



## Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of Kogan Academy of Dramatic Arts, April 2016

### 1 Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Kogan Academy of Dramatic Arts (the Academy) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the April 2014 [Review for Specific Course Designation](#).

### 2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 There have been no significant changes to numbers of staff or students since the April 2014 Review for Specific Course Designation (RSCD). Staffing remains at about 20 (six full-time equivalents), comprising three full-time staff and 17 with fractional appointments. The total number of students following the programme has decreased slightly in the last two years from 40 to 35. Currently there are 22 studying at Level 4, six at Level 5 and seven at Level 6; all are full-time. During the academic year 2015-16, in addition to this monitoring visit, the Academy has undergone an inspection by the British Accreditation Council and an Internal Subject Review was carried out by Kingston University.

### 3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The Academy continues to offer the BA (Hons) Acting degree programme, delivered on behalf of Kingston University (the University). It is the only degree programme currently offered. The Academy has built on the good practice (see paragraph 4) noted in the report arising from the April 2014 review. While the Academy has sought to address all recommendations in the report, the effectiveness of the individual actions is variable. The review team met staff and students during the monitoring visit, and considered the Academy's annual return and supporting documentation, particularly its updated action plan, the University's recent Subject Review report and the external examiner's reports. All seven elements of good practice identified in the RSCD report have been reviewed and developed, and the role of the Student Vice-Principal continues to be noteworthy (paragraph 4). While some progress has been made in responding to elements of the four advisable and three desirable recommendations (paragraphs 5-7 and 16, and 7-9 respectively), the Academy can do more to formalise and record existing processes and procedures, and to develop the higher education ethos within its specific and distinctive context. Similarly, recommendations made in the University's Internal Subject Review 2016 (paragraph 9), mostly concerning formalising existing processes, are being appropriately addressed in action planning. Thus the Academy has made acceptable progress in responding to the good practice and recommendations set out in its 2014 RSCD action plan, with progress reviewed and reported at Core Staff Teaching Team meetings.

4 Good practice has been maintained, with the Academy continuing to emphasise its distinct acting educational philosophy. Greater interaction with the Academy's directing provision has provided further opportunities for integration of practical theatrical management with acting theory. The response by the Academy to student concerns remains a strong feature, making effective use of both formal and informal systems. The Student Vice-Principal Manual has been revised with input from students to reflect current practice.

This comprehensive guide supports the post-holder in executing shared responsibility for the running of the Academy. The students confirmed that they are extremely well supported throughout their studies, and continue to receive detailed written and oral feedback on assessed work. All classes and performances continue to be filmed and the Academy maintains an extensive collection of electronic recordings that are available to students.

5 The Staff and Student Manual now includes the aims of the degree programme, a module matrix specifying the credit values, assessment weightings and a link to the University complaints procedure. However, the Manual still makes no reference to the Board of Study, external examiner arrangements, and appeals procedure, nor does it have comprehensive links to the University's academic regulations. Outdated reference is made to the Education Committee and the title of the institution alternates between Academy and School. The Internal Subject Review conducted by the University earlier this year also identified omissions and an inaccuracy relating to the re-admittance of students to the programme. The Academy is addressing these concerns through the Subject Review action plan. The Staff and Student Manual and Acting Field Guide are being revised for approval by the Board of Study for use in 2016.

6 Students are now provided with the opportunity to state learning needs or impairments through a student registration document. Staff confirmed that they had experience of supporting students with autism and issues relating to hearing and sight. Given the small size of the Academy the current arrangements are satisfactory as it is possible to manage this support on an individual basis. However, the University's Subject Review recommended formalisation of the process. Concerns raised by the external examiner about the quality of written English of non-British EU students are currently addressed through the provision of a series of workshops delivered in the spring term of 2016 and overseen by the Accreditation Coordinator.

7 The Academy has implemented a publications schedule to exercise greater control over the approval of published information and to ensure its currency and accuracy. It lists the documents to be reviewed, the review completion date, name of the approver and the date for making the documents available to students. The Academy has revised its website with input from students. The process is in the early stages of being embedded and still needs refining as recommended by the University's Subject Review. Students commented favourably on the nature and quality of information provided on the programme, noting that it was detailed and comprehensive.

8 The Education Committee has been superseded by the Board of Study, jointly managed by the University. To provide a forum to discuss learning and teaching, staff development, learning resources and the student learning experience, the Academy has established the Core Teaching Staff Meeting, which reports to the Board of Study. In addition, a new committee has been established with a specific remit to provide a forum for the exchange of views on the Science of Acting and build a community of practice. Students are represented on both groups. Due to the small staff base the two groups are operating as a single unit. The planned increase in student numbers and the medium-term plan to expand the curriculum offer will require the Academy to review its current arrangements.

9 The Academy recognises that the form for requesting staff development has been of limited value in identifying personal development requirements and in planning suitable institutional development opportunities. There is clear evidence that the Academy encourages staff development, with three members of staff commencing study for higher degree qualifications. However, staff development opportunities are provided on an individual basis in response to a direct request and a formal staff development policy has yet to be developed. The University's Subject Review identified staff development as an area for

further consideration, including formally articulating the teaching observation policy and exploring partnership opportunities to foster staff interaction.

10 The arrangements for the recruitment, selection and admission of students are carefully documented and administered. Students usually learn of the Academy by word of mouth and then find more information on the website, supplemented by correspondence and telephone calls. All sources of information are accurate and Academy staff are exceptionally friendly and helpful. Students applying from overseas are required to provide evidence of English language proficiency with a minimum International English Language Testing System score of 6.5 or equivalent. In recognition of the need to provide additional support in the use of written English, the Academy delivers a series of workshops.

11 In response to a changing student profile and low retention rates in 2013-14, the Academy strengthened the admissions process through the provision of open days. Candidates who satisfy the minimum entry requirements are invited for interview and audition where their motivation and ability are thoroughly evaluated. Applicants are given a tour of the resources, attend a seminar or workshop with teaching staff, and have the opportunity to meet current students. Staff also emphasise the defining philosophy of the Academy, which is to maintain an ethos of intensive actor and director training within a conservatoire model. Students testified to the rigour as well as the helpfulness of the admissions process in understanding at a very early stage what would be expected of them.

12 Annual monitoring complies with the requirements of the University. The Academy prepares module reports and action plans, drawing on quantitative data, student feedback, and comments made by the external examiner. It compiles a programme summary report, collating and reflecting on issues arising from the module reports, external examiner reports, assessment boards and feedback from student representatives. Both the Academy's Board of Study, whose membership includes the Academy's Student Vice-Principal, and the University's Board of Study consider this report together with the action plans. The Board of Study is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the action plans. Additionally, the University carries out an annual Institutional Monitoring process to review the operation and performance of the Academy.

13 The Academy does not currently operate its own overarching annual monitoring process whereby reports and action plans from external and internal reviews are formally approved through its own governance structures. While the University's process satisfactorily reflects the size of provision, the planned expansion in student numbers and proposed curriculum development would necessitate further development of the Academy's quality framework. The Academy plans to compile an annual institutional-level self-assessment report, commencing in the autumn term of 2016-17, which will consider a wider body of evidence to inform strategic planning and the evaluation of systems and resources.

14 Completion and achievement rates for the programme are considered at an assessment board under the auspices of the University. Overall annual progressions and achievement rates at both the programme and module levels are included in the annual monitoring reports that are presented to the University's School Board of Study. Module average pass marks for 2014-15 range between 61 and 71 per cent. All these students passed modules at the first attempt. Of the 14 students enrolled in 2013-14, two students (14 per cent) achieved a Certificate of Higher Education, seven (50 per cent) completed the programme and five (36 per cent) students withdrew. To address the low retention rate at Level 4, the Academy has significantly enhanced its admissions procedure to ensure that prospective students are fully informed about programme requirements and expectations (see paragraphs 10-11). Seven students were admitted in 2014-15. One student (14 per cent) graduated with a Certificate of Higher Education, the remaining students progressed.

Six students (22 per cent) have withdrawn so far from the 2015-16 cohort, one due to poor attendance and progress, the other five due to financial reasons.

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

15 The Academy engages with the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) primarily through the design, development and approval of its validated programme. Academy staff have made use of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, as well as external guidance on the preparation of programme and module specifications. Engagement with the Quality Code, Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality through the validation process is explicit with staff using the expectations set out in the individual chapters to inform admissions, recognition of prior learning, assessment and learning and teaching.

16 The Academy has reviewed its policies and procedures to ensure alignment with the Quality Code. A resulting mapping exercise demonstrates how each of the expectations is met. While staff now have a much clearer understanding of national expectations, the Academy has yet to articulate fully how its policies align with the Quality Code to demonstrate how it is meeting both its responsibilities and those of the University. The outcome from the recent Subject Review conducted by the University confirms this view. For example, recommendations require the Academy to update relevant documentation to align with University regulations, develop a teaching, learning and assessment policy, formalise English language support, formally articulate the teaching observation policy and formalise the policy for supporting students with disabilities. Staff have prepared an action plan to address these issues which is monitored by the University.

#### **5 Background to the monitoring visit**

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

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Colin Fryer (Reviewer) and Dr Chris Amodio (Coordinator) on 13 April 2016.

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