

Application for taught degree awarding powers: Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance

Scrutiny team report

November 2015

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About this report

This report reflects the findings of a team appointed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to conduct a detailed scrutiny of an application from Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance for the power to award taught degrees.

The application was considered under criteria approved by Government in 2004. In advising on applications, QAA is guided by the relevant criteria and the associated evidence requirements. QAA's work in this area is overseen by its Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP), a subcommittee of the QAA Board.

ACDAP's initial consideration of applications establishes whether an applicant has made a case to proceed to detailed scrutiny of the application and the evidence on which it is based. If satisfied on this matter, ACDAP agrees that a team may be appointed to conduct the scrutiny and prepare a report, enabling ACDAP to determine the nature of the recommendation it will make to the QAA Board.

Scrutiny teams produce reports following each of the engagements undertaken. The final report reflects the team's findings and is structured around the four main criteria contained in the 2004 TDAP criteria,¹ namely:

- governance and academic management
- academic standards and quality assurance
- scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff
- the environment supporting the delivery of taught higher education programmes.

Subject to the approval of the Board, QAA's advice is communicated to the appropriate minister. This advice is provided in confidence. The minister determines whether it should be disclosed to the applicant. A final decision on an application, and the notification of that decision, is a matter for the Privy Council.

¹ The TDAP criteria are available in Appendix 1 of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' *Applications for the grant of taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers and university title: Guidance for applicant organisations in England and Wales (August 2004)* at www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32388/11-781-applications-for-degree-awarding-powers-guidance.pdf (PDF, 304KB)

Executive summary

Governance and academic management

Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance (the Conservatoire) is a two-faculty institution located on four sites in south-east London. Two of these sites housed the former Trinity College of Music and Laban (the two institutions merged in 2005); students in Musical Theatre sit structurally within the Faculty of Music but with much of their learning taking place at premises in New Cross. The Conservatoire's degree programmes currently lead to awards given by City University London (the University), which supports the present application.

Governance is in the hands of a Board of Governors (the Board), which was found to be competent and, in its composition, fit for purpose. Members demonstrate their commitment to the Conservatoire in ways which range from attending concerts to providing networking opportunities for students and graduates. The Board conducts much of its detailed business through its Audit, and its Finance and General Purposes Committees. Both are fit for purpose, and the Conservatoire's financial position is generally (if cautiously) healthy. This report draws attention to the fact, with which the Conservatoire is comfortable, that the Chair of the Board is also the Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

The Conservatoire has a strong senior management team (the Principal's Management Group), and is well led. Both faculties are characterised by strong leadership and engaged and sometimes forceful staff groups. The report cites no significant difficulties in this area, and all issues raised by the scrutiny team were adequately answered.

An underlying theme of this and previous external scrutinies has been the extent to which the Conservatoire operates as an integrated whole, and the extent to which the very different structures and traditions of Music and Dance training create a centrifugal push. The Conservatoire is very aware of this tension and has taken deliberate steps to strengthen integration; these are explained in the report. Overall, though this is work in progress it does not emerge as problematic in the context of the taught degree awarding powers (TDAP) criteria.

The Conservatoire has a fairly traditional committee structure headed by an Academic Board (on which, unusually, a member of the Board sits as observer), which is complemented by faculty and sub-faculty management groups. This operates in a satisfactory manner.

Academic standards and quality assurance

In any TDAP application a scrutiny team will explore the manner in which the applicant institution discharges its contractual obligations to the awarding body; the manner in which it exercises any devolved powers it may have been granted; and the extent to which it demonstrates its readiness to assume the additional responsibilities associated with the granting of TDAP.

In the present case the Conservatoire discharges its contractual responsibilities to the full satisfaction of the awarding body. In consequence it has been granted devolved powers in areas which include annual monitoring, where it has put in place a structure which the awarding body has cited as commendable, a view from which the scrutiny team would not demur. Nor does the team have any reason to doubt that the Conservatoire would have the capacity to assume the additional responsibilities associated with TDAP. Its Registry is efficient and well managed; its deliberative structure is sound; its management is firm; there

is a unified commitment among staff and students; and, unusually for an applicant institution, it already awards its own diplomas following a Privy Council ruling some years ago.

Turning to the criteria in greater detail, the Conservatoire is compliant with all external requirements and expectations; it makes appropriate use of external advice in programme planning and monitoring; its management information systems are fit for purpose; its resource allocation methods are rational, realistic and strategic; its staff and students are well apprised of their rights and responsibilities; evidence from external examiner reports is overwhelmingly positive; and it is increasingly taking deliberate steps in the direction of institutional-level quality enhancement.

Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff

The Conservatoire is developing an approach to research which, while accepting of the desirability of research within the remit of the Research Excellence Framework (to which it submitted 11.6 full-time equivalent staff in 2014, achieving an outcome which it considered very satisfactory), is not circumscribed by it. A policy paper has been produced which encourages a broader and performance-related approach, and the Conservatoire is in the process of debating and implementing it at institutional level.

An analysis of the curricula vitae of all academic staff has been undertaken. From this it can be concluded that staff are, in a manner appropriate to a Conservatoire, professionally and academically engaged, and competent to teach the classes for which they are responsible in a manner which meets the expectations of all relevant external reference points.

The Conservatoire's staff complement includes a high proportion of hourly-paid professional staff from the dance and (particularly) music professions. The contribution made by these staff, many of them distinguished figures in their field, is valued by full-time staff and students alike, and the Conservatoire is currently planning to incorporate them in its staff development framework – a framework which already appears both sound and generous.

While only a small minority of teaching staff are likely to be submitted to the next Research Excellence Framework, the Conservatoire claims that this does not mean that the spirit of enquiry and discovery is other than fundamental to its higher education operations. While the scrutiny team takes the view that the structures in place to support and nurture this spirit are as yet incomplete, the claim as a whole is one which the team would largely endorse.

The environment supporting the delivery of taught higher education programmes

The information the Conservatoire provides for potential applicants should leave them in no doubt about the nature of the institution they might be joining, including the strongly professional dimension to their study and the high expectations which the Conservatoire, as a highly selective institution, has of its students. Induction is thorough, and the subsequent supports range from those for students with additional needs (around one in five fall into this category) to specialist libraries and a satisfactory and developing virtual learning environment (VLE).

Students reported positively on all these matters, as they did on the quality of their interactions with teaching staff. A complaints procedure is in place (but little used); information provided is clear and accurate; and, both formally through its equal opportunities structures and less formally as a result of its small size and informal and participative ethos, the Conservatoire reaches out to make its students feel both welcome and professionally focused.

The two areas where reservations are expressed relate to the extent to which it has succeeded in returning all student work within a specified time frame which, even if it were adhered to, has attracted critical comment from students and external reviews; and its failure to achieve what it considers acceptable response rates to internal evaluation questionnaires.

Privy Council's decision

The Privy Council's decision is to grant Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance indefinite taught degree awarding powers from 2 February 2016.

Introduction

This report provides a summary of the work and findings of the scrutiny team (the team appointed by QAA to review in detail the evidence submitted in support of an application for TDAP by Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance).

The application was considered by ACDAP in November 2014, when the Committee agreed to proceed to the detailed scrutiny of the application. The team appointed to conduct the detailed scrutiny comprised Professor Richard Allen, Professor Malcolm Cook and Professor Clare Pickles and Ms Corinne Smith (secretary). The detailed scrutiny was managed on behalf of QAA by Professor Robert Harris, Assistant Director.

The detailed scrutiny began in December 2014, culminating in a report to ACDAP in November 2015. In the course of the scrutiny, the team read a wide range of documents presented as part of the evidence in support of the application. The team also spoke to a range of stakeholders, and observed meetings and events pertinent to the application.

Key information about Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance

Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance (the Conservatoire) was established in 2005 through the merger of two specialist institutions: Trinity College of Music (founded 1872) and Laban (founded 1948). The Conservatoire employs 29 full-time permanent academic staff, some 50 part-time permanent academic staff (including two professors), 129 permanent hourly-paid academic staff making a teaching contribution equivalent to at least 0.1 full-time equivalence, and 54 such staff contributing less than this. In addition, a wide range of visiting academic staff contribute to the life of the Conservatoire in ways which include masterclasses, seminars, workshops, ensemble direction, mentoring and research. The Conservatoire also employs approximately 194 permanent or fixed-term administrative staff.

The Conservatoire's mission statement is:

Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance is an international artistic and educational community that brings together performers and practitioners to train, collaborate, research and perform in inspiring creative, intellectual and physical spaces. We identify, support and develop talented and innovative performers and creators wherever they may be found and throughout their creative lives.

The Conservatoire had 994 registered students on award-bearing programmes in academic year 2014-15. Sixty-seven per cent of students were from the UK, 21 per cent from the EU and 12 per cent were classed as international students.

The Conservatoire offers the following degrees on behalf of City University London with student numbers registered for the academic year 2014-15 (at 1 October 2014) in brackets:

Undergraduate

BA (Hons) Contemporary Dance (271)
BA (Hons) Musical Theatre Performance (65)
BMus (Hons) Performance/Composition/Jazz (356)

Postgraduate

MPhil/PhD in Creative Practice: (Dance/Music/Collaborative Arts)
MPhil/PhD in (Dance and/or Music) Science

MPhil/PhD in (Dance and/or Music) Pedagogy (total of 24 on MPhil/PhD programmes)
MA Choreography (11)
MA Creative Practice (18)
MA Dance Performance (12)
MA The Body In Performance (10)
MA Music Education and Performance (6)
MFA Creative Practice Dance/Music (10)
MMus Performance/Composition/Jazz/Creative Practice (88)
MSc Dance Science (18)
Postgraduate Diploma Community Dance (9)

The Conservatoire also offers the following programmes under its own validation:

Diploma in Dance Studies (available until July 2016) (17)
Postgraduate Artist Diploma (Performance/Composition/Jazz) (25)
Postgraduate Diploma (Performance/Composition/Jazz) (32)
Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma: The Teaching Musician (22)

In addition, the following courses were validated during the 2014-15 academic year for future entry:

Undergraduate

Graduate Diploma in Dance Studies

Postgraduate

MFA Choreography
MFA Dance Science

The Conservatoire is divided academically into two faculties, each of which is further subdivided into a number of departments:

Faculty of Music

- Academic Studies
- Composition
- Jazz
- Musical Theatre (September 2015 onwards)
- Piano and Keyboard Instruments
- Strings
- Voice
- Wind, Brass and Percussion

Faculty of Dance

- Undergraduate Studies
- Postgraduate Studies
- Professional development programmes

Cross-faculty departments

- Research
- Learning Enhancement
- Learning and Participation.

Detailed scrutiny against taught degree awarding powers criteria

A Governance and academic management

Criterion A1

An organisation granted taught degree awarding powers is governed, managed and administered effectively, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities. Its financial management is sound and a clear relationship exists between its financial policy and the safeguarding of the quality and standards of its higher education provision. In the case of an organisation that is not primarily a higher education institution; its principal activities are compatible with the provision of higher education programmes and awards.

1 The Conservatoire's Board of Governors (the Board) contains independent members with expertise in relevant professions and in both commercial and higher education management. The scrutiny team reviewed the manner in which the Board and its constituent subcommittees discharge their respective responsibilities. The Board, which was found to be diligent and competent, sets the parameters for financial planning, and senior managers' performance in working within them is kept under review by the Finance and General Purposes Committee. The team, noting that the Chair of the Board is also Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, a dual role requested by the Chair himself, did raise this matter, but was told that the Conservatoire is alert to the potential difficulties involved.

2 Within the Conservatoire the focal point for financial and strategic planning, resource allocation and implementation is the Principal's Management Group, which consists of senior academic and support staff managers, including the Directors of Music and Dance. Observation of this Group confirms that it is properly constituted and fit for purpose. At faculty level, effective and broadly parallel structures are in place. Faculty management groups are supported by departmental meetings and undergraduate and postgraduate programme committees, whose Chairs' membership of the institutional-level Academic Standards and Quality Board (ASQB) is designed to achieve both vertical and horizontal integration. The scrutiny team, finding that size and structural simplicity enable lines of communication to be short, confirms the effectiveness of current systems.

3 The Academic Board is the senior internal committee: a member of the Board of Governors sits on it as an observer. It exercises its responsibilities mainly through a suite of properly constituted subcommittees. Of these, the ASQB is of particular relevance to this scrutiny. The scrutiny team, exploring why this body has no remit for curriculum development, learned that following the disestablishment of the former Curriculum Development Committee this remit is reserved by the Academic Board. The team also established that, while the Conservatoire's senior committees contain in most cases only a small minority of non-office holders (none in the case of the Academic Board), opportunities do exist at faculty level and below for staff of all levels to engage in curriculum development discussions and workshops, and for these engagements to contribute to faculty planning.

4 In the context of the successful merger of two very different institutions, in spite of the creation of a robust unitary governance structure, the scrutiny team noted (and representatives of the awarding body confirmed) that the Conservatoire has taken a more cautious approach to academic integration. Such integration is currently largely limited to a well-received 10-credit programme component (CoLab), wherein students spend a fortnight working on collaborative projects across disciplines and years, and Musical Theatre. This

latter, a successful initiative located in the Faculty of Music but drawing also on the resources of the Faculty of Dance, has benefited from the increased institutional awareness of its space and technical requirements which led to the allocation of bespoke premises adapted to its needs. While this constitutes a significant step forward, the team judges, primarily on the basis of its meetings with programme staff and students, that Musical Theatre has yet to be fully integrated into institutional operations.

5 The Conservatoire has also made two significant senior cross-faculty appointments, both of which constitute constructive steps along the road to greater integration. The Head of Learning Enhancement chairs the ASQB, and the Head of Research was responsible for overseeing the Conservatoire's submission to the Research Excellence Framework. The two post-holders report, respectively, to the Directors of Music and Dance, who exercise cross-institutional executive responsibility for these areas.

6 The Conservatoire has effective and independent institutional leadership, governance and management, achieving high levels of engagement from a full-time staff cohort which appears willing to apply its creative and expressive talents to lively and constructive debate.

7 The Conservatoire is a company limited by guarantee and without share capital, and is a legally recognised higher education institution with student numbers directly allocated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). While its programmes of study leading to degree-level awards are validated by City University London (the University), it makes certificate and diploma awards under its own authority through powers bestowed by the Privy Council, under procedures aligned with those of the University. While HEFCE had short-term concerns about the Conservatoire's financial health following merger and relocation, corrective action enabled it to return to surplus in financial year 2007-08; its subsequent financial position has remained healthy. The Conservatoire assured the scrutiny team that it is compliant with all relevant legislation.

8 Within the Conservatoire, and given the overarching responsibility of the validating body, responsibility for monitoring alignment with the Quality Code and other external reference points rests with the Registry, which both oversees and supports quality-related initiatives and policies. External monitoring was conducted both by QAA and the validating body in 2012, when the Conservatoire's alignment with external reference points was confirmed. The QAA Institutional Review report, which contained two negative judgements, was amended in 2013 when it was confirmed that the Conservatoire had addressed all recommendations.

9 The Conservatoire's higher education mission, which combines traditional academic study with professional practice, is reflected in its Strategic Plan and its Learning and Teaching Plan, both of which are available online. The Human Resources Policy ensures that all staff are familiar with the institutional mission, and the scrutiny team noted the conscientious way in which the Conservatoire encourages hourly-paid staff to see themselves as members of the wider academic community.

10 The Conservatoire's specialist nature and public profile make it unlikely that any potential applicant would be unaware of its broad higher education mission, which is also clearly articulated in the online prospectus and faculty webpages. The scrutiny team confirms from meetings that current students, all of whom are also assigned an academic tutor, make good use of these information sources.

11 As noted at paragraph 1, the Conservatoire's governance and management structures are well-considered and fit for the purpose of overseeing and managing the range of institutional responsibilities. In terms of committees, the Academic Board's subcommittees, in addition to the ASQB consist of the Learning and Teaching Board,

Student Affairs Committee, Admissions and Scholarships Committee, Music and Dance Assessment Boards, Knowledge Exchange and Public Engagement Board, Equality, Diversity and Access Committee, Research Board, and Research Ethics Committee. Terms of reference are clear, and as far as possible mutually exclusive. Observations confirm that meetings are well supported and chaired, and justify confidence that all contributions are heard and respected.

12 Hourly-paid staff are not routinely committee members (though one hourly-paid member serves on the ASQB and hourly-paid staff are often members of programme committees), and, while the Conservatoire takes steps to ensure that their views and advice are made known, a more systematic approach to engaging such staff, many of them senior professionals with experience of a variety of higher education institutions, would bring an additional perspective to institutional-level deliberations. This is particularly so in a small institution where, inevitably, a small group of staff in managerial roles is a regular presence in both senior and junior committees; the composition of the Academic Board in particular is constituted almost entirely of office-bearing staff.

13 The leadership experience of the Board of Governors is as previously described. The Principal has extensive academic and higher education management expertise; the appointment of the Heads of Research and Learning Enhancement has further strengthened the senior team; faculty-level leadership is strategically and operationally effective, both Directors having professional and academic qualifications and credibility with their staff. At departmental level, observations confirm that the Conservatoire has succeeded in ensuring that more junior post-holders have added expertise in higher education leadership to their pre-existing professional abilities and commitment.

14 The development of academic policies and systems takes place against a background in which undergraduate teaching in each faculty is numerically dominated by one successful and highly selective programme. In this context development is predominantly incremental, though the scrutiny team confirms that students and external professionals are involved in planning. At master's level, most innovations taking place during the scrutiny were in teaching method not content, including developing use of the VLE, modifying attendance requirements, and extending the MA programme offer to include MFA awards.

15 Higher education policy implementation, which is competently managed and effectively communicated to staff of all levels, is geared to training students for careers as performers or in related roles. The Conservatoire, with the strong support of its Governors, encourages students to undertake public performances, and procedures exist for any necessary consequential adjustments to be made to attendance and submission rules.

16 The planning system is responsive to the external environment, and Governors are cognisant both of the steps being taken to implement the Strategic Plan and of the higher education context in which the Conservatoire operates. Recent monitoring and review activities have embraced such well-established policies as Learning & Teaching; Widening Participation; Research; Knowledge Exchange & Public Engagement; and the Financial Regulations. Academic Regulations are reviewed annually. The Conservatoire also undertook a helpful Internal Audit of Long Term Planning in January 2013.

17 The minutes of the Audit Committee and a suite of internal audit reports confirm that the Conservatoire has sound structures, policies and procedures for risk management.

18 Change management in higher education involves such factors as clear goals, effective management and staff commitment. The scrutiny team confirms, from documentary study and observations, that these requirements are in place, that they closely involve the Board of Governors, and that the Conservatoire is informed both by a common endeavour

and by an all-permeating realism. Contingency and scenario planning are regular features of senior meetings, and a joint governor-management working group has been established to oversee the current Institution Specific Targeted Allocation submission to HEFCE. Overall, the Conservatoire, buttressed also as it is by reasonable levels of reserves and unrestricted trust funds, is well placed to withstand all but the most severe future financial buffeting.

19 While responsibility for academic standards rests with the awarding body, the Conservatoire has discharged all its responsibilities in this area competently. Representatives of City University told the scrutiny team that the Conservatoire demonstrates a high level of 'ownership' of quality and standards; that appropriate systems are embedded; and that the University itself has learned from the Conservatoire and adopted some of its approaches. The most immediately relevant internal bodies, the ASQB and the two assessment boards, have a direct reporting line to the Academic Board; the assessment boards additionally report to the University Senate. These arrangements form a straightforward part of routine operations.

20 The University has devolved increasing responsibility to the Conservatoire as their relationship has evolved, its representatives telling the scrutiny team that in programme validation 'We're almost feeling redundant now'.

21 The Conservatoire claims to have a clear understanding of the changes required should taught degree awarding powers be granted; the University expresses complete confidence in the Conservatoire's ability to exercise such powers; and the scrutiny team confirms both that planning is at an advanced stage and that the Conservatoire's ability to develop, evolve, monitor and review systems gives grounds for confidence that it would successfully manage the additional responsibilities involved.

B Academic standards and quality assurance

Criterion B1

An organisation granted taught degree awarding powers has in place an appropriate regulatory framework to govern the award of its higher education qualifications.

22 The quality-related policies and practices, which together constitute the Conservatoire's regulatory framework, are subject to internal review. This is conducted on behalf of the ASQB, and encompasses annual programme evaluations, external examiner reports, periodic review (which takes the form of quinquennial revalidation), research degree reporting, and alignment with the Quality Code. The scrutiny team confirms, from documentary study, discussion (including with representatives of the awarding body) and observations, that procedures are consistently implemented.

23 In the event of taught degree awarding powers being granted, the present regulatory framework would form the basis of new regulations. QAA reviews of both the Conservatoire and the University suggest that this approach would be responsible and realistic. University representatives confirmed the maturity of the Conservatoire's regulatory framework, supported the application, and anticipated a smooth transition. The Conservatoire understands and is addressing the additional responsibilities, administrative as well as academic, which taught degree awarding powers would bring; the scrutiny team believes they would be competently discharged.

Criterion B2

An organisation granted taught degree awarding powers has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for defining and securing the academic standards of its higher education provision.

24 The Conservatoire produced evidence of awards at all levels being aligned to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). Both external examiners and the awarding body confirm unequivocally that this is so.

25 Ensuring the alignment of the Conservatoire's higher education provision to the Quality Code falls to the ASQB. A revised Academic Quality Handbook was introduced in 2014, based on an analysis of each aspect of the Quality Code, and a range of observations testifies to the thoroughness with which the mapping is undertaken as well as to the adequacy of review procedures more generally. Observations of assessment boards confirm the robustness of institutional examining and the overall security of academic standards. The conscientious work of the Board of Governors, the Academic Board and the ASQB testifies to the diligence of the Conservatoire's oversight of academic standards.

26 The Director of Music was a member of the review group for the most recent *Subject Benchmark Statement: Music*. Relevant Subject Benchmark Statements are basic to programme design and a point of reference for validation panels. External examiner reports confirm that alignment with Subject Benchmark Statements is complete.

27 Programme specifications are constructed and amended in programme validation, review and modification procedures and published on the Conservatoire's website. The scrutiny team confirms, following a sampling exercise, that they are fit for purpose and in line with national norms and expectations.

28 Advice from external peers is incorporated in programme validation and revalidation, both in consultation events and in the inclusion of an external adviser on validation panels. When the scrutiny team queried the effective externality of one member, a longstanding senior and highly respected external adviser to the department, the Conservatoire responded that the individual concerned had not been a Conservatoire nominee. Overall, the Conservatoire is active in seeking and engaging with external academic and professional peers. Its programmes are not subject to statutory regulation.

29 The Conservatoire has delegated authority for annual monitoring. The method chosen is based on peer review conducted by a cross-institutional working group which audits and comments on evaluation and development plans, considers evidence which includes feedback from external examiners and students, and reports to the ASQB. This Board audits the process and reports to the Academic Board and thence the awarding body on its soundness and integrity. Both the Conservatoire and the University express confidence in the method, which is regularly reviewed at institutional level.

30 Procedures for programme validation and the review of existing programmes are as specified by the University. They are well recorded and overseen at institutional level, with the Academic Board receiving regular reports on actions following validation events. The scrutiny team found the arrangements thorough, and confirms that they include external involvement and are conscientiously undertaken.

31 The Directors of Music and Dance prepare annual budgets in consultation with programme teams. Decisions are made by the Principal's Management Group on the basis of evidence of which much is derived from annual monitoring. Staffing needs are kept under review at programme level, in-faculty staffing reallocations and reassignments are the responsibility of the Director; at institutional level new staffing applications are considered within the annual budget round, with decisions made on the basis of academic prioritisation. The relationship between academic planning and resource allocation is clear.

Criterion B3

The education provision of an organisation granted taught degree awarding powers consistently meets its stated learning objectives and achieves its intended outcomes.

32 Strategies for learning and assessment are discussed at validation, monitoring and revalidation, taking into account programme level, the nature of the discipline, entry profile and assessment load. The Conservatoire drew the scrutiny team's attention to a revalidation in which discussions with the external examiner had helped revise and realign both the techniques taught and the assessment metrics. Observations of departmental meetings confirmed the competence of the Conservatoire's approach to academic planning. The team confirms the consonance between learning and assessment strategies on the one hand and academic objectives and intended learning outcomes on the other.

33 Policies and procedures for programme design, monitoring and review are accurately specified in the Academic Quality Handbook, where helpful guidance is supplemented by targeted staff development sessions. Procedures are discussed at all institutional levels. An observation of a departmental meeting in the Faculty of Music noted a Head of Department's in-depth knowledge of relevant policies in the course of a lively and well-informed discussion on curriculum enhancement.

34 At faculty level, managerial responsibility for amending or improving programme proposals lies with the Director (assisted by the Faculty Management Group), who is tasked with ensuring adherence to the procedures specified in the Academic Quality Handbook.

Proposed amendments are submitted through programme committees to the ASQB, which is chaired by the Head of Learning Enhancement to ensure that decisions are independent of programme management and which has delegated authority. An annual report on programme and modular changes designed to guard against the danger of accumulated changes leading to unintended variations in learning outcomes is submitted to the Academic Board. These arrangements are clear and appropriate.

35 At undergraduate level, the Conservatoire's programme structure is almost entirely focused on Music (including Musical Theatre) or Dance, with little or no variation. In those postgraduate programmes where alternative pathways are available, coherence is tested at validation, monitoring and review. The scrutiny team noted a small number of changes to structure or assessment, largely in response to programme-level recommendations. For example, in one taught postgraduate programme the range of module choices was reduced to create greater coherence; in another, assessment weightings were adjusted to enable students to set priorities within their programme pathways.

36 Confirmation of the availability of adequate learning resources and support is a condition of programme validation; their continuing fitness for purpose features in monitoring and review. That due consideration is afforded to this issue was demonstrated in observations of validation and revalidation events, where the appropriateness of the support environment and its match to the curriculum were the subjects of careful scrutiny.

37 Within the Conservatoire's academic structure, three main elements confirm that attention is paid to the alignment of learning support and quality management. First, in combining the role of Registrar with that of Director of Academic Services, the Conservatoire aims to achieve parallel senior-level oversight; secondly, in relocating responsibility for academic learning support from Student Services to the Learning Enhancement Unit it aims to strengthen its link to programme development; thirdly, in requiring the Learning and Teaching Board, which oversees annual monitoring reports, to consider annual departmental plans from the perspective of both learning and teaching, and support services and to make recommendations to the Academic Board, it aims to ensure that the link is embedded in routine operations. These arrangements are appropriate and appear effective.

38 The Conservatoire has one blended learning programme, the first cohort of which completed in December 2014. It involves block periods of study punctuating continual remote learning, and is subject to the same quality and standards procedures and requirements as on-campus programmes. The scrutiny team established that students make sound use of the VLE to maintain contact with staff and with each other.

39 The Conservatoire's quality management procedures are subject to University regulations, follow a traditional cycle of validation, monitoring and review/revalidation, and are aligned with all relevant reference points. Observations confirm that these procedures are competently implemented.

40 The Conservatoire explains assessment criteria in all relevant student-facing documentation and the VLE. Staff receive appropriate guidance, and regular meetings enable module and component leaders to ensure that assessment tasks are communicated as necessary. The scrutiny team paid particular attention to the extent to which students understand the procedures for assessing performance. They confirmed that they are familiar and comfortable with the procedures involved, and understand the use and importance of external involvement in performance assessment.

41 Responsibility for reviewing assessment practices falls to the ASQB, reporting annually to the Academic Board. The scrutiny of annual monitoring reports covers this issue in detail and includes an analysis of external examiner reports, which confirm the alignment

of assessment practices with learning objectives and outcomes. In an observation of the ASQB thorough consideration was given to the available evidence.

42 Heads of studies and programme leaders are responsible for ensuring that staff who mark or moderate student work are appropriately qualified, and that moderation and reporting procedures are accurate and timely. The nature of the professional practice at the Conservatoire is such that many academic staff are part-time or hourly paid. The work of the minority of such staff with assessment responsibilities is moderated by internal peers, and a sample is scrutinised by external examiners. All panels assessing performance include external assessors. Moderation and monitoring meetings appear effective in ensuring inter-assessor consistency and reliability.

43 External examiners consistently express satisfaction with the reliability and validity of assessment. Observations of an assessment board in each faculty found the meetings effectively chaired, the administration and papers excellent, and external examiners positive about all aspects of their involvement. Papers from the boards contribute to annual monitoring, where statistical data on assessment outcomes are also considered and addressed institutionally, and to forward planning at programme and departmental levels.

44 One MA programme, suspended in 2013 when aspects of the curriculum were incorporated into other master's level programmes, was formally closed in 2015 when the faculty did not pursue revalidation; no students were affected. Recruitment to another MA has been suspended for the next academic year on the ground of non-viability. In this case appropriate action has been taken to safeguard the interests of the one applicant and the few continuing students, who are being taught out.

Criterion B4

An organisation granted taught degree awarding powers takes effective action to promote strengths and respond to identified limitations.

45 The cycle of annual monitoring and review begins at departmental level, and, through the reporting mechanisms described above, involves detailed scrutiny at committee level. Observations undertaken throughout the scrutiny confirm the existence of robust debate and a determination to strive for the best and then to make it better still. This is not an institution where staff are lacking in self-criticality.

46 In addition to routine aspects of quality management, the Conservatoire has demonstrated its commitment to critical self-assessment in appointing an institutional-level Head of Learning Enhancement; in its panel review (by members of the Learning and Teaching Board and staff members from both faculties) of learning points from annual monitoring; and in the ASQB's annual report to the Academic Board, which reports on the outcomes of the year's monitoring and review procedures and contributes to charting a pathway for the following academic year.

47 The monitoring and review of learning objectives and outcomes are integral to course management. For example, annual monitoring requires academic managers to report on student learning achievement and outcomes against stated learning objectives. An observation of a departmental discussion demonstrated that this was carefully done and led to planned improvements to students' learning experience.

48 Internally, the two faculties act as peer reviewers for each other in monitoring and review, collaborating also in a cross-faculty panel which reviews annual monitoring reports. The two Directors also act as Chairs of each other's diploma validation events. Externally,

all validation, monitoring and review events include external participants, normally from other higher education institutions as well as from the professions; external assessors are necessarily used in performance assessment.

49 The appointment of a Head of Learning Enhancement reflects an institutional-level commitment to ensuring continuous improvement at a level which transcends subject-specific teaching in Music and Dance; and annual monitoring serves a good purpose in indicating the soundness of academic provision and currency of programmes by means of a peer-review method which secures the engagement of staff directly involved in programme delivery.

C Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff

Criterion C1

The staff of an organisation granted powers to award taught degrees will be competent to teach, facilitate learning and undertake assessment to the level of the qualifications being awarded.

50 The Conservatoire provided the curricula vitae of all staff. They were detailed, extensive and scrutiny-relevant, revealing a rich variety of educational and professional expertise. In terms of academic qualifications, 35 full-time and 14 part-time staff have PhDs or its equivalent; 90 full-time and 20 part-time staff have master's degrees; of the non-graduate staff almost all (89) are part-time teachers whom the Conservatoire has judged to have equivalent professional qualifications. There are 219 staff involved in professional practice, either as performers (solo or as members of leading orchestras or ensembles) or in a performance-related capacity (for example as composers or choreographers); 47 are members of the Higher Education Academy; 28 have leadership roles; the remaining 229 are teaching staff. Of the 190 staff in the Faculty of Music, 51 are salaried and the remainder hourly-paid; of the 58 staff in the Faculty of Dance, 24 are salaried and 34 hourly-paid.

51 The scrutiny team examined the experience and qualifications of hourly-paid staff. Such staff contribute to the life of the Conservatoire in many ways, not only in providing individual training in the faculty of Music, but also in performing, teaching, writing and giving workshops and masterclasses in both faculties. While noting that some staff teach to an academic level above their own, the team confirms that this is not unusual in professional training programmes (many such staff also teach in other conservatoires). Any lack of formal credentials is compensated by extensive professional experience and reputations; few such staff are involved in academic assessment; none has sole decision-making responsibility.

52 Of the Conservatoire's 257 academic staff, 160 are members of their respective specialist or professional bodies, and evidence exists of widespread engagement with pedagogic discipline development. All salaried staff are subject to performance review to ensure that their expertise and involvement are regularly updated, and the professional involvement of hourly-paid staff is now also monitored. The scheme requires each relevant staff member to submit a self-assessment form identifying institutional needs and priorities, and the Conservatoire actively encourages staff to engage nationally and internationally with (in particular) practice-related pedagogic issues.

53 The scrutiny team studied the evolution of the Conservatoire's research profile, noting that all staff are now required to update their curriculum vitae annually to show that their knowledge is relevant and current. While only a minority of salaried staff are, or are

likely in the short term to become, research active in the traditional sense, the team found widespread understanding of the nature of practice-led research, noting that 207 staff describe themselves as active in research or scholarship (as broadly defined). The Learning and Teaching Plan aims to develop a model of research informed by professional practice as well as traditional scholarship, some or all of it in a manner falling within the definitions of research set by the Research Excellence Framework. While this approach may not sit comfortably with traditional models outside the conservatoire sector, the Conservatoire articulates an aspiration to develop a research and development infrastructure facilitating links between artistic practice and higher education teaching. While it is reasonable to anticipate that the Conservatoire will develop its research profile primarily within this framework, it is also fair to acknowledge that this is as yet by no means fully achieved.

54 While the Conservatoire's main research strengths are practice-based, in the past three years staff have also produced seven books, 14 book chapters, 32 articles and 46 conference papers. The submission to the Research Excellence Framework consisted of 11.6 full-time equivalent staff, achieving a modal (50 per cent) 3* result, with 18 per cent 4* and no unclassified; this result met or exceeded internal expectations.

55 The Conservatoire takes steps to ensure that research students engage, through their studies, with additional eminent and experienced figures in professional practice. In Music this can involve membership of a named professional ensemble, whether as soloist, conductor, director or ensemble member; in Dance it can include providing masterclasses for a leading professional company. In either case involvement in an arts-related charity or funding body, and authorship of a significant number of invited or otherwise published articles, whether peer-reviewed or in professional journals, are potentially relevant criteria for staff teaching on, or otherwise supporting, doctoral programmes.

56 Doctoral supervisors are required to have a doctorate or equivalent professional standing, and show evidence of engagement in research and scholarly activity commensurate with teaching at this level; they are supported by supervisory teams (normally of two), at least one of whom must be an internal member of staff, who has undertaken formal supervisor training.

57 Full-time salaried teaching staff are allocated 20 days to undertake approved staff development activity (pro rata for fractional staff), and recently-introduced terms and conditions for hourly paid teaching staff clarify professional development expectations. The Learning Enhancement Unit, the focus for staff development, is developing a Higher Education Academy-accredited professional teaching qualification to increase the number of accredited staff; while the appointment of an Institutional E-Learning Technologist has supported the programme of training in the use of the VLE. The scrutiny team confirms, from observations and discussion, that considerable interest exists in the institutional staff development scheme to the point where demand currently outstrips resources, a situation which will be reviewed in the next budget round.

58 The most senior figures in the institution are significant figures in higher education. Both the Principal and the two faculty Directors have extensive and high-profile senior external involvements, and all academic staff with leadership roles have engagements with other higher education institutions through, for example, involvement as external examiners in 37 cases, and as validation panel members in 21 cases.

D The environment supporting the delivery of taught higher education programmes

Criterion D1

The teaching and learning infrastructure of an organisation granted taught degree awarding powers, including its student support and administrative support arrangements, is effective and monitored.

59 From a range of observations, the scrutiny team found that the Conservatoire gathers and evaluates evidence of the effectiveness of learning and teaching at all levels, from the Board of Governors and the Academic Board to departments and programmes. The validating body commended the Conservatoire on the quality of annual monitoring, and the procedure has subsequently been augmented by the introduction of discussions between Learning and Teaching Board representatives and heads of selected support services to strengthen the link between academic and resource planning to support learning and teaching (see paragraph 37). Given that the Conservatoire already scores well on learning resources in the National Student Survey (its overall position in 2015 was =141), this procedure, in addition to the recent strengthening of e-technology support can fairly be described as reflecting a commitment to make strong facilities ever better.

60 Formal written feedback to students is provided in line with the policy on the return of assessed work: this policy allows 21 working days for the return of work - four weeks and one day in term time, but excluding vacations. This has attracted criticism from students and in external reports. First, in the National Student Survey satisfaction with the timeliness of feedback on assessed work achieves some of the Conservatoire's lowest scores, ranging from 43 per cent to 70 per cent; secondly, both the 2008 and the 2012 QAA Institutional Reviews addressed this point. The 2008 report recommended that the Conservatoire 'consider carefully the evidence from student feedback relating to the timeliness of the return of student work, to ensure that agreed policy is followed'; the 2012 review recommended that it 'review its current policy on the return of formally assessed work to ensure that all such work is returned within a time frame which supports students' future learning needs and with feedback that is consistently of good quality'.

61 The scrutiny team's first concern is that students claim that the policy itself does not always support their future learning needs (one described the 21 working days as 'feeling like an eternity'), a particular problem arising when the deadline extends beyond term dates; the second is that full compliance with the policy has yet to be achieved. The Conservatoire, while stressing that day-to-day formative feedback is routinely provided orally, states, and the scrutiny team confirms, that monitoring of adherence is under way; additional resources have been allocated for this purpose; most such feedback is now returned on time; and the Conservatoire has taken remedial action in some cases when this has not happened. Nevertheless, the combination of the National Student Survey scores and the fact that the matter has been the subject of recommendations in successive QAA reviews four years apart demonstrates that while efforts to ensure adherence to the policy have engaged the Conservatoire over a number of years, the problem has yet to be fully resolved.

62 Much of the work associated with the performance aspect of the degrees is undertaken by students on a day-to-day basis, so immediate formative feedback is provided both in class and individually. The Learning Enhancement Unit is working with programme staff and student groups to encourage students to recognise and make full use of the feedback they receive.

63 In both faculties, students have access to academic support, and those who spoke to the scrutiny team expressed strong satisfaction with the personal, academic and professional attention they receive, valuing also, and in particular, the expertise of the many practitioners who contribute to their teaching and orient them towards their future careers.

64 The Conservatoire's vehicles for securing stakeholder feedback include induction, collaboration between staff and students, training sessions for student representatives, the Student Charter, the Student Affairs Committee, and the Student Ambassador Scheme, which involves students working directly with a range of stakeholders including staff, Governors, the Principal and honorary fellows.

65 The nature of the disciplines and the size and culture of the Conservatoire mean that students have ample opportunity to express their views frequently and informally; staff are reported as responsive to students' feedback. This practice extends to the CoLab initiative (see paragraph 4), where evidence was found of regular and systemic evaluation of the student experience and of student feedback from across the range of provision contributing to changes to the broader curriculum, the provision of more social space, and improved access to library resources.

66 The Registrar, as Director of Academic Services, is charged with ensuring that student feedback is considered and addressed. The results of external surveys, most notably the National Student Survey, receive detailed formal attention. Securing student engagement with internal evaluation mechanisms, notably surveys, has proved challenging, however, and the scrutiny team found evidence not only of low levels of participation in formal student evaluation returns but of a further decline following a move to electronic surveys. At the time of the scrutiny this move was undergoing re-evaluation, and the Learning Enhancement Unit was exploring with faculties and the Registry how best to increase feedback response rates; the problem has yet to be solved.

67 The scrutiny team observed the contributions of student representatives at academic committees and the Board of Governors, finding them often effective and engaging. Students' views as well as those of music and dance professionals from the Conservatoire's wide network of contacts also contribute to internal and periodic review panels.

68 The Conservatoire provides potential applicants with extensive information, explaining in professionally relevant terms the expectations and skills required of them, including the aspects of health and safety pertinent to a performance context. The two-week induction programme, which includes registration, practical issues, room bookings, equipment training and hiring and library induction, aims to ensure new students have all necessary information and are fully prepared for their programme; their involvement in CoLab continues this theme.

69 As well as leading on enhancement initiatives and chairing key committees, the Head of Learning Enhancement coordinates a working group on the transition of students to higher education and student induction. Particular induction activities are offered for international students and those with disabilities, the latter typically being around 20 per cent of the population. The Student Affairs Committee reviews induction arrangements on an annual basis, and the Equality, Diversity and Access Committee reports annually to the Academic Board. Students spoke particularly well of the support available for students with dyslexia, those requiring physiotherapy, and those with aural impairment. The scrutiny team found that the Conservatoire's proactive and successful methods of student induction take account of the needs of many groups of students with a disclosed disability.

70 The Board of Governors and the Academic Board receive reports on resource issues arising from annual monitoring and revalidation. The scrutiny team heard examples

of recent enhancements, including (following representations from staff and students) the strengthening of resources for Musical Theatre, building on the existing provision of bespoke dance and music spaces, external professional venues, a health suite, a composition suite, recording studios and an extensive range of instruments and scores.

71 The scrutiny team learnt of improved consistency of staff use of the VLE - a trend likely to continue following the strengthening of the technical staff complement.

72 The development of the range of student services is overseen by the Principal's Management Group. The quality of such services is reviewed by the Student Affairs Committee, in annual monitoring, and by the services themselves, deploying methods which feed into departmental and faculty annual plans. The Department of Student Services, managed by the Registrar, operates through a team of student advisers and specialist coordinators, and involves counselling, health services, international student support and (in conjunction with the Learning Enhancement Unit) addressing learning support needs.

73 Only a minority of students expect to gain a permanent job on graduation, as most plan to become freelance professionals. In this context the scrutiny team noted in particular the developing contribution made by the Careers Service, the provisions of which include lectures on taxation and self-assessment; support and guidance for two years following graduation; support for postgraduate students in producing professional portfolios; advice on such matters as website building, marketing oneself, obtaining an agent and creating an audience; and mock auditions.

74 The Conservatoire makes appropriate use of student progress and related data to inform decision-making in quality and standards, outperforming its benchmark group and sector averages. The Principal's Management Group monitors this data closely, develops key performance indicators, and is advised by the Data Quality Group on the internal use of management information, complaints statistics and external benchmarking. Assessment Boards monitor and make judgements on students' achievements; absences from class are closely monitored. The systems in place appear wholly effective.

75 Complaints and appeals procedures are aligned with those of the University as awarding body. Appeals procedures for validated degree programmes are a University responsibility; students are made aware of where to locate the necessary information. Advice and information on the complaints procedure are published on the VLE and in handbooks, and support staff are available in an advisory capacity. While few formal complaints are reported, an annual report on complaints, appeals and disciplinary cases is addressed appropriately. The Conservatoire has effective procedures for handling student complaints.

76 The Conservatoire is committed to the professional development of staff, and operates a professional review system at departmental level. The scrutiny team heard of the many opportunities for staff to engage in professional development, including an array of activities, professional body and cross-departmental events and meetings. Annual performance reviews and departmental plans record and plan professional development opportunities.

77 Information about academic provision is checked both internally and by the University. The internal auditors report regularly on the scrutiny and accuracy of data and information. The information about academic provision on the Conservatoire's website appears clear, accurate and up to date; students reported finding it so, both when making an informed choice as to whether to apply and subsequently.

78 The Conservatoire provides comprehensive support for students with learning needs and disabilities and for international students, and their needs and progression are

regularly reviewed at departmental meetings. Staff are trained to support these students, whose awareness of support for their needs is clear. The Conservatoire also provides a good range and quality of support including, where possible, access to treatment for students experiencing injury or illness during their studies.

79 The Equality, Diversity and Access Committee, which reports and makes recommendations direct to the Academic Board, is responsible for matters relating to equality, diversity and widening participation. Workshops on these areas are included in student induction, and permanent staff take a compulsory equal opportunities training programme. The scrutiny team confirms that equality of opportunity is sought, and appears to be achieved, throughout the Conservatoire.

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