# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of London Film Academy

November 2016

## Contents

# About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at London Film Academy. The review took place from 8 to 10 November 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Christopher Clare
- Professor David Boughey.

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

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

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

A check is also made on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) with the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

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

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code
[2] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[3] Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers):
www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight-.aspx

# Key findings

## QAA's judgements about London Film Academy

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at London Film Academy.

- The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

## Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at London Film Academy:

- the inclusive and detailed admissions process, which ensures that students are well suited for the course and enables them to succeed (Expectation B2)
- the nurturing, embedded and career-focused support that enables students to reach their full personal, academic and professional potential (Expectation B4).

## Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to London Film Academy.

By April 2017:

- develop and implement a procedure for course approval which incorporates independent external expertise (Expectations B1 and A3.1)
- include student representatives as full members of course management committees (Expectation B5).

By June 2017:

- implement a systematic process to monitor and assure the continued effectiveness of all teaching staff (Expectation B3)
- develop and implement regulations relating to the term of office for external examiners in line with the guidance in the Quality Code (Expectation B7)
- ensure that students and tutors are made aware of how to access external examiner reports (Expectation B7).

By September 2017:

- develop and implement a process for the periodic review of all courses (Expectations B8 and A2.2).

## Financial sustainability, management and governance

The financial sustainability, management and governance check has been satisfactorily completed.

# About London Film Academy

London Film Academy (the Academy) was founded in 2002 and is a non-profit making trust based on one site in Fulham, south west London. The Academy offers a range of professional film training courses and qualifications and these include full-time one-year postgraduate diplomas in Filmmaking and Screenwriting; shorter certificate courses in documentary and filmmaking; foundation courses in filmmaking, screenwriting, documentary and English for filmmakers; a feature film development lab and short specialised courses such as shooting and lighting for film and TV.

The Academy aims to guide and prepare multi-skilled, adaptable and creative filmmakers for employment in the film and TV industry by encouraging an appreciation of all roles in the filmmaking process and an understanding of teamwork. In addition, the Academy aims to run a professional film and TV training establishment that delivers on quality, innovation and continued student and graduate development in a collaborative and personable way.

The Academy has 374 students and 26 of these are undertaking higher education courses. There are two full-time teaching staff and 15 part-time staff who teach on specific modules of the diplomas. Many of these staff are industry professionals and teach at other higher education institutions. A number of visiting tutors also regularly contribute to courses.

The Academy underwent a Review for Educational Oversight (REO) by QAA in November 2012. Since then the Academy has restructured its staff to meet the changing needs of the business and responsibilities outlined within the Quality Code. The most significant staffing change was the appointment of a Vice Principal to work closely with the Joint Principals in managing academic governance and overseeing all course delivery. This was coupled with the appointment of senior members of staff to handle Operations and Marketing. A redesigned website was launched, which showcased more interactive and visual examples of students' work and provided enhanced features such as an online payment facility for students. The oversight and operation of quality has been facilitated by the introduction of a more robust system of committees with fixed dates throughout the academic year, the implementation of more effective procedures, the launching of a series of handbooks for staff and students, and handbooks on quality assurance, and the revision and implementation of course documentation and assessment practice in collaboration with the external examiner. In 2015 the Academy was successful in its bid for funding to the Creative Skillset to deliver a six-week course for graduates to assist them to find work in the film industry. The course encourages young people to develop soft and creative skills, which enhances their employability in the sector. In 2016 the Academy successfully obtained funding from the British Film Institute to run a short course for young people to learn about filmmaking and to make their own short films.

The key challenges faced by the Academy are threefold. Firstly, an increase in competition from other institutions offering practically based postgraduate programmes in filmmaking and screenwriting; secondly, restrictions placed upon the Academy by UKVI in attracting international students to study in the UK; and thirdly, maintaining and monitoring teaching practice while engaging working film professionals as tutors.

The Academy has formalised progression arrangements with the University of Hertfordshire and Anglia Ruskin University and a number of students have progressed onto the final year of a bachelor's degree or master's degree.

In the 2012 REO, the review team identified four areas of good practice, three advisable and four desirable recommendations. The findings from this were summarised in an action plan compiled by the Academy and this was subject to QAA annual monitoring visits in 2013, 2014 and 2015, all of which recorded judgements of acceptable progress. The Academy has

responded in a detailed and rigorous way to the recommendations of the REO and the areas of good practice have been built upon.

# Explanation of the findings about London Film Academy

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.

# 1    Judgement: The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.1     The Academy awards its own postgraduate-level Diplomas in Filmmaking and in Screenwriting. These awards are not validated by universities, though they are identified in articulation agreements with Anglia Ruskin University and the University of Hertfordshire. The Academy also runs a programme of short courses that do not lead to designated awards.

1.2     The Academy's documentation and processes refer to appropriate external reference points, specifically QAA Subject Benchmark Statements, *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, (FHEQ) and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). The Academy also engaged positively with QAA and has responded fully to the recommendations made in the 2012 REO.

1.3     Through the application of Subject Benchmark Statements, and correct alignment with the FHEQ, the Academy's approach to its diploma awards would allow Expectation A1 to be met.

1.4     In order to establish the Academy's understanding of the threshold academic standards the review team scrutinised the Academy's Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) Handbook and its diploma specifications, and explored with staff the application of sector-wide reference points.

1.5      The Academy has made appropriate use of all relevant Subject Benchmark Statements in the development and refinement of its diplomas, and is able to draw on the expertise that its tutors gain from their interactions with other providers.

1.6      The Academy's diplomas are not called Graduate Diplomas, even though they are level 7 awards. Academy staff acknowledged this, but reasonably argued that the level of their awards is transparent and well documented, and that diploma was the common language used to describe such awards in the filmmaking and screenwriting subject areas.

1.7      The Academy has developed programme specifications and module specifications that set out aims and learning outcomes, and these are followed through into assignment requirements. These are all appropriately aligned with the expectations set out in linked Subject Benchmark Statements, and in the FHEQ.

1.8      The Academy is drawing upon and applying appropriate external and sector reference points, and the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.9      The governance of the award of credit and qualifications is set out in the Academy's QAE Handbook. There is an explanation of the processes, roles and responsibilities in respect of the governance of academic credit and awards, with the Head of Academic Governance (HOAG) holding the ultimate responsibility, and reporting to the Executive Committee.

1.10     The framework and regulations would allow Expectation A2.1 to be met.

1.11     The review team explored the implementation of frameworks and regulations by considering quality assurance documentation, minutes of interim and final exam boards, external examiner reports and through discussion with staff.

1.12     Until recently the Academy had a Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee as its main deliberative committee responsible for quality and standards. The Committee has been disbanded and its work taken over by the Executive Committee, which has become the main body having responsibility for quality and standards.

1.13     Operationally, the HOAG is also one of the Joint Principals, and in documentation it appears that the lines of responsibility and accountability are blurred. However, in practice this is not problematic, and defined lines of reporting and confirmation are well understood by staff, and enacted by them.

1.14     The staff and tutors whom the review team met are well acquainted with the frameworks and regulations around the award of credit at the Academy, and academic members of the Industry Advisory Board and the external examiner provide further expert guidance, advice and assurance.

1.15     Processes around examination boards, the confirmation of grades, the award of credit, and confirmation of awards are appropriately managed in accordance with the defined frameworks and regulations.

1.16     The review team considers that the frameworks and regulations in place are proportionate and effective for an institution of this scale, as well as being transparent and comprehensive, and therefore conclude that the Expectation is met, with a low level of risk.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.17      Programme specifications record the formal nature of the Academy's diploma programmes, and these are available within the Academy to students and staff. Similarly, module specifications define learning outcomes and assessment, which are then explained in assignment briefs.

1.18      Assessment regulations are defined in the Academy's QAE Handbook, with the generic grading criteria translated as appropriate in individual modules. There are course committee meetings to undertake course oversight, and a process for formal annual course review.

1.19      The documentation, records, process and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.20      The review team considered the QAE Handbook, which brings together various associated procedures and regulatory frameworks for the maintaining and enhancement of academic standards. The team also reviewed programme and module specifications, handbooks, records of interim and final exam boards, and student records. The effectiveness of the operation of these systems and regulations was explored with relevant senior staff and the Academy's tutors.

1.21      There is a clear and coherent line between programme learning outcomes and those found in modules, and their associated assessments. The assessment criteria are clear and well understood by students and staff.

1.22      There is a process for annual course review to look at the delivery and assessment of the programme, which includes the scrutiny of statistics relating to progression and award. The annual course review therefore considers the further development of the programme, and draws upon module reviews which themselves have been informed by tutors and students.

1.23      While there is considerable reflection upon the efficacy, approach and content of programmes, with contributions from teaching staff and consideration of student views, there is not a conventional process of periodic review supported by additional external perspectives, and this aspect is considered directly in Expectation B8.

1.24      Student performance and progress is monitored via quarterly interim assessment boards and there are formal final assessment boards to determine the award of credit and qualifications. An external examiner is fully integrated into the approval process for confirming assessment, grades and credit.

1.25      Records of study are available to students as they graduate, and to alumni upon request, and this is all in accordance with the Academy's Records Retention Policy.

1.26      Overall, the Academy staff understand the importance of the definitive record of a programme, and how it is expressed in the learning outcomes and assessment at module

level. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.27    The Academy redesigned two diploma programmes in 2012; these were the Diplomas in Screenwriting and in Filmmaking. The process made reference to external sources, including the Quality Code, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, the FHEQ and to the two universities with which the Academy has developed subsequent progression agreements. The process centred on a series of meetings between the Joint Principals and the Course Leader. The Course Leader involved the teaching team in these developments, many of whom bring external expertise to the process through their involvement with other higher education institutions. Members of the Industry Advisory Board also had input to the design and development process.

1.28    The QAE Handbook has a section on course development. It describes a process for module development whereby a first draft of the proposal is produced by the Course Leader, who makes an initial recommendation to the Joint Principals. If the recommendation is positively received, the Joint Principals submit the proposal to the HOAG, who will review the proposal for quality and resourcing implications.

1.29    Subject to final approval by the Joint Principals, or their designated representative, the new module(s) will be presented for review and confirmation at the next meeting of a Course Committee. There is currently no formal approval event (either real or virtual) that involves the participation of independent external expertise.

1.30    All of these arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.31    The Expectation was tested by inspection of the self-evaluation document that was submitted as part of this review, the QAE Handbook, and the progression agreements. The review team also inspected external examiner reports and held meetings with staff and the external examiner.

1.32    The design and development process for new courses is rigorous and involves external input from the Industry Advisory Board, as well as from tutors. The academic standards of the courses have been confirmed through progression agreements with Anglia Ruskin University and the University of Hertfordshire.

1.33    In the absence of a formal approval event (real or virtual) involving independent external expertise, the Expectation may not have been considered to be fully met and this is linked to the recommendation under Expectation B1 of this report. However, the current diploma courses used external expertise in their design and development to ensure that they met appropriate academic standards, and this has been confirmed by the external examiner for the courses. Further confirmation of the standards is evidenced by the progression agreements with two partner universities.

1.34    The review team considers that, on balance, the Academy's procedures for setting and articulating academic standards in the design and planning of its courses operate

effectively. The review team concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.35    The Academy produces programme specifications and module descriptors. The programme specifications detail programme learning outcomes and contain module maps to show the links between the programme and the module learning outcomes. Tutors develop assignment briefs based on the module learning outcomes to be tested, and these are presented to students along with supporting explanations from the tutors.

1.36    There is an internal verification process at both the setting and marking stages, and the Academy holds internal and final assessment boards, with the external examiner in attendance at the final assessment board. The processes for internal and external verification are set out in the QAE Handbook and in the Internal Verification and External Examining Handbook. This document directly references Expectations B6 and B7 of the Quality Code, explains the role of internal and external verification in the maintenance of standards and outlines the processes.

1.37    The processes and procedures described in the documentation would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.38    The review team tested the Expectation by scrutiny of the self-evaluation document, and inspection of programme specifications, module specifications, assignment briefs, internal assessment board minutes, and final assessment board minutes. Meetings were held with staff, students and the external examiner.

1.39    The review team found the processes for setting assessments related to learning outcomes to be sound. There was evidence of rigorous processes for internal and external verification for the setting and marking of assessments. This results in clear and comprehensive assessment briefs, and students confirmed their satisfaction with assessment briefs and feedback. There is evidence of thorough processes of internal and external verification, for the operation of internal and external assessment boards and for reporting by the external examiner.

1.40    The review team considers that effective oversight of standards is undertaken by the Academy and concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met. The associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.41    The Academy has produced the QAE Handbook, and this has various sections covering policies and processes that include programme monitoring and review. Reference is made to the use of Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ, and to the input of external examiners. The QAE Handbook describes the processes briefly, and they are summarised under Expectation B8.

1.42    All courses are subject to annual monitoring in order to ensure that academic standards are maintained and the quality of students' learning experiences is assured and enhanced. Module reports are produced by the Course Leader and these involve input from student questionnaires, tutor questionnaires and minutes of the Staff/Student Liaison Committee (SSLC). These reports are considered at course committee meetings, and these discussions inform the production of an Annual Academy and Course Review (ACR). A standard pro forma for producing the annual course review has been developed, which is used across all Academy diploma courses. The use of common internal reporting formats was introduced to facilitate comparisons across all higher education provision at the Academy.

1.43    The description of periodic review in the QAE Handbook is in fact a description of a process of minor or major change stemming from annual review. There is no formal re-approval process and no event (real or virtual) involving independent external input.

1.44    Overall, the arrangements described in the documentation would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.45    The review team tested the Expectation by reading the self-evaluation document, and by an inspection of the QAE Handbook, scrutiny of module reports, annual course review documents and course committee minutes.

1.46    The review team considered that the process for annual course review is rigorous and comprehensive. Fed by the module reports that are informed by tutor and student input, and by the minutes of course committee minutes, the ACR reports also consider external examiner comments and consider areas for enhancement. The ACR reports are signed off by the Head of Academic Governance and by the Executive Committee. Although there is currently no formal process for the periodic review of courses, there is periodic strategic review of courses undertaken by the Principals (see also Expectation B8).

1.47    The review team concludes that as there are rigorous procedures for annual monitoring and review, involving external and internal procedures, Expectation A3.3 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.48    The Academy has a range of external reference points that it uses on a regular basis. An Industry Advisory Board meets on an annual basis to provide input to the development of the Academy's programmes. This Board consists of a range of film industry specialists along with representatives from other higher education institutions and the Academy external examiner. The Academy also makes use of industry experts as guest lecturers on its programmes.

1.49    There is also a grouping of some 44 film-related higher education contacts, the National Association of Higher Education in the Moving Image (NAHEMI). This group provides a regular source of external input in various aspects of the Academy's activities.

1.50    Full use is made of external examiners in the assessment process to ensure comparability of academic standards on the Academy courses. The Academy also makes use of the expertise of its associate and visiting tutors, brought into the Academy from their experiences at their home institutions.

1.51    External expertise is used in the design and development of courses, although not in any formal approval event (see Expectations A3.1 and B1), or in the periodic review of courses (see Expectations A3.3 and B8).

1.52    The academic framework and procedures developed by the Academy would allow Expectation A3.4 to be met.

1.53    The review team tested the Expectation through reading the self-evaluation document, inspection of the minutes of the Industry Advisory Board, the Internal Verification and External Examining Handbook, external examiner reports and inspection of the QAE Handbook.

1.54    The Academy makes full use of external reference points, in particular the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements, in the design and development of courses. This is complemented by input from contacts at NAHEMI and the Industry Advisory Board, and from tutors, most of whom are employed at other higher education institutions. There is also external input gleaned from staff and students regularly attending various film festivals.

1.55    The review team considers that the Academy makes effective use of independent external expertise in respect of course development, assessment processes and the award of credit. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A3.4 is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

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

# The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.56     In determining its judgement on the setting and maintenance of academic standards of awards at the Academy, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is considered low. There are no areas of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this section.

1.57     The Academy awards its own postgraduate-level diplomas. The diplomas are not validated by an awarding body but they are identified in progression agreements with Anglia Ruskin University and the University of Hertfordshire. The Academy's documentation and processes refer to appropriate reference points such as FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and the Quality Code, and these are applied and aligned appropriately. Staff are well acquainted with academic standards and the frameworks and regulations around the award of credit at the Academy, while there is external engagement through academic members of the Industry Advisory Board and the external examiner provides further oversight of standards.

1.58     Overall, the review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the Academy **meets** UK expectations.

# 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

**Findings**

2.1     The Academy redesigned two diploma programmes in 2012; these were the Diplomas in Screenwriting and in Filmmaking. The process made reference to external sources, including the Quality Code and the two universities with which the Academy has developed subsequent progression agreements. The process centred on a series of meetings between the Joint Principals and the Course Leader. The Course Leader involved the teaching team in these developments.

2.2     The QAE Handbook has a section on programme development. It describes a process for the approval of a new course module whereby a first draft of the proposal is produced by the Course Leader, who makes an initial recommendation to the Joint Principals. If the recommendation is positively received, the proposal is submitted to the HOAG, who will review the proposal for quality and resourcing implications.

2.3     Subject to final approval by the Joint Principals, or their designated representative, the new module will be presented for review and confirmation at the next meeting of a Course Committee, or if part of a validated degree, at the earliest appropriate Board of Studies meeting convened by the relevant university. Although the section of the Handbook is labelled as module and course approval, it does not describe a process for an entire course.

2.4     There is no formal approval event for new courses at the Academy that involves input to the process by independent external subject experts. This absence of independent external input would not enable this Expectation to be met.

2.5     The Expectation was tested by inspection of the self-evaluation document, and scrutiny of programme specifications, module specifications, the QAE Handbook and the university progression agreements. The review team also inspected external examiner reports and held meetings with staff and with the external examiner.

2.6     The current diploma courses used external expertise in their design and development to ensure that they meet appropriate academic standards and that the learning opportunities available to students are appropriate. This has been confirmed by the external examiner for the courses, and further confirmation of the standards is evidenced by the progression agreements with two partner universities (see also Expectation A3.1).

2.7     In meetings with staff it was confirmed by the review team that there is no formal approval event (real or virtual) involving independent external expertise. The team was assured that the academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities for students on the current diploma courses were in line with similar courses at other institutions and this was confirmed by comments from the external examiner.

2.8     Despite the confidence in the current courses, the team considers that there are risks to future courses resulting from the absence of external expertise in the formal approval

of new courses; this issue was also raised in Expectation A3.1. As a consequence, the review team **recommends** that the Academy develops and implements a procedure for course approval which incorporates independent external expertise.

2.9      In summary, the process for design and development sets an appropriate foundation for the Academy to produce courses of the appropriate quality. However, the review team found the processes for the approval of courses to lack the opportunity for the use of independent external expertise at a formal course approval event. In light of this, the team concludes that Expectation B1 is not met and that the level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation:   Not met**
**Level of risk:   Moderate**

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

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

**Findings**

2.10    The Academy's approach to managing recruitment, selection and admission to the programmes is described in the Admissions Handbook. Entry requirements and the admissions process are clearly stated, and there is an admissions team to oversee the consistency and enactment of the Academy's approach to recruitment.

2.11    The stated policy and process would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.12    The review team assessed the application of the admissions process through scrutiny of the Admissions Handbook and the Academy's website, and through discussion with staff directly involved in the admissions process, and with students.

2.13    The Academy maintains a clear set of policies and procedures with respect to the open, transparent and fair recruitment, selection and admission of students who are well suited to the immersive learning experience of the Academy's courses.

2.14    While potential applicants usually learn of the courses via the Academy's website, a tour of the Academy can be arranged, and students reported a very welcoming open environment, with quick responses to queries. The application process is detailed on the website, and is clear and accessible.

2.15    The entry requirements are clearly stated on the website, to include English language requirements, with the application process involving submitting evidence that would enable the Academy to determine whether to call an applicant for interview. Application materials usually include evidence of prior qualifications, work experience, a creative portfolio and references. All suitable applicants are interviewed either in person, or if the applicant is based outside the UK, by online video conferencing. Interviews are conducted by a range of tutors from across the Academy as well as by the Course Leader. Decisions on scholarships are made by the Joint Principals. Applicants receive personalised feedback on their interview and suitability for the course, and there is a formal complaint and appeals process.

2.16    The Academy has a process for the recognition of prior learning (RPL), though the emphasis at admission is on relevant practical experience, motivation and aptitude for the course.

2.17    The inclusive and detailed admissions process, which ensures that students are well suited for the course and enables them to succeed, is **good practice**.

2.18    Overall, the review team considers that the recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures are fair and well managed, and are carefully attuned to the demands of the courses. The admissions process is well supported by staff from across the Academy. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met, and that the level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code,** *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

**Findings**

2.19     The Academy's approach to teaching and learning is set out in the staff and tutor handbooks, with quality processes and enhancement addressed in the separate QAE Handbook. There is a structure of diploma management meetings and associated teaching discussion groups to monitor and develop policy and practice. There is a system of module review, which builds into annual course reviews.

2.20     The Academy emphasises the employment of well qualified staff according to their professional filmmaking industry expertise. While there is no formal recruitment policy, there is an induction process, guidance for new tutors, and ongoing monitoring. The Academy also encourages staff to undertake additional training each year.

2.21     Information for students on learning opportunities and support is explained in the Student Handbook, provided to students and also available via the front-of-house desk and the intranet.

2.22     These processes and policies are an approach to enable the effective teaching and learning that permits students to develop, and would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.23     The review team assessed the implementation and effectiveness of the Academy's approach to learning opportunity and teaching practice by examining documentation, to include handbooks, committee minutes, and observation records. The review team also discussed approaches to teaching and learning with senior staff, junior staff, and students.

2.24     The employment of professionally expert adjunct staff leading and teaching on courses does present challenges in terms of monitoring and review of their teaching performance. This is because their engagement can be for short periods of time. The quantity of team-based teaching does mean that immediate peer support is often available, and there were clear mechanisms for the review of tutors where concerns had been raised.

2.25     Staff new to teaching at the Academy reported a clear induction process, and a welcoming and open supportive approach.

2.26     Staff were clearly able to learn from each other, in part supported by their accumulated experience of teaching in a variety of other providers. The teaching and learning discussions that followed course committee meetings are recognised as good opportunities to share and discuss practice.

2.27     The Academy has recently moved away from a formal, documented system of appraisal and staff development towards a system of reviews and key performance indicators. There are still annual staff reviews at which there is an opportunity for staff to identify training needs, and staff have monthly meetings with their line managers to monitor targets and discuss workload.

2.28    The review team **recommends** that the Academy implements a systematic process to monitor and assure the continued effectiveness of all teaching staff.

2.29    Students confirmed that the staff appear to be expert in their fields and are able to inspire the group. The role of critical thinking and developing reflective practice is well understood by staff.

2.30    The Academy recruits and supports a range of professionally expert staff, and operates a strong culture of collaboration. While monitoring and review of teaching practice is not as systematic as it might be, students are consistently well supported to develop as independent learners, enhancing their analytical, critical and creative skills. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met, and that the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.31     As might be expected with highly practical courses that are industry focused, the Academy places great emphasis on career development and employability and seeks to ensure that its practice and resources are aligned with industry needs. Students have career meetings with the Course Leader and Joint Principals, and students have to engage with an Independent Learning Plan designed to encourage reflection on their own learning. Academic development is underpinned by Academy regulations, set out in the Student Handbook, and there is a structure of interim assessment boards and course meetings to monitor progress. There is appropriate documentation to provide formal feedback to students on their course assessments**.**

2.32     The mechanisms are therefore in place to monitor development and provide the resources to enable students to succeed, thereby allowing the Expectation to be met.

2.33     The review team tested the effectiveness of the Academy's approach to student development and achievement by considering guidance provided to students, course review documents, minutes of course committees, sample assessment grids, and documents supporting the termly careers meeting, and through discussion with staff, the Industry Advisory Board, and students themselves.

2.34     The Academy has appropriate flexible studio space, technical equipment, information technology resources (which include software and online training accounts) and library material to enable students to succeed. Investment in technical film equipment is taken under guidance from the Industry Advisory Board, and draws on the expertise of the Academy's tutors and with consideration of suggestions made by student representatives. There is collective recognition by students and staff of the value of the Academy having industry-standard advanced filmmaking equipment.

2.35     There is not a conventional virtual learning environment, but the Academy has an intranet for holding course documentation, handbooks, and other guidance materials. There are also sufficient computing facilities to enable students to complete their work.

2.36     Students recognised the challenges of manoeuvring equipment on the site of the Academy, but are supported through the easy availability of staff, and through appropriate training and a culture of supporting each other.

2.37     Students confirmed the value of the day-long induction process, the subsequent availability and openness of staff to answer queries, and the clarity of academic requirements and professional standards expected of them.

2.38     The approach to academic and professional support is explained in the Student Handbook, and is well understood by students. The careers meetings are the focus of reviewing individual student academic performance and professional development. These are systematic, extensive and repeated occasions, and are led by the Joint Principals and Course Leader. Pro formas guide the content of the meetings, and these become the development record for each student.

2.39     Students report ample opportunities to seek guidance from senior staff at any stage, and to gain advice and feedback from course tutors on an almost daily basis. This reflects

and confirms the intensive and immersive learning experience on the Academy's programmes.

2.40    Purposeful feedback from tutors on student progress and summative assessment is focused and timely. The individual daily debriefs on film set were highly appreciated by students, as were the cohort feedback opportunities, as this enabled learning from each other.

2.41    There are well understood policies and process surrounding mitigating circumstances, and an appropriate and sensitive approach to reassessment. Interim exam boards are well used to flag possible cases of failure to progress, and establish or record appropriate interventions. There is a standing Academic Infringement Committee and associated process for the management of alleged cases of academic misconduct.

2.42    The nurturing, embedded and career-focused support that enables students to reach their full personal, academic and professional potential is **good practice**.

2.43    The Academy takes a close interest in the academic and professional development of its students. This is embedded in its practice from the point of initial enquiry to enrolment, to development during the course. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement***

**Findings**

2.44     There is no explicit strategy document to show how the Academy engages with students or the wider community of higher education. However, there are quarterly staff/student liaison meetings where students, through their representatives, are given the opportunity to address any concerns or to provide other feedback concerning their programmes.

2.45     There is a module questionnaire that is produced at the end of each module. Information from the questionnaires is collated by the Course Leader and used in the production of a module report, which in turn feeds into the annual course monitoring process through the course committee meetings. Students confirmed that they are required to complete end-of-module questionnaires.

2.46     The Academy states that the relatively small class sizes enable daily interaction between individual students and tutors, which provides a valuable route for student feedback. Students also have one-to-one career meetings with senior staff at which there is an opportunity to feed back on any aspect of the course. Further feedback can be given to staff via the debriefing meetings that form part of the filmmaking diploma exercises. There is also a physical feedback box for comments that is checked by the operations leader on a regular basis.

2.47     There are elected student representatives whose role it is to liaise directly with the Course Leader, and, according to the self-evaluation document, attend course committee meetings and the SSLC meetings. There are no other Academy committees that have student representatives.

2.48     Students confirmed the existence and effective operation of a student representative system. They did not specify the exact committees involved but did feel that the Academy responds to issues through changes to programmes.

2.49     The process for course or module design does not indicate any input by students or their representatives.

2.50     The arrangements that are described by the Academy for student engagement would enable the Expectation to be met. In testing this Expectation the review team examined the self-evaluation document, the Student Handbook, committee terms of reference, course committee minutes, SSLC minutes, course deliverers' meeting minutes, module reports and ACR reports. The review team also discussed student engagement opportunities with staff and students.

2.51     In a meeting with students, the team heard that students felt that they had a number of opportunities to feed their views on a variety of aspects of their courses to staff of the Academy. They felt that the size of the Academy facilitated easy open-door access to staff. They also stated that there was a feedback box for posting anonymous comments.

2.52     The students confirmed that they attend Staff/Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) meetings and that they complete module questionnaires, and this was evident from inspection of the documentation. The students confirmed that they have representatives, elected on a termly basis. The representatives regularly meet staff but do not attend any

meetings, other than the SSLCs. Inspection of course committee terms of reference and minutes confirmed this to be the case. The students cited a number of examples of the Academy responding to issues they had raised.

2.53     Although there was evidence of a number of effective routes for students to comment on aspects of their course, the team considered that student involvement in quality assurance would be enhanced if they had representation within the Academy governance structure. Consequently the team **recommends** that the Academy includes student representatives as full members of course management committees.

2.54     The team considers that the Academy makes effective use of student views in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The team therefore concludes that Expectation B5 is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.55     The Academy produces programme specifications and module descriptors. The programme specifications detail programme learning outcomes and contain module maps to show the links between the programme and the module learning outcomes. Tutors develop assignment briefs, based on the module learning outcomes to be tested and, following scrutiny by the external examiner, these are presented to students along with supporting explanations from the tutors. The Academy standardised grading criteria are referenced on the assignment briefs.

2.56     The Academy goes to some lengths to ensure that students are aware of the nature of academic misconduct and how to avoid it. There is an Academic Infringement Committee that ensures that judgements on student infringements are consistent and fair.

2.57     There is an internal verification process at both the setting and marking stages. The processes for internal and external verification are articulated in the Internal Verification and External Examining Handbook. Internal verification is applied to all elements of credit-rated assessment. This includes the involvement by an internal verifier other than the module or Course Leader who acts as first marker. The internal verifier will have knowledge of the subject at the level in question.

2.58     A variety of approaches to internal verification are adopted including second marking, either open or blind, following earlier review of the assessment briefs. The extent of work considered ranges from all work for all students, through to sampling. The Executive Committee approves and monitors the approaches to be used.

2.59     External moderation requires the review of assignment briefs and a sample of marked submitted work by the appointed external examiner for the programme or subject. This is normally a complete set of work for each of an agreed selection of students from a given cohort. Usually, the selection provides the external examiner with a sample from across the marks range.

2.60     Assessment feedback to students is both written and verbal. This latter form exploits the special nature of the assessments, which are often accompanied by debriefing sessions. Students also have termly career meetings with senior staff at which they are presented with individual assessment grids, where their scores for assessments and grades for modules are summarised.

2.61     Students confirmed that assessments get progressively more difficult as the course progresses. They also stated that they understand the grading criteria and that the feedback on assessment is effective and helpful, especially the filming debriefs.

2.62     The Academy holds internal and final assessment boards, with the external examiner in attendance at the final board.

2.63     The recognition of prior learning is outlined in the Admissions Handbook, although the details of the process are not set out.

2.64     The documentation, processes and procedures in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.65     The review team tested the Expectation by reading evidence including the self-evaluation document and handbooks, and by inspection of programme specifications and module descriptors, samples of assignment briefs, assessment and internal verification records, and minutes of internal and final assessment boards. The team also held meetings with staff and students.

2.66     The Academy does not publish an assessment policy or assessment procedure document. There is commentary on aspects of assessment in the QAE Handbook; however, this is brief and does not go into any detail on, for example, internal verification or second marking. Although there are generic grading criteria, there is not a set of general assessment regulations covering such issues as overall pass marks, draft submission of assignments, referrals and resits. However, the team found that there is in practice a rigorous process for producing a variety of assessments based on the module learning outcomes. Assessment briefs were unambiguous and based on the generic grading criteria and students confirmed that the assignment briefs were clear in what students needed to do to obtain good grades. There is evidence of internal and external verification at the setting stage of the assessment and the application of the process was confirmed by the external examiner.

2.67     Members of the Academy staff make it clear to students what constitutes academic misconduct and plagiarism at induction and through handbooks. Students confirmed this to be the case.

2.68     Internal and external moderation takes place at the marking stage and students are satisfied with the quality and timeliness of feedback on their assessments. There is no written standard for turnaround of assessments but students stated that it is often instant (in the case of critique for filming activity) and rarely longer than four weeks, in the case of other assessments.

2.69     The Academy holds formal, minuted interim assessment boards, which are internal, followed by final assessment boards, where the external examiner is in attendance. The minutes of the final assessment boards are signed off by the Joint Principals and by the Executive Committee.

2.70     The review team considers that the Academy operates equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment that enable students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. The team concludes therefore that Expectation B6 is met. The associated level of risk is low.

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

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

### Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

### Findings

2.71     The Academy operates an external examining system. The role is set out in the Internal Verification and External Examining Handbook and reinforced in the QAE Handbook. The role encompasses the scrutiny of assignment briefs, records of internal verification and samples of assessed student work.

2.72     External examiners are also in attendance at final assessment boards. The roles and procedures, with the exception of the detail of the selection and appointment process, are clearly articulated in the Internal Verification and External Examining Handbook. The Handbook also contains the pro formas used in the internal and external verification procedures.

2.73     External examiners produce an annual report, which is a mixture of direct questions on standards and quality, supplemented by sections allowing more qualitative commentary. The reports presented as evidence were extremely positive.

2.74     Comments from external examiners feed into the annual monitoring process and there are specific sections on assessment in the annual reports that specifically refer to external examiners' comments. Other than through inspection of the annual reports, the Academy responds to any issues raised by its external examiners through a section on the report form itself.

2.75     The policy and procedures would allow Expectation B7 to be met.

2.76     The review team tested the Expectation through reading the self-evaluation document, and scrutiny of handbooks, external examiner reports, and course annual reports. The team inspected assessment board minutes and documentation relating to external verification, and held meetings with staff, students and the external examiner.

2.77     There is clear evidence of guidelines on the role and duties of the external examiner, and on how tutors and academic staff interact with the examiner. The review team also found evidence of the full involvement of the external examiner in the moderation of assessment briefs, and in the verification of the marking of assessments. There was also evidence of the participation of the external examiner in assessment boards and in the production of annual external examiner reports. The Academy responds to comments made by the external examiner either directly or through the annual course monitoring process.

2.78     The review team noted that there is a lack of clarity over the term of office of the external examiner. The team was told that it was four to six years but the external examiner was unclear on the exact term of their office. The term of office was stated as 'four to six years' in the Internal Verification and External Examining Handbook but it was not clear whether this contained any renewable element; this term of office is not in line with the guidance contained within the Quality Code under Expectation B7. The process for replacement of the external examiner was not made clear in the Handbook. The review team therefore **recommends** that the Academy develops and implements regulations relating to the term of office for external examiners in line with the guidance in the Quality Code.

2.79     The review team found that students were not aware of how to access the external examiner reports. The absence of student representatives on the Governance committees of the Academy (see Expectation B5) means that student representatives do not automatically

gain access to the reports. Some of the tutors met by the team were also not clear as to how they could access the reports. Consequently, the team **recommends** that the Academy ensures that students and tutors are made aware of how to access external examiner reports.

2.80      Notwithstanding the recommendations, the team considers that the Academy makes scrupulous use of external examiners and that Expectation B7 is met. The level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.81     The Academy has produced a QAE Handbook, and this has various sections covering policies and processes that include programme monitoring and review. Reference is made to the use of Subject Benchmark Statements, the FHEQ and the input of external examiners.

2.82     The QAE Handbook describes the processes briefly. There are regular, minuted course meetings held between the Vice Principal and the course teams for the diploma courses, which result in a task list. Any issues raised are fed directly into Executive Committee meetings by the Vice Principal. All courses are subject to a more formal process of annual monitoring in order to ensure that academic standards are maintained and that the quality of students' learning experiences is assured and enhanced.

2.83     Students complete end-of-module questionnaires that are used by the Course Leader to produce a module report. The module reports also contain feedback from the teaching team, and a brief summary of average marks. There is a section in the report entitled 'Enhancement and Legacy', which can be used to highlight any issues or good practice. There is also a section for issues to be carried forward to the course committee meeting.

2.84     The module reports are considered at an annual course committee meeting, with the external examiner present. It is here that any modifications to the modules or course are considered, although there is no indication as to whether there is distinction made between major and minor modifications. Any suggested changes are forwarded to the Joint Principals for approval. The course committee meeting is also informed by any action points raised at the Industry Advisory Board.

2.85     The QAE Handbook refers to the ACR process. Proposed changes emanating from the course committee meeting are proposed as actions in the review report. The Vice Principal and Course Leader produce an annual course review which is forwarded to the HOAG. The reports are informed by the module reports and include comments from external examiners and progression statistics, and have sections on action plans and comments on previous action plans. They are also informed by student/staff meetings and by the responses to the student questionnaires.

2.86     The ACR report is considered by the Joint Principals and by the Executive Committee for sign-off. The Executive Committee monitors the implementation of any actions agreed as a result of the annual monitoring process.

2.87     The Academy asserts that programmes are subjected to periodic review. However, there is no process description for periodic review, and the commentary in the Handbook describes an ongoing review process rather than a formal event involving independent expertise held on a quadrennial or quinquennial basis.

2.88     The processes and procedures described in the documentation would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.89     The review team tested the Expectation though consideration of the QAE Handbook, course meetings, course committee minutes, annual course reviews and module reports. The minutes of the Executive Committee were scrutinised and meetings were held with staff and students.

2.90     The review team found that the annual monitoring process at the Academy is rigorous, comprehensive and implemented as described in the revised QAE Handbook. The Course Leader confirmed their role in preparation of the module reports, and the reports contain input from student and tutor questionnaires and from the Staff/Student Liaison Committee meetings. The Vice Principal confirmed their role in the production of the ACR reports, and these contain student progression data, external examiner commentary and input from the Industry Advisory Board.

2.91     In terms of the periodic review of programmes, the process is less clear. The QAE Handbook suggests a process similar to that used by any university partners but does not detail such a process. The only detail is of module change through the ACR process. There is a further suggestion that the approval of courses is for a set period of five years (suggesting a revalidation following review) but this could not be confirmed in meetings with staff. The Academy did undertake a 'strategic review' of courses by the Joint Principals, with input from members of the Industry Advisory Board, but this was not a formal periodic review.

2.92     The current diploma courses started in 2012 and would not yet normally be subject to a periodic review. However, the review team felt that the Academy would benefit from developing and articulating a process for review. The team therefore **recommends** that the Academy develops and implements a process for the periodic review of all courses. This is linked to the points made in Expectation A2.2.

2.93     On the basis of the above evidence, the review team concludes that Expectation B8 is met. However, because of the absence of a formalised system of periodic review, the level of risk is deemed to be moderate.

**Expectation:     Met**
**Level of risk:    Moderate**

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

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

**Findings**

2.94    The process for appeal is clearly set out in the Student Handbook. An appeal should be submitted by the student to the Head of Academic Governance using the appropriate form provided in the Handbook. All appeals must be lodged within 10 days of the student receiving notification of their award/assessment. The possible grounds for appeal are clearly stated on the form and relevant documentary evidence must be provided. The Academy makes it clear to students that the grounds for appeal do not include a challenge to the academic judgement.

2.95    Once an appeal has been formally submitted by a student the assessment will be verified. Verification will establish whether: the mark(s) and/or result as published is free from arithmetical or other error of fact; there were any defects or irregularities in the conduct of the examinations and/or other assessments; or if there were any exceptional personal circumstances pertaining to the student that were reported to the Assessment Board.

2.96    The Chair of the Assessment Board informs the HOAG of the outcome of the verification in writing following receipt of the appeal form. The outcome of the verification will inform the decision as to whether the assessment board is to be reconvened to review the case in light of the information provided. The decision will be made by the HOAG.

2.97    The Academy also has a student grievance procedure, which is clearly laid out in the Student Handbook. A student who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the Academy is encouraged to raise the cause of that dissatisfaction with the staff member most directly concerned. The staff member will hear the grievance, collect facts and make informal notes. If the staff member or tutor has immediate responsibility then he or she will take action to try to resolve the grievance. A student should expect a response within 10 working days from the initial informal raising of the grievance. During this period, a student may consult with the Student Welfare Officer for advice and/or informal mediation.

2.98    If the grievance is not satisfactorily resolved the formal process is invoked. Students complete the grievance form and send it to the HOAG of the Academy, who will acknowledge receipt within five working days. Following investigation, a full response should normally be expected within 20 working days from the receipt of the grievance letter/form. Any recommended remedies should be implemented by the Academy as soon as possible, and written confirmation of action taken will be sent to the Joint Principals.

2.99    If at the end of the process the student is still unhappy with the Academy's actions, they may appeal to the Board of Directors of the Academy or their nominated representative, whose decision in the matter will be final. The description of the procedure does not include reference to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator as a possible further step.

2.100    The processes and procedures described in the documentation would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.101    The team tested the Expectation through scrutiny of the self-evaluation document, the Student Handbook and the QAE Handbook. The team also inspected assessment board minutes, and held meetings with students and staff.

2.102    The team asked for evidence of an appeal or complaint that had progressed through the processes described. The staff responded that, so far, no appeals had been raised and that all grievances had been resolved at the initial informal stage.

2.103    Students whom the review team met had no knowledge of any appeals or grievances progressing beyond the informal stage. Although they did not know the detail of either process, they confirmed that they were aware that they could access the procedures through their handbook or through the intranet.

2.104    The Academy's appeals and complaints documentation provides a straightforward overview of formal and informal procedures for making a complaint or academic appeal. Therefore, Expectation B9 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

### Findings

2.105    The Academy awards its own Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) level 7 diplomas, and has no arrangements for the delivery of learning opportunities with any other provider or organisation. There are no formal arrangements for internships, placements or other work-based learning that are integral to the Academy's awards. The Academy therefore retains total and direct control, and governance, of its awards.

2.106    The team discussed with Academy staff and students the opportunities for field trips and for gathering work experience over the duration of study. It was clear that the Academy is supportive of students gaining relevant experience, but that while this experiential learning may be relevant to the student's diploma, it was neither a requirement, nor was it assessed. As such the review team considers that this Expectation does not apply to the Academy.

**Expectation (B11): Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols.**

**This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.**

**Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees***

**Findings**

2.107    The Academy does not deliver research degrees, and therefore this Expectation does not apply.

# The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.108    In determining its judgement on the quality of student learning opportunities at the Academy, the review team considered the findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met, with the exception of Expectation B1. The level of risk is considered low in all Expectations apart from B1 and B8, where the review team considers there to be a moderate risk to the quality of learning opportunities. The review team identifies two areas of good practice in Expectations B2 and B4 and a total of six recommendations for action pertaining to Expectations B1, B3, B5, B7, where there are two recommendations, and B8. There are no affirmations in this area.

2.109    The Academy's recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures are fair and well managed and are carefully attuned to the demands of the courses. The admissions process is well supported by staff from across the Academy and students reported a very welcoming open environment, with quick responses to queries. All suitable applicants are interviewed either in person, or by online video conferencing and applicants receive personalised feedback on their interview and suitability for the course. The inclusive and detailed admissions process, which ensures that students are well suited for the course, is recognised as **good practice**.

2.110    The Academy takes a close interest in the academic and professional development of its students. This is embedded in its practice from the point of initial enquiry to enrolment, to development during the course. Emphasis is placed on career development and employability and the Academy seeks to ensure that its practice and resources are aligned with industry needs. Students have career meetings with senior staff and have to engage with an Independent Learning Plan designed to encourage reflection on their own learning. The review team notes as **good practice** the nurturing, embedded and career-focused support that enables students to reach their full personal, academic and professional potential.

2.111    There is no formal approval event for new courses involving independent external expertise. The review team was assured that the academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities for students on the current diploma courses were in line with similar courses at other institutions. However, despite this confidence, the team considers that there are risks to future courses resulting from the absence of external expertise in the formal approval of new courses. The review team therefore recommends that the Academy develops and implements a procedure for course approval that incorporates independent external expertise.

2.112    The Academy emphasises the employment of well qualified staff according to their professional filmmaking industry expertise. Students confirmed that the staff appeared to be expert in their fields and are able to inspire them. The employment of professionally expert adjunct staff leading and teaching on courses presents challenges in terms of monitoring and review of their teaching performance. The review team therefore recommends that the Academy implements a systematic process to monitor and assure the continued effectiveness of all teaching staff.

2.113    Relatively small class sizes enable daily interaction between individual students and tutors, which provides a valuable route for student feedback, and there were a number of effective additional routes for students to comment on aspects of their course. Students confirmed that while student representatives meet regularly with staff, they do not attend any meetings, other than the Staff/Student Liaison Committee. The review team considers that student involvement in quality assurance would be enhanced if they had representation within the Academy governance structure. Consequently, the review team recommends that

the Academy includes student representatives as full members of course management committees.

2.114    The Academy operates an external examining system. The role of the external examiner encompasses the scrutiny of assignment briefs, records of internal verification, and samples of assessed student work, and attendance at final assessment boards. External examiners produce an annual report and comments feed into the annual monitoring process. The roles and procedures, with the exception of the detail of the selection and appointment process, are clearly articulated in the Internal Verification and External Examining Handbook. The review team noted that there was a lack of clarity over the term of office of the external examiner and that the process for replacement was not made clear in the Handbook. The team therefore recommends that the Academy develops and implements regulations relating to the term of office for external examiners in line with the guidance in the Quality Code. In addition, the review team found that students were not aware of how to access the external examiner reports and that some tutors were also unclear about how to access these documents. Consequently, the team recommends that the Academy ensures that students and tutors are made aware of how to access external examiner reports.

2.115    The review team found that the annual monitoring process at the Academy was rigorous and comprehensive and in accordance with the processes and procedures described in the QAE Handbook. In terms of the periodic review of programmes, the process is less clear. The QAE Handbook suggests a process similar to that used by any university partners but does not detail such a process. The Academy did undertake a 'strategic review' of courses by the Joint Principals, with input from members of the Industry Advisory Board, but this was not a formal periodic review. The current diploma courses would not yet normally be subject to a periodic review; however, the review team felt that the Academy would benefit from developing and articulating a process for review. Due to the absence of a formalised system of periodic review, the level of risk is deemed to be moderate. The review team therefore recommends that the Academy develops and implements a process for the periodic review of all courses.

2.116    After consideration of the criteria for judgements set out in Annex 2 of the published handbook, the review team concludes that, overall, the quality of student learning opportunities at the Academy **meets** UK expectations.

# 3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

**Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision**

**Findings**

3.1 The Academy's website is the principal source of externally facing information, with detailed explanations of programmes and support to assist prospective students. Clear instructions are given on the application process, on seeking further information, and on how to visit the Academy. Information for enrolled students is available through the Academy's intranet, or in hard copy via the front-of-house desk. The potential for diploma students to progress to a degree award is explained on the website and in programme documentation. The Academy does not provide an externally facing strategic plan, but does explain its mission in supporting professional filmmaking training.

3.2 There are clear policies and procedures to manage the creation, revision and approval of published information. Different levels of oversight and approval are in place to ensure proportionate and consistent management of information provision. Taken together, the approach of the Academy would allow Expectation C to be met.

3.3 The review team scrutinised the Academy's website, its Public Information Handbook, the Student Handbook and associated course handbooks; it was also given access to the student intranet. The team discussed information provision and accuracy in meetings with Academy staff and students.

3.4 Staff throughout the Academy are involved in the creation and revision of information. The marketing team takes the lead in externally facing materials, following an internal checking process before final sign-off by the Joint Principals. The Academy takes a pragmatic approach to approval of frequently produced material, or that with minor revisions, with the marketing lead taking responsibility for this.

3.5 Through their frequent direct contact with applicants, the admissions office is able to monitor and report on the clarity of information provided to potential students. The Academy regularly seeks views from students on the accuracy of information provision, and students report clarity and consistency of information provision from the point of first seeking to enrol at the Academy.

3.6 Students and staff have a strong sense of understanding of the Academy rules, regulations and procedures. Reminders of key information is provided to students in a timely and supportive manner through weekly emails. The process for obtaining grade, transcripts, and certificates is understood, and accessible for alumni, and there is a new and considered data retention policy.

3.7 The opportunity to progress from the Academy's RQF level 7 awards to a BA or MA award is explained, and understood by students. However, the explanation of progression arrangements with the University of Hertfordshire and Anglia Ruskin University could be made more explicit.

3.8 Overall, the information provided by the Academy is generally fit for purpose, accurate and trustworthy. Information provision is monitored, and updated regularly, with

students and staff confirming its accessibility and completeness. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met, and that the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

3.9      In determining its judgement on the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the Academy, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team considers that the Expectation in this area is met and that the risk to student learning opportunities is low. There are no recommendations, affirmations or areas of good practice.

3.10     The Academy's website is the principal source of externally facing information. There are detailed explanations of programmes and clear instructions are given on the application process. Information for enrolled students is available through the Academy's intranet, or in hard copy via the front-of-house desk. Accuracy of information is facilitated by clear policies and procedures that ensure that different levels of oversight and approval are in place, and these are understood by staff. Students report clarity and consistency of information provision throughout their studies. Overall, the information provided by the Academy is generally fit for purpose, accurate and trustworthy.

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

# 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

**Findings**

4.1 The Executive Committee, which is the body with responsibility for strategic oversight of the Academy, has the remit for enhancement and this is a regular agenda item for meetings. The responsibilities of the HOAG also include enhancement as one of the main responsibilities, although the role responsibilities for Course Leaders and lead tutors do not specifically refer to this. Nevertheless, the evidence provided shows discussion and agreement of improvements to operations and facilities being considered at an Academy-wide level and there are defined sections for discussion of enhancement in module reports.

4.2 The arrangements and procedures that the Academy has described as being in place would allow this Expectation to be met.

4.3 The review team tested the Expectation through inspection of the terms of reference of the governance committees, the minutes of those committees and those of the Industry Advisory Board. The team also held meetings with the Industry Advisory Board and with staff from the Academy. There is no formalised statement or strategy for enhancement published by the Academy. Although this is not a requirement, such a strategy would better articulate the Academy's approach to enhancement and ensure a consistent view throughout the institution. However, from discussions with staff and inspection of minutes there is clear evidence of an integrated, systematic approach to enhancement.

4.4 Evidence is gathered from a variety of sources on issues affecting the learning environment, instances of good practice within the Academy, and developments and good practice in the industry and other higher education institutions. These sources include the SSLC, student and tutor questionnaires, course committee meetings, the Industry Advisory Board, the National Association of Higher Education in the Moving Image (NAHEMI) meetings, and various film festivals.

4.5 This evidence filters up to the Joint Principals and becomes an enhancement agenda item for the Executive Committee. The Committee then agrees actions for the Academy and monitors their implementation.

4.6 A number of specific examples of enhancements that arose through this route were given. These included: the resequencing of modules on the Screenwriting Diploma; the purchase of state-of-the-art camera equipment; opportunities for work experience for students; and increased interaction between the Filmmaking and Screenwriting Diplomas.

4.7 In considering the above evidence, the team concludes that the Academy adopted a systematic approach to the identification of enhancement opportunities, with emphasis on the identification, implementation and monitoring of good practice and enhancements throughout all levels of the organisation. The Expectation is therefore met and the risk is deemed to be low.

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

# The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.8        In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no recommendations, affirmations or areas of good practice.

4.9        Although there is no formalised statement or strategy for enhancement published by the Academy, there is clear evidence of an integrated, systematic approach to enhancement. Evidence is gathered from a variety of sources on issues affecting the learning environment, instances of good practice within the Academy, and developments and good practice in the industry and other higher education institutions. This information filters up to the Joint Principals and becomes an enhancement agenda item for the Executive Committee, which then agrees actions for the Academy and monitors their implementation. The Academy adopts a systematic approach to the identification of enhancement opportunities with emphasis on the identification, implementation and monitoring of good practice throughout all levels of the organisation.

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

# Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**e-learning**
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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