

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

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Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) exists to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education (HE) qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE.

To do this QAA carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In England and Northern Ireland this process is known as institutional audit. QAA operates similar but separate processes in Scotland and Wales.

The purpose of institutional audit

The aims of institutional audit are to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges are:

- providing HE, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard, and
- exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

Judgements

Institutional audit results in judgements about the institutions being reviewed. Judgements are made about:

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

These judgements are expressed as either **broad confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence** and are accompanied by examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

Nationally agreed standards

Institutional audit uses a set of nationally agreed reference points, known as the 'Academic Infrastructure', to consider an institution's standards and quality. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*, which include descriptions of different HE qualifications
- *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of the what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. They outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

The audit process

Institutional audits are carried out by teams of academics who review the way in which institutions oversee their academic quality and standards. Because they are evaluating their equals, the process is called 'peer review'.

The main elements of institutional audit are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution nine months before the audit visit
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the audit visit
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the audit visit
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the audit team five weeks before the audit visit
- the audit visit, which lasts five days
- the publication of a report on the audit team's judgements and findings 20 weeks after the audit visit.

The evidence for the audit

In order to obtain the evidence for its judgement, the audit team carries out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, such as regulations, policy statements, codes of practice, recruitment publications and minutes of relevant meetings, as well as the self-evaluation document itself
- reviewing the written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff
- talking to students about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the Academic Infrastructure.

The audit team also gathers evidence by focusing on examples of the institution's internal quality assurance processes at work using 'audit trails'. These trails may focus on a particular programme or programmes offered at that institution, when they are known as a 'discipline audit trail'. In addition, the audit team may focus on a particular theme that runs throughout the institution's management of its standards and quality. This is known as a 'thematic enquiry'.

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews progress towards meeting this requirement.

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Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (CDD) from 13-15 June 2005 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students, and on the academic standards of awards that the CDD offers on behalf of the affiliate schools' validating universities.

To arrive at its conclusions the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the CDD, to current students, and read a wide range of documents relating to the way the CDD manages the academic aspects of its provision.

The words 'academic standards' are used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK.

Academic quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for them.

In institutional audit, both academic standards and academic quality are reviewed.

Outcome of the audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view is that the CDD:

is moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities for the current and likely future management of the quality of academic programmes and the academic standards of the awards of its affiliate schools.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the inclusive and collaborative approach to the development of the CDD quality framework
- the opportunities for students to participate in collaborative events between affiliates which have improved the student experience and employment prospects
- the staff-student consultative committees in affiliates, especially where they provide access to senior management and where regular progress reports are provided to students
- the effectiveness of the disability project in raising disability awareness in staff at all levels within the affiliates
- the ways in which the CDD has facilitated the opportunities for staff to refresh and extend their professional practice.

Recommendations for action

The team advises the CDD to:

- strengthen and continue to develop the work of its Academic Board, in line with the action plan, to improve the effectiveness of the CDD's monitoring function
- address the responsibility of its Academic Board for ensuring that affiliates have appropriate staff-development strategies and for monitoring their effectiveness
- ensure that affiliates develop learning and teaching strategies which include a remit for learning resources and student support and guidance, as well as a pedagogic focus to peer observation of teaching.

National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings the audit team also investigated the use made by the CDD of the Academic Infrastructure, which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points to define both good practice and academic standards. The audit found that the CDD was moving towards meeting the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality*

and standards in higher education, published by QAA. The CDD has engaged with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and subject benchmark statements but still has some work to do in these areas.

In due course the institutional audit process will include a check on the reliability of the information set published by institutions in the format recommended in HEFCE's document, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance, (HEFCE 03/51)*. The audit team was satisfied that at the time of the audit, the institution was alert to the requirements set out in *HEFCE 03/51*, and was moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities in this respect.

Main report

Main report

1 An institutional audit of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (CDD) was undertaken during the week commencing 13 June 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on how the CDD meets its responsibilities for quality and standards.

2 The audit was carried out using a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and Universities UK (UUK), and has been endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills. For institutions in England, it replaces the previous processes of continuation audit, undertaken by QAA at the request of UUK and SCOP, and universal subject review, undertaken by QAA on behalf of HEFCE, as part of the latter's statutory responsibility for assessing the quality of education that it funds.

3 The audit checked the effectiveness of the CDD's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study leading to those awards; and for publishing reliable information.

Section 1: Introduction: the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

The institution and its mission

4 The CDD was established in 2001 with a view to securing the future of conservatoire-level dance and drama vocational training in the UK. It has been constructed as a new-model higher education institution (HEI), with a unique confederal structure comprising institutional partnerships between the CDD and its seven affiliate schools. The seven affiliates are: London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS), founding affiliate 2001; Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), founding affiliate 2001; Bristol Old Vic Theatre School (BOVTS), joined August 2003; Northern School of Contemporary Dance

(NSCD), joined August 2003; Central School of Ballet (CSB), joined August 2004; London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA), joined August 2004; and The Circus Space (TCS), joined August 2004. The CDD aims to add one further affiliate institution to complete the full balance of specialisms. Although the affiliates remain legally and artistically autonomous institutions, the relationship includes full collegial participation by affiliates in the CDD's deliberative processes, decision-making and administration.

5 The affiliates' programmes of study have independent validation agreements at undergraduate and/or postgraduate level with four awarding institutions: RADA with King's College London; BOVTS with the University of the West of England; NSCD with the University of Leeds; and LCDS, CSB, TCS, and LAMDA with the University of Kent.

6 Students are selected by affiliates and registered jointly as students of the CDD and their affiliate school. Students are also registered for the awards of the relevant awarding HEI. In 2004-05, the CDD had some 1,028 students of which 766 were UK, 169 EU and 93 overseas and there were 52 postgraduates (BOVTS and LCDS). The students are distributed across the affiliates as follows: BOVTS, 146; CSB, 98; LAMDA, 180; LCDS, 199; NSCD, 186; RADA, 177; TCS, 42.

7 The self-evaluation document (SED) described how each affiliate has an established record of training students to a professional standard with a very high success rate in the number of students gaining employment in the dance, drama and circus professions. The intensive training is characterised by strong links to the highest levels of professional practice and by the use of industry-standard facilities. In addition to permanent staff, it is common across all affiliates to use visiting teachers and/or part-time teachers from the dance, drama and circus professions. The establishment of the CDD has allowed the most talented students to benefit from this demanding vocational training, enabling access irrespective of background or financial circumstances.

8 The CDD mission is:

'to advance the art forms of dance and drama by preparing students for sustainable careers as artists; the CDD aims to attract the most talented students, who are selected for training irrespective of background, and to sustain its affiliate schools' excellence and leadership in training and research'.

Background information

9 The CDD provided QAA with:

- an institutional SED and appendices
- students' written submission
- a SED for each affiliate school
- Quality Assurance Mapping Exercise (QAME)
- Operating Agreement between the CDD and LAMDA
- the CDD Membership Guidelines
- details of the governance structure, membership and terms of reference of its Academic Board
- Disability Project year 1 report.

10 During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was given ready access to a wide range of the CDD and its affiliates' internal and published documents. These included the CDD's SED update, Draft Action Plan, and the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The team was also provided with a copy of each affiliate's prospectus, student handbook and an array of other working documents and committee minutes.

11 The CDD has had no prior audit or review. However, six of the seven affiliates have been involved in external review procedures relevant to their position in the sector, and three (LCDS, NSCD and RADA) have undergone periodic review by their awarding institutions. No specific monitoring or external review of TCS has occurred, as it was always encompassed in the overall monitoring of the Central School of Speech and Drama's 'Theatre Practice' provision. Reviews have included external accreditation visits by professional bodies:

National Council for Drama Training (BOVTS; LAMDA; RADA) and Council for Dance Education and Training (CSB; LCDS); inspections by Ofsted (CSB), the Adult Learning Inspectorate (LAMDA); Further Education Funding Council (LAMDA: RADA); QAA Quality Review (BOVTS; LCDS); and QAA Subject Review (NSCD). The outcomes of these reviews, without exception, have been very positive and were reported on, with key actions taken in response to the reports.

The audit process

12 QAA conducted a preliminary visit in October 2004 to discuss operational aspects of the audit and received the SED in February 2005.

13 The audit team visited the institution on 11 to 13 May 2005 to explore with the joint principals, senior members of staff and student representatives matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the SED or other documentation provided for the team. During this briefing visit the team identified two affiliates (NSCD and LCDS) to visit during the audit. A programme of meetings was developed, which was agreed with the CDD.

14 The students of the CDD were invited, through their representatives, to submit a separate document, the SWS, expressing views on the student experience at all the affiliates of the CDD, identifying any matters of concern or commendation about the quality of programmes and the standard of awards. In February 2005, the CDD student representatives for each of the respective affiliates submitted a statement to QAA. The team is grateful to the students for preparing this statement to support the audit.

15 The audit visit took place from 13 June and involved further meetings with staff of the CDD. The review team comprised: Dr V Chapman; Ms S Jennett; Mrs P Lowrie; Ms M Wilks, reviewers, and Ms Kathryn Powell, audit secretary. The review was coordinated for QAA by Dr J Ellis, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

16 The SED explained that the current framework for the assurance of academic quality and standards has three strands. The first is based on the agreements between affiliates and their awarding institutions and links to the quality-assurance (QA) frameworks in those institutions. The second is based on the responsibility devolved to affiliates by the CDD for their own QA arrangements. The third strand is the CDD's own QA framework. A quality assurance mapping exercise (QAME) was commissioned by the CDD and completed in 2004. It surveyed the QA systems and practice in place at each affiliate, identified the relationship of each affiliate to its validating body, and produced advice to the CDD on its existing QA arrangements, their fitness for purpose, and any omissions.

17 The CDD is currently developing its responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of programmes delivered by its affiliates. However, the validating/awarding HEIs are accountable for ensuring that students from the CDD affiliates have met the required standards for the awards for which they are registered. The CDD intends to undertake an annual review of the affiliates' QA arrangements.

The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision.

18 On becoming a member of the CDD each affiliate enters into a formal agreement. The operating agreement identifies the CDD's responsibilities and those of the affiliates in relation to QA. Each affiliate is required 'to have in place the necessary quality assurance systems, procedures and mechanisms to ensure delivery of HE learning opportunities and programme outcomes of an appropriate high standard, and which support continuous improvement'. The

CDD's responsibility is 'to receive and approve a statement of the named affiliate's systems, procedures and mechanisms for internal quality assurance, updated annually as necessary'. As each affiliate is required to ensure that all relevant programmes are appropriately validated, its QA arrangements also involve due consideration of the requirements of its separate validating institutions.

19 The CDD requires each affiliate to establish, operate and review its own QA systems. The CDD has established an Academic Board that provides advice and guidance to the affiliates, and the terms of reference of the Academic Board make explicit the features that should be encompassed by the affiliate's quality assurance arrangements. Each affiliate is required to make provision for a committee at institutional level with responsibility for matters relating to quality assurance and the enhancement of learning and teaching, and to identify a member of staff with responsibility for the oversight and the implementation of QA requirements.

20 The CDD Academic Board receives and considers the details of each affiliated institution's QA arrangements and it is intended that the CDD Academic Board will undertake an annual review of the arrangements. In 2002 a quality assurance working group (QAWG) was established to provide support to the Academic Board for the management of its responsibilities for academic quality and standards. Membership of the QAWG comprises representatives with responsibility for QA in each of the affiliates and is chaired by the Principal of NSCD who also leads on the development of the CDD QA systems. The CDD appointed a quality-assurance manager to help with the preparation for audit and the introduction of the QA framework in the CDD and the affiliates.

21 The work of the QAWG has been complemented by the recent formation of the Quality Assurance, Development and Enhancement team (QADE). The QADE has responsibility on behalf of the Academic Board for developing the CDD's QA policies and procedures, for sharing and disseminating best practice and for the effective management of

quality assurance. The QAWG remains as a forum for discussion and sharing of best practice between affiliates and retains responsibility for the implementation of the CDD policies and procedures at affiliate level.

22 To help in developing its quality assurance systems the QAME explored: the QA systems in place in each of the first four affiliates and how these worked in practice; the relationships that existed between affiliates and their validating bodies and the associated QA systems; and the existing CDD QA arrangements and their fitness for purpose. The QAME considered the practice of each affiliate in relation to the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by the QAA (see below paragraphs 51-52). The QAME confirmed the different stages of development in the affiliates. Some affiliates had established QA structures which had been developed in line with the validating institutions' requirements. The QA arrangements in the more recent affiliates were still under development; the proposed practices have been brought forward and considered by the CDD Academic Board. The CDD was sensitive to the particular difficulties faced by some affiliates who had a smaller number of staff and had accepted that an affiliated academic board may subsume the work of a learning and teaching committee (LTC).

23 Affiliates QA arrangements are to be subject to ongoing review by the CDD. For some affiliates membership of the CDD had required them to grow their academic structures and this was accepted by the affiliates as being appropriate to support their work within the CDD. In some instances new affiliates had appointed staff with specific responsibility for quality assurance. The CDD Academic Board recognised that the first priority for new affiliates was the delivery of new programmes of study. However, staff that the audit team met with indicated that there was an enthusiasm to take on board QA requirements and the development of systems to enhance practice.

24 The CDD has developed a draft action plan to take forward the 'future developments' agenda, including: reviewing the academic management structure; revisiting the terms of reference for the Academic Board to make explicit the board's responsibility for academic quality and standards; establishing a CDD quality assurance unit to replace the QADE and to have overall responsibility for the effective management of procedures related to QA and enhancement; establishing effective monitoring mechanisms for both the CDD and affiliate processes/activities; and redefining the role of the QAWG.

25 In the SED the institution reflected on the start-up phase of the management of quality and standards. Due to the continual state of change and continued growth since its formation, the CDD expressed the view that 'there is limited evidence to illustrate the effectiveness of the institutional arrangements for the management of academic quality and standards'. The audit team would agree with this view, but recognise that progress is being made, and the action plan signals the intention to 'establish a culture of continual review to develop and enhance the quality structures and mechanisms'. Having considered the detailed proposals in the action plan, the team would endorse the need for a continued central quality assurance presence in the CDD to facilitate the development of the CDD QA systems and help the affiliates' understanding of purpose and ownership of QA procedures.

26 The audit team acknowledges the CDD's aim to achieve a balance between a centrally derived agenda and collegial activities, and note the progress that has been made through the inclusive and collaborative approach taken in the development of the CDD quality framework. The team considered the inclusive and collaborative approach to the development of the CDD quality framework a feature of good practice. However, the team concluded that the CDD is advised to strengthen and continue to develop the work of its Academic Board, in line with the action plan, to improve the effectiveness of the CDD's monitoring function (see below, paragraphs 36, 50, 70, 78).

The institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards

27 The action plan forms the basis of the CDD's strategy for the enhancement of quality and standards. The audit team considered that the action plan has an ambitious timetable and the CDD will need to carefully prioritise the actions identified. The team formed the view that the action plan was comprehensive and noted the crucial role to be played by the proposed Quality Unit in achieving the outcomes of the action plan.

28 The next three to five years will be a consolidation period, particularly for the new affiliates, as systems become established and the full potential of the confederal arrangements is realised. Already the work of the Curriculum and Artistic Joint Development Group is providing opportunities for staff from the affiliates to take part in joint staff-development seminars and is leading to the identification of opportunities for collaboration between staff in affiliates.

29 The CDD has been able to support collaborative activities between students in the affiliates that have enhanced the student learning experience. Students spoke enthusiastically about the joint residencies and the opportunities of working in affiliates in London that they believed would enhance their employment prospects. Students saw themselves as part of a larger academic body since the formation of the CDD and valued the opportunities for curricular development between the vocationally aligned affiliates. The audit team considered the opportunities for students to participate in collaborative events between affiliates which have improved the student experience and employment prospects was a feature of good practice.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Programme approval

30 On seeking membership of the CDD, potential affiliates had to ensure that their programmes were appropriately validated. This meant that the processes of programme approval

in the start-up phase of the CDD had been those of the awarding institutions. The current arrangements established by the CDD require outline proposals for new programmes to be submitted to the Academic Board for planning approval, to proceed with the development. Affiliates then follow the validation requirements for programme development, submission and consideration by the awarding body. The CDD's Academic Board then considers the detailed proposals following approval of the validating university. The SED identified some difficulties experienced by the Academic Board with the approval process. As a consequence, the QADE had been asked to bring forward proposals that would allow the CDD to approve programmes before validation by an awarding institution.

31 The audit team was able to see a draft policy document outlining revised procedures for programme approval. There would be three sequential stages in the process. The first stage would be planning approval, followed by programme development, then validation/revalidation. The proposed CDD Quality Unit would provide guidance to affiliates throughout the process and the Principal's Management Group (PMG) would make the planning decision. Affiliates would enter into discussions at an early stage with awarding bodies to ascertain the timescale for development and the current validation procedures in place in the institution. The team considered that the revised procedures would address the current difficulties and that the proposed CDD QA unit would have a key role to play in supporting affiliates in the planning and programme development stages.

Annual monitoring

32 The CDD's responsibility for annual monitoring is 'to receive annually a copy of the quality-assurance report produced by each affiliate for its own and/or validating body's internal quality-assurance process, together with responses from the validating body and a note on issues arising'. An annual report is drawn up by each affiliate and considered by the CDD Academic Board.

33 Where an affiliate is required to submit an annual report to its validating body, the same report may be used as the report to the CDD or be used as part of the report. However, the Academic Board had found that there were differences in the scope and format of the reports due to the differing requirements of the awarding bodies, and the reports had not fulfilled the requirements of the CDD which required more information than was contained within the annual programme review.

34 The QADE was asked to develop guidelines for annual monitoring for use by the affiliates as appropriate, and it was intended that the guidelines would be discussed with the awarding institutions before further discussion at the QAWG. The Academic Board is seeking annual reports that are more structured, and which include statistical information consistently presented to provide a CDD perspective.

35 With the growth in the number of affiliates, the CDD is considering how to ensure that the Academic Board can give due consideration to all the reports from affiliates (including those from awarding institutions to affiliates) that it will receive in an annual monitoring cycle. This issue is addressed in the action plan which identifies the need for further work to be undertaken to establish effective monitoring mechanisms for both the CDD and the affiliates. The action plan, also indicated that consideration was being given to the possibility of the Academic Board delegating authority for programme approval, monitoring and review to a learning and teaching committee. Staff indicated to the audit team their willingness to consider developing a system of working between affiliates where, for example, staff from two affiliates could consider reports from other affiliates, so sharing the workload and providing an opportunity for the spreading of good practice.

36 The audit team was made aware that the CDD was sensitive to the relationships that already existed between affiliates and their awarding bodies. In seeking to develop QA arrangements the CDD has entered into dialogue with the awarding institutions to try to create systems that were effective and

acceptable to all parties, and which would not duplicate arrangements already in place or lead to systems that were burdensome for the affiliates. Staff who met the team indicated that they welcomed the guidance given centrally by the CDD, which they considered would lead to improvements in monitoring processes. The team concluded that in order to provide support for the work of the Academic Board an appropriate committee structure should be put in place as soon as possible.

Periodic review

37 The CDD requires that an affiliate's QA systems should include arrangements for in-depth review of each programme of study at regular intervals, normally of not more than six years; and these reviews may be integrated with those undertaken by the affiliate's awarding body.

38 In those affiliates whose relationships with awarding bodies were established before joining the CDD, periodic reviews had been carried out according to the awarding institutions' cycles and procedures. The CDD's Academic Board has considered recent reviews, and it has become aware of the variety of practice across the affiliates and their validating bodies about the requirements for review. The preparation for institutional audit had prompted the CDD to discuss the process of internal/periodic review. It was decided to carry out an information gathering exercise across the first four affiliates. The exercise revealed that the current practices were not comprehensive when examined against the *Code of Practice*, published by QAA, and highlighted differing approaches to the way in which externality was built into the processes.

39 The QADE has developed the CDD guidelines for internal programme review by programme teams. These guidelines were piloted; the indications from the pilot were that the framework had been helpful in preparing the affiliate SED and the process of internal review had enhanced the preparation for periodic review. Within the affiliates there is a range of practice and expertise in annual monitoring and programme/periodic review processes. The CDD has the opportunity to identify best practice and staff indicated to the

audit team that they considered interaffiliate activity and thinking a strength; they were very amenable to working with each other and sharing good practice.

40 The audit team considered that the CDD had provided greater clarity for affiliates on the requirements for annual monitoring and internal programme review. The guidelines for the internal review process had drawn on the *Code of Practice* and their implementation was an indication of the development of the affiliates' QA procedures.

External participation in internal review processes

41 Each of the affiliates has extensive links with external agencies. Practising professionals are consulted about curricular development, artistic vision and professional requirements, and their views inform the delivery, monitoring, review and development of programmes. In most instances, the involvement of external industry professionals is informal but this informality is not considered to make the involvement any less relevant. Some affiliates involve guest professionals in the work of assessment panels (see below, paragraph 55) and the participation of freelance theatre practitioners in internal course reviews.

42 External involvement and feedback is systematic during the awarding bodies' validation process and for the periodic review of programmes. In some cases the awarding bodies involve external advisers in the consideration of the need and appropriateness of the proposed provision. Following discussions by the CDD with one of the awarding bodies, it had been suggested that there might in future be the opportunity for a CDD representative on approval and periodic review panels.

43 The guidance prepared to accompany the information gathering exercise on internal programme review procedures suggested to programme teams that they should consider external participation in the review process at programme level. Various examples of how this external dimension could be achieved were

given, including the involvement of a colleague from another affiliate to act as 'a critical friend', as well as seeking advice from professional organisations and practitioners.

44 The CDD recognises the need to strengthen procedures for formal external participation in programme approval and review. The QAME indicated that the CDD should consider a minimum requirement for the involvement of 'external participants of high calibre and academic/professional credibility in the review processes relating to its programmes both during the development of new programmes and during the review of a programme leading to re-validation'.

45 In meetings with staff, the audit team was made aware of the significant contributions made by external practitioners to the work of the affiliates. There is an enthusiasm in the CDD to continue the excellent working relationships that exist with a wide range of professionals. The team would endorse the steps being taken to engage with field professionals on a more formal basis.

External examiners and their reports

46 The Academic Board of the CDD is 'the only forum where external examiners' reports, and responses to those reports, and actions taken can be monitored. Consequently, this process is an essential element of the CDD's role' in the management of quality and standards'. The SED described how external examiners' reports were carefully considered and acted upon. Affiliates are also responsible for monitoring actions to be taken in response to external examiners' reports. However, the QAME reported some variation across affiliates, with 'possible gaps and difficulties' including: the preparation of external examiners; the contents of external examiner reports; feedback to external examiners on their reports.

47 From the evidence of the QAME, there were clearly some anomalies that were beyond the CDD's control, for example, where differing requirements were in place with awarding bodies for presentation, or administrative oversights had

meant that an affiliate had not received its annual report from the awarding body. The QAME also noted that responsibility for ensuring the affiliates meet the *Code of Practice* precepts on external examining rests with the awarding institution, but that, in practice, affiliates take on some of these responsibilities. It concludes that 'affiliates need to be clear about their own roles and responsibilities for the preparation of external examiners and of how this complements and supports the role and responsibilities of their validating bodies'.

48 The SED reported that there were no major concerns from reports seen to date; recommendations were being carefully considered and where agreed, acted upon. Affiliates are expected to include the external examiners' reports and responses in their annual reports to the CDD. The annual reports of both affiliates visited by the audit team met this requirement, although in different ways: one affiliate attached both reports and responses, while the other attached the reports and gave responses in the annual report text. The team noted that the external examiner in the latter case could have to wait for a response until the annual programme report to the CDD was written. Responses were also followed through in a summary action plan in one affiliate's report, where the other did not have a separate action plan.

49 The external examiners' reports seen by audit team confirmed the standards of awards, with very positive comments about student achievement. They also confirmed the appropriateness in general of assessment processes.

50 In general, the audit team concluded that the CDD's use of external examiner reports and responses was a positive contribution to the maintenance of academic standards in affiliates. However, some issues do remain, including: the nature of the three way relationship between the awarding institution, the affiliate and the CDD; and the role of the CDD's Academic Board in monitoring external examiners reports. The team would encourage the CDD to continue with its plans to provide 'more effective monitoring mechanisms for both the CDD and affiliate

processes, by scrutinising papers presented to Academic Board from affiliates'. In particular, the CDD should pay close attention to how actions are identified and reported on in response to external examiners' advice.

External reference points

51 In its initial approach to establishing appropriate quality assurance arrangements with its affiliates the audit team noted that the CDD had used the *Code of Practice* as the basis for its QAME. It had also established a Disability Project specifically to deal with the requirements of legislation and the relevant part of the *Code* on students with disabilities.

52 The SED described how the QAME gave rise to 'considerable work at affiliate level' on improving their ability to meet the *Code of Practice*. The QAWG then facilitated ongoing discussions between affiliates and provided the opportunity to share expertise, and also identified gaps and areas for improvement in affiliates. The SED commented that the 'developmental approach (to the QAME) had led to a sharing of good practice' and allowed affiliates to develop policies and procedures that were appropriate to their size and structure. The QAME had revealed some strengths in individual affiliates for example, in admissions procedures, and in the support for inducting external examiners and new staff into the use of assessment strategies, as well as some areas in need of attention, such as placement learning.

53 The SED noted that two areas of the *Code of Practice* had resulted in policy developments: provision for academic and non-academic appeals, and programme approval, monitoring and review (see above, paragraphs 30-31). A case study on the appeals policy development supplied for the audit team indicated that progress on appeals had been slower than anticipated because it was realised that work was also needed on non-academic appeals and complaints. The SED indicated that a policy paper was under consideration proposing that the CDD should play a role in appeals against the outcome of affiliate disciplinary procedures, and against decisions for complaints or

grievances. However, the team heard that subsequently a problem had been identified, in that the role of the CDD representative nominated for an appeal panel would include establishing whether or not the affiliate had followed proper procedures, and it was not clear what would happen in the eventuality of an affiliate being found not to have followed correct procedure. The team learnt that the CDD had not yet finalised the CDD appeals policy but were working towards it.

54 As membership of the CDD requires all provision to be validated by an awarding body, assessment requirements are currently generally developed in line with the awarding body's regulations, and therefore vary between affiliates. The SED described the support for inducting external examiners and new staff into the nature and purpose of assessment strategies, although in some cases these were informal rather than formalised into written guidance. The QAME had noted inconsistencies of assessment practice but did not identify any particular role for the CDD in relation to assessment. Affiliate principals confirmed to the audit team that there was a substantial culture shift to be achieved for the more systematic use of assessment criteria and keeping of records, but that they considered they were already moving forward positively, in a harmonising rather than a homogenising, way. Despite this approach, the team considered it important that the CDD ensures its role in the enhancement of teaching and learning includes the sharing of good practice in this vital area for the maintenance of academic standards. While each affiliate has to work within the assessment arrangements and regulations of its awarding body, it was nevertheless possible to envisage a role for the CDD in ensuring the publication and consistent implementation by affiliates of clear criteria for the marking and grading of assessments across all affiliates. The team considered this was important not only for consistency and fairness, but also to promote the further development of students' learning.

55 The audit team also discussed with the CDD staff how affiliates use external professional assessors to assess and mark students' work,

particularly in relation to work in technique and performance, a practice described in the SED as 'a distinctive characteristic' and, indeed, a strength of the work of the CDD affiliates. They heard how the need for appropriate induction and advice on marking practices for visiting professionals and placement hosts had been identified through the QAME. The team learnt that one of the affiliates had developed a mentors' handbook which the team considered may be of value to other affiliates.

56 The audit team concluded that the CDD was generally moving forward appropriately in meeting the expectations of the *Code of Practice*. The team would encourage the CDD to continue to clarify the distinction between those parts of the *Code* where it was necessary to establish a role for the CDD in a particular policy or procedure, and those parts where validating institutions might be involved, where it might be sufficient for the CDD in its present stage of development to scrutinise affiliates' policies and/or procedures to ensure alignment with the *Code*, and to encourage the sharing and adoption of good practice. In either case, there would seem to be a continuing role for the CDD in monitoring/auditing the effectiveness of affiliates' implementation of agreed action plans in relation to the *Code*.

57 The SED acknowledged that at present there is variability across affiliates in their regard for and/or use of programme specifications and subject benchmark statements. The SED noted that at present, programmes offered by the CDD affiliates have to comply with their awarding bodies approach to using the framework, and are regularly subject to ongoing review. The SED also acknowledged some tension between the requirements of the Academic Infrastructure and meeting the demands of the professions for which they receive premium HEFCE funding. The SED noted that 'links with professionals provide other important external reference points, as does the accreditation of programmes, where appropriate, by professional bodies'.

58 The SED observed that referencing subject benchmark statements has proved problematic

within the vocational/technical training context provided by the affiliates. Also, the audit team noted from affiliates' own SEDs that practices varied in making programme specifications available to students, with one affiliate including them 'in a more accessible form' in student handbooks, while another affiliate decided not to include them either in programme or staff handbooks but to make them available in the library. Another affiliate noted that programme specifications only worked as a source of information alongside module outlines.

59 At present, the CDD has no plans to address the style or presentation of programme specifications, as these are essentially a matter for affiliates and their awarding bodies. The QAWG has recently recommended that the CDD should take the lead in approaching the various subject communities about addressing the limitations of the current subject benchmark statements, which, the SED noted, could also provide an opportunity for the CDD to gain a shared institutional perspective of the extent to which the subject benchmarks are embedded within affiliates' programme specifications. The audit team considered this one way forward, and noted the intention in the Draft Action Plan to 'identify the processes through which matters relating to the QAA Academic Infrastructure are monitored and discussed'. On balance, the team concluded that the CDD was generally engaging appropriately with the elements of the Academic Infrastructure but that there was more work to be done in this area.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

60 Students are represented on academic committees and boards at the CDD and affiliate level. The CDD Academic Board includes two student representatives from the affiliates, one from the dance schools and one from the drama schools. The representative is the president of either the Students' Union or another student representative body.

61 The CDD requires that affiliates make provision for 'arrangements for obtaining the

views of students, for considering such views and for informing students of the outcomes of such consideration'. Affiliates have responded appropriately to this requirement and several have made amendments to the constitutions of their academic boards and programme review committees to ensure that students are now represented. One affiliate has decided that there should be representation from both undergraduate and postgraduate students at academic boards, while another includes student representation on both its Academic Board and LTC.

62 Students whom the audit team met, reported that that they are clear about their responsibilities and that, although no formal training is provided, they are guided through agendas and their views are actively sought. The team saw some evidence to suggest that affiliates found it difficult to recruit student representatives and that attendance at institution-level committees could be patchy. However, where students were in attendance, the team found evidence that efforts were made to actively seek their views. For example, student representatives at one affiliate were asked to consult with their student groups on the policy on concessions and extensions.

63 In addition to representation on academic committees, all affiliates have adopted a form of staff-student consultative committee (SSCC), where students are able to meet with staff to discuss housekeeping and organisational issues, and sometimes academic matters. In the majority of the affiliates these committees include members of the senior management team giving students direct access to decision makers. Students confirmed that these meetings worked particularly well and that actions often flowed quickly from them. The audit team noted the detailed action plans and status reports emanating from the monthly communications committee meetings held in one affiliate. The team considered the SSCCs in affiliates, especially where they provide access to senior management and where regular progress reports are provided to students, to be a feature of good practice.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

64 The affiliates visited by the audit team have both recently reviewed the effectiveness of student feedback methods and revised their student surveys and questionnaires as a result. Both affiliates ensure that student feedback preserves anonymity and informs their annual reports on modules and programmes at all levels, which are received by the academic boards of the affiliate and the CDD. The team saw detailed responses to the issues raised by students in the annual reports and learnt that these were discussed with students. The team also learnt that 'reading mornings' had been introduced in one affiliate at student request and that a long-standing issue about the transparency of a particular assessment method was nearing resolution. In general, students reported that they are generally well informed and know how issues are being dealt with.

65 The SED provided no evaluation of the effectiveness of the methods deployed by the affiliates, and, as yet, there has been no comparison of student feedback systems. Staff whom the audit team met, acknowledged that a review of the methods in use was a 'job yet to be done' and the team encourages the CDD to undertake such an evaluation as part of its agenda for improving quality management systems.

66 The audit team understood that the vocational nature of the CDD's courses means that strong relationships with the professions are regarded as very important. One of the criteria for affiliated status require that an institution seeking to join the CDD must have structured links with the professional world and be able to demonstrate a strong graduate employment record, with not less than 75 per cent of graduates working in dance/drama professional performances within three years of graduating. The team learnt that the CDD draft guidelines on internal periodic review highlight external involvement in curricular design and suggest that programme teams should seek advice from a professional organisation or professional practitioner (see above, paragraph 41). The team concluded that the formal and

informal methods by which the CDD affiliates involve the professions in the design and delivery of their vocational training programmes, do much to enhance the employability of the CDD graduates.

Progression and completion statistics

67 Affiliates are responsible for monitoring progression and achievement within their own QA arrangements, which they report on in the annual monitoring report to the CDD. The CDD has a responsibility for ensuring an appropriate balance of over and under-recruitment and for monitoring retention of students across affiliates. All movements in student numbers, including withdrawals and intermissions are reported to the CDD.

68 Annual reports from affiliates are required to include statistical data for each programme of study on student progression and achievement, an analysis of this data and any action proposed in the light of this analysis. However, as many of these reports are also used for reporting to the awarding institutions, it was clear that data was currently variable in its presentation and content, although all had some form of progression, completion and qualifications data. The audit team saw examples of annual reports, and the CDD's response. The team noted it was not possible to compare statistical data, but it was possible to miss potential problems, for example, the retention rate at the end of first year in one affiliate's programme, which had shown a 24 per cent loss for various reasons at the end of the first year. This was not noted in the Academic Board minutes, despite the CDD's role in keeping the balance of retention of student numbers overall, although it was reported in the affiliate's annual report to the CDD, with an analysis of reasons for withdrawal.

69 Draft CDD guidelines are now being developed for annual monitoring, which include a greater degree of specificity in the data requirements than required previously. The CDD confirmed that it had not as yet undertaken any comparative analysis of data across the affiliates, and, as yet, only four affiliates

have been required to present annual reports. The CDD were aware that they needed to establish comparable data sets in the first instance, before they could undertake any analysis. The audit team noted the intention in the draft Action Plan 'to improve the collation and use of statistical data by standardising presentation of statistical information presented through annual monitoring of programmes, with guidelines for analysis of statistical data', and to undertake 'cross-affiliate analysis of statistical information presented in affiliates' annual reports'.

70 The audit team noted that the QADE has responsibilities for considering models of reporting 'to prevent duplication and overlap', which might provide a way forward. They also endorsed the CDD's stated intention to improve the underpinning to the annual monitoring report by harmonising the presentation of statistical data across affiliates 'to ensure a more systematic approach', and would encourage the CDD to move towards a capacity for cross-affiliate analysis in the medium term. This would not only support the CDD's role in maintaining an overview of the balance of student retention but would also provide insight into possible areas for improvement across affiliates.

Assurance of quality of teaching staff, appointment, appraisal and reward

71 The affiliates joined the CDD with established staff teams and individual traditions of managing employment arrangements. They have retained sole responsibility for the appointment of teaching staff and the CDD's involvement in employment issues is mainly strategic. The use of professionals is a common and regular feature of the taught provision across all affiliates. Typically, they employ permanent staff with a professional background, and in some schools there is a high proportion of part-time staff supplemented by many visiting tutors, choreographers, designers and producers, usually on short-term or project contracts.

72 Systems for the appointment, induction, mentoring and appraisal of staff vary markedly

across the affiliates. The CDD's human resources strategy emphasises that it has been articulated in the context of a newly formed, uniquely structured organisation. It is actively seeking to help affiliates to develop further and formally articulate their own human resources strategies in order to ensure parity across the affiliates.

73 Some affiliates have well-established systems for the appointment and induction of staff, as well as observation of teaching as part of induction, though this can be informal. One affiliate also has well-documented systems for line management and annual appraisal. Recruitment of staff at one affiliate is covered by The Place Recruitment Procedures and has a comprehensive induction programme that normally includes observation of teaching by the designated line manager; an appraisal system is under development in consultation with all staff which will be implemented during the coming academic year.

74 While the CDD has no overarching policy in place for appointments, induction or mentoring of affiliates' staff as yet, it is aware of the need to ensure the formalisation of procedures across affiliates to secure equitable opportunities for their staff. Affiliate staff noted that employment systems such as job evaluation and appraisal have already become more transparent since joining the CDD. In addition, the staff of the affiliates met by the team were clear about the distinction in roles between the CDD and the affiliates, and highlighted the collegial process of sharing good practice. Several of the affiliates' principals considered that membership of the CDD had afforded much greater security of staffing levels and/or extra staffing which was enhancing the student experience.

Assurance of quality of teaching through staff support and development

75 The CDD's central staffing level is small; the overwhelming majority of staff within the CDD are employees of the affiliates and not the direct employees of the CDD. This means that the CDD's direct employer functions are limited and mainly strategic as most staff development is organised and delivered through the affiliates.

76 The CDD is clear about its expressed commitment to strengthening frameworks for professional development and vocationally relevant research activities to support the delivery of high-quality learning and teaching within a conservatoire environment. In order to ensure the CDD remains at the cutting edge of developments in vocational training in dance, drama and circus arts, the organisation has committed itself to identifying the needs of staff who were recruited for their professional experience as artists, and to supporting their transition into teaching. Equally importantly, it aims to ensure that all staff remain in touch with, and are informed by professional practice in dance, drama and/or circus arts.

77 In developing the CDD's human resource strategy, the CDD and the affiliates have taken account of the sector-wide initiatives to encourage HE teaching staff to continue their academic/vocational development and, where appropriate, gain appropriate teaching qualifications; six teachers were registered for teaching qualifications for the period 2004-05 including a PG Diploma in Dance Education and Training.

78 A supporting professional standards scheme and peer observation scheme were introduced in 2004, and systems for implementation and evaluation of these are now in development. Prioritised targets have been identified within these schemes and funding has been allocated to support their achievement. The schemes allow for buying-out staff time, to allow for engagement in development activities and providing/paying for training to develop skills in complementary disciplines or techniques. Funding has also been made available to deliver interaffiliate staff seminars and/or training opportunities and to develop staff skills in supporting students with dyslexia and other impairments. It is intended that progress achieved in implementing the schemes will be reported through the Principals Management Group, but the CDD is advised to address the responsibilities of its Academic Board for ensuring that affiliates have appropriate staff-development strategies and for monitoring their effectiveness.

79 The audit team noted the ways in which the CDD has facilitated the opportunities for staff to refresh and extend their professional practice. All the staff met by the team acknowledged the fact that the establishment of the CDD, and resultant increased funding, has enhanced the range and number of opportunities for staff across all affiliates to develop their professional and educational practice. Membership of the CDD has yielded exciting opportunities for cross-discipline observation, though this is not yet linked to formalised systems of observation in relation to pedagogy. Both students as well as staff have enjoyed multidisciplinary performance events. The team considered that the ways in which the CDD has facilitated the opportunities for staff to refresh and extend their professional practice was a feature of good practice.

80 All affiliates' staff were unanimous in their appreciation of the disability awareness training delivered within affiliates but organised centrally through HEFCE project funding. The audit team noted the effectiveness of the disability project in raising disability awareness in staff at all levels within the affiliates, and concluded that the project was a feature of good practice.

81 It is intended to increase the number of staff undertaking teaching qualifications each year and involve staff from all affiliates. The audit team considered that the CDD may find it helpful to enlist the assistance of those already on the PG Certificate in Learning and Teaching in HE programmes to help promote these to other staff across all affiliates.

Learning support resources

82 The SED provided little information on the provision of learning-support resources, saying that these are provided and managed locally. However, there is a CDD requirement that affiliates have industry-standard facilities and that they meet the general HEFCE criteria for affiliated status.

83 The audit team, from its reading of student handbooks, the SWS and meetings with staff, formed the view that there is

considerable variability in the provision of library and information technology (IT) resources. Some staff explained that this, in part, reflected the content of the curriculum, but others were of the view that a CDD overview of some aspects, such as library resources, could bring advantages for students. During the visit, the team learnt that the libraries of the London-based affiliates were open to students from each of those affiliates, although the students told the team that they were not aware of this. Recent reviews and inspections of three affiliates have included recommendations on learning resources, and the SED provided details of how affiliates were responding to these recommendations. The SWS and students from some affiliates whom the team met expressed some concerns, particularly about IT resources and support, many however acknowledged that resourcing levels had improved since joining the CDD.

84 The SED stated that the effectiveness of learning resources is monitored through annual reporting and periodic review and the audit team found some evidence that this was occurring at affiliate level. From its reading of the CDD Academic Board minutes of the meeting, which considered affiliates' annual reports, the team was unable to confirm that the CDD took an overview of learning resources, and agreed with staff who considered that the monitoring of this aspect of provision could be strengthened.

85 Documentation received by the audit team setting out the CDD's requirements for affiliate QA systems says that affiliates' learning and teaching strategies should include a remit for learning resources, however, the team could find no evidence of this. Equally, the CDD's own learning and teaching strategy makes no reference to learning resources and the team could find no other strategic overview of learning resources either across or within affiliates (see below, paragraph 98). The team advises the CDD to ensure that affiliates develop learning and teaching strategies that include a remit for learning resources.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

86 There is no overarching CDD policy on academic guidance or tutorial provision, however, affiliates are required to have arrangements for student support and guidance. This expectation is articulated in the Academic Board's requirements of affiliates' QA systems. The SED described a 'typical' model of support as having three aspects: dedicated tutorial time as part of validated provision; formal tutorial systems that deliver academic and professional support, and designated personal tutors with responsibility for monitoring progress and providing individual feedback. The audit team was able to confirm that this level of support was available in each affiliate.

87 In addition, the SED reported that close monitoring of students' progress is undertaken by designated staff meetings or through regular committees, and that students experiencing difficulties are identified and support needs discussed. Staff confirmed that this was the case, with staff from one affiliate reporting that they had recently adopted this good practice upon joining the CDD.

88 Tutors tend to have an open-door policy and informal access is also possible. The SWS and majority of students whom the audit team met praised the accessibility and availability of tutors, saying that often staff were available for additional feedback at the end of classes. The CDD assign mentors to all students, however, some of the students met by the team reported that it was sometimes difficult, when on placement, to meet with their mentor.

89 The CDD's learning and teaching strategy contains an objective 'to enhance tutorial systems to support each student throughout their training and preparation for employment'. The QAWG and QADE have been taking this forward through the Progress Files initiative. Existing practice in some of the affiliates is believed to align closely with the Guidelines for HE Progress Files, and work is well advanced to share good practice across affiliates and ensure that each complies fully with the guidelines by September 2005.

90 The SED reported that extensive extra support is available in keeping with the expectations of high-level vocational training. This includes one-to-one and group coaching, classes in Pilates and Alexander Technique, instruction in body-conditioning and help for students recovering from injury, including access to physiotherapists and osteopaths. Students who met the audit team clearly appreciate this provision, but at both affiliates visited, students reported concerns about how their academic progress is supported while they are injured and the way in which their rehabilitation is managed. This is perceived by students to be a contentious issue with no ready resolution. However, the CDD does plan to introduce a Performance Enhancement and Rehabilitation Unit to try and address this issue.

91 The QAME showed that a variety of procedures have been in place for the management of student appeals, complaints and discipline and that there was substantial room for improvement in the clarity, completeness and accessibility of these procedures (see above, paragraph 53). The team found that progress has been made and it is anticipated that affiliates' revised policies and procedures will have been approved through their own internal procedures by Summer 2005. The CDD's own policy requires further work to be undertaken, to detail arrangements for monitoring and review and to decide the consequences for an affiliate failing to follow its procedures correctly.

92 On the basis of its discussions with staff and students and its reading of the documentation, including the SWS, the audit team concluded that arrangements for academic support and guidance are extensive, valued by students and are mostly working effectively. However, the CDD may also wish to consider how the academic progress of students with injuries, and upon rehabilitation, might be sustained.

Personal support and guidance

93 There are different arrangements for the management of personal support at each affiliate. At one affiliate the Director of Student

Services is a member of the SMT and chairs the student progress review committees. All affiliates offer counselling and financial support, but the provision of other services varies between affiliates. English-language support for international students is available in two of the affiliates.

94 The CDD has been conducting a three-year disability project funded by HEFCE since April 2003. A disability project manager has been responsible for leading this work, reporting to the senior management teams at affiliate level and also to the PMG and the Academic Board. Audit work in the affiliates has been scheduled during 2004 and 2005 that has resulted in local action plans based on the Project Manager's findings. Tangible results, so far include adjustments to auditioning procedures; training in the administration of DSA applications; the inclusion of information on disclosure in the affiliates' prospectuses, and the development of personal learning plans to support students with disabilities. Staff at all levels described the significance of the project for their practice as educators, and welcomed its positive impact on the accessibility of their courses.

95 The audit team agreed with the CDD's view, expressed in the SED, that the project has been a good example of the CDD taking a strong lead at institutional level; the team considered that most of this work would not have been possible without the benefit of the CDD umbrella. The team noted that the project is to end in April 2006 and heard that a member of staff in each affiliate would be designated as holding responsibility for disability issues from then onwards.

96 All affiliates are committed to providing learner support for students with specific learning needs. The disability project has revealed that dyslexic students are the largest impairment group, and that there are implications for teaching and learning in the performance aspects of courses as well as in the written components. The disability project revealed that at first only one affiliate had a member of staff specifically trained to deal with dyslexic students. Another used the services of its

validating university. In others, experienced but not specifically trained members of staff provided support. One affiliate employs a freelance specialist member of staff to provide weekly tutorials to dyslexic students. Appropriate support software has been purchased through the disability project. From its reading of the documentation and meetings with staff, the audit team concluded that enhancements had been made to learner support, but that affiliates are, nonetheless, at different stages in the development of their provision.

97 The vocational nature of the education and training offered by the CDD means that careers education information and guidance is usually integrated into the curriculum rather than offered as a service by a specialist department. Several of the affiliates include employment-orientated and professional practice modules as part of the final-year programme, and some offer placement opportunities. Students told the audit team that they would like to see careers activities earlier in their courses, not just in the final year. Professional practitioners deliver much of the teaching and contact with the profession occurs in a variety of other ways. The QAME observed that arrangements are secure when part of the validated provision but less so when provided as an 'extra' service unless part of a documented policy. The team encourages affiliates to consider developing such policies, as recommended in the QAME.

98 There are currently no clear arrangements for the regular monitoring of student support services, although the audit team observed examples of annual reports where this did occur. The team also noted that the CDD's draft guidelines for annual monitoring include a requirement to consider student support and guidance. Documentation received by the team setting out the CDD's requirements for affiliate QA systems says that affiliates' learning and teaching strategies should encompass student support and guidance; however, the team could find no evidence of this. The team concluded that students would benefit from a more strategic approach to the development

and management of student-support services across all affiliates and recommends that the CDD implements its requirement for affiliates to have learning and teaching strategies that include a remit for student support and guidance.

Section 3: The audit investigations: published information

The students' experience of published information and other information available to them

99 Each affiliate produces an undergraduate and postgraduate (where applicable) prospectus, website and student handbook. The CDD is still developing its own brand identity, and all prospectuses published by affiliates now carry a short statement about the CDD, although each affiliate has its own approach to the style and presentation of this information in line with its own unique character. All prospectuses include information about the programmes of study, entry requirements and auditions. Key features of the programme are highlighted in all affiliates' prospectuses.

100 Some affiliates communicate programme-specific information through programme or course handbooks that include details of module learning outcomes, content and assessment. The SED acknowledged considerable variation in the completeness of the information provided for students across affiliates, particularly about relevant policies and procedures. This matter is under consideration by the QAWG and the QADE, with a view to sharing good practice.

101 The QAME, scrutinised all affiliates' handbooks and highlighted some inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the information produced for students, particularly where that information was contained in different handbooks (for example, appeals). Subsequently, one affiliate, in line with the recommendation of the QAME, has produced a student handbook that includes all information about students' rights, regulations and responsibilities.

102 The audit team explored the accuracy and utility of published information in their meetings with students. The students confirmed the accuracy of the prospectuses, and the helpfulness of the student handbooks and that they were broadly content with the range and reliability of the information they had received.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

103 The SED outlined the steps taken by the CDD to address the requirements of the published HEFCE 02/15, *Information on Quality and Standards in Higher Education*. Responsibility for overseeing compliance with the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) has rested with the QAWG who have been working to decide which information is held centrally by the CDD.

104 The TQI site includes institutional documents on learning and teaching; involving employers and meeting their needs, and a commentary about the statistics gathered through document Higher Education Statistics Agency returns. The information presented does not yet include a commentary on external examiner reports. Currently, quantitative data is shown for only two of the affiliates, although 2003-04 data will be recorded for four affiliates.

105 The CDD have identified two priorities in relation to their published information. First, 'To improve the accuracy and clarity of information available to students, applicants and others and, where relevant, to ensure compliance with external agencies and to agree CDD policy and procedures'; and second, 'To complete the posting of TQI information and to complete the development of the CDD website'.

106 The uniqueness of the CDD's confederal structure and the range of validating universities has had an effect on the speed with which the required information can be gathered. For example, all institutional reports have been published except for one about the appointment of external examiners; this needs to be discussed and agreed with colleagues at the validating universities before publishing. Extra complexity is created by the various

approaches adopted by the different universities to the CDD's publishing data on their validated programmes. The CDD intends to produce a commentary on external examiners' reports that will explain these arrangements.

107 As a new HEI with a unique federal structure, the CDD is aware of its responsibilities and has clearly mapped the progress achieved to date for published information. In general, the audit team is satisfied that the CDD is engaging constructively with the recommendations of HEFCE's *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance 03/51*, and is moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities in this area.

Findings

Findings of the audit

108 An institutional audit of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (CDD) was undertaken during the period 13-15 June 2005. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on how the CDD meets its responsibilities for quality and standards. This section of the report of the audit summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and recommendations to the CDD for enhancing current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

109 Since its formation, the CDD has been working towards meeting its responsibilities for the management of quality and standards. The CDD, in seeking to establish its own quality assurance (QA) arrangements and to ensure the effectiveness of affiliates' procedures, has been sensitive to the existing relationships with the awarding bodies. The Quality Assurance Mapping Exercise (QAME) of mapping practice against the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, gave a clear indication of where practice in the CDD and the affiliates needs further development. The CDD is beginning to work with the awarding institutions in the consideration of their QA systems alongside those of the CDD and the affiliates, to ensure there is no duplication or extra QA burden for the affiliates. The additional number of affiliates has brought recognition of the need to strengthen and refine systems, in particular, the work of the Academic Board in relation to monitoring and review.

110 After the process of 'forming' the CDD, there has emerged the need to clarify roles and responsibilities. Quality assurance is seen as essential and beneficial by the affiliates, although there is a continuing need to achieve balance between central, affiliate and awarding bodies' requirements. The CDD centrally is taking steps to develop its quality procedures, and has issued

guidance to affiliates on annual monitoring and internal programme review. In line with the CDD's Action Plan the audit team consider that there is a need to consolidate the central quality assurance function to support quality assurance in the CDD and in individual affiliates.

111 The audit team found that the work undertaken by the CDD in preparation for audit, in particular the QAME, has raised awareness of QA issues. The team considered the draft action plan formulated from the future developments section of the self-evaluation document (SED) to be comprehensive and ambitious. The implementation of the Draft Action Plan would be a significant achievement, and the outcomes would enhance the procedures for quality assurance in the CDD and the affiliates.

112 Students are represented on academic committees and boards at the CDD and affiliate level. The audit team found some evidence that securing student representation at institution level committees was difficult, but concluded, that where students were present they were actively encouraged to participate. All affiliates have staff-student consultative committees, where students are able to meet with senior staff to discuss housekeeping and organisational issues and sometimes academic matters. The team found examples of detailed action plans and progress reports arising from these meetings, and was confident that the communications loop was effectively closed in the majority of cases. The team regards the establishment and operation of the staff-student consultative committees as good practice.

113 The SED recorded that affiliates use different mechanisms to obtain student feedback, including surveys, interviews and discussions. Students provided examples of how their views had been considered and had brought about changes to assessment and the timetable. The SED acknowledged that, although good practice had been shared, a formal review of the methods used had yet to take place, therefore the audit team encourages the CDD to undertake such an evaluation as part of its quality agenda for action.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

114 External examiners are recommended by affiliates, but are approved, appointed by, and report to awarding institutions. The CDD expects affiliates to include external examiners reports and responses to the reports in their annual reports to the CDD. At present, the Academic Board is the only forum where these external examiners' reports and the affiliates' responses can be monitored, and the CDD had recognised this was not effective enough at present. The audit team saw developmental plans that indicated intentions to strengthen the monitoring function. In the view of the team, this would support closer scrutiny of some of the externals' comments, and would benefit the CDD in providing a more rigorous underpinning to the overview presented at Academic Board.

115 The external examiners' reports seen by the audit team from the two affiliates visited confirmed the standards of awards, with very positive comments about the generally high levels of student achievement. They also confirmed the appropriateness in general of assessment processes, although there were some comments about improvements that could be made in encouraging greater transparency for students and staff about how criteria were used in the marking processes.

116 In general, the audit team concluded that the CDD's use of external examiner reports and responses was a positive contribution to the maintenance of academic standards in affiliates, with opportunities for improvement being identified in the QAME. However, the CDD's identified role in monitoring student enrolment, progress and achievement would also be improved by a more consistent presentation of data across affiliates in their annual reports, and, in due course, a more comparative analysis.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

117 Learning support resources are provided locally and resourcing levels have increased for

affiliates since joining the CDD, although there was some concern expressed about the availability of, and support for, information technology resources. The audit team understood that the CDD had not, at this stage, taken a strategic view of learning resources, its learning and teaching strategy being focussed on other aspects of provision, but it did learn that the libraries of the London based affiliates are now open to students from each of those affiliates. The effectiveness of learning resources is monitored through annual reporting and periodic review, and the team found evidence of this at affiliate level. However the team was unable to find any CDD level consideration of learning resources and agreed with staff who told the team that they believed that this aspect of provision could be monitored more effectively. The team advises the CDD to take a strategic overview by implementing its requirement for affiliates to have learning and teaching strategies that include a remit for learning resources.

118 The CDD does not have an overarching policy on academic guidance, but requires each affiliate to ensure that students have ready access to academic advice and support. In addition, progress review committees identify students with any particular difficulties and discuss their support needs. Work is well advanced to implement Progress Files by September 2005. The audit team considered that arrangements for academic support and guidance are extensive and mostly working effectively. However, the CDD may wish to consider further how the academic progress of students with injuries are supported.

119 The Disability Project Higher Education Funding Council for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (HEFCE) funded by has had considerable impact across the CDD leading, among other things, to improvements in the processes for disclosure, the administration of Disabled Students Allowance applications and the development of personal learning plans to support students with disabilities. The audit team heard that a designated member of staff within each affiliate would sustain the work of

this project upon completion. This project would not have been possible without the benefit of the CDD umbrella, and the team confirmed that it is a good example of the CDD taking a strong lead at institutional level.

120 All affiliates have a commitment to the provision of learner support for students with specific learning needs, and the audit team found evidence of improvements in the earlier affiliates to embed this provision more soundly. However, provision tends to be less well established in the newer affiliates. Careers education information and guidance is integrated into the curriculum rather than being offered by a separate service. The team concluded that opportunities for students to engage with their professional environments are extensive and valuable, but would encourage affiliates to strengthen their arrangements by documenting their policies as recommended in the QAME.

121 The audit team learnt that affiliates' learning and teaching strategies are intended to include student support and guidance, however the team could find no evidence of this. The team concluded that students would benefit from a more strategic approach to the development and management of student support services across all affiliates, and recommends that the CDD implements its requirement for affiliates to have learning and teaching strategies that include a remit for student support and guidance.

The use made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure

122 The CDD has used the *Code of Practice* as a basis for its QAME except for the section relating to students with disabilities; this section of the *Code* has been considered separately through the HEFCE-funded Disability Project. The QAME gave rise to 'considerable work at affiliate level' on improving their ability to meet the expectations of the *Code*. The QAME report concluded that 'each affiliate is at a very different stage of development'. The report recommended that each affiliate draw up an action plan (to be agreed with the CDD). The

Quality Assurance Working Group (QAWG) has since facilitated continuing discussions between affiliates and provided the opportunity to share expertise, and also identified gaps and areas for improvement in all affiliates. The CDD staff confirmed that there was a great deal more work to be done, but they had confidence that the developmental and collegial approach used in the QAME and the disability project had been beneficial in raising awareness and engaging affiliates appropriately.

123 The audit team noted that each affiliate had to work within the assessment arrangements and regulations of its awarding body. It was, nevertheless, possible to envisage a role for the CDD in ensuring the publication and consistent implementation of clear criteria for the marking and grading of assessments across all affiliates. The team concluded from the evidence seen from the case study on the draft appeals and complaints procedure, the disabilities project, and the draft guidelines for annual monitoring, that the CDD was generally moving forward appropriately towards meeting the expectations of the *Code of Practice*.

124 The audit team would encourage the CDD to continue to clarify the distinction between those parts of the *Code of practice* where it was necessary to establish a role for CDD, and those parts where validating institutions might be involved. In either case, there would seem to be a continuing role for the CDD in monitoring the effectiveness of affiliates' implementation of agreed action plans in relation to the *Code*.

125 For the use of other aspects of the Academic Infrastructure, the SED acknowledged that at present there is variability across affiliates in their use of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, and in their regard for and/or use of programme specifications and subject benchmark statements. The audit team welcomed the intention of the CDD to 'identify the processes through which matters relating to the Academic Infrastructure are monitored and discussed', and concluded that the CDD was generally moving forward and engaging appropriately with the elements of the Academic Infrastructure.

The utility of the SED as an illustration of the institution's capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and limitations, and to act on these to enhance quality and standards

126 The audit team found the CDD's SED to be a useful self-critical document that drew heavily on the practices of all affiliates and has given rise to a prioritised action plan. Its development was underpinned by the QAME and the SEDs received from each affiliate. Affiliates agreed that the process of engaging in the self-critical evaluative process of writing their own SED was highly beneficial in addressing quality issues.

Commentary on the Institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards

127 There was a substantial section in the SED on 'Future Developments' in which the institution has identified priorities for immediate or ongoing action or for development and implementation in the next three to five years. The areas identified include academic management, academic policy development, monitoring and reporting and enhancement of learning and teaching.

128 The CDD have taken this section as the basis of an action plan, and drawn up a schedule of measures to be taken to enhance the quality and standards of its provision. When implemented, the action plan will lead to significant improvements/developments in the QA systems of the emerging institution.

129 The formation of the CDD, the sense of belonging and the opportunities for interaffiliate debate has been welcomed by the staff of the affiliates. The setting up of the Curriculum and Artistic Joint Development Group and the provision of joint staff-development seminars offer valuable opportunities for cross-affiliate enhancement. Also, the peer observation opportunities which encourage staff to visit and observe colleagues in other affiliates provide an opportunity to enhance teaching quality.

130 The student learning experience will be further enriched by the opportunities presented by being part of a larger prestigious institution. The CDD intends to continue to support students to take part in interaffiliate activities and to identify joint projects which will widen the students' experience. With these intentions the institution has a range of initiatives which will enhance the quality and standards of its provision. The team noted the enthusiasm and commitment of the CDD staff and students to work towards the achievement of the aims of the CDD.

Reliability of information

131 The SED outlined the steps taken by the CDD to address the requirements of the published HEFCE document 03/51 *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance* (HEFCE 03/51). Responsibility for overseeing compliance with the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) has rested with the QAWG, who have been working to decide which information is held centrally.

132 The TQI (CDD) site includes institutional documents on learning and teaching; involving employers and meeting their needs, and a commentary about the statistics gathered through the Higher Education Statistics Agency returns. The information presented does not yet include a commentary on external examiner reports. Currently, quantitative data is shown for only two of the affiliates although 2003-04 data will be recorded for four affiliates.

133 As a new higher education institutions with a unique confederal structure, the CDD is aware of its responsibilities and has clearly mapped the progress achieved to date for published information. In general, the audit team is satisfied that the CDD is engaging constructively with the recommendations of *HEFCE 03/51*, and is moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities in this area.

Features of good practice

134 The following features of good practice were noted:

- i. the inclusive and collaborative approach to the development of the CDD quality framework (paragraph 26)
- ii. the opportunities for students to participate in collaborative events between affiliates which have improved the student experience and employment prospects (paragraph 29)
- iii. the staff-student consultative committees in affiliates, especially where they provide access to senior management and where regular progress reports are provided to students (paragraph 63)
- iv. the ways in which the CDD has facilitated the opportunities for staff to refresh and extend their professional practice (paragraph 79)
- v. the effectiveness of the disability project in raising disability awareness in staff at all levels within the affiliates (paragraph 80).

Recommendations for action by the institution

135 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- i. strengthen and continue to develop the work of its Academic Board, in line with the action plan, to improve the effectiveness of the CDD's monitoring function (paragraphs 25; 26; 36; 50; 70)
- ii. address the responsibility of its Academic Board for ensuring that affiliates have appropriate staff development strategies and for monitoring their effectiveness (paragraph 78)
- iii. ensure that affiliates develop learning and teaching strategies that include a remit for learning resources and student support and guidance, as well as a pedagogic focus to peer observation of teaching (paragraphs 85; 98).

Appendix

The Conservatoire of Dance and Drama's response to the audit report

To be faced with an institutional audit when establishing a new higher education institution presented a challenge which was compounded by the newness of Conservatoire affiliates to the institution, to higher education and to the public sector. We are therefore gratified by the overall judgment of the audit team that CDD is moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities for the current and likely future management of the quality of academic programmes and the academic standards of the awards of its affiliate schools. We are also pleased that the team recognised the steps taken by CDD to respond constructively to the new teaching quality information requirements.

The preparation for audit provided an opportunity for substantial reflection within CDD. We were delighted that the audit team concurred with our self-evaluation and in their report supported our action plan for enhancing the quality assurance framework established within CDD. We were also pleased with the many positive comments in the report and the choice of five areas of good practice highlighted by the team. The audit team has confirmed our judgment that a fully collaborative approach to the development of CDD's quality framework was the only way of making it work within a confederal structure. As a second example, we are also pleased that the disability project was singled out for praise.

Since the audit visit, the quality assurance action plan has been formally approved and we expect to achieve the structural adjustments during the autumn term of 2005. The audit team advised us to strengthen and develop the work of the Academic Board. Work is underway with a new structure which includes establishing a Learning and Teaching Committee which is to meet six times during the current academic year. A separate affiliates' quality assurance forum has also been included in the meeting plan. Both committees commence their work in October 2005.

The team advised us to strengthen strategies for learning and teaching and staff development and to ensure that affiliate strategies included provision for learning resources. This has been noted. Affiliates' learning and teaching strategies will be revised or developed during the year in conjunction with a review of CDD's strategy. The report confirms the crucial role to be played by a proposed quality unit and early discussions regarding staffing, structure and function of such a unit have already taken place.

Finally, we would like to commend the team on its sensitive and perceptive approach to the audit and the openness with which they engaged with a unique situation. We feel that the audit has been a positive experience, which has brought our affiliates closer together and helped to develop a sense of shared values.

