



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Ballet West, December 2019

### Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Ballet West (the College) has made acceptable progress since the December 2017 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

### Changes since the last QAA review visit

2 Currently, the College employs nine full-time and eight part-time staff members as well as five guest lecturers. There are currently 64 full-time students enrolled on two higher education programmes; one Higher National programme approved by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and a BA (Hons) Ballet approved by Bath Spa University (BSU).

3 Since the previous visit, the validating partner of the College's foundation degree and BA (Hons) top-up degree, decided to end their agreement following a review of the strategic fit of the programme and in accordance with the validation agreement. The College acted promptly to inform students, parents and staff of the implications of this change and the actions being undertaken; and put a student protection plan in place. Students were clearly informed as to their options in writing and through face-to-face meetings and were effectively supported in making informed decisions about their future studies. The College entered into negotiations with Bath Spa University (BSU) and a partnership agreement was agreed with BSU in June 2019.

4 In consultation with BSU, the BA (Hons) Ballet programme was revised, developed and mapped against the existing programme to ensure that students transitioning to the programme approved by BSU were suitably qualified. The programme was successfully approved in August 2019 under a franchise agreement in accordance with BSU's governance and quality assurance standards and is mapped against the new Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), with the first students enrolled in September 2019.

### Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The 2017 HER (AP) identified five areas of good practice and made one recommendation and one affirmation. The College continues to offer individual auditions (paragraph 6) and encouragement to take external professional qualifications has been enhanced (paragraph 8). The College has maintained its participation in the annual tour which contributes positively to the students' overall learning experience (paragraph 9). The annual review of staff performance has been maintained and feeds into an overall staff development plan. A more structured and proactive approach has the potential to enhance this process (paragraph 10). Detailed calendars continue to be provided for each student to assist with their study planning (paragraph 11). The one recommendation has been addressed and a Programme Development Procedure has been developed and approved (paragraph 12). The affirmation made related to the steps being taken to introduce a new virtual learning environment (VLE) for students and staff, and this is now in operation (paragraph 13).

6 The College continues to offer individual auditions for applicants, although the number of applicants attending auditions decreased in 2018-19. Audition-to-enrolment ratio is reported as being very high and the audition process is well thought of by students. The College is currently updating its admissions process to align with the BSU admission processes and is awaiting final approval prior to its introduction for 2019-20.

7 A range of informal and formal feedback opportunities are provided to students who report a high degree of satisfaction. Formal feedback is gathered through a variety of routes and has been enhanced by the introduction of online surveys at the end of modules and end of course. Feedback is used to inform module evaluation and subsequent enhancement.

8 The College continues to offer all students the opportunity to enter Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) examinations which also provide a stepping stone for entry into national and international dance competitions. Opportunity to compete at a national and international level provides further developmental experience for students and enhances their employability on graduation. Analysis of student performance is used to benchmark students against external standards and critically inform teaching practice. Opportunities for student development have been further enhanced, following agreement with RAD, for students who successfully pass the RAD dance examinations to go on to study the access route to Registered Teacher status - the only UK provider to offer this opportunity.

9 Student engagement with performing arts practitioners and the Ballet West touring company, which were identified in the 2017 review, continue to make a positive contribution to the students' learning experience. The College has continued to make extended use of guest teachers to enhance students' learning experiences and has responded to feedback by having individuals deliver into the programme for longer periods of time. Such practice has been well received by students who value the professional status of individual lecturers and the opportunity to broaden their dancing knowledge, skills and repertoire. At the time of the visit, the College was preparing to perform Swan Lake on a tour of Scotland. All students are given the opportunity to audition for available roles and participate in the tour which enables them to extend their performing experience.

10 The College continues to undertake an annual review of staff performance and development in accordance with their Staff Development Policy and has introduced a new development plan for 2019-20. Individual development plans vary in style, with some having very specific objective actions and others having more open, subjective targets that encourage reflection and planning. Staff value the opportunity to independently identify development needs informed by individual goals and through feedback from students collated during module evaluation, although these development needs are acknowledged as being somewhat reactive rather than proactive.

11 The College is taking steps to align current practice with BSU so that detail of academic content and assessment is captured within the programme handbook, module descriptors and module handbooks and that all relevant course materials are shared with students through the College's virtual learning environment (VLE). Students are orientated to course content and assessment during induction and have access to relevant documentation through the VLE. Detailed academic calendars are also provided to students which assist them with their planning and preparation.

12 The College has developed and approved a Programme Development Procedure in discussion with their previous validating partner, which outlines the process for new programme development and validation although, since the BA (Hons) Ballet is a revised and not a new programme in terms of subject, there has not yet been an opportunity to apply this policy.

13 The College has developed a VLE, managed by the Academic Administrator, that supports the sharing of relevant course information and learning resources, and supports student and staff communication. Students and staff recognise that this has greatly enhanced communication and enhances their learning through the sharing of learning resources and links to external learning tools. The College has been encouraged by BSU to further enhance provision in this area, although the College does not have a formal VLE development plan, it is responsive to staff and student feedback to guide enhancement.

14 There was a decline in student numbers from 83 in 2018-19, to 64 in 2019-20 (23%). The reduction in student numbers was primarily a consequence of the uncertainty surrounding the change in validating partner. Of the 60 students that achieved an exit qualification equipping them to transfer onto the new BA (Hons) programme, 44 (73%) chose to do so. Due to the challenges faced by the College in identifying a new validating partner, it was agreed, in consultation with BSU, that new applicants should enrol into the existing Higher National programme for their first year of study and transfer onto the BA programme in year two. Retention rates for 2018-19 remain high at 90% for the BA (Hons) Ballet with The Open University. The pass rate for the programme was 100%.

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

15 The College underwent successful validation of the BA (Hons) degree by BSU, with final approval being awarded in July 2019 subject to one condition and one recommendation. The report noted that the panel were satisfied with the processes in place to ensure the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards, and the existing quality of provision.

16 A mapping and review process is underway to ensure that existing policies and procedures align with the Core and Common practices of the new Quality Code. Although this process is yet to be completed, initial mapping indicates that existing practice broadly fulfils the new Code. The College is working collaboratively with BSU to ensure that further review and updating is completed and monitored as part of the partnership review and annual monitoring. Staff have been orientated to the Code by senior management, but it is acknowledged by the Senior Management Team that the unexpected need to obtain a new awarding body partner took precedence over more detailed work on embedding the new Code. This is to be a priority for the coming year.

## **Background to the monitoring visit**

17 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Simeon London, Reviewer, and Mr Alan Weale, QAA Officer, on 3 December 2019.

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