



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Central Film School, June 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 the Central Film School (the School) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [May 2018 monitoring visit](#).

### Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The School continues to deliver two-year fast track undergraduate BA programmes in filmmaking and screenwriting and a one-year MA in Directing Fiction, all validated by the University of Gloucestershire. An MA in Social Impact Film making has been validated, but has not yet recruited students. The School is in the process of validating a new Level 3 Foundation course in Media Production and three MA programmes in Film Sales Distribution, Film Making and Visual Effects. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 68 registered students, six of whom are studying for the MA. A new Quality Assurance Officer has been appointed. Otherwise, the management structure and staffing has remained as reported in the 2018 annual monitoring visit.

### Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The School had completed the actions to address the recommendations from the 2016 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER (AP)) as confirmed by the annual monitoring visit of 2018. Monitoring of the outcomes of these actions is thorough and effective and the School now evaluates the management of academic standards and progress against its own enhancement objectives through its annual monitoring process and consolidated action plan (CAP). The good practice has been further developed and new enhancement opportunities have been identified (paragraphs 5-9).

4 Student admission arrangements are thorough and supported by clear and up-to-date information (paragraphs 10-12). Assessment practices are robust, set in a clear policy framework and assured through internal and external moderation and close collaboration with the validating University (paragraphs 13-14). The use of relevant external reference points is evident in the recent updating of policies and procedures and School staff are involved in regional and national higher education networks (paragraph 18).

5 The School's provision is managed and enhanced within a clear academic framework where the allocation of responsibilities for policy and procedure between the validating University (the University) and the School are clearly articulated. The School has developed a comprehensive policy framework and a clear governance structure is evident.

6 The School uses the principles identified in the University's Quality Handbook in the design, management and review of programmes to assure quality and enhance provision. It also follows the University's academic regulations and uses its own processes for

institutional monitoring. The School's Academic Board is responsible for the creation and implementation of an annual consolidated action plan. The CAP draws data and reports from external and internal reviews of academic and professional departments into a single plan which is reviewed on a monthly basis at the Quality Assurance and Academic Management, meeting. Progress reports with the implementation of the year's CAP are made to each Academic Board and a final report supports the annual monitoring process where quality assurance issues and enhancement opportunities for the forthcoming year are identified to produce the next year's CAP.

7 Detailed course evaluation also takes place in conjunction with the University during the annual partnership review and actions arising from this evaluation are also incorporated into the School's CAP. Action planning and the subsequent monitoring of outcomes is informed by both qualitative and quantitative evidence for success.

8 There is a thorough and reflective approach to annual monitoring with benefits leading to further enhancements to provision as well as alignment with statutory and regulatory requirements and assurance of quality. External examiners reported satisfaction with the consistency and effectiveness of the quality assurance processes in place. The annual monitoring and CAP processes have now led to the identification of four new enhancement themes which develop and broaden the scope of work already completed in response to the 2016 HER (AP). These cover improvements to student feedback and engagement, student attendance, student employability and graduation film engagement.

9 Students were very positive about their experience at the School and the relevance of their programme to their chosen area of study and future work. The School has recently introduced a professional perspectives initiative which provides students with a range of opportunities for professional networking and master classes embedded within and in addition to course curricula. The School also supports a comprehensive programme of staff development including support with developing pedagogic expertise through internal events and support for attendance at external events.

10 School policy and procedure covering admissions is presented on the School website and within the documentation of the University. Documentation is thorough covering selection criteria, policy and procedure and how to appeal decisions. Criteria for admission to all courses are clearly indicated for students from different backgrounds and with different qualifications, qualification levels or outcomes. A combination of UCAS qualifications or evidence of work experience, a personal statement and, for 2019 admissions, a portfolio or show reel are supported by an interview to reveal candidates' aptitude and skill as well as their qualifications.

11 Students with qualifications that are not media related or students without qualifications are required to provide further evidence according to the validating University's Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy to demonstrate their aptitude and potential to succeed as evidenced by prior certificated or experiential learning. English language requirements are clearly stated for home and EU students and international students without a recognised level 3 qualification. Offer letters are clear and highlight appropriate clauses from the School's contract, which students will be expected to adhere to.

12 Students indicated that they had found that the information provided, and the interview process, had made a positive contribution to their decision making when selecting the School. Positive aspects had included the responsiveness of staff to their enquiries and the flexibility shown in response to interview times and locations, the latter particularly for international students.

13 The School integrates its assessment policy and procedures closely with those of the University. Clear guidance to students is provided through the School's Assessment

Policy which covers the processes of marking, feedback and moderation and explains the roles of staff, external examiners and exam boards. Assessments are set by School staff who work closely with the University's Link Tutors. Assessment strategies are provided within programme specifications and course handbooks and specific information about taught sessions, learning outcomes and assessments is also provided in module guides at the beginning of each delivery cycle. Assessment briefs are clear and informative, a feature noted by external examiners and commended by students. Students also praised the availability of staff and their promptness in responding to student queries.

14 The robustness of the School's approach to assessment is ensured by the provision of clear guidance to staff and staff development relating to the procedures involved. Samples of work are moderated by the University's Link Tutors as well as the external examiners and blind double marking of all completed Level 6 work takes place. The close collaboration with the University has been noted by the external examiners and deemed helpful by School staff. The role of exam boards is clear with students indicating that they understood the process for appealing assessment decisions. The School also provides a helpful process map for students taking resits. At the end of each assessment cycle, Academic Board reviews the assessment process and marks gained and actions arising from this review are incorporated into the CAP.

15 There is a clear process for course development, which ensures the integrity of the assessment process through consideration of styles of delivery and identification of appropriate modes of assessment which are strongly practical and develop the students' skills base as well as evidencing intellectual development. Reference to industry requirements, the scrutiny of staff qualifications and a rigorous process for modifying courses and assessment strategies in consultation with the University and external examiners further ensure the reliability of the assessment process.

16 Students confirmed that they understood the concept of academic misconduct which is discussed during their induction to the School. Where appropriate, plagiarism-detection software aims to prevent misconduct together with the type of assignments, which are highly practical and individualised in their outcomes.

17 Statistical data for the last three years illustrates consistent recruitment overall with some fluctuation between the two undergraduate courses offered. Retention rates over both courses have risen from 75 per cent for the 2013 cohort to 92 per cent for the 2016 cohort. Overall module progression rates have improved, particularly for level 5 students where 12 out of a cohort of 19 (63 per cent) failed their first module assessment attempt in 2014 compared with 7 out of 29 (24 per cent) in 2016. As a result of actions identified during the annual monitoring process, assessment strategies have been reviewed and a Personal Tutor system introduced to successfully mitigate the previously high failure rates.

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

18 The School demonstrates highly effective engagement with external reference points. It adopted an evaluative approach to the success of its recruitment policies and a recent mapping exercise against the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education has been undertaken. Senior staff are also members of the Independent Higher Education Group for networking, benchmarking and competitor research.

## Background to the monitoring visit

19 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.

20 The monitoring visit was carried out by Elizabeth Smith, Reviewer, and Dr Monika Ruthe, QAA Officer, on 6 June 2019.

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