management of the student learning experience on collaborative programmes

50   The Academy offers three programmes collaboratively: the BEd Music with the University of Glasgow; the specialist piping strand of the BA Scottish Music with the National Piping Centre; and the Postgraduate Diploma in Pianist for Dance with Scottish Ballet. All of these programmes

follow the Academy's monitoring and review arrangements and involve students in regular monitoring, evaluation and review meetings.

51   The BEd Music students are able to access the resources of both institutions. Students confirmed the benefits of this but highlighted that there can be conflicting pressures regarding workloads and expectations about assessment, including deadlines. There would be benefit in the Academy ensuring the BEd students are not exposed to conflicting pressures between the two institutions.

Institution-led monitoring and review of quality and standards

Key features of institution-led monitoring and review at the institution, and the extent to which these arrangements meet sector-wide expectations.

52   The Academy indicated that key features of its approach to monitoring and review include:

- the level of external involvement from employers, practitioners, academics and graduates

- the engagement of students, particularly through the monitoring, evaluation and review process and membership of programme review panels

- the extent to which processes are embedded and understood throughout the institution

- the use of appropriate reference points, including performance indicators, external examiners' reports and the Academic Infrastructure

- the rigour of programme approval and review processes.

Monitoring evaluation and review

53   All programmes are monitored on a continuous basis through the monitoring, evaluation and review process. This process is designed to comprise two distinct functions: monitoring; and evaluation and review. The Monitoring Panel includes staff from inside and outside the host school and an elected student from each level of the programme being reviewed. It meets twice a year to consider the delivery of the programme against a range of specified criteria. The Evaluation Group comprises the Monitoring Panel membership supplemented by two external members (one academic and the other from an appropriate field of professional practice), and two graduates of the programme. The Evaluation Group meets once a year and is intended to evaluate the findings of the Monitoring Panel, with the aim of informing the programme's development; it also considers summaries of external examiners' reports and relevant performance indicators. The process culminates in an annual review report and recommendations, which is considered by a number of the Academy's committees, including the relevant school committee and the Academic Standards Committee.

54   Student involvement is a strong feature of the monitoring, evaluation and review process, as the Academy intends, but there is a tendency for relatively low-level operational issues to be raised at repeated points in the process (both at the monitoring and at the evaluation stages) with limited evidence of a more holistic or evaluative approach being adopted in practice. In addition, the Academy has acknowledged that, in some instances, although issues are generally addressed, it can be difficult to identify how and where the relevant decisions have been made, and to track progress with subsequent action. Outcomes of the monitoring, evaluation and review process appear to be contained within the annual cycle rather than providing an opportunity for programmes to identify and evaluate the effectiveness of particular decisions and actions over time. The Academy should review the operation of the monitoring, evaluation and review process to ensure that it functions as intended and, in particular, fulfils an evaluative role in practice.

Programme review

55   The Academy stated that programme reviews are normally conducted within a five-year cycle. Programme review panel membership usually includes a student reviewer and three individuals external to the Academy: an academic, a representative from a relevant profession, and an employer representative. The Academy emphasised that programme reviews are required to consider relevant subject benchmark statements, demonstrate adherence to the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF), and recognise national and international good practice. In addition, the reviews should refer to recommendations made annually in the monitoring, evaluation and review process and take full account of student feedback.

56   The 2008 Scottish Funding Council (SFC) guidance on institution-led quality review places greater emphasis on the role of support services in contributing to the quality of the student experience. The central resources and learning infrastructure required by a programme are intended to be considered during the Academy's programme review process. The recently centralised Academic Administration and Support Department is likely to be in a positive position to provide a more holistic overview and data to effectively inform the programme review process. The Academy is encouraged to consider how it will address the emphasis on support services in the revised SFC guidance.

57   In 2008, the Academy embarked on a Curriculum Reform project, which is intended to include reviewing and revalidating all the Academy's programmes. Senior staff confirmed that the existing programmes would not be impacted by the design and content of the new programmes, but, would continue to be offered in their current form for the students already registered on them. Programmes in the School of Music had been scheduled for programme review but the Academy had decided to delay this and to review the programmes as part of the Curriculum Reform project. The Academy acknowledged that this would delay a number of the reviews beyond the Academy's five-year cycle and, potentially, beyond the six-year maximum cycle stipulated in the SFC guidance. The Academy also expressed an intention to delay consideration of a number of matters raised in external examiners' reports, and in other quality assurance processes, until the Curriculum Reform project. While there is likely to be benefit in considering key topics arising from these sources during Curriculum Reform, it will be important for the Academy to address the matters raised in relation to the existing programmes for its current students.

58   Given that the design of the existing programmes will not be revised as a result of Curriculum Reform, there does not appear to be a strong rationale for delaying the reviews or for including them within the project, which is already ambitious in scope. In addition, staff expressed doubt that the Curriculum Reform project could be achieved within the timescale stated by the Academy, which made it possible that the review of the School of Music programmes could be delayed even further. The Academy is strongly advised to progress with the School of Music programme reviews separate from the Curriculum Reform project, to assure itself that the quality of the student experience and the academic standards of existing awards are maintained during the project (see paragraph 84).

59   Overall, the programme review process itself is effective; students are represented in the process and the monitoring, evaluation and review outcomes are considered. In particular, the reviews of programmes in the School of Drama (which took place in 2007) had clearly resulted in a number of significant and positive changes.

Management of research degrees

60   The Academy's Research Degrees Committee has an overall responsibility for the research degree programmes. The Committee, whose membership includes a representative of the University of St Andrews, approves the admission of research students, monitors progress and oversees examination arrangements. The Committee also makes recommendations regarding research policy through the Academy's Academic Board to the University.

61   Research students and staff were less clear than other groups regarding the learning support available and, in particular, were unclear about any requirement to participate in research skills training (see paragraph 34). In addition, the Academy does not currently have formal research supervisor training in place. There are particular challenges for a small specialist institution in developing a critical mass of research supervisors within specialist disciplines. It is, nonetheless, important for the Academy to implement formal systems for managing the quality of its research student experience.

The extent to which the institution's monitoring and review arrangements include consideration of all students

62   The Academy emphasised that its programme approval, review and monitoring, evaluation and review processes are all explicitly required to address equality of opportunity and the extent to which individual programmes meet the needs of all students. The Academy is clearly concerned to listen to the views of all of its students and this is reflected in the formal monitoring and review processes.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to self-evaluation including the use made of external reference points

63   The Academy described its approach to self-evaluation as being predicated upon informed and insightful external opinion. It makes use of graduates, employers, and practitioners, as well as external academic staff in its formal quality processes. In addition, the Academy makes significant use of visiting staff, drawn from across the UK and internationally. Staff confirmed their engagement with external bodies and the professions as a further means of externally referencing provision and practice.

64   Senior staff indicated that they have international contacts and personal experience which enables them to compare the Academy's overall quality with that of similar institutions abroad. The Academy is also active in a number of European organisations and is aware of the European reference points produced in the Tuning and Polifonia projects. It is very positive that the Academy has developed international activity and engaged with a variety of key networks. These contacts and involvements are undoubtedly valued by the institution, and the Academy is encouraged to develop ways of ensuring that these external references inform internal debate in a systematic and strategic way. The Academy is, therefore, encouraged to develop an approach to capturing the information and experiences gained in order to inform a more systematic process of self-evaluation and reflection. Maximum benefit will be derived from an approach that demonstrates where the evaluation takes place, who considers the outcomes, and where the actions are implemented and subsequently monitored.

65   The Academy acknowledged that, while it evaluates its monitoring and review activity on a continuous basis, it has not reviewed the effectiveness of its entire quality arrangements, other than through preparation for ELIR. In its desire to respond quickly to student opinion, the Academy may be placing too great an emphasis on reviewing its activities continuously and close to the operational level. Continuous review inhibits the extent to which patterns can be identified over time. By reviewing its processes incrementally and individually, the Academy is likely to miss the opportunity to identify more effective ways of integrating them, as well as missing the opportunity to take a holistic view of their overall effectiveness. The Academy is encouraged to adopt a more strategic approach to reviewing its quality processes.

66   The Board of Governors has expressed its intention to conduct a review of its own effectiveness and the effectiveness of its subcommittees, including the Academic Board, during 2008-09. As a practical step towards promoting consistency of practice in its academic committees, the Academy confirmed that it was currently developing standard template agendas. The Academy is encouraged to undertake a review of its academic committee structure to consider opportunities for streamlining and, in particular, to ensure clarity of deliberative and

decision-making functions (see paragraphs 68 and 69). The Academy also indicated that it had embarked upon a review of its senior management team, the Academy Executive. This is likely to be a positive development to ensure the sustainability of a number of key roles. The Academy is encouraged to ensure that its Executive will include appropriate academic expertise in quality management and the management of research degrees, and that this expertise is appropriately deployed in the chairing of key committees.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to the management of information to inform the operation and evaluation of its monitoring and review activity

67   The Academy stated that the range of qualitative and quantitative data used in its quality assurance processes is comprehensive. Student achievement rates and programme completion rates are reviewed annually during the monitoring, evaluation and review process and are subsequently considered by the Academic Standards Committee. The Committee minutes indicate that, in many cases, where issues have been identified during monitoring, evaluation and review, appropriate actions have already been discussed and immediate changes implemented before the Committee meetings.

68   In general, the Academy produces an appropriate range of statistical information to inform monitoring and review activity. However, in some instances, the Academic Standards Committee considers data in a manner that may not help the Academy to identify potential problems. For example, the Academy describes progression in terms of the percentage of students continuing in each, individual year of a programme and does not always take account of the progression rate for the whole cohort longitudinally. This approach does not help the Academy to consider how many students failed to progress overall from the start to the end of an award. There is also a need for the minutes to make decisions and actions more explicit to assist with the tracking of outcomes, for example to identify evidence of improvements following actions that have been taken during the monitoring, evaluation and review process.

69   Overall, the Academy considers it has high student achievement rates. However, in one programme relatively high non-completion and academic failure rates were identified over a number of years. While it is clear that the Academy had taken action each year in an effort to address the issues, it was not evident from the documentation that this work had been accompanied by a more formal review of the underlying causes. There would be benefit in the Academy pursuing this. The Academy would also benefit from considering datasets collectively to achieve a coherent overview, for example analysing the interrelationship between annual student achievement data, cohort progression data and final programme completion rates. The Academy should consider how the holistic analysis of this data and the interrelationship of the data sets over time could be used more effectively.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to setting and maintaining academic standards including the management of assessment

70   The Academy highlighted that the establishment of academic standards begins with the programme approval process, which includes the involvement of individuals external to the institution and consideration of key elements of the Academic Infrastructure. The maintenance of academic standards is reviewed through the monitoring, evaluation and review and programme review processes. The Academy does not currently have any formal restriction on the extent to which programmes can be modified annually as a result of the monitoring, evaluation and review process. This means that, potentially, a series of incremental changes could, collectively, lead to a significant alteration in the programme without the impact of the changes being explicitly considered. A significant number of changes have been approved for some programmes as a result of the monitoring, evaluation and review process and the Academy is strongly advised to develop its regulations to identify the maximum volume of change that can be permitted before triggering a full programme review or re-approval. In a positive development, the Academic Administration and Support Department will now ensure the efficient and effective administration

of the modifications process. Nonetheless, the Academy should ensure it has effective mechanisms in place for approving modifications and for maintaining a clear oversight of the extent to which programmes have been adapted over time, including the clear recording of decisions and longitudinal tracking of modifications made.

71   The Academy makes a considerable investment in its assessment processes, recognising that the assessment of performance presents particular challenges. There are some differences in the way external examiners are used in the two schools, but both schools involve external individuals directly in the assessment of performance. The Academy recognises that this is expensive but considers that the benefits outweigh the costs, particularly in terms of underwriting the integrity of the examinations process and in assisting with the comparability of academic standards. In the School of Drama, external examiners are involved in the examination of all final-year students, which necessitates attendance at a number of student productions throughout the session. Depending on the assessment requirements of the particular programme, external examiners may also undertake a moderating function in respect of written elements. In the School of Music, there are performance assessment panels which include internal and specialist external examiners. There are also chief external examiners who (along with key internal staff) ensure comparability of standards across the specialist examination panels and evaluate the effectiveness of the School's examination process overall. For contextual and theoretical aspects of the programmes, the chief external examiners also carry out a moderating role on an agreed sampling basis.

72   Overall, the Academy's approach to managing assessment is secure. There is a potential for confusion in the School of Music between the role of the specialist external examiners, who contribute to the assessment of student performance as part of an internal assessment panel, and the overarching role of the chief external examiners. Across both schools, there is potential for confusion between external examiners of performance and external examiners who are performing a more traditional, moderating role. The Academy is asked to consider the way in which the two roles are described in documentation to promote greater clarity of understanding by students and by the external examiners themselves. This clarity would be further aided by a differentiation in the titles of these roles.

73   The Academic Secretary prepares a summary of the external examiners' reports which is considered, alongside the school and departmental responses, by the Academic Standards Committee. The Committee, in turn, reports to the Academic Board. The summary report and the Committee's consideration of the matters raised, provide a useful overview of academic standards across the institution. There would be benefit in the Academy considering whether it maximises the potential benefit of this information to inform future developments and enhancements.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing public information about quality and academic standards, including the linkage with the institution's monitoring and review arrangements

74   The Academy indicated that it does not currently publish data produced through its monitoring and review arrangements although, because those processes significantly influence the continuous development of programmes, their outcomes are reflected in a range of other material including student handbooks and the prospectus. The content of the prospectus, which is reviewed and updated annually, is approved by an Editorial Board, reporting to the Academy's Executive. The Academy considers that this task is relatively straightforward due to the small number of programmes offered.

75   The Academy's website, which was comprehensively redesigned in 2007-08, serves an academic purpose and also includes information about events at the Academy as a performance venue. It is, therefore, a complex and sizeable site. The Marketing Department has responsibility for the content of the main pages, and updating the detail of web content is devolved to identified staff in each school and the support areas. There is a newly established Web Users

Group (to be chaired by the Head of Marketing), which aims to support staff in updating the website. The Academy acknowledged that arrangements for managing and scrutinising the website were bedding in, but it is evident that appropriate structures for overseeing it are being put in place.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to linking its monitoring and review processes to its enhancement arrangements

76   The Academy stated that the outcomes of its monitoring and review processes lead directly to the quality enhancement of students' learning experience. It is clear that the outcomes of the monitoring, evaluation and review process lead to incremental enhancement at the programme and (to a lesser extent) school level. There was also evidence of programme reviews having had a significant enhancing effect. It is not clear, currently, how the monitoring, evaluation and review or programme review processes would systematically inform strategic enhancement initiatives, although the Academy does intend to use the outcomes of the programme reviews to inform the Curriculum Reform project. The Academy is encouraged to make more effective use of the statistical and analytical information gathered during its monitoring, evaluation and review and programme review processes, to enhance provision across the institution, for example to accelerate the adoption of existing good practice or to address issues that may lead to enhancement across the institution rather than relating these to specific programmes or to a single school.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to monitoring and reviewing its collaborative activity

77   For administrative and programme management purposes, each of the Academy's three collaborative programmes (see paragraph 50) are wholly owned by the Academy and are fully integrated within the Academy's arrangements for monitoring and review. The Academy also engages in a periodic review of the institutional partnerships. Staff from partner institutions participate fully in monitoring, evaluation and review and programme review activity and are full members of the appropriate boards of examiners. Programmes are managed through joint programme boards, which are convened and administered through the School of Music. The Academy indicated that each of these programmes had been reviewed since the 2004 ELIR. In general, these are secure arrangements which operate effectively, although the BEd students identified some issues associated with differing requirements from the two institutions (see paragraph 51).

Strategic approach to quality enhancement

Key features of the institution's strategic approach to quality enhancement

78   Since the 2004 ELIR, the Academy has developed a Strategic Plan for the period 2006-2013, Investing in Creativity, which it views as having enhancement at its core. This Plan sets out the Academy's aspirations and associated funding needs, seeks to take full account of the Scottish cultural context, the Academy's developing relationships with the national performing arts companies and sets out its key objective for internationalisation as a means of academic and artistic enrichment. The Academy views the development and realisation of this Plan as having a significant impact upon the quality of the student experience.

79   Investing in Creativity highlights international collaboration and mobility as important features that will have a positive impact on quality enhancement. The Academy has ambitious goals in relation to its international position, stating, for example, that it would like to become the Juilliard of Europe. The Academy regards itself as a conservatoire of international standing and indicates that its facilities are among the best in Europe. The Academy has taken a number of steps to develop its international contacts including the International Fellows programme,

involvement in European networks and participation in the Eramus programme (see paragraphs 28, 30, 47 and 64). Although the Academy convened an international advisory committee to support the development of Investing in Creativity, it does not currently have an explicit international strategy and has not yet undertaken any formal international benchmarking in order to underpin its ambitions or self-evaluation. The Academy is invited to consider the benefit of adopting a coherent international strategy to address the range of its activities aimed at promoting international links and comparability of the institution.

80   The key strategic aims and operational objectives contained within Investing in Creativity have given rise to a 'One Academy' agenda, one aim of which is the creation of a more student-driven curriculum in which it is intended that all students will benefit from greater choice, flexibility and opportunities for interdisciplinarity. Investing in Creativity provides positive evidence of the way in which the Academy is ambitious and imaginative in its approach to enhancement. The One Academy agenda seeks to promote the development of the institution as a coherent whole, rather than on the basis of individual schools or departments and is identified as underpinning the Academy's whole approach to enhancement. The Academy has identified a number of achievements resulting from its One Academy agenda, including the creation of the centralised Academic Administration and Support department and the establishment of the Learning and Teaching Committee. The Academy clearly finds the One Academy agenda to be a useful device for discussing and seeking to progress its enhancement agenda, which is positive. However, some key elements of the One Academy agenda are at a relatively early stage of implementation and there remains considerable scope for the two schools to share and learn from each others' practice.

81   A range of the Academy's institutional strategy documents make reference to quality enhancement or set out related objectives, including: Investing in Creativity; the Quality Enhancement Strategy; and the Mission Statement, Strategic Aims and Operational Objectives. Senior staff have recognised that there would be benefit in bringing together the institutional aims and objectives relating to quality enhancement, and the Academy is encouraged to consolidate the current variety of strategic documents in circulation in order to promote a clear and shared understanding among all staff about the key strategic priorities in this area.

The effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategies and policies for promoting quality enhancement across the institution

82   The Academy first developed a coordinated quality enhancement strategy as part of the planning process leading up to the production of the 2002-06 Strategic Plan. The 2004 ELIR report noted the holistic and comprehensive nature of that strategy, and the current Strategy (for 2008-09) continues in this vein, seeking to make explicit the links between the Academy's various strategic initiatives in support of quality. Since the 2004 ELIR, the Academy has focused much of its attention on the creation, development and implementation of the Investing in Creativity strategy. This included engagement with a number of significant challenges for the institution: securing its future funding arrangements; a comprehensive job evaluation and pay grading exercise; and the management of two organisational restructures. While the Academy identifies the role of these activities in sustaining and enhancing the quality of the student experience, it also recognises that it has not yet exploited the full potential of its quality enhancement strategy as a vehicle for the promotion of quality enhancement across the institution, and that it would benefit from a renewed focus on the totality of the quality enhancement strategy..

83   To oversee implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy within the context of the overarching quality enhancement strategy, the Academy has recently established a Learning and Teaching Committee. The Committee is regarded as a mechanism for identifying and disseminating good practice within the Academy (see paragraph 86), and will have primary responsibility for engaging with the national Enhancement Themes. In support of this intention,

the Academy has recently assigned two senior academic staff to engage with the current national Theme, 'Graduates for the 21st Century: Integrating the Enhancement Themes'. Although established recently, the Committee has already begun to make a positive impact upon the learning environment and has enabled the Academy to have a greater level of engagement with the national Enhancement Themes.

84   The Academy has brought together its enhancement-focused strategic objectives within the frame of the Curriculum Reform project. At the time of the current ELIR visits, the project was at an early stage of implementation. The preliminary tasks of formulating project aims and key questions had recently been agreed by the Academic Board. A convenor of the project steering committee had been appointed and a number of visits had been undertaken to other institutions that had engaged in comparable developments. A number of events, one involving senior staff and another open to all staff and students, had been held as a means of carrying the project forward. Documentation relating to the project makes clear its wide scope, including the intention to address a number of quality assurance matters during the exercise (see paragraph 58). A variety of views were expressed by different groups of staff and students concerning the overall aims and intended timeframe for the project. In some cases, the views expressed contrasted with those set out by senior staff. The imaginative and holistic nature of the project is recognised, as is its potential as a vehicle for delivering institution-wide enhancement of the learning experience. However, there is a risk that the project, as currently conceived, may not be manageable for the relatively small group of staff at the Academy, given the necessity to simultaneously continue delivering existing provision. The Academy is, therefore, strongly encouraged to review and clarify the intended scope of the project, and to review the timelines to ensure the project aims can be achieved.

The effectiveness of the institution's use of external reference points in its approach to quality enhancement, including the extent to which the institution's approach is informed by national and international practice

85   The Academy considers that its approach to using external reference points is highly effective and that the level of external involvement in its quality processes is one of its most striking features (see paragraph 63). At the subject level, the Academy has a range of opportunities for drawing on external expertise and knowledge including: its International Fellows programme; its use of visiting directors, conductors, performers, and teachers from across the world; and its engagement with a range of international and UK-based networks. The development of the Investing in Creativity strategy was informed by an International Advisory Committee, the membership of which included senior practitioners and academics from across Europe. The Curriculum Reform project steering group includes external membership and the Academy intends to extend this to international membership. One of the key questions that the Curriculum Reform project intends to address is how the Academy can best position its curricula in an international context and how it might best address developments in the Bologna Process. The Academy is clearly aware of a range of external reference points and engages in a wide variety of external involvement at both subject and, increasingly, institutional level. The Academy is encouraged to make more systematic use of the information available from its external involvements to inform its practice and its decision-making processes.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to identifying, disseminating and implementing good practice in the context of its strategic approach to enhancement

86   The Academy is able to highlight a number of innovations and enhancements occurring within the schools, and clearly enhancement initiatives are supported and encouraged. There is less evidence of good practice being shared between the schools, although this may change in future through the work of the Learning and Teaching Committee (see paragraph 83). The Academy is encouraged to focus on more systematic ways of identifying and disseminating good practice across the institution.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to enhancing collaborative provision

87   The Academy expressed its intention to involve its collaborative partners in the Curriculum Reform project. Given the project's potentially significant impact on the Academy's regulations and programme design, this would clearly be important.

Conclusion

Effectiveness of the institution's management of the student learning experience

88   The Academy is student-focused and responsive to matters raised by students in relation to their subject provision, notably through the monitoring evaluation and review process. There is also a supportive relationship between the Students' Union and senior staff. The Academy is encouraged to continue developing opportunities for students to engage in strategic and policy matters and, in particular to support the further development of the Students' Union. The Academy is strongly encouraged to continue with a programme of training provided by the national Student Participation in Quality Scotland (sparqs) service as a means of promoting effective student engagement.

89   The School of Drama has arrangements in place for students to provide feedback on an anonymous basis, and the Academy is encouraged to pursue its plans to introduce a similar opportunity in the School of Music. A variety of surveys and other mechanisms are in operation for gathering student feedback on academic and support matters, but the Academy does not currently have a means of obtaining a holistic view of student opinion. The Academy is encouraged to address this to support its evaluative and decision-making processes.

90   A personal academic tutorial system is in place in the School of Drama, which is closely integrated with personal development planning support and guidance. In the School of Music, the personal academic tutorial system and its link to personal development planning is at an early stage of implementation. The Academy should consider the uneven implementation of the personal academic tutorial and personal development planning arrangements to ensure students gain maximum benefit. A variety of approaches are in place for providing feedback to students on their assessed work. A number of examples of good practice are in place, including integrating assessment feedback with the personal academic tutorial system. The Academy should address the current variability in practice to meet its own ambition of ensuring that all student assessment feedback is of a consistently high standard.

91   The Academy is making progress in developing a research community. There is a growing commitment among staff to research activity and there is evidence that this is informing teaching. There is a small research student population and the Academy is keen to tailor research training to meet individual students' needs. The Academy should give priority to ensuring that research supervisors receive adequate training and that research students undertake research-skills training on a systematic basis in practice.

92   Significant progress has been made in establishing sound staff development policies, and the Academy has benefited from the clear and effective direction provided by the Staff Development Committee. In particular, the introduction of the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Arts in Higher Education has had a wide impact, with staff describing it as 'transformational'.

93   Overall, students are enthusiastic about the lively, creative and supportive learning environment provided by the Academy. The recently established Academic Administration and Support Department, which provides a 'one-stop shop' for student and staff enquiries on all matters relating to academic administration is a particularly positive development. The support provided for students with disabilities and the developing support available for international students are also positive. Students particularly appreciate the accessibility of the teaching staff;

the range of opportunities provided to perform at a variety of venues inside and outside the Academy; and the contacts they have with communities of professional practice.

Effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for institution-led monitoring and review of quality, and academic standards of awards

94   The Academy has processes in place which enable it to secure academic standards and assure the quality of the student experience but there is a range of ways in which these processes could operate more effectively, notably the evaluative element of the annual monitoring evaluation and review process. In relation to the management of its research degrees, the Academy should implement formal systems for ensuring that all research students undertake research-skills training and that research supervisors receive training for their role.

95   A significant number of changes are made to programmes as a result of the monitoring evaluation and review process and the Academy is strongly advised to develop its regulations to identify the maximum volume of change that can be permitted before triggering a full programme review or re-approval. The Academy should also ensure it has effective mechanisms in place for approving modifications and for maintaining a clear oversight of the extent to which programmes are adapted over time.

96   The Academy had planned to delay programme reviews relating to provision in the School of Music and to combine these, along with a number of other matters arising from quality and standards processes, with the Curriculum Reform project. The Academy is strongly advised to progress with the School of Music programme reviews separately from the Curriculum Reform project, to assure itself that the quality of the student experience and the academic standards of existing awards are maintained during the project.

97   While the Academy evaluates its monitoring and review activity on a continuous basis, it has acknowledged that it does not have periodic mechanisms in place to review the totality of its quality arrangements. In its desire to respond quickly to student opinion, the Academy may be placing too great an emphasis on reviewing its activities continuously and close to the operational level. The Academy should adopt a more strategic and holistic approach to reviewing its quality processes. The Academy would benefit from more critical self-evaluation at a number of stages of its quality processes, including drawing more systematically on a range of reference points and statistical data. The Academy produces and collates a range of statistical information to inform monitoring and review activity. There would be considerable benefit in the Academy developing its use of this data to support and inform strategic decision-making.

98   The Academy's approach to managing assessment includes significant external involvement. In the School of Music, there is a potential for confusion between the role of specialist external examiners, who become directly involved in assessing individual student performance, and the overarching role of external examiners who carry out a moderating role in relation to the programme of study. The Academy is asked to consider the way in which the two roles are described (including the titles used) in documentation to promote greater clarity of understanding.

99   The Academy's Board of Governors has indicated that it will conduct a review of its effectiveness and the effectiveness of its subcommittees, including the Academic Board. The Academy is encouraged to undertake a review of its academic committee structure to consider opportunities for streamlining and, in particular, to ensure clarity of deliberative and decision-making functions. There would be benefit in ensuring that appropriate levels of academic expertise are established and deployed in the senior management team (the Academy Executive), particularly in quality management and the management of research degrees.

Effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategic approach to quality enhancement

100   The Academy is ambitious and imaginative, perhaps most notably in relation to the development and early implementation of its strategic plan, Investing in Creativity. Currently there are a variety of strategic documents in circulation at the institution which identify objectives relating to quality enhancement, and the Academy is encouraged to consolidate these to promote a shared understanding among all staff about the key strategic enhancement priorities. The Academy has recognised the benefits that could be derived from establishing an explicit, coherent international strategy, and there would be benefit in pursuing this as a means of bringing together and prioritising its activities aimed at promoting international links and the comparability of the institution in an international context. The Academy is clearly aware of a range of external reference points and engages in a wide variety of external involvement at both subject and, increasingly, institutional level. The Academy should make more systematic use of the information available from its external involvements to inform its practice and its decision-making processes.

101   The establishment of the Learning and Teaching Committee has had a positive impact on the Academy's work, particularly in facilitating greater engagement with the national enhancement themes. It is clear that enhancement initiatives are supported but these often take place within, rather than across, the schools. The Academy is, therefore, encouraged to focus on more systematic ways of identifying and disseminating good practice across the institution.

102   The Academy has embarked on an imaginative and holistic Curriculum Reform project. The project's potential as a vehicle for delivering institution-wide enhancement is recognised. However, the Academy is asked to consider the extent to which the project, as currently conceived, is manageable for the relatively small group of staff at the institution, given the necessity to simultaneously continue delivering existing provision. The Academy is, therefore, strongly encouraged to review and clarify the intended scope of the project, and to review the associated timelines to ensure the project aims can be achieved.

Overarching confidence judgement

103   The findings of the ELIR indicate that there can be **confidence** in the institution's current management of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of the student learning experience it offers. Provided that the resolution of issues arising from the operation of current assurance processes and the periodic review of existing programmes are decoupled from the Curriculum Reform project, there can also be **confidence** in the institution's likely future management of academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.