Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of The Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts Ltd

November 2017

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at The Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts Ltd. The review took place from 22-23 November 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Elisabeth Cook
- Mrs Sala Khulumula (Student Reviewer)
- Mr Anthony Turjansky.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provision and to make judgements as to whether or not academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)[1] setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
    - the setting and maintenance of academic standards
    - the quality of student learning opportunities
    - the information provided about higher education provision
    - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

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

---

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

Key findings

Judgements

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding body **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice**.

- The Academy's inclusive and wide-ranging approach to the support and development of its staff and the culture of dialogue that this promotes in the support of teaching and learning (Expectation B3).
- The opportunities provided for collaboration that enrich the students' experience of learning and nurture their self-reliance as emerging professional practitioners (Expectation B3).
- The extensive range of opportunities that exists for students to discuss their learning experiences with staff and the culture of openness that this encourages (Expectation B4).
- The effective contribution of panel tutorials to students' formative development as confident and self-critical learners (Expectation B6).

Recommendations

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

By April 2018:

- ensure that committee agendas and minutes record explicit consideration of programme monitoring reports and programme improvement plans (Expectation B8)
- rigorously implement procedures for updating information to ensure continued accuracy of information (Information).

Affirmations

The QAA review team identified no affirmations.

About the provider

The Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts Ltd (the Academy) was founded in 1911 initially as a stage school; however, since this time it has developed its provision and now delivers secondary, further and higher education. The Academy aims to be a small, specialist provider of professional/vocational training and learning, predicated upon the conservatoire model.

The BA (Honours) Acting was validated in 1994 in partnership with Middlesex University as its degree-awarding body and since 2011 The University of East London has been the awarding body, with the programme being successfully revalidated in 2015. An addition to the higher education portfolio was made in autumn 2017 with the successful validation of a BA (Honours) Musical Theatre and a Certificate of Higher Education Introduction to Acting.

The BA (Honours) Acting was successfully considered by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in 2014 under the Review for Specific Course Designation, and subsequently in 2015 and 2016 through the annual monitoring process. The programme has been judged to meet all UK expectations in respect of quality and standards in higher education.

The programme is accredited by PSRB (or equivalent) bodies in the sector. Drama UK, the previous PSRB which granted re-accreditation of the programme in November 2014 until 2019, closed in the autumn of 2016 and the accreditation role is in the process of transferring to the Council for Dance Education and Training (CDET).

The Diploma in Professional Dance and the Diploma in Professional Musical Theatre, offered at Level 6, are validated by Trinity College London, accredited by CDET and subject to the regulatory processes of OfSTED, whose most recent inspection, as reported in January 2016, found the provision to be outstanding.

The Academy's stated mission is:

"Our aim is to help talented and diverse students of all ages and multiple levels of education to harness their dedication to become excellent and creative performing artists, with the pure passion and understanding to reach within themselves to affect and move audiences and to become versatile and valuable contributors within the performance industries."

The Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts operates across three sites. The BA (Honours) Acting is delivered from the Avondale site in Clapham North and the Diplomas are delivered at The Barbican site. The Avondale site comprises: theatre spaces, studio spaces, library and IT facilities, and administration and teaching offices.

The BA programme aims to enrol 30 students per year in order to begin the three-year programme in September. The Level 6 diplomas are based on enrolment of approximately 35 students per year.

Since the last review there have been two key changes. There has been a change of Principal - Samantha Newton replaced Anne Sheward in January 2017; and, there have been new staff appointments to the Senior Management Team at Head Office.

The Academy has identified current key challenges in relation to managing new appointments to the leadership team; centralising quality management and oversight; responding to changes to education funding; validating and implementing two new programmes and managing the limitations of facilities and physical resources.

The Academy's last engagement with QAA was an October 2015 monitoring visit which reported that the Academy had made 'commendable progress with implementing the action

plan' from the October 2014 Review for Specific Course Designation (RSCD); and that the areas of good practice continue to be developed. The RSCD identified six items of good practice, including, for example, engagement with external stakeholders and the mentoring of new students. It identified seven recommendations, three of which were 'advisable' and related to formalising internal moderation, ensuring external examiner reports were discussed and made available to students; and four of which were 'desirable,' namely, to continue to develop the virtual learning environment; to plan and record staff development; to develop pedagogical staff development; and to introduce a system of version control for documentation.

The review team further explored the effectiveness of the actions which have been undertaken and have concluded that the areas previously identified as good practice remain so, and have continued to be strengthened. In addition, the review team have noted the work undertaken to date to develop the recommendations.

Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

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

Expectation (A1): In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) are met by:

- **positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications**
- **awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes**

b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics

c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework

d) consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards*

Findings

1.1   The Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts (the Academy) delivers its higher education provision in partnership with The University of East London (UEL). The Academy has offered a BA (Hons) Acting since 2011. A BA (Hons) Musical Theatre and a Certificate of Higher Education Introduction to Acting have both recently been validated and will commence in September 2018.

1.2   UEL, as the awarding body, retains responsibility for academic standards. The Academy follows UEL's academic frameworks and regulations and uses a range of external reference points to secure threshold academic standards. UEL validation processes scrutinise programme learning outcomes and require these to have been mapped against FHEQ qualification descriptors and against the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. The appropriate award of credit is determined through consideration of module size and delivery. The Academy's approach to securing and maintaining the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body would allow this Expectation to be met.

1.3   The review team tested the effectiveness of these arrangements by scrutinising a range of documentation and meeting with programme staff. Subject Benchmark Statements are mapped against programme modules to show where the engagement with each statement is found and the Academy uses FHEQ qualification descriptors as the basis for defining its own interpretation and practice of these. UEL validation reports confirm appropriate scrutiny in these areas. In addition, the Academy has mapped the expectations of Chapter A1 to its current policy and processes. External examiner reports confirm that the standards set are appropriate for the level of qualification.

1.4   Programme staff speak knowledgeably about the FHEQ, the principles of training established by the Federation of Drama Schools (FDS), the requirements of their new PSRB (the Council for Dance Education and Training: CDET) and the implications of this range of reference points for programme content and design. Module specifications set out the FHEQ level and level-appropriate learning outcomes for students and the Staff Handbook outlines level descriptors in user-friendly language.

1.5   The review team concludes that the processes followed by the Academy, working in conjunction with its validating partner, to secure and maintain academic standards are established and effective. This Expectation is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.1): In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards*

Findings

1.6   The University and Academy have a collaborative agreement that sets out the responsibilities of both parties in ensuring effective arrangements for academic governance. The award of academic credit and qualifications is governed by UEL regulations and set out in their Manual of General Regulations. UEL is responsible for ensuring, through validation, that academic standards are met, are appropriately benchmarked and that the Academy's policies and processes align with the University's regulations. It is also responsible for ensuring, through annual monitoring and periodic review processes, that standards are sustained and enhanced. Divergences from UEL regulations are permitted but must be documented and approved at validation. These are then incorporated into the assessment regulations for the BA (Hons) Acting programme.

1.7   The Academy is responsible for ensuring programmes are designed in accordance with partner regulations and external reference points, and that delivery and assessment enable appropriate standards to be maintained. The Academy Quality Board has oversight of quality and standards across the whole of the Academy's provision and the Programme Quality Board considers the standards set and achieved by students on the BA (Hons) Acting. The principles underpinning assessment within higher education are outlined in the Academy's Quality Manual and Staff Handbook. Marking and moderation processes are conducted through internal Assessment Boards which feed into Academy Pre-Progression and university Progression and Award Boards. Awards of credit, qualification, certificates and transcripts are made available by UEL. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.8   In considering this Expectation the review team examined documentation relating to validations, assessment regulations, the Academy's Quality Manual, committee minutes, external examiner reports and programme documents. The team also held meetings with academic staff and students.

1.9   The validation report for the BA (Hons) Acting programme confirms that UEL regulatory standards and quality criteria have been met but includes, as a condition, further clarification with regard to the Academy's proposed divergences in attendance, academic misconduct and extenuation policies. These variations have been documented in detail and subsequently carried over into the recent validation of the BA (Hons) Musical Theatre and Certificate of HE Introduction to Acting. The Assessment Regulations for the BA (Hons) Acting programme are comprehensive and are included in the Student Handbook.

1.10   Individual module specifications contain clear, specific assessment criteria and marking guidelines which define the standards of the BA (Hons) Acting programme. Staff confirmed that assessment processes are monitored and managed at programme level and this is evident in the minutes of both the Programme Quality Board and the Programme Board. The UEL Progression Board fulfils its role appropriately, receiving assessment results, dealing with reassessment and extenuation and confirming awards. External examiner reports confirm that the delivery and management of the award is in line with regulations.

1.11   In order to verify the routine monitoring of standards through the Academy's deliberative committee structure, as described in the self-evaluation and the Quality Manual, the review team scrutinised the minutes of the Academy Quality Board (AQB) and the Programme Quality Board (PQB). Consideration of standards by PQB, while not explicitly minuted, is implicit in its regular review of the programme's REP and QIP. Oversight of standards within the higher education portfolio is less evident in the minutes of AQB which, as staff acknowledged, had met irregularly over the previous two academic years, due to changes in senior management. AQB members confirmed to the review team that a regular cycle of meetings for this committee had recently been re-established. This, in conjunction with clear minutes of AQB and PQB meetings, will enable more effective monitoring and management of standards by the Academy through its deliberative committee structure and links to the recommendation in B8.

1.12   Notwithstanding the need for AQB to strengthen its oversight of standards within the Academy's higher education portfolio, the review team concludes that the academic and regulatory framework established in collaboration with UEL is securely implemented. This Expectation is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards*

Findings

1.13   Responsibility for maintaining a definitive record for the BA programme in the form of programme specification and module specifications is a shared responsibility between the Academy and UEL with the awarding body's framework regulations prescribing any changes and revisions to the programme, which ultimately pass through the awarding body's deliberative school and quality committees. The programme specification is mapped to both academic and vocational/professional standards that include the Subject Benchmark Statements, the FHEQ, the FDS and the Council for Dance Education and Training (CDET). These meet the Expectation of the Quality Code for producing definitive records and using the templates of the Academy's awarding body. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.14   The review team evaluated the effectiveness of these arrangements by examining the programme specification, the Student Handbook, the Academy's and UEL's websites, and partnership agreements. The team also held meetings with senior and teaching staff, including awarding body representatives and students.

1.15   The current programme specification for the BA (Hons) Acting was approved as part of the programme's revalidation in 2015-16. Information contained in the programme specification comprises final and intermediate (exit) awards; professional body accreditation; mode and location of delivery; entry requirements, English language requirements and Accreditation of Experiential Learning (AEL)/Accreditation of Certificated Learning (ACL); programme aims and structure (modules and credits); programme learning outcomes, differentiated by knowledge and skills; and a summary of teaching and assessment methods. Draft programme specifications for the BA (Hons) Musical Theatre and Cert HE Introduction to Acting contain similar content, including information on additional course costs which have also been added to the revised BA (Hons) Acting programme specification. Programme specifications are made available to students online, therefore they can be viewed by students prior to attending auditions. They are also available via the Student Handbook.

1.16   Overall, the evidence reviewed demonstrates that the arrangements are effective in practice. The Academy adheres to its awarding body's procedures for the approval and modification of programme and module specifications which provide full and relevant information for its awards. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.17   The Academy engages in processes for quality assurance, including programme design and approval that satisfy the requirements of its various regulatory, awarding and accrediting bodies. These include the Expectations of the Quality Code, specifically the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statement; the quality framework and regulations of UEL as awarding body; and the professional standards of CDET (accrediting body) and Federation of Drama Schools hallmarks. Programme approval processes are described in the provider's Higher Education Quality Manual and designed to set standards that are equivalent to, or exceed, threshold standards, and comparable to similar provision of other providers. Programme design seeks to integrate academic and practical (vocational) outcomes and standards. Approval is managed via UEL's validation process in which programme documentation is reviewed by an academic panel containing external representation. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.18   In testing the effectiveness of processes for setting standards in programme design and approval the review team considered a range of documentation including the provider's self-evaluation document and student submission; Academy and UEL procedural documents; programme and module documentation; validation reports; and the minutes of Academy committees and other meetings. The team also met with senior and teaching staff, including an awarding body representative.

1.19   The BA (Hons) Acting programme has been in operation since 1994 and been validated by UEL since 2011 under the terms of a collaborative partnership agreement (Memorandum of Cooperation). The programme was revalidated in 2015-16, in part to align with UEL's revised modular credit framework. Curriculum design ensures that programme learning outcomes and standards are aligned with the relevant FHEQ qualification level descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statement for Dance, Drama and Performance in respect of subject knowledge and skills. Revalidation reviewed the programme's alignment with UEL regulations as well as the relevant national academic reference points. Evidence for validation included programme and module specifications and the 'mapping' of modules to FHEQ level descriptors and the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement.

1.20   At the time of the review the Academy had recently taken two new programmes through validation - the BA (Hons) Musical Theatre, and Certificate of Higher Education Introduction to Acting - in which similar scrutiny was applied.

1.21   The review team found that the Academy implements the processes established by its awarding body for programme design and approval, which are supported by engagement with the relevant academic reference points, as well as with professional standards, and include appropriate externality. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.2): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:

- **the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment**
- **both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.**

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.22   Operating within the terms of its partnership with UEL, the Academy is responsible for assessment design, consistent with the awarding body's assessment policies and regulations and with due account of the Quality Code, specifically the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Module specifications map assessment tasks to intended learning outcomes to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes is demonstrated, and progression between levels clearly articulated. Marking decisions are internally and externally moderated, and UEL's Progression Board awards credit and qualifications in line with the successful demonstration of learning outcomes. This approach enables the Expectation to be met.

1.23   In testing processes for the design and assessment of learning outcomes, the review team considered a range of documentation, including the provider's self-evaluation document and student submission; Academy and UEL procedural documents and regulations; module specifications, assessment briefs, marking criteria and coursework feedback sheets; minutes of committees and assessment boards; and programme webpages. The team also met with senior and teaching staff, and with students.

1.24   The Higher Education Quality Manual, which was reviewed and updated during 2017, contains a statement on Assessment and Standards which serves as the Academy's higher education assessment strategy and explicitly links assessment with the demonstration of intended learning outcomes. Programme and module specifications, which contain learning outcomes defined by FHEQ level and mapped to specific assessment tasks, are approved by UEL as part of its validation and modification procedures. The response to the 2015 UEL revalidation report demonstrates the Academy's thoughtful approach to how academic and skills-based learning outcomes are articulated.

1.25   Students receive a Student Handbook, based on the validated programme specification, accompanied by module specifications and marking criteria, while schemes of work align teaching activities with learning outcomes.

1.26   Staff receive guidance and instruction on marking practice through using assessment materials (module specifications and assessment criteria) and accessing briefing sessions. Staff induction includes a specific focus on assessment policy and practice which is reinforced by information contained in a Staff Handbook. Freelance teachers receive a briefing on assessment practice from their Head of Department.

1.27   Assessment feedback sheets record students' performance against defined grading criteria. Internal moderation of assessment is conducted by the programme team, with external moderation by a UEL-appointed external examiner whose reports confirm that assessment methods are appropriate to the demonstration of learning outcomes. An annual UEL Progression Board confirms students' results by which the award of credit and

qualifications is confirmed. All modules are required to be passed (following re-assessment) before students may progress or graduate, however compensation is available within grade thresholds and credit limits set out in the programme regulations.

1.28   The review team found that the Academy follows the assessment principles and regulations of its awarding body, UEL. Assessments are designed to test the achievement of intended learning outcomes as defined within validated module specifications, and staff are supported to develop learning outcomes and use marking criteria which are also shared with students. External examiner reports confirm the appropriateness and comparability of the standards being achieved by students, and that processes for assessment and the award of credit are sound and conducted fairly. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.3): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.29   The Academy engages in processes for quality assurance, including programme monitoring and review that satisfy the requirements of its various regulatory, awarding and accrediting bodies. These include the Expectations of the Quality Code, specifically the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statement; UEL's quality framework and regulations (as awarding body); and the professional standards of CDET (accrediting body) and Federation of Drama Schools hallmarks. Operating within the terms of its partnership agreement with UEL, the Academy follows the requirements of UEL's annual Review and Enhancement Process, which evaluates the continuing appropriateness of standards through the consideration of student achievement and progression data and an external examiner's report. A separate five-yearly review and revalidation process, managed by UEL, involves academic panel consideration of an evaluative commentary and programme documentation with independent subject externality. This approach enables the Expectation to be met.

1.30   In testing the appropriateness of the monitoring and review processes for the maintenance of academic standards, the review team considered a range of documentation including the provider's self-evaluation document and student submission; academic quality monitoring procedures; monitoring reports and action plans; committee minutes; and the VLE. The team also met with senior and teaching staff, including awarding body representatives.

1.31   UEL programme monitoring and review processes, and their associated reports, were found to evidence the continuing appropriateness of the Academy's higher education provision in relation to meeting national threshold standards, and its comparability with similar provision of other providers. Reports also confirm the maintenance of output standards, based on effective collaboration between the Academy and its awarding body. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.4): In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:

- **UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved**
- **the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.**

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.32   The Academy makes full use of independent expertise to ensure that a range of external reference points informs the design, delivery and standards of its academic provision. The University's validation procedures include external subject specialists and UEL academics from outside the proposing school to encourage contributions from beyond the subject area. Programmes, once validated, are further supported by a designated link tutor and by UEL's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team. The Academy's higher education provision currently includes one external examiner. Links with practitioners working within the industry are extensive. A further layer of externality is provided through professional body accreditation: the Council for Dance Education Training (CDET) has recently replaced Drama UK as the PSRB for the BA (Hons) Acting. The FDS, to which the Academy subscribes, has also recently established core principles to define the essential characteristics of training in drama schools. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.33   The review team tested the effectiveness of the processes for the use of independent external expertise by scrutinising a range of documents, including validation and external examiner reports and the Quality Manual. The team also held meetings with senior and academic staff.

1.34   Validation reports confirm the use of external panel members who verify that threshold academic standards are set in accordance with national reference points. The external examiner appointed by UEL confirms that students' achievements are in line with national standards. In 2014 Drama UK re-accredited the BA (Hons) Acting programme for a five-year period, and CDET granted reaccreditation for four years for provision that included the Trinity diploma, now revalidated by UEL as the BA (Hons) Musical Theatre.

1.35   The Academy has extensive contacts within the industry and has used these to inform curriculum design and development in the recently-validated programmes. It has sought to formalise procedures for gathering feedback from employers and industry professionals through formal round table forums but has encountered understandable scheduling challenges. Of the several alternative methods explored, the informal gathering of feedback has proved the most effective.

1.36   The Academy makes full use of external and independent expertise in setting and maintaining academic standards. The review team therefore concludes that this Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.38   All seven of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated level of risk is low in all areas. There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this area.

1.39   The responsibility for much of this judgement area lies not with the Academy but with the awarding body; and the Academy collaborates well with its awarding body. The Academy works effectively to ensure that the necessary procedures to assure the maintenance of academic standards are carried out.

1.40   The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered at the provider on behalf of its degree-awarding body **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval*

Findings

2.1 The Academy engages in processes for quality assurance, including programme design and approval that satisfy the requirements of its various regulatory, awarding and accrediting bodies. These include the Expectations of the Quality Code, specifically the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statement; UEL's quality framework and regulations (as awarding body); and the professional standards of CDET (accrediting body) and Federation of Drama Schools hallmarks. Programme design and approval set standards that are equivalent to, or exceed, national threshold standards and are comparable with those of similar programmes of other providers.

2.2 The Academy follows the programme approval process of its awarding body, UEL, based on production of programme documentation for review by an academic panel containing external subject representation. Programme approval is managed separately from institutional collaborative partner approval which ensures that academic and business decisions are kept separate. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.3 In testing the effectiveness of processes for programme design and approval, the review team considered a range of documentation including the provider's self-evaluation document and student submission; Academy and UEL procedural documents; programme and module documentation; validation and accreditation reports; and the minutes of Academy committees and other meetings. The team also met with senior and teaching staff, including awarding body representatives, and students.

2.4 The BA (Hons) Acting programme has been in operation since 1994 and been validated by UEL of East London since 2011 under the terms of a collaborative partnership agreement (Memorandum of Cooperation) which is reviewed every three years. The undergraduate honours degree provides progression for Level 3 drama students. The programme was revalidated by UEL in 2015-16, in part to align with the awarding body's revised modular credit framework. Covered within the revalidation were: the programme's continued alignment with UEL regulations and quality procedures, and with national academic reference points including the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement; programme content and structure, including target and intermediate exit awards, modules and credits; programme aims and learning outcomes; teaching, learning and assessment strategies; student academic guidance and pastoral care; staffing and learning resources, including staff development; programme management, including academic liaison between the Academy and UEL; and programme information. A tour of Academy facilities was provided for the validation panel. Validation documentation comprised programme and module specifications, supported by a critical commentary and draft Student Handbook and the mapping of modules to FHEQ level descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statement. Panel conditions were required to be met before final approval was confirmed, while recommendations were responded to through an agreed action plan.

2.5   At the time of the review the Academy had recently taken two new programmes through UEL's validation process: the BA (Hons) Musical Theatre, developed out of an established Level 6 Professional Diploma in Musical Theatre, validated by Trinity College London; and a Certificate of Higher Education Introduction to Acting, based on an existing Foundation Acting course. Validation of both programmes was completed successfully in September 2017 for delivery from September 2018.

2.6   Initial planning proposals were submitted for UEL approval which considered their academic and business rationales, proposed awards and structures (modules) and resource requirements, alongside evidence of the Academy's quality record, based on previous UEL monitoring activities and external reviews, including by QAA. Following initial approval by UEL, programme development was undertaken by a core team of Academy staff led by the Head of Studies. Curriculum design ensured that academic standards and programme learning outcomes aligned with the relevant FHEQ qualification level descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statement in respect of subject knowledge and skills.

2.7   Programmes (modules) were designed and developed through consultation with students and endorsement by industry via focus group panels and surveys. Graduate alumni were also consulted through the 'Italia Continued' Facebook group. Tutors met by the review team described the effective integration of academic and vocational outcomes through learners' critical engagement with practice. Programme content, including assessment, was also mapped to UEL's Skills Curriculum.

2.8   Development of the new programmes had identified a need for more comprehensive and proactive support for staff who were less familiar with higher education quality frameworks and expectations. The Higher Education Quality Manual, which describes the principles and outcomes of programme design and approval, was reviewed and updated during 2017 while mapping was also undertaken to Expectation B1 of the Quality Code in relation to programme design, development and approval. While noting the progress made in developing an internal process for programme design and approval, the Academy acknowledges the need to systematise this further in support of any future higher education developments.

2.9   Following curriculum development, a UEL-convened planning meeting considered draft programme documentation and identified any issues that required particular consideration at validation. Programmes that have not yet completed formal approval may be promoted and recruited to on a 'subject-to-validation' basis. Programme approval culminated in a validation event and report, with conditions and recommendations documented and an action plan reviewed as part of UEL's programme monitoring process. Validation discussions covered the programmes' rationales, aims and objectives; academic benchmarking and compliance with UEL regulations; programme content (modules) and structures; teaching, learning and assessment strategies; staffing and learning resources; student support; and programme information and management.

2.10   Professional accreditation of Academy programmes, including the BA (Hons) Acting, has recently transferred to CDET in succession to the previous accrediting body, Drama UK. Re-accreditation, which is due to take place in 2019, will involve panel consideration of programme documentation and a two-day visit.

2.11   The review team found that the Academy follows the programme approval process of its awarding body, UEL. Programme design and approval are supported by relevant engagement with academic benchmarks and professional standards, and consultation with students and employer-stakeholders. Programme approval also makes use of appropriate academic subject externality. While the provider has identified scope to further systematise its internal programme design and approval processes, the current approach is

fundamentally sound and meets UEL's requirements. On this basis the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

Expectation (B2): Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*

Findings

2.12   The Academy is responsible for the recruitment of students, while student selection and admissions is a shared responsibility with UEL according to the entry requirements articulated within programme specifications. The Academy's recruitment and selection processes are outlined within the Higher Education Quality Manual, with the application process accessible online to potential students; these are further augmented by the Audition Code of Practice and underpinned by a recruitment strategy. Information for application is found online, at workshops, through question and answer sessions run by staff, current students and recent graduates and via outreach recruitment activities to target a wider range of potential students, including those from under-represented groups. There is one intake a year starting in September.

2.13   All applications are made via UCAS and the application process requires attendance at an audition interview, with international students being required to submit a DVD for first round auditions in agreement with the Programme Administrator. Students with no formal qualifications are considered under the Accreditation of Experiential Learning (AEL) or Accreditation of Certificated Learning (ACL) process that can only be considered at Level 4; these students have to also produce a portfolio of written work, if requested, and undertake an audition and an interview with the Programme Director and module leaders.

2.14   Entry to the programme is determined by an audition assessment. Students are sent an audition invitation and given a programme handbook in order to prepare. They then undergo a three-stage audition with final auditions conducted by the Head of Department of the programme on a panel. Applicants are notified in writing of the outcome of the audition within two or three weeks, or 14 days and an offer is sent as a separate email.

2.15   Students are given a new starter pack to complete the enrolment process. They also receive an accommodation pack to help them plan and prepare for when they arrive. Students then undergo a one week induction process where they are introduced to the programme, timetable, facilities, staff and students; and have a half day induction at UEL. Students are also made aware of relevant processes and support systems in place; they also receive a Student Handbook and are given the opportunity to give feedback on the process. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.16   The review team tested the operation and effectiveness of recruitment, selection and admission procedures by considering information contained within the Academy's self-evaluation and student video submission; procedural documents; programme specification; minutes from reports; and information produced for applicants and current students on the Academy's website and VLE. The team also met with senior and teaching staff, and students, including alumni.

2.17   Procedures for recruitment, selection and admissions work effectively in practice. The Academy's new strategic direction means that it will reduce Diploma courses in favour of the BA programme which has better access to funding. The Academy aims to keep its

small cohort sizes which it considers fundamental to the selection of suitable candidates and maximising employment prospects. This is reflected in the UEL REP report 2016-2017 where it states that student engagement, retention and the robustness of student performance is due to recruitment decisions that lead to good completion data. All students, including those with ACL and AEL, start at Level 4 as an entry point, and they are all interviewed and auditioned in order to assess their suitability, maturity and preparedness to undertake an intensive programme of study.

2.18   The students the review team met with stated that they found the admissions process easy to understand, as they had access to accurate information from the Academy's website about the audition, funding and contents of the programme. They also had adequate time to prepare for their audition and were equipped with an outline of what to expect on the day. They were guided through the day with feedback given at each stage of the audition. Students felt less pressure and reassured by the involvement of a current student in the audition process, who they identified with and with whom they could build a connection and direct questions to. Students involved in the audition process confirmed that they are trained for their role and that they are given an opportunity to offer their opinion on the applicants that is taken into consideration by the interview panel. The students also confirmed that they had received written communication on the audition outcomes and a student package that had helped them prepare for the start of their programme. The Academy and students both confirmed that students are encouraged to disclose learning needs during the application process, at auditions and during their student journey in order to proactively identify support required to allow adjustments to be made, and examples of this were given.

2.19   During their one week induction, students are provided with the relevant handbooks, policies and procedures and signposted to relevant departments, and are also provided with a separate induction by UEL. Students are introduced to the student family groups; a mentoring system whereby new students are mentored by second years, and the process is fully managed by students who use social media as their main communication format. Students noted that these supportive relationships are continued throughout their student journey and into their professional lives; the review team therefore identified that this supported the good practice identified in Expectation B4 in relation to the extensive range of opportunities that exists for students to discuss their learning experiences with staff and the culture of openness that this encourages.

2.20   The review team found that the Academy operates appropriate and robust processes for the recruitment, selection and admission of students. Entry requirements and admissions procedures are published on the programme's website and are used when shortlisting applicants for audition. Written guidance on the audition process, including selection criteria is available to both applicants and staff. The Academy has extended its recruitment activity to include students from outside its traditional catchment area. Communication of selection decisions is accompanied by a process for handling complaints and appeals from unsuccessful applicants. Successful applicants receive pre-entry guidance and support prior to enrolment and induction. While accreditation of prior learning is restricted to Level 4 entry and rarely used, the review team saw evidence of formal consideration of one application by the programme team.

2.21   On the basis of this evidence, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.22   The Academy's Quality Manual outlines the aims, objectives and principles of learning and teaching alongside the processes for the realisation, management and evaluation of these. Learning and teaching is structured around the hallmarks and core principles set by the FDS, emphasising learning experiences that are practical, intensive and demanding and that creatively enable diverse approaches.

2.23   In addition to a small core of full-time staff, the Academy employs a wide range of experienced freelance practitioners who reflect professional standards in their teaching and practice. The nature of the training on the BA programme encourages a collaborative approach to learning and teaching, and the student performances that are an integral outcome of this training are attended by a range of Academy staff. This helps them to place their individual sessions within a wider programme context.

2.24   Staff receive a comprehensive handbook. Departmental heads provide induction for new staff and all freelancers undertake teaching-based appraisals that include an element of staff development. Support for staff encourages freelance tutors in their academic practice and permanent staff with opportunities to maintain their professional practice. It thus encompasses a broad range of activities beyond scheduled sessions and the annual staff forum, including support for higher qualifications, support in kind and flexible absences allied to a coherent deputising system. The whole is underpinned by a staff development policy and an annual report on staff development is presented to the Programme Quality Board. A range of data is collated in the annual monitoring report to UEL, including student surveys and reviews that generate information in relation to learning and teaching.

2.25   The key learning resource for students is studio space and access to theatrical resources (in-house technicians, set designers, and costumes) of professional standard. The VLE has undergone some development with priorities focussing on online submission of work, facilitating digital communication and access to learning support materials. Students receive formal inductions from both the Academy and UEL, a study skills tutorial and a range of materials including a starter pack, Student Handbook, programme and module specifications. The Academy operates a system of year tutors and peer mentors and advice is available informally from the Academy's Head of Student Services or through UEL's Student Services.

2.26   The Code of Conduct in the Student Handbook articulates the expectations and responsibilities of students and the capacity for robust self-scrutiny, viewed as a key professional behaviour, is embedded into programme delivery. The Academy has comprehensive systems for feedback including an open-door policy and regular panel tutorials for formal formative feedback. Learning opportunities are designed to ensure equality of opportunity and additional support is provided for students with specific learning difficulties. These extensive arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.27   The review team tested the effectiveness of the Academy's approaches to the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices through discussions with staff and

students, and through scrutiny of a range of documents.

2.28   The 2014 QAA review identified the desirability of more detailed planning and recording of staff development activities. As a result, the BA (Hons) Acting programme Quality Improvement Plan now contains a section on staff development and annual monitoring to UEL includes a description and evaluation of staff development activities which the Academy completes through a separate staff development report. Priorities for institution-led staff development include understanding dyslexia and mental health issues, encouraging digital literacy, developing assessment practice and facilitating the professional development of junior staff. Individual staff are encouraged in a wider range of activities, linked to their teaching appraisals, which are considered below. Senior staff confirm that staff development is an integral feature of annual monitoring and the minutes of the Programme Quality Board show regular consideration of staff development matters.

2.29   Arrangements for the appraisal of Academy staff encourage a proactive approach to, and open dialogue about, professional development. Appraisal is allied to observation of teaching, a format introduced in 2014. Departmental heads observe their colleagues' teaching and seek feedback from students involved in the class. Appraiser and appraisee meet subsequent to this observation to share their feedback and complete the report which records personal and professional development activity and goals. The reports seen by the review team are detailed in their documentation of the different stages of this process. Freelance staff confirm that their appraisals include opportunities to identify personal development and outline several examples of the developmental opportunities available: support for higher qualifications, specialist training in dyslexia, participating in directing workshops and attending conferences.

2.30   The Academy has taken an imaginative and proactive approach to observation and appraisal, which includes contributions from students, and the resulting opportunities for professional development are varied and flexible. The review team therefore considers the Academy's inclusive and wide-ranging approach to the support and development of its staff, and the culture of dialogue that this promotes in the support of teaching and learning, to be **good practice**.

2.31   Sharing practice through performance is an essential feature of the Academy's approach: staff work closely together and learn from each other. The nature of the training is holistic and the separate disciplines of acting, voice and movement, each with their head of department, naturally forge strong connections. As a result, students are used to working with teams of practitioners and this serves as a good model for their own collaborative practice, most strongly exemplified in the Dissertation Module. This has evolved in recent years into a fully practical project that enables students to collaborate in cross-year groups, encourages final-year students to explore new skills such as writing and directing and offers students in their first and second years' freedom to experiment in a non-assessed performance context. Staff confirm that this module is distinctive to the Academy and unusual within their sector; students speak very positively about how their dissertation projects push them beyond acting to become 'theatre makers' and self-reliant as emerging professionals. Second year students have the opportunity to prepare for their dissertation module by performing a student-led project at the Edinburgh Festival each summer and are responsible for their own performances, organisation and fundraising. They recognise the need to operate as professionals in this 'real world' venture and describe it as an important transitional experience.

2.32   Collaborative ways of working extend beyond learning, teaching and performing. Freelance staff note the accessibility of core staff, their openness to change and the evolving nature of the curriculum in response to their feedback; they also find assessment meetings very collaborative and symptomatic of the organic way in which departments work together.

Students place considerable value on these panel assessment tutorials where feedback is given from an inter-disciplinary team, so enabling each individual to make holistic sense of their progress.

2.33   The review team considers this range of opportunities provided for collaborative practice to be **good practice** in enriching the students' experience of learning and nurturing their self-reliance as emerging professional practitioners.

2.34   The information provided to students is comprehensive. In addition to student handbooks, programme and module specifications it includes a dedicated third-year handbook with a section on 'Taking Responsibility', a new starter pack and Induction Week timetable, a Contextual Studies induction pack and various project briefs. Students endorse the usefulness of the VLE, known as contistudies, where information is plentiful and easy to locate, and also the Academy's recent subscription to Drama Online. They are given many opportunities to provide feedback on the resources available to support their learning, including through annual focus groups, and these have fed into considered decisions by the Academy as to how to prioritise resources most effectively. Two recent and much-welcomed initiatives have been the provision of specialist support for students with dyslexia and dyspraxia and the steps taken to support students' mental health and wellbeing.

2.35   Given the Academy's systematic approach to the provision, review and enhancement of learning opportunities, and the two examples of good practice identified in this area, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*

Findings

2.36   One of the Academy's central objectives is to enable each student to develop their potential and a core value is to provide a safe and enabling learning environment. Key staff are identified in programme information and include the Programme Director, Heads of Years, Heads of Departments, the Head of Studies and the Head of Student Services, who is also the Programme Co-ordinator.

2.37   The FDS hallmarks that characterise the key elements of training at the Academy include a focus on the development of each student as an individual. Teaching practices therefore encompass a range of approaches so that individuals have several points of access to facilitate their development rather than a single methodology.

2.38   Transition into higher education is supported through preparation packs, Academy and university inductions and the creation of student mentor families during Induction Week. Progression between levels is clearly articulated through a coherent and progressive curriculum and within module specifications. Students are helped to make the transition into employment through the support of an Industry Liaison Officer, through their regular contact with the Academy's freelance staff, guest directors and visiting industry professionals, and through agent attendance at third year performances. The self-led dissertation projects mentioned in the previous section develop students' capacity to generate their own work which is key to sustaining a long-term career in an unstable industry.

2.39   Students have access to a range of staff who will support their development, principally their heads of year, and student support is described as 'multi-dimensional.' The small size of the Academy means that staff know all students personally. Physical resources to support learning include studios, costumes and props, technical performance equipment, texts of plays and music, internet resources and study skills support materials. Facilities available at UEL include the library, video editing suites and further study support. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.40   In considering this Expectation the review team examined a range of documents and met with staff and students.

2.41   Students spoke positively about their experience of induction, their regular contact with, and easy access to, industry professionals over the course of the programme and, particularly, their work in their final year with the Academy's Industry Liaison Officer. This is a part-time role as the post-holder also works as a casting director and students find this a valuable resource in making the transition into the acting industry. Agents are invited to major productions and their attendance is monitored and recorded.

2.42   The Academy's small cohorts mean that staff are at all times aware of individual students' progress and any issues that may be preventing them from gaining the most from their learning experience. The welfare department records issues daily: these feed through to weekly staff meetings and, if of a serious nature, into the cause-for-concern process where concerns, together with a strategy for moving forward, are recorded formally. Students and graduates praise the focus on individual learning and the Academy's strengths in identifying the best personal journey for each student.

2.43   The Academy's formal and informal arrangements for supporting students and providing opportunities to discuss and reflect on their learning are extensive. They include an open door policy and ready access to freelance staff, regular one-to-one meetings with the Head of Year, year meetings, active student representatives and a Programme Board where the main focus of the students and staff members is to discuss student feedback. In addition, the Academy allocates students to 'family' groups which comprise Foundation students, first to third years and graduates. This model is now sustained by the students themselves, who keep in touch and provide peer support through social media groups. Students welcome the opportunity this provides for cross-year integration and informal support. The review team considers the extensive range of opportunities that exists for students to discuss their learning experience with staff and the culture of openness that this encourages to be **good practice**.

2.44   The Academy has robust and varied systems in place to help students develop their academic, personal and professional potential. These are monitored and evaluated carefully. The review team therefore concludes that this Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.45   Operating within the terms of its partnership agreement with UEL, student engagement is the sole responsibility of the Academy. The Quality Manual and the Student Handbook outline methods of engagement that include consultation, participation and representation; this information is also made available to students via the Academy's VLE. A review of student engagement procedures is undertaken annually.

2.46   The Academy's arrangements for engaging students includes provision of a student representative system, student mentors, and the involvement of student representatives in formal structures, such as the Programme Board termly meetings where they are given the opportunity to attend meetings and to sign-off the Quality Improvement Plan, UEL reports and programme reports.

2.47   One student representative is elected by their peers for each year group. They are given a job description and a briefing pack that explains the role and informal induction is conducted by student representatives from previous years, who are supported by senior student representatives and the Head of Studies. A Student Representative Handbook was introduced in 2016-17 and a student charter is currently in development. Student representatives are directed to the Academy's appeals and complaints procedures with a view to providing informed advice and support to other students. They may also accompany students to formal meetings, such as disciplinary interviews. There are no direct financial incentives for students undertaking the student representative role, although 'payment in kind' is provided, for example, through free tickets to public events.

2.48   Students feedback formally and informally through their student representatives; through contribution to module evaluations and focus groups; via discussion across year groups and through participation in external data collection, such as the National Student Survey and (as alumni) the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey. Programme Board meetings receive a synthesis of module feedback, with minutes published on the Academy's VLE. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.49   The review team reviewed the effectiveness of the arrangements to engage students by examining documentation, including the Academy's self-evaluation and student video submission; procedural documents; minutes of committees (boards) and focus groups; module evaluations; and course webpages. The team also met with senior and teaching staff, and students.

2.50   The review team were informed by both students and staff that the Academy had taken deliberate and systematic steps to develop the student charter which is benchmarked against NUS guidance and against Expectation B5 of the Quality Code, with students confirming their active input into its development, in order to ensure that it carries the student voice.

2.51   Student representatives whom the review team met stated that they were consulted about formal training for their role which they had declined. Instead they felt that it was beneficial for them to learn on the job by using the support of the senior student representatives, other student representatives in different years, and the Head of Studies. They also felt that their voice is valued with student representatives being given recognition

informally for their participation through incentives, such as discounts and first choice in theatre tickets. Student representatives also stated that the Academy creates an environment of transparency where they are encouraged to sign off content of reports/documents. The review team noted that this reinforces collaboration and strengthens the transparent and open culture the Academy has created thus contributing towards the good practice as identified in Expectation B4 where the extensive range of opportunities exists for students to discuss their learning experience with staff and the culture of openness this encourages.

2.52   Students met by the review team confirmed that they are actively engaged individually and collectively in giving feedback to the Academy through a range of informal and formal feedback channels, such as the social media groups; termly and yearly meetings; consultations on new programme developments; through student representatives; panel tutorials and informal one-to-one meetings with tutors and staff. The review team noted that the module feedback form has recently undergone revision and been evaluated positively in relation to its increased clarity and usefulness, with the Academy exploring the introduction of an online version. Students also highlighted the key role that their student representatives play in feedforward and feedback with regards to their concerns and the sharing of general information in class and via social media groups. Students also have access to published minutes of consultation meetings that are housed on the Academy's VLE. Students were unanimous in stating that their feedback is acted upon, with examples cited, such as the introduction of the TV module in Year 1, dyslexia classes, and access and support for mental well-being.

2.53   Overall, the arrangements to engage students work effectively. The Academy has benchmarked its approach to student engagement and representation directly to Chapter B5 of the Quality Code and National Union of Students' guidance on course representation. This, together with the good practice identified in Expectation B4, and other evidence indicates that the Academy engages students effectively as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their learning experience. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*

Findings

2.54 The Academy is accountable to its awarding body for assessment design, marking, moderation and feedback, consistent with the terms of programme validation and UEL assessment policies and regulations, including any agreed local variations.

2.55 Assessment strategies test students' achievement of academic and practical skills-based learning outcomes. At module level, students enjoy a range of opportunities to demonstrate their learning through performances, written reflections, formal essays, presentations and portfolios. Students receive oral and written information on assessment, including coursework briefs, learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and submission deadlines. Assessment comprises both formative and summative elements and feedback is required to be timely, specific and developmental. Student work is moderated internally prior to scrutiny by a UEL-appointed external examiner. Termly assessment boards feed into UEL Pre-Progression and Progression Boards which include the external examiner and confirm marks while also considering any extenuating circumstances or incidences of malpractice. Staff involved in assessment are responsible for its scheduling and administration and are supported to understand and undertake their role effectively through induction and briefings, a Staff Handbook and group marking and moderation sessions. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.56 In testing the appropriateness of assessment design and operation, the review team considered a range of documentation including the provider's self-evaluation document and student submission; Academy and UEL procedural documents and regulations; module specifications; assessment briefs, marking criteria and feedback sheets; minutes of committees and assessment boards; and the VLE. The team also met with senior and teaching staff, including awarding body representatives, and with students.

2.57 The Academy's Higher Education Quality Manual, which was reviewed and updated during 2017, contains a statement on Assessment and Standards which serves as the provider's higher education assessment strategy. Students receive a Student Handbook, based on the validated programme specification, which describes assessment procedures including submission requirements and deadlines and assessment-related policies governing academic misconduct, extenuation and appeals. Module specifications are approved at validation and contain the intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria used to set and assess the standards to be achieved by students. Schemes of work detail module teaching content in relation to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and students met by the review team described their value in helping identify areas for development. Coursework briefs, which are moderated by the external examiner before distribution, contain a description of assessment tasks supported by guidance on assignment planning, research and structure, including academic referencing.

2.58 Students experience new modes of assessment formatively before they are undertaken summatively, and a staged approach to assessment enables early failures to be retrieved which the Academy sees as consistent with its emphasis on artistic experimentation. Formative feedback is provided both verbally and in writing, while

end-of-term 'panel tutorials' involve students in meeting individually with their teaching team to receive holistic feedback on their progress. Students and staff the review team met spoke enthusiastically of the effective contribution of panel tutorials, which students are permitted to record, to their formative development as confident and self-critical learners which was identified as **good practice**.

2.59   All modules are required to be passed (following re-assessment) before students may progress or graduate, with no trailing of module failure, however compensation is permitted within grade thresholds and credit limits defined in the programme regulations. First year students who fail modules are offered the opportunity to repeat the year as for the first time.

2.60   While operating within its awarding body's assessment regulations and quality assurance framework, the Academy has agreed specific variations in relation to mode of delivery and attendance requirements which are approved at validation and subsequently via UEL's programme modification process. Advanced entry, or other credit exemption through Accreditation of Experiential Learning is not permitted on the basis that all skills training must be undertaken within the student's programme of study.

2.61   Tutors, including freelance staff, receive instruction on marking practice by accessing assessment materials (module specifications, assessment criteria and marking guidelines), briefing sessions and professional development. Staff induction includes specific briefing on assessment policy and practice which is reinforced by information in the Staff Handbook. Group marking and moderation enable staff who are new to higher education to be supported by more experienced colleagues. Where module leaders are also responsible for the artistic direction of students' performance work, independent markers are assigned to guard against subjective assessment decisions. Practice-based assessments are attended by external examiners and video-recorded for moderation purposes. Assessment feedback sheets record students' performance against defined marking criteria, accompanied by written comments. Tutors receive guidance on producing developmental feedback which was evident in the sample feedback seen by the review team.

2.62   Assessment is a standing item at Programme Quality Board meetings and considered within UEL's annual Review and Enhancement Process. Local assessment boards are held at the end of each term to consider students' academic progress, interim marks and any extenuating circumstances or incidences of malpractice. Notes of these meetings seen by the review team contained frank and detailed conversations about students' personal circumstances which were felt to be inappropriate for an assessment board, and the team suggests the Academy review the designation of these meetings to more accurately denote their function as confidential student progress reviews.

2.63   A Pre-Progression Board is convened immediately prior to the annual UEL Progression Board to review students' results. Grades are confirmed by the Progression Board, held at the Academy and chaired by UEL's Associate Dean (External), with a final Award Board conducted by and at UEL. Pre-Progression and Progression Boards are attended by the external examiner. External examiner reports comment on the general rigour and appropriateness of assessment and where specific comments were received on inadequate use of the full marking scale, these were addressed and noted positively at a subsequent Progression Board.

2.64   Students submit written coursework electronically via the VLE. Academy staff can access UEL's similarity plagiarism-detection software in cases of suspected malpractice, however, the high volume of performance-based assessments largely mitigates the risk of plagiarism or collusion.

2.65   The review team found that the Academy follows the assessment principles and regulations of its awarding body, UEL. Assessments are designed to test the achievement of intended learning outcomes as defined within validated module specifications, and staff develop and use marking criteria which are shared with students in assessment briefs, schemes of work and programme handbooks. Students receive and value developmental feedback on their work. Staff receive detailed information on assessment, and group marking and internal moderation support the integrity of assessment and maintenance of standards. Minutes of Pre-Progression and Progression Boards show them to be operating soundly although the Academy may wish to review the designation of its local assessment boards. On the basis that external examiner reports confirm the rigour, fairness and standards of assessment, and participation in UEL's annual monitoring and assessment board processes demonstrates appropriate consideration of assessment outcomes, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.66 UEL of East London is responsible for the appointment and induction of external examiners, for the report template and for circulation of the completed report to the Academy; the Academy is responsible for formal responses to the external examiner and for incorporating the points made in their report into annual monitoring processes.

2.67 The external examiner samples student work, attends performances, considers the assessment and feedback practice of the programme and comments on standards. The report template seeks confirmation that the standards set are appropriate and comparable, and that assessment matches learning outcomes, is fair and rigorous, and in line with regulations.

2.68 The BA (Hons) Acting Programme Director circulates the external examiner's report to departmental heads and to students for review and response. Reports are discussed at PQB and at meetings of student representatives, made available to the wider student body via the VLE and referred to during students' induction sessions. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.69 In considering this Expectation the review team examined external examiner and annual monitoring reports, improvement plans and committee minutes. The team also met with students and staff.

2.70 External examiners' reports confirm that the standards set are appropriate and that assessment is rigorous, fair and in line with regulations. They comment on the quality of the students' learning opportunities and, although UEL's template does not specifically prompt examiners to identify good practice, reports do include observations in this area.

2.71 The Academy's annual monitoring report to UEL is the Review and Enhancement Report (REP). The template for this includes a section for the summary of planned actions in response to examiners' reports and an outline of how these are circulated to students. The Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) that results from the REP records planned actions in further detail. Both processes enable the Academy's consideration of the external examiner's report within annual monitoring to be robust.

2.72 Staff confirmed that reports were considered by PQB but the review team was unable to locate any minuted discussion in this area before September 2017. Similarly, consideration of the examiner's report by student representatives was not evident in minutes before September 2017. Students did confirm, however, that external examiners' reports are made available on the VLE and some have accessed and read these. The external examiner is named in the Student Handbook.

2.73 The review team concludes that the Academy makes effective use of their external examiner. The Expectation is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*

Findings

2.74   The Academy engages in processes for quality assurance, including programme monitoring and review that satisfy the requirements of its various regulatory, awarding and accrediting bodies. These include the Expectations of the Quality Code, specifically the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statement; UEL's quality framework and regulations (as awarding body); and the professional standards of CDET (accrediting body) and Federation of Drama Schools hallmarks.

2.75   The Academy's core values inform the identification of quality and provide strategic direction in ensuring that standards remain appropriate to national threshold standards and comparable with other providers. Programme monitoring is located within the Academy's deliberative committee system. An annual quality cycle operates at programme level, with a Programme Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) generated for consideration by a Programme Board and Programme Quality Board, and by the Academy Quality Board (AQB).
The provider also meets the monitoring requirements of its awarding body, UEL and accrediting body, CDET. Monitoring of standards is supported by annual reports of a UEL-appointed external examiner. Periodic review is instigated by UEL on a five-year cycle and informed by appropriate independent subject externality. CDET re-accreditation, which is next due in 2019, involves panel consideration of a critical commentary and a site visit. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.76   In testing the appropriateness of processes for monitoring and review, the review team considered a range of documentation including the provider's self-evaluation document and student submission; Academy and UEL strategies and operating procedures; monitoring reports and action plans; committee minutes; and the VLE. The team also met with senior and teaching staff, including representatives of its awarding body UEL, and students.

2.77   Operating under the terms of its partnership agreement with UEL, the Academy has established processes for programme monitoring and review that use evidence (data) and feedback from students, staff, an independent external examiner and other stakeholders including industry representatives. The Higher Education Quality Manual describes procedures for programme monitoring and review that are aligned with Expectation B8 of the Quality Code. Overall responsibility for academic monitoring resides with the AQB which is chaired by the Principal and attended by senior academic managers. The AQB, which meets four times a year, has oversight of all academic provision with explicit responsibility for quality and standards. Reporting to the AQB is a termly Programme Quality Board, chaired by the Programme Director and attended by relevant heads of department. A termly Programme Board, also chaired by the Programme Director, feeds into the Programme Quality Board and contains student representation.

2.78   Central to the Programme Quality Board's remit is the development and monitoring of a Programme Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Production of the QIP is informed by module leader reports, student evaluations and feedback from progression boards, external examiner reports and employers. The QIP also distils and identifies good practice for the purpose of enhancing quality. According to documentation supplied by the provider the QIP is received for discussion by the AQB, alongside an annual report from the Programme Director, although AQB minutes received by the review team did not evidence this explicitly.

While referencing the QIP, Programme Quality Board minutes seen by the team showed no specific discussion of the Programme Director's report, although the team was informed that these were both scheduled for receipt in December 2017. In similar vein, the provider's documentation indicated that the QIP was considered by the Programme Board although this was not explicit in minutes received by the team. While the Academy acknowledges that committee scrutiny may previously have been inconsistent and is taking deliberate steps to address this, the team **recommends** that committee agendas and minutes record explicit consideration of programme monitoring reports and programme improvement plans.

2.79   In addition to internal monitoring activity, the Academy follows the requirements of UEL's annual Review and Enhancement Process, which considers the continuing appropriateness of academic standards and quality through evaluation of UEL-generated data on student recruitment, retention and progression, including graduate destinations; external examiner's report and programme team's response; and feedback from student representatives, student focus groups, year meetings, module evaluations and Programme Boards. While demonstrating good levels of critical reflection, REP reports and associated action plans also identify good practice and are shared with students via the VLE. While there were some issues with the accuracy of UEL data in the past, these had been resolved through effective liaison between the Academy and awarding body.

2.80   The Academy has identified the use of data in monitoring as an area of continued development, particularly in relation to graduate employment where the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey is felt to be inadequate in representing the nature of employment in the acting profession. To address this, the Academy collects its own destinations data via its 'Italia Continued' alumni group and the monitoring of graduates' professional Spotlight profiles. Data on student retention and progression are analysed in relation to UEL Key Performance Indicators.

2.81   The Academy accesses UEL's process for approving formal programme modifications although minor changes to delivery are delegated to the Programme Quality Board. While the need for any significant modification of the BA (Hons) Acting was overtaken by its 2015 revalidation, minor delivery changes have included adjustments to the pace and sequence of module delivery and scheduling of additional skills sessions for final year students. Students the review team met described the introduction of Television at Level 4 as having resulted directly from their feedback.

2.82   The Academy demonstrates a planned approach to programme monitoring and review focussed around the Programme Quality Improvement Plan and UEL Review and Enhancement Process report. The UEL REP process confirms the maintenance of standards. However, minutes of internal committees including the Academy Quality Board inadequately demonstrate how monitoring reports and plans are directly engaged with which has led to the recommendation to make such reporting more explicit. On this basis, and in the context of the Academy's growing higher education portfolio, the Expectation is judged to be met but with moderate level of risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints*

Findings

2.83   The Academy and UEL have a shared responsibility for dealing with student complaints, while academic appeals regarding marks, awards and qualification are the sole responsibility of UEL. There are separate processes in place for appeals and complaints, with the Academy responsible for managing stages 1 and 2 of the complaints process. This information is readily accessible to students in the Student Handbook, Higher Education Quality Manual and on the Academy's VLE. The Academy has an institution-wide complaints process with the Head of Student Services/Programme Co-ordinator as the initial contact for complaints and the Head of Studies as the initial contact for appeals. Other members of staff and student representatives provide support as needed. Students may take a complaint or appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator when all formal Academy and UEL procedures have been exhausted.

2.84   The Academy has a centralised approach for monitoring complaints. The Academy's processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.85   The review team tested the effectiveness of the Academy's complaints policies and procedures by examining key documentation such as its self-evaluation and student video submission; procedural documents; committee minutes; and information for current and prospective students. The team also met with senior and teaching staff, and students.

2.86   Overall, the processes for academic appeals and student complaints work effectively. Students have direct access to UEL's appeals process in which the Academy is represented on any academic appeals panels. The Academy is responsible for managing student complaints at the earliest stages which involve informal resolution through student-staff dialogue, or formal conciliation on submission of a written complaint. Complainants may escalate unresolved complaints for formal review by UEL's Vice-Chancellor's Group, with further appeal to a UEL complaints review panel (with Academy representation) where the evidence warrants it.

2.87   Students confirmed their awareness of the complaints and appeals procedures and where to find them. Both staff and students identified that most concerns raised by students are resolved informally through the varied feedback channels, such as tutor panels. This allows for issues to be picked up and resolved early on and to not grow into a complaint. The environment of open communication and dialogue that the Academy fosters in this way contributes to the good practice identified in Expectation B4 where the review team identified the extensive range of opportunities that exists for students to discuss their learning experiences with staff and the culture of openness that this encourages.

2.88   The review team noted that no formal complaints or appeals have been lodged in respect of the BA (Hons) Acting programme since its validation by UEL. According to the Academy's self-evaluation, all complaints, including those handled informally, are recorded and evaluated, with any implications being referred to the Academy Quality Board via the Programme Quality Improvement Plan, however, there was no direct evidence of this occurring in the minutes seen by the review team. The review team were satisfied with the explanations from staff and students that issues and concerns picked up through feedback are being followed through and handled to the satisfaction of the students, with the

Programme Board capturing feedback that allows for any patterns and concerns to be noted; and that these are not necessarily picked up explicitly as complaints, rather as issues and possible recommendations for enhancements.

2.89   The Academy follows its awarding body's regulations and procedures for managing appeals and student complaints which are communicated to students at induction via programme documentation and which are accessible online. Despite the lack of evidence for the formal evaluation of students' informal complaints, the team is satisfied that the mechanisms in place are effective in managing and dealing with student issues. On this basis the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B10): Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.

Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*

Findings

2.90   This Expectation is not applicable as the Academy does not manage provision with others.

Expectation: Not applicable
Level of risk: Not applicable

Expectation (B11): Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols.
This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.91   This Expectation is not applicable as the Academy does not offer research degrees.

Expectation: Not applicable
Level of risk: Not applicable

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.93   All Expectations in this area are met and the associated level of risk is low in all areas, apart from one - Expectation B8 is deemed to be moderate risk. The review team identified four areas of good practice and one recommendation. The recommendation refers to Expectation B8 and is related to the recording in committee agendas and minutes of the explicit consideration of programme monitoring reports and programme improvement plans. In considering Expectations B3, B4 and B6 the review team were able to identify features of good practice.

2.94   The review team particularly identified that the Academy is committed to creating a culture of openness and of dialogue in order to encourage collaborative practice at all levels and all stages of a student's development.

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

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1   The Academy's programme team is responsible for the overall management of published information and this is centralised through the Programme Co-ordinator in the Administration Office; and the media team is in charge of digital published information, through, for example, Facebook. Externally-published information available to the public is subject to approval via the Academy's Senior Management Team (SMT) and Academic Quality Board; and for programme materials UEL approval is required. All published information undergoes a cyclical review process with a designated member of Academy staff responsible for this.

3.2   The Academy's website is the key platform that provides information to the general public and potential students about the Academy, the programme content, including the validated programme specification; location and duration of delivery; fees and funding; UNISTATS data (Key Information Set); admissions procedures, including application processes; and information on UEL validation; its provision and support for current students; other websites such as UEL, CDET, Federation of Drama Schools, Twitter; and QAA published reports. Responsibility for assuring the accuracy of the website lies with the BA programme team, with specific webpages allocated to different departmental heads and individuals, while responsibility for the publication of documents sits with the Academy's SMT.

3.3   Students have access to study-related information through the Student Handbook, via the Academy's VLE, (known as contistudies); this includes the details of the programme, relevant policies and procedures, timetables, support mechanisms in place and the Academy's Quality Manual. Students are also able to access learning support materials via UEL's Library and Learning Services website. The Student Handbook signposts UEL academic regulations and includes a Code of Conduct outlining the expectations of students' engagement with teaching and assessment activities; while a separate 3rd Year Handbook provides specific guidance on final year practical performance activities and the dissertation. In addition to validated module specifications, students receive Schemes of Work detailing module teaching content, learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and assessment briefs containing task descriptions, supported by guidance on assignment planning, research and structure, including academic referencing. The Italia Conti Acting Facebook group serves as an online noticeboard for students, staff, alumni and the general public. The 'Italia Continued' Facebook group provides a vehicle for communication with, and by, alumni. A Twitter feed, managed by the programme team, is used to promote and support the work of alumni. Facebook and Twitter accounts are moderated by staff to ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of content.

3.4   Following progression and award boards students receive their marks from UEL in hard copy and may also access them electronically via the UEL Direct information portal.

3.5   In assuring standards and quality, the Academy produces documents for various external bodies. This is articulated in the Quality Manual and this responsibility lies with the

programme team. The Quality Manual provides guidance and details on how the Academy collates and uses information as part of its quality improvement process, with action plans that feed into the QIP, which is reviewed annually by the Programme Quality Board. Staff information is held on a shared network which is administered in order to maintain version control, with updates to validated programme and module specifications managed via the awarding body's curriculum approval and modification processes. The Student Handbook is reviewed and updated annually via the Programme Quality Board at which students are represented.

3.6   The Academy's arrangements for the production of published information would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.7   In testing the appropriateness of the processes for managing the quality of published information the review team considered a range of documentation, including the provider's self-evaluation and student video submission; the policies that govern the production and approval of published information and a variety of marketing and admissions materials, student handbooks, information on the website, social media and Twitter, and the Academy's VLE. The team also met with senior and teaching staff, including awarding body representatives, and students.

3.8   The review team were informed that the Academy uses internal verification processes to sign off all published information, with a cyclical review in operation in order to maintain a system of version control. The students that the team met with felt that they had been given accurate and up-to-date information at application, while studying, and on completion. They confirmed the Student Handbook's general usefulness and commented positively about having the handbook online. Separate student focus group activity had also identified a need for more concise and 'student-friendly' language within the handbook.

3.9   Students confirmed that they managed their own social group pages such as Facebook and Twitter; and that these are private accounts which allow them to communicate anonymously and freely. Staff confirmed that they periodically 'sweep' external online sources, albeit cautiously, to help inform their decision making and quality assurance.

3.10   The review team found that information provided to prospective and current students was for the most part valid, reliable and accessible. The team noted that accreditation information had not been updated from Drama UK to CDET when the site was accessed during the review process and would **recommend** that procedures are rigorously implemented for updating information to ensure continued accuracy of information.

3.11   The Academy is currently reviewing its external web presence with a view to further improving the integration and coherence of information provided across the full range of its activities. In identifying a desire to improve its information management the Academy has also developed an Information Review Plan to further systematise the quality assurance of published information, defining areas of responsibility and timescales for review which should help to resolve any isolated issues with timeliness or accuracy. On this basis the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.12   The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

3.13   The review team identified that information published by the Academy is fit for purpose and that students find the information to be useful and accessible. A range of procedures for the production and checking of information were evident, however a recommendation has been made to ensure checking procedures are rigorously implemented to support the continued accuracy of published information.

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

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Findings

4.1 The Academy has described a 'forward thinking ethos that actively seeks opportunities to re-imagine, innovate, and enhance the quality of its programmes.' The recent appointment of a new Principal had triggered a review of the provider's strategic approach to enhancement, with a particular focus on learning facilities and resources. Maintaining and enhancing the professional relevance of its programmes features prominently within the Academy's mission and core values. Monitoring and review processes use feedback from students, staff and other stakeholders to identify potential enhancements to programme content and delivery. Deliberative committees, and other staff forums provide mechanisms for exchanging good practice in teaching and supporting students. This approach enables the Expectation to be met.

4.2 In testing the Academy's approach to enabling planned and deliberate enhancement at provider level, the review team considered a range of documentation, including the provider's self-evaluation document and student submission; procedural documents and policies; committee minutes; and feedback from students. The team also met with senior and teaching staff, and with students.

4.3 The Academy's Higher Education Quality Manual describes continuous improvement achieved systematically as a function of quality assurance, with monitoring and review used to identify, plan and implement enhancement. The Academy Quality Board (AQB), chaired by the Principal and with senior representation, has oversight of all academic provision and considers the outcomes of monitoring and review activities via the Programme Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Production of the QIP is informed by module leader reports, student evaluations and feedback from the external examiner, progression boards and employers and distils and identifies good practice for the purpose of enhancing quality. The review team heard that the AQB operated effectively to identify and promote cross-institutional enhancements, particularly in relation to learning resources.

4.4 In addition to feedback from module evaluations and Programme Boards, student focus groups and other surveys have been used to identify and promote enhancements in areas such as student admission, enrolment and induction; use of digital learning technologies; assessment; and student support. Specific enhancement initiatives described as being 'provider-driven' include advanced support for learners with dyslexia or mental health issues.

4.5 Staff meetings, including annual end-of-year staff forums provide opportunities for tutors to reflect on, evaluate and exchange practice. Teaching appraisals and staff training activities provide further opportunities to refresh practice, while group marking and moderation support the development of less experienced staff. Staff are supported to seek external examiner positions at institutions with similar provision, with a view to broadening their experience of higher education delivery. Department heads also meet regularly as a team to pool experience and share issues.

4.6 Under its new Principal, the Academy is seeking to formalise its academic governance arrangements, including the AQB, with a view to achieving more strategic and institution-wide enhancement. Committee remits reference enhancement although this is less explicit in the minutes of discussions. However, notwithstanding some weakness in

reporting that has led to a separate recommendation under Expectation B8 the review team saw evidence that the Academy uses programme monitoring in general, and the Programme Quality Improvement Plan and Programme Board in particular to drive student-focused enhancements and on this basis the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.8   The Expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

4.9   A wide range of procedures exist to support the identification of, and sharing of practice, which operate in a culture of openness and collaboration, as identified particularly through Expectations B3, B4 and B6.

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

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 21-24 of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) handbook.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality.

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

Academic standards
The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Award
A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

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

Blended learning
Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

Credit(s)
A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

Degree-awarding body
A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

Distance learning
A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'. See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award
The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Enhancement
The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

Expectations
Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

Flexible and distributed learning
A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations. See also **distance learning**.

Framework
A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

Framework for higher education qualifications
A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS).

Good practice
A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

Learning opportunities
The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

Learning outcomes
What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

Multiple awards
An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

Operational definition
A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

Programme (of study)
An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

Programme specifications
Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

Quality Code
Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

Reference points
Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

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

Subject Benchmark Statement
A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard
The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)
An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

Widening participation
Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.