Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of London Film Academy Ltd, November 2017

1   Outcome of the monitoring visit

1   From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that London Film Academy Ltd (the Academy) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the November 2016 [Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).](#)

2   Changes since the last QAA review

2   There have been no material changes at the Academy since the last QAA review in terms of programmes delivered, premises or partner arrangements. The Academy continues to offer a range of professional film training courses and qualifications including full-time, one-year postgraduate diplomas in Filmmaking and Screenwriting and various shorter certificate, specialised and foundation courses in filmmaking, screenwriting and specialist topics such as shooting and lighting for film and TV.

3   The Academy has maintained its formalised progression arrangements with one student progressing onto the final year of a bachelor's degree at the University of Hertfordshire and four onto a master's degree at Anglia Ruskin University.

4   There has been an increase in students on the Filmmaking Diploma course with 29 new students enrolled in September 2017 compared with 17 in September 2016, as well as small increases in the spring intakes for this programme (from eight to 10 students) and the Screenwriting Diploma course (from four to six students). This has been due to new marketing and recruitment initiatives and the introduction of a new Admissions Coordinator to the Admissions Team. There have been no other staff changes.

3   Findings from the monitoring visit

5   The Academy's 2016 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) noted two areas of good practice and made six recommendations. The Academy has continued to develop the two areas of good practice: the inclusive and detailed admissions process, which ensures that students are well suited for the course and enables them to succeed (Expectation B2); and the nurturing, embedded and career-focused support that enables students to reach their full personal, academic and professional potential (Expectation B4) (see also paragraph 7). Acceptable progress has been made on the six recommendations with steps being taken on all of them but not all yet being fully achieved or embedded (paragraphs 8 to 14).

6   The Academy's effective admissions processes and accompanying information continue to support students in making appropriate course choices to enable success. The introduction of a new Admissions Coordinator has enabled the Admissions Team to spend more time with applicants at enrolment stage. Students commented positively on the comprehensive, rigorous and supportive nature of the admissions process, the accuracy of information provided and the meeting of their expectations. The website provides

comprehensive information and key facts about courses, entry criteria, fees and admissions processes. Prospective students can also complete the application process easily online.

7   The Academy continues to nurture and support students to reach their full potential. Students now complete a useful career mapping exercise that is used to support them in career development planning by highlighting potential career paths and defining personal achievement targets. This personal development planning is supported by termly career meetings with tutors and mentoring sessions with industry professionals.

8   The recommendation to develop and implement a procedure for course approval which incorporates independent external expertise (Expectations B1 and A3.1) has partially been met. External examiners and independent industry experts, who sit on the Academy's Advisory Board, are all used to inform and consider course development opportunities. Informal discussions also take place with industry colleagues on professional bodies, such as NAHEMI (The National Association of Higher Education in the Moving Image) and collaborative partners, but these have yet to be incorporated into formal approval procedures. Discussions with potential academic partners for a validated BA programme will provide new opportunities for formal incorporation of independent external expertise into course approval processes.

9   Progress has been made with the second recommendation to include student representatives as full members of course management committees (Expectation B5), but students are not yet included on all committees. Student representatives participate in annual Course Committee meetings and Student-Staff Liaison meetings but do not yet participate in Executive Committee Meetings, although this is planned.

10   Student representatives are given a generalised introduction to their role during Induction and in the Student Handbook but are not provided with any formal training and do not have a clear idea of the Academy's committee structure. Some channels exist for feedback to students on committee actions, such as via a weekly email and Committee Minutes, but students expressed a wish for a collated action plan of activity to explain and/or monitor progress with issues and developments in response to the student voice.

11   In response to the recommendation to implement a systematic process to monitor and assure the continued effectiveness of all teaching staff (Expectation B3), the Academy has agreed and installed a new peer observation process. The observations are logged formally using a template completed by tutors. Peer exchange has also taken place between certain tutors. The Academy recognises the challenge of systematising this activity across many freelance tutors using different learning formats and with diverse schedules, and so has also addressed this issue via joint tutoring and debriefing for certain modules and film shoots. Students commented that they are very satisfied with the quality of teaching that they receive and the expertise of tutors.

12   The recommendation to develop and implement regulations relating to the term of office for external examiners in line with the guidance in the Quality Code (Expectation B7) has been met. The Internal Verification and External Examining Handbook is aligned with the Quality Code and includes a detailed section on External Examining. The Handbook now explicitly states that external examiners are appointed for a period of four to six years and this is confirmed in Letters of Agreement with examiners. A second external examiner has been appointed to overlap with the first to ensure continuity and to provide additional external input.

13   To ensure that students and tutors are made aware of how to access external examiner reports (Expectation B7) the reports are referenced in Student-Staff Liaison Meetings and during induction activities as well as made available on the Academy intranet.

Students demonstrated awareness of these reports although they were unsure of how they are used by the Academy to monitor standards and drive improvements.

14   For the final recommendation to develop and implement a process for the periodic review of all courses (Expectations B8 and A2.2) the Academy uses module reports, quarterly Course Deliverer's Meetings, Course Committee meetings, Executive Committee Meetings and the annual Industry Advisory Board Meeting to review different aspects of course provision. There is also a comprehensive Annual Course Review (ACR) compiled for each full-time course. However, there is not yet a systematic and joined-up process for monitoring of periodic review via the committee structure. Senior staff are scheduled to discuss a revised process of periodic review at the next Executive Committee meeting.

15   While the Academy's admissions process is thorough and robust, and includes assessment of the required level of English language ability via different means, students reported that there were sometimes communication difficulties on set with those for whom English is not their first language. It was also suggested that this might pose a safety issue, for example in the case of falling equipment, if instructions were not understood.
The Academy is addressing this issue by providing additional specialist language support.

16   Student retention and achievement continue to be strong at the Academy. The 2016 spring intake for the one-year Filmmaking Diploma had a 100 per cent retention rate and 88 per cent pass rate while the September intake had 82 per cent retention, with three drop-outs, and 100 per cent pass rate. For the 2016 Screenwriting Diploma intake there was 100 per cent retention and 100 per cent pass rate. For the 2017 intakes there has been one drop-out and two deferrals leading to a current overall progression rate of 89 per cent.

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

17   The Academy continues to engage with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) by informing staff of any updates and by reviewing and mapping all policies and procedures to ensure that they are aligned with the Quality Code. For example, its Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook was updated in October 2017 and all aspects of the management of academic and quality standards have been referenced against the Quality Code.

18   The Academy makes appropriate reference to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) level descriptors. Relevant Subject Benchmark Statements for Creative Writing and Communication, Media, Film and Cultural Studies have been provided to tutors and any recommendations for changes to the diplomas considered by the Executive Committee.

19   The Academy does not currently take part in the National Student Survey but intends to do so once its proposed validated bachelor's degree is launched.

20   Staff at the Academy are members of relevant professional organisations that provide industry-related external reference points, such as the Joint Principal's involvement with NAHEMI. The appointment of a second external examiner, and the industry and academic professionals on the Academy's Advisory Board, provide additional external reference points, as will potential university partners for the proposed new BA programme.

5   Background to the monitoring visit

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

22   The monitoring visit was carried out by Mark Cooper, Reviewer, and Jacqueline Young, Coordinator, on 7 November 2017.