



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Ballet West

December 2017

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## 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 Ballet West. The review took place from 5 to 6 December 2017 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Jeremy Bradshaw
- Ms Catherine Fairhurst.

The main purpose of the 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)<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 (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.

A check is also made on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) with 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.

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

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

<sup>2</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education).

## Key findings

### Judgements

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities is **commended**.
- The quality of the 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**.

- The use of individual auditions, which are highly effective in preparing applicants for the style of learning and teaching at the School (Expectation B2).
- The high quality learning opportunities enhanced by staff support and encouragement of students taking external professional qualifications (Expectation B3).
- The extensive range of professional practice exposure provided through the tour, showcase and staff professional experience, which enhances students' employment potential (Expectation B3).
- The operation of annual staff development plans and the engagement of staff members with them, which encourages, formalises and monitors their professional and academic development (Expectation B3).
- The comprehensive academic calendar, which students find invaluable for understanding the structure of assessments and planning workloads (Expectation B6).

### Recommendations

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

By September 2018:

- introduce a documented procedure to ensure consideration of the academic standards of new programmes (Expectation A3.1).

### Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action already being taken to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to students:

- the work underway to develop a new virtual learning environment for staff and students (Expectation B3).

### Financial sustainability, management and governance

The financial sustainability, management and governance check has been satisfactorily completed.

## About the provider

Ballet West (the School) is a ballet school, founded in Taynuilt near Oban in Argyll, Scotland in 1991. In 1993 the School was granted charitable status and in 1997 the School was registered as a company limited by guarantee. In 1995 the School enrolled its first students on the three-year Dancers' and teachers' course, and became established as a provider of full-time, post-16 dance training. The School started to deliver higher education in partnership with North Highland College in 2007.

The School's mission is to make the student experience the very best it can possibly be, from the two-year-old taking his or her first dance class to the professional in training, every student will be offered the very best in dance training and treated equally and as an individual. The School's five strategic aims are to: create excellence in learning and teaching; deliver learning that is relevant, flexible and adaptable to the needs of employers and students; make a contribution to the economic and cultural development of the region; widen access to dance training nationally; maintain good governance, leadership and management and ensure financial sustainability.

In session 2017-18 the School has students enrolled on three full-time courses, as follows: 27 students enrolled on the HND Professional Dance Performance, 33 students enrolled on the Foundation Degree in Dance and 23 students enrolled on the BA (Hons) Dance (top-up). Ballet West has 18 staff members.

The HND Professional Dance Performance is a Scottish Qualifications Authority award. The Foundation Degree in Dance and the BA (Hons) Dance (top-up) are delivered under a validated course arrangement, with The Open University as the awarding body. These two awards were validated successfully in July 2016. At the same time, the School received institutional approval from The Open University.

Previously, the School had delivered a one-year top-up degree through a franchise arrangement with Northumbria University, which had commenced in 2013 - the BA (Hons) Dance (completion award). It also delivered the HND Professional Dance Performance, which articulated into the BA (Hons) course.

The opportunity to seek validation with another validating body arose through a coincidence of events. Firstly, was the School's desire to move away from HND provision and into a more integrated foundation degree plus top-up or three-year degree. Secondly, a strategic decision by Northumbria University to reduce the amount of external franchise agreements. The School was offered the option to continue teaching under Northumbria University until June 2018 but moved to The Open University as soon as possible. This was an opportunity for the School to seek validation for a 2 plus 1 model of higher education delivery with a different partner.

The change in awarding body and course delivery has been one of two key changes, and challenges, since the QAA Review for Specific Course Designation in 2013.

The second change has been to address the shortage of available teaching space and rehearsal space for students' projects, which has been noted in student module evaluations and has been recognised as a limiting factor for growth in student numbers. Plans have been developing for several years for a new campus building, which will provide state of the art studios and facilities appropriate for students in the 21st century. The School hopes that

these plans will come to fruition in 2021. In the meantime, growth in student numbers has been accommodated by two new modular buildings, bringing the number of studios at the School to four.

The School has made acceptable progress in addressing the recommendations of the 2013 review.

## Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

### 1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or 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 (FHEQ)* 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 The Open University Approval and Validation Agreement makes it clear that each validated programme must be designed and operated in accordance with the programme documents and the principles, regulations and provisions of the Open University's Handbook. The Handbook explicitly requires consideration of the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements, and the SEEC Credit Level Descriptors during programme design.

1.2 Similarly, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) HND award has been designed and operated in accordance with SQA requirements, including the explicit consideration of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework levels and credits.

1.3 The design of processes for securing threshold academic standards would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.4 This was tested by scrutiny of recent programme validation documentation and programme validation reports, and during meetings with staff and students of the School.

1.5 The School states that the primary reference points used in the design and development of programmes are the Quality Code and the Subject Benchmark Statement for Dance, Drama and Performance. The Open University's programme approval process was effective in ensuring the BA (Hons) Dance addressed appropriately the relationship between learning outcomes and FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements (see Expectation A3.1).

1.6 The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**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**

1.7 The foundation and BA (Hons) degree programmes delivered by the School operate under the academic framework of The Open University, as described in the University's documents, Revised Regulations for Validated Awards, and the Handbook for Validated Awards. This is a requirement of the Validation Agreement.

1.8 The HND programme operates under the academic framework the SQA.

1.9 The design of academic frameworks and regulations to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.10 This was tested by scrutiny of institutional approval documentation, award specifications and during meetings with staff and students of the School.

1.11 One significant change that occurred with the transition from Northumbria University to Open University provision has been the creation of an Academic Board at the School. Under the terms of reference this Board carries responsibility for exercising the overall academic and operational responsibility for the programmes and their development within defined policies, procedures and regulations of The Open University.

1.12 Senior and teaching staff clearly understood the relationship between the School and the University and were fully aware of their responsibilities. Ultimate responsibility for academic standards rests with The Open University. The School is responsible for ensuring the programmes comply with University regulations, including their alignment with the University's, and therefore national academic standards. A representative from the University confirmed that the School has proved its ability to exercise its responsibility through the University programme validation process.

1.13 The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**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 The responsibility for maintaining the definitive record rests with the University, with the School carrying responsibility for providing the information, as required.

1.15 Module specifications, including detailed assessment criteria, are available through the Student Hub.

1.16 The approach to maintenance of a definitive record would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.17 This was tested by scrutiny of programme information.

1.18 Example programme handbooks, containing programme specifications for current programmes were provided. The specifications were also available on the Student Hub. In both formats the information was clear, accurate and accessible.

1.19 Since programme modification is also the responsibility of The Open University, there is no requirement for notification of any changes that require amendment to the programme specifications.

1.20 The team concludes the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**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**

1.21 The Foundation Degree in Dance and the BA (Hons) Dance (top-up) are subject to The Open University's approval procedure. The University has validation responsibility for ensuring compliance with the FHEQ and professional benchmarks, and confirming module content, associated learning outcomes and assessment strategies for the programmes. The HND Professional Dance Performance delivered at the School is a pre-existing programme, which is being taught out. Revision of this programme is the responsibility of the SQA.

1.22 The University's programme approval procedures ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets UK threshold standards and are in accordance with relevant academic frameworks and regulations, which would enable the School to meet the Expectation.

1.23 The implementation and effectiveness of the approval processes undertaken at the School were tested by scrutinising the University's Handbook for Validated Awards, the School's Operations Manual, committee minutes, programme validation documentation of The Open University and SQA, programme specifications and module specifications. Discussions with University and School senior staff and teaching staff also contributed to the assessment of this Expectation.

1.24 The formal external validation processes of the University secure academic standards. The policies and processes in place for programme approval ensure the alignment of content and assessment with the UK threshold standards contained within the FHEQ. The validation event for the Foundation Degree in Dance and the BA (Hons) Dance (top-up) degree was held in July 2016. The School fulfilled the validation conditions and 56 students were enrolled in 2017-18. The HND course will continue to teach out those students who joined in 2016-17 and to provide an alternative route for students into the BA (Hons) degree.

1.25 Although the recent programme validation demonstrates that the processes described above operate effectively and as intended, the new arrangements with The Open University require the School to take more responsibility for academic standards than with Northumbria University. The School considers academic standards at the development stage of new programmes by staff discussions. However, the University's five validation conditions were related to academic standards. The School needs to assure itself formally that the academic standards are set at a level in accordance with their own, and the awarding bodies' academic frameworks and regulations. The review team therefore **recommends** that the School introduce a documented procedure to ensure consideration of the academic standards of new programmes.

1.26 Although the School's programme approval processes for determining academic standards are underdeveloped, the alignment to the University's programme approval procedures ensures that academic standards are set at a level which meets UK threshold standards and are in accordance with relevant academic frameworks and regulations.

The School has no immediate plans to introduce any new programmes. The introduction of a documented procedure to ensure consideration of the academic standards of a new programme will not require a major structural operational or procedural change. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of 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**

1.27 The School is responsible for securing academic standards by ensuring that students' achievement of relevant learning outcomes is demonstrated through assessment. The School undertakes assessment according to the University's requirements and regulations for each programme, which are set through the programme approval process. The Open University's validation procedures consider learning outcomes and their assessment to ensure alignment with threshold standards. Programme specifications identify programme learning outcomes and the module specifications map assessment tasks to specific learning outcomes. The School is responsible for the setting, marking, moderation and feedback of the assessment of undergraduate degrees. The School's Academic Board has responsibility for monitoring the consistency of academic quality and comparability of standards. The HND delivered at the School is a pre-existing programme. Assessment guidelines are set out in SQA Descriptors. The School verifies internally and designs the exact details of assessment using the SQA Guide to Assessment.

1.28 The policies and regulations in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.29 To test the Expectation the review team considered a range of evidence, including programme specifications, module specifications, handbooks, assessment briefs, external examiners' reports and validation documents, met staff responsible for assessment and its oversight, and met students.

1.30 There has not yet been any moderated assessment for the newly validated Open University programmes. The previous external examiner from Northumbria University confirmed that the standard of marking is in line with current UK subject benchmarks, standards are adhered to strongly and the role of internal moderation is strong. Assessment briefs clearly define learning outcomes and grading criteria. Programme handbooks and module specifications describe clearly academic regulations, and students reported they are made aware of these by their lecturers and through the Student Handbook and web-based Student Hub.

1.31 A formally constituted Board of Examiners at the School recommends the award, progression or academic credit. The Board of Examiners is chaired by the School's Principal and attended by an Open University representative and the external examiner. The Open University's Module Results Approval and Qualifications Classification Panel approves recommendations for module results and the award and classification of qualifications. These procedures ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where both UK threshold standards and the University's academic standards have been satisfied through the School's adherence to the assessment requirements and regulations.

1.32 The team concludes that that the assessment regulations ensure that students' achievements will be calibrated relative to the threshold standard in a consistent and

systematic manner. The Expectation is met, and because of the relationship with the University 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 School delivers the validated programmes within a quality assurance and enhancement framework defined by The Open University. The annual monitoring process ensures appropriate academic standards are achieved and maintained. The School monitors its programmes through its annual monitoring report submitted to the University. This report includes a statement that programmes have been taught, managed and operated in accordance with the procedures agreed at validation; an annual evaluation of each programme; and an institutional overview together with an action plan. The Open University Academic Reviewer, an Open University Faculty representative, also contributes to the annual monitoring report. The University provides standard templates for the annual institutional overview and annual programme evaluations. Annual monitoring reports are considered by the University's Curriculum Partnerships Committee. The Foundation Degree in Dance and the BA (Hons) Dance (top-up) are subject to a University review every five years from 1 September 2016, and an interim visit for the BA (Hons) Dance (top-up) at three years. The School monitors internally its SQA HND provision by a self-evaluation document with performance indicators and staff and student feedback.

1.34 The design of the policies and procedures detailed in The Open University Handbook for Validated Awards and SQA External Verification Guide would allow this Expectation to be met.

1.35 The team scrutinised the documentation for the two newly validated programmes and the documentation from the previous validating partner. This included The Open University Handbook for Validated Awards, the School's Operations Manual, module evaluation documents, committee minutes and programme evaluation documents. Discussions with School staff and the University's Senior Partnerships and Quality Manager further contributed evidence that programme monitoring and review processes address the achievement of academic standards.

1.36 The School's internal annual programme monitoring procedures, managed through course committees and the Academic Board, are clear and systematic as described in the School's Operations Manual. The School has not yet undertaken a monitoring cycle for The Open University. For the Northumbria University provision, the School produced annual programme and module evaluations. Under the Northumbria University franchised course arrangements, there were three institutions delivering the BA (Hons) Dance (completion). The Northumbria University coordinator for all three delivering institutions produced a Programme Evaluation Document, which explicitly addressed academic standards.

1.37 The external examiner report and module evaluation documents evidence that academic standards are being maintained to a high level. This perspective is supported by the data for student achievement. The internal procedures and associated documents sent to Northumbria University demonstrate that the School regularly monitors standards to ensure academic currency is maintained and that programmes continue to meet the UK threshold standards. The procedures should enable the School to meet The Open University's academic standards as defined by their academic frameworks and regulations.

1.38 The documentary evidence and discussion with staff confirm that the School has in place sound and effective processes of programme monitoring that address the achievement of threshold academic standards and those required by The Open University. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the 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**

1.39 The School uses external and independent expertise at key stages to set and maintain academic standards. This is through The Open University's validation procedures, the University's Academic Reviewer, the external examiner, external members of the School's Board of Trustees, the Academic Board, and professional links. The University's programme validation processes require external membership of panels. This is to verify that threshold academic standards are set by reference to the national reference points and to confirm that the University's internal requirements are implemented consistently.

1.40 The University provides independent expertise by appointing an Academic Reviewer who comments and advises on academic standards. In addition, to support the maintenance of standards, the external examiner is appointed by the University to ensure that the University's regulations are being implemented consistently, fairly and in line with national standards. Additional external referencing is achieved through professional links established by the School. Practitioners are involved in the delivery and assessment of programmes. Although there are no relevant professional body accreditations for the programmes, the School has a strong relationship with One Dance UK and professional links with the Royal Academy of Dance.

1.41 The team concludes that because of oversight by the University and other external involvement the School uses external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards for the programmes, which would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.42 The team tested the effectiveness of external involvement in the setting and maintaining of academic standards by examining documentation supplied by the University including the validation report, external examiners' reports, and the School's Operations Manual. The team held meetings with appropriate staff and students.

1.43 The School clearly demonstrates that external and independent expertise is obtained at key stages of the quality processes. The validation panel had three external members. The School implements effectively the University's validation process.

1.44 Its report for the Foundation Degree in Dance and the BA (Hons) Dance (top-up) makes explicit reference to appropriate external reference points. This report, and associated documentation, indicates that the University's review processes are carefully followed. The University's Academic Reviewer oversees the monitoring and review procedures providing a useful insight for both the University and the School into the way academic standards are maintained and benchmarked against other qualifications in a similar field. The School's previous external examiner confirms that programmes adhere to relevant professional and regulatory standards and benchmarks.

1.45 External involvement in setting and maintaining academic standards includes workshops for students led by professional choreographers with externally focused staff development and performance. A wide range of external professionals observe performances during the Dance Company tours. In addition, the awards achieved by the students in national and international competitions and the Royal Academy of Dance examinations confirm external verification that threshold academic standards are achieved.

1.46 The School has transparent arrangements for using external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards for its programmes and so the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

1.47 In reaching its judgement about the School's maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its awarding bodies, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.48 After reviewing all the evidence and having discussions with staff and students, the team identified one recommendation for the School, which was to introduce a documented procedure to ensure consideration of the academic standards of new programmes. There were no good practice points or affirmations in this area.

1.49 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations at the School **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, Development and Approval*

#### Findings

2.1 The School follows the University's processes for the development and approval of programmes. The Open University provides guidance and templates to the School, which support the various stages of approval, from initial idea to the validation event. The University conducts the validation event and ensures the appropriate involvement of independent and external experts. The School is responsible for developing the programme documentation, guided by the University Handbook for Validated Awards.

2.2 By following The Open University Validation Partnership arrangements and the allocation of a University Senior Partnerships and Quality Manager, this would enable the School to meet the Expectation.

2.3 In considering this Expectation, the review team examined programme validation documentation and reports, and relevant committee minutes. The team also met senior University and School staff, teaching staff and students.

2.4 The Open University validated two programmes at the School to commence in 2017. The Open University Validation Partnerships department has assisted with the design and development of these new programmes to ensure the rigour and quality of the process. The School's approach to the design and development of programmes has matured since the introduction of its first higher education programme validated by Northumbria University in 2013.

2.5 Staff report ownership of the new programmes with direct contributions from staff development activities. The procedures for curriculum design and development, which enable staff to contribute fully to the design and development of programme curricula, are more advanced than those of academic standards described in Expectation A3.1. There is evidence of formal curriculum meetings and systematic mapping of learning outcomes against Chapter B of the Quality Code. Student feedback clearly contributes to the content and assessment of new module design and development. The Principal and Vice-Principal have strategic oversight.

2.6 There are appropriate internal processes in place for the design and development of new programmes that with University support, oversight and approval procedures allow the Expectation to be met and the 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**

2.7 The procedures for student recruitment, selection and admission to higher education programmes at the School are described in detail in the Operations Manual.

2.8 The design of recruitment, selection and admission procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.9 This was tested by examination of policy and procedure documentation, and through meetings with staff and students.

2.10 The admissions policy and procedures are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and are underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. There are explicit entry requirements, a policy for accreditation of prior learning, and an appeals and complaints process.

2.11 Following submission of an application, applicants are invited for an audition and interview before they have an outcome. Each individual audition is carried out during a routine class at the School, and applicants are also given a tour of the facilities, receive information about the structure of the programme, financial support, accommodation, Student Services and Learning Services, and have the opportunity to meet a range of staff. There is also an interview that aims to evaluate the individual's requirement for additional support or training.

2.12 Students from outside the UK have the option of attending the audition or submitting a video recording. The School encourages applicants to visit whenever possible, so they can appreciate what the School has to offer and what the student experience will be like.

2.13 Students reported that the admissions process was fair. They viewed the audition visit as part of the induction process, and greatly appreciated the insights it gave into the School, enabling them to make an informed decision about whether it was right for them. The review team concludes that the use of individual auditions, which are highly effective in preparing applicants for the style of learning and teaching at the School is **good practice**.

2.14 Monitoring of both the processes involved in recruitment and the outcomes of the processes is the responsibility of the Academic Board as described in the Operations Manual, and confirmed by committee papers and senior staff.

2.15 The admissions policy also includes information about the appeals process; this information is available to applicants via a link on the open website.

2.16 The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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**

2.17 There is a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy that sets out the core values of the School and describes different approaches to learning and teaching that meet these values.

2.18 The Operations Manual describes the School's approach to articulation, systematic review and enhancement of its provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. Different sections cover quality assurance and enhancement policies, learning, teaching and assessment strategy, equality of provision, and staff development.

2.19 The design of these processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.20 This was tested by examination of documentation describing training and professional experience opportunities, institutional strategy, student handbooks, and course documents, and through meetings with staff and students.

2.21 The School admits that evaluation of the effectiveness of its policies is difficult as, to date, there have not been any serious issues that required use of formal procedures. However, the team saw ample evidence that the policies were being carried out in an effective manner.

2.22 As noted above, the relationship with The Open University is still very new and the School is still learning how the University operates. However, the University has put in place a programme of training events, each timed to prepare the School's staff for the next stage of the academic year. School staff will also join The Open University's communities of practice, that will help to keep staff informed of contemporary good practice. The School also runs good practice sharing days to ensure its staff review and enhance their teaching practice.

2.23 The School aspires to give its students good employment prospects and lifelong career opportunities. The employment potential of students benefits from the integrated professional practice environment at the School, which includes but is not restricted to the professional experience of staff members and the exposure to professional practice experiences throughout the curriculum.

2.24 Many of the staff at the School also teach at other institutions or have professional practice experience. The students benefit from this experience both in terms of the currency and enrichment it brings to the learning environment, and in terms of the opportunities for professional employment.

2.25 The team considers the high quality of learning opportunities, enhanced by staff support and encouragement of students taking external professional qualifications, to be **good practice**.

2.26 Students at the School participate in annual events where students perform for the general public. There is a tour and a showcase, each of which places the studio-based

techniques learned in the classroom into genuine performance contexts and prepares students for their future professional careers. Students were very positive about these events and the opportunities they provided for professional experience and employment opportunities.

2.27 Students at the School are encouraged to enhance their employability further by taking the Royal Academy of Dance examinations.

2.28 The review team considers the extensive range of professional practice exposure provided through the tour, showcase and staff professional experience, which enhances students' employment potential to be **good practice**.

2.29 Students reported that they found their teachers highly qualified and were generally pleased with the teaching throughout the School.

2.30 The School's Strategic Plan includes as one of its strategic aims, to create excellence in learning and teaching. Recognising that achievement of this will require the staff to strive for excellence in their own professional development, the School supports staff who wish to perform, train and teach or act as external examiners in other organisations, and encourages them to develop and plan their own professional goals.

2.31 There is a culture of extensive and externally facing individual staff development at the School. Annual staff development plans are prepared by teaching and other staff. They provide personalised developmental objectives for each of the teaching staff and record progress towards them. Developmental activities may include studying for a postgraduate degree, attendance at external events, sharing good practice, and meetings with representatives from the awarding bodies. The plans are prepared during a discussion with the Academic Administrator at the start of the academic year, and progress is reviewed the following year.

2.32 Staff were very positive about the development plans and reported high levels of engagement with the process. Generally, the individual objectives were achieved, though sometimes circumstances prevent progress towards a specific objective and an alternative will be agreed with the staff member.

2.33 It is a specific goal of the School for staff to achieve membership of the Higher Education Academy (HEA); the 2017 update of the Institution's Strategic Plan includes explicit reference to this aim, and the number of staff members who are associates or fellows of HEA is recorded annually.

2.34 The University provides periodic training opportunities for staff at the School to ensure they fully understand each stage in the academic year and their obligations. At the time of the visit, the next Open University training session would cover examination board processes, in time for the end-of-year assessments.

2.35 The team considers the operation of annual staff development plans and the engagement of staff members with them, which encourages, formalises and monitors their professional and academic development, to be **good practice**.

2.36 The School recognised the challenge presented by the loss of the arrangement with Northumbria University that permitted students to remotely access the University's library for online journals, ebooks and digitised material library support, and has put in place processes to address this.

2.37 At the time of the visit, students had access to a level of Open University library resources but not the full resource. Students reported that they were able to access the

library books and journals they required and that the learning resources were satisfactory. Teaching staff reported that access to online learning resources was adequate for their teaching and continued to improve.

2.38 Students and staff have access to a web-based resource, the Student Hub, which contains detailed information about each module together with a calendar of its associated assessments and additional learning resources. There is also a link to The Open University's online library, and a comprehensive set of institutional policy documents. Students valued the Student Hub as a repository of useful information about their studies and were satisfied with the type and amount of information available through it. Staff also found it useful as a way of making supplementary information available to the students.

2.39 Recognising that the Student Hub has limited functionality, the School has plans to develop a new virtual learning environment. This was first discussed during The Open University's institutional approval process. At the time of the visit, the School was reviewing the potential of the SharePoint/Office365 environment as a document-sharing facility, alongside other options such as the Moodle or Canvas platforms. The team **affirms** the work underway to develop a new virtual learning environment for staff and students.

2.40 The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of 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**

2.41 Students at the School are supported in their academic, personal and professional development through an induction process, academic and personal support and, as noted under Expectation B3, by the professional experience of the staff (see paragraph 2.25). The arrangements for student support are detailed in the Operations Manual.

2.42 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.43 This was tested by examining policy and procedure documentation, student handbooks, student induction material and committee papers and through meetings with staff and students.

2.44 There is an effective induction process for new students that includes a tour of the School's facilities, and presentations by the Principal and Programme Manager, which together cover the School's expectations of the students, assessment processes, plagiarism and academic dishonesty, policies for complaints and appeals, and health and safety advice and procedures. They also receive a copy of the Programme Handbook.

2.45 Students reported satisfaction with the induction process and confirmed that they received a handbook and detailed information about the institutional policies. They understood what they were committing to and were clear about the School's expectations of them.

2.46 Although the School had experimented with a formalised systematic process for personal tutoring, in which individual staff members were assigned groups of around 10 students each, this had been abandoned in favour of a less formal approach to student support. Senior staff were confident that despite the change students were not being overlooked. Following discussions with staff and students, and given the size of the School and the nature of the teaching, the team is satisfied that the less formal arrangement is effective in meeting the support needs of the students.

2.47 The nature of the practical study of dance ensures a high level of staff contact. This means that any academic and personal issues are usually quickly identified and resolved. Students reported that they felt able to approach any of the teachers at any time to inquire about anything that was concerning them, and the teachers would clarify matters for them.

2.48 In addition to this, students may at any time request to meet with the student adviser on a one-to-one basis to discuss their needs and to prepare a personal learning support plan. The student adviser then discusses the needs of the student with the relevant teaching staff to ensure that the teaching and assessment take into account any individual requirements. Both staff and students confirmed that the process was operating effectively.

2.49 Student adviser tutorials had been carried out by the School's Principal, though the team learnt that a member of the academic staff would be taking over this role in the near future.

2.50 Students had told the School that they would benefit from knowing there was an independent person from whom they could receive pastoral support, in addition to the established in-house system. This need is now being met by the local minister and the

Taynuilt Medical Practice.

2.51 The School provides career seminars and lectures by industry professionals, to provide careers advice to the students, but the most effective source of advice, guidance and support comes from the teaching staff, who are all active practitioners, and through the opportunities for gaining professional experience provided by the showcase and tour, as discussed in Expectation B3 (see paragraph 2.28).

2.52 The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of 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**

2.53 Policies for student engagement in the quality assurance and enhancement processes are explained in the Operations Manual. The School encourages students to respond to course content and delivery methods by offering feedback through module evaluation and the student representatives to the course management and other committees.

2.54 The policies and processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.55 This was tested by examination of module evaluation documentation, committee papers, and through meetings with staff and students.

2.56 Students are encouraged to submit anonymous feedback on their modules, using a pro forma that prompts for comment on the quality of the teaching, assessment and feedback, the quality of any handouts, online materials and physical resources. From September 2017, the School will be collecting data from all students using online forms, which will be anonymous and include free text input.

2.57 Student feedback through the module evaluation forms is considered by the course committees, the relevant Programme Manager, the Academic Board, the Board of Trustees and the Principal. The annual module and programme monitoring process, as described in the Operations Manual, includes scrutiny of evidence from committee meetings, student evaluation, staff input, course retention and progression data and student performance. The annual monitoring process informs decision-making at the Academic Board and Board of Trustees.

2.58 Students reported that they felt they were involved in shaping learning opportunities at the School mainly through student representatives at course committee meetings. Students are encouraged to bring any matters of concern to the meetings; example minutes of these committees record the school responding to issues raised by the students; there are also two student representatives on the Academic Board.

2.59 Staff and students were able to supply examples of ways in which the School had responded to student feedback, including changes to the timetable, provision of additional body conditioning classes and improvements to the clarity of the assessment criteria.

2.60 The team concludes that the Expectation is met and with a low level of risk.

**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**

2.61 The School's Operations Manual and the revised regulations describe assessment policy and processes. The Vice-Principal has overall responsibility for ensuring the suitability of teaching, learning and assessment activities. The Principal chairs the Board of Examiners. The School produces students' transcripts. The Board of Examiners is governed by the Regulations for Validated Awards and the Handbook of Validated Awards issued by The Open University. There are defined policies, regulations and processes for the Recognition of Prior Learning with a specified procedure for Foundation Degree students entering the level six BA (Hons) Dance (top-up) programme.

2.62 The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.63 The team examined assessment policies and strategies, external examiner reports, student feedback and programme monitoring reports. The team also met with senior staff, the University's Senior Quality and Partnership Manager, teaching staff, and students.

2.64 There has not yet been any moderated assessment for the newly validated Open University programmes. The external examiner for the previously assessed programmes confirms that the assessment feedback is thorough and there is evidence of both written and oral feedback. The external examiner's report also states that there is clear provision to facilitate the students' broad range of practical learning assessments with module content and assessment designs appropriate for the qualification. Students are able to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes through varied modes of assessment and fair and consistent assessment procedures.

2.65 The School's assessment procedures are well defined and carefully verified, moderated and monitored. The policy for moderation clearly describes the marking and moderation processes for both written and practical work. The module descriptors detail assessment requirements including modes of assessment, learning outcomes and assessment criteria. There are feedback templates for practical and theory assessments. The academic calendar is embedded in the Student Handbook and provides an overview of the year. It provides detailed information for each assessment on assessment weighting within the module, the module tutor, whether the assessment was written or practical and submission dates. Students found the calendar to be very effective in helping them organise preparation time for assessments. The team considers the comprehensive academic calendar, which students find invaluable for understanding the structure of assessments and planning workloads, to be **good practice**.

2.66 The assessment regulations allow reasonable adjustments (such as extra time) to assessment modes, where required, to avoid the risk of disadvantaging students with protected characteristics. The School considers students' extenuating circumstances prior to the Board of Examiners according to its policy and the University's regulations.

2.67 The staff are competent to undertake the assessment of students because they are experienced higher education teachers, they have undertaken individual staff development

and continuing professional development such as Masters of Education. In addition, the University provides dedicated training in this area.

2.68 The assessment regulations contain the academic misconduct policy and penalties. Students submit written assessments through plagiarism-detection software. The student meeting and submission confirms they understand academic misconduct and the students say they found formative assessments using this software very helpful.

2.69 In summary, the team found the School has equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, which are conducted in a systematic manner and enable students to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes. Assessments are varied, with a robust marking and moderating system. Formative and summative feedback is provided effectively. The Expectation is therefore met and the 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

2.70 The Open University, which has explicit policies and regulations, appoints and employs the independent external examiner for the Foundation Degree and BA (Hons) Dance (top-up) after nominations by the School. The University provides written briefing and induction for the external examiner. The School's Operations Manual explains the role of the external examiner. The external examiners submit a written report to the University on the University template. The reporting form includes sections on comparability of standards, curriculum design and delivery, assessment methods and procedures, student feedback and achievement and a section on good practice and areas for improvement. Course leaders are required to consider the external examiner's reports in annual monitoring. This includes referencing any responses made to specific concerns raised by external examiners.

2.71 The processes in place to appoint external examiners and to ensure that their comments are considered and responded to would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.72 To test the Expectation the team examined the School's assessments, annual monitoring reports, external examiners' reports, policies and procedures. They also considered the University's regulations and the School's committee minutes. They met staff and students to establish the use made of external examiners by the School.

2.73 The School is clear about its responsibilities with regard to the appointment and induction of external examiners. The documentation from the University of Northumbria's validated programmes shows that the School makes scrupulous use of external examiners. The University has appointed the previous external examiner from the University of Northumbria to be the external examiner for the first year of the new Foundation Degree and BA (Hons) Dance (top-up), which provides continuity. The previous external examiner report demonstrates that the examiner gives the School impartial and independent advice, as well as comments on the assessment processes, the academic standards and on the achievement of students.

2.74 There is evidence to show that the external examiner is informed about the assessment practices and procedures and understands the importance of their contribution to quality assurance and enhancements. The report also confirms that the examiner has sufficient evidence to fulfil the role effectively. The external examiner's report is discussed at Course Committee meetings so students and staff contribute to the resultant action plan. The staff show full awareness of the function of the external examiner. The reports are discussed at the Programme Committee with student members. Teaching staff contribute to the development of the resultant action plan through the Course Committee.

2.75 The team concludes that the School, through its relationship with the University and its oversight, makes scrupulous use of external examiners. The Expectation is met and the level of 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**

2.76 The Open University Regulations and procedures provide the framework for programme monitoring and review to enable strategic oversight of processes and to ensure these processes are applied systematically. SQA provision is monitored annually through the production of a self-evaluation document, which draws together information from performance indicators and staff and student feedback. The SQA has an external verification programme, involving visits to centres by verifiers who review processes. The SQA has not included the School in its external verification processes for 2016-17 due to consistently successful visits in previous years. The Open University employs a template for annual monitoring and involves the University's Academic Reviewer in the process.

2.77 At the School, the Vice-Principal is responsible for programme monitoring and the annual evaluation. The Programme Manager uses module evaluation documents from all modules and the external examiner's report to produce the Programme Evaluation Document, which clearly identifies points of good practice and an action plan for improvement. The Academic Board approves the Programme Evaluation Documents and the action plan, with recommendations, is fed back to the Programme Committee.

2.78 The team found that the School has appropriate policies in place for the monitoring and review of its programmes that would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.79 In order to test the effectiveness of the monitoring and review procedures the team examined policy documents and templates, read monitoring and review reports, as well as action plans and committee minutes. They met with those responsible for, and staff involved in, annual monitoring and periodic review.

2.80 The School's internal monitoring and review procedures complement those of the awarding bodies. Although the School has not yet undertaken a monitoring cycle for The Open University, it was shown by their relationship with Northumbria University that the School follows University procedures meticulously. The Academic Board reviews and endorses the University's Annual Monitoring Reports and follows up actions. These are completed on a University template and include external examiner reports, as well as an action plan.

2.81 Students are members of the Programme Committee, which together with Student Representative meetings enable students to be involved in all programme monitoring and review processes. If the School or The Open University decides to discontinue the programme, it is the responsibility of the School to ensure students can complete their studies or transfer to another provider. The team discussed the change of programme and awarding body from Northumbria University to The Open University with current students. They all confirmed that the change was handled fairly and they were always kept up to date.

2.82 The School, in discharging its responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operates

effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and review of programmes with the involvement of staff and students. The team concludes, therefore, that the Expectation is met and the 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**

- 2.83 Under the agreement with The Open University, the School is responsible for handling any appeals and complaints, with a final right of appeal to the University against a decision of a Board of Examiners only if the appeal is against a decision related to either progression from one stage of the programme to the next, or a final award. The Operations Manual describes the procedure for academic appeals, including appeals against admissions decisions, exam board decisions and against academic misconduct or disciplinary panel decisions. It also describes the procedures for complaints.
- 2.84 The SQA has its own appeals process.
- 2.85 The design of procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.
- 2.86 This was tested by scrutiny of policy and procedures documentation, student handbooks, the School's website and Student Hub, and through meetings with staff and students.
- 2.87 At the time of the visit, there had not been any formal appeals or complaints. Staff tended to pick up on problems early because of the high volume of contact hours with students and any issues tended to be resolved quickly.
- 2.88 While the appeals and complaints procedures at the School are yet to be tested by an actual case, the processes in place appear to be appropriate and effective.
- 2.89 For both complaints and appeals, the procedures in place are accessible, transparent and well publicised. It is expected they will be carried out in a timely manner without with any risk of disadvantage to the appellant. The aim is to seek resolution of candidates' or students' issues through open communication with staff, either through informal discussion or through student representation on the programme committees.
- 2.90 Information about the complaints and appeals procedures and forms are available on the Student Hub and in the programme handbooks. There is a link to the appeals and complaints procedures on the open website, for the benefit of applicants who wish to appeal an admissions decision, or the general public. There is also an Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour Policy. The School considers that the induction procedures are also very important in conveying this information.
- 2.91 The policy documents state that complaints and appeals are monitored with reports going to the appropriate managing committees. The Academic Board carries responsibility for providing an overview of complaints and appeals data.
- 2.92 External resolution through the validating body is in place in the event that all internal processes have failed to achieve resolution.
- 2.93 Students reported they often took an informal approach when dealing with appeals and complaints by either going directly to the teacher or going to the office. They reported that they found it generally to be the best way to deal with their problems as they feel it is quickly resolved and there are fewer misunderstandings. However, they also confirmed they

were aware of the formal channels for appeals and complaints and knew that the procedures were in their handbooks as well as on the School's website.

2.94 The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of 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**

2.95 The School has no arrangements for delivery of learning opportunities through other organisations, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

**Expectation: Not applicable**

**Level of risk: Not applicable**

**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**

2.96 The School does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

**Expectation: Not applicable**

**Level of risk: Not applicable**

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

2.97 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.

2.98 Having reviewed all the evidence and having had full discussions with staff and students at the School, the team identified five areas of good practice: the audition process, activities relating to employment; high quality of learning opportunities; staff development planning; and assessment scheduling and planning. The team identified one affirmation around the steps being taken to develop a new virtual learning environment for staff and students. No recommendations were identified.

2.99 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the School is **commended**.

### 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 In the Operations Manual, the School states that it will ensure that all information relating to its higher education provision is accurate, current, comprehensive and freely available. Further information about how it intends to do this is given in the Course Information Policy, which cross references to the Quality Code.

3.2 There are two websites, one containing information aimed at the general public, [www.balletwest.co.uk](http://www.balletwest.co.uk) that covers all aspects of the School's provision, its outreach work, the Summer Schools Associates' programmes and performances, and an outline view of the higher education provision. This is supplemented by another website, [www.balletwest.ac.uk](http://www.balletwest.ac.uk) that provides detailed information about the higher education provision.

3.3 There is no paper prospectus. The intention is that potential students can find all the information they require from the website, including course content, how to apply, entry requirements, regulations and policies and contact details.

3.4 Enrolled students have access to a Student Hub that provides them with detailed information about their modules, assessments, learning materials, regulations and policies. There are also links to external sites providing access to research material such as The Open University for study skills, academic journals, and Argyll and Bute Libraries for reference material.

3.5 Award certificates will be issued by The Open University. Transcripts of academic achievement have been provided previously by Northumbria University and the SQA, though under the current arrangement with The Open University the School will issue the transcript and diploma supplement, in accordance with The Open University's regulations.

3.6 Arrangements for production of information would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.7 This was tested by meetings with staff and students, by scrutiny of policy documentation, agreements and guidance, online material, and by examination of the two websites and Student Hub.

3.8 The School has effective mechanisms in place for ensuring that the information made available to potential and current students, staff and the general public, is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.9 Both websites are clear, descriptive and intuitively navigable.

3.10 The marketing team is responsible for the press and public relations for the School, including advertising, social networking and the traditional press outlets. All information under consideration for publication is first scrutinised by the Principal or the Academic Administrator. The Academic Administrator has final responsibility for signing off material

for publication. Any changes to the published information are reported to the University's Partnerships Manager. These arrangements were clearly understood by all staff who the team met.

3.11 While it does not include the full functionality of a virtual learning environment, the Student Hub (also discussed in Section B3) contains detailed information about each module together with a calendar of its associated assessments and additional learning resources. There is also a link to the University's online library, and a comprehensive set of institutional policy documents.

3.12 Students reported that the information they received following acceptance onto a programme was plentiful and clear, and that they were able to find all the information they required about their programmes of study, either from the Student Hub or by contacting staff members.

3.13 There have not yet been any graduations from The Open University programme, though a sample diploma supplement was provided to the team. It will provide a comprehensive verifiable record of a student's learning, including details of the student and the qualification, details of the modules or units studied, credits awarded, marks or grades achieved and the date and year in which credits were awarded. It will also include details of non-completion, including the number of attempts taken to complete a module, and any other types of learning such as study abroad, work placement or work experience. The diploma supplement clearly states the place of study and that The Open University is the awarding body.

3.14 The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

3.16 The team is satisfied with the discussion it had with staff and students at the School and its review of the evidence. The team did not identify any affirmations, good practice or recommendations.

3.17 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the School **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 School's strategic approach to enhancing the student learning experience is embedded in the culture of continuous improvement within several areas, including staff professional development, student engagement and ensuring that the graduates produced are well equipped to meet the needs of employers in the performing arts industry. This is supported by the School's Strategic Plan and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.

4.2 The Quality Enhancement Policy describes this approach to enhancement and the subsequent procedures for its implementation.

4.3 The team was able to identify the School's enhancement approach through the meetings it held with staff, students and senior managers. These meetings provided the team with information that supported the School's policies, committee structures and practices for enhancement, and this is supported by a dedicated quality assurance and enhancement process. This is underpinned by the School's intention to embed a continuous improvement ethos in curriculum delivery and management and the learning environment.

4.4 The Strategic Plan aims are to create excellence in learning and teaching, which is reflected in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The School aims to deliver learning that is relevant, flexible and adaptable to the needs of employers and individuals and make a contribution to the economic and cultural development of the region. The School aims to widen access to dance training nationally, maintain good governance, leadership and management and ensure financial sustainability with staff encouraged to produce their own professional development plan. The Academic Board sets and routinely considers specific quantitative targets for these aims.

4.5 The School provides a consistently strategic approach to enhancement that is led from its senior management team. The Principal and senior managers steer a clear path that facilitates the development of a higher education dimension to the strategy, with a focused plan for enhancing higher education provision that identifies deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. Programme Committee and Academic Board structures and annual monitoring processes ensure that quality enhancement is robustly embedded within activities as described in the Quality Enhancement Policy. The structure and processes are designed to support enhancement through continuous improvement and dissemination of good practice.

4.6 Students are clearly able to influence the cycle of enhancement through representation on decision-making committees and by giving formal and informal feedback. Additionally, students are able to articulate examples of where changes have been made as a result of student feedback, for example feedback gained from module evaluations has shaped the new programme delivered through The Open University.

4.7 The School integrates the enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner, using its existing quality management structures to strategically identify opportunities for enhancement, monitoring their implementation and formally evaluating them through monitoring and review procedures and deliberative committees.

4.8 There is a systematic approach to staff development which encourages staff to be proactive in recognising their own development needs. The annual staff development plans and the engagement of staff members with them encourages, formalises and monitors their professional and academic development. All teaching staff are actively engaged in current professional practice outside the School, both pedagogic practices and those relating to professional skills and experience.

4.9 Students are exposed to an extensive range of professional practices through the tour, showcase, support for professional examinations and staff professional experience, which enhance students' employment potential.

4.10 The School demonstrates strong commitment to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities, and there is evidence of student satisfaction and high levels of student achievement. The School is taking deliberate steps to bring about continuous improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experience of students. The team therefore concludes that this Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

4.11 In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against criteria specified within the Quality Code, summarised in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.12 Having reviewed the evidence and discussed enhancement activity with staff and students, the team found that the arrangements of the enhancement of student learning opportunities are effective. No affirmations, areas of good practice or recommendations were identified.

4.13 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the School **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](#).

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.

### 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.

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