Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Access to Music Ltd

Partial Review

November 2018

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Access to Music Limited. The review took place from 21 to 22 November 2018 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Dr David Wright
- Dr Nicola Dickson.

The main purpose of this review was to investigate the higher education provision and to make judgements as to whether or not academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)[1] 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.

This was a partial review following an original review undertaken in November 2017, which resulted in a published report. The QAA review team made judgements on three areas requiring improvement: the quality of student learning opportunities, the information provided about higher education provision and the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) 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
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA[2] and explains the method for Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).[3] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.
[2] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk.
[3] Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers):
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

Judgements

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision.

- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendation**.

By May 2019:

- ensure the revised governance structure is used effectively in confirming the accuracy of information (Expectation C).

About the provider

Access to Music Limited (the College) was established in 1992 as a privately funded provider of higher education and became part of Armstrong Learning in 2009. The College is a provider of specialist music, digital and creative education and primarily delivers further education programmes, with a small amount of higher education provision in music. The College's mission is focused on 'developing the next generation of creatives through innovative, practical, employment-led education and training' and it has recently rebranded to Access Creative College to support the growth of further creative educational programmes. However, Access to Music Limited continues to be the legal and trading name of the company.

The College's higher education provision comprises: two degree programmes validated by Birmingham City University (BCU), which are currently in a teach out phase; a Diploma for Creative Practitioners, a level 4 programme delivered on behalf of Rockschool, which the College refer to as the Artist Development programme; and two new foundation degrees being delivered under a franchised arrangement with Nottingham Trent University's Confetti Institute of Creative Technologies (NTU/CICT), which began in October 2018. CICT is a wholly owned subsidiary of NTU with the University having responsibility for the quality of learning opportunities provided to students and for the academic standards of its awards as the awarding body.

The College operates from seven delivery centres across the UK and delivers the Artist Development programme at most of its centres. The BCU programmes, BMus (Hons) Popular Music Performance and BA (Hons) Music Business are delivered at the College's Birmingham centre, while the new foundation degrees, FdSc Audio and Music Technology, and FdA Music Performance are currently being delivered in Norwich. There are currently 19 students on the BCU programmes and 20 on the NTU/CICT foundation degrees.

QAA carried out a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER (AP)) of the College in November 2017, when BCU was the main awarding body. The QAA review team made judgements that three areas of its provision with BCU required improvement: the quality of student learning opportunities, the information provided about higher education

provision and the enhancement of student learning opportunities. In the case of enhancement, the Artist Development programme was also included. Eleven recommendations were made for the College to address, two of which related to the judgement area on academic standards. In response, the College developed an action plan, the details of which are discussed in the main report. In the case of recommendations relating to academic standards, these have in part been addressed as a consequence of the termination of the partnership with BCU. The franchised arrangement with NTU/CICT also means that definitive records are held by the University and it is the custodian of the regulatory framework.

Since the 2017 HER (AP) the College has undergone a number of major changes. The College and its awarding body, BCU, mutually agreed to terminate the partnership and hence no new recruitment has occurred to the two accelerated degree programmes. The College has started to offer new foundation degree provision under a franchise arrangement with NTU/CICT, with which it already had collaborative arrangements for the delivery of further education programmes. These are currently being delivered at the College's centre in Norwich, but it also has approval to deliver them at its centres in Manchester and London. The College has also undergone major changes in its governance structure, responding to recommendations from the review. A number of committees and groups have been created, with strategic oversight for its higher education now the responsibility of the Higher Education Management Working Group. These committees are operational but their terms of reference had not been fully approved. In addition, two new posts, Chief Operations Officer and a Director of Quality and Learner Services have been appointed to. As part of the organisational changes, the College has also established a new Executive Team and a new Senior Leadership Team.

In considering the evidence for this partial review the team found the College has made satisfactory progress with its action plan and although it is early days, the revised governance structure appears fit for purpose, and provides clarity and accountability, enabling enhancement of learning opportunities and teaching practices.

Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

1 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, Development and Approval*

Findings

1.1 The College does not have its own degree awarding powers. Since 2012 it has delivered two distinct two year accelerated degree programmes, BMus (Hons) Popular Music Performance and BA (Hons) Music Business, validated by BCU. In 2018 the partnership was dissolved, and it is anticipated that the remaining students will complete in 2019. There are currently 19 students on the college books for teach-out. The College has also recently started the delivery of two foundation degrees, FdSc Audio and Music Technology, and FdA Music Performance under franchise arrangements with NTU/CICT.

1.2 The 2017 HER (AP) recommended that the College 'develop and implement deliberative structures and effective internal processes to design, develop and approve programmes'. In response the College has introduced a new academic governance structure, which will enable it to design, develop and internally approve programmes in the future. However, as it does not have its own degree awarding powers, programme approval must ultimately meet the requirements of its awarding bodies.

1.3 As a result of the organisational changes, there is a new academic governance structure that will enable improved oversight and management of all aspects of the College. Two new posts have been created and appointed to: a Chief Operations Officer and a Director of Quality and Learner Services. As part of the organisational changes, the College has also established a new Executive Team, Senior Leadership Team and a Curriculum Development Group (CDG). The CDG has oversight of both higher and further education curriculum developments and is chaired by the Chief Operations Officer. It has responsibility to research, review and recommend new HE curriculum opportunities to the Board in line with the strategic aims of the College. These changes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.4 The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing information in the College's self-evaluation document, and through consideration of a range of documents including terms of reference for the new committees and working groups, minutes and through meetings with staff.

1.5 The new partnership with NTU/CICT was established following a strategic decision taken by senior managers. The College already had arrangements with CICT for the delivery of further education programmes and it was concluded that a franchise arrangement would allow increased progression opportunities for the College's students. The new foundation degrees in Audio and Music Technology, and Music Performance were approved at the time of the previous review. As the programmes are franchised, the College was not involved in curriculum development but was involved in the development of operational procedures.

1.6   When teaching commenced there was no signed agreement in place with NTU. However, the agreement was signed on 22 November 2018 when the review was being completed.

1.7   Two new programmes, in Games Design and Games Art, are undergoing business case approval by the College, with the view to gaining approval from NTU/CICT for delivery in 2021. Expansion of the College's higher education programmes into the gaming area is aligned with its growth strategy. Currently the proposals have been considered by the Board. The review team were informed that documentation will be considered by the CDG once the business case has been approved, demonstrating commitment to transparent programme approval processes at all levels of the College.

1.8   The new CDG has yet to be tested on its role in the approval process but the review team were assured that there is a shared understanding of the process among the senior staff responsible for the design and development of programmes. The review team, therefore, concludes that this Expectation is met and that 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 to Higher Education*

Findings

1.9   Recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures must meet the requirements of the College's awarding bodies. Following the decision to terminate the partnership with BCU, recruitment to the two programmes has ceased. Applications to the foundation degree programmes are made directly to NTU/CICT via UCAS. Entry requirements are determined by the awarding body and defined in the approved programme documentation. Information relating to College facilities, academic programmes, entry requirements and learning support is available to prospective applicants on the College website. NTU/CICT is responsible for the College's foundation degree programme entries on the UCAS website. The Marketing, Admissions and Recruitment Group (MARG) oversees recruitment and admissions processes within the College. Its terms of reference include responsibility to establish best practices within the College and to ensure that information, advice and guidance is accurate. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.10   The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing information in the College's self-evaluation document and inspecting the College, NTU/CICT and UCAS websites. It also discussed recruitment and admissions processes with students, senior management and professional support staff.

1.11   The College's website enables potential applicants to make informed decisions about the College as a place to study. It includes information on the facilities available at each centre and the support that is available for students with a disability or additional learning need. The College is committed to equal opportunity, widening access and encourages applications from students irrespective of background.

1.12   The 2017 Higher Education Review noted some inaccuracies and omissions in the information for the BCU degree programmes on both the UCAS and College websites. No recommendations were made under Expectation B2 but a broader recommendation relating to accuracy of all information was made under Expectation C. As these degrees are being terminated they are no longer advertised.

1.13   The College's webpages for the two foundation degrees include details of admissions requirements, course content, industry links, delivery pattern and fees. The name of the validating university is clearly stated. There is little information on assessment and it is not stated whether the final award is an FdA or FdSc. The review team also noted an inconsistency between the College and UCAS websites in the standard admission requirements for the programmes. The College website specifies that students are required to achieve a recognised level 3 qualification in a music-related subject. However, this is not stated on the UCAS website and discussion with the awarding body confirmed that a level 3 qualification in a music-related subject is not a specific admission requirement. This is discussed further and a recommendation relating to ensuring the accuracy of information made in Expectation C.

1.14   The MARG was established in January 2018. It is responsible for overseeing marketing, recruitment and admissions strategies, ensuring that best practices are followed, and that information, advice and guidance is accurate. It is beginning to commence activities and has met twice. Hence these arrangements have yet to be fully tested.

1.15   Applicants that are able to meet the standard admission requirement receive an offer directly from the University. Those with non-standard qualifications are referred to the College and interviewed by the College's Higher Education Development Manager and the Higher Education Course Director, who assess their potential to succeed on the programme. Guidance on how to prepare for interview and the interview process is available on the College website. The College receives details of any student that has declared that they have a disability or require additional learning support from the University's Additional Learning Support Coordinator. Systems are in place to assist students in their transition into the College. These are discussed further under Expectation B4.

1.16   The review team concludes that the College's admissions processes are transparent, inclusive, consistent and fair and therefore the Expectation is met. The inconsistency in admission requirements between the College and UCAS websites may cause some confusion for potential applicants and deter them from applying. However, as the University processes all applications it is able to ensure that those admitted to the programmes meet its admission requirements. Hence, the associated level of risk is low.

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

1.17   At the time of this review the last cohort on the BCU degree programmes were in their second year and expected to complete their programmes in September 2019. The NTU/CICT foundation degrees had just commenced, the first cohort starting at the College's Norwich centre in October 2018. The College also has approval to offer the foundation degrees at its centres in London and Manchester and is seeking approval to offer them at Birmingham.

1.18   Following the 2017 HER (AP) the College revised its committee structures, with the aim of increasing accountability. The Higher Education Curriculum Team (HECT) oversees teaching and feedback from students, link tutors and external examiners. Membership is open to all members of teaching staff, professional support staff and student representatives. Separate committees operate at the College's centres in Birmingham and Norwich, both chaired by the Higher Education Course Director. In Norwich this committee fulfils the role of the Course Committee specified in the agreement with NTU/CICT. The Higher Education Management (HEM) Group provides strategic oversight of higher education provision. Its responsibilities include reviewing staff and physical resources, issues arising from the Student Academic Board (SAB) and appraising the College's Annual Evaluative Review (AER) and Enhancement Action Plan (EAP). Committee minutes are available on a shared drive within the College and responsibilities for reporting to other committees within the College are delegated to particular role holders, identified in the relevant committee terms of reference.

1.19   The College emphasises the practical nature of its programmes, that they are industry focused and taught by professionals using industry standard equipment. Delivery of programmes must follow the approved programme specifications and module descriptions. Student handbooks and module descriptions are available on the virtual learning environment (VLE). The College has procedures to ensure that staff have appropriate qualifications and experience, to monitor their performance and promote their professional development.

1.20   The College has limited library facilities, but all students are able to access the library resources of its awarding bodies. Venues for performance and facilities for recording and editing are available at each College centre and through arrangements with local recording studios. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.21   The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing the College's self-evaluation document and programme and module information on the VLE. It also discussed teaching with students, senior management and teaching staff.

1.22   The decision to terminate the BCU programmes was one that was made jointly by the College and the University and was not in response to any concerns about academic standards. A formal termination agreement was put in place, incorporating provisions to allow students to complete their programmes. Students reported that teaching and assessment were continuing as normal and that they continued to have full access to the

University library and other resources. Staff are approachable, friendly and pass on their enthusiasm for music. The College has taken steps to address historical concerns with these degree programmes. The level of 'overall satisfaction' in the National Students' Survey increased from 37% in 2016-17 to 71% in 2017-18.

1.23   The College was approved to deliver the foundation degrees in November 2017 and the first cohort started in Norwich in October 2018. They are managed on a day-to-day basis by a centre-based Course Leader, who is also a module tutor, and overseen by the Centre's Delivery and Performance Manager, the Higher Education Development Manager and Higher Education Course Director. The programmes are franchised from the University. Module guides and assessment tasks are written by University staff and updated annually. College teaching staff in Norwich were unable to access the University VLE at the start of term due to some technical problems. However, module guides were made available via a shared drive and this was not highlighted as a concern by either staff or students. The technical issues were subsequently resolved and currently teaching staff were populating module pages on the VLE. Module descriptions include details of content, learning outcomes and assessment and incorporate links to reference materials. They also include a link to assessment regulations. However, this takes the reader to the University regulations for bachelor and integrated master's degrees, not the regulations for foundation degrees. This is discussed further including a recommendation relating to ensuring the accuracy of information in Expectation C.

1.24   The College is responsible for ensuring that teaching staff are appropriately qualified but must inform NTU/CICT of any it appoints to teach on the programmes. Teaching staff have access to the online resources NTU/CICT provides for its own staff. Staff teaching the foundation degree programmes reported that they had received training on programme implementation and the use of the VLE from the College and the University. The College is responsible for promoting staff development. It operates a peer review scheme and has its own Scholarly Activity Policy. The College reviews the effectiveness of teaching via annual module reviews completed by students and peer observations of teaching staff.

1.25   The 2017 HER (AP) report recommended that the College ensure that it uses the outcomes of internal review processes to assure and systematically enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. In particular, it noted that the AER did not encompass annual programme monitoring reports and did not identify common themes or prioritise areas for staff development. The format of the review has been modified. It now encompasses annual programme monitoring reports and is supplemented with a prioritised EAP, which identifies any staff development activities required. The action plan is discussed in meetings of the HECT and the SAB and reviewed by the HEM Group. It is also made available to students on the VLE. This is discussed further under Expectations B8 and Enhancement.

1.26   The review team concludes that academic programmes allow students to study subjects in depth and develop their transferable skills. The College has systematic processes to evaluate and enhance learning opportunities and teaching practices. Therefore, it concludes that the Expectation is met and that the level of associated risk is low.

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

1.27   The College's higher education programmes are designed to develop students' skills, qualities and attributes as well as their knowledge and understanding. Students develop their independent learning and teamwork skills through individual and group teaching and assessment activities. The College attaches importance to links with industry as a means of enhancing students' experience and employability. It has links with a wide range of industry partners, offering opportunities for students to develop and showcase their skills. Many of the College's teaching staff are professionals working in the music industry and are able to bring their experience directly into the classroom. Students do not have individual personal tutors. Pastoral support is provided through individual and group tutorials with module leaders. Students are able to provide feedback on pastoral support, facilities and resources on an informal basis via their module tutors and to the SAB via course representatives. This is monitored at College level via the AER. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.28   The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing the College's self-evaluation document and information on the VLE. It also discussed support services, facilities and resources with students, senior management, teaching, and professional support staff.

1.29   The 2017 HER (AP) report concluded that the Expectation was met, and that the level of risk was low. It made no recommendations in relation to this Expectation.

1.30   The students on the BCU programmes confirmed that they continue to have normal access to University support services, library and other online resources. Any issues they raise concerning facilities or resources are resolved quickly. Students on the Music Business programme highlighted how their involvement with the 2018 Lunar Festival had given them direct practical experience of working with artists and promoters, managing a stage, teamwork and networking. The 'Your Future's Gateway' on the College VLE provides a wide range of advice and information to assist students starting their career in the music industry. Systems for monitoring arrangements and resources for student development are effective. The AER includes a summary of issues raised by students during the year and actions taken to address them. It also incorporates annual monitoring reports, which include data and commentary on student progression, retention and achievement.

1.31   The College selected its centres in Norwich, London, Manchester and Birmingham to deliver the foundation degrees because of the range and quality of facilities available. In Norwich, where the programmes have commenced, the College is aiming to create a distinctive experience for the students. Through a signed agreement with Plug Studios they are able to access professional standard rehearsal rooms and digital recording equipment. These facilities are not available to the students on the College's further education programmes.

1.32   Students the review team met noted that they had received induction packs from both the College and the University. They commented that some elements of the pack provided by the University were not relevant as they related to activities taking place in Nottingham. Enrolling with the University was straightforward. During a 3-day induction period they received background information on the College and guidance on referencing and unfair practice. They also noted that although they had usernames and passwords

giving them access to the University's VLE they had only recently received guidance on how to use it.

1.33   Admissions processes allow any student that has declared that they have a disability or additional learning need to be identified. (see Expectation B2) The College also evaluates students during the induction period. Each College centre has an Additional Learning Support Tutor who assesses support needs. Students are also made aware of the need to apply for Disabled Students' Allowance.

1.34   The review team concludes that the College has arrangements and resources in place that allow students to develop their knowledge and skills. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of associated risk is low.

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

1.35   The College employs a variety of processes to engage with and elicit feedback from its students. Students are able to discuss matters of interest or concern informally with module tutors or to bring them to the attention of their representatives so that they can be raised at the SAB. Students also complete module reviews and the College participates in the National Students' Survey. The College has also recently appointed a Director of Quality and Learner Services, who chairs the Learner Experience and Quality Review Group (LEQR). This group, established in September 2018, will review all aspects of the learner experience in each centre. This Expectation was met and the level of risk was low in the previous review.

1.36   In relation to the BCU programmes, the SAB has replaced the Board of Studies and the Student Council. The terms of reference have been re-written, but at the time of this review were awaiting approval from the College Board. Issues raised by students are discussed at the SAB and updates are shared from Course Teams, including discussion on curriculum issues and reports from examination boards and external reviews. In relation to the NTU/CICT programmes, the SAB has a similar remit and fulfils the role of the Course Committee specified in the partnership agreement.

1.37   Oversight of the student experience is appropriately maintained through the revised governance structure. The HECT, which student representatives also attend, has more of a focus on curriculum and student issues and reports to the HEM Group that has strategic oversight of higher education. The SAB reports to the HECT. Issues raised in the SAB are also noted in the AER, which now encompasses a new EAP that considers all areas of feedback, detailed in the Curriculum Enhancement Procedure.

1.38   The College's student representation system and its arrangements for student evaluations support student engagement and would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.39   To test the Expectation, the review team considered various documents and met with students including student representatives, senior staff and with academic and professional support staff.

1.40   The students the review team met from both Birmingham and Norwich centres noted that they could freely raise any issues or concerns they had with module tutors. In relation to the BCU programmes, the Course Representative System is well established. Student representatives reported that SAB meetings are effective and were able to describe examples where their feedback had resulted in actions being taken by the College. An initial meeting of the SAB has also been held at Norwich and students reported they felt discussions there were useful. Minutes of the SAB are posted on the VLE. The Chief Operating Officer had also visited the Norwich centre and held interviews with students there, to ensure he was aware of any issues arising. The College is clearly involving its students in all aspects of its governance arrangements and values the student contribution greatly.

1.41   The review team concludes that the College engages effectively with its students as partners to assure and enhance their educational experience. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of associated 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

1.42   The College's role in assessment is determined by the type of arrangements it has with its awarding bodies. These are detailed in institutional agreements, academic regulations and the definitive programme documentation. Assessment includes formative and summative tasks, which are described in module handbooks. Links are provided to academic regulations including requirements for progression and award. Institutional and programme approval require that the College has appropriate processes in place to meet the requirements of the awarding bodies. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.43   The review team tested the Expectation through consideration of a range of documentation including module handbooks, and in meetings with senior staff, link tutors from both awarding bodies, teaching and professional services staff and with students.

1.44   The previous HER (AP) report recommended that the College "ensure that it publishes and operates assessment practices and procedures which are clear, comprehensive and consistent (Expectation B6 and A2.1)".

1.45   The review team highlighted the fact that module handbooks were inconsistent in demonstrating the links between module and programme learning outcomes, and in some cases the assessment criteria were not clear. The Course Director has since issued a module handbook template for all staff to follow. The Course Director reviews and approves the completed module handbooks, before they are released to the students. The review team examined a range of module handbooks and were able to confirm that links between outcomes and assessment and grading criteria are clear. In the case of the NTU/CICT programmes, module documentation including assessment tasks are provided by NTU/CICT.

1.46   The previous review also noted that the examination boards for the BCU programmes were not quorate. Additional systems have now been put in place to ensure quoracy, with both the College and the University undertaking checks to ensure this. BCU have appointed a new external examiner who covers both degree pathways. He has commented favourably regarding the preparation by College staff for the examination boards. The external examiner reports are now produced on an annual basis and cover both degree pathways.

1.47   Assessment is overseen by the HECT, which receives and considers external examiners' reports and by the HEM, which appraises the AER, including statistics on progression and completion.

1.48   Staff teaching on the BCU programmes have a clear understanding of how assessment marking and moderation processes work. Staff teaching on the NTU/CICT programmes are also clear on their role in marking and moderation, and how examination boards will operate with the foundation degree programmes. For NTU/CICT programmes first marking will be carried out by tutors at Norwich, and second marking by senior staff at

the Birmingham centre, with the University carrying out moderation. This process is robust and enables inexperienced markers to be supported in their work.

1.49   The foundation degree teaching staff the review team met were unsure of how student work would be graded. They reported that they thought it would be marked using a percentage scale, rather than the grade-based assessment scheme required by University regulations. However, the review team noted that at the time of the review no summative assessments had been submitted and that University staff would be involved in moderation.

1.50   The review team concludes that the College had addressed the recommendations of the previous review in relation to the BCU programmes. In addition, the processes for the NTU/CICT programmes were considered to be sound. Accordingly, this Expectation is met, and the level of associated 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

1.51   The agreements with the awarding bodies detail the arrangements made for the academic oversight of the degree programmes. The awarding bodies appoint external examiners to monitor academic standards and provide independent oversight of the College's assessment practices. Institutional and programme approval processes require that the College follows processes agreed with the awarding bodies, which allows for the Expectation to be met.

1.52   At the last review this expectation was met, and the level of risk identified was low. The process used for external examination boards for the BCU programmes has remained the same as identified in the previous review.

1.53   The review team tested this Expectation using a range of documents including the AER, EAP, examination board minutes, and meetings with senior and teaching staff.

1.54   A new external examiner was appointed for the BCU programmes who now covers both degree pathways. A summary of the examination board minutes and external examiner reports continue to be included in the AER. Issues and areas of good practice are now captured in the EAP.

1.55   The processes for external examining the NTU/CICT programmes are similar, and all staff are familiar with how this will work in practice. However, at the time of this review teaching had only recently started and no examination boards had been held. Hence the arrangements for the NTU/CICT programmes have yet to be tested. The revised academic governance structure put into place at the College should ensure external examining is dealt with appropriately and robustly.

1.56   The review team concludes that the College makes effective use of the external examiners and moderators to monitor its programmes, their assessment and academic standards. The processes it has in place are sound and accordingly the Expectation is met and the level of associated risk is low.

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

1.57   The College is responsible for the annual monitoring of its degree programmes. However, it is required to follow processes specified by its awarding bodies and defined in the partnership agreements. The principal requirement is to complete an annual monitoring report for each programme, incorporating feedback from students and external examiners. These are submitted to the relevant awarding body. The College supplements these with its own internal procedures, principally the completion of an AER and an EAP. These are reviewed by the HEM Group, which provides strategic oversight of the College's higher education provision. The awarding bodies also oversee programmes directly, via link tutors/programme coordinators they appoint from within their own staff. The HECT and SAB monitor programmes in each centre. Individual teaching staff are monitored by a peer review scheme. Student feedback on individual modules is obtained via annual module evaluations. The College has also recently established the LEQR to track and monitor the progress of learners and their quality experience within each delivery centre. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.58   The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing the College's self-evaluation document, the College and University websites and VLE. Discussions were also held with students, academic and senior management staff.

1.59   The 2017 HER (AP) report recommended that the College develop and implement periodic review processes that will enable it to meet the requirements of the degree-awarding body. This recommendation has not been pursued as the BCU programmes have been terminated. The College was also recommended to articulate and consistently apply internal processes that enable it to identify, prioritise and address issues identified in monitoring and review.

1.60   In response the College has taken steps to improve the quality of annual monitoring reports but notes that further progress is required. The AER now encompasses annual monitoring reports and is supplemented with an EAP. This lists priorities emerging from monitoring and review processes, specifies the action required to address them and the individuals responsible. This is discussed further under Enhancement.

1.61   The College was also recommended to review and revise the terms of reference and operation of deliberative committees to ensure effective oversight of higher education programmes and that degree-awarding body requirements are met. In response the College has substantially revised its committees and their reporting lines in order to facilitate better oversight of its higher education programmes. The terms of reference of the SAB have been revised. It provides a mechanism to gather the views of students, share updates from the course team and discuss curriculum issues and reports from examination boards and external reviews. This is discussed further in Expectation B5. The HECT is responsible for programme management on a day-to-day basis. It receives and responds to issues emerging from the SAB. It also considers external examiner reports, module review feedback and reports from link tutors/programme coordinators. These two committees have been established separately in Birmingham and Norwich. Both are chaired by the Higher Education Course Director. The HEM Group oversees all the College's higher education programmes and is responsible for appraisal of AER and EAP. Its first meeting was on 11

September 2018. Committee minutes are available on a shared drive within the College and responsibilities for reporting to other committees within the College are delegated to particular role holders, identified in the relevant committee terms of reference. The review team concludes that these arrangements would allow more effective oversight of higher education programmes but noted that they had yet to be fully tested.

1.62   The existing BCU programmes continue to be monitored as required and the outcomes of monitoring feed into the AER and EAP. The closure of these programmes is underpinned by a formal termination agreement between the College and the University. The agreement confirms that students will continue to be supported until they have completed their programme.

1.63   Annual monitoring and review processes for the foundation degrees are required to follow procedures defined by NTU/CICT. The programmes have just started and hence these arrangements have yet to be tested.

1.64   The review team concludes that the College had provided an effective response to the recommendations in the 2017 HER (AP) report. Monitoring and review processes are effective and operated systematically. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of associated 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

1.65   Academic appeals and student complaints are addressed following procedures agreed with its awarding bodies. Emphasis is placed on resolving complaints locally although provisions are in place for them to be escalated up to the awarding body if this becomes necessary. Academic appeals must be made directly to the awarding body. Links to the appropriate processes are provided on the College VLE and in student handbooks. The College's processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.66   The Expectation was tested through consideration of the College's documentation on academic appeals and student complaints, and meetings with senior staff, teaching staff, and students.

1.67   In the previous review this expectation was met, and the level of risk identified was low. In the case of the BCU programmes, the procedures described in the last HER are still being followed. The course team initially deals with complaints; if the situation cannot be resolved the Course Director will review the complaint. If the situation continues, it will be dealt with by the Head of HE Development, and eventually by a member of the Board. BCU will only become involved if the College cannot resolve the complaint internally.

1.68   The arrangements with NTU are equally clear and are detailed in the student handbook which is made available to students via email and the VLE. Students the review team met, however, could not recall the information in the handbook but were able to explain who they would contact if they had a complaint or an academic appeal, and the College staff were felt to be responsive in this.

1.69   On the basis of the evidence provided, the review team concludes that the procedures for the consideration of complaints and academic appeals, although not fully tested in practice for the NTU/CICT programmes, were sound. The Expectation is, therefore, met and the level of associated risk is low.

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

1.70   The College is dependent on a small number of external organisations, principally for the provision of performance studios and recording venues. These provide opportunities for students to work with modern, industry standard equipment in a commercial setting. Students are also able to make use of the library and other online resources of its awarding bodies. These arrangements secured by signed, written agreements between the College and its partners. They would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.71   The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing the College's self-evaluation document and signed agreements. It also discussed partnership arrangements with senior management staff of the College and its awarding bodies.

1.72   Following the 2017 HER (AP) the College was recommended to establish appropriate written agreements with support providers to manage risk and secure service level arrangements that safeguard the provision of learning opportunities for students. The College responded positively to this, and now has signed agreements with external providers, for both BCU and NTU/CICT programmes. These specify the responsibilities and obligations of the College and its partner, specify the facilities provided and incorporate health and safety provisions.

1.73   The agreement the College has with BCU expires in September 2019. A termination agreement is in place to secure the ability of the remaining students to complete their programme. This is discussed in Expectations B3 and B8.

1.74   The review team noted that students were recruited on to the NTU/CICT foundation degrees and teaching started without a signed agreement with the awarding body in place. The agreement was signed-off by all parties during the review period. The agreement confirms that students have access to the University's electronic resources including the e-library and VLE. The agreement also incorporates provision for College staff involved in the delivery of the programmes to access the University's resources for teaching staff.

1.75   The College has strengthened its oversight and responded effectively to the management of risk in this area and accordingly the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the level of associated risk is low.

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*

Findings

1.76   The College does not offer research degrees. Therefore, the Expectation is not applicable.

Expectation: Not applicable
Level of risk: Not applicable

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

1.77 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

1.78 All 10 applicable expectations are met with low levels of risk. The College has taken significant steps in responding to recommendations arising from the 2017 HER (AP) report. It has implemented a revised governance structure that is fit for purpose, and while early days, the frameworks in place give the team confidence that the College's oversight provides an effective approach to managing the quality of student learning opportunities.

1.79 There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations noted in this judgement area.

1.80 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

2   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

2.1   The College publishes a range of information for prospective students on its public website. Once registered within the College students have access to handbooks, regulations, programme and module information, policies and procedures via the VLE of the College and its awarding bodies. The 2017 HER (AP) report recommended that the College develop policies and procedures to ensure that the information it provides is accurate and meets external requirements. Following the review the College established the MARG. Working with other groups in the College its purpose is to review and ensure the information, advice and guidance that the College provides is accurate and in line with external requirements. It reports to the College's Senior Management Team and Board of Governors. The staff responsible for the content and consistency of information have been defined. A standard template has been devised to ensure accuracy and consistency of information in module handbooks. The College's agreements with its awarding bodies and associated operational documents define their respective responsibilities and the quality assurance mechanisms that apply to the programmes. NTU/CICT is responsible for the foundation degree programme entries on the UCAS website. Responsibility for the production of certificates and transcripts lies with the awarding bodies. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.2   To test the Expectation the review team scrutinised information on the websites and VLE of the College and its awarding bodies. It also reviewed programme information on the UCAS website. Procedures for developing and approving information were discussed with senior management and professional support staff.

2.3   The College's programmes with BCU have been terminated and they are no longer described on the College website. The inaccuracies in module handbooks noted in the 2017 HER (AP) report have been corrected.

2.4   The College launched a new public website in October 2018. In its self-evaluation document the College notes that all marketing materials and website updates must be brought to the MARG.

2.5   However, information relating to the foundation degree programmes did not follow this route. It was compiled and approved by the Head of Higher Education Development and Higher Education Course Director. The website describes the Mission and Vision of the College and provides information about the programmes and facilities available at each of its centres. In relation to the foundation degrees this includes admission requirements, course content, delivery pattern, fees and the name of the validating University. There is little information about assessment and it is not stated whether the final award is an FdA or an FdSc, although this is noted on the UCAS website. The College website also states that applicants must achieve a recognised level 3 qualification 'in a music-related subject, or where music is a key component'. However, this specific requirement is not noted on the UCAS website and discussions with the awarding body confirmed that it is not an admission requirement.

2.6   Students on the BCU degrees have access to programme and module information via the VLE and to academic regulations via links to the University's website. In the case of the foundation degrees, students have access to the NTU/CICT VLE, although currently they have only recently received training in how to access it. Similarly, staff teaching on the foundation degrees were in the process of populating the pages for individual modules. However, the review team were informed that module descriptions had been provided to staff and students before teaching started and the students the review team met reported that they had not been disadvantaged in any way. Module descriptions are comprehensive and include details of content, learning outcomes, assessment and sources of information. However, in the case of the foundation degrees the link to academic and submission regulations in the module handbooks take the reader to the University's regulations for bachelor's and integrated master's degrees, not the regulations for foundation degrees.

2.7   Quality assurance procedures and the roles and responsibilities of the College and NTU/CICT are defined in the Collaborative Operational Document. The review team were informed that a revised version of this was being finalised within the University.

2.8   Although the errors and inconsistencies noted in paragraphs 2.5 to 2.7 can be corrected easily without the need for structural or procedural changes, they indicate a need for more effective checking of information and links across websites. The review team also noted that the College had failed to follow its new procedures, in that the MARG did not consider the information relating to the foundation degrees prior to the launch of the updated College website in October 2018. Hence, the review team **recommends** that the College ensure the revised governance structure is used effectively in confirming the accuracy of information (Expectation C).

2.9   The review team concludes that the College had responded positively to the recommendation made in the 2017 HER (AP) report. Appropriate procedures for assuring the quality of information the College provides about its higher education programmes have been established. However, the review team also noted that as the MARG had only recently been established these arrangements have yet to be fully tested. The review team considered that formally documenting operational procedures and the roles of individual staff would help to ensure that they were understood and operated by all existing and new staff at the increasing number of centres at which the foundation degrees are offered.

2.10   Based on its findings the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

2.11　　In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

2.12　　This Expectation is met with a low level of risk. The College has taken significant steps in responding to recommendations arising from the 2017 HER (AP) review report. It has established the MARG, and while it is early days, the review team are assured that College staff understand their responsibilities associated with the quality of information about learning opportunities.

2.13　　There are no features of good practice, or affirmations noted in this judgement area.

The review team identified one recommendation that the College ensure the revised governance structure is used effectively in confirming the accuracy of information (Expectation C). This recommendation is also associated with the discussion under Expectations B2.

2.14　　The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

3   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

3.1   The 2017 HER (AP) report noted that although the College had systems in place to record feedback from teaching staff, external examiners and students, it did not use this feedback to identify and address targets for enhancement. It recommended that the College 'develop and implement a strategy that will systematically identify and introduce enhancements to students' learning opportunities and embed this at all levels within the Institution". In light of this the College reviewed its governance structures and new working groups were introduced with specific responsibilities and terms of reference. The HECT receives and responds to issues raised in the SAB, considers module review feedback and external examiner and link tutor reports. Issues are summarised in the AER, which is reviewed by the HEM Group. A new post of Director of Quality and Learner Services has been established and appointed to in March 2018. The Director chairs a new working group entitled the LEQR, which is a process of internal audit carried out at each centre, and forms part of the overall quality assurance and enhancement calendar. A new enhancement action plan is built into the AER mechanism. The revised governance structure should enable the College to have more effective oversight of its academic programmes and enable it to take deliberative steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. These revised arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.2   To test the Expectation the review team scrutinised various documents including minutes of committees and groups, the AER and EAP.

3.3   All staff were able to describe how the new enhancement action plan was operated, and how the recommendations from the 2017 HER (AP) report were addressed within that. Staff were also clear on the difference between enhancement and enrichment and were able to discuss examples of how they had enhanced processes within the College (including standardising module guides) as well as adding enrichment to programmes (via student involvement in the Lunar Festival). Regarding the Artist Development programme (AD4), the College was able to provide examples of enrichment activity carried out, although these activities were not specifically developed within the revised governance structure.

3.4   The EAP is compiled by the Head of HE Development, using the external examiner reports, link tutor reports, and student feedback in the AER. The plan is a live document, recording the status of actions and their likely impact on students. The EAP is monitored by the HEM and the LEQR. Actions are also monitored by the Head of HE Development.

3.5   The revised academic governance structure, including the new SAB, provides a suitable environment in which to develop enhancement. The revision of the governance structure was a decision taken by senior management to improve clarity and accountability, and the structure now put in place would enable enhancement decisions to be taken responsibly and with clear purpose. Documenting the College's strategic and operational approach to enhancement would help to ensure that this is understood across the increasing number of centres at which the College's higher education programmes are being offered.

3.6   In conclusion, the work the College has undertaken to provide greater accountability and clarity in its committee structures, along with a commitment to building enhancement into its existing reporting mechanisms means this Expectation is met and that the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

3.7   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. The College now takes deliberate steps at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The single Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

3.8   There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area.

3.9   The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

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 21-24 of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) handbook.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer Glossary on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/glossary.

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.

Awarding organisation
An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications.

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* (FQHEIS).

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.

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.

Self-evaluation document
A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

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.