Central School of Speech and Drama

JUNE 2008

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Central School of Speech and Drama (the School) from 9 to 12 June 2008 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the School offers.

Outcomes of the institutional audit

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

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers on behalf of the University of London

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The enhancement remit at the School has been promoted and acted upon in the practical areas of performance; industrial collaboration; professional and community development and the recent postgraduate research strategies. However, the audit team noted that there still appeared to be a lack of clear and deliberate steps to enhance students' learning opportunities, in a systematic manner, in the long-established undergraduate portfolio of courses and, to a lesser extent, within the taught postgraduate courses. It was the view of the team that different arrangements for course organisation might enhance the learning opportunities for students through the systematic analysis of the impact and outcomes of performance, research and professional and community activities.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The institutional arrangements that the School has established for postgraduate research students contribute significantly to the claims that the School makes in its mission that it is 'dedicated to specialist teaching, scholarship and research for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing standards'. It also sees itself 'as a global intermediary for university drama departments and drama schools in the areas of teaching, practice and research within and for theatre'. The arrangements are systematic and contribute to the enhancement of the students' learning opportunities.

Published information

The audit team found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the School publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the creative work of the School of Professional and Community Development in supporting both the School and the constituencies it serves (paragraphs 14, 128)

- the iterative engagement with industry, including student placements and outreach work, thus supporting the aims and philosophy of the institution's programmes (paragraphs 43, 83, 89, 103, 111 and 124)

- the successful promotion of a research culture and environment with particular consideration to PhD supervision (paragraphs 127, 135, 136, 141)

- the Technical Support Department, which provides a vital resource for the School, students and stakeholders and which contributes to the mission of the School (paragraph 97).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- to affirm the institutional leadership of both quality assurance and enhancement activities and the roles of those supporting them, to ensure clarity and vision and to overcome the current institutional shortcomings in swiftly expediting change (paragraphs 10, 15, 25, 91)

- to ensure clear minimum expectations in the communication of assessment activities and criteria, to minimise the current variability and inconsistencies within and across courses, levels and their supporting documentation (paragraphs 29, 42, 46, 47, 50, 57, 142)

- to initiate, at the earliest opportunity, development of a strategic approach to learning resources which links explicitly to other strategies, policies and statements of intent (paragraphs 95, 96, 99, 100).

Recommendation for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- to consider means by which the School can engage better with the broader higher education community, thus increasing its awareness and understanding of debates and practices within the sector (paragraphs 89, 90, 100, 116, 119).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   The Central School of Speech and Drama (the School) was founded in 1906 as the Central School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art. It was integrated into the publicly funded higher education institution sector in l989 and receives funding as a discrete specialist institution. Awards of the Open University were made to first-degree students who began before 2004 and to postgraduates who began before 2005. The School became the newest of the 19 current full colleges of the Federal University of London in September 2005. It was awarded taught degree awarding powers of its own in August 2004, although at the time of the audit it was offering degrees of the University of London. In March 2005, the School was designated a Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre; one of 54 Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)-funded Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

2   The School offers three first-degree courses and two related PGCE courses. There are 12 MA courses and a small cohort of postgraduate research students. At the date of the 2007 Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey, the School had 848 students registered on higher education courses; 570 of these were undergraduate students, 266 were taught postgraduate students and 12 were MPhil/PhD students. There is no sub-degree work. Nearly 97 per cent of the School's higher education students study full-time. Additionally, the School of Professional and Community Development offers a programme of short courses and summer schools, which in 2006-07 involved 982 participants. The School employs 58 contracted teaching and research staff (50 full-time equivalent), and in 2006-07 it employed 37.5 full-time equivalent visiting professionals.

3   Between 2002 and 2007, the School operated as a single faculty with no subject-based departments. From the start of the academic year 2007-08, responsibility for undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses has been brought together into the remit of the Dean of Studies. Research, including oversight of the research degree programme is the remit of the Dean of Research. Both deans report to the Deputy Principal (Academic). Two deputy deans support the Dean of Studies.

4   The School's mission statement was re-expressed in 2007 to present the balance of its roles more clearly:

'Central is the English Funding Council's designated Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre, providing a conservatoire higher education in dramatic arts practice. It holds a premier position as a university college dedicated to specialist teaching, scholarship and research for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing standards within its subject field in general and the drama and performance industries in particular.

As an internationally distinguished institution for professional drama education and scholarship, the college will continue to develop -

● as the UK's leading brand in drama HE

● as the UK's only HE specialist drama college with a full range of opportunities for undergraduate and postgraduate study in theatre

● as an international centre for the production, enhancement and the promulgation of knowledge about and for theatre and performance

● as an educational hub which draws together higher education, industry and user communities in the field of drama

● as a global intermediary for university drama departments and drama schools in the arenas of teaching, practice and research within and for theatre.'

The information base for the audit

5   The School provided the audit team with a briefing paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling and supplementary trails selected by the team. The index to the Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence, to illustrate the institution's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. The team had a hard copy of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper; in addition it was provided with a memory stick holding the same information.

6   The Students' Union produced a student written submission, setting out the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management. The written submission was informed by elected course representatives, who ran focus groups to gather further information.

7   In addition, the audit team had access to:

- a report, based on enquiries undertaken in the period 2002-04, in connection with the School's successful application for taught degree awarding powers, which was produced following an event carried out in lieu of the normal institutional audit process

- the Ofsted Secondary Initial Teacher Training Partnership Full Inspection Report 2005-06 and reports of the National Council for Drama Training and the Health Professional's Council Report of April 2005

- the School's internal documents

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

The team was given full access to the School's internal documents, both in paper form and on the institution's website. The team met groups of staff and students, according to a programme agreed with the School.

Developments since the last audit

8   The most recent audit visit to the School was in 1994. The December 2005 audit report was derived from the confidential report to the Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers based on scrutiny over the period 2002-04. The team of assessors concluded that 'broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the School's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards'.

9   Many developments since then have involved building on the outcome of the Taught Degree Awarding Powers scrutiny rather than responding to specific audit recommendations. The Briefing Paper for the present audit summarised the areas addressed by the School in response to the 2005 report. As noted above, with effect from September 2005, the School became the twentieth full College of the University of London, and began awarding degrees of the University. In March 2005, the School was designated as a Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre. The School of Professional and Community Development was established in 2005 to coordinate aspects of outreach work, including Third Stream, Knowledge Transfer and Widening Participation. With effect from academic year 2006-07 the School began to admit research degree students. Phase 4 of a six-part estates plan was completed in 2005, allowing the School to consolidate its provision on one site.

10   A new committee structure had been put in place during the latter part of the taught degree awarding powers scrutiny. The audit report at that time noted that the structure was not yet fully embedded and that the culture of commitment and self-criticism sometimes 'existed slightly awkwardly with the need for speedy and decisive executive decision-making'. Those structures have continued without major change. The School expressed its belief that they

'bedded in' effectively, but revisited them in the academic year 2007-08, in the light both of experience and organisational restructuring. The audit team found that the School had carefully considered its committee structure, but also formed the view that speedy and decisive executive decision-making was still an issue to be addressed.

11   Posts in the School of Professional and Community Development, funded under the Widening Participation budget, support some of the School's outreach work. In summer 2007, the Academic Board approved an updated widening participation strategy. During 2008, a working party of the Academic Development Committee, chaired by the Head of the School of Professional and Community Development, was beginning the dissemination and implementation of the revised strategy.

12   The peer-observation scheme has benefited from experience of the observation process within the PGCert Learning and Teaching in higher Education, and has been extended to include a wider range of learning sessions. The audit team was able to see clear evidence of staff engagement with peer observation and dissemination of good practice, although it should be noted that, at the time of the audit, the PGCert had currently been discontinued and replaced with a range of learning sessions for new staff.

13   In the report, the School was commended on its use of visiting professionals, it was also advised to consider 'regularising the deployment of these personnel and...ensuring more systematically their familiarity with current policies on quality and standards'. Visiting lecturers have been supported mainly through close liaison with their course leaders. There is also a helpful visiting professionals' handbook available for guidance.

14   The audit team saw evidence that the School had addressed issues identified in the previous audit process. In particular, the application of the Widening Participation Policy was effective and linked closely to the outreach work of the School of Professional and Community Development, and the team found this to be good practice.

15   In the interval between audits, there have been a number of changes to key personnel and a series of reviews of organisation and process has led to several significant changes. The retirement of the former Principal in 2007, one member of the Directorate and the School's Registrar allowed for the review of the senior management structure. At the time of this audit, the School was in a somewhat transitional phase while new management structures became established, along with the reorganisation of the committee structure. An administrative mapping exercise was, at the time of the audit team's visit, nearing completion and it was anticipated that all structures would be in place ready for the commencement of the 2008-09 academic year. The importance of ensuring that these changes are implemented effectively is reflected in the recommendations made by the team.

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

16   The Quality Assurance Framework (the Framework) 2007 presents the current structures for quality assurance in terms of the constitutions of the Academic Board and its subcommittees, and of management groups with remits for strategy, learning resources and support. It is supplemented by other handbooks and by guidelines on the separate procedures for course teams and for panels.

17   The Academic Board has direct oversight of arrangements for quality and standards. In the period up to the academic year 2007-08, the Board had two subcommittees; the Faculty Board and the Academic Development Committee.

18   The Academic Board has primacy in all matters related to research, scholarship, teaching and courses, including admissions, appointment of examiners, assessment policies and procedures, awards, and student expulsion. There is a 'dotted line' relationship between the

Academic Board and the Executive Management Group allowing for management decisions to be informed by academic quality and standards issues.

19   The Academic Development Committee has responsibility for the implementation of the Academic Plan. The successor committee, the Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee, continues to make recommendations to the Academic Board with respect to the learning and teaching and research strategies and their implementation, widening participation strategy, equal opportunities and access. The Committee typically discharges its responsibilities through the establishment of a series of working parties.

20   The Faculty Board is responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of academic standards of the courses within its remit. This includes termly reporting to the Academic Board through faculty board minutes, the preparation of yearly monitoring overview reports and the overview of action plans drawn up in response to monitoring overview reports. The Faculty Board's responsibilities also include, via regular reports from the Head of the School of Professional and Community Development, the monitoring of non-award bearing courses. It is required to receive termly reports and annual course reports from course committees and to keep under regular review the quality of learning outcomes, of student experience, of teaching standards and the impact of resource provision in relation to the courses within its remit, and to make recommendations for attention or enhancement as appropriate to the Academic Board. Other committees that report to The Faculty Board are the Ethics Committee, partnership groups, examination boards, the Research Degrees Committee and the Joint Graduate Studies Committee. The Faculty Board recommends to the Academic Board new course proposals and any proposed (significant) alterations to existing course structures, documentation or regulations, and recommends external examiners for each award-bearing course. The course committee is the formal channel of communication between students and academic staff in matters relevant to the operating of courses.

21   At the start of the academic year 2007-08, the Academic Board launched a restructuring process by convening a working party to review and if necessary remodel the committee structure. In March 2008, the Academic Board approved new and revised terms of reference for its own subcommittees, and agreed that they should operate from the summer term 2008, with structured transitional meetings where relevant.

22   The key changes have included: an academic standards and enhancement committee, with some terms of reference and working methods continuing from the former Academic Development Committee, but with a more explicit remit for matters of standards and regulations; a new College Management Group, replacing the former Strategic Planning and Policy Review Group, meeting more frequently, and with provision for working groups that may be joint with the Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee; the development of institution-wide quality assurance systems, and tracking institution-wide academic strategies; the reintroduction of a research committee reporting to the Academic Board; and a more clearly defined relationship between the Faculty Board and the operational Faculty Management Group.

23   In the academic year 2008-09, the School will be managed by an executive management group and a college management group reporting directly to the Principal. A student and support service forum will report into the College Management Group and the Executive Management Group.

24   These organisational changes have occurred in the final year of the Corporate Plan 2003-2008. A new corporate plan was being developed during 2007-08, incorporating an academic plan and other sub-strategies.

25   While there was clear evidence of the effective working of each of the current committees, it is difficult for the audit team to comment on the implementation of the new structure as this was not fully operational at the time of the audit. Senior staff were able to confirm that the new structures would be operational in full from September 2008; the team believes that it would be helpful for the School to keep these under review. In its discussions with staff, the team heard

that progress so far in implementing the new structures had given staff a better sense of ownership of the working structures of the School and had provided better for discussion of key issues and sharing of good practice. The new structures have been designed to be more efficient and to result therefore in speedier action.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

26   The primary mechanisms by which the School defines and maintains the academic standards of its awards are enshrined in the Framework, which provides an overview of the key committees, management groups, processes and procedures that contribute to managing quality and academic standards, including core procedures for course monitoring, validation, changes to courses, audit and review, examination boards and the appointment of external examiners.

27   The Framework emphasises the importance of external practice and guidance, and the School has sought to ensure that its processes accord with the Ordinances of the University of London, the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the relevant published subject benchmark statements.

28   Not all the processes and procedures that contribute to assuring academic standards or to managing and enhancing learning opportunities are included in the Framework statement; in addition, the School defines its approach to assessment in the assessment handbook, which offers guidance on the principles of assessment, the conduct of assessment, regulations on the structure of courses and their assessment for credit and for awards, regulations on the assessment of students, external examiners and assessment boards.

29   The introduction to the Framework indicates the intention to ensure that the School's quality assurance arrangements are fit for purpose and reflect the particular character and portfolio of a small, specialist institution. As a result, at the time of the audit, consideration of and amendments to the various processes and practices for the maintenance of standards had been a feature of recent life at the School. Continuing consideration of these matters was clearly evident to the audit team through its scrutiny of revised or newly published documents, and from discussions of these with staff. The School aims to ensure that quality assurance principles should be embedded in its daily life, and the Framework and related documents, such as the assessment handbook, demonstrated clear evidence of the intention to provide induction and ongoing training for staff and students, although some work remains to be done in considering opportunities for fully consistent practices, for instance, in relation to assessment (for example, different arrangements for considering level 2 work for honours - see paragraph 56). The team found that the School did have a reflective approach to this ongoing development.

External examiners

30   The roles and responsibilities of external examiners are clearly specified and dealt with in both the Framework and the Assessment Handbook. The Framework refers directly to the Academic Board responsibilities for the appointment of external examiners and for the receipt of the views of all examiners and moderators through annual course reports, and through monitoring of external examiner reports by its chair. The Framework also clearly defines the terms and process of appointment, and the School's expectations in respect of briefing and documentary guidance for external examiners.

31   The Assessment Handbook provides detailed information on the appointment of the external examiner, the role, the duties and responsibilities, liaison procedures, institutional mechanism for the consideration of reports, and a full range of supporting documentation, including report pro formas and notes of guidance for the completion of reports.

32   The briefing paper described useful approaches in the School's management of external examiners, including the conduct of the main postgraduate examination board that gathers together the 10 external examiners, and the annual external examiners' briefing day which, in the audit team's view, not only ensures a clear understanding by the external examiners of their roles and responsibilities, but provides, also, an opportunity for them to act as 'critical friends' to the course team.

33   The School states in its Briefing Paper that it believes that it has made 'strong and scrupulous' use of external examiners in assuring academic standards and the audit team found good evidence of this, and of the use of advice from external experts in course validation and review. In the conduct of assessment, external examiners are engaged in a range of activities, which include reading scripts, viewing time-based media and attending performances and recitals, and providing critiques of these events.

34   The audit team took the view that the process for the nomination and appointment of external examiners was clearly defined and properly carried out, and that all institutional requirements in this area were implemented. Briefing and support is taken seriously by the School and effective guidance is offered, in particular, in the assessment handbook, which is updated annually. In addition, the annual briefing day allows for induction activities, updating and briefing on the year's activities, and an opportunity to discuss relevant matters with course teams.

35   External examiner reporting requirements are clearly articulated and supervised and there is responsibility for the processing and consideration of reports at both course and institutional level, with the chair of the Academic Board monitoring reports, all of which are copied to the chair, and course teams incorporating their consideration and response in annual course monitoring reports. The assessment handbook states that reports are also seen by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Officer, who makes a summary report of issues with school-wide relevance, and that reports form part of the portfolio of evidence considered by audit and review panels during course review. Feedback to external examiners on their reports is provided, initially with a response from the course leader within a month, and then through the provision to them of outcomes from course monitoring, and it was clear to the audit team that these processes were, generally speaking, taken seriously and operated effectively.

36   The audit team found some occasions of poor communication in postgraduate provision, where there had been a change in course leadership and one case of an external examiner being allowed to lose contact with their programme due to matters around course leadership and intermittent running of the programme, but all issues were picked up from the report and annual review and remedial procedures implemented. The team found good evidence of healthy debate around points raised by external examiners, and formed the view that the system was operating effectively and making a significant contribution to the assurance of academic standards in the courses and awards, contributing to a judgement of confidence in the School's current and likely future management of academic standards.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

37   The School claimed in the Briefing Paper that the use of the Academic Infrastructure, especially the FHEQ and course (programme) specifications and relevant professional reference points, was well embedded in the School's processes and that thorough use of external expertise in course approval and review, and sometimes in course design, was established, well understood and effective.

38   Guidelines are available for course teams preparing for validation, which advise on use of the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements. Much of the School's provision is well established, with the most recent wholly new taught postgraduate course being approved in 2005, so references at the point of revalidation tend to focus on verifying continuing adherence. The FHEQ descriptors were particularly used in the development of new master's courses between 2002 and

2005, where course design was seeking to ensure a balance of advanced practice skills with outcomes demonstrably at master's level. Most of the external examiner reports seen by the audit team confirmed that this balance had been achieved. Course teams for postgraduate courses also referred to the FHEQ master's degree descriptor in the guidelines for monitoring. The audit team also saw evidence from the BA (Hons) Drama and Theatre Education revalidation in 2008 of the proper consideration of external reference points.

39   In several of the School's subject areas, course design must reflect the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and the Briefing Paper underlined the institution's work in this area. Since the academic year 2006-07, PGCE courses have been assessed for an award at M-level. The MA Drama and Movement Therapy (Sesame) is accredited by the Health Professions Council and the BA (Hons) Acting and some strands of the BA (Hons) Theatre Practice are accredited by the National Council for Drama Training, with which the School enjoys a strong reciprocal arrangement. The National Council for Drama Training specified competences have informed the setting of standards for those courses.

40   The School acknowledges that it has not explicitly drawn on the European Standards and Guidelines in its management of academic standards, but indicates that the Academic Board has received periodic updates on the progress of the Bologna Process. The consideration of the future structure and organisation of taught MA courses has included reference to the European context.

41   Amendments to the *Code of practice* are considered through the Academic Development Committee and the audit team saw evidence of senior consideration of matters related to the *Code* issues in the Undergraduate, Executive and Postgraduate Planning away day.

42   Course specifications are used in course design, review and approval, together with other core documents such as course handbooks. In the Briefing Paper, the School placed emphasis on the fact that course specifications were written in simple and user-friendly language. It also emphasised that the aims, learning outcomes, unit structure, credit and approaches to teaching and assessment in the course specification and in the handbook unit outlines were the defining attributes of the course, which may not change without formal modification. The School believes that course specifications are well constructed, but the audit team did find a number of examples of different practice across the School with material on learning outcomes, assessment criteria and grading matrices located in slightly different formats in different areas of the whole information package. All relevant information to support the understanding of learning outcomes, the relevant assessment criteria and the standards of achievement was provided, but in different places, and greater consistency here might be advantageous in a small specialist institution.

43   In general terms, the School has a very good record on externality in respect of both design and validation of courses and in their implementation and delivery. The Briefing Paper emphasised the School's commitment to externality, in the normal processes of validation, review and use of external examiners, but also in its engagement with external academic peers, visiting professionals and in its record of vocational interconnectedness with its industries. The School is considering wider or more thematic contexts to which an external viewpoint might fruitfully contribute, building, for instance, from the case of the use of an external peer in a consultative review of the Student Counselling and Advisory Service in 2008. The audit team saw and heard of many examples of external engagement in relationship to performance and placement activities, and work with visiting professionals and external bodies, which have a bearing on the maintenance of academic standards in that they testify to the continuing professional relevance and acceptability of the courses.

44   The audit team formed the view that, generally, the School takes a serious and professional approach to external reference points in informing course design and development, in testing courses at validation and review, and in the implementation and delivery of programmes.

Assessment policies and regulations

45   The assessment handbook offers detailed guidance on the principles of assessment; the conduct of assessment; regulations on the structure of courses and their assessment for credit and for awards; regulations on the assessment of students, external examiners and assessment boards. Among the 'Purposes of Assessment' listed in section 1 of the assessment handbook is a statement indicating the intention to use assessment to 'measure the outcomes of students' learning in relation to the intended learning outcomes of the course and to national and professional frameworks, and on this basis to make decisions about the standard of their achievement, their progression within the course, their eligibility for academic credit and awards and, where relevant, their competence for professional practice'. This intention is supported by the provision of detailed guidance for students, staff and external partners including external examiners. The assessment handbook is the key source of reference on school-wide assessment policies and regulations and it is a 'live' document, which claims to take account of a wide range of material including the use of learning outcomes; the potential benefits of consistent practice in different courses; the sections of the *Code* dealing with assessment and with external examining; the final report of the HEFCE task force on information on quality and standards in higher education; the issues concerning common structures and credit systems; national guidelines on the issue of transcripts to students and the opportunities afforded by the implementation of a modern student record system. The document is also regularly updated in response to suggestions from external examiners or through working parties of the Academic Development Committee. The Briefing Paper cited as an example recent work on regulations in respect of candidates at classification borders, on assessment of ephemeral work, and on arrangements for students with special circumstances affecting their assessment.

46   The audit team found that, although the assessment handbook described the assessment principles, procedures and processes clearly, duplications of material on assessment in course specifications and course handbooks could, potentially, lead to a proliferation of material and potential confusion. The Briefing Paper indicated that principles of assessment applicable across the School as a whole were explained in the student handbook, which also explains the general principle of learning outcomes and assessment criteria, procedures for extension, support for special needs, and procedures for considering extenuating circumstances and suspected academic misconduct. Some of this information is repeated or expanded in course handbooks, which provide additional, more detailed information on assessment, including the criteria to be applied, and a final level of detail is provided in briefs for individual assessment tasks. This level of detail is creditable but, in the view of the team, has the potential to lead to lack of clarity across document and versions, and the School is encouraged to ensure clear minimum expectations in the communication of assessment activities and criteria to eradicate the current variability and inconsistencies within and across courses, levels and their supporting documentation.

47   The Briefing Paper also indicates that, generally, the School does not apply common patterns of assessment across all courses at the same level, since not all course units have the same credit value. Sections 3 and 4 of the assessment handbook define regulations on course structure and credit, and assessment that can accommodate diversity. The audit team understood the principle but questioned whether diversity should extend to differences in the classification requirements, for instance in the selection and the weighting of level 2 work included for classification. It advises the School to give the matter further consideration.

48   The information about assessment provided in the Handbook and associated documents is provided effectively to all relevant staff and students. Auditors also saw evidence of it being highlighted for attention of visiting professionals and being brought forward for discussion by external examiners.

49   The assessment handbook is also a key tool for the communication of the constitution, remit and procedures for the operation of examination boards and terms of reference; membership, powers and roles and responsibilities of all staff concerned are clearly laid out, and sample agendas and other support material are provided.

50   Information on the conduct of assessment is provided in the assessment handbook, in the course handbooks and in the student handbook. In each case, the information is clear in respect of its particular intention, for example, the 'Types of Assessment' section of the assessment handbook clearly defines diagnostic, formative and summative assessment and indicates that some tasks may fall into more than one area. However, the fact that different types of assessment information are delivered through different publications may create unnecessary complexity, and a rationalisation of this information and better use of electronic communication would minimise the risk of confusion arising from this complexity.

51   School-wide policies and matters are made clear, and issues identified by, for instance, external examiners are addressed effectively, not just in each individual case, but also in respect of any systematic lessons that can be derived. Regulatory information, for instance on penalties and special consideration cases, is available in the assessment handbook and other sources and students interviewed by the audit team indicated a good understanding of this material.

52   In respect of assessment loads and timing, the Briefing Paper indicated that the assessment design for each programme was formally agreed at validation and that this had resulted in a situation where different courses, in similar areas, at the same level, had slightly different assessment models. Amendments may arise from monitoring student experience and from external examiner recommendations. The audit team found no evidence of concern about overall load and timing in most cases, although PGCE students indicated some limited concerns. In general, external examiners were supportive of the assessment balance, timing and method, and the team saw evidence in the Postgraduate Report to Academic Board 06/07, an abstract of institutionally relevant issues raised by external examiners, which indicated that external examiners had a largely positive view of the assessment process.

53   Guidance on progression and qualification for award are clear in the School's regulations as laid out in the assessment handbook and elsewhere, and there are explicit statements on credit requirements for award and for requirements in respect of classifications and distinction, both in the generic regulations and in course handbooks as approved at validation.

54   Public, statutory and regulatory bodies' requirements are reflected, where appropriate, in the accreditation of courses with appropriate bodies, and the appropriateness of the assessment arrangements for these courses are confirmed in the accreditation process.

55   The Briefing Paper indicated that changes to course specific regulations were dependent on the agreement of staff, continuing students, external examiners, the Faculty Board and the Academic Board, and the audit team heard from staff about the operation of this process. An example cited was the change to arrangements in the BA Acting course in 2007, which adhered to the established principles. In the case of amendments to School-wide regulations formal process involving the Registry is invoked.

56   As a result of the changing environment and the School's reorganisation and development, at the time of the audit, a number of policies and strategic positions were emergent or untested. This is the case with respect to research degrees, which developed after the School became a college of the University of London, and their assessment. The School's research courses are new, and no students have been examined. The Briefing Paper indicated that arrangements for the management of research degrees were based upon the section of the *Code of practice* on research degree programmes and guidance from the University, and were enshrined in the papers of the Research Degree Committee and the Postgraduate Student Handbook. The audit team can confirm that the assessment procedures and requirements, including guidance for upgrade from MPhil to PhD and the requirements of the thesis and final examination, are clearly articulated in this document, and that research students interviewed were clear about these regulations.

57   The audit team took the view that the arrangements for assessment were clearly established and understood and made an appropriate contribution to the maintenance of academic standards, but that there was room for improvement in some of the mechanisms for

communication, and for clarification and simplification of the documents by which they were communicated. The School acknowledges that National Student Survey responses have indicated scope for improvement in the clarity of student information about assessment in some undergraduate courses and the team saw evidence of effective address to issues in student understanding of assessment in the BA (Hons) Acting course. Modifications to the course were developed in consultation with students and external examiners, and the Academic Board very exceptionally approved a modification to take effect from December in the year of approval. The team also saw evidence in external examiner reports of issues being raised in respect of assessment issues, all of which were fed through to course committees and the Academic Board in the undergraduate and postgraduate summary reports, with satisfactory response.

Management information - statistics

58   In the Briefing Paper, the School indicated confidence in its use of data to set, communicate, assess and monitor academic and professional standards.

59   Annual course reports employ statistics on entry, progression and award prepared by the Academic Registry and course teams comment on these data. The audit team saw evidence of such consideration and analysis of data in course reports and of the use of commentary on data in the audit and review process. The portfolio of evidence in the review process includes commentary on data over the period under review, including collated annual data, with entry, continuation and completion figures for each discrete year. The Academic Board also receives data on awards conferred over a rolling five-year period, with commentary incorporating comparison with the most recent available Higher Education Statistics Survey data for the subject area. Data reports also relate equality and diversity information, including disability, to progression and achievement. In terms of academic standards achieved, the overall picture presented by the statistics reassured the team that the School's current gathering and use of statistical information is satisfactory.

60   The School finds the Higher Education Statistics Survey destinations survey ineffective in providing employment information, given the employment pattern of the School's main industries. Nevertheless, the Academic Board periodically receives reports on employment, most recently at the time of the audit in June 2006. The School acknowledges some historical difficulty in working with data due to issues in the management information statistics, but the audit team saw evidence of development in this area in fostering improved use of the system to generate useful data. Additionally, the School indicated that quality assurance and enhancement officers now had an increased role in analysing as well as generating student data, and presenting it in a form which would encourage fruitful discussion and help to identify priorities for enhancement. Ongoing consideration of data use will be part of a review agreed by the Academic Board in December 2007, of the balance of course-based and school-wide approaches to managing quality and standards.

61   The audit team saw clear evidence of the use of management statistics for the purposes of monitoring quality and academic standards; in particular, good use was made of the National Student Survey and other student survey data to inform future planning. The Gender Equality Scheme April 2007 makes good use of applications and admissions statistics to analyse gender balance across programmes. Exit profiles and progression rates are also mapped and action plans are identified to enhance future practice in relation to these matters.

62   From a review of relevant documentation and discussion with staff and students, the audit team concluded that confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of academic standards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

63   The School is confident that it takes full account of the *Code of practice* in the articulation of its policies and operations. The procedures around students with disability, for instance, were drawn up in relation to the relevant guidance in the *Code*, in addition to legal requirements. The procedures on admissions, placements and student appeals and complaints were likewise informed by the relevant sections of the *Code*, as is the assessment handbook, and management of the new research course has benefited in its development from the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes.* There is evidence that the School uses the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* effectively to inform policies and to enhance good practice in course design, while ensuring transparency through the use of external reference points.

64   Typically, the Director of Quality (in the past) or the Academic Registrar checks policies and procedures with key staff for adherence to the *Code of practice*. The Faculty Board discusses handbooks and guidance material and may initiate action where necessary on, for instance, staff development requirements in relation to guidance in the *Code* on placements. The Academic Board receives updates to the *Code* and reviews any action necessary to meet new guidelines. However, the School recognises that changed circumstances may affect the appropriateness of its policies, for instance, in relation to careers education and, in the context of its revision of quality assurance, is now considering a more systematic rolling schedule to ensure continuing alignment of procedures against the *Code.* On the basis of its reading of committee minutes and relevant handbooks for staff and students, the audit team would concur with the School's own belief that it meticulously considers each published section of the *Code* and takes any necessary action to implement the relevant guidance. It would encourage the School to be proactive in continuing to review its practice and disseminate awareness of the *Code.*

65   Course teams and validation panels are advised by the Registry, through the 'Preparing for Validation Guide', the Audit and Review Guide for Course Leaders, and the Audit and Review Guide for Course Teams on the use of appropriate external reference points, such as subject benchmarks, the FHEQ and the requirements of public, statutory and regulatory bodies. Some courses are accredited by professional bodies, such as the National Council for Drama Training, in the case of BA Acting and BA Theatre Practice, or by the Health Professions Council in the case of the MA Drama Movement Therapy, and a number of staff serve on accreditation panels for such regulatory bodies. Recent inspection reports suggest that professional requirements are understood. The PGCE programmes are governed by the requirements of the Training and Development Agency and are inspected by Ofsted. The FHEQ has been invoked as a useful reference point in discussions with partners, employers and students, where there might be potential for stakeholders primarily interested in professional training and advanced practice skills to be less aware of the academic level required by master's awards. Course specifications are used in course approval but are not normally issued to students, being generally embodied in more user-friendly language in course handbooks.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

66   The School's approach to managing approval, monitoring and review is expressed in the Quality Assurance Framework, supplemented by guidance information for teams preparing for review and validation of courses. The process is designed to ensure that courses 'constitute an appropriate and deliverable programme of study offering students a rewarding and challenging curriculum that fulfils all requirements for the level of award proposed'. Monitoring is also covered by the Framework, which describes the two main sources of information as being annual course monitoring reports and the minutes of the Faculty Board. The procedures for validation are also applied to established courses every five years, with the addition of an audit, which is part of this quinquennial review process and which checks, among other things, that responses

have been made to all conditions or recommendations made at the time of the original validation. The audit team was able to see the outcomes from courses revalidated under more streamlined interim procedures, as well as the specification of future systems for periodic review which will not routinely entail full revalidation.

67   The full validation process consists of a feasibility study and a two-stage validation. At each stage the panels are small but fulfil the requirements of independence and externality, consisting at stage one of an internal chair, a second internal member and two members external to the School. This panel may make recommendations to be incorporated in the proposal and will typically authorise progression to the second stage, which includes the chair, one of the external members and a new external representative. There is documentary guidance to teams and panels on paperwork required and themes to be explored, while at each stage the panel is supported by a quality enhancement officer.

68   A feasibility study is required before a new course can begin the validation process and may also be required for courses revalidating, although it is likely that this will be replaced in future by an indication that course changes are resource-neutral. The requirement for a feasibility study safeguards against wasted effort for courses that would be unsustainable in resource needs or market demand, and allows, in theory, for a strategic allocation and database of resource requirements across the institution. The audit team considered that the template for this exercise was a detailed and useful document, requiring a rationale and market analysis and specifying particular requirements across the years of the programme, against sectoral and institutional norms for space, technical and staffing ratios. The feasibility study was previously considered by the Strategic Planning and Review Group, although in future the College Management Group will have this responsibility. The team was informed that some proposals had been rejected at the feasibility stage and that no new courses had been approved since 2005, but it was not in a position to determine whether this indicated an appropriately cautious level of resource and risk assessment or strategic consolidation with respect to curricular development.

69   Once feasibility has been established, the new proposal is included in the validation schedule, including proposed internal and external panel membership, agreed by the Academic Board at the start of each academic year. Practical guidance is given to course teams in the Preparing for Validation document on the requirement to demonstrate curricular coherence, appropriate levels of study, learning outcomes, course specifications, course handbooks and on the nature of the contextual documentation to be supplied centrally. Panels receive information on physical, learning and staffing resources, including curricula vitae, and are guided in a Notes of Guidance document on themes they should pursue. The audit team was able to read a number of reports from panels which demonstrated that they had conducted thorough and wider-ranging discussions with teams, including exploring learning opportunities in relation to the curricula and resources. Validation and revalidation outcomes are reported to the Academic Board and any validation conditions are followed up by the Academic Registrar (or, in the future, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office) with the validation chair and course team.

70   Procedures for course modifications are detailed in the Quality Assurance Framework. Modifications can arise from recommendations by external examiners, suggestions from partners, employers or students or through reflections on practice. The Employers' Partnership Group meetings, which report to the Faculty Board, have an explicit remit to contribute to periodic review and revalidation. Proposed changes are likely to be discussed in course committees, there will be consultation with students and agreement will be sought from external examiners, and from continuing students where there are implications for the remainder of their studies. Proposed changes are expected to be flagged in annual monitoring reports. Proposals for changes must be recommended by the Faculty Board to the Academic Board if they are deemed 'substantive' rather than 'technical', in which case the Faculty Board exercises devolved authority from the Academic Board to approve the modification. Wide-ranging changes have to be approved in principle by the Strategic Planning and Policy Review Group. Other changes do not

require formal approval. For instance, the BA Drama and Applied Theatre Education course self-evaluation document of 2007 described how each year the curricular content is 'tweaked' to reflect changes in pedagogic practice, subject knowledge, publications and other factors. The Faculty Board minutes suggest that course teams are responsive to their constituencies in seeking to make changes. One course was subject to a 'rearticulation' in the light of observations made in the National Student Survey, and after formal appeals by students highlighted misunderstandings over assessment.

71   In conversation with the audit team, staff emphasised the reflective and proactive nature of the School and welcomed mechanisms that were less paper-based and facilitated a flexible approach. For instance, they identified the validation of a module defined in terms of outcomes, structure, assessment style and credit which could accommodate specialist curricular content relevant to different courses. The team considered that it was too early to judge whether changes in the current procedures would give an appropriate balance between rigour and the ability to respond effectively to change.

72   The Academic Board has overall responsibility for monitoring courses, drawing on annual monitoring reports and the minutes of the Faculty Board, which has a remit to review the curricula and the impact of learning resources. The Academic Board is concerned to establish the general health of the faculty and its courses and to take early account of any potentially major issues. It also seeks to ensure that appropriate follow-up action is being taken at faculty or institutional level. Individual course reports are produced annually and an overview document is written by the Dean of Studies for consideration by the Academic Board. The formal report submitted annually to the University of London Senate draws on the School's annual summary of themes from external examiner reports.

73   The discrete monitoring reports for each undergraduate course, supported by guidance notes, comment on application rates, student profiles, student progression, award outcomes, external examiner reports and course team responses, student feedback and equal opportunities. Course reports draw on issues raised by students in course committees or other means, indicating action planned or taken as a result, and reflect generally on practice. There is no centrally prescribed monitoring process at unit level, but in practice course committees do gather feedback on units. Courses due for revalidation are not required to produce an annual monitoring report. As a pilot in the academic year 2007-08, postgraduate level reports were collated in a single composite report. Reports are considered by course committees and discussed first by the faculty board, which may make recommendations that go through to the Academic Board. Any concerns about the quality of the learning experience on courses can trigger a review, the requirement for an action plan to deal with perceived deficiencies or, in theory, course closure. The audit team formed the view that this system provided adequate safeguards for the School to identify and take action on any potential threats to quality.

74   The School believes that monitoring is undertaken consistently and thoroughly and allows the institution to be confident of the health of its programmes. The audit team's reading of annual monitoring reports, Faculty and Academic Board minutes and the report to the University of London Senate would confirm that the current process is both reflective and rigorous. However, further developments are intended to systematise arrangements for peer readers and feedback in respect of reports. A noteworthy feature of the process is that the template for monitoring reports is not uniform from year to year. Courses at different points in their quinquennial cycle will focus on different aspects of the learning opportunities and student outcomes. A recent development is the determining by the Faculty Board of a particular annual theme to the reports, in an attempt to gather centrally and distil information about local practice, such as the engagement of courses with the Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre or cross-curricular teaching and opportunities for students. The audit team would encourage the School to seek opportunities for monitoring at a more general level than individual courses, as an opportunity to share practice and drive enhancement agendas.

75   Overall, the audit team considered that the School had approval, monitoring and review procedures that promoted careful consideration of the quality of learning opportunities. Although many of the new committees and procedures were as yet untested, the evidence from the operation of previous structures and systems, and the institution's willingness to review and reassess their effectiveness, indicate an institution which engages in critical reflection both on academic and professional practice and on its own processes, and suggests that confidence can be placed in the developing systems for monitoring quality.

Management information - feedback from students

76   The latest edition of the student handbook summarises the formal avenues for student representation. The most immediate one for students is the course committee for each undergraduate course and for groups of related postgraduate courses. It includes elected student representatives from each year and meets once a term, after student representatives have elicited student views from year groups. Course committee minutes are considered by the Faculty Board. The handbook also draws to students' attention the Support Services Forum, which brings together one student from each course committee, with staff from the main service departments (information technology, technical support, finance and estates) to discuss practical and resource issues.

77   The School believes that course committees are an effective forum for course-level qualitative feedback that has contributed to curricular modification and changes in operational practice, as well as trouble-shooting. The audit team had the opportunity to read the minutes of a number of course committees, which included agenda items ranging from concerns with general services such as the canteen and security, and learning resource matters, such as access to practice space and data storage, to curricular issues, such as the opportunity to attend sessions across strands and opportunities to learn new skills. It was evident that staff were generally very responsive to matters and requests raised by students and took action to refer issues to relevant bodies and authorities, or to make changes and facilitate needs where it lay within their power to do so. However, experiences differed between courses and some students felt their issues were 'filtered' from course committee discussions. The position was also poorer for students on shorter courses, like master's, where they needed a much more rapid response to feedback, to benefit personally from any changes. Research students, on the other hand, felt that their suggestions were immediately investigated. In general, the team considered course committees and year group meetings to be effective fora for discussing operational matters, for quality enhancement at a local level and also in improving student understanding of course expectations.

78   Although the School does not prescribe the use of questionnaires at unit level, these are sometimes undertaken, as they are at course level, and services such as the library, catering and student counselling and advisory service occasionally elicit opinion through these means. There are also from time to time themed questionnaires, for instance on experience of placements. Email is used heavily as a means of communication and, according to the student written submission, 'is widely regarded as an effective voice channel'. The School has responded vigorously to the outcomes of the National Student Survey, which it found disappointing in some courses and areas, particularly those of course organisation, communication of changes and clarity of information. The National Student Survey outcome has prompted more institutional interest in quantifiable data. An online survey of second-year students is used to 'shadow' the questions to be given in the National Student Survey to final-year students and this practice is to be extended to first-year students. A school-wide postgraduate survey is also planned for summer 2008.

79   The National Student Survey results have been studied closely at the Academic Board and benchmarked against the sector generally and other relevant specialist institutions. Satisfaction rates of under 50 per cent have prompted reviews and beneath a mean score of 3 required action for improvement within six weeks. Quality assurance staff have been made available to teams to help analyse the data. A particular example of improvements resulting from the National Student Survey was revision of course documentation for the BA Acting and a review of the student-

friendliness of all relevant documentation. As a student reported to the audit team, as a result, handbooks had removed 'posh language.' Other students and the student written submission had been critical of the lack of clarity, as they perceived it, in some School and course documentation and their understanding of processes and requirements appeared to depend to some extent on the documentation being mediated to them by staff. The degree of attention given to the National Student Survey outcome is noteworthy and indicates that the School is taking a more robust central and coherent overview than has been the case until recently, when the individual course was the locus for evaluation and enhancement. The team welcomes this development.

Role of students in quality assurance

80   Student representatives are trained annually by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office or the Deputy Dean for quality assurance. On course committees they have the opportunity to discuss annual monitoring reports and external examiners' reports, and proposals for modifications to courses are also presented here. Students are also represented on the Board of Governors, Academic Board, the Academic Development Committee and the successor Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee and, from the academic year 2008-09, on the Faculty Board. There are also student representatives on the employers' partnership groups. Review panels always meet students, including elected student representatives.

81   Students have been involved in a number of working groups, including those preparing for revalidation and those analysing and seeking improvement in low-scoring areas of the National Student Survey. In discussion with students, the audit team heard of examples of students being involved in preparation for revalidation and also of being involved in a number of working groups of the Academic Development Committee/Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee.

82   The School is concerned to use the student voice not only in operational but in strategic contexts and recognises that it may still have some way to go in this respect. The Students' Union has no role in the election of course representatives and, over the past year, due to restructuring, there has been no system of regular meetings between the Students' Union and senior School staff. However, regular meetings will be reinstated in the next academic year. In their discussions with the audit team, some students pointed out that, as committee members, they were not necessarily briefed and inducted, and in meetings with students it was apparent to the team that students felt that their presence at committee meetings was tokenistic. The Faculty Board has said that one of the reasons to reorganise committees was to have students participating in 'transparent debate and decision making processes'. The working party concerned posed the question whether the School's arrangements enabled students both to have a forum to discuss and resolve issues that concerned them, for instance, in relation to resources and services, and to be represented in discussions about institutional strategy, development and processes. The student written submission suggests that the student voice is highly emphasised in the School and the team saw much evidence of the School's sensitivity to the needs of students, and its willingness to use them as a resource for quality enhancement in working groups. The team would encourage the School to continue to explore ways of using the strength of the student voice to best effect.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

83   The relationship between research and scholarly activities and students' learning is complex and rooted in the unique character of the School in its mission to provide conservatoire-style training in a higher education environment. The School sees itself as professionally aligned but also as having the capacity to interrogate received practice, by virtue of its high reputation within the theatre industry for being 'cutting edge' and a 'crucible' for the development both of individual talent and new techniques. Consequently, the relationship with professional practice is an iterative one and students are expected both to learn from and contribute to the expertise of others: fellow students on complementary courses, alumni, teachers and external organisations. The pursuit of 'uncompromising excellence' is undertaken within the realism of professional confines, with

students having the opportunity to engage with a wide range of national and international theatres and organisations and from community, to regional, national and international companies. Courses are designed 'lineally', to develop individual capacity through practice, exposition, reflection and review. At master's level, in particular, the notion of 'practice as research' is highlighted. It appeared to the audit team that the School engaged in a constant and productive articulation of the research/practice and learning/teaching relationship.

84   The School identifies a long-standing practice of including staff development and research details in its documentation, and in validation panels discussing the links with teaching. Curricular design and review procedures in operation at the time of the audit were explicit in the advice to course teams and review and validation panels about the account to be taken of research-informed teaching, in accordance with the institution's Learning and Teaching Strategy. There are, for instance, prompts as to 'whether curriculum content is appropriately informed by research and scholarship' and 'whether the delivery of the course draws on current developments in learning and teaching'. Annual monitoring reports are not explicitly required to link research or scholarship and the curricula but in the reviews of the academic year 2006-07, report writers were asked to discuss any relationships they had had with the Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre.

85   The Corporate Planning Statement identifies 'high academic values' and research capacity' as key priorities and cites the Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre as a means of achieving 'strong external links'. The Centre was envisaged in 2004 as 'a national laboratory for pedagogic exploration within a vocational context' and in 2007 its interim evaluation report declared its intention to be 'a focus for theatre research and scholarship' a 'commitment to the facilitation of incremental learning based on real-world challenges', and a 'site for collaboration' between the industry and higher education and specialist trainer providers. All students and staff are members and the School believes that the entire institution has benefited from the capital funding for the project. It sees the Centre as a way to add value to the full range of its activities, including stimulating and sustaining new postgraduate taught and research courses with a potentially important role within the School, to foster research and teaching links and relate these both to pedagogic practice within the curricula and to that in the industry.

86   A number of projects conducted within the aegis of the Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre have given opportunities for students to be involved: recent examples include the Green Venue collaboration with the Bartlett School of Architecture on sustainable theatre and an 'Issues in Theatre Training' project involving groups of students with disabilities. Bursaries have been provided to support student participation, for instance, enabling five students to attend a conference at the Moscow Art Theatre School, and money has been secured from the Leverhulme Trust, which has also supported student projects outside London and abroad. Several of the students who met the audit team had taken advantage of these grants and others had attended events organised by the Centre, demonstrating that it was going at least some way to meeting its goal of 'achieving ownership and investment from across the student body'. The Centre has also been a means to bring international practitioner-teachers to the School and has introduced an honorary visiting fellow scheme to enable the hosting of distinguished academic visitors. It claims to offer 'unprecedented opportunity for staff to ensure currency of curriculum, and promote a truly international perspective for the College's pedagogic provision', to provide networking opportunities and to enhance the ability of staff to ensure currency in their teaching and research. The team recognises the strategic value of the Centre to the School and was able, through its reading of minutes and reports and meetings with staff and students, to see examples of relationships between the Centre and learning opportunities for students. However, it also gained the view, particularly from reading recent annual monitoring reports, that the engagement with the Centre was patchy and that structurally it was not easy to embed in all areas of the School. Consequently, it could not entirely realise its potential to add value to student learning opportunities through informing pedagogic practice in the curricula.

87   The Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre temporarily administered a leave-of-absence scheme for staff to support research-informed teaching and reward staff for teaching excellence. However, this latter activity is now differentiated from the Centre's secondment scheme and is the responsibility of the Dean of Research. Any member of staff may now apply for such leave, funded through the HEFCE Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund and any kind of research and development activity is eligible, provided 'there is an eventual dividend to learning and teaching through new techniques, new curricula or evolved methods of teaching'. The involvement of students as interns is encouraged, since it yields an immediate dividend to learning and teaching. It was apparent to the audit team that the use of distinguished visiting professionals in teaching is an important contribution to the currency and vibrancy of the curricula and enhances students' enthusiasm, professional awareness and career opportunities. The team learnt from students that, in general, the use of visiting lecturers was well integrated and provided a seamless interface with full-time staff.

88   The annual report to the University of London for the academic year 2005-06 identified some of the best teaching practices in the School, among which was 'teaching using staff's active research as a model and as a learning context'; this is particularly a focus of attention at master's level. Students are encouraged to recognise the academic implications of work at this level, and the working group considering the development of postgraduate work has emphasised the need for subject specialisms to be informed by current research or 'cutting edge' practice. A research methods and outputs unit is now common to all courses at this level. The audit team welcomes this emphasis.

89   A target of the institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy for 2007-10 is to develop more research-informed teaching 'as the defining characteristic of Higher Education' and, at the time of the audit, a conference on this subject was envisaged. The Strategy also looks to an increase in the number of PhD students and supervisors and attention to the issues around PhD as practice. The Strategy seeks to debate and reflect on the role of a conservatoire in a higher education context and increase the public engagement' aspects of the School's work, with the School of Professional and Community Development being an important agent of such knowledge transfer. The School's portfolio of non-credit-bearing courses offers opportunities for schools, governments departments, commercial organisations, the media and individuals, to benefit from the expertise of the School in presentational skills (see paragraph 140). At the time of writing, a current aim is to engage more of the School in such outreach activity. Since the School of Professional and Community Development has hosted a student placement and has the potential to offer a different kind of real-life community involvement for students on credit-bearing courses, the audit team would encourage this extension of its work within the School as a potentially powerful contributor to the learning and career opportunities of existing, as well as potential future, students.

90   External examiners have commented specifically on the effectiveness of the research and teaching relationship. One noted the 'frequent confirmation of the distinctive balance of vocation, professional and research-led elements in assessment and student learning', a second identified the 'meta-critique' of practice in distinction-level portfolios, while a third commented on 'the interaction between practice and theory and the emphasis on research' making for 'an extremely empowering learning environment'. The audit team welcomes the efforts being made to promote a research culture in the School, especially in light of the challenge this may pose in an institution with long-established vocational courses. The team would encourage the School further to promote the research and teaching relationship through involving its entire staff in research and scholarly networks, both within their subject and professional areas and also in pedagogic and related higher education networks.

91   The School has been engaged in considerable deliberation over its structure of committees and working groups. In relation to learning and teaching, these questions have focused on how the Strategy can be owned, driven forward, tracked and evaluated and the

minutes of the May 2008 meeting of the Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee suggested that while there was evidence of progress on specific actions, the working group involved 'noted limits in what a working group could achieve in embedding the strategy'. The audit team, having seen little evidence of progress in areas of the Strategy, such as e-learning initiatives, would concur and would encourage the new Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee to be diligent in its responsibility for promoting a whole-institution approach to the enhancement of learning and teaching.

Other modes of study

92   The School does not offer provision in any other mode of study.

Resources for learning

93   Resources for learning are generally managed at institutional level in the interests of effective allocation. The library, Technical Services Department and information technology are all separately managed, with the first two being within the portfolio of the Deputy Principal (Academic) and information technology due to move to that of the Deputy Principal (Corporate), who also has responsibility for estates. The relationship between course development and resources is embedded in the culture of the School (see paragraphs 68-70).

94   Before any new course can be developed, a detailed feasibility study is undertaken and developments will have been halted at this point if resource demands are likely to outstrip availability. Until the practice was relaxed recently, feasibility studies were also conducted before courses could be revalidated. The check covers the availability of placements, staffing needs, equipment, specialist space and a detailed account of timetabled general teaching and learning space needs. There is also an analysis of start-up costs, including staff training and equipment. Guidance notes indicate the maximum length of the teaching year and the working day and week (0900 to 2100 hours Monday to Friday) and space norms per student full-time equivalent. Despite this detailed planning, however, there are indications of pressure on resources.

95   The student written submission, and the students met by the audit team reported frustration about the perceived shortage both of learning and social spaces. Some difficulties related to room shortages and unsuitability for MA courses, and some to double-bookings, but most of the problems were in finding rooms for rehearsals and projects, which are not covered by the feasibility mapping process. The student handbook makes clear that rooms cannot generally be booked for such purposes outside term time, despite the expectation of independent study, particularly in masters' programmes. Nor can space be booked after 0900 or on Sundays. Students who spoke to the team talked about unsuitable internal and external spaces. The reluctance to engage with this issue to the students' satisfaction was also indicated by some students who met with the team, suggesting that such issues were not included in course committee discussions. Students also felt that room booking and timetable organisation were not improving and staff confirmed that the management of these systems was not well resourced.

96   The record of an Academic Board discussion of the results of the National Student Survey noted the suggestion that space was a significant problem and that realistic expectations should be set. An estates development task group reporting to the College Management Group had drawn on an analysis of room bookings comparing it with that allocated in the course feasibility studies, with the addition of interview, audition and meetings usage, and concluded 'there seemed to be a general shortage of practice teaching space that could only partially be ameliorated through economy gains through timetabling'. Detailed and creative solutions were proposed by the group and, at the time of the audit, negotiations were ongoing over an arrangement to refurbish a venue outside the institution. The audit team had the opportunity to hear of the efforts made by the School to manage its space effectively, in refurbishing, office-sharing and multi-use, and overcome its shortages by leasing, refurbishment or new-build, but access to rehearsal and social space are likely to continue to fall short of student expectations.

97   The Technical Support Department incorporates media, technical, wardrobe and workshop support and is a vital resource for the School, and highly regarded by stakeholders. The department supports all taught provision, research students and activities of the Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre and manages specialist spaces, overseeing performance and studio spaces and equipment and being responsible for health and safety issues. Students who met the audit team were very appreciative of the resources and facilities managed by the department and the help and advice of the staff. The needs of PhD students are met particularly well, with individual technical support agreements. Other students were impressed by the industry standard facilities which they said exceeded their expectations. The team recognises the important contribution made by this department to the mission of the School to be 'an international centre for the production, enhancement and promulgation of knowledge about and for the theatre and performance'.

98   The library is purpose-built and considered by the School a 'sound' resource, bearing comparison with that of other drama schools. Undergraduate students find it adequate with a good supply of basic primary texts. The Briefing Paper states that the expansion of postgraduate provision and the research degree programme would have been a challenge to the library, but the central London location and, especially, entry to the University of London, provide major supplementary resources on which students can draw. In the federal context, use of sector benchmarks is deemed not particularly appropriate. The Collections Management Policy, approved in 2007, aims to provide all books on course reading lists, but also to complement the holdings of the University of London library rather than duplicate them. Postgraduate students generally find the holdings at the School insufficient for their needs and make use of the University of London provision. Students generally testified to the helpfulness of library staff and their responsiveness. The library has a suggestion box and conducts occasional surveys.

99   Wireless access across much of the site allows students to use laptops. In meetings with the audit team, students reported that computer provision was adequate except at peak times and that they were generally satisfied with the provision, but would welcome longer opening hours. The students who met the team were more critical of the access to information off-site, particularly of the inability to access material on a shared drive needed for production work. The School does not have an intranet or virtual learning environment, the provision of which has been under consideration for some years. The intranet was to be introduced through the Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre, but plans were changed and, at the time of the audit, the implementation is still awaited. Staff who spoke to the team acknowledged that there had been delays implementing the intranet and that it had the potential to facilitate better communication. The Learning and Teaching Strategy contains a section 'Consider e-learning initiatives', which commits to implementing the intranet between 2007 and 2009, and at the time of the audit there was a commitment to launch the intranet by September 2008. But, other than a suggestion of 'exploring economies of delivery', there is no mention of a virtual learning environment. Staff who met with the team said that e-learning had been considered more positively some seven or eight years ago, but that it was felt the business of the School was very much geared to physical interactions. The accreditation visit of the Higher Education Academy explored with the School its limited engagement with e-learning. Given that, currently, students are unable to access relevant learning materials, course information or the library catalogue off-site, a position admitted by the library to be 'highly unusual' in academic institutions and, given space constraints on-site, the team would agree with the student observation that the School is in these respects, a somewhat '9 -5' operation (with the exception of access to electronic and some physical resources), which might limit the learning opportunities for current and future students. The team would encourage the School to expedite speedily the implementation of the intranet or other means of electronic communication.

100   Annual monitoring, course committees and Faculty Board and the Student Support Services Forum are the loci for discussions on resources and how they meet the needs of the curricula. Departments are set targets linked to the Corporate Planning Statement and progress

towards them was covered in reports to the Strategic Planning and Policy Review Group, with data on service use and feedback from users. However, reporting was suspended in 2006, since it was felt that an annual reporting round might be excessive for a small institution and insufficient attention could be given to the detail of such reports. A system of working groups reporting to the Corporate Management Group is in planning, especially where there have been perceived problems. The working party reviewing the committee structure reported that there was no forum in which support services met together to consider broader developmental issues or enhancement. Since enhancement of learner support might need input from both teaching and support staff, there was 'scope for a broader based enhancement forum'. The audit team would agree. It would encourage the School to implement an effective and transparent way of reporting on, and planning, resource provision, to ensure that developments indicated in planning are on target, linked with institutional priorities and appropriate to support curricular needs. Further, it suggests that the School might wish to make greater use of professional networks to benchmark themselves against other higher education providers.

Admissions policy

101   The principles underpinning admissions to the School are published on its website. The admissions handbook makes links with associated policies such as widening participation and equal opportunities, and details responsibilities for admissions and the roles of the Academic Registry, programme admissions tutors and the marketing department in the different stages of the applications and admissions process. It also covers procedures for feedback to unsuccessful applicants, appeals against admissions decisions and procedures to be followed for courses requiring an enhanced disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau. A working party meets at least annually and, from the academic year 07-08, has had both a strategic and operational remit. At the time of the audit, the School's priorities for recruitment included increasing the number of international students and recruiting more PhD students. The profile of the student body is monitored by the Academic Board and benchmarked against other specialist institutions and other colleges of the University of London.

102   The School recruits to its undergraduate courses through UCAS and many courses require an audition, and/or an interview, for which protocols are described in the admissions handbook. An off-site away day was held in October 2007 for audition panel members for the BA Acting, who include visiting professionals. Fees are charged for auditions, but a voucher scheme assists with the costs in some cases. The Student Counselling and Advisory Service is involved at an early stage, with students declaring a disability, a high percentage of whom are dyslexic. Students who met with the audit team were generally very appreciative of the admissions process. Many had attended open days and the communication with the School over their applications was described by one undergraduate student as 'personal and enabling', and others felt that the interview process was focused on individual interests and needs and genuinely two-way, with as much emphasis on whether the School was right for the student as whether they were right for the School. Some master's students felt less prepared for the interviews, and for prospective PhD students the admissions process had been confusing in the early days of the course but had greatly improved. Induction was again described as 'personal'. Master's students can take advantage of a 'buddy' system and international students are provided with a special induction pack. Most students felt that the information they had been given, prior to their enrolling, gave an accurate impression of their courses, although there was some feeling that masters' courses were more theoretical than expected, a perception taken up in the most recent postgraduate monitoring report, which suggested that the prospectus needed to be very clear to stress the academic requirements of the course and avoid 'unrealistic promises of vocational training in one year at M level'.

103   The School's agreement with the Office for Fair Access gives a commitment to outreach towards underrepresented schools and communities, including a programme of audition and interview workshops run through the School of Professional and Community Development by

the School and Community Liaison Officer, which is much appreciated by these constituencies. Feedback from one school described the workshop as well researched and informative, and pointed out that the fact it was funded by the School made it accessible to a school like theirs. An Ofsted report on the School's secondary initial teacher training courses comments on how documentation 'reflects powerfully the provider's commitment to diversity and sets out clearly its mission to contribute to social cohesion though its courses'. In the view of the audit team, the School is effective in implementing and monitoring its admissions policy and, in particular, its outreach work makes a good contribution to achieving a socially inclusive student body.

Student support

104   At institutional level, there is a range of support mechanisms available to students outlined for students and staff in the student handbook. In meetings with the audit team, students confirmed that they were aware of the range of support available, which they were able to describe to the team. Further information is provided via course handbooks and the assessment handbook, although these were variable in content and style, and students expressed some confusion over the range and complexity of handbook information.

105   The Academic Registry provides services relating to student records, registration, access to learning funds, support regarding the student loans company, examination boards, transcripts and certificates. The Finance Office deals with fees. Advice for students in financial hardship was available from the Student Counselling and Advisory Service. Students were pleased with the support offered by the Finance Office and described a range of funding opportunities and hardship funding, for which they were able to apply. In particular, the 'short-term loan' scheme seemed to the audit team to be a helpful and supportive resource for students.

106   Centrally, the Student Counselling and Advisory Service delivers the majority of student support services, including counselling, disability support, an accommodation service, and general guidance to students. The aims of the Student Counselling and Advisory Service are 'To provide a multi-disciplinary one stop shop approach to student and staff support tailored to the specific context of a specialist HEI/Conservatoire environment'. Services are publicised through posters and flyers throughout the year, in the prospectus, via emails and through a proactive presence at registration. The service appears to be well used, with 40 per cent of the total student population accessing its services during the academic year 2006-07. The Student Counselling and Advisory Service is particularly proactive in its support of students with dyslexia, recognising that a high proportion of the students at the School have this condition. Students are aware of this support and were able to describe a range of services provided to them and their colleagues, including one-to-one support, provision of laptops and adjustments to assessment. A range of staff development activities and training is provided by the Student Counselling and Advisory Service in relation to dyslexia and equal opportunities; there are also helpful information booklets. A style guide for staff provides advice on good practice when preparing course handbooks, forms, booklets and teaching materials. External examiners comment that equal opportunities are a key feature of the relationship of students and lecturers at the School. The Student Counselling and Advisory Service annual report to Strategic Planning and Policy Review Group 2006-07 reports that 89 per cent of students accessing the Disability and Dyslexia service were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'. The service is reviewed regularly with student input to the review.

107   Further support for students is offered by the Technical Support Department, which provides support for all production and presentation activities (see paragraph 106).

108   The strong ethos of course identity within the School means that students generally use tutors as the first reference point for any issues they may have. Students regard this ability to speak to tutors directly as extremely valuable, and those who met the audit team expressed satisfaction that they were able to find academic support when needed. Students regularly meet with their support tutor and also speak to other tutors as necessary. Tutors are regarded as helpful and approachable. Efforts are made to ensure the needs of the variety of students are

met. Part-time masters' students appreciated the 'buddy system' and felt that specific effort was made to ensure their inclusion in the School and its activities. Research students were pleased with the supervisory package provided and felt it supported them well in their research activity.

109   Students are represented on the full range of institutional-level committees and there are course committee representatives for each programme. Students appreciated that the School was willing to listen to their views and act upon them, although the effectiveness of the course committee representation system varied from course to course. Students told the audit team that proposals for course modifications were discussed at course committees, as are the outcomes of any student surveys, including the National Student Survey. Good use is made of National Student Survey data in identifying student issues and proposing improvements. Students are able to see the direct results of their feedback and the added-value the National Student Survey can deliver. There is a consistent approach within undergraduate and postgraduate courses to gathering feedback, and it is apparent that students are able to articulate matters and act as full members of course committees. There is evidence that course committee issues feed through to the Faculty Board and onwards to the Academic Board. Frank and constructive feedback is given by students, indicating an openness of approach.

110   There is a Students' Union, which represents the student voice on all key committees. The audit team learnt that regular meetings between the Students' Union and senior managers were to be reinstated in the academic year 2008-09 and would encourage the School to ensure that these meetings provide a further forum for the student voice.

111   Career development and personal development planning opportunities are embedded in the curricula. The audit team noted the extensive number of placement opportunities, regular employment of visiting professionals, master classes, continuing professional development sessions for postgraduate students and regular reviews by students of their progress.

112   In the view of the audit team, the School has a comprehensive framework for academic and personal student support that operates effectively. It seeks ways to improve continuously this support, drawing on student input.

Staff support (including staff development)

113   The human resources function is overseen by the Deputy Principal (Corporate), supported by the Human Resources department. The School's human resources strategy dates from 2004 and, at the time of the audit, was due for update in line with the forthcoming Corporate Plan; there was a human resources policies and procedures working group currently working on the update. Support for staff development is centrally funded and is described in the staff development priorities document for the academic year 2007-08. Individual staff policies are available on a shared computer drive. At the time of writing, a modular staff handbook is planned, along with a teaching staff handbook, and a comprehensive visiting lecturer's handbook is already available. There is a centrally coordinated staff development workshop programme. The Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre offers further opportunities for staff development.

114   Contracted staff are assigned to a grade within a job family, specified as academic, specialist professional and administrative or technical. Grade profiles are defined in terms either of teaching and research or of teaching and scholarship. The detailed balance of duties within each grade is discussed with the Dean of Studies or other line manager as part of the appraisal process. Although the School successfully implemented the National Framework for Pay and Conditions of Service in August 2006, at the time of the audit, it had not yet developed the promotion criteria for certain grades. The School informed the audit team that published criteria would be in place for the start of the academic year 2008-09. Prior to the implementation of the framework agreement, staff/grade promotions were application-based and managed by the Human Resources department, in liaison with the appropriate director/deputy principal. Conferment of the academic titles of Reader or Professor of the University of London is

based on criteria in University Ordinance 16 and considered through the University procedure of Conferment of Academic Titles Committee. There is an established performance-related pay scheme in operation.

115   There is an established annual appraisal system with supporting documentation, and the audit team was able to see evidence of its operation. Objectives are linked to the corporate planning statement, and reflection and forward planning are incorporated into the discussion. There is a well-established system of peer observation of teaching, which may feed into this process and inform discussion of future development needs. Staff also produce reports on research and staff development activity undertaken, to enable reflection and dissemination of good practice. Applications for staff development funding commonly refer to what has been agreed at appraisal. A notional per capita allowance for staff development is agreed each year and the introduction of opportunities for secondment to the Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre and the leave of absence scheme for research-informed teaching add to the opportunities available. Increasing use has also been made of management and leadership training through the leadership foundation, and also in-house.

116   The development of a research culture is supported through a research seminar programme. A full-time research officer appointed in 2006 has organised training sessions for the Arts and Humanities Research Council and other funding applications. Supervisor training is provided by another of the constituent institutions of the University of London. While annual appraisal review forms demonstrate some evidence of networking and comparing practice across the wider higher education sector, the audit team felt that a more concerted approach to this in developing staff may be beneficial to the School in enhancing the quality of learning opportunities for students.

117   Course monitoring reports and audit and review portfolios are the main vehicle by which the Academic Board is informed of staff development activities that impact on learning opportunities.

118   The School has offered a Higher Education Academy accredited PGCert Learning and Teaching in Higher Education to staff new to teaching in higher education within their first two years, and open also to staff from the Technical Support Department and Library Services. The PGCert did not run in the academic years 2006-07 or 2007-08, mainly due to low numbers. Alternative provision for new teaching staff during this period included enhanced involvement of the deputy deans in induction, and a day session Starting Out: a workshop for new and early career lecturers, offered via the Higher Education Academy subject network. At the time of the audit, the School was planning a shorter programme of structured sessions, combined with a more formal mentoring system as an alternative to the PGCert. Research students with no prior teaching experience will also have access to these sessions, to enable them to undertake teaching activities effectively.

119   Overall, the audit team found that the School's arrangements for staff support and development in relation to academic staff engaged in teaching and the supervision of research students were satisfactory, but that a clear focus on higher education sector benchmarking and networking would be beneficial.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

120   The School has a HEFCE-designated Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre and in its mission statement states the aim to 'pursue enhancement strategies for both maintaining and enhancing standards within its subject field in general and the drama and performance industries in particular', in addition to its aspiration to be 'an international centre for the production, enhancement and the promulgation of knowledge about and for theatre and performance'.

121   The audit team noted the list of alumni for the School and the institution has undoubtedly made a major contribution to drama and the performing arts at both a national and international level. It has also been very proactive in realising the potential of its disciplines for the benefit of a much wider and disparate audience, including through the activities of its School of Professional and Community Development, and this has led to opportunities for excellent enhancement outcomes.

Management information - quality enhancement

122   In terms of the standard mechanisms for achieving quality, the School has extensive processes which, overall, secure appropriate standards and quality. External examiners are predominantly favourable in their comments about the student learning experience and there is also a variety of external mechanisms that are used to ensure that quality is maintained, such as the BA Drama, Applied Theatre and Education course partnership group meetings, the feedback from host companies involved with placement and the feedback from industry representatives at the showcase events.

123   Student feedback mechanisms are well established and acted upon, as well as internal review procedures and internal quality assurance systems, as indicated in the Learning and Teaching Strategy. However, at the time of the audit, the School was still in a transition period with new working groups and committees being established such as the Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee; the audit team would encourage the School to consider how the revised deliberative structure might contribute most effectively to the use of management information to enhance as well as to achieve and maintain quality.

Good practice

124   The audit team found that the School had outstanding links with industry in a wide variety of different ways. A high proportion of courses provide student placements across a wide of different organisations and this, for example, occurs during a four-week period in year 2, and an eight-week period in year 3 for students on the BA Drama, Applied Theatre and Education course. A well-organised support structure is used to oversee and monitor these placements with both student and host mentor feedback.

125   Throughout the academic year, students present a large number of performances, many of which are in the public arena with some of these in overseas locations. The School also participates in arts festivals such as the Accidental Festival at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, which it instigated, and the Prague Quadrennial. The Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre has been proactive in promoting and funding some of these events. At the end of each academic year, there is also a number of showcase events for acting students where graduating students can present cameo performances to a specially invited audience of agents, casting directors and producers. In addition to the formal Embassy Theatre lectures given by practitioners of repute from the industry, there are also master-classes from internationally recognised artists.

126   While the audit team acknowledges the impact that all of these predominantly performance-based activities gave to the students, especially in terms of improving and developing subsequent future performance, it could not find any evidence of deliberate steps to take a systematic approach to this invaluable enhancement opportunity that could specifically influence course curricula and development.

127   In marked contrast, there was clear evidence in two other areas of good practice where deliberate steps had been taken, systematically, to enhance the students' learning opportunities. The postgraduate research culture and environment, although recently established, defined the School's strategy of transforming from a conservatoire into a research-active higher education institution with a three-stage programme and identified research focus area. The general strategy clearly indicated the impact upon postgraduate supervision generally and PhD provision specifically, as well as the value and importance to staff development and pedagogy. One outstanding example within this context was the postgraduate research conferences where PhD students, (and also taught master's students), had to present papers to their peers (see section 6).

128   In addition to the excellent research seminar series for postgraduate research students and staff, the School of Professional and Community Development was also a good example of where a systemic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities was taking place. A deliberate strategy had been established with definitive outcomes, which enhanced personal well-being and productivity at work through links with schools, voluntary and community organisations, the public sector and the business community. A wide range of projects had been completed successfully, such as a widening participation scheme in conjunction with the London College of Fashion, which led to a Times Higher Education Supplement award, A Higher Education Innovation Funded project with the Metropolitan police to improve customer service skills; a School project that improved the language/communication skills of overseas trained doctors, subsequently leading to an increase in their employment rate with the National Health Service, and a parallel scheme with inmates at the Rochester Young Offenders Institution, similarly leading to an improved employment rate. The diversity of School of Professional and Community Development projects is exemplified further with individual coaching sessions for senior personnel in major blue-chip companies.

Staff development and reward

129   All staff are encouraged to pursue staff development and there are some excellent examples within and across the four principal areas of research: New Technologies in Contemporary Theatre Practice; Sonic Dramaturgies; Spaces and Ethics of Performance and Bodies and Culture. Four members of academic staff worked on a National Theatre/Art of Regeneration project that explored new combinations of puppetry, robotics, performance and pyrotechnics.

130   There is a human resources strategy and a recent initiative, at the time of writing, was the staff development systems and priorities for the agenda for the academic year 2007-08. This document defines the budget that is available to enhance training and development opportunities for staff, and how the money is distributed to the respective budget-holders (the Deputy Principal (Academic), the Deputy Principal (Corporate) and the Head of Human Resources (for School-wide events). Both deputy principals have an extensive agenda of objectives and priority areas of support that relate directly to their institutional roles and responsibilities. The criteria in both of these key areas are very extensive and made transparent to all staff.

131   The Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund for research-informed teaching submissions provides opportunities for staff development. The fund provides for periods of leave in order to undertake research-related activities that will have a direct impact upon teaching practices and student learning. Staff can apply for either a half-term or full-term sabbatical to study one of two strands: research-informed teaching/knowledge transfer or pedagogic research.

132   The audit team concluded that the staff development systems and priorities agenda fully supported the opportunities for all staff to develop their own expertise, in order to enhance the learning opportunities for students and also the reputation of both the School and themselves as professional participants within the performing arts.

133   While the enhancement remit has been promoted and acted upon in the practical areas of performance, industrial collaboration, professional and community development, and the

recent postgraduate research strategies, the audit team noted that there still appeared to be a lack of clear and deliberate steps to enhance students' learning opportunities in a systematic manner through the long-established undergraduate portfolio of courses and to a lesser extent within the taught postgraduate courses. It was the view of the team that different arrangements for course organisation might enhance the learning opportunities for students through the systematic analysis of the impact and outcomes of performance, research, and professional and community activities.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

134   At the time of the audit, the School did not have any collaborative arrangements for delivery of higher education provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

135   In its overarching approach to dramatic arts practice, the School states in its mission statement that it is 'dedicated to specialist teaching, scholarship and research for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing standards' and it also sees itself 'as a global intermediary for university drama departments and drama schools in the areas of teaching, practice and research within and for theatre'. The institutional arrangements that it has established for postgraduate research students make a significant contribution to these claims in a well-organised and systematic manner, which contribute to the enhancement of the students' learning opportunities.

136   Documentation reviewed by the audit team clearly indicated the fertile research environment that has been established, and there are plans for future developments with a significant number of research publications, conference papers and practice-based research projects and extensive external research-related grants, including some from the Arts Council. The three-stage strategy adopted by the School demonstrates a clear commitment to build a sustainable research environment that will strengthen the research staff development context and also influence the learning experience for postgraduate research students.

137   The School has a research degrees committee that oversees all aspects of research work, and the study arrangements for postgraduate research students can be found in the Postgraduate Research Degrees Handbook 2006-08. The selection and admission procedure is very rigorous and ensures that early dialogue takes place, to identify key issues related to the calibre of both the applicant and the intended PhD proposal before a formal interview and subsequent acceptance/selection occurs. A two-day induction session takes place, which highlights the key features of being a practitioner/researcher; academic protocols and ethics and responsibilities.

138   The Research Degrees Handbook is a very comprehensive publication in two main sections. Section 1 specifies the guidelines for the programme of study: the research topic; the framework for supervision and support; research training; and assessment procedures and requirements. In the second section, research degree codes of conduct are spelt out in respect of the roles and responsibilities of both the research students and supervisors, in addition to the supervision, monitoring and assessment of students.

139   The procedures for review, which include scrutiny of feedback and assessment processes, are robust with an agreed scheme of work review dates incorporating presentations at the annual School postgraduate research conference, in addition to a technical support agreement, which is vital to the success of practice-based research activities.

140   The process for student complaints or appeals relating to their progress are described in the student handbook and students who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their final viva voce exams can appeal using the University of London procedure for consideration of appeals by candidates for research degrees.

141   The institutional arrangements that the School has established for postgraduate research students reflect the aspirations that are defined in its overall mission statements, and the manner in which these are systematically organised clearly supports the enhancement of the students' learning opportunities. It was the view of the audit team that this holistic approach to establishing a research culture which has a deliberate impact on the students' learning experience is a model that could be extended still further in the undergraduate context.

Section 7: Published information

142   Students confirmed during both the briefing visit and the audit visit that the published information that they had seen, such as the prospectus, website and programme specification was accurate, as indicated, when they experienced the course themselves. However, the audit team found a number of inconsistencies in internal documentation about assessment information for students where information varied between the student handbook, the course handbook and the assessment handbook (see paragraphs 46 and 57).

143   The School has a well-established system of checking the accuracy of its published information with regard to marketing and promotion, which involves all course leaders. The two deputy principals are ultimately responsible for approving all published information, whether it was for marketing and promotion or the Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey.

144   The audit team found that, overall, reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the School publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.