



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Urdang Schools Ltd t/a Urdang Academy, February 2017

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 commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the April 2015 [Higher Education Review \(Plus\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 There are currently 402 students registered on higher education programmes at the Academy. Eighty-two students enrolled on the first year of the new degree programme with Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) in September 2016. There are 128 students continuing on the University of East London (UEL) programme and 192 students are enrolled on the Trinity College Diploma.

3 Since the last monitoring visit the Academy has appointed a Head of Degree and Academic Studies. It has also engaged an education strategist to increase wider participation for students wishing to access funding for the foundation course. The pastoral team, including a tutor and the courses administrator, tracks the attendance of students and provides pastoral care. The library was enhanced in summer 2016 to create both an IT study suite/office for the librarian and a more practical space for housing the stock. The lecture theatre has also been upgraded.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The Academy is making **commendable** progress in response to the good practice and recommendations of the 2015 Higher Education Review (Plus). The Academy continues with the good practice identified at the review. It engages well with the industry. It has also employed a consultant to advise on future possible developments. External engagement with recruitment and through staff in professional practice continues. Changes have been made to the physical environment and a tracking system introduced to monitor attendance. The assessment processes are sound, with university external examiners and Trinity College moderators very satisfied with standards. The Academy has responded positively to the recommendations from the HER (Plus). It has set up a Programme Development Board and this has met on two occasions. Student representatives are well informed and the student voice is heard and effective. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place for student appeals and complaints. The Academy has become a member of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) Scheme and in doing so has adhered to its good practice framework. The Academy has successfully continued to refine and develop its Quality Improvement Plan, and the Academic Board reviews and oversees the implementation of action points from department self-assessment reports.

5 As noted at the HER (Plus) and at the last monitoring visit, the Academy continues to engage well with the industry. Guest professionals give master classes and the appointment of a high profile professional as patron is to be supplemented with the involvement of musical theatre professionals in advisory roles. An external consultant has been employed to

assist senior management in relation to the Academy's future strategy. This consultant has met with all of the Academy's stakeholders and is in the process of preparing a report for the Academic Board for consideration of possible restructuring and areas for development. Changes to the website have already been proposed and will be implemented in June 2017.

6 Since the last monitoring visit there has been further improvement to the supportive learning environment at the Academy. Changes have been made to the learning facilities. As noted in paragraph 3, the library was enhanced in summer 2016 to create both an IT study suite/office for the librarian and a more practical space for the housing of the library stock. The librarian provides excellent study skills support and students appreciate the new facilities. They particularly value the increase in library resources. The VLE is still to be developed but the Academy does use a Dropbox facility and other learning support materials. For example, performance videos are made available directly to the student body by email. Students on the degree course access specialist support through their respective universities. The Academy has also made contact with a local student support centre. Although a proposed personal tutor scheme has not been implemented staff have an open door policy, and this works well. The pastoral liaison officer continues to provide good support and attendance has improved because of the tracking system she has introduced. Student welfare is a standing agenda item at Head of Department meetings. The careers handbook has been revised and third-year students report that the careers module this academic year has been a valuable experience in preparing them for employment, with a number of students already having received offers.

7 The assessment process continues to be effective and robust. External examiner reports are positive and confirm that standards are commensurate with those at similar institutions. Students receive one-to-one feedback after practical assessments and receive feedback on written work within the respective university guidelines.

8 External engagement continues to play a large part in the Academy's activities. Staff are recruited from the industry and often continue with professional careers while teaching at the Academy. The last monitoring visit noted the Academy's clear ethos and commitment to diversity, although there is still a high proportion of female to male students. Senior management reported that a targeted recruitment day to encourage male applicants went well, with a wide age range of boys attending. The Academy is hopeful that this day will produce results in the longer term. The Academy has a presence at specialist recruitment conventions and open days and actively engages in outreach to colleges.

9 Since the last monitoring visit the Academy has set up a Programme Development Board in response to a recommendation from the review. Understandably, the focus of this Board has been the further development of the degree programme with Anglia Ruskin University. Changes made to the curriculum since the last monitoring visit have been fully implemented and a tracking system introduced so that student potential in a particular discipline is acknowledged.

10 The review of the offer process and admissions undertaken by the Quality Assurance and HR Manager, identified as ongoing at the last visit, has led to changes in these procedures. There is now a systematic process of a full-day audition for all applicants with a second day, for those who are successful, to allocate funding. A new form to record the outcome of the audition has been developed and each student is evaluated across each discipline. Staff consider that these changes have led to better consistency and assessment of student potential.

11 Student representatives are made aware of the extent and requirements of their role and meet with staff regularly. There is student representation on programme committees and appropriate student surveys are conducted to collect student views. A student forum has

been introduced for the diploma students. Students reported very positively on the improvements to the physical environment and were clear that changes had been made in response to student comments, such as the appointment of the librarian.

12 The Academy is now a member of the OIA Scheme and in doing so has adhered to its good practice framework. Students confirmed that they are aware of procedures. No complaints or appeals had been received at the time of the visit.

13 Student recruitment has been maintained for the academic year 2016-17, with the Academy receiving 1,267 applications. As noted in paragraph 1, 83 students enrolled on the first year of the Anglia Ruskin University programme and 65 students enrolled on the Trinity College Diploma. Students already enrolled with the University of East London continue on this programme. Currently, the degree statistics are recorded and analysed through UEL's Review and Enhancement Process for collaborative programmes. Achievement is consistently high. On average, 50 per cent of the Academy's students gained a 2:1 in 2015 and 2016, with 38 per cent gaining a first class honours award in 2016. The proportion of students gaining a 2.1 honours degree or above has consistently been between 85 and 94 per cent for the academic years 2014-2016. The diploma students are graded as pass/fail, and all completing students seen by the Trinity College moderators passed overall. Statistics show that retention levels are good, with 76 per cent in 2013-14, 100 per cent in 2014-15, and 98 per cent in 2015-16.

14 The Academy has successfully continued to refine and develop its Quality Improvement Plan. A Quality Assurance Calendar has been integrated into the Academy's year planner and is being kept under review. A self-assessment report is prepared for each discipline and, although these are not in a standard format, they are thorough and comprehensive. These reports include reviews of staff-student meetings and student surveys. The Quality Assurance and HR Manager also prepares an overall self-assessment report. The Programme Committee (UEL) meets annually and reviews the degree programme. The timing of the degree review is to be moved to June rather than September so that reviews of the diploma and degree courses will be simultaneous. From these reviews / reports the Academic Board identifies actions and sets implementation dates for their completion. The Academy is in the process of integrating the review and enhancement processes of ARU. Staff-student liaison committees are already using the ARU template for meetings.

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

15 The Academy continues to use external reference points to enhance the quality of its higher education provision. Staff respond proactively to the comments and recommendations made by UEL external examiners and Trinity College moderators. The ARU programme validation made use of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and Subject Benchmark Statements to ensure that performance standards remain high, and staff use the Council for Dance Education and Training (CDET) Annual Consultant Report to identify good practice and recommended improvements. As noted in paragraph 4, the appointment of an external consultant to advise on future strategic developments demonstrates the Academy's commitment to ensuring currency of the curriculum in the future. Ofsted reports are also used to ensure that academic standards are maintained in respect of teaching and learning.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

16 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.

17 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Tommie Anderson-Jaquest, Reviewer, and Brenda Hodgkinson, Coordinator, 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