



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Ballet West, December 2015

Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Ballet West (the School) has made commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [previous monitoring visit](#) in December 2014.

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2 No major strategic changes have taken place at the School since the Review for Specific Course Designation visit in December 2013. This report is of an Educational Oversight annual monitoring visit.

3 There are 75 students enrolled on two higher education programmes: one Higher National programme approved by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, and a BA (Hons) Dance approved by the University of Northumbria at Newcastle (the University). The number of students is similar to that at the time of the December 2014 monitoring visit when there were 64 full-time students.

4 Since the introduction of the BA (Hons) Dance in 2013-14, 91 students have enrolled at the School. Of these, five students (five per cent) have left with a Higher National Certificate, and 11 students (12 per cent) have left with no award. Thirteen students (54 per cent of the 2013-14 cohort of 24 students) are currently studying towards the BA (Hons) Dance; 32 students (86 per cent of the 2014-15 cohort of 37 students) have progressed to the Higher National Diploma; and the remaining 30 students form the 2015-16 cohort. The University's Programme Evaluation Document 2014-15 notes progression and achievement statistics as consistently excellent.

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The School's engagement with the Educational Oversight process has encouraged a proactive approach to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of its internal quality processes designed to enhance the student learning experience. Staff have a high level of awareness of the need to develop strategic approaches to academic quality by using, for example, the individual learning plan process to identify and inform the development of internal quality processes.

6 Student engagement with performing arts practitioners and the Ballet West touring company continue to be features of good practice. The 13 full-time staff are supported by 11 freelance teachers who have regular teaching commitments. In addition, eight performing arts practitioners have delivered a series of one-off master classes since the last monitoring visit. Students spoke enthusiastically about the number of guest lecture opportunities provided and the professional status of individual lecturers. At the time of the visit the School was preparing to perform The Nutcracker ballet on a tour of Scotland. All students participate in the tour, which enables them to extend their performing experience. The external examiner noted that the School's strong portfolio practice, and its connections to

professional practitioners, prepares students for graduate employment. Students continue to receive specialist technical training in preparation for Royal Academy of Dance examinations, and student achievement continues to be high.

7 Students the review team met strongly praised the availability of academic and pastoral support and the School's responsiveness to student feedback and comment. Student representatives are selected by their colleagues and prepared for their role through an initial meeting with staff and mentoring by senior students. Students use social media to gather comments prior to course meetings. Meeting minutes indicate that matters raised by students are taken seriously and action taken where appropriate. Where suggestions cannot be implemented staff ensure that students are aware of the reason for this. Student learning plans provide a mechanism for identifying and monitoring student learning support needs. The School monitors attendance at every class and practical session, which provides an effective mechanism for identifying individual students who might require additional support. Students are appreciative of the personal nature of the pastoral care provided by staff, which includes a member of staff being on call at all times in case of an emergency. A formal record is now kept of matters discussed at all meetings with students.

8 Since the 2014 monitoring visit the School has reviewed its Operations Manual. This Manual continues to meet the requirements of the University and reflects its practice and procedures, which facilitates consistency of quality and standards of degree delivery across the University's three partner colleges. In revising the manual the School has addressed in full the comment made during the 2014 monitoring visit, and the Manual now includes a comprehensive mapping of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

9 The School staff development plan continues to be reviewed annually. The introduction of a more systematic approach to staff development in 2014 has raised staff awareness of their individual professional and pedagogic development needs. The close working partnership with the University provides further opportunities for staff development. The University hosted a development sharing day for staff at the partner colleges that deliver the BA (Hons) Dance. Two lecturers from the partner colleges deliver the same module at either Dundee or Edinburgh Colleges, and the School. School staff spoke enthusiastically about the benefits gained from this opportunity, both for staff development and student learning perspectives.

10 The School operates an admission process that adheres to the entry requirements of the awarding partners. The process is aligned to the Expectation of the Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*. All students are required to have achieved a minimum of five standard grades or equivalent, including English. Applicants whose first language is not English are required to take a secure English language test as part of the visa application process, and are also required to achieve Common European Framework for Languages level B2, which is an overall International English Language Test Score of 6.0, with no element being less than 5.5. In addition, students are interviewed by the Principal and an assessment made of their abilities in listening and talking in English.

11 The School has developed and implemented an effective and coherent quality assurance and enhancement system, which ensures that the Expectations of the Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*, and *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review* are met. Student engagement with the quality system is through student representatives attending course meetings each trimester.

Section 4: Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

12 The School continues to make appropriate use of the Quality Code, and staff have a sound understanding of its purpose and Expectations. The Operations Manual is mapped appropriately to relevant Quality Code chapters.

Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit

13 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

14 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Grant Horsburgh, Coordinator, and Mr Simeon London, Reviewer, on 9 December 2015.

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