



# Quality Review Visit of Leeds College of Music

October 2017

## Key findings

### QAA's rounded judgements about Leeds College of Music

The QAA review team formed the following rounded judgements about the higher education provision at Leeds College of Music.

- **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 identified the following **areas for development** that have the potential to enhance quality and/or further secure the reliability and/or comparability of academic standards at Leeds College of Music. The review team advises Leeds College of Music to:

- further refine the processes by which it identifies and confirms the completion of actions arising from external examiner reports to ensure that they are all completed. (Quality Code).
- fully embed its proposals to formally include and record the student voice in the College's governance structures (Code of Governance).

### Specified improvements

The review team identified no **specified improvements**.

## About this review

The review visit took place from 3 to 5 October 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Craig Best (student reviewer)
- Professor John Deane
- Professor Mary Malcolm.

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 Leeds College of Music

Leeds College of Music (the College) is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Leeds City College Group (LCCG), which is a Further Education Corporation, following a merger that took place in 2011-12. Before the merger, the College was a HEFCE-funded higher education institution (HEI), having entered the higher education sector in 2005. Since merging the College has continued to operate autonomously in relation to its academic standards and student academic experience, with the College's deliberative committees and governance structure being linked to the governance structure of LCCG.

The College delivers further and higher education and is a conservatoire: a specialist music education provider and member of Conservatoires UK. In 2016-17 the College had 1,094 full-time higher education undergraduate students and 67 postgraduate students. The provision falling under the remit of the Quality Review Visit consists of three higher education qualifications: a Foundation Degree, a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Music that has multiple pathways, and a postgraduate Master of Music. All of the College's higher education programmes are validated by one awarding body, the University of Hull, under an Agreement that has been in place since 2014.

The College and the LCCG University Centre are the only parts of LCCG to deliver higher education. LCCG underwent Higher Education Review (HER) in March 2016, with judgements of meets UK expectations. The College is undergoing a Quality Review Visit as part of its application to be designated again as an HEI. If designated, the College will remain part of LCCG but will have a separate designation with HEFCE.

## Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1 The review team found that the College has arrangements in place that meet the requirements of the degree-awarding body which ensure that the academic standards of the programmes offered meet or exceed the UK threshold set out by the FHEQ.

2 The College works with one awarding body, that is responsible for assuring the quality and maintaining the standards of its awards. The awarding body sets the standards of the College's higher education (HE) programmes through the application of its own academic frameworks and regulations, to which the College is required to adhere. This is set out in the Collaborative Provision Agreement and in the awarding body's regulations. This ensures that qualifications are positioned at the appropriate level and that awards are based on the achievement of learning outcomes, which students demonstrate through assessment.

3 The awarding body is responsible for maintaining the definitive record of programme specifications and the College is responsible for the production of the specifications prior to approval by the awarding body. Though programme specifications do not provide explicit reference to the FHEQ Level, the Provider Submission and information given by staff and students in meetings with the review team indicate that the College is aware of the appropriate FHEQ alignment.

4 The College is required by its awarding body to include external expertise within its programme development. The College seeks both formal and informal advice from external sources. External examining is prescribed by the awarding body and external examiners sample assignment briefs and assessed student work and report annually to the awarding body and to the College. External examiner reports require explicit consideration of the comparability of 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

5 The College is a wholly owned subsidiary of LCCG and the College's governance arrangements are outlined in a Memorandum and Articles of Association. Current oversight of academic governance sits with the LCCG Board of Governors via a Joint HE Academic Board. The Committee and governance structures and the reporting lines between the College, LCCG and the awarding body are outlined in the College's Committee Structure 2016-17.

6 The LCCG Joint HE Academic Board and Joint HE Quality Enhancement Committee were formed in 2016-17 as part of the LCCG bid for Foundation Degree-Awarding Powers. Committees are reviewed annually and in 2016-17 the Terms of Reference of the Joint HE Academic Board and Joint HE Quality Enhancement Committee were reviewed and revised as a result of a Governance Review that identified areas that could be improved. The Chair of the College Board of Directors is on the Joint HE Academic Board. The Chair is the lead HE Governor for LCCG and is the Chair of the College Audit Committee, ensuring that all key developments regarding risk and governance are dealt with at Board level. The College Principal is also a member of the LCCG Board of Governors.

7 Currently the Chair of the College Board of Directors sits on the LCCG Board of Governors and is the HE Link Governor. The College's Students' Union (SU) President has been an observer at College Board of Director meetings since 2014-15. From 2017-18 the SU President will be a formal member of the College Board of Directors as a Student Director, and a College staff member will be elected to the College Board of Directors as Staff Director, as outlined in the LCCG Governance Paper. In meetings with the review team, senior, academic and professional staff demonstrated their clear commitment to meeting the expectations of the Governance Review.

8 The College has responsibility for the management of a Strategic Risk Register that is presented to the College Board of Directors. The process links into the LCCG Audit Committee, which reviews the LCCG Risk Register. The risk registers and the KPIs are also presented and discussed at the College Board of Directors.

9 The College Board of Directors' template for all deliberative committee agendas contains a section on risk assessment and on the impact of all activities on the student experience. Risk Assessment appears as a standing item on the agenda of the HE Quality and Enhancement Committee and on the agenda of the Academic Council, both of which formally consider issues of academic risk. The LCCG Academic Board Terms of Reference explicitly mentions the management of risk, and the Joint HE Quality Enhancement Committee Terms of Reference outlines the monitoring of key performance data. Risk is a standing item on the College Board of Directors agenda.

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

10 All programme documentation includes the credit volume and level of the component modules and reference to relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statements. Module specifications map module outcomes to programme outcomes and define the assessment methods by which those module outcomes are assessed. The College is responsible for the provision and management of placement learning at foundation degree level and has appropriate arrangements in place.

11 Assessment criteria are specified within assignment briefs and are based on standardised criteria that are applied across the College's higher education provision. Placement assessments within the Foundation Degree are assessed by the College. The College employs external instrument assessors, trained by the College to ensure that the standards achieved in performance assessments are comparable with sector norms and equitable across disciplines. There are specified arrangements for the organisation and administration of performance assessments. The awarding body's procedures are followed for the accreditation of prior learning for specific credit, and in matters of academic misconduct.

12 The College operates module and programme assessment boards under the regulations of the awarding body. The review team confirmed with staff that condonement for missing credit at award level is permitted only in cases in which the programme learning outcomes are confirmed as being met.

13 The College proposes external examiners to the awarding body for appointment by it, and provides training for those appointed. External examiners provide their annual reports directly to the awarding body and to the College, which considers the reports within its Annual Monitoring process.

14 The College's Annual Monitoring Reports (AMR), which follow the awarding body's template, include key areas related to the maintenance of academic standards and associated action planning. The AMRs are considered by Academic Council, with action

planning being managed through a proprietary system and progress monitoring conducted by Academic Council and the College Board of Directors. Related to the Annual Monitoring process, the awarding body requires the College to submit an annual Partner Quality Enhancement Report.

15 Staff are responsible for completing their own actions within the action planning process and, within the proprietary system, specify their own actions and then confirm their own completion of these. In a recent AMR, an external examiner was noted as having repeated the same concern in consecutive years about the award of high marks in a particular area of the curriculum. In this specific case, the external examiner's concerns generated actions that did not address fully the external examiner's concerns by the required deadlines. The review team identifies this an **area for development** and advises the College to further refine the processes by which it identifies and confirms the completion of actions arising from external examiner reports to ensure that they are all completed.

16 Minor changes to modules and programmes require the approval of Academic Council and the awarding body prior to implementation within the definitive record. The review team heard that no changes that fall within the awarding body's criteria for major change have been made.

17 An internal approval process precedes the validation of provision by the awarding body. The internal approval process separates business from academic decision making. The review team heard that the awarding body operates six-yearly periodic reviews of partner provision, and the College expects to undertake this in 2019.

## **Rounded judgement**

18 The College has demonstrated through its governance structures, its internal policies and procedures, and its adherence to the awarding body's policies and procedures that it effectively meets all the baseline regulatory requirements in this area. The review team identified one area for development and no specified improvements in this judgement area.

19 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)

20 The quality of the student academic experience is managed and monitored in accordance with the Joint HE Quality Enhancement Committee and institutional oversight rests with Academic Council, which operates with clear Terms of Reference.

21 The HE Admissions Policy sets out the process for the recruitment, selection and admission of students and is reviewed annually. There is an appeals process, feedback on admissions decisions, mid-cycle admissions communications, and joining instructions sent to applicants. The students who met the review team were satisfied with the admissions process.

22 The College operates a personal tutor system for first year students. Students who met the review team valued the fact that personal tutors were not from their own pathway area and that there was the option for female students to have female personal tutors. From 2017-18 the College is introducing Student Digital Mentors to support student digital skills development. The College has developed a Student Mental Health Policy to support students presenting with mental health issues. All staff within Student Services have specialist qualifications in careers, disability, finance or occupational therapy.

23 College teaching staff are required to obtain the awarding body's approval as a 'Recognised Teacher'. There is an annual round of applications for staff promotion and this can be for excellence in learning, teaching and assessment or for research or both, and is set out in the Probation and Promotion Policy. Staff are required to take part in a peer observation scheme. The Organisational Development Policy outlines the numerous ways in which staff are supported to remain current in their practice, including support for higher degrees and Higher Education Academy Fellowship. The College provides mandatory training and continuing professional development linked to internal policy and procedure updates and sessions on the use of the VLE, this training links to engagement in learning and teaching activity.

24 The College has a Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy that is aligned to its Strategic Plan and outlines what students can expect in terms of engagement in the learning and teaching process. This Strategy is supported by a new Technology Enhanced Learning Strategy 2017-2020, approved in July 2017 by Academic Council. The Strategy's inclusive learning approach is outlined in programme specifications. Students who met the review team confirmed the statements in the written Student Submission that the College engages students in the development of programmes and with the appointment of staff and the students reported that they receive good support, feel that they have advanced academically and that College staff play a role in their personal, professional and academic development.

25 An extensive student survey of induction, including library induction, is undertaken by the College. The College AMR has a student feedback section and the student-staff forum has representation from all pathways. The student-staff forums outline the number of issues raised and the number that are dealt with effectively and are also the mechanism for feedback to students regarding any issues raised. The student-staff forums, which take place twice per term, are attended by two student representatives for each pathway, and in between the representatives attend interim meetings with the programme leaders. The representatives are provided with training for their role.

26 The College AMR consider various items relating to the student academic experience, including issues from the Board of Examiners, student support issues, feedback from external examiners' reports, learning resources, issues relating to assessment strategy and student feedback. Also, attached to the AMR are student progression and achievement data, the NSS action plan, and responses to external examiner reports and related actions. The AMR provide detailed evaluation of student performance data and results in action plans. The Joint HE Quality Enhancement Committee considers annual student retention, progression and achievement data and AMR are considered at the Joint HE Quality Enhancement Committee and at Academic Council. The College's performance data are also considered by the LCCG Academic Board.

27 The Estates Strategy 2017-2022 sets out future plans to continue to invest in the specialist learning and teaching spaces required by the College. The College has a VLE that can be accessed on and off site and the extensive policy covering its use sets out explicitly to staff what they need to make available to students. Students who met the review team expressed a high level of satisfaction with the range of learning opportunities provided and with learning resources, and with the new library in particular.

28 The College engages with external industry stakeholders to advise on the relevance to the industry of the College's programmes, learning and teaching strategies, assessment methods and learning outcomes.

**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 Only staff and students of the LCCG Further Education Corporation (which does not include the College) are eligible to serve as staff and student governors on the LCCG Board of Governors. The College's HE students are represented on the LCCG HE Academic Board and the Joint HE Quality and Enhancement Committee, which reports on matters of strategy and curriculum to the LCCG HE Academic Board. The College's HE students are also represented on the College's Academic Council.

30 The SU President has been an observer on the College Board of Directors since 2014-15 and will become a formal member of the College Board of Directors, as Student Director, in 2017-18. The schedule of Board business includes review of College-wide performance associated with quality and standards, though postgraduate students are not currently reflected within KPIs because of their relatively small numbers. The Board maintains a strategic risk register and considers matters reflecting student interest. From 2017-18 the schedule of Board business will include a 'student voice report'. The new Student Engagement Policy, which sets out how the student voice will be heard and acted upon, was approved by Academic Council in September 2017.

31 The LCCG Joint HE Academic Board delegates to the College's Academic Council responsibility for quality assurance. Academic Council is currently undertaking a mapping of student voice activities. The SU President is an ex officio member of Academic Council, which receives the minutes of staff-student forum meetings. This forms a key component of the student voice representation at the College. Academic Council considers a range of matters reflecting student interest.

32 The College Board of Directors considers aspects of the student complaints policy. Reporting on appeals and complaints is through the AMR process and the annual Partner Quality Enhancement Report, and reports are reviewed by Academic Council.

33 The formalisation of student membership of the College Board of Directors and the introduction of a student voice report at Board level are new developments and the template for the student voice report has not yet been finalised. The review team identifies this as an **area for development** and advises the College to fully embed its proposals to formally include and record the student voice in the College's governance structures (Code of Governance).

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

34 The College is responsible for ensuring that prospective students are informed about its arrangements with the awarding body. This includes information pertaining to the management of academic standards, quality of learning opportunities, appeals and complaints, and students' rights and responsibilities. Oversight is maintained by Academic Council and the College Board of Directors, with Group oversight by the LCCG Joint HE Academic Board and LCCG Board of Governors.

35 The College has a policy covering its published information, and a published information responsibilities overview. The College is required to ensure that all publicity, promotional and marketing material, and teaching quality information for all validated programmes is subject to a sign-off process by the awarding body. Information for prospective students is published in the prospectus, on the College website and presented at open days. The College website includes information on College, course structure and content, financial costs and reference to the Terms and Conditions. The latter follows Competition and Markets Authority guidance.

### **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**

36 The review team found that the College has an effective approach to supporting students through student services and through personal tutors.

37 The College has an Admissions Appeals Policy and an HE Academic Appeals and Queries Policy and Procedures. The Policy is be communicated to students on the VLE and is referenced in the HE student handbooks. The Policy has four stages, including the right of challenge to the awarding body.

38 The complaints procedure is set out in the Student Complaints Policy and Procedure, this document includes reference to complaints made by applicants and aligns with the HE Admissions Policy. The College's Student Complaints Policy and Procedure is governed by the LCCG Complaints Policy. The Procedure has four stages, including the right of complaint to the awarding body. The College Board of Directors and Academic Council receive reports on complaints. Appeals and complaints are reported through the annual Partner Quality Enhancement Report to the awarding body.

39 The College follows the programme and module modification processes set by the awarding body, and modifications are approved at the Academic Council. The College has protection measures in place for prospective and current students in cases of course closure, and the College has used its teach-out procedures where a course has been closed for new entrants. The review team found these procedures to be effective; staff who met the review team have a good understanding of their responsibilities, and students who met the review team who have been affected spoke positively of their experience. There has been



the recent withdrawal and amendment of courses before registration and the review team were informed that the College has in place communication plans to inform applicants.

## **Rounded judgement**

40 The College has demonstrated that overall governance and quality management of the student academic experience are effective. Policies and procedures are in place to ensure that consumer protection obligations are met and that there are appropriate student protection measures. The review team identified one area for development and no specified improvements in this judgement area.

41 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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