



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Millennium Performing Arts

Partial review

April 2018

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) partial review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Millennium Performing Arts. The review took place on 13 April 2018 and was conducted by one reviewer, as follows:

- Dr Elisabeth Cook.

The main purpose of the partial review was to investigate the higher education provision and to make judgements as to whether or not 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.

This was a partial review following an original review undertaken in May 2017 which resulted in a published report. The QAA review team made judgements on one area requiring improvement: the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

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.

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

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.

² QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk.

³ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/en/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

Judgement

The QAA review team formed the following judgement about the higher education provision.

- the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action already being taken to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to students:

- the work undertaken by Millennium Performing Arts in the development of a framework for a more strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).

About the provider

Millennium Performing Arts (MPA) was created in 1997 by three professional performers and teachers. It is a private vocational College for training professional performers in three distinct disciplines (Dancing, Acting and Singing). The College does not have its own degree awarding powers and offers a range of programmes in the musical theatre subject area under agreements with awarding bodies and organisations. The College mission, strategic direction and management structure is unchanged since the previous review. Its mission is to provide an outstanding opportunity for young performers in a progressive environment where everyone can realise their true potential.

In 2002 the College was included in the Dance and Drama Awards (DaDA) Scheme awarded to vocational colleges in the Further Education (FE) sector. At this time MPA was affiliated to Trinity College London (TCL), the awarding body, which validates the National Diploma in Dance and Performance, required for DaDA Awards. All of the College's provision is accredited by the Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre (CDMT). The College relocated into its own building in Woolwich in 2008, which has enabled it to expand provision and to reach a less economically affluent community in their outreach and community provision.

MPA expanded its academic portfolio through the introduction of an undergraduate degree in Musical Theatre in 2015. The programme is validated by the University for the Creative Arts (UCA). At the same time specific course designation was achieved allowing students to access student loans to support their studies. In 2016 a Dance pathway within the BA (Hons) Musical Theatre programme gained UCA approval. The College currently has 105 students on the BA (Hons) Musical Theatre.

The May 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative providers) report identified a culture of reflection at discipline level and an ethos of continuous improvement across the College. However, the management of quality enhancement across the College, that is the identification, implementation and evaluation of enhancement-related activities and the governance structures to support this, were underdeveloped. This led to a recommendation that the College develop its reflective culture in order to generate a more strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

The College produced a detailed action plan to address the recommendation and monitors its progress. Key elements within this were the creation of an enhancement strategy with a linked operational plan and an updated strategic plan. These documents are intended to connect closely and drive activity from the Strategic Plan. The College also reviewed aspects of its academic governance structure. Terms of reference for the Teaching, Quality and Enhancement Committee (TQEC) have been updated and now include explicit reference to enhancement thus ensuring that TQEC has oversight of the implementation of the Enhancement Strategy. A Governance Advisory Board (GAB) has been established and conducted its first meeting in December 2017. Specific enhancement initiatives have been articulated and developed strategically, and consultation activities with students and staff in respect of the Enhancement Strategy and Operational Plan have taken place.

Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

1 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

1.1 The College's Enhancement Strategy and associated Operational Plan, developed in consultation with staff and students drive enhancement activities from the updated Strategic Plan. The Teaching Quality and Enhancement Committee has oversight of the College's enhancement activities and is responsible for the development, implementation and review of MPA's systems, policies and procedures for enhancing the quality of students' learning experience. MPA also uses its quality monitoring cycle to identify opportunities for enhancement, particularly the annual programme monitoring process, and shares good practice identified in staff meetings. The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.2 In testing the impact and effectiveness of the College's recent work within the enhancement area the review team considered a range of evidence including strategic documents, committee minutes and terms of reference, annual monitoring reports and course action plans. The team also met with members of the TQEC, teaching staff and students.

1.3 Although not yet formally signed off by Academic Board, the Enhancement Strategy is a formal articulation of what the College aspires to achieve and, as such, it resonates with students in capturing their everyday experience of study at the College. A cross-College Operational Plan drives the Enhancement Strategy in articulating how objectives, including enhancement initiatives. This plan represents a shift from departmental to institution-wide planning but is still in a transitional phase of development. However, the benefits of the change are already emerging as departmental ideas are brought together into an over-arching document that is shared widely, codifying the informal ways in which the College previously developed initiatives, and enabling a wider staff team to become involved in shaping and implementing strategy. The awarding body receives regular reports on progress through updated course action plans which chart the work outlined above, the development of staff awareness and the revision of committee terms of reference.

1.4 The College has firm plans to develop these key documents further. For example, future operational plans will set timescales for the completion of activities and allocate responsibilities to individuals. The resource plan that currently sits as an appendix within the Enhancement Strategy will not form part of it going forward. The review team noted that the revised Operational Plan has yet to feed into annual monitoring for 2017-18, but it was assured that it would enable the quality cycle to engage explicitly with enhancement matters.

1.5 The College has consulted with students in the development of its Enhancement Strategy. The Lead Student Representative spoke eloquently about her involvement in providing feedback to the College's senior team on the strategy, student handbooks and new programme proposals. Student representatives attending Course Board meetings confirmed that discussions about enhancement have taken place in this forum. With regard to the Enhancement Strategy in particular, Course Board representatives observed that it builds on what they already knew about the ethos of the College and articulated what happens on a day-to-day basis. The review team found that full-time students had a better understanding of how enhancement work permeates the College as opposed to third year direct entry students, but heard all students outline several positive changes that were improving communication within the College and thus their experience. These include the introduction of Heads of Year, College email addresses, new technology to support information sharing

and a more autonomous student representative system. Students are also involved in a range of working groups and this has encouraged them to be more actively involved as partners in shaping and enhancing their learning environment.

1.6 Discussions with teaching staff confirmed a shift in culture is taking place at the College as individuals are encouraged to think more holistically and place their work within a wider institutional picture. Staff described the process of compiling departmental annual reports as more collaborative, more formalised and less solitary activity, with time and space for cross-College conversations. There is limited evidence of this in committee minutes, but the review team heard that the College's small staff team sit on many different committees and understands that this is a transitional year. Peer observation encourages cross-disciplinary integration. This, in addition to the benefits for staff in sharing ideas and good practice, is felt to better prepare students for their professional lives. The teaching staff met by the review team feel informed, supported and integrated and reiterated the improved nature of communications. Staff meetings provide an opportunity to discuss enhancement work in a wider forum.

1.7 The review team explored the involvement of College committees in shaping and steering processes relating to enhancement. Strategic documents are initiated by the Directors, drafted by the Head of Academic Quality and Curriculum, discussed by the senior team and shared with TQEC, the Course Board and the new Governance Advisory Board. Feedback is sought from these groups which was evident from the minutes of meetings. TQEC now has a defined role in overseeing and evaluating enhancement work. There is evidence through its minutes, the quality of which has improved during 2017-18, that the committee is engaging with enhancement matters in a more meaningful way. Its role in evaluating actions in order to embed an ethos of enhancement has yet to be tested.

1.8 One particular enhancement initiative that the College has developed considerably over the last 18 months is its outreach activity. Staff outlined the shift from prospective students approaching the College to staff visiting communities around the UK, targeting areas where BTEC provision in music theatre is strong and where students access the subject through school-based provision rather than through private study. The aim of this work is to enhance perceptions of music theatre and dance as a career and to promote the ethos of the College's training. The impact of this initiative has been an increase in the calibre of students auditioning at the College.

1.9 The team also discussed the use of statistical data to evaluate and improve the student experience, noting that the May 2017 report had affirmed the work undertaken to develop a new learning management system. This system has improved communication, accelerated the processes involved in student assessment and improved data with regard to admissions. The College recognises that there is capacity to further optimise this resource, particularly with regard to data collection and evaluation to inform and support enhancement initiatives, and the Vice-Principal who leads on this initiative liaises regularly with staff.

1.10 The review team concludes that a more strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities is now in place through the detailed Operational Plan generated from the Enhancement Strategy and institutional oversight through the Teaching Quality Enhancement Committee. These provide a structure and framework for more regular discussions and contributions by staff and students. The components within this framework are still evolving and their effectiveness has yet to be evaluated through annual monitoring. The review team therefore **affirms** the work undertaken by the College in the development of a framework for a more strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

1.11 Overall, the review team considers that the Expectation is met and that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

1.12 In reaching its judgement the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation is met and the associated risk is low. The Expectation attracted one affirmation relating to the work undertaken in the development of a more strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. There are no good practice features or recommendations in this judgement area.

1.13 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the provider **meet** 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](#).

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* (FQHEIS).

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.

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