Monitoring visit for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of ICMP Management Limited trading as The Institute of Contemporary Music Performance, March 2017

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 ICMP Management Ltd trading as The Institute of Contemporary Music Performance (the Institute) has made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the previous monitoring visit in March 2016.

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2   The Institute's current number of enrolled higher education students is 815, which is an increase of 25 since the previous monitoring visit. It has also undergone two positive external reviews since then: a Pearson Academic Management Review in January 2017 and a University of East London Collaborative Partner Review in February 2017. The Institute added a new programme to its provision, MA Songwriting, validated in August 2016 by the University of East London.

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3   The Institute has effectively built upon the points of good practice and usefully completed all of the outstanding actions of its 2015 Higher Education Review action plan, with the exception of supporting the student body in setting up a student union (see paragraph 11 below). It now competently manages its own institution-wide Quality Improvement Plan, which is in its second cycle.

4   The Institute has robust internal quality procedures to further enhance its provision. The Quality Improvement Plan clearly records actions; sets deadlines for completion; ascribes specific owners; identifies success indicators; notes progress made; notes evaluations; tracks status, including completion; and, as of 2017, records the evidence and better metrics for the preceding activities. Notable examples of enhancement are the review and update of the Wellbeing Team's procedures, which the students noted as working well at the initial contact point, and the continual monitoring of student assessment feedback. Actions that are not completed in cycle are carried over to the next. A good example is the formal surveying of staff and student satisfaction with the new virtual learning environment, which was not completed, although the templates were designed. It was scheduled for the end of academic year 2015-2016, but was delayed because of the establishment of a new ICT Steering Committee, set up to review all technological developments within the Institute. It was rescheduled for completion in March 2017. The 2017 Quality Improvement Plan also demonstrates continual enhancement through its 19 new action points.

5   The Institute has effective systematic processes for programme monitoring and review. It monitors all programmes and produces reports on standard templates, including reviews of module performance, student satisfaction and achievement data, and action plans. It also prepares annual programme reports for its awarding bodies. Action plans

incorporate a range of activities, including library and learning resources, curriculum delivery and student engagement. Students contribute to programme monitoring through participation in committee meetings. The actions arising from programme annual reports are brought together in an overarching institutional Quality Improvement Plan, which is approved by the Academic Board. Actions are then monitored by the Quality Standing Committee.
The Higher Education Quality Assurance Manual and the Quality Cycle of planned activities over a twelve-month period provide staff with clear guidance on the quality system, such as internal deadlines, essential meetings and deadlines for statutory institutional returns.

6   The Institute actively collects a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data, called Academic Quality Indicators, to support its oversight of programmes. These cover matters such as achievement and success, retention, attendance, and student satisfaction. A data dashboard enables programme leaders to access up-to-date information and contributes to effective programme monitoring and review. In addition, each committee within the governance structure has a remit to review and monitor a set of Academic Quality Indicators. The Quality Standing Committee, for example, reviewed and made further recommendations for the improvement of three Academic Quality Indicators: the Quality Improvement Plan, Student Satisfaction and Module Evaluation.

7   The Institute identifies enhancements to its provision through its annual self-evaluation document and Quality Improvement Plan from analysis of programme monitoring reports and Student Voice mechanisms. Examples of recent enhancements are virtual learning environment improvements, better Wi-Fi access, and actions to improve curriculum delivery and student support.

8   The Institute's thorough admissions procedures have remained largely unchanged since the last review. Its admissions practices are governed by its comprehensive Admissions Policy and its Confirmation of Acceptance Studies policies, both of which are reviewed annually by the Admissions Panel. The Academic Board has ultimate responsibility for agreeing entry criteria with each awarding body or organisation, as stated in its terms of reference.

9   The Institute's Admissions Panel, which reports to the Academic Board, reviews against key Academic Quality Indicator datasets and spot checks audition paperwork to ensure that the policy and processes are fit for purpose. Its application and audition processes review of November 2016 enhanced the system so that it now captures additional contextual evidence of student commitment to study. The review also led to a request for refresher training, which was provided.

10   The Institute engaged specialist education-sector solicitors to review its terms and conditions and associated policies to ensure that they were fit for purpose and in line with the Competition and Markets Authority guidelines. The Institute accepted all of the proposed recommendations and updated its terms and conditions accordingly. The solicitors will undertake a further review at the end of 2017.

11   The Institute provides four forums to promote staff and student discussion and decision making on how the student experience can be enhanced: the Student Senate Meeting, the Programme Committee Meeting, the Academic Board, and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee. It has repeatedly attempted to support students to set up a student union, but, as mentioned in the previous monitoring report, there continue to be problems liaising with the National Union of Students. The students, however, think that they have most benefits that a student union would offer, including a fully functional student representative system, and they now think that it is not in their interest to pursue formal affiliation.

12   The Institute's HE Quality Assurance Manual cogently sets out the terms of reference, reporting lines and student positions within the committee structure. It clearly articulates how students engage in the Institute's quality systems and how feedback collected via module evaluations and surveys is considered at the programme and institutional levels and then used to drive improvement. The Institute also uses a Student Charter to make the point that giving feedback is an expectation on students to help improve the student experience through partnership.

13   Retention rates on programmes vary. The largest four programmes have the following average retention rates across the current three-year cohorts from 2013-2014 to 2015-2016: BA (Hons) Creative Musicianship 80 per cent, BA (Hons) Songwriting 70 per cent, BMus (Hons) Popular Music Performance 74 per cent, and Higher National Diploma Music Performance 90 per cent. The six smaller programmes range from BA (Hons) Music Business 73 per cent to Certificate of Higher Education Songwriting 91 percent.

14   The Institute is making progress in addressing student retention issues, through careful monitoring of student data, the provision of pastoral support and extracurricular activities. Actions being taken include improvements in marketing materials and training for admissions staff to better advise students on programme choice; training for programme and support staff providing pastoral support; and communication and activities to retain student engagement over the summer break. The Quality Improvement Plan included the establishment of a working party to investigate withdrawals and intervention strategies to improve retention rates, but this action has now been redirected into the Educational Management Team. The Institute also now monitors attendance rates weekly to identify disengagement, so that corrective action can be put in place before withdrawal.

15   In all of the largest four programmes, the 2015-2016 cohorts have better retention rates than the 2014-2015 cohorts: BA (Hons) Creative Musicianship 74 to 83 per cent, BA (Hons) Songwriting 71 to 80 per cent, BMus (Hons) Popular Music Performance 65 to 79 per cent, and Higher National Diploma Music Performance 86 to 89 per cent. In the smaller six programmes, the 2015-2016 cohorts have better retention rates than the 2014-2015 cohorts in all but two: the BA (Hons) Music Business (81 per cent to 71 per cent); and Certificate Higher Education Songwriting (100 per cent to 77 per cent). Some retention statistics are adversely affected by transfer or admission by accreditation of prior learning to other programmes within the Institute. The success of students achieving good employment also lowers retention rates when they leave programmes before completion.

16   As noted in the previous monitoring report, the Institute reviewed processes and identified two further action points to increase retention rates, which were to be implemented within the year. The first was to instigate a formal student withdrawal interview protocol and paperwork, which is now in place. The second was to develop a more rigorous and consistent pastoral and academic support system in the form of tutorials. The protocols are in place. A single overarching tutorial system will be in place in September 2017, which will build on several examples of good practice developed during the year, including one-to-one instrumental tuition and local programme tutorials.

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

17   The Institute continues to use a range of external reference points relating to academic standards and quality for higher education, including *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland;* the Qualifications and Credit Framework; and its awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's procedures. The most recent programme validated, MA Songwriting, contains within its documentation a mapping against Subject Benchmark Statements for Music and English. The Institute also

maps its Academic Quality Indicators against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and regularly reviews them.

Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit

18   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.

19   The monitoring visit was carried out by Prof Edward J Esche, Coordinator, and Dr Elaine Crosthwaite, Reviewer, on 16 March 2017.