



**QAA**



# Institutional audit

**Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts**

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## Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To this end, QAA carries out Institutional audits of higher education institutions.

In England and Northern Ireland, QAA conducts Institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector, to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council in England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations to assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (now the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills). It was revised in 2006 following recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, a representative group established to review the structures and processes of quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland, and evaluate the work of QAA.

Institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework established in 2002 following revisions to the United Kingdom's approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the revised Institutional audit process is to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges of higher education in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner
- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications
- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and feedback from stakeholders.

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

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of awards
- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes
- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research

- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

If the audit includes the institution's collaborative provision the judgements and comments also apply unless the audit team considers that any of its judgements or comments in respect of the collaborative provision differ from those in respect of the institution's 'home' provision. Any such differences will be reflected in the form of words used to express a judgement or comment on the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

### **Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex**

The reports of quality audits have to be useful to several audiences. The revised Institutional audit process makes a clear distinction between that part of the reporting process aimed at an external audience and that aimed at the institution. There are three elements to the reporting:

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students
- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences
- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. (*Handbook for institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland 2006 - Annexes B and C refer*).

## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA or the Institute) from 30 March to 3 April 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that LIPA offers on behalf of Liverpool John Moores University (as the awarding body).

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout LIPA and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which LIPA manages the academic aspects of its provision.

In Institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the United Kingdom (UK). The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

### Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that are validated by Liverpool John Moores University
- confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement

In the Briefing Paper, LIPA states that reviewing the extent to which individual programmes achieve the goals and priorities determined with the Strategic Plan is central to enhancement. The audit team was able to confirm that the main drivers for quality enhancement were both internal and external review. However, the team noted that, in some instances, in order to work in a collegial manner and in an attempt to agree a collective view, some initiatives to enhance quality had become protracted and could perhaps be brought to a swifter conclusion.

### Postgraduate research students

At the time of the audit, the Institute had no postgraduate research students.

### Published information

The audit found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the Institute publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of the awards that are validated by Liverpool John Moores University. However, internal programme and module information published to students could benefit from a more rigorous and consistent approach.

## Features of good practice

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

- the annual review days held in November which draw upon the annual programme review process as part of finalising the Institutional Quality Report
- the attention given, as part of the undergraduate admissions process, to providing auditions which reflect current practice and course content
- the Institute's proactive strategy towards enhancing the development of staff through their engagement with the Higher Education Academy and support for research and scholarly activity.

## Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that the Institute consider further action in some areas.

The team advises the Institute to:

- ensure that the Institute's accreditation status with Liverpool John Moores University (as the degree awarding body) is subject to a written, legally-binding and regularly reviewed contractual agreement signed by the two institutions
- develop further the management and organisation of its formal boards and committees, and the exchange of information between them, to ensure each is discharging its responsibilities for the management of quality and standards effectively and transparently
- implement, in collaboration with the University, revised procedures in the Institute that will enhance the role of external examiners in securing the standards of awards
- undertake with the University (as the degree awarding body) a review of the Institute's degree classification profile across its undergraduate programmes with due regard to national comparators across the sector.

It would be desirable for the Institute to:

- engage with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* in a systematic way at institutional level to develop further its policies and procedures for the assurance of academic quality and standards
- keep under review the annual monitoring process to ensure that the deliberative structure meets the Institute's aspirations for overall consistency of reporting, the implementation of action plans and the achievement of targets
- take steps to improve the effectiveness of formal student representation and participation on boards and committees
- improve the timeliness of enhancement initiatives in order to have greater impact on the experience of current students.

## Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by the Institute of the Academic Infrastructure, which provides a means of describing academic standards in UK higher education. It allows for diversity and innovation within academic programmes offered by higher education. QAA worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure, which are:

- the *Code of practice*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

The audit found that LIPA took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students but should engage with the *Code of practice* systematically at institutional level in order to further develop its policies and procedures.





## Report

1 An Institutional audit of the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA or the Institute) was undertaken during the week commencing 30 March 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the Institute's management of the academic standards of the awards that are validated by Liverpool John Moores University and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Professor M Hunt, Ms B Howell, Professor P Manning and Dr C Pickles, auditors, and Mr D Batty, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Ms S Butler, Assistant Director, Development and Enhancement Group.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

3 LIPA is a small specialist higher education institution. It began teaching students in 1996 and was designated as a higher education institution in 2006. Its focus is the performing arts through collaborative working and one of its aims is an outcome of sustained employment. Its mission is 'to provide exemplary and distinctive vocational performing arts and related education and training'. It provides a range of pre-higher education programmes which lead to LIPA diplomas. At undergraduate level it provides eight full-time BA honours programmes on which there are 598 students registered in 2008-09 and four MA programmes on which there are 73 students registered. One of the MA programmes is full-time and the remaining three integrated MAs are part-time. Thirteen per cent of the student population are international students.

4 The Institute's higher education programmes are validated by Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) as the awarding body which confers the qualifications. This arrangement has been in place since the Institute's inception.

5 This was the first QAA Institutional audit undertaken of the Institute. Prior to this, key external reviews include: the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) commissioned QAA Review in 2002 prior to LIPA's designation as a higher education institution, and the LJMU institutional reviews of 2003 and 2008. The institutional review of 2003 approved the partnership between the Institute and the University for a further three years. The subsequent institutional review of the Institute, which took place in May 2008, confirmed the continuation of the partnership for a period of five years. HEFCE designation was granted on 1 August 2006.

### Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

6 As noted above, LIPA is in a validation partnership with LJMU. The audit team was advised that, since 2002, the nature of the relationship with LJMU was that of an accredited institution to the University. The Institute acts as a shadow school of LJMU and reports to the University's faculty of Media, Arts and Social Science. LIPA's Director of Higher Education is regarded as a Director of School. A document published by the University sets out the responsibilities, expectations and requirements of its accredited institutions.

7 The audit team was provided with a copy of the legal agreement between the Institute and the University dated 31 March 1995 which was binding for a period of eight years. There appeared to be no formal agreement after the expiry of this first legal agreement which records the Institute's status and contractual arrangement with the University as its awarding body. The team recommends that it is advisable to ensure that the Institute's accreditation status with LJMU (as the degree awarding body) is subject to a written, legally binding and regularly reviewed contractual agreement signed by the two institutions.

8 All the Institute's programmes have been designed and operate within the LJMU Modular Framework. In agreement with the University, the Institute is permitted to vary the Framework in a number of ways; the variations are set out in the LIPA Principles and Procedures for Higher Education which is issued annually.

9 The relationship between the Institute and the University is managed by the University's Partnerships Quality and Standards Panel which, on a periodic basis, undertakes a formal institutional review of the Institute. The purpose of the institutional review is to assure the University that the standards and quality of programmes leading to a university award are being maintained and that there is an appropriate learning environment for the students. Two institutional reviews have been undertaken to date, as noted in paragraph 5 above. Although the recommendations are acted upon, the audit team noted that, on occasion, it took some time before appropriate action was implemented by the Institute (for example the ongoing issue of timeliness in providing students with feedback and the review of the ways in which external examiners function).

10 The LIPA Council is responsible for the determination of the educational character and mission of the Institute and has oversight of its activities. The primary internal committee for the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities of the Institute's higher education provision is the Teaching and Learning Board, a formal subcommittee of the LIPA Council, chaired by the Principal. The main subcommittee of the Teaching and Learning Board is the Institute Quality Committee, chaired by the Director of Higher Education, which has delegated responsibility for the operational management of the principles, procedures and systems for the maintenance of quality and standards. The audit team found that the range of committees generally worked well together on an informal level but would advise that the record of meetings should be strengthened in order to capture the debate and interplay of decision-making between committees in respect of both quality and standards and to ensure appropriate levels of transparency. Furthermore, in the context of the Institute Quality Committee, the team was unable to distinguish clearly a differentiation of roles relating to governance and executive (operational) functions in terms of assuring quality and standards. For example, the Director of Higher Education is not only responsible for producing the annual Institutional Quality Report and its recommendations, but also for presenting them to a committee which he chairs.

11 The Director of Higher Education is directly accountable to the Principal for the quality and standards of the Institute's higher education provision and chairs the majority of committees at both programme and institutional level. In the audit team's view, this range and level of involvement may represent an over-reliance on a single individual in both governance and executive (operational) aspects of quality assurance and standards. The Institute may wish to consider ways of revising some internal responsibilities to produce arrangements less dependent on a single post-holder.

12 The audit team found that the partnership with the University has been a supportive and effective relationship. However, it was not clear to the team how the guidance provided by the University was acted upon in all cases. The team concluded that the institutional framework for managing standards had the capacity to be effective but the team recommended that it was advisable to develop further the management and organisation of its formal boards and committees, and the exchange of information between them, to ensure each is discharging its responsibilities for the management of quality and standards effectively and transparently.

13 In addition to programmes being designed and developed consistent with the LJMU Modular Framework requirements, programme approval is conducted according to the LJMU procedures culminating in a validation event chaired by the University and including external members. Standards are monitored through the annual programme review cycle which leads to the production of the Institutional Quality Report, a process which the University has approved for the Institute on a bespoke basis, and also through the module and programme assessment boards which are required to operate under the University Modular Framework. A review of academic standards also forms an important component of the periodic review of programmes which is conducted in accordance with the LJMU programme review procedures. As the majority of the mechanisms listed above are also concerned with the management of academic quality, these aspects are discussed more fully under Section 3.

14 The Institute uses external examiners to secure the academic standards of awards in accordance with the regulations of the University. Some aspects of the procedures followed, however, leave room for improvement, in particular the way in which external examiners function in programmes across the provision, with particular regard to the issue of attendance at, and input into, module assessment boards, and the way in which subject external examiners are represented at programme assessment boards. These concerns were identified in the LJMU institutional review of the Institute in 2008, and the audit team came to the view that the Institute's internal consideration to date of this recommendation does not adequately address the expectations of that review. The Institute is advised to revisit its response to this recommendation and implement, in collaboration with the University, revised procedures in the Institute that will enhance the role of external examiners in securing the standards of awards.

15 The Institute confirmed that it had not consistently engaged with revisions to the Academic Infrastructure. *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* is, however, used as a core reference point for a range of policies and practices within the Institute. It forms a central part of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and of the processes leading up to programme reviews and new validations. Subject benchmark statements are referenced on all LIPA programme specifications; in some cases multiple benchmark statements are referred to. However, the audit team could not identify an institutional approach to oversight of engagement with revisions to subject benchmark statements and the identification of any changes which might flow from these. Programme specifications viewed by the team were clear and comprehensive. The team found that the Institute took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students, but considered that a more strategic overview could be undertaken of engagement with subject benchmark statements at institutional level.

16 The Institute has one official professional accreditation via the Joint Audio Media Education Services, which has recently accredited the BA Sound Technology programme for the third time (2008 to 2010). The accreditation report is used by the programme team to place the programme in its external professional context and to encourage student preparation for future employment. External expert opinion is required by LJMU in new programme approval and the programme review processes and is implemented consistently across LIPA as evidenced by outcome-based reports.

17 Assessment policies and regulations are those of the University (as set out in the University Modular Framework), subject to variations which have been agreed specific to the Institute. The audit team noted that external examiners are generally satisfied with the implementation of these and it was possible to confirm that specific issues concerning assessment arising from external examiners' reports are appropriately addressed as part of the processes of annual programme review. The team was less convinced with the Institute's engagement with assessment issues that invite proactive reflection that goes beyond the information specifically provided in external examiners' reports. Whereas the latter provide the key measure of quality assurance, there are other aspects which merit further consideration by the Institute prior to the annual programme review and confirmation of the assessment processes by the University. In particular, the team noted the wide variation in the proportion of First class degrees awarded in different programmes. The team considers it advisable for the Institute to undertake with the University (as the degree awarding body) a review of the Institute's degree classification profile across its undergraduate programmes with due regard to national comparators. It should also reflect more proactively on the issues arising from assessment at an institutional level, perhaps as part of the Annual Review Day, where, in the context of enhancement, it is possible to share views with representatives of the University.

18 The audit team was able to confirm that comprehensive statistical data is generated for the annual programme review process, and that relevant data is also available for consideration by programme boards. There is evidence that areas such as the outcomes of the National Student Survey are subject to appropriate processes of analysis and reflection. However, the implementation of suitable remedies to identified shortcomings needs to take place in a more timely manner. In the case of other areas, notably student progression and degree results, it would appear that the significance of statistical data in identifying trends and anomalies is not being explored to maximum advantage. A more proactive engagement with such information would also more generally secure improvements to the deliberative structures which underpin annual course monitoring in terms of the quantitative aspects of implementing action plans and meeting targets.

19 The standards infrastructure is generally robust with a consistent range of systems and processes being deployed. Confidence can be placed in the soundness of the Institute's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that are validated by LJMU. However, there is scope for improvement in the transparency and effectiveness of the operation of committees, the Institute's engagement with assessment issues, the use of statistical data to monitor trends, and the ways in which external examiners are deployed.

### **Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities**

20 The audit team found that the Institute took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students, but would recommend that a more strategic overview is undertaken. The team recommends that it is desirable that the Institute engages with the *Code of practice* in a systematic way at institutional level to develop further its policies and procedures for the assurance of academic quality and standards.

21 The Institute is required to follow the LJMU procedures for approval of new programmes in common with faculties of the University. The audit team found that the processes for approval of new programmes and amendments to existing programmes at Institute level were understood and applied in accordance with the University's requirements. The team noted, however, that a limited number of new programme validations had taken place; therefore the current procedures had not been thoroughly tested.

22 With the agreement of the University, the Institute has developed its own quality assurance procedures that are detailed in the Institute's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook. The Institute's annual programme review is based around team self-assessment underpinned by quantitative and qualitative data; at the core of the process are external examiners' reports. Programme boards are charged with monitoring the quality assurance and enhancement process for their programme. The audit team found that there was variability in the extent to which boards engaged with the prescribed data and that it would be desirable for a greater level of consistency in the content and coverage of annual programme review reports to be achieved and for this to be monitored more effectively at institutional level.

23 The Institute operates annual review days in November of each year which are devoted to the collective review and evaluation of the annual programme reviews by representatives of programmes and service areas at the Institute, together with two representatives from the University. Students were invited to attend the review day for the first time in 2008. The audit team considered that the coming together of staff for the annual review days was a feature of good practice.

24 The Director of Higher Education produces the annual Institutional Quality Report, based on the annual programme review reports and the outcomes of the review day, together with a comprehensive action plan. These are submitted both to the LIPA Teaching and Learning Board and to the LJMU Media, Arts and Social Science Faculty Quality Committee and from the latter they are transmitted to the LJMU Partnerships Quality and Standards Panel.

25 The audit team found that the processes for programme monitoring at Institute and programme level are understood and applied in accordance with both the University's and, broadly, with the Institute's requirements. The team considered the annual programme review process to be generally robust, ensuring that no significant issue is overlooked. It was noted, however, that actions sometimes recurred in the following year's annual programme review and institutional quality reports, therefore leading to a protracted period before these were completed. The team recommended that it was desirable that the Institute keeps under review the annual monitoring process to ensure that it meets the Institute's aspirations for overall consistency of reporting, the implementation of action plans and the achievement of targets.

26 The audit team found that the processes for review of programmes at Institute level are understood and applied in accordance with the University's requirements. The team confirmed that the evidence available suggested the process of periodic review was generally robust but noted that the timeliness and consistency of reporting could be improved.

27 The Institute has a number of informal and formal mechanisms for capturing student feedback. The audit team found that subject areas were responsive to informal student feedback and were informed that the Institute was making improvements to the collection of module feedback. Opinions from current and former students are also sought as part of the programme review process. The Institute makes use of feedback from the National Student Survey (NSS) through consideration at the Institute Quality Committee as part of the Institutional Quality Report. The Institute compared favourably to national sector benchmarks in four areas of the NSS and less well in two (assessment and feedback; organisation and management). The team was made aware of the considerable steps the Institute had taken over a significant period of time to improve feedback on assessment but noted that a greater impact on the student experience could have been achieved through more timely interventions.

28 The Institute has no Students' Union nor are there any sabbatical officers. Student representation is provided through programme student advisory boards, the Institute student advisory boards, attendance at programme boards and membership of a range of institutional committees including the Teaching and Learning Board and the Equality and Diversity Committee. External examiners' reports are not currently made available to students (see paragraph 43). The audit team was encouraged by the value students placed on the student advisory boards. However, it noted inconsistencies in the scheduling of the various boards and committees and variations in the pattern of attendance. The team took the view that the variability of approach could contribute to difficulties in engaging student attendance and would encourage the Institute to take further steps to ensure student representation and participation.

29 The Institute's research is generally focused on professional practice in the areas taught. Staff engagement in professional practice has a direct link to the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students by ensuring the currency and reliability of the curriculum, and by fostering links with other industry practitioners who in turn contribute to the delivery of the programme. The audit team concluded that arrangements for promoting links between research or scholarly activity and teaching and learning were embedded at programme level.

30 The Institute's teaching accommodation and other central learning resources are located in two buildings (Hope Street and Mount Street). Students and staff are supported through a range of information and communication technology resources; for example, the virtual learning environment, intranet, Microsoft Vista and Office Professional 2007, upgraded PC stock, WiFi access and SharePoint 2007. The Institute also has a wide selection of resources in the Learning Resources Centre which include books, journals, CDs, DVDs, special collections, information technology user guides, PCs and various online information resources. It was recognised that difficulties had been encountered with accommodation but the audit team reached the view that steps were being taken to improve this. While both the information and communication technology resources and the Learning Resources Centre effectively met the needs of the Institute and made a positive

contribution to the learning opportunities available to students, the team was of the view that the Institute's existing procedures to optimise their use should be consistently applied.

31 The Institute manages its admissions process completely independently of the University and has a detailed admissions policy which is reviewed on an annual basis. One of the Institute's strategic goals is to 'maintain and develop inclusive recruitment of talented students' and this is elaborated in its Widening Participation Strategy. The Institute interviews or auditions a large proportion of its applicants, including all international students. The admissions procedures and criteria are clearly set out in the LIPA Admissions Policy and comprehensive guidelines for potential applicants can be found on the Institute's website. Comprehensive admissions statistics are compiled at programme level as part of the annual programme review and similar statistics as part of the Institutional Quality Report cycle. However, the audit team noted some variability of reflection at the programme level. The team was impressed by the detailed support provided prior to the audition/interview. The team further considered that the attention given to providing an audition which reflects current practice and course content was a feature of good practice.

32 Students are provided with a student handbook (The Green Book) which provides comprehensive guidelines on the operation of programmes and academic regulations. The audit team learnt of a comprehensive induction week and support provided to students through the Learning Guidance Tutorial system (which includes at least two meetings per year) designed to monitor progress throughout a programme of study and to support career planning. Career guidance is further provided through advice integrated within programmes, a graduate conference, staff links to industry, professional interviews, work placements, external speakers, involvement in local projects and advice from recent graduates. The team noted that the Learning Guidance Tutorial system had been interpreted in different ways and took the view that, although considerable effort had taken place to provide a more consistent approach, it would encourage the Institute to introduce improvements more rapidly. The team further viewed the level of career advice to be reliant on the specialism of the individual course teams and would suggest students would benefit from a broader and more generic approach (possibly by drawing on the resources of the University for non-specialist advice).

33 Current and prospective students are further supported through the Learner Support Services which provide specialist language support for international students, study skills tutors, musicianship coaching and, where appropriate, note-takers, examination scribes and readers, counselling, attention and deficit disorder/hyperactive disorder coaching, educational psychologists and ICT trainers. This service is outwardly proactive to the extent of being willing to meet/communicate with prospective students, parents and, where relevant, carers and support workers.

34 Following a QAA review of the Institute in December 2002 (prior to designation as a higher education institute) staff development became a renewed priority. A twin approach has been adopted in the context of teaching staff professional development, embracing the enhancement of teaching skills and the enhancement of subject knowledge/expertise. A specific objective is recognition of all teaching and teaching support staff by the Higher Education Academy. So far over 80 per cent of permanent teaching staff and support staff with significant teaching responsibilities have become fellows of the Academy. A range of initiatives have been supported to enhance professional development. These include a sabbatical programme specifically designed to provide teaching staff with the opportunity to maintain and develop their skills as practitioners, teachers and/or subject specialists through a period of paid absence from work. It was clear to the audit team from a scrutiny of supporting documents and meetings with staff that the Institute's proactive strategy towards enhancing the development of staff, in particular through their engagement with the Higher Education Academy and support for research and scholarly activity, is a feature of good practice.

35 It was the view of the audit team that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

## **Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement**

36 The Institute states that the central approach to enhancement is the practice of reviewing the extent to which individual programmes achieve the goals and priorities determined with the Strategic Plan. The methods used to accomplish this are: embedding enhancement within the strategic planning process; the professional development of staff and support of staff research; membership of and input from organisations that have a direct link with the performing arts economies; visiting lecturers attached to each discipline; employer/professional engagement with programme delivery; annual review cycles and periodic programme reviews.

37 The Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund has been used productively to support a range of initiatives to enhance professional development including sabbaticals. Teaching and support staff who achieve prescribed aspirations agreed as part of appraisal gain a financial supplement. Evidence presented to the team verified that this is an effective strategy at institutional level to support quality enhancement initiatives.

38 The Briefing Paper states that good practice in all areas related to learning and teaching are formally recognised and disseminated through the annual review days, with discussions around allocated themes; in this way practice is shared among programme leaders. However, the audit team did not find any evidence of the Institute taking deliberate steps to roll out identified good practice systematically across all LIPA programmes. The team would recommend that the Institute considers the systematic embedding of evident good practice across the Institute as an approach to quality enhancement.

39 The audit team was able to confirm that the main drivers for quality enhancement were both internal and external review. Examples resulting from these reviews were the Institute's extensive projects on the Learning Guidance Tutorial System and on feedback to students on assessment. These projects involved external perspectives which enhanced the evidence base and it was clear that the Institute worked in a collegial manner to secure collective agreement. However, this also led to protracted periods from the point of recognition to conclusion and implementation and the team recommends that it is desirable that the Institute improves the timeliness of enhancement initiatives in order to have a greater impact on the experience of current students.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

40 At the time of the audit, the Institute did not have any collaborative arrangements for delivery of higher education provision.

## **Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students**

41 At the time of the audit, the Institute did not have any postgraduate research student provision.

## **Section 7: Published information**

42 The audit team reviewed the prospectus website and a range of the Institute's promotional material as well as the entry on the Unistats website. Students were aware that the website is under redevelopment; their view is that the current website does not reflect the quality of the Institute compared with competitor institutions and that it does not capture the 'LIPA experience'.

43 The audit team found that external examiner reports are not currently made available to students. The comments of external examiners provide useful feedback to students on the standards of their awards and it is suggested that the Institute should develop a suitable mechanism for communicating this information to all student representatives as part of annual review and in accordance with requirements of HEFCE.

44 A review of module handbooks provided to the audit team demonstrated that not all module handbooks provided to students publish the information required by the LIPA Teaching Learning and Assessment Handbook, particularly in respect of feedback to students. Students claimed that delivery of the programme modules did not always follow what students were given in published documents. The team concluded that greater institutional oversight of module documentation could be exerted in order to ensure that the information requirements specified by the Institute could be more accurately and consistently implemented in internal documentation published to students.

45 The audit found that, overall, reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the public information that the Institute publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of the awards that are validated by LJMU. However, the team found no evidence that the Institute was making publicly available the documentation suggested in Annex F of HEFCE circular 2006/45, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*. The team also concluded that internal programme and module information published to students could benefit from a more rigorous and consistent approach.

## **Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations**

### **Features of good practice**

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

- the annual review days held in November which draw upon the annual programme review process as part of finalising the Institutional Quality Report (paragraph 23)
- the attention given, as part of the undergraduate admissions process, to providing auditions which reflect current practice and course content (paragraph 31)
- the Institute's proactive strategy towards enhancing the development of staff through their engagement with the Higher Education Academy and support for research and scholarly activity (paragraph 34).

### **Recommendations for action**

46 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- ensure that the Institute's accreditation status with Liverpool John Moores University (as the degree awarding body) is subject to a written, legally-binding and regularly reviewed contractual agreement signed by the two institutions (paragraph 7)
- develop further the management and organisation of its formal boards and committees, and the exchange of information between them, to ensure each is discharging its responsibilities for the management of quality and standards effectively and transparently (paragraphs 10, 11, 12, 18, 19)
- implement, in collaboration with the University, revised procedures in the Institute that will enhance the role of external examiners in securing the standards of awards (paragraph 14)
- undertake with the University (as the degree awarding body) a review of the Institute's degree classification profile across its undergraduate programmes with due regard to national comparators across the sector (paragraph 17).



47 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- engage with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* in a systematic way at institutional level to develop further its policies and procedures for the assurance of academic quality and standards (paragraph 20)
- keep under review the annual monitoring process to ensure that the deliberative structure meets the Institute's aspirations for overall consistency of reporting, the implementation of action plans and the achievement of targets (paragraphs 18, 22, 25, 31)
- take steps to improve the effectiveness of formal student representation and participation on boards and committees (paragraph 28)
- improve the timeliness of enhancement initiatives in order to have greater impact on the experience of current students (paragraphs 27, 39).

## **Appendix**

### **The Liverpool Institute for Performance Arts' response to the Institutional audit report**

Our students learn, as do we, continually. Our Annual Course Review is, as identified in the report, our main information gathering and reflective process. The QAA's institutional audit report will take its place alongside and perform its part in improving what we do.

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