



Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of Millennium Performing Arts, April 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 Millennium Performing Arts (MPA) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the May 2017 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#) and the April 2018 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) Partial Review](#).

Changes since the last QAA review

2 There are currently 117 students studying on higher education programmes at MPA, compared with a total of 150 in 2017-18. Of these 117 students, 99 are on the BA Musical Theatre compared with 105 in 2017-18, as reported at the previous review. 18 are on Level 6 Professional Diplomas, compared with 45 in 2017-18. MPA employs a total of 23 members of staff, three full-time and 20 part-time. MPA also engages approximately 35 sessional/guest teaching staff each year.

3 MPA's BA Musical Theatre continues to be validated by the University for the Creative Arts (UCA). MPA also offers Diplomas in Professional Musical Theatre and Professional Dance awarded by Trinity College London. No other external reviews have taken place since the last QAA review.

Findings from the monitoring visit

4 Millennium Performing Arts (MPA) have maintained the good practice identified in the Higher Education Review (Alternative Provider) of May 2017, and the partial review of April 2018. Audition is still an effective and positive part of the admissions process (paragraph 5), the professional practice ethos remains a feature of the learning environment and experience (paragraph 6), and students' individual needs continue to be embedded in a holistic approach to support (paragraph 7). The recommendations have been addressed, with MPA introducing a bespoke complaints policy for its higher education provision (paragraph 8), student representatives being more involved and engaged in MPA business (paragraph 9), and a more strategic approach introduced for the enhancement of student learning opportunities (paragraph 10). The affirmation has been undertaken with the new website developed and introduced, and the introduction of a learning management system (paragraph 11). MPA's approaches to admissions and assessment are reliable processes (paragraphs 12 and 13).

5 Audition days continue to provide a wide range of activities to deepen applicants' knowledge of MPA and practice that will be expected of them. Students who have recently gone through the process confirmed that this remains the case. Audition is supportive and takes steps to minimise nerves and stress, with access to student workshops and classes which continue to make applicants aware of what will be expected of them. This approach is a deliberate strategy on the part of MPA.

6 The integrated professional practice which ensures industry currency of the provision remains in place. Employers approach MPA with a view to using students, and the curriculum content continues to reflect the nature of the industry. In addition, staff - both permanent and sessional - are active practitioners and bring insight to the delivery of the curriculum.

7 The good practice related to students' individual needs is maintained through the evaluation of support services, dialogue with students at weekly student review meetings, and a commitment to strengthening and developing student support mechanisms.

8 MPA have addressed the recommendation to articulate consistently the relationship between MPA's and the awarding body's complaints policies. As part of a review of policies, a bespoke higher education complaints policy was introduced following consultation in November 2017. The complaints policy was reviewed and updated in January 2019. Students receive the policy as part of the student handbook issued to them at the beginning of the academic year, and while the newly-introduced policy was available to students, those present at the annual monitoring visit student meeting were unaware that it had been recently updated.

9 In response to the recommendation to 'support student representatives to engage more fully with the business of the College committees and the decision-making process', MPA have strengthened their approach. An induction and training programme for student representatives is now in place. Lead student representatives attend and contribute to key MPA committee meetings. They have access to staff, including senior staff, and are encouraged to share student feedback and contribute to the agendas of these meetings. Students confirmed that they felt the management of MPA listened to them, and acted where possible. An example cited by students was where they requested updated library resources and to have them displayed in a more 'user-friendly' way, with better printer facilities. MPA responded to these requests swiftly and ensured that they were in place.

10 Following the 2017 review, a further partial review was needed to ensure that MPA met the requirement for enhancement. In order to meet this, a recommendation was made to 'develop the reflective culture into a more strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities'. The partial review took place in April 2018 and concluded that the enhancement of student learning opportunities meets UK expectations, and affirmed the actions already being taken by MPA to address the recommendation. An enhancement strategy has been introduced and monitored by MPA's directors and the Governance Advisory Board. The MPA strategic plan 2016-19 was updated accordingly, and MPA operational plans are also influenced by the enhancement strategy. Students have been made aware of the enhancement strategy and made reference to it at the student meeting.

11 The 2017 review affirmed action already being taken, to continue the work undertaken to develop a new website and learning management system. Development work for the website was completed in December 2017 and the website is subject to ongoing maintenance. Staff take responsibility for updating and maintaining the accuracy and currency of web pages allocated to them. MPA collect feedback on the website in terms of satisfaction and accuracy from partners and other external audiences, as well as students and auditionees. Students confirmed that they found the website helpful and easy to navigate. Also regarding the affirmation, MPA have continued to develop aspects of their learning management system, with a new system now in place which seeks to provide reliable and accurate student records. Both the website and the learning management system remain under ongoing review.

12 The approach to student admissions is valid and reliable. MPA have an admissions policy which reflects the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and sector guidelines. This

has been approved by its awarding body, the University for the Creative Arts (UCA). MPA also engages with UCA benchmarks to check satisfaction levels for the admissions process. As a specialist performing arts institution, the audition element is a key part of the admissions process, and MPA continues to maintain this area of good practice (paragraph 5). MPA assesses students' suitability to study the subject and academic level for which they are applying, using recruitment and entry criteria agreed with the awarding body, alongside the requirement for successful completion of the audition. It also maintains fitness to study guidelines which support the student selection process. Student admissions data is reviewed, and this helps MPA in understanding its applicant base and ensuring the admissions process remains appropriate. At the end of the first term, student views are captured to inform any further development of the admissions process. Students stated that the approach to recruitment and admissions was helpful and supportive, citing the audition aspect in particular as enjoyable and informative.

13 The approach to assessment is valid and reliable. MPA has a moderation strategy that has been agreed by UCA and external examiners. New staff that set and mark student assessments are trained and overseen to ensure that they are fully equipped to enable students to complete work to the best of their ability. UCA maintains oversight of the process and there is joint staff development with MPA to ensure that approaches to assessment and marking are consistent, accurate and carried out with rigour and integrity. Students said there is clarity of expectation in terms of what is required from them. They are made aware of learning outcomes in student handbooks, and these are reiterated along with grade descriptors when the assessment is formally launched. Formative assessment meetings take place, and students feel enabled to access staff, either in person or via email, when they require help or advice. Students confirmed that they were made aware of intentional and unintentional plagiarism, and consequences of each. In addition, students identified that they appreciated teachers' performing arts-based expertise and experience, providing insight and currency enabling them to complete assessments with confidence. There is an expectation that student work is returned within four weeks of submission, and staff and students stated that this was usually the case, though not always.

14 MPA uses retention and pass data to help inform its decision-making. Year one retention data contributes to its review of admissions and reflects on the effectiveness of student support actions. Retention and pass rates are high. For the 2015-16 BA Musical Theatre cohort retention was 100% (22 students throughout all years) and a pass rate of 89%. For the following year, retention remains at 100% (26 students) and a pass rate for the three students who have so far completed of 100%. The 2017-18 starting cohort shows 94% retention with three students discontinuing from 52 who started.

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

15 MPA engages with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and is aware of and planning activities using the new Quality Code. In course development and validation with UCA, it has engaged with *The Framework for Higher Education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and Subject Benchmark Statements. It has several performing arts-based links with employers and agents, and uses these to help inform the curriculum.

Background to the monitoring visit

16 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.

17 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Mike Slawin, Reviewer, and Ms Helen Uglow, QAA Officer, on 9 April 2019.

QAA2380 - R10396 - May 19

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