



Quality Review Visit of LAMDA Ltd trading as London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art

November 2017

Key findings

QAA's rounded judgements about LAMDA Ltd trading as London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art

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

- **There can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK.**
- **There can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.**

Areas for development

The review team did not identify any areas for development.

Specified improvements

The review team did not identify any specified improvements.

About this review

The review visit took place from 29 to 30 November 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mrs Alexandra Day
- Dr Fiona Thompson
- Mrs Rebekah Osborne (student reviewer).

The overall aim of Quality Review Visit is to:

- provide the relevant funding body with an expert judgement about the readiness of a provider to enter, or continue to operate within, the higher education sector.

Quality Review Visit is designed to:

- ensure that the student interest is protected
- provide expert advice to ensure that the reputation of the UK higher education system is protected, including the protection of degree standards
- identify development areas that will help a provider to progress through a developmental period and be considered 'established'.

Each review visit considers a provider's arrangements against relevant aspects of the baseline regulatory requirements, and in particular:

- the reliability of degree standards and their reasonable comparability with standards set and achieved by other providers
- the quality of the student academic experience, including student outcomes where the provider has a track record of delivery of higher education.

About LAMDA

Founded in 1861, London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) is the oldest drama school in the UK offering vocational training to actors, stage managers, technicians and directors. LAMDA operates from a single campus in Hammersmith, West London which was recently redeveloped through a substantial capital investment project. LAMDA's mission is 'to seek out and train the exceptional dramatic artists and technicians of every generation, so they can have the most extraordinary impact on the world through their work in theatre, film and television', and 'to inspire young people across the globe, through the exams and qualifications, to become confident and creative communicators, equipped and empowered to realise their full potential'.

LAMDA does not have degree awarding powers and delivers higher education programmes through a long-standing validation arrangement with the University of Kent (the awarding body). LAMDA's higher education provision comprises two foundation degrees, two bachelor's degrees, two master's degrees and two short, credit-rated programmes, all offered in full-time mode of study. For the academic year 2016-17, LAMDA had 361 students registered on higher education programmes.

Since 2004, LAMDA has been part of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (CDD), which is a higher education institution formed through a federal collaboration of eight specialist institutions offering higher education in the performing arts. The CDD provides an additional layer of oversight to that undertaken by the awarding body and is responsible for completing some statutory returns on behalf of the federation.

Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)

1 LAMDA delivers higher education programmes validated by its awarding body, the University of Kent. Responsibilities regarding the maintenance of academic standards are clearly articulated in the Memorandum of Agreement between the two institutions.

2 LAMDA ensures that its programmes are aligned to the correct level of the FHEQ by complying with the comprehensive requirements for the design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes contained within the awarding body's Regulations and Codes of Practice for quality assurance and credit framework. The requirements include explicit reference to level descriptors, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and use of external subject experts to ensure that programmes reflect national standards and expectations in terms of qualifications, credits and characteristics. Approval of production and technical arts by the Stage Management Association, and membership of the Federation of Drama Schools, provide additional external reference points.

3 LAMDA has responsibility for programme review and annual programme monitoring, which are scrutinised and ultimately approved by the awarding body. There is a robust process to ensure that requirements of the awarding body are adhered to consistently through LAMDA's committee processes and through the work of the Head of Academic Services and Development, who has overall responsibility.

4 The awarding body and CDD carried out a periodic review of all programmes in 2017. A key objective of the review was to test whether the programme specifications were being delivered as outlined, and learning outcomes achieved, and to investigate whether responsibilities, as set out in the awarding body's Codes of Practice, were met. The Periodic Review Panel concluded that quality and standards of the programmes were being maintained and no concerns regarding the use of the Subject Benchmark Statements, or issues related to the fit of the programmes within the FHEQ, were identified.

5 External examiner reports viewed by the review team further confirm that the use of external reference points is appropriate and that academic standards are comparable with UK standards.

The relevant code of governance: such as the Higher Education Code of Governance published by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) or the Association of Colleges' (AoC) Code of Good Governance for English Colleges

6 LAMDA has effective and robust arrangements for maintaining oversight of academic governance. It operates under two governance arrangements: LAMDA has a Board of Trustees, as does the CDD. Both Boards operate in accordance with the principles set out in the CUC Code of Governance. LAMDA's Board considers an annual report, which provides assurance regarding quality, standards and financial performance. LAMDA also submits a report to CDD as part of its annual monitoring process, which informs the CDD Board annual assurance statement to the funding body.

7 LAMDA's Board has appropriate subcommittees which effectively and rigorously maintain oversight of academic risk. The Audit Committee regularly considers a detailed corporate risk register. The academic governance structure includes an Academic Board and a recently established Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, which has replaced

and enhanced the work of the previous Learning and Teaching Committee, all of which operate soundly.

8 The principles of academic freedom and collegiality are fully embedded within LAMDA's culture. As part of its strategy to achieve taught degree awarding powers, LAMDA is undertaking a review of its governance arrangements and intends to make reference to academic freedom and collegiality explicit in future revisions.

The Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)

9 Academic standards are set by the awarding body. Standards are met and maintained effectively by LAMDA through high standards of learning and teaching, regular input from external examiners and visiting industry professionals, annual monitoring processes, and through the marking and moderation process. LAMDA also provides thorough annual reports to CDD and to the awarding body.

10 The awarding body holds the definitive programme records, which are published on its website in full. Summary documents are available on LAMDA's website and in course handbooks made available to students.

11 New programme proposals are considered by the Course Planning Group, which is a working group that reports to Academic Board. The Group oversees the production of detailed proposals, which are submitted and considered through the awarding body's formal approval process. Prior to the approval and development of a programme, LAMDA also submits the proposal to the CDD for approval. These robust processes ensure that the programmes prepare graduates whose skills and knowledge are fit for purpose and highly relevant to the industry, and ensure that learning is securely underpinned by sound pedagogy and assessment methods. Student views are also sought as part of this process.

12 External examiners are appointed by the awarding body, with agreement from the CDD and LAMDA. External examiners confirm that academic standards are maintained. External examiner comments relating to individual programmes are shared across LAMDA through action plans that ensure strategic and holistic improvement, and which are considered at Academic Board. Cross-programme teaching provides an effective mechanism for ensuring that suggestions made by external examiners can be implemented across the provision. Internal Examination Boards are held at LAMDA every term. External Examination Boards, chaired by a member of staff from the awarding body, are held annually for each programme.

13 Assessment criteria and degree classification information is provided in each course handbook. This information is clear and used consistently by students and staff. Moderation is conducted in line with the awarding body's marking and moderation procedures and occurs at the end of each term. Marks are discussed regularly, and multiple staff are involved in each piece of assessment. Staff and placement providers are appropriately trained to carry out assessment, and students met by the review team expressed complete confidence in the integrity of the assessors and the assessment process. Students focus more on the regular summative and formative feedback received on assessment rather than on numerical marks, although the latter are made available. Students are aware of the implications of failure, are clear on how they can improve between assessments, and were able to articulate the difference in standards and expectations between academic levels.

14 The outcomes of the assessment and moderation process inform termly academic tutorials, which consider academic goal setting for individual students and provide monitoring information for the fortnightly Head of Department meetings. This ultimately informs Annual Monitoring Programme Reports (AMPR), in addition to progression, retention and award

data and external examiner comments. AMPRs are received and discussed in detail by Academic Board, which maintains clear oversight of issues and actions. LAMDA's approach to assessment feedback is well documented in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, and there is a visibly embedded culture of continuous feedback which students consider of immense benefit.

Rounded judgement

15 Overall, the governance and quality management of academic standards is effective and enables LAMDA to fulfil its responsibilities to the awarding body, to align with the baseline regulatory requirements and to maintain comparable academic standards. The review team identified no areas for development or specified improvements.

16 The review team concludes that there can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK.

Judgement area: Quality of the student academic experience

The Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)

17 LAMDA has highly effective arrangements for monitoring and improving the academic experience. These include fortnightly Head of Department meetings to review and respond to learner progress and student voice issues, and consideration of items through the formal committee process. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy clearly articulates a pedagogical approach which encourages students to become increasingly self-reliant, independent and highly creative learners who analyse their performance and use frequent feedback to learn and improve. Students met by the review team confirmed the effectiveness of this approach.

18 LAMDA attracts highly competent academic staff and can therefore be selective and identify professionals, who are often the best in their field, to deliver aspects of the degree programmes. Staff are reflective practitioners and actively seek new approaches to enhance teaching and learning. The Periodic Review Panel commended the continual development of new training opportunities by the teaching staff, especially in terms of rethinking how the programme reflects the changing real-world experience that students will encounter in their professional lives. External examiners comment on the high standard of teaching and learning and note a clear culture of continuous interplay between work-based learning and critical reflection on the work, informed and supported by the staff.

19 There is a comprehensive lesson observation process, which is utilised at departmental level and across the whole Conservatoire so that good practice can be shared, and so that emerging issues and common themes can be identified, discussed and addressed. LAMDA works swiftly and effectively to address a staff training need once identified. For example, the induction process for visiting professionals has been made more robust through coverage of individual student specific learning needs.

20 LAMDA has highly effective processes in place to ensure that staff are competent in research, scholarship and pedagogy. Its commitment is articulated in the Academic Staff Development Policy, which includes comprehensive support for staff to apply for Higher Education Academy fellowships. Staff development needs are identified through an annual appraisal, academic contracts enable staff to continue to interface with the industry, and time is set aside each week for staff research and professional development. The Research and Scholarship Strategy aims to develop a research culture and staff have accessed research grants through the CDD Research and Ethics Committee since 2015. The Periodic Review Panel reported that research activities have a positive impact on the academic practice of staff and enhance the learning experience of students.

21 Students report that they are prepared professionally, mentally and emotionally for the industry. They value the contribution of visiting professionals as it provides currency and diversity of styles, and the vocational training received is considered excellent by students. National Student Survey (NSS) results reinforce the highly positive student view on the learning experience.

22 A strong ensemble culture exists whereby students and tutors work together to continuously improve. Communication channels are open and frank which, along with the desire for excellence among staff and students, results in highly effective teaching and learning, as well as effectiveness in collecting and responding to student feedback. Staff and students met by the review team provided examples of this interaction and external

examiner reports confirm that LAMDA is responsive to student feedback.

23 There is a clear policy and strategy for student engagement. A recently enhanced Staff-Student Liaison Committee reports to the Academic Board and acts as a formal channel of communication between staff and students. Student representatives are clear on their role and are supported effectively by the Teaching, Learning and Quality Manager (TLQM). In meetings with the review team, Student Presidents clearly articulated the difference between the role of student representative and President. The TLQM shares findings, recommendations and student queries with the senior management team and the Heads of Departments. In addition, students contribute formally through surveys that include an internal twice-yearly survey, the NSS, and the awarding body's Partner Institution Survey. Data from these surveys feed into annual monitoring reports and the periodic review process. The latter includes direct student input and students also contribute to the programme approval process, as required by the awarding body. The student feedback loop is closed via 'You said, we did' information, emails and verbal communication to students, and through the Principal's letter. Meetings with staff and students during the visit confirmed that issues raised by students have been expediently and effectively addressed.

24 Comprehensive arrangements are in place to ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and support are available for students. Students state that LAMDA is proactive in diagnosing additional learning support needs and provides additional sessions to develop skills and confidence. This is supported by above-benchmark NSS results and through external reviews such as the awarding body periodic review, which concluded that the student support system is effective and to be commended. Student well-being is ensured through the personal tutor policy, which clearly articulates expectations of students and tutors as well as setting out the support and training provided to new tutors. A range of additional support for student well-being is provided, such as access to physiotherapy and counselling.

25 LAMDA has highly effective arrangements to involve students in the learning and assessment process and to create a learning community. NSS results in these areas are above benchmarks. Assessment processes are designed to ensure that student work is assessed fairly, appropriately and transparently and that assessment systems provide a relevant and appropriate means of developing student progress. Termly meetings are held to moderate assessments and review marks awarded by each staff member to each student. This data is also used to identify staff who might need additional guidance regarding marking criteria. Clear guidance is issued to students about the assessment process, including the nature of the grading and tutorial systems in the course handbooks. Along with regular verbal feedback from staff, student academic and professional development is enabled through formal end-of-term tutorials with the Head of Department. The tutorials are rigorous, with discussion informed by a written report from each relevant member of the teaching team and resulting in formally agreed development goals in each subject. Students confirm that the tutorial process is valued, and the Periodic Review Panel found the practice both laudable and highly commendable, giving students a better understanding of their own progression through the programme. External examiner comments state that students are particularly clear about assessment requirements.

26 Admissions requirements are clearly stated within course handbooks and on the institutional website, along with an Access and Widening Participation Strategy. LAMDA adopts a methodical, structured approach to the selection of students, which provides potential students with the opportunity to ask questions and seek further information on several occasions. Overall responsibility for the admissions process lies with the Registrar. The induction programme is robust, with students being provided with access to key documentation such as student handbooks in advance of the start. A social media site and a buddy system help students to make an effective transition from prospective to current

student and a comprehensive week of induction activities is provided at the start of the programmes.

27 LAMDA adheres to the awarding body annual quality and monitoring cycle, which includes submission of individual programme AMPRs and an overall report. Effective processes exist to construct and monitor AMPRs, involving Heads of Department, teaching staff and the TLQM. Actions from AMPRs are monitored appropriately through standing items in Head of Department meetings and at the Academic Board.

28 Direct engagement with employers, alumni and the wider community is extensive and valued highly by students. Examples include the use of past graduates in the admissions process, the use of visiting professionals, and productions in the community. External examiner and awarding body reports confirm that the strong and innovative links with industry benefit the programmes. Work placements are clearly planned and organised between the student, Head of Department and Conservatoire, including appropriate risk assessments and detailed guidance documentation for students and the placement provider. An innovative mentoring scheme using alumni has also been introduced to help graduates transition from LAMDA to the workplace.

The relevant code of governance: such as the Higher Education Code of Governance published by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) or the Association of Colleges' (AoC) Code of Good Governance for English Colleges

29 LAMDA has effective arrangements for encouraging student involvement in academic governance. Formal opportunities for engagement include student representation on Academic Board and the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee. The future inclusion of student representatives as members of the Board of Trustees has also been identified through the current governance review.

30 The student representative system works effectively, with information and training provided by LAMDA. Both the Student Engagement Strategy and Policy 2017 and the Student Representative Guidance 2017-18 articulate the expectations of the roles of representatives and Presidents. As well as meeting independently, the student representatives and the Presidents meet on a termly basis with the TLQM, and meet formally through the Staff-Student Liaison Committee.

31 Concerns raised by students are considered through management and academic governance committees. For example, the Heads of Department meet fortnightly and informal complaints feature highly in discussions, with actions identified and addressed. Minutes of Academic Board and the Learning and Teaching Committee demonstrate thorough engagement with issues raised by students. Students met by the review team were confident that their views were heard, that action was taken and that they were informed of the outcome either by email or face to face.

Policies and procedures are in place to ensure consumer protection obligations are met (Competition and Markets Authority guidance)

32 LAMDA's approach to admissions is robust and comprehensive and fully supports its well-embedded commitment to widening participation. Auditions are held in multiple locations across Europe and America to enable applicants to attend auditions without incurring prohibitive travel costs, thus enabling a far wider range of applicants to audition.

33 Underpinning this, LAMDA has a fair, transparent and accessible admissions policy and procedure which clearly outlines LAMDA's approach to admissions. This is provided in plain language and is easily accessible to applicants on the website. Applicants who are

successful in gaining a place through interview receive a telephone call to discuss the programme, followed by an offer letter sent from the central student record system, providing relevant information about the policies and procedures related to becoming a student and drawing attention to the terms and conditions of study. Terms and conditions are fair, balanced, clear and unambiguous and are made available in downloadable format. At the point of enrolment, students must accept the terms and conditions in order to proceed onto the programme. This information is consistent and fit for purpose, enabling applicants to make an informed decision prior to accepting a place. Staff and students met by the review team confirmed that the admissions policies and process operate consistently as outlined.

Student protection measures as expressed through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) Good Practice Framework, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's (PHSO) Principles of Good Administration, and HEFCE's Statement of Good Practice on Higher Education Course Changes and Closures

34 LAMDA has processes in place to ensure full compliance with course closure processes. The Memorandum of Agreement with the awarding body articulates the responsibilities of each organisation. LAMDA is required to apply to the awarding body for permission to close a programme and provide assurance regarding the arrangements for prospective and current students as the programme is withdrawn. The current FdA in Professional Acting is being replaced with an MFA in Professional Acting, with students supported while the programme is taught out. As defined by the Operating Agreement with the CDD, LAMDA offers support to, and can be supported by, other affiliated members in the rare instances of under or over-recruitment, or course closure.

35 Changes to provision are informed by formal and informal student feedback and through the annual monitoring process. For example, the change from FdA to MFA in Professional Acting was informed by student feedback. The culture of continuous improvement is evident through the in-course changes made in response to student and external examiner feedback. Students are notified of any material changes by email although major changes are rare, with most amendments resulting from normal monitoring and consultation processes identifying enhancements.

36 LAMDA has a rigorous approach to complaints and appeals handling. Two separate and distinct complaints policies operate: one for applicants and one for enrolled students. Both policies are clear, fair, accessible and timely and emphasise the independent and confidential nature of the process. The policies are available to applicants on LAMDA's website and clearly signposted to enrolled students in the student handbook, at induction and at appropriate points during their studies. Students and staff met by the review team confirmed that the size of the institution, frequency of contact, and the vocational and professional nature of the programmes results in almost all issues being resolved quickly and informally. Both formal and informal complaints and appeals are managed operationally through the Heads of Department meetings and institutional oversight is maintained by the Academic Board. The complaints process for enrolled students includes direction both to the awarding body's complaints process and to the OIA should internal processes (including those operated by CDD) be exhausted. Although no formal complaints have been received in recent years, LAMDA has effective measures in place to ensure complaints are dealt with in a fair and consistent manner. The awarding body is responsible for handling appeals against decisions made by Examination Boards and students are directed to that process in course handbooks.

37 The size and culture of LAMDA provides informal opportunities for students to input directly into the management of their own studies. Indeed, the review team noted that the empowering of students to raise issues is an important aspect of their professional

development as practitioners and, as such, leads to effective resolution of issues at an early stage. Examples of such engagement includes the availability of all-year classes and the resolution of issues relating to computer functioning. While the informal approach is encouraged, students are referred by staff to the formal complaints policy where appropriate, and themes from the informal process are considered at Heads of Department meetings.

Rounded judgement

38 Overall, LAMDA operates robust policies and procedures which ensure that the quality of the student academic experience is appropriately managed and monitored in line with baseline regulatory requirements. The approach reflects the specific culture of LAMDA and encourages a rigorous interface between students and staff, which reflects their professional engagement as an ensemble of practitioners. This empowers students and enables issues to be addressed in a timely and consistent manner, and enables LAMDA to identify and act swiftly to improve the student academic experience. Policies and procedures are implemented effectively and are designed to place appropriate emphasis on the student learning experience and protecting student interests. The review team identified no areas for development or specified improvements.

39 The review team concludes that there can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.

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