



Quality Review Visit of Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA)

April 2018

Key findings

QAA's rounded judgements about RADA

The QAA review team formed the following rounded judgements about the higher education provision at RADA:

- **There can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK.**
- **There can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.**

Areas for development

The review team identified the following **areas for development** that have the potential to enhance quality and/or further secure the reliability and/or comparability of academic standards at RADA. The review team advises RADA to:

- Ensure all students have access to and understand the process for informally discussing their grade and feedback (Quality Code)
- Ensure that the final stage of the informal appeals process is brought to the attention of all students within RADA's formal appeals policies and procedures. (Student Protection)

Specified improvements

No specific improvements have been identified.

About this review

The review visit took place from 12-13 June 2018 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Peter Bush
- Ms Ann Hill
- Ms Kate Wicklow (Student Reviewer)

The overall aim of Quality Review Visit is to:

- provide the relevant funding body with an expert judgement about the readiness of a provider to enter, or continue to operate within, the higher education sector.

Quality Review Visit is designed to:

- ensure that the student interest is protected
- provide expert advice to ensure that the reputation of the UK higher education system is protected, including the protection of degree standards
- identify development areas that will help a provider to progress through a developmental period and be considered 'established'.

Each review visit considers a provider's arrangements against relevant aspects of the baseline regulatory requirements, and in particular:

- the reliability of degree standards and their reasonable comparability with standards set and achieved by other providers
- the quality of the student academic experience, including student outcomes where the provider has a track record of delivery of higher education.

About RADA

The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) is a renowned institution, founded in 1904 and based in central London which provides practice-based conservatoire-level higher education and training in acting, stage management, design and production. Students undertake a minimum of 35 hours per week of teaching on undergraduate programmes.

RADA is a founding affiliate of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (CDD) which was created to access public funding for specialist teaching in dance and drama. RADA now seeks to become an independent institution in its own right, to change its relationship with CDD and apply for independent designation with the Office for Students (OfS). In this, it will continue to work with its two awarding bodies, King's College London and Birkbeck College, but will no longer be an affiliate of CDD and will not sign a new membership agreement with them. It is currently an Associate School of the CDD. A large number of practitioners (external Directors) currently working in theatre, film and television deliver on programmes and contribute to the assessment of student work. Students find this input and feedback from professionals extremely useful.

RADA currently has 221 students on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and offers the following programmes: FdA Technical Theatre and Stage Management, BA Technical Theatre and Stage Management (Level 6 top-up), BA Acting, Postgraduate Diploma Theatre Costume, MA Theatre Lab all awarded by King's College London. RADA underwent a revalidation of these programmes in 2017 for a further six years. It also offers an MA Text and Performance delivered jointly and awarded by Birkbeck, University of London.

Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)

1 RADA is guided by its awarding bodies in ensuring the qualifications it delivers align with the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. These awarding bodies have overall responsibility for ensuring RADA courses meet UK threshold standards. Course Programme Specifications outline the level of the programme on the FHEQ and makes explicit reference to the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

2 Teaching Staff have an appropriate understanding of the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements and how they are used in delivery and assessment. The Teaching and Quality team use a variety of other external reference points to ensure that their awards are industry relevant and also make use of industry experts and alumni through the Council Training Committee.

3 RADA has recently developed its own Quality Handbook which details a new process for programme design and review. This articulates how future programmes will fully consider the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements at an early stage. Annual Monitoring processes and Periodic Reviews check that the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements have been fully considered by the teaching team and have recently been checked by the awarding bodies.

The relevant code of governance: such as the Higher Education Code of Governance published by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) or the Association of Colleges'(AoC) Code of Good Governance for English Colleges

4 The review team found that RADA's governance arrangements are aligned to the primary elements of the CUC Code of HE Governance (2014) and there are robust arrangements in place for maintaining oversight of academic governance including effective risk management and the assurance of standards, through the reporting structures that support the work of the Council. RADA is governed by its Council which comprises twenty three independent members with a broad range of experience. Academic staff and student representatives attend each Council meeting, along with the senior management team. Council meets quarterly and receives reports from the RADA Director, the Director of Actor Training, Director of Technical Training and the Director of Student and Academic Services. Council is supported by the Training Committee which comprises senior members of the profession, and acts as an advisory body. The review team were advised that RADA has identified the need to clarify the responsibilities of this group in relation to Academic Board. Revised terms of reference will be put into place by the end of the 2017-18 academic year. Assurance is provided to Council regarding quality, standards and financial performance through the Board's consideration of the Annual Programme Monitoring Report (APMR), the outcome of programme reviews conducted by the two awarding bodies, Academic Board minutes, and the results of the National Student Survey (NSS). Reports from the Student Experience Forum are contained within the Academic Board minutes. Council has appropriate sub-committees in place which effectively maintain oversight of academic risk, by the Audit Committee, reporting termly to Council. The Audit Committee also receives internal audit reports relating to the student academic experience and admissions processes.

5 The principles of academic freedom and collegiality are fully embedded within RADA's culture; it has a Freedom of Speech Policy and staff and students demonstrate an explicit understanding regarding the principles of academic freedom and collegiality.

The Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)

6 RADA's arrangements for discharging its responsibilities for the setting and maintenance of the standards of its programmes are robust, well managed and effective. It adheres to the regulatory frameworks of its awarding bodies which have ultimate responsibility for setting and maintaining academic quality and standards. King's regulations are contextualised and amended annually by RADA's Academic Board for approval by King's, an arrangement confirmed for a further six years from September 2018 following a successful revalidation of all RADA's King's programmes in November 2017. Documentation prepared for this revalidation includes programme self-analyses and proposals from both the Acting and Technical teams, together with programme specifications which include learning outcomes and references to Subject Benchmark Statements. These specifications are regularly updated in the light of annual monitoring activities and inform Student Handbooks with complete records of previous versions of these and module specifications maintained.

7 The MA Text and Performance programme is delivered jointly by RADA and Birkbeck, and there is no devolution of Birkbeck's regulations to RADA. The institutions plan to review in the summer of 2018 the regulatory arrangements for student support currently reflected in the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) for five years from 2014/15, which requires the joint steering committee to review the programme annually. The Birkbeck MoA includes a comprehensive programme specification.

8 RADA was a founding Affiliate of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (CDD) in 2001 contributing to the establishment and regular updating of the CDD's Quality Handbook. This serves the interests of all eight Schools of CDD, recognises the quality assurance requirements of all four CDD awarding bodies, and references the Quality Code. RADA's internal quality assurance arrangements reflect the guidance in the Handbook. The arrangements adopted by RADA both meet the requirements of the CDD Quality Handbook and the terms of the agreements with its awarding bodies. Seeking separate registration with OfS in its own right whilst developing interim Associate School status with CDD, RADA is currently compiling its own Quality Handbook, expected to be completed by the end of 2018 which is consistent with the UK Quality Code and the requirements of King's and Birkbeck.

9 Validation reports and Agreements formally set and confirm the standards of programmes delivered by RADA, they are reviewed and maintained through the annual monitoring processes. This culminates in a detailed annual monitoring report which is considered by Academic Board and contributes to the Annual Report from RADA considered at the annual meeting with King's the following January. The joint Birkbeck/RADA course committee prepares an annual monitoring report which is submitted directly to Birkbeck, although RADA will in future involve its Academic Board in the consideration process.

10 RADA's arrangements for the testing of students to ensure that academic standards are met are comprehensive and effective. The Assessment Strategy and principles are outlined in its draft Quality Handbook. The assessment regime operates on a 22-point scale for Acting programmes and on an 11-point scale for Technical Theatre programmes, explained in programme handbooks. The Course Handbook for the MA Text and Performance describes the assessment arrangements and grade criteria. Students understand the assessment arrangements, and welcome the frequent detailed feedback received from Tutors and Programme Director at 1:1 meetings and feedback sessions, especially on the Acting programme where continuous oral feedback is often of greater

significance than reporting grades. Formal assignments are moderated through second-marking arrangements, including assessments by external Directors. The Acting and Technical Theatre Programme Directors adjudicate in the event of a dispute between markers, with the Academy Director determining the grade outcome in the event of the Programme Director being one of the two markers unable to agree a grade. Students may informally challenge a grade through discussion with their Tutor and then the Programme Director; these arrangements are outlined by their Programme Director and included in the Appeals Regulations. These informal and thorough arrangements were welcomed and fully understood by students.

11 RADA proposes External Examiners who are appointed by and report to King's. Reports are forwarded to RADA for consideration and action by the relevant Programme Committee. RADA chairs its Assessment Boards which are sub-Boards of the appropriate King's Assessment Board and are attended by the King's Faculty Assessment Board Chair. External Examiner Reports and responses are considered at the annual King's/RADA meeting. Reports seen by the team are very positive and the King's (re-) validation report noted RADA's prompt responses to reports. Birkbeck appoints the External Examiner for MA Text and Performance, with comments from the report and actions being included in the Joint Annual Monitoring report considered by Birkbeck's Department of English and Humanities.

12 RADA benefits from its involvement with industry peers in admissions, assessments and in providing general feedback. The involvement of external professionals is regularised in the Director's, Project Leader's and Designer's Handbooks.

13 RADA's use of data is considered and used effectively in its monitoring of academic standards. APMRs include data on applications to audition; equality data; progression and achievement; employment and tracks the progression of identified groups. Data is collected and summarised by student characteristics and programme, with observations/actions recorded against each. These outcomes have informed learning, teaching and quality action plans, and have contributed to RADA's approach to widening participation. NSS results and action plans are considered at programme, Academic Board and Council levels, with students reporting that outcomes had been used effectively for enhancing learning resources and opportunities and that NSS outcomes on assessment and feedback had been acted upon positively.

14 Assessment sub-boards receive statistics on marks for current students, along with comparative data for previous years. In 2017 RADA established an equality analysis of outcomes at programme level, noting the possibility of differential outcomes for disabled students. The approach to the collection, analysis and application of data is generally fit for purpose, although RADA is aware of the need to improve this by identifying a number of key performance indicators to review and enhance its general student record system.

Rounded judgement

15 RADA has robust and comprehensive processes in place to ensure the reliability and comparability of Academic Standards. It complies with the regulations and procedures of its main awarding body, King's as confirmed by the revalidation of programmes for six years in 2017. The programme jointly delivered with Birkbeck follows their regulations and procedures. Programme are aligned to the FHEQ, the Quality Code, CDD and Subject Benchmark Statements.

16 The review team concludes that there can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK.

Judgement area: Quality of the student academic experience

The Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)

17 The review team considered that the quality of the student academic experience was assured and enhanced through activities ranging from student representation to monitoring processes and admission. The student voice is effectively captured through a formal representation system, module evaluation, and informal opportunities facilitated by the accessible, responsive and caring culture of the organisation. For example, new draft policies are forwarded to the Student Experience Forum for student review.

18 The Director of Student and Academic Services (SAS) is responsible for quality assurance systems, working closely with the Directors of Training, course leaders and senior members of faculty. A cross-Academy Quality Forum, a sub-committee of Academic Board, provides a focused approach to policy scrutiny ahead of full consideration by Academic Board. Processes for annual monitoring, action planning and review are varied and substantial, meet the requirements of the awarding bodies and include contributions from staff across the programmes. Annual review is effective and sufficiently self-critical, drawing on a range of data to identify enhancements, consideration of external examiner reports, student feedback and the development of action plans. This is supported by clear target dates, responsibilities, and monitoring points throughout the quality assurance cycle.

19 Admissions processes are clearly stated in the Admissions Policy which is aligned to the UK Quality Code and is available on the website. Students are exceptionally satisfied with the rigour of the process and the support provided. RADA has a robust approach to the selection of students. Applicants for BA (Hons.) Acting undergo a four-round audition process. The BA Technical Theatre Production and Stage Management admission is by interview and portfolio. Third year students value the opportunity to sit on interview panels for the FdA/BA Technical Theatre Production and Stage Management course. Birkbeck College processes admissions for the MA Text and Performance. The process for appealing against admissions decisions is available on the website. Applicants have the opportunity to attend workshops to prepare them for the admissions process. The Technical Course Committee and Academic Board both receive updates on admissions.

20 The induction process is rigorous and informed by student feedback, with an increase in the informative to international students. Students are provided with timely and accurate course materials. A buddy mentoring system for new students to helps them to make the transition to the programme and additional provides support.

21 Teaching is practice-based, with staff who have a high level of practical professional experience in theatre, film and allied industries and of teaching in higher education. Students speak highly of the 'added value' components of the BA Acting course, such as the Rickman Breakfast programme, available to all first year students which offers students an exceptional opportunity to hear from first class speakers and contextualise their studies. External Examiners consider teaching to be of a very high standard, often exceeding Subject Benchmarks in all programmes and 'superbly' equipping its graduates for employment.

22 Teaching and professional services staff are reflective practitioners and are provided with appropriate individual support for development and maintenance of professional practice through a comprehensive appraisal and peer review process and staff development opportunities. Staff development priorities are aligned with RADA's strategic plan with outcomes reported through the committee process and monitored and evaluated

by the senior management team. There is a draft staff development policy which RADA intends to codify into a formal strategy. Once a staff development need has been identified, such as equality and diversity training, the institution responds with timely and effective training.

23 RADA has a clear policy and strategy for student engagement. The Student Experience Forum meets termly and acts as a formal communication channel between staff and students and is managed through deliberative committees, reporting through to the senior management team, Academic Board and Council. The attendance of a Council member at each meeting ensures that student views are fed directly back to Council. Students' views are taken seriously and feedback is systematically collected and analysed using a wide range of mechanisms, including surveys, module evaluations, annual monitoring reports, elected student representatives and well-attended student forums. Students confirm that their views are acted upon.

24 Students regard the support they receive in terms of teaching and learning as exceptional with a strong ensemble culture where staff and students work together for continuous improvement. They have full confidence in teaching and professional services staff who they describe as imaginative, caring and inspirational. Students are actively encouraged to participate in decision making and their views are heard and expedited. They confirmed that they are actively involved with the teaching, learning and assessment processes through comprehensive formative feedback.

25 RADA has produced an Assessment Strategy included in the draft Quality Handbook. Assessment processes are designed to ensure that student work is assessed fairly and appropriately as a means of developing progression. Assessment tasks and mechanisms reflect the practice-based nature of RADA's programmes. Students clearly understand the grading criteria and assessment strategies and receive termly formal feedback from course tutors and their Directors following the Profile Meetings where student progress is discussed. Depending on programme, students receive formal and informal feedback from course tutors and Director/Project Leaders after Profile Meetings or assessments. They confirmed that assessment becomes more challenging each year and that they are satisfied with the feedback they receive. This opportunity is not fully documented in student handbooks, although students met by the team were aware they could challenge their feedback and grade. The review team advise RADA to ensure all students have access to and understand the process for informally discussing their grade and feedback as an **area for development**.

26 RADA offers a wide range of support for students, including programme specific equipment, facilities and software. Students have access to an appropriate breadth and depth of learning resources to enable them to develop their academic, personal and professional skills. Students expressed satisfaction with library provision, including specialist materials and e-resources with a recently developed virtual learning environment, which houses a variety of current course information, regulations and policies. There are plans to develop this further as part of a longer-term strategy to upgrade IT provision. In response to student feedback identifying lack of IT space, RADA plans to invest in tablets or laptops rather than PCs.

27 Student and Academic Services (SAS) provides additional support for students, details of which are in the Student Handbook and A-Z of Student Services leaflet. Students are provided with access to an exemplary range of pastoral care and wellbeing facilities, such as professional counselling, physiotherapy and mental health services. The learning support services including additional needs provision are very highly valued by students.

28 RADA's Strategic Plan clearly emphasises their commitment to the importance of collaboration with external professionals nationally and internationally making commendable use of externality to improve the student academic and professional experience. External Examiners' reports are shared with staff and students and there is exceptional direct engagement with employers, alumni and the wider community of professionals worldwide. Examples include the use of graduates and professional externals in the admissions and assessment processes, the use of visiting professionals, and productions in the community. External industry peers are supported with detailed specialist handbooks.

29 Work placements are well-planned with appropriate risk assessments and detailed guidance documentation for students and placement providers. Students value the support provided by RADA to enable them to secure work experience, which ranges from four to six weeks and are clear about their responsibilities. In exceptional circumstances, financial support is provided so that no student is disadvantaged.

The relevant code of governance: such as the Higher Education Code of Governance published by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) or the Association of Colleges'(AoC) Code of Good Governance for English Colleges

30 RADA's arrangements for encouraging students' involvement in academic governance are comprehensive, encouraged and effective. Student representation is a strong feature of academic governance structures with representation on Council (currently students are alternating), Academic Board (one student from each King's course), Course Committees (up to two students per year), the Quality Forum (two elected students), Library Committee (one elected student from each of the Acting and Technical programmes), and the Student Experience Forum (all elected student representatives). Opportunities to represent students are clearly explained in the Student Handbook. Students are not members of the MA Text and Performance Programme Committee, in line with Birkbeck's regulations, but are represented on that programmes' Staff Student Liaison Group. The Handbook alerts students to representative opportunities on CDD Committees. SAS arrange elections for student representatives, and student Social Representatives. A postgraduate student is a member of Academic Board. RADA recognises and will address the anomaly whereby Birkbeck students are currently not automatically represented on Academic Board. SAS arranges termly meetings of the Student Experience Forum for all elected student representatives, attended by a Council member and Senior Management, with training for representatives in the first term. Students reported a strong commitment by senior management to encourage student participation and engagement in RADA's deliberative structures. Students welcomed Council's decision that students will be represented at Council from 2018/19 by two elected student representatives in attendance rather than by a different individual student from the group of student representatives attending each time which will provide greater continuity in representation.

31 RADA's policy and procedures for complaint handling are transparent, proportionate, accessible and effective. Formal academic appeals fall within the jurisdiction of the awarding bodies, with arrangements described in RADA's Regulations available on the SharePoint site. The informal stage of the appeals procedures is described in para 10 above. RADA reports that only two cases have been submitted to the OIA, neither being justified. There are three stages within RADA's complaints procedures: informal resolution at programme level; formal resolution with an investigation by Director of Student and Academic Services; and appeal, under the jurisdiction of CDD. The volume of formal complaints is small with two formal complaints and one admissions complaint in 2017. SAS reserves the right at the second stage to call upon colleagues from King's or CDD to ensure that panels can be independently and adequately staffed. The Student Well-being Manager supports students through the various stages, and staff are trained in handling complaints. RADA considers that student feedback and the informal complaints stages provide useful

inputs into action planning. Formal cases are reported to CDD and to closed sessions of Academic Board with the College Director advising Council of formal complaints. RADA is aware of the need to reconsider reporting arrangements should their formal relationship with CDD change. Students review team met had not used the procedure nor knew of students who had.

32 Arrangements for student welfare are clear with students able to access support as necessary from a variety of sources including the open-door policies, through SAS and the Student Well-being Manager with pastoral care sessions, in-house counselling and specialist external advice. Students believe that no student is left 'without appropriate help or guidance when needed'.

Policies and procedures are in place to ensure consumer protection obligations are met (Competition and Markets Authority guidance)

33 The RADA website and prospectus provide all necessary details for prospective students to make informed decisions including programme details, fees and additional costs. Awarding bodies approve core information and course handbooks at the point of validation. The website has recently been developed and whilst all the relevant information to prospective students is available, students are unhappy with the layout and note it is not always clear where industry relevant information can be found. Ongoing discussions are taking place between students and staff to further develop the content and layout and ensure it is more user-friendly. RADA also recognises that more can be done to ensure the course pages of the joint programme with Birkbeck are more consistent with information provided on the Birkbeck website. CMA compliance is monitored by the senior management team.

34 RADA operates a distinctive admissions process for its King's programmes, Birkbeck are responsible for the admission of students to MA Text and Performance. The Admissions Policy is very clearly understood by staff and students and available on the website. Charges for auditions are clearly signposted with details of how some students can access a fee waiver. Students felt that the audition process was very encouraging and developmental.

35 Terms and conditions are in line with CDD requirements and awarding bodies. A Student Contract provides a firm understanding of what is expected of them. Students receive updated Pre-Arrival information details with specific information for international students.

36 Academic Regulations and Policies are signed off by King's annually. The latter also receives copies of all course documents (including delivery structure and assessment timetable). Birkbeck prepares the Course Handbook for the MA Text and Performance annually and RADA contributes to this prior to approval by Birkbeck.

Student protection measures as expressed through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) Good Practice Framework, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's (PHSO) Principles of Good Administration, and HEFCE's Statement of Good Practice on Higher Education Course Changes and Closures

37 Decisions to close programmes are made at a strategic level involving Council and Academic Board after formal review with decisions reported to the CDD and awarding bodies. A number of very small Postgraduate courses have been closed using this process with students actively consulted and taught out].

38 RADA is developing its own course review process, but currently uses the King's process. RADA course committees are responsible for reviewing curriculum content monitoring changes and programme delivery. Students Representatives are involved in Course Committees and students are consulted on changes in course structure and content including through specially held sessions. Students are very happy that their voice was listened to when making changes to courses.

39 RADA uses the formal appeals processes of its awarding bodies. Staff are trained in complaints handling with the right to call upon staff in other CDD institutions to ensure appropriate levels of independence. Informal complaints and suggestions from students are considered by staff through conversations or in committee meetings. Students feel that their views are considered and dealt with in a timely manner. Complaints are monitored by Council and Senior Managers. Formal complaints and appeals processes are included in King's programme handbooks and are available on SharePoint and the RADA website. The Birkbeck complaints and appeals process is available online. The informal process for discussing student marks is unclear in the formal documentation, and this had led to a suggested area for development in the Quality Code Part B and C section of this report. The team advises that RADA should ensure that the final stage of the informal appeals process is brought to the attention of all students within formal appeals policies and procedures as an **area for development**

Rounded judgement

40 RADA has clear and comprehensive processes in place to support and enhance the student experience which is evident in the very high levels of student satisfaction demonstrated. Students feel genuinely respected and involved in strategic and operational decisions and in quality assurance. They recognise the quality and appropriateness of teaching, support and preparation for careers in highly competitive and demanding industries. The processes for consideration of complaints and appeals, changes to programmes and course closure are thorough, compliant with external bodies and reflect the positive relationship between staff and students.

41 The team identifies two areas for development around understanding the process for informally discussing grades and feedback

42 The review team concludes that there can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.

QAA2206 - R10017 - July 18

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2018
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557050
Website: www.qaa.ac.uk