



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Urdang Schools Ltd t/a Urdang Academy, February 2016

### 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 Urdang Schools Ltd t/a Urdang Academy (the Academy) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the April 2015 [Higher Education Review \(Plus\)](#).

### Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2 In July 2015 the Academy underwent an institution and course validation with Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) for a new franchised BA (Hons) in Professional Dance and Musical Theatre. This will replace the current degree programme and awarding body, the University of East London (UEL). The first intake for the new programme will be in September 2016. There will be no changes for the students already enrolled on the UEL degree programme, which will run out with the graduating cohort of 2018. Trinity College London continues as the awarding body for the Diplomas in Professional Musical Theatre and Professional Dance.

3 The number of students registered at the time of the 2015 review was 379 and this has remained stable, with 381 students registered at the time of the monitoring visit. There have been three new faculty positions created since the 2015 review: an Assistant Head of Dance, an Assistant Head of Musical Theatre, and a Librarian and Study Skills Support Officer. In addition, the role of Tutor and Pastoral Liaison Officer has been established. The new facility at Urdang 2 has been up and running since spring 2014. It is working well and is appreciated by the students.

### Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The Academy has responded well to the findings of the Higher Education Review (Plus) report of February 2015. A clear action plan with success indicators was developed after the review. Dates for evaluation and review were identified. The good practice identified in the HER action plan has been continued. Progress with the recommendations is still ongoing in some areas but the Academy is working to ensure that objectives are met. It subsequently developed a Quality Improvement Plan for 2015-16 and this embodies many of the same objectives with more detail in relation to key issues.

5 Professional practice engagement, recognised as good practice at the review, is integral to the Academy and it is sustained throughout the teaching and learning. The job specification for part-time staff has been redrafted to make current or recent industry experience an essential for appointment to a teaching position. A Continuing Professional Development Policy has been drafted and, as identified in the Academy's action plan, an external consultant has been appointed to review staff CVs to identify training needs. Students reported that they greatly appreciate the input made to their learning by having tutors who are actively and currently involved in the profession.

6 The Academy continues to maintain a good supportive learning environment. Some positive curriculum changes have been implemented. For example, to encourage reflection and critical thinking, a new subject of Musical Theatre Repertoire has been introduced for diploma students. Careers guidance is being developed into a module for all third year degree students. Students confirmed that they are assessed for learning style at the start of their programme and that study skills support is good. They are particularly appreciative of the masterclasses delivered in the third year that prepare them for auditions and employment. International students reported that they are given extra curriculum classes in speech and accent. Changes have also been made to the delivery of the year two singing classes in response to student feedback. Staff have an open door policy. Limited staff development has been undertaken on different teaching strategies, including dyslexia training.

7 Students and staff continue to be proactively engaged in the assessment process. For both the degree and the diploma programmes, external examiner reports confirm that standards are met in performance and written assessments. The marking pack for staff sets out grade descriptors and grade boundaries, the process of sampling second marking and expectations for the provision of feedback. There are planned inset days on assessment training for all staff. Key issues surrounding assessment are discussed at Academic Board and programme committees and evaluated through the annual review and enhancement process. There is an assessment handbook for degree students and a similar one for the diploma students is in development. Students confirmed that they have an assessment timetable and are aware of the academic rules and regulations. The practical nature of the subject demands that feedback to students is on a continuous basis in class. In addition, students have a weekly meeting with staff. After some discussion of their effectiveness, the one-to-one feedback sessions after assessments have been retained.

8 The Higher Education Review (Plus) recognised the Academy's commitment to allow students to fulfil their potential regardless of their background, through the strength of the Academy's external engagements. The Academy continues to maintain these links and provides employment services and opportunities. To advance this aim further it has reviewed all its policies to ensure diversity issues are addressed. The revised policies have subsequently been approved by the Board of Directors. Pastoral liaison tutors have also undertaken diversity training. Statistics demonstrate that numbers of female students remain high. In order to increase the number of male applicants the Academy is holding a targeted recruitment day.

9 The recommendation relating to the development of a formal documented process for the planning, design and approval of new programmes has yet to be completed. A policy has been developed and recently approved by the Academic Board. The review team understands that the development of the new partnership and approval of the degree programme with ARU has taken priority over the development of new programmes. Senior management reported that when the transition to the new awarding body is complete the Academy will move forward with plans to extend its provision and implement its policy.

10 The Academy has responded satisfactorily to the Higher Education Review (Plus) recommendation in relation to admissions. The Admissions Policy has been updated and admissions is now a standing item on key committee agendas. The admissions process is kept under review at a senior level. A questionnaire was circulated to applicants to assess the effectiveness of the application process in 2014-15. In addition, two analyses have been carried out to identify from where the Academy recruits and on the ethnicity of applicants. The Academy's policy is to give all applicants a full day audition, allowing them to demonstrate their potential for a career in performing arts. Audition forms have been reviewed. Student achievement in each aspect of each performance element at the audition is now graded so that a student's strengths and weaknesses are identified, and this

contributes to more objective decision making. In addition, students applying for the degree programme must have achieved the published academic level. International students are also required to attain an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of 6.5 in English language proficiency.

11 In response to the recommendation regarding training of student representatives, a handbook has been developed outlining their role, responsibilities and the appointment process. Students confirmed that they had been given a list of those responsibilities and that student representative meetings are held regularly. Students also confirmed that they had confidence in the system and that the Academy is responsive to their feedback. For example, students have been consulted with regard to the new facilities at Urdang 2.

12 The Academy continues to review and monitor the degree and diploma programmes effectively at programme level as reported in the Higher Education Review (Plus). A detailed Self-Assessment Report, which addresses all aspects of teaching, learning and student support, is prepared by the Academy's Quality Manager. In addition, for the degree programme, a Review and Enhancement Process Report is prepared annually for UEL. The Academy also uses Ofsted inspection judgements to produce a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) that brings issues together and which is submitted to the Education Funding Agency. However, it is not clear how systematic monitoring and review at institutional level has been developed so as to extend opportunities for enhancement. The QIP does not include dates for completion of actions and sits alongside the Academy's Higher Education Review (Plus) action plan. A graphical comparison of the diploma module assessment results over a three-year period has been made but this has yet to be analysed and evaluated.

13 The Self-Assessment Report identifies high rates of student achievement in assessment with good progression rates in the Diploma. The breakdown of results on the degree programme, contained in the Review and Enhancement Process Report, also shows high pass and retention rates. External examiner reports are complimentary of the work submitted in the assessments and confirm the high level of student work produced.

14 The process of logging student complaints and appeals has been adequately reviewed to ensure these are formally recorded. The Grievance Policy sets out a procedure to be followed if a complaint is made and an appropriate form complying with UEL requirements has been developed. The student database has been updated to allow for recording of any complaints made. Students on the degree programme are aware of the UEL appeals processes.

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

15 The Academy engages well with external reference points. As noted in paragraph 5, the integration of professional practice is key to the Academy's delivery. The Academy works with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) in developing and reviewing its policies and procedures. In the revalidation of the degree programme, the Academy engaged with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and the Subject Benchmark Statements for Dance and Drama. The quality of the Academy's documentation was noted by the ARU validation panel.

16 Trinity College London assessors attend the Academy to view assessments and provide moderator reports. These visits allow the Academy's staff to meet and discuss issues and standards with other experts in the relevant subject areas. The Academy also underwent a successful Ofsted inspection in October 2015, when it was given an

'outstanding' grading. All criteria at the March 2015 Council for Dance and Education Training accreditation visit were fully met.

## **Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit**

17 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.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Brenda Hodgkinson, Coordinator, and Jonathan Baker, Reviewer, on 9 February 2016.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050  
Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)