



# Higher Education Review (Plus) of Urdang Schools Ltd t/a Urdang Academy

February 2015

## Contents

<b>About this review</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Key findings</b> .....	<b>3</b>
QAA's judgements about Urdang Schools Ltd.....	3
Good practice .....	3
Recommendations .....	3
Theme: Student Employability.....	3
<b>Financial sustainability, management and governance</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>About Urdang Schools Ltd</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Explanation of the findings about Urdang Schools Ltd</b> .....	<b>6</b>
1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations.....	7
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities .....	19
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities .....	39
4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities .....	42
5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability .....	45
Glossary.....	46

## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Urdang Schools Ltd t/a Urdang Academy (Urdang). The review took place from 3 to 5 February 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Joanne Coward
- Maxina Butler-Holmes
- James Perkins (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Urdang Schools Ltd and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code)<sup>1</sup> setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review (Plus) the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

In Higher Education Review (Plus) there is also a check on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG). This check has the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure of their education provider.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

In reviewing Urdang Schools Ltd the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Plus\)](#)<sup>4</sup> and has links to the review

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code)

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106)

<sup>3</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus).

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review Plus web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx)

handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Urdang Schools Ltd

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Urdang Schools Ltd.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the provider's information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Urdang Schools Ltd.

- The engagement with industry that enhances the curriculum (Expectation B4).
- The provision of highly supportive learning environment which develops students as skilled professionals and independent learners (Expectation B3).
- The proactive engagement of both students and staff in assessment practice (Expectation B6).
- The positive impact of external engagements on the diversity of applicants (Expectation B4).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Urdang Schools Ltd.

By December 2015:

- develop and formally document a detailed internal process for the planning, design and approval of new programmes (Expectation B1).

By October 2015:

- formalise the annual processes for monitoring admissions to demonstrate consistency and fairness in the selection of applicants (Expectation B2)
- provide training and development for all student representatives to more fully engage the student body as partners in Urdang's feedback processes (Expectation B5)
- extend the opportunities for enhancement through the strengthening of annual reporting processes (Expectation B8 and Enhancement)
- implement procedures for the oversight of the annual recording of student appeals and complaints (Expectation B9).

## **Theme: Student Employability**

This theme was determined in consultation between Urdang and its students.

A major focus for Urdang is students' academic and vocational preparation and this is embedded in its provision. Students are auditioned twice to determine both their technical ability and potential employability and once accepted are continually prepared for employment.

Urdang aims to develop students who are skilled across three disciplines to optimise their employment prospects. The curriculum includes significant involvement with industry through the teaching staff engaged and masterclasses, seminars and workshops delivered by those working in related sectors.

Urdang aims to ensure that students successfully make the transition to employment and allocates tutors specifically for this purpose. Students are trained in audition, life skills, preparing CVs, personal finances and how to acquire a personal agent. In addition Urdang has established an in-house agency to help students find employment. Students also take part in Academy shows and industry events to demonstrate their talents.

The skills and high levels of preparation for employment of Urdang's graduates was confirmed by alumni and employers who described their continued high quality and professionalism. The Urdang Academy's graduates succeed in establishing their careers and this is confirmed in the graduate destination data.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Higher Education Review \(Plus\)](#).

## **Financial sustainability, management and governance**

There were no material issues identified at Urdang Schools Ltd during the financial sustainability, management and governance check.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Higher Education Review Plus](#).

## **About Urdang Schools Ltd**

The Urdang Academy has a long history as a vocational performing arts college. It offers a BA (Hons) degree in Professional Dance and Musical Theatre validated by the University of East London, and Diplomas in Professional Dance or Professional Musical Theatre validated by Trinity College London (TCL), to students from Britain and overseas. It was founded in 1970 by Leonie Urdang in Golders Green as a ballet school before moving to premises in Covent Garden in 1976. Urdang started to diversify into other dance disciplines such as jazz and commercial in the 1980s before developing into musical theatre to complement its dance training.

During the 1990s, Urdang was one of the founding providers of the new qualifications delivering the National Diplomas in Professional Dance and Professional Musical Theatre devised with advice from members of theatrical professions and the National Council for Drama Training and the Council for Dance Education and Training (UK) (CDET) and assessed by experienced working actors, dancers and directors.

In 2000 the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority approved the Diplomas in Professional Dance, and Professional Musical Theatre at level 6 on the new further education National Qualifications Framework. Urdang has delivered these courses, validated by TCL, since their inception.

In 2007 Urdang expanded into its current main premises at the Old Finsbury Town Hall. The BA (Hons) Professional Dance and Musical Theatre programme was developed with, and franchised by, the University of East London (UEL) with the first cohort commencing in September 2008. It is intended that the degree programme will change to a validated arrangement in 2015.

In addition Urdang is currently considering the provision of a master's programme with an initial cohort of 10-15, to start in September 2016; a top-up degree for diploma students through professional practice, and an increase in international recruitment.

Urdang was awarded Grade 1 Outstanding by Ofsted in March 2011. In 2013 a Quinquennial Review conducted by the University of East London revalidated the degree for a further five years.

In spring 2014 Urdang opened its second site, Urdang 2, in nearby Goswell Road. It makes provision at its main site, the Old Finsbury Town Hall, for some performances and uses external theatre space.

In 2013-14 there were 386 students on Urdang's main programmes, an increase of 38 on the previous year. At the time of the review visit there were 379 students: 143 on the degree programme and 236 on the diploma programme.

Urdang has the following mission and values:

- individuality and diversity are encouraged and promoted
- current practice and scholarship in the dance and musical theatre fields are reflected in the course content and delivery
- graduates will make a positive contribution to the dance, musical theatre and related fields
- graduates will be leaders and innovators in the field
- learning is best achieved by the integration of practical dance and musical theatre training and education, supported by a relevant theoretical and conceptual knowledge base
- developing the capacity for independent study and research-mindedness is essential for an informed and scholarly dance and musical theatre practitioner
- developing performance practice in a group context requires not only the acquisition of a relevant knowledge base, but also active engagement in an experiential learning process that facilitates reflective practice
- close links with the industry will support the students' learning at all stages

Graduates from Urdang gain leading and supporting roles in West End, UK and international touring musicals and dance companies; pursue careers in film and TV; and as vocalists, choreographers, directors and teachers. Recent Urdang graduates and students have featured in prime time TV shows and many performed at the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Key challenges faced by Urdang include:

- the intended change in the delivery of the degree programme with UEL from a franchised to a validated programme in 2015.
- the change in the degree structure from 20 and 40 credit modules to 30 and 60 credit modules.
- limit to diploma level funding.

## Explanation of the findings about Urdang Schools Ltd

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#) is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.

## **1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations**

**Expectation (A1):** In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:

**a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* are met by:**

- **positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications**
- **awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes**

**b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics**

**c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework**

**d) consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards**

### **Findings**

1.1 Urdang makes provision through two awarding partners: The University of East London (UEL) and Trinity College London (TCL). Urdang benefits from the support of these two bodies in curriculum development and the management of standards. The degree programme is franchised from UEL and the curriculum has been developed using *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) for levels 4-6 and the Subject Benchmark Statements for dance and drama. It is planned for greater responsibility to transfer to Urdang as the degree moves from franchised to validated provision, commencing in the academic year 2015-16.

1.2 The diploma programmes awarded by TCL are offered at level 6 using the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) framework and are re-validated by TCL every six years. The diploma syllabus is determined by TCL and Urdang academic staff create schemes of work.

1.3 The degree is subject to UEL's academic policies and regulations and is managed by Urdang's Degree Programme Committee. This is chaired by the Head of Degree and includes representatives from the academic staff and students and UEL Link Tutors. The programme has a comprehensive student handbook which is updated annually and includes

both programme and module specifications. The module specifications are mapped against the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. There is a process in place which ensures that learning outcomes are appropriately measured by the assessment methods. Assessment is overseen by UEL's Examination Boards and appointed external examiners using UEL's assessment regulations. The diplomas are accredited as being at the threshold standard at QCA level 6. Assessment is moderated by TCL Moderators who visit Urdang at each assessment point.

1.4 The team tested this expectation through examination of a range of documents, reports and committee minutes. These included the TCL Course Providers Handbook, UEL Collaborative Agreement, Quinquennial Review report, Degree Programme Committee minutes and moderator reports. In addition the team met senior, academic and administrative staff, students and representatives from the two awarding bodies.

1.5 There are clear and effective processes in place in support for meeting this expectation. Senior and academic staff are familiar with the respective remits of each of the awarding bodies and their responsibilities. Academic staff confirmed that they had received regular staff development support in relation to the requirements of the Quality Code and the FHEQ from the Head of Degree. It was noted that this had been especially helpful when developing appropriate assessment methods. There was evidence of engagement and response to the Quinquennial Review report and moderator and external examiner reports.

1.6 Both the UEL Link Tutor and the TCL representative confirmed their confidence in Urdang's management and delivery of their respective provision. The students were complimentary about the information provided and fully aware of the requirements of their programmes.

1.7 The established mechanisms and structures at Urdang ensure the expectation is met with a low level of risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A2.1): In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards**

**Findings**

1.8 Academic frameworks are provided by each of Urdang's two awarding bodies. UEL provides the academic governance and academic regulations for the degree course. Similarly with the diploma provision, the governance structure and regulatory framework is provided by TCL with its qualifications regulated by QCA. The Degree Programme Committee is responsible for ensuring that Urdang adheres to UEL policies and regulations.

1.9 UEL oversees the assessment processes for the degree. All assessment instruments are approved by external examiners approved by UEL who also moderate samples of assessed work. The Degree Examination Board is chaired by a member of UEL staff. For the diplomas, TCL engages moderators to oversee the assessment processes. They attend every practical performance assessment component for each module and sample practical assessment. Assessment information, including marking and grading criteria, is included in the Student Handbooks for both the degree and diploma. In addition, students are provided with assessment information sheets to ensure they are prepared for each assessment element.

1.10 The UEL Collaborative Agreement states clearly the governance and regulatory framework for Urdang. With the diploma provision, Urdang follows the TCL Course Providers Handbook which provides comprehensive guidance. The Degree Programme Committee works effectively to ensure that Urdang's responsibilities are met. There is evidence of active engagement with external examiners and moderators from the respective awarding bodies. This engagement is also evident in relation to the Quinquennial Review, the Annual Review and the Review and Enhancement Process (REP).

1.11 The Policy and Procedures booklet provides detail of assessment. There was some discrepancy between the stated assessment policy and its operation, particularly in relation to the submission of draft assessment. The team found no evidence that students were detrimentally affected. However, ensuring consistency across all year groups would be prudent and guard against possible student concern.

1.12 The team considered published material from Urdang and its awarding bodies. It also referred to review reports, and external examiner and moderator reports. In addition, the team met staff, students and representatives of the awarding bodies.

1.13 Overall the process works well, with staff clear on their roles, responsibilities and accountability for awarding body standards. Processes to secure academic standards are fully established and working effectively. The expectation is met with a low level of risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards**

**Findings**

1.14 Degree and diploma student handbooks provide a definitive record of each programme delivered by Urdang. For the degree programme, module specifications are located in the handbook, whereas for the diploma programme the handbook complements syllabus guides from the awarding body, Trinity College London. Exit routes and required credits to achieve a certificate and diploma of higher education are also articulated in the handbooks. The diploma programme is subject to the regulations as set out in provider syllabi. Students receive certification for the degree and diplomas from the awarding bodies which specify the credit and level attached to modules completed.

1.15 The degree handbook is updated by the Head of Degree with adjustments being made in consultation with heads of department and the Degree Programme Committee. Changes to modules are subject to approval by the validating partner, and the programme specification is available online from the awarding body. The degree programme specification refers to FHEQ levels 4-6 as 1-3. This is matched in the degree handbook. The programme module specifications allocate 10 hours per credit, in line with the UK credit framework. This is disaggregated between learning and teaching time and individual student learning for each module. Programme learning outcomes are mapped to each module. Modules are also mapped to Subject Benchmark Statements to ensure students meet the required thresholds.

1.16 The diploma syllabi are the core record of the programmes and students are referred to them in their handbook which contains information pertaining to levels 5 and 6 as specified by the QCA. There is indicative content, learning outcomes and assessment methods. Tutors devise schemes of work for diploma modules that identify teaching methods, learning outcomes and resources required.

1.17 The team considered the provider's self-evaluation document, the degree student handbook including module specifications, the programme specification for the degree programme, diploma syllabi and teaching schemes of work. Meetings were also held with students, alumni, senior staff, teaching staff and administrative staff.

1.18 Students confirmed that the handbooks are helpful with clear alignment of assessments to learning outcomes and criteria. The senior team at Urdang ensure staff are informed of Subject Benchmark Statements during induction and then at regular development meetings. They are also provided with examples of schemes of work developed from programme specifications. The positive relationships between staff promotes open dialogue about, and understanding of, learning outcomes. Programme records are maintained and there is a clearly understood process for making amendments managed by the Head of Degree with heads of department. Any changes are formally recorded within department meetings.

1.19 The expectation is met and there is a low level of risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

## **Findings**

1.20 Urdang's degree programme was initially developed in collaboration with UEL using the Subject Benchmark Statement for Dance and Drama. Approval was achieved in 2007 with reapproval in 2013. The degree student handbook details the aims and intended learning outcomes. These were approved as meeting the UK threshold and academic standards required of an honours degree programme. The initial approval in 2007 and the Quinquennial Review in 2013 were both conducted rigorously. In preparation for the transition from franchised to validated degree provision, planned from September 2015, Urdang has established an Academic Board which at the time of the review visit had met twice.

1.21 The diplomas were first validated by Trinity College London in 2000 and were approved by the QCA at Level 6 on the National Qualifications Framework. The diplomas are reapproved every six years with the most recent being in December 2013. Ofsted inspected Urdang in March 2011 and a Grade 1 Outstanding was awarded for the overall effectiveness of provision.

1.22 The review team tested the effectiveness of these processes with reference to the Quinquennial Review, TCL reports and minutes of senior management meetings. The team held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff, representatives from UEL and TCL and students. In addition the team reviewed decisions leading to the approval of programmes. The team found that Urdang prepared for the reapprovals process in 2013 through the production of a comprehensive and reflective Critical Appraisal Commentary document. The oversight was provided by the senior management team (SMT).

1.23 Changes to modules for the degree are approved by the University following discussion at Urdang's Programme Committee. At the time of the review Urdang was preparing for significant changes in its relationship with UEL including the transition from a franchised to a validation arrangement, the requirement to redesign the degree into larger credit modules and the intention to offer a distance learning progression bachelor's stage programme for the diploma students. In addition, Urdang was in the early stages of seeking approval for a master's programme. There had been some uncertainty over the timing of these events. The minutes of the two Academic Board meetings, held before the review visit took place, demonstrated limited detailed discussion and planning for these changes. This was acknowledged by Urdang. However, further evidence was provided and this is detailed in Expectation B1.

1.24 Urdang works in effective partnership with both awarding bodies to ensure approval for the provision and the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.2): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:**

- **the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment**
- **both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

## **Findings**

1.25 The regulatory frameworks of UEL and TCL and associated course handbooks provide Urdang's oversight of assessment processes and inform the design and monitoring of assessment strategies. Urdang's assessment policy is published in the policies and procedures booklet. Urdang is committed to a strategy of 'continual, rigorous, combined formative and summative' assessment'.

1.26 Learning outcomes for each module of the degree programme are provided in the degree student handbook and these are cross-referenced to assessment methods. They were approved as meeting UEL standards at the 2007 and 2013 approval events. Urdang has produced a useful summary guide in the diploma student handbook which further articulates the requirements of the awarding body. This contains marking and grading descriptors across all levels for all assessments.

1.27 Boards of Examiners are chaired by UEL and operate according to UEL's policies and procedures. For the TCL diplomas Urdang has produced draft terms of reference for an Assessment Board commencing during 2014-15. These frameworks and arrangements assure that the design, approval, and monitoring of assessment strategies meet academic standards.

1.28 A condition of the UEL Quinquennial Review was to clearly map learning outcomes to summative assessment in the module specifications and this has been progressed through an action plan and completed. In addition, the Head of Degree has liaised with the UEL Link Tutor to modify assessment in the Dance module following the external examiner's feedback that the assessment and moderation was 'onerous'.

1.29 The assessment process, conducted under the University regulatory framework, is robustly and rigorously applied. External examiners approve all assessment tasks, assessment criteria and weightings before they are given to students. External examiners follow UEL requirements and attend practical assessments or are provided with a DVD of the selected performance.

1.30 All years' assessments on the diplomas are second marked and moderated by assessors who attend an annual conference organised by TCL. The external moderator attends Urdang to conduct formal assessments and to moderate a sample of student work. Moderator reports are produced annually.

1.31 Urdang, as part of its commitment to continually reviewing quality assurance processes, recently introduced further changes. These have included: strengthening the approaches towards standardisation; provision of clearer guidelines for staff including video examples of musical theatre assessments; and the introduction of an internal assessment moderation board to ensure parity across subjects.

1.32 The evidence from documentation and meetings confirm that Urdang is effectively managing its responsibilities for the award of credit and qualifications. Students are provided with the opportunity to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes through assessment. The review team concludes that the expectation is met both in design and operation, and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.3): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.33 The Universities' requirements for annual reporting and periodic reviews are described in the collaborative agreement. UEL and TCL conduct periodic reviews for their awards every five and six years respectively. An annual update report is submitted to the Council for Dance Education and Training as part of the continuing accreditation process.

1.34 Urdang produces an Annual Review for internal reporting which leads to the self-assessment report (SAR) to fulfil its reporting requirement for Ofsted. The Diploma provision is included in this document. Each department contributes to the overall SAR and the Quality Improvement Plan is reviewed at SMT meetings.

1.35 The annual review and enhancement process requires Urdang to submit a report to the Universities' Quality Assurance and Enhancement Divisions. This includes analysis of external examiner reports, the programme leader's overview report, response to comments made by external examiners and minutes of meetings of the Programme Committee. Urdang's Managing Director has two strategic level meetings each year at the University and the Director attends the Collaborative Partners Committee. Urdang produced a comprehensive Critical Appraisal Commentary in preparation for the 2013 Quinquennial Review process which analysed its strengths and weaknesses. The outcome of the review was successful.

1.36 The review team tested the effectiveness of Urdang's processes for monitoring and review at a strategic level. This involved reading key documents including those relating to the Quinquennial Review, the SAR, minutes of committee meetings and the programme reports. The team met senior staff, academic staff, representatives from the awarding bodies, support staff and students.

1.37 Overall, the team found that the processes for the monitoring and review of programmes work effectively. The action plan arising from the Quinquennial Review was completed although it was not clearly monitored and approved through senior management meetings. Senior staff described the experience as promoting an increased 'sense of responsibility'.

1.38 The Principal chairs the weekly meeting with the heads of department, College Director and the Head of Degree. These meetings inform the discussions at the weekly SMT meetings. Staff confirmed that these meetings provide the forum for ongoing institution-wide monitoring and enhancement-led discussions.

1.39 The newly constituted Academic Board had met twice at the time of the review and as yet no students had been invited to become members, although the team heard that this will be addressed in future. The staff the team met have welcomed the introduction of the Board in 'promoting a learning environment' and the Principal referred to the move as providing a stronger voice to the academic staff in review processes.

1.40 Internal oversight is assured through a number of processes and procedures. The institutional Annual Review provides a brief summary overview of the whole of Urdang's provision and it will be reviewed by the Academic Board under the revised committee structure. Urdang's self assessment report, which is contributed to by each Head of Department, captures the review of the TCL provision. In addition, actions arising from annual reporting are incorporated into the overall quality improvement plan which is monitored by the SMT.

1.41 The team found that the Degree Annual Review Committee, which is chaired by the Head of Degree, provides an effective mechanism for monitoring and review. The review and enhancement process report is presented, discussed and approved before it is submitted to the University. In the future, the report will be presented to and monitored by the Academic Board under the strengthened committee structure.

1.42 Overall, the team concludes that Urdang is meeting its responsibilities in relation to the Expectation in Chapter A3.3 in both design and operation. The associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.4): In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:**

- **UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved**
- **the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.43 The framework for the design of provision is determined by the two awarding bodies, UEL and TCL. The curriculum is developed by Urdang staff with reference to external examiners and awarding bodies. Industry practitioners also provide significant input to the design of the curriculum to ensure it is relevant and contemporary for a rapidly changing industry. This helps in the preparation of students for their careers.

1.44 Proposals for module modifications arise from assessment reviews, student feedback and from external examiners and are discussed in heads of department meetings. Proposals for amendment are submitted to UEL for approval. For the diploma provision, Urdang can make changes to its schemes of work within the overall frameworks.

1.45 External examiners for the degree are required to complete an annual report which asks them to comment whether the standards set for the subject are appropriate for the level and qualification. External examiners are also required to ensure appropriateness of the assessment of learning outcomes and approve formative assessment. In addition they moderate a sample of scripts from each module. Formal responses are made to issues raised in their reports and are incorporated into the review and enhancement process.

1.46 Assessment for the diplomas is moderated by TCL moderators who visit Urdang to observe student performance. Urdang responds to issues raised by the moderators through their Annual Review process.

1.47 The frameworks provided by the two awarding bodies provide Urdang with clear guidelines for design and approval of their provision. Urdang has developed a culture of openness and receptiveness to feedback from both internal and external sources. These include external examiners, moderators, the UEL Link Tutor, industry practitioners, and alumni. Many of the current teaching staff remain industry practitioners and this enables Urdang to foster the sharing of good practice and expertise.

1.48 The team tested the expectation by reference to the self-evaluation document, design guidelines provided by the respective awarding bodies, and external examiner and moderator reports. The team also considered responses to external examiner and moderator reports and action plans arising from the review and monitoring processes and met senior and academic staff, representatives from the awarding bodies, former and current students and employers.

1.49 Urdang has developed an environment in which the standards and relevancy of the curriculum are continuously monitored and evaluated. Staff and students engage in rigorous yet supportive learning and teaching. They are receptive to criticism and are encouraged to share good practice and feedback. While there is a formal system of teaching observation, academic staff regularly visit each other's studios and work space on an informal basis to

learn from each other. Many of the teaching staff are current industry practitioners which enhances industry-relevant input into design of programmes.

1.50 External examiner reports enable Urdang to meet its responsibilities for the monitoring and review of academic standards. External examiners also ensure that assessments are appropriate to learning outcomes. Similarly, TCL diploma moderator reports are effective in ensuring that the standards of TCL are met. Annual review reports and the review and enhancement process report provide detailed analysis of standards and assessment outcomes.

1.51 There is a high level of external engagement in the curriculum and appropriate assessment. Staff are fully engaged in ensuring that courses remain fit for purpose and informed by valuable input from industry practitioners. The level and depth of knowledge of the Quality Code is not consistent across the staff. However, all staff are aware of the quality assurance processes at Urdang. The team considers that this expectation has been met with a low level of risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.52 In reaching its judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.53 There are seven Expectations in this area and all are met with a low level of risk.

1.54 The team concludes that higher education provision at Urdang, in partnership with the awarding bodies University of East London and Trinity College London, matches programme outcomes to the appropriate levels in the QCA. In addition, the regulatory framework provided by the awarding bodies is clear.

1.55 Urdang works within the awarding bodies' documentation for its qualifications and programme specifications. Staff design module and assignment content to meet the learning outcomes required in the awarding bodies' regulations. Responsibility for assuring that academic standards are maintained at an appropriate level involves both Urdang and the awarding bodies. The review team concludes that staff at all levels are aware of their responsibilities and engage fully with the requirements of each awarding body.

1.56 The framework for assessment is provided by the awarding bodies. The process works well and staff are clear on their roles and responsibilities. The recently established Academic Board by Urdang is constituted to provide further overview.

1.57 The review team finds that Urdang's policies and processes for programme monitoring and review align with the those of the awarding bodies and UK threshold standards. Annual Review processes ensure that records are accurate, and records of study are provided for students. In addition, Urdang works in effective partnership with both awarding bodies to ensure the approval of its provision.

1.58 Urdang effectively manages its responsibilities for the award of credit and qualifications and students are provided with the opportunity to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes. Further, staff are fully engaged in ensuring that courses remain fit for purpose and are aware of the quality assurance processes at Urdang.

1.59 The review team concludes that the maintenance of academic standards at Urdang **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

**Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes**

### **Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme Design and Approval**

#### **Findings**

2.1 The requirements of the awarding bodies for the approval and reapproval of programmes are identified in section A3.1 and Urdang follows their procedures for design and approval. The BA (Hons) Professional Dance and Musical Theatre was initially developed and approved in 2007. The Subject Benchmark Statement has been mapped to each module on the degree which was developed using the University of East London's modular credit framework.

2.2 Trinity College London determines the syllabus for the diplomas which are accredited at level 6. Urdang develops schemes of work based on the course handbooks provided by the awarding body; these schemes are mapped to the learning outcomes of each unit. The Academic Board plans, as part of its terms of reference, to exercise increasing oversight of the approval of new programmes.

2.3 The team analysed the process for the design and development of programmes in operation and within the context of the planned expansion of programmes. This included examining minutes of team meetings, the Quinquennial Review report and the annual monitoring and reporting documents. The team also held meetings with a range of staff, students and alumni.

2.4 The review team found that Urdang staff work proactively to revise the curriculum to reflect contemporary changes in the sector. The five year periodic review and re-approval of the degree programme in 2013 identified areas of good practice, including links to industry and high graduate employability. Conditions and recommendations resulting from this review were fully addressed by Urdang.

2.5 Minor changes to modules on the degree programme are made through an internal process which requires approval at the Programme Committee following discussion with staff, students and the UEL Link Tutor. A university process is completed which includes a rationale for changes. These are submitted for approval to the UEL Quality Assurance and Enhancement division. The Critical Appraisal Commentary produced by Urdang for the Quinquennial Review identified challenges in achieving module modification as an area for improvement.

2.6 The TCL syllabus is provided by the awarding body and tutors create the programme by applying Urdang's multidisciplinary model for programme design which covers all elements of Dance, Musical Theatre and Contextual Studies. Any changes to the diplomas are approved during the Annual Review and are documented in the self assessment reports.

2.7 As noted in section A3.1, the Academic Board had met twice at the time of the review. Minutes of the Academic Board contained limited detail on discussion and planning for the intended changes to programmes. This was acknowledged by Urdang and the review team was provided with additional evidence of the outline strategy to prepare for revalidation

and approval. The team were informed that agreement with the University had been reached to seek approval for all programmes over two academic years, 2015-17, and the two institutions were working collaboratively towards that outcome.

2.8 The review team **recommends** that Urdang develop and formally document a detailed internal process for the planning, design and approval of new programmes.

2.9 Overall, the team concludes that the expectation is met both in design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B2): Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.**

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission***

#### **Findings**

2.10 Urdang operates rigorous recruitment, admissions and selection procedures, which are contained within the Policy and Procedure booklet. Records are kept of all applications and auditions to Urdang. Performance selection criteria for the diploma courses are provided by Trinity College London. The degree programme admissions criteria are determined by the University of East London. There is an appeals process which includes the auditions.

2.11 Information regarding recruitment, selection and admission is available online. Application is made online or by post and this is followed by the audition process and subsequent confirmation of offers. The audition process requires an initial full day audition and successful applicants are subsequently invited to a second audition. Auditions are undertaken by tutors and senior managers are present. This determines offers to either the diploma or degree programmes based on specialism and all-round ability. Due to the high numbers of applicants, individual feedback on auditions is not provided.

2.12 Urdang's self-evaluation document, policy and procedures, reports from validating bodies, external examiners' reports and senior team meeting minutes were considered by the review team. Further context and insight was provided through meetings with senior staff and academy managers and telephone discussions with an employer of current students and alumni.

2.13 The admissions process is reviewed annually to maintain parity and remain competitive with other providers. Audition criteria are also reviewed in internal reports and discussions with staff. Urdang has worked to decrease the response time to applicants of the outcome of their auditions. Students expressed their appreciation of this change which was introduced following Annual Review of admissions. There is oversight of these processes by Urdang's senior managers and staff confirmed they understood the process for managing any appeals. However, some of the documentation reviewed by the review team was contradictory and Urdang provided an updated policy for clarification during the review visit.

2.14 The review team found applicants records and data to be incomplete and oversight of student recruitment and selection information informal and inconsistent. The team **recommends** that Urdang formalise the annual processes for monitoring admissions to demonstrate consistency and fairness in the selection of applicants.

2.15 Students stated that they considered the information for the application and admissions process clear and they also acknowledged the benefit of Urdang's website and presence at exhibitions as sources of helpful information. Students confirmed they understood the process by which they may receive an offer for either the diploma or degree programme.

2.16 Urdang has a 99 per cent retention rate on programmes and a 99 per cent student success rate in module assessments. External examiners have identified the high levels of student achievement, particularly in practical assessments, as a consequence of Urdang's selection process. Urdang is gradually increasing its student numbers and intending to extend the number of its programmes. Staff remain confident that the quality of applicants

will not be adversely affected and reported that in recent years the calibre of applicants had increased.

2.17 Feedback from students, meetings with staff and supporting documents confirmed that this expectation is met and there is a low level of risk.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.**

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching***

#### **Findings**

2.18 Urdang does not have a distinct learning and teaching policy although aspects of learning and teaching are included in the Annual Review of provision. This review incorporates any proposed changes to the provision and resource implications. The heads of department produce an annual SAR which includes an appropriate action plan. The Quality Assurance and HR Manager also produces an annual report which includes information on facilities, course management and student numbers

2.19 Degree students are represented on the Degree Programme Committee. Degree and Diploma student representatives meet with members of senior academic staff to discuss any issues or concerns. Students also have weekly information meetings at which they can raise any matters. In addition, tutorials provide an opportunity for students to express their views and receive feedback. Urdang conducts student feedback surveys at the end of each module and again annually at programme level. Students also receive informal individual feedback on a regular basis during and after practical classes.

2.20 Urdang aims to develop independent learning through the delivery of contextual and critical modules on the degree programme. The combination of these modules along with the high levels of feedback on students' practical performance is designed to produce graduates with a distinctive skill set and a high level of individuality.

2.21 Academic staff attend heads of department meetings and they also contribute the SARs, the Annual Review and the REP report. Some inconsistency was evident in staff awareness of the Quinquennial Review action plan but they were aware of the issues raised in the report.

2.22 The Degree Programme Committee meets every semester and student representatives are actively encouraged to be involved in the development of the learning provision. The review team considered the distinction between degree and diploma student representation on committees limits Urdang's potential to benefit from the student voice and the enhancement of learning opportunities.

2.23 Urdang has a formal policy for teaching observations and there is also an informal and valued practice of unannounced informal observation of classes by colleagues. There is a policy for staff development which academic staff confirmed was helpful in meeting their needs. Staff development is also available through UEL to enhance learning and teaching although staff participation is limited.

2.24 The team looked at a range of related documents including minutes of meetings and policies and procedures. In addition meetings were held with senior staff, tutors, students and alumni.

2.25 Urdang's staff and students benefit from the formal and informal processes to deliver an effective and successful learning environment. The learning environment for students is extremely supportive, yet realistic, in developing them as skilled professionals

and independent learners. There is a high level of staff and student interaction on a daily basis. Students are fully aware of their current level of performance and progress and what they need to do in order to improve. The review team considers as **good practice** the provision of the highly supportive learning environment which develops students as skilled professionals and independent learners.

2.26 Students have opportunities to engage productively with staff through the weekly information meetings, student representative meetings and representation on the Degree Programme Committee. Urdang uses the results of student surveys to review and monitoring programmes and provide feedback to students.

2.27 Urdang deploys a range of processes to effectively and systematically review and enhance its provision. The expectation is met with a low level of risk.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement**

**Findings**

2.28 Weekly tutorials are provided for all students in addition to the information meetings. Students are also provided with assessment information booklets. Students' progress is reviewed weekly at Head of Department meetings and at the end of each practical class. Diploma students are provided with target forms which record both formative and summative assessment feedback. Significant support is available to students to respond to the intense physical requirements of programmes. They complete a medical questionnaire during the registration process to assess their needs and have access to physiotherapy and sports massage services. In addition, assessments of students with special needs are undertaken by the Head of Contextual Studies during Induction week and then monitored regularly. Students on the degree programme can also access UEL's Dyslexia and Disability Support Service.

2.29 In the final year the focus of tutorials is helping students into employment and there is emphasis on preparation for auditions, development of CVs and the financial aspects of self-employment. Students can also register with Urdang's own agency that assists in finding work.

2.30 Urdang has improved library space and computing provision taking into account feedback from students. In addition there has been expansion onto a second site to maintain suitable facilities and a virtual learning environment (VLE) is being developed. The quality and range of the support structures and processes is of a high standard and reflects the investment made by Urdang. The review and monitoring processes ensure that the level of support is regularly evaluated to ensure it meets the expectation.

2.31 The emphasis Urdang gives to developing employability skills in the final year of study, including their agency, prepares students for work in the sector. The focus on developing students with a broad range of skills while retaining their individuality is recognised by alumni and employers as a unique and valued characteristic of an Urdang Academy graduate.

2.32 To test this expectation the review team met senior staff, tutors, administrative staff, students, employers and alumni. This included meeting the head of Urdang's Talent Agency and a theatrical agent. The team also considered documents relating to student support, review processes and procedures and committee minutes.

2.33 Students receive daily feedback on progress, particularly in performance modules. There is effective use of target forms to monitor student progress. Students are aware of how they can improve and what standards they need to achieve. There is also a high level of realism conveyed to students about employment prospects, including managing rejections, and the needs of employers. The engagement of practitioners as tutors at Urdang aids student preparation for a sector of employment which is subject to constant change. In a meeting with the review team, alumni confirmed the value of this guidance. The engagement with industry that enhances the curriculum is **good practice**.

2.34 Students are extremely well supported academically and pastorally and demonstrate high levels of achievement and effective career preparation. Urdang is committed to ensuring its student body is diverse with regard to gender and ethnicity. It has

increased pastoral support through new staff appointments and an increase in the number of specialist services available to students. The review team concludes that the positive impact of external engagements on the diversity of applicants is **good practice**.

2.35 This expectation has been met and has a low risk level.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement**

**Findings**

2.36 Student engagement is both formal, through student representatives; and informal, through individual consultation via information meetings. The latter provides students with information from staff and are coordinated by staff responsible for quality assurance. Students are invited to a range of committees, including the degree programme committee. It is intended both diploma and degree students will be represented on the recently formed Academic Board. Student representative meetings are held termly and chaired by the Urdang College Director. Students provide feedback through module questionnaires and by survey at the end of the year

2.37 Students can attend meetings with staff and student representative meetings. An 'open door' policy operates to provide students with access to staff whenever they need. Issues raised by student representatives are forwarded to Heads of Department meetings for consideration and action. Feedback from student representatives is also considered during annual course reviews.

2.38 The team considered minutes from heads of department, programme committee and student representative meetings along with validation documents, survey forms, survey data, a student representative handbook and Urdang's self-evaluation document. Further evidence was gathered in meetings with senior management, administrative staff, teaching staff, students and alumni.

2.39 There is both effective individual and collective student engagement. The evidence presented in feedback from staff and students confirmed an openness which enables students to raise issues and engage in course-related discussions on an informal basis. The senior management have a close relationship with students and teaching staff are aware of student feedback processes. They are responsive to feedback and accommodate changes proposed by students. Data gathered from student surveys receives a quick response and full consideration. Alumni confirmed also they felt they were listened to and confirmed the opportunities of feedback through surveys and information meetings.

2.40 Student involvement in quality assurance was considered by the review team to be limited. Much of the discussion takes place in departmental heads' meetings where students are not represented. For example, in response to issues arising from student survey data students are provided with pre-agreed action plans which they help prioritise. However, this is regarded by students to be an appropriate level of engagement. Students on the diploma programme stated that they were confident Urdang supplied all the relevant information. Given their busy schedules students they felt more engagement would impact upon their studies.

2.41 Students are kept up to date and engaged in regular dialogue about the quality of provision, through the weekly information meetings. They appreciate this regular involvement which is timetabled and consider they are encouraged to be 'autonomous learners'.

2.42 Student representatives on the diploma course are not offered training while degree students can access training from the awarding body's Students' Union. This is rarely used as students feel they are members of Urdang. Staff considered more use could be made of student representatives. Given the planned transition from franchised to validated provision

and the expansion of programmes, the review team **recommends** Urdang provide training and development for all student representatives to more fully engage the study body as partners in Urdang's feedback processes.

2.43 The expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B6): Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning**

**Findings**

2.44 The Degree Assessment and Examinations booklet is written under the rules and regulations on the University of East London and is compliant with the UEL Academic Integrity policy. Assessments are set in accordance with the learning outcomes specified in the module descriptors contained in the degree student handbook which contains the details of assessment methods across the programme. For the Diploma, assessment is conducted in accordance with the requirements of Trinity College London and the information is provided in the handbooks which support each level of study.

2.45 A recommendation from the Quinquennial Review required Urdang to assure parity across subjects in relation to the mapping of feedback to learning outcomes. Urdang produced an action plan to ensure this was included as an agenda item for departmental meetings and ran mock assessment exercises on a staff development basis. This has been a successful exercise.

2.46 The Head of Degree holds overall responsibility for ensuring that the processes of assessment operate in a reliable and equitable manner, liaising with the heads of departments, teaching staff and the external examiner.

2.47 The team tested the effectiveness of the assessment arrangements through examination of programme handbooks, academic regulations, the minutes of validation and revalidation events and the policies provided by Urdang. The team also held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

2.48 Urdang operates a rigorous and reliable approach to the range of assessment on the degree and the diploma programmes, many of which are performance or practice based. The Head of Degree holds a staff induction session each year covering all aspects of the assessment process. This is followed up with individual meetings with tutors to agree academic standards and the quality of written feedback. Assessments are developed by tutors in conjunction with the heads of departments and subject to comment by University peers and approval by the external examiners before being issued to students. Once approved these are collated into a Degree Assessment and Examinations booklet which is distributed to students at least four weeks in advance of the assessment period. In addition, the Contextual and Critical Studies module is designed to prepare students for the requirements of assessment with weekly tasks to be completed over the first seven weeks of the programme.

2.49 The Assessment and Examination booklet covers all levels in one publication and students find this useful as a point of reference. Additional assignment briefing documents are provided by each tutor for more specific guidance. The Head of Degree meets with all students at each level prior to the summative assessment period to ensure their understanding. This is supplemented by an assignment sheet containing a plagiarism declaration and an auditable trail of dates to be completed at all stages from initial submission by the student to eventual return of the work.

2.50 The review team confirmed that students understand what is expected of them and the assessment requirements as they progress on their programmes. Students and alumni the team met also confirmed the validity of the assessments that enable them to prepare for auditions in the industry.

2.51 Feedback on written work for the degree should be supplied within one month. The student submission, however, noted an issue with delays arising from the time taken with some external moderations. The team heard that in response to student requests Urdang had taken action to ensure that all students receive an end of semester individual tutorial for verbal feedback in each discipline.

2.52 As part of its approach towards formative assessment, Urdang allows students to submit written drafts. This has proved successful in the management of plagiarism and in the wider development of good academic practice. Students, especially in their first year, welcome the opportunity to receive formative feedback. This may be in practicals, such as singing, or in relation to written tasks. The team was informed that 'surgeries' have been introduced for the degree students which provide a forum for discussion of drafts. In the third year the focus of these is the dissertation.

2.53 For the Diploma a similar approach is adopted where assessment criteria are given to students at least three weeks in advance of the assessment period. TCL requires grading of assessment on a pass/fail basis. However, Urdang uses an internal system of grading using a percentage mark which is also converted to grades A-F to provide personalised feedback to students about their academic and practical performance. Students are also provided with an assessment criteria information sheet which summarises the three year assessment requirements for each of the disciplines.

2.54 In September 2013 a target setting process was introduced to promote a partnership approach between tutors and students to monitor progress through assessments. Students have target forms which enable them to see how assessment criteria are embedded into their practice. The review team heard that both staff and students find these provide an effective mechanism.

2.55 Marking of student practical or performance is undertaken by the tutor and a second marker in accordance with Urdang's Assessment and Feedback Policy. External examiners are provided with a DVD recording of student performance or practical work if they are not able to be present to see the live performance. An attached TCL external moderator scrutinises the full range of student assessed work during the visit to Urdang. The team met the moderator for level 6 who was attending to engage in the assessment of practical performances. The moderator conducts debriefs with academic staff following the assessed performances. The external examiner reports confirm that assessments are appropriate, conducted in a rigorous way and balance practical training with scholarly standards. One report refers to students 'clearly relishing the challenges presented rather than dreading the outcome'.

2.56 Students are provided with oral and/or written feedback, as appropriate and encouraged to reflect on their performance to help with future assessments. The Head of Degree meets with all staff, including sessional, to ensure that written feedback is of the desired standard. Part-time staff confirmed that Urdang has emphasised the importance of good quality feedback. Both the students and tutors the team met spoke enthusiastically about the opportunities to watch their peers and provide informal critique as part of a 'symbiotic relationship' which promotes a deeper understanding of each others' disciplines. Students with whom the team met described feedback as being 'just what we do' and see it as integral to their wider learning experience.

2.57 The review team concluded that the proactive engagement of both students and staff in assessment practice is an area of **good practice**.

2.58 Urdang operates a thorough internal moderation process for the Diploma which is conducted in accordance with the Assessment Policy. Diploma moderation meetings ensure that student performance is compared across both Musical Theatre and Dance subjects. This informs the decisions relating to the placement in the most appropriate Track for the following year. The Academic Board minutes noted some difficulties in assuring the second marking processes which Urdang is addressing. The departmental staff meetings include practical sessions where senior staff provide support to tutors in their assessment practice.

2.59 Boards of examiners are chaired by a member of the University staff, operating according to its policies and procedure. Minutes are kept of these meetings. In advance of the examination boards, first and second marked work is forwarded to the external examiners and this procedure is fully auditable. The external examiners present reports to the board and the Head of Degree subsequently produces a comprehensive response to the external examiners. To strengthen the structural arrangements for the Diploma, Urdang has produced terms reference for an Assessment Board to commence during 2014-15.

2.60 Recognition of prior learning is guided by the awarding body. An applicant for advanced standing must come from a Trinity College London accredited course for the Diploma. The UEL policy for accreditation of prior learning enables acceptance into year two (level 5) of the degree where an applicant has completed an equivalent programme at level 4 elsewhere. To date Urdang has not admitted a student onto the degree with advanced standing.

2.61 Overall, the team concludes that Urdang provides appropriate opportunities for students to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes. This is confirmed by the external examiners and external moderators. Criteria and expectations are presented clearly to students. The expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## **Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.**

### **Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

#### **Findings**

2.62 The remit of the external examiners for the degree is determined by UEL's policy and detailed in the Policy and Procedures Handbook. New external examiner appointments are nominated by Urdang and appointed by the University. Each external examiner is required to produce a report after each assessment cycle which is submitted to UEL for consideration.

2.63 The UEL Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office reviews each report and provides a commentary with suggested actions to Urdang. Urdang's heads of department incorporate feedback to issues raised by external examiners into SARs with associated action plans.

2.64 External examiners are also responsible for approving assessments and for reviewing a sample of them for each module following UEL's policy.

2.65 Moderators are appointed by TCL who consider student work and visit Urdang during each assessment period. Urdang staff are required to respond to any issues or concerns raised in the reports through the internal monitoring processes.

2.66 There are clear and effective processes in place for the appointment of both external examiners for the degree provision and for the appointment of external moderators for the diploma provision. Both sets of reports demonstrate effective engagement with Urdang. The external examiner reports for the degree are considered by heads of department and inform the REP.

2.67 The review team sampled a number of external examiner and moderator reports and response by Urdang to issues they had raised. They also considered relevant monitoring and review reports. These were further explored in meetings with staff and students.

2.68 There are established processes for the nomination and appointment of external examiners and moderators with the respective awarding bodies. Their responsibilities are clear and documented in the Policy and Procedures Handbook. The procedures are adhered to by Urdang and are effective. The responses to external examiner and moderator reports are timely. External examiners provide full and helpful feedback and reports, and the correspondence between them and Urdang indicates a positive relationship.

2.69 The review team considered Urdang makes scrupulous use of external examiners and moderators and the expectation is met with a low level of risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review**

**Findings**

2.70 Urdang is required to contribute to the annual and periodic review procedures of the awarding bodies and organisations in addition to having its own regular and systematic process for monitoring and reviewing of programmes. The University of East London Collaborative Agreement outlines Urdang's responsibility for assuring and enhancing the quality of the student experience at programme level. This requires Urdang to conduct programme committee meetings and to submit the Annual REP report to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement division. The Critical Appraisal Commentary produced in advance of the Quinquennial Review described this process as an effective mechanism.

2.71 The effectiveness of Urdang's processes and practices was assessed by examining the annual monitoring documentation, including the self-assessment reports, the quinquennial Review report, and minutes of committee meetings. The review team also met senior staff, academic staff, support staff and students.

2.72 Overall, the team found that the processes for programme monitoring and review work effectively. The REP report has consistently been comprehensively completed. This is discussed at Urdang's Degree Annual Review Committee with progress updates in the programme committee meetings. These meetings are attended by the University Link Tutor.

2.73 The REP includes external examiner comments, analysis of student performance, module mark ranges, student feedback from module evaluations and matters from the Programme Committee. The Student handbook describes the purpose and importance of this process. This provides comprehensive information for maintaining academic standards and assuring the quality of learning opportunities. The action plans attached to the reports, however, contain actions which lack detail. The systematic monitoring and review at senior level to inform an institution wide improvement is developing through the Academic Board. The team concluded that the annual reporting process could be further strengthened to develop an enhancement-led approach.

2.74 Programme committees, chaired by the Head of Degree, meet once each semester. Student representation is drawn from all levels of study and students are actively engaged in the meetings. Verbal reports are presented by individual Heads and each student year group representatives. Annual overview reports are produced for the TCL provision and the moderator reports are received by SMT. Heads of Department each produce an annual SAR which provides a plan of action for the following year.

2.75 For the Diploma, Urdang engages in an annual quality review process through the self-assessment reports produced by heads of departments. These inform the Annual Review and the Academy-level self-assessment report. The Quality Improvement Plan provides the actions for the following year and this is reviewed at senior management meetings. The team found some inconsistency with the level of detail, analysis and evaluative commentary in the departmental reports.

2.76 The review team confirmed that student feedback is collected regularly through end of module evaluations, information meetings and end of year surveys. Students consider their views inform changes to their programmes. There is potential for Urdang to make more

use the qualitative data it collects to inform the development of learning, teaching and assessment practices. The review team therefore **recommends** that Urdang extend the opportunities for enhancement through the strengthening of its annual reporting processes.

2.77 Overall, the evidence from documentation and meetings led the team to conclude that Urdang is effectively managing its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing the programmes which it delivers on behalf of awarding bodies. Therefore, the Expectation is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints**

**Findings**

2.78 The procedures for appeals for the degree programme are determined by the policy of the awarding bodies. They are outlined in the awarding partners' handbooks. Complaints from students follow the procedures in Urdang's Grievance Policy. Urdang seeks to resolve complaints informally and this stage is managed by the Pastoral Liaison Officer. Resolution at this stage can lead to issues being considered by student representatives and heads of department and at the weekly information meetings.

2.79 The University is informed of appeals on the degree programme and Urdang undertakes initial investigation. The University is responsible for progressing appeals. Students are advised to access the awarding University's advice service as soon as possible and the policy is available in their handbooks.

2.80 Diploma students are offered an initial opportunity for an internal resolution meeting within ten working days of an appeal being submitted. If they are not satisfied with the outcome then they can appeal to the validating body within five days of this meeting. Appeals cannot be made on the grounds of academic judgement but on material error or regulatory breaches; also where students who receive additional support feel this was not adequately provided.

2.81 Evidence considered by the review team included documents from the awarding bodies, Urdang's policies and procedures, the collaborative agreements between Urdang and partners, student complaint audit trails and that from meetings with senior management, students and administrative staff.

2.82 The review team noted that there have been very few formal complaints with one submitted in the academic year prior to the review visit. The effective relationship with the awarding bodies ensures that appeals and complaints issues are addressed in a timely manner. It was evident to the review team that staff at Urdang understood the distinctions between managing formal and informal complaints and appeals. Students informed the review team that they knew how to seek external support for appeals and complaints. However, their expectation was that issues would be resolved by Urdang.

2.83 The team recognised that the number of appeals and complaints received by Urdang is limited. However, their formal recording and monitoring is under-developed. Therefore the team **recommends** that Urdang implement procedures for the oversight of the annual recording of student appeals and complaints.

2.84 The expectation is met, and there is a low level of risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B10): Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others**

## **Findings**

2.85 Urdang has close links with employers, including agents, and industry practitioners. These inform curriculum design and delivery and help prepare students for employment. Current industry practitioners regularly provide teaching, workshops and masterclasses to share their knowledge and experience with students and tutors.

2.86 Urdang's agency, Link Talent, supports students in their transition to employment. This agency also provides a conduit by which Urdang remains current with changes in the sector's requirements which informs students learning experience. Students from Urdang contribute to industry organised events including 'Move-it' which provides valuable exposure to potential employers.

2.87 The team tested this expectation through the consideration of a range of documents and in their meetings with staff, students, alumni and employers.

2.88 Urdang makes effective use of the support and involvement of employers and practitioners from related industry sectors. The strength of these links helps to create at Urdang an approach that fosters their integration in learning. This enhances the relevance of the curriculum and prepares students for employment.

2.89 This expectation has been met with a low level of risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B11): Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.**

**Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees***

2.90 Urdang does not deliver research degrees.

## The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.91 In reaching its judgements about the quality of learning opportunities the review team matched its findings against the criteria in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.92 Of the 10 applicable expectations in this area all are met and with a low level of risk.

2.93 There are five recommendations in this area which relate to programme design and approval (B1); recruitment, selection and admission (B2); student engagement (B5); programme monitoring and review (B8, Enhancement); and academic appeals and student complaints (B9). There are also four features of good practice. These recognise the highly supportive learning environment (B3); engagement with industry (B4); the positive impact of external engagements (B4); and the proactive assessment practice (B6).

2.94 Urdang follows the requirements of the awarding bodies for the design and approval of programmes. Given the proposed changes to the structure of the degree programme and the proposed development of a master's award, the team recommends that Urdang develop and formally document a detailed internal process for the planning, design and approval of new programmes (B1).

2.95 There are transparent thresholds to enable admission to existing provision, and selection criteria is transparent. Student progression rates support the rigour of existing processes and procedures. However, the team considered that applicant records and data are incomplete, and oversight of recruitment and selection information informal and inconsistent. With the responsibility for degree admissions planned to transfer to Urdang, the team recommends Urdang to formalise the annual processes for monitoring admissions to demonstrate consistency and fairness in the selection of applicants (B2).

2.96 Students feel supported at Urdang and are positive about their engagement. Their elected representatives confirmed their views on provision are taken into account by Urdang which is committed to readily addressing concerns. With the intended changes to the structure and range of provision the team considered greater use could be made of student representatives and their role in quality assurance strengthened. The team recommends that training and development for all student representatives is provided to more fully engage the student body as partners in Urdang's feedback processes (B5).

2.97 Urdang effectively manages its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing the programmes. However, the team considered there are opportunities for qualitative data to inform the further development of learning, teaching and assessment practices across the provision. The team, therefore, recommends that Urdang extend the opportunities for enhancement through the strengthening of annual reporting processes (B8, Enhancement).

2.98 Urdang has a clear and effective procedures for appeals and complaints. Students have confidence in it to ensure issues can be resolved. There are arrangements for informal resolution and the procedures for referral to partner awarding bodies. The team considered that the formal recording and monitoring of them was limited. It recommends Urdang implement procedures for the oversight of the annual recording of student appeals and complaints (B9).

2.99 Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of learning opportunities at Urdang **meets** UK expectations.

### 3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

**Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.**

#### **Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision**

#### **Findings**

3.1 Information produced by Urdang is guided by the communication policy. This establishes its approach to printed and electronic information. Internal communications between staff and students are managed by a distinct policy. An appendix to Urdang's public information policy clarifies responsibility for managing information.

3.2 Urdang is committed to publishing accurate, fair, reasonable and timely information. Applicants are able to access the website for information about programmes and this is aligned to information about Urdang from respective awarding partners. Upon admission, students are provided with handbooks relating to their programmes. Additional information regarding students' studies is provided verbally through weekly information meetings and via email. The expectations placed on students are available in programme handbooks, and assessment criteria are provided for every assessment. Degree transcripts and certificates are provided by the awarding bodies, with diploma students receiving a combined certificate and transcript.

3.3 The review team tested the expectation with evidence including Urdang's self-evaluation document, policies and procedures, prospectus, student handbooks and screenshots of the VLE. In addition the team met senior staff, administrative staff, degree and diploma students, and alumni.

3.4 There is a well defined policy and process for approval of the prospectus. Published information during application and selection is useful to students and communicated in good time. Though documented, knowledge of the responsible members of staff for approving information was not consistent.

3.5 During a recent review by the degree's awarding body a lack of clarity in public information was identified. Urdang's response was timely and an amended clear selection criteria is now available for all prospective students. Likewise, a current version of the degree programme specification was provided once the need was identified.

3.6 Urdang consults students on the usefulness and presentation of information, particularly for prospective students, and students were positive about their involvement in redesigning the public website. Alumni confirmed they were always aware of information regarding quality and standards including learning outcomes from the information in handbooks.

3.7 Information about learning opportunities is maintained and version controlled by heads of department, with final responsibility for approval with the quality manager. When changes to information for applicants occurs at short notice prior to admission it is communicated to students during induction. Students reported this approach was effective. Urdang intends the development of the new VLE will provide increased access for staff and students to relevant information about learning opportunities.

3.8 Urdang's policy and procedures ensure information regarding the learning opportunities available to students is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Staff responsible for managing academic standards, quality assurance and enhancement have access to any necessary information and are aware of procedures to ensure that it is accurate. Where information needs amending or updating, this is effectively actioned. The expectation is met and there is a low level of risk.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

## The quality of the information about learning opportunities: Summary of findings

3.9 In reaching its judgements on information about higher education provision the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.10 Urdang's information is governed by a communication policy and it publishes accurate and timely information. Internal communications between staff and students are governed by a separate policy. At admission students are provided with programme handbooks. Additional information is provided through weekly information meetings and assessment criteria are provided for each assessment. Staff responsible for managing academic standards and quality have access to necessary information and are aware of the procedures to ensure it is accurate. Upon graduation students are issued with degree certificate and transcripts of their study.

3.11 There is a well defined policy and process for approval of the prospectus. Students confirmed the published information is helpful. They are consulted about the usefulness and presentation of information and are positive about their involvement in redesigning the website. Urdang intends the development of the VLE to further access to learning opportunities.

3.12 The review team concludes that information about learning opportunities produced by Urdang **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

**Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.**

### Findings

4.1 The Urdang Academy has a long history as a vocational performing arts institution. The fundamental aim which drove the strategy to offer the degree programme was to embed the quality of its vocational training into a degree context. A critical and creative academic approach to integrate practice with theory sought to achieve a differential advantage within the sector. Urdang has established close and productive links with practitioners which enable it to fulfil its overarching philosophy of developing professionals who are adaptable and versatile and employable within the industry. Urdang provided a draft enhancement strategy paper and the Consolidated Urdang Academy Action Plan 2015.

4.2 Urdang has taken the deliberate step to introduce an Academic Board. Its terms of reference identify '...enhancement of the quality of student learning opportunities' as part of its remit. Urdang is committed to a strategy of 'growth by reputation'. In 2014 its facilities increased with the opening of a new site, Urdang 2. This provides students with a contemporary learning environment and social space in addition to the Finsbury Town Hall building.

4.3 The review team reviewed the enhancement strategy paper and met the Managing Director, the Principal, senior staff, teaching staff, support staff, employing agents, students and alumni.

4.4 The review team noted that the Academic Strategy paper contains key objectives relating to market development, programmes' development and internal academic structural development. Each is reinforced by a series of performance indicators. The Consolidated Action Plan 2015 is monitored through the Academic Board and the SMT meetings. The enhancement strategy, although still in draft form, reflects Urdang's values and contains objectives up to 2016. The associated success indicators have been transposed into the action plan.

4.5 The review team identified a shared understanding of Urdang's values of trust, openness and collegiality amongst the students. However, there remain opportunities to translate the range of qualitative data derived from module evaluations and student surveys into learning, teaching and assessment strategies.

4.6 Teaching staff, including those on part-time sessional contracts, confirmed that the Head of Degree meets with them to review feedback from students with the purpose of extending opportunities for enhancement. Tutors referred to 'ingrained openness and accountability' in the feedback they receive from heads of department and the value of the numerous opportunities to observe their peers.

4.7 The partnership with students is not as fully developed with regard to engagement through representative structures and quality assurance. A student engagement summary document was presented to the review team, based on the principle of mutual respect. It reaffirmed a range of mechanisms which engage students and had begun to identify themes. The review team considered it provides a foundation upon which to secure further enhancement opportunities with a focused development plan.

4.8 In addition, Urdang has pursued as a deliberate staffing strategy the recruitment and retention of a core of active industry professionals. Students spoke enthusiastically of being able to benefit from their expertise. Similarly, part-time staff spoke of the personal growth derived through their teaching experiences with the 'Urdang family' which informs their development and creates new professional opportunities.

4.9 In keeping with the ethos of an experience which integrates theory and practice, Urdang has an established approach to student volunteering to maximise exposure at industry-led events such as the 'Move It' event held at Olympia. An in-house agency supports students' preparedness to enter the professional context. Integrated performance projects provide a developmental experience for students which integrates all disciplines. This enhances their prospects for employment in a competitive industry where the demands can change rapidly. During the third year students have weekly classes for employability which include external speakers and visiting casting directors. The intention of these is to provide a context for learning in which students are 'treated as young professionals'. The team met alumni who reinforced the view of Urdang's graduates as versatile and well prepared for employment.

4.10 Overall, the team concludes that Urdang has a clear strategic commitment to further develop and enhance its higher education provision. The formal oversight at institutional level is developing and it is planned that the Academic Board will assume a key role in strengthening the systematic approach towards planning and review. The recommendation made in section B8 to extend the opportunities for enhancement through the strengthening of annual reporting processes is, therefore, repeated.

4.11 Urdang meets the expectation and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.12 In reaching its judgements about the quality of the enhancement of student learning opportunities the review team matched its findings against the criteria in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.13 There is one recommendation in this area which is also applicable to expectation B8 and the review team recommends Urdang extends the opportunities for enhancement through the strengthening of annual reporting processes.

4.14 Urdang's draft Enhancement Strategy confirms its values and objectives which are underpinned by the strong links with industry. These support its philosophy to develop students for employment. Urdang has taken further deliberate steps to enhance the quality of learning provision by establishing an Academic Board with terms of reference identifying enhancement as part of its remit. In addition the Academic Strategy contains key objectives relating to market, programme and academic structural development. Each is supported by performance indicators.

4.15 There is a clear strategic commitment to further develop higher education provision with formal oversight at institutional level. In conclusion, the review team finds that the enhancement of learning opportunities at Urdang Schools Ltd **meets** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 Employability is a major focus and strength for Urdang. All students are auditioned twice as part of the admission process to determine their technical ability and potential employability. The second audition determines whether they are offered a place on the degree or diploma programme and to allocate funding. While students do specialise, the overall aim is to develop what is known as the 'triple threat' where students have good skills and technical ability across three disciplines. This is to maximise their future employment prospects.

5.2 The currency of the curriculum is maintained through the active involvement of industry practitioners. These include current teaching staff and external practitioners who deliver masterclasses, seminars and workshops.

5.3 Throughout their studies students are continually preparing for employment. They are given continuous feedback on their technical skills whilst on programmes. This increases in the final year when Urdang aims to ensure they successfully make the transition to new professionals. A Year Tutor is allocated specifically for this purpose. Students are given guidance and training in preparation for auditions and developing high quality portfolios.

5.4 Urdang's agency assists students with auditions in their final year, meeting potential agents and arranging work experience. Students also participate in shows and events such as 'Move It' where they showcase their talents.

5.5 Both alumni and employers praised graduates from Urdang for their distinctive skills' set and preparation for the challenges in a competitive industry. Alumni regularly return to Urdang to share their experiences and they also continue to receive help and support from their former tutors. Employers endorsed the high quality and professionalism of Urdang's graduates. Current and former students consider Urdang to have a unique environment and 'family' atmosphere. Graduate destination data indicates that Urdang's graduates are successful in establishing careers in the sector.

5.6 Urdang has embedded employability and ensures that its students and graduates retain individuality while having a broad skill set. This is admired and respected by industry practitioners and employers.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 29-32 of the [Higher Education Review \(Plus\) handbook](#)

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality)

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx)

### Academic standards

The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

### Award

A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

### Blended learning

Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

### Credit(s)

A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

### Degree-awarding body

A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

### Distance learning

A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'.

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

### **Expectations**

Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

A published formal structure. See also **Framework for Higher Education Qualifications**.

### **Framework for Higher Education Qualifications**

A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FHEQIS).

### **Good practice**

A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

### **Learning opportunities**

The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

### **Learning outcomes**

What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

### **Multiple awards**

An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

### **Operational definition**

A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

### **Programme (of study)**

An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

### **Programme specifications**

Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

### **Public information**

Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

### **Quality Code**

Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

### **Reference points**

Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

### **Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)**

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

### **Threshold academic standard**

The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

### **Widening participation**

Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

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