



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of London Studio Centre, May 2019

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that the London Studio Centre (LSC) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [May 2017 Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

Changes since the last QAA review

2 London Studio Centre Ltd is an independent conservatoire dance and music theatre higher education provider founded in 1978. It is located in North Finchley in an arts centre called 'artsdepot'. A successful partnership has been forged and developed with the arts centre enabling LSC to benefit from two contrasting theatre spaces, purpose built dance studios and associated professional resources. Its mission is to provide education in dance and related subjects for the professional theatre, in an environment where individual creative talents of each student are nurtured. Middlesex University validates its programme, BA (Hons) Theatre Dance. There are 332 students on the programme and there are 21.75 FTE staff, comprising 16 full-time staff and 5.75 fractional staff.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The outcome of the review was reached by reading the annual monitoring return form, review of the documentary evidence and meetings with staff and students. At the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER (AP)) review in May 2017 the review team identified three items of good practice. These were all identified in the July 2017 HER (AP) action plan and all associated actions have been completed. LSC operates a clear, fair and robust admissions process, informed by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*, and as set out in their policies and procedures. Procedures for the setting, moderation and feedback of assessed work complies fully with Middlesex University's regulations, and students the team met understood assessment criteria and how to avoid plagiarism. While working closely with the University, LSC continues to be informed by external reference points.

4 Progress has been made with the first item of good practice, which centres on the promotion of individual staff professional development through the Staff Development Policy. Staff development days (LIFT OFF) are held twice a year and include meetings of the new Professional Research Network. A peer-supported review of teaching (PSRT) Scheme is also being used. There are clear guidelines on the expectations for CPD for both faculty and administrative staff, including a credit system for assessing whether they are meeting these expectations. To achieve its focus on the AdvanceHE (formerly the Higher Education Academy) Fellowship, LSC is in the process of introducing a new MA Dance Education with an associated PGCert HE programme. It is envisaged that this will carry automatic FHEA accreditation.

5 The second item of good practice focusses on the embedding of professional practice in the curriculum. Through module M602 (Creation, Performance and Production) the final year prepares students for their professional careers, including forming touring performance companies, which are supported by highly regarded professional choreographers and costume designers. Module M602 was singled out for praise by the external examiner. Students have also found the new module M603 Employability in Practice, launched in September 2017, very valuable. Industry professionals are regularly invited to speak to current students. There is a new graduate mentoring scheme and contact with alumni has been developed, including an Alumni Association Administrator and an alumni gallery on LSC's website showcasing their achievements. Alumni are also used to teach and give guest lectures, and can easily be contacted by current students. In the DLHE survey, 94 percent of 2017 graduates had entered work (an increase on 2016), with 87 percent in graduate-level jobs.

6 The third item of good practice focuses on student support and the strong culture of health and well-being. A student support map for each level shows the full range of support available at each stage. The personal tutoring system allows opportunities for individual meetings as well as group events. The LIFT OFF staff development sessions update tutors on all aspects of supporting student mental and physical health. Student support is extensive and from induction onwards students are taught how to avoid injury and given advice on nutrition, exercise and physiotherapy with opportunities to consult professionals in these areas.

7 Trends in student achievement are discussed at the Student Support and Progress Committee. Each committee has its own action plan which interacts with the strategic action plan and student feedback is incorporated in all these. There are very high levels of engagement of student reps in the many committees on which they are represented, and this allows for timely feedback. The student reps also meet together in a forum once a term. Training for student reps is available online. Information from meetings is disseminated to the wider student body online.

8 The weekly bulletin was identified as a way of closing the quality loop. This has been well received and is routinely used by both staff and students and items for it form a standing item on committee agendas.

9 LSC's website gives full details of admissions processes including videos for each pathway and students confirmed that they found the process straightforward with support available at all stages if required. LSC offers a wide range of taster opportunities including open days, boys' days, a Saturday Associate Programme and audition experience days. LSC holds a Tier 4 Sponsor's licence and accepts a range of possible English qualifications, including Middlesex University's Academic English course, and asks for a minimum score of 5.5 in each IELTS 6 component. Feedback is not normally provided to unsuccessful applicants, but a complaints and appeals procedure is in place.

10 The audition process plays the central role in admissions decisions, with opportunities to audition in some overseas venues or by video. All those involved in the auditions process are trained in it and, where appropriate, also mentored. Recommendations for admission are made after each round of auditions by the Admissions Review Board, which also considers applications for recognition of prior learning.

11 The current robust two-stage process of auditions and recall is at present under review because well qualified candidates are under pressure from other providers to accept offers before LSC's recall audition has taken place. Early offers are increasingly being made to outstanding candidates.

12 There is a wide range of learning activities matched to learning outcomes, an Assessment and Feedback Policy and a clear assessment strategy. Assessment briefs and marking criteria are provided online and in Programme and Module Handbooks. Training in assessment and feedback forms are part of staff training and tutor guidelines on assessment and feedback are provided. For the Level 6 dissertation module, students can select how they will be assessed, for example by making a film, doing a presentation or creating a site-specific performance. Summative performance assessments at Levels 5 and 6 are videoed. Provision has been made with Middlesex University that students can apply to substitute work done under a professional contract for their final assessment. As part of this process, the student must map the activity on to the assessment criteria. There are clear guidelines for the management of delays in submitting work for assessment.

13 Feedback is made available within 15 days. The feedback form includes the opportunity for student self-reflection. Students appreciate the policy whereby, while both individual and group feedback are given, the grades are not released until internal and external moderation are complete. Innovative feedback is encouraged. This may be elective (the students decide on what areas they would like feedback), or audio or video-recorded feedback, and some peer assessment is included. Students reported that they receive daily feedback in their classes.

14 Recruitment over the past few years has fluctuated slightly, with 119 students enrolling in 2016-17, 126 in 2017-18 and 111 in 2018-19. A small number of overseas students enrol each year (five in 2016 and seven in 2017). International recruitment adheres to the LSC's UKVI arrangements in terms of Tier 4 sponsorship status.

15 LSC can also demonstrate high levels of retention, completion and pass rates with 93 percent completing their course in 2017 (106 students), and 91 percent in 2018 (115 students).

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

16 The provision is fully mapped on to the Quality Code by the Quality Management and Enhancement Group. The Subject Benchmark Statement for Dance, Drama and Performance (2015) has been used for the existing course provision and for the master's courses, which are about to be introduced. The relationship with Middlesex is a mature one: the Complaints and Appeals Process was changed to meet OIA requirements and admissions is geared to *Chapter B2*.

Background to the monitoring visit

17 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.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Professor Helen King, Reviewer, and Mr Ian Welch, QAA Officer, on 23 May 2019.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786
Tel 01452 557050
Web www.qaa.ac.uk