# Royal Academy of Music

## Institutional Review
## by the Quality Assurance Agency
## for Higher Education

February 2013

# Contents

# About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the Royal Academy of Music. The review took place between 18 and 21 February 2013 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Christopher McIntyre
- Fiona Thompson
- Joe Greenwood (student reviewer)
- Gillian Simpson (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the Royal Academy of Music and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - threshold academic standards[1]
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the quality of the information produced by the institution about its learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- identifies features of good practice
- makes recommendations
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take
- provides commentaries on public information and the theme topic.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

In reviewing the Royal Academy of Music, the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The themes for the academic year 2012-13 are the First Year Student Experience and Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement, and the institution is required to elect, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] Background information about the Royal Academy of Music is given on page 3 of this report. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for Institutional Review of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland[3] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

---

[1] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus
[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/ireni/pages/default.aspx

# Key findings

This section summarises the QAA review team's key findings about the Royal Academy of Music (the Academy).

## QAA's judgements about the Royal Academy of Music

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the Royal Academy of Music.

- Academic standards at the Academy **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the Academy **meets UK expectations**.
- The quality of the information produced by the institution about its learning opportunities **meets UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the Academy **is commended**.

## Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at the Royal Academy of Music:

- the systematic use of specialist external assessors, including the formal reporting mechanisms that bring additional objectivity and externality to the students' learning opportunities and the assessment process, and the way that the specialist external assessor appointment process and guidance reflects and supports the Academy's quality assurance and enhancement processes (paragraph 1.2.8)
- the systematic and effective approach to admissions processes, which is underpinned by clear information and is responsive and adaptive to feedback (paragraph 2.5.3)
- the embedding of professional opportunities within the curriculum, and the range of opportunities provided by the Academy to enhance the employability of its students (paragraphs 2.7.2 and 4.7)
- the flexibility of the Academy and its staff in responding to the individual learning needs of its students (paragraphs 2.13.3 and 4.9).

## Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to the Royal Academy of Music.

- By the start of the academic year 2013-14, the Academy should share external examiners' reports with the student body beyond the student representatives and provide advice and guidance that enables effective engagement with the reports (paragraph 1.2.7).
- By the end of the academic year 2013-14, the Academy should ensure appropriate procedures are in place to assure itself of the consistency, editorial control, location and intranet structure for all documentation (paragraph 3.6).

## Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that the Royal Academy of Music is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students:

- the Academy's continuing work to improve career development opportunities through the introduction and enhancement of the Professional Development Portfolio (paragraph 2.7.2)
- internal electronic communication for students and staff is under review (paragraph 2.12.2).

## The first year student experience

The Academy has a student cohort drawn from all over the world, and seeks to engage with the broad range of students' cultural backgrounds and prior learning experiences while providing them with a supportive environment. Issues particular to the Academy include the need for first-year students to understand very quickly the professional ethos of musical training at the Academy and its implications for their professional development and employability. The Academy devotes significant resources to supporting and enhancing the first-year experience. The Academy has a strong record in student retention and progression.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the operational description and handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland](#).[4]

# About the Royal Academy of Music

The Academy states that its purpose and focus is to provide pre-professional undergraduate and postgraduate musical training of the highest international standards; to engage in concert, operatic and research activities related to the education of the institution; to create and perform new music; and to preserve and enrich international musical culture.
The Academy aims to produce musicians at the highest level as soloists, orchestral and chamber players, singers and composers, with a knowledge of the whole art of music, its performance, history, theory and an understanding of its context within the humanities.

The Academy was founded in 1822 and granted a Royal Charter in 1830. Since 1999, the Academy has been a full member-college of the federal University of London. In March 2012 the Academy was granted taught degree-awarding powers by the Privy Council.

In 2012-13, the Academy has 750 full-time students enrolled on programmes of study leading to the following University of London awards: BMus, BMus (Jazz), MA, MMus, MPhil and PhD. It also awards three diplomas under the terms of its Royal Charter: the Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music (LRAM, a Level 6 award), the Advanced Diploma in Opera Performance (a Level 8 award) and the PG DIP in Musical Theatre. There are over 70 full-time or associate (part-time) academic staff, over 350 hourly paid teaching staff (from the music profession), and about 100 administrative staff.

---

[4] [www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/ireni/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/ireni/pages/default.aspx)

The student written submission states that: 'we think the standard of teaching at the Academy is very high and that academic staff are well qualified, through their expertise and experience, to deliver their areas of the programmes of study'.

Since the last QAA Institutional Audit in 2007, the Academy has changed its approach to academic governance and quality assurance; introduced three new programmes of study - MA, BMus (Jazz) and Advanced Diploma in Opera Performance; completed two programme reviews (BMus and LRAM); and recruited new staff in key senior posts.

The student written submission stated that, comparing the Academy with the Institutional Audit report of 2007, 'it is clear that the recommendations have been implemented effectively. Students were heavily involved in the application for degree-awarding powers in 2010-11, and the success of that application reflects the Academy's progress in the previous two years'.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England's review of the institution-specific targeted allocation to specialist institutions makes uncertain a key source of income underpinning the delivery of the Academy's programmes. The Academy is seeking to reduce its reliance on government funding through a continued drive to increase philanthropic giving and development.

However, the new fee structure for UK/EU undergraduates will place extra financial pressures on undergraduate recruitment and retention, and possibly on postgraduate recruitment, in the near future. The Academy is continuing to develop its scholarships and bursaries.

Space continues to be an issue for the Academy, but a major project to renovate the Academy's theatre during the middle of this decade will transform backstage facilities, enable full accessibility, provide additional advanced recording facilities, and will include a new 100-seat recital hall to add to the Academy's performance space.

The Academy has a student exchange programme with other higher education institutions around the world, but it has no formal collaborative provision arrangements.

# Explanation of the findings about the Royal Academy of Music

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.[5]

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms[6] is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.[7]

## 1 Academic standards

### Outcome

The academic standards at the Royal Academy of Music **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

### Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 Each qualification awarded at the Academy is allocated to the appropriate level of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

1.1.1 The Academy systematically uses the FHEQ, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and relevant subject benchmarks statements in its strong procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review. This was confirmed through consideration of reports and in meetings with staff and student representatives.

1.1.2 Conformity with the different levels of the FHEQ is checked through detailed consideration in programme planning, approval and review, and monitored through committees - including the Standing Committee of the Academic Board (SCAB) and Academic Board (AB) - and is supported by formal quality assurance procedures, records of approval and review events, and SCAB and AB papers. This was confirmed in meetings with staff and student representatives. The student written submission referred to detailed discussions about FHEQ level in the approval process for the Advanced Diploma in Opera and the Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music (LRAM), demonstrating the inclusion of student representative input, and this was confirmed through discussion with staff and students.

1.1.3 In the Periodic Review report for LRAM, reference is made specifically to the FHEQ and the report notes the discussions with the programme team about levels.

1.1.4 The Academy's external examiners are requested to comment on level appropriateness, and their reports are used for the ongoing monitoring of programmes. This was confirmed from examples of external examiner reports, and SCAB annually scrutinises each programme's annual monitoring report. Individual programme learning outcomes reflect FHEQ levels, although for postgraduate taught programmes the term descriptor 'awareness' is used.

---

[5] The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published; however, it is available on request for inspection. Please contact QAA Reviews Group.
[6] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx
[7] See note 4.

1.1.5     The volume of study for the Academy's programmes is sufficient to achieve the intended learning outcomes, and in some cases - for example Musical Theatre - the very intensive study pattern reflects the learning outcomes that are matched onto professional expectations.

## Use of external examiners

1.2     The Academy makes scrupulous use of external examiners.

1.2.1     The Academy clearly defines the role of the external examiner and provides effective guidance for internal staff and for external examiners. The regulations concerning this and other aspects of standards are mapped against the Quality Code.

1.2.2     Procedures for the nomination of external examiners are clear and well defined, and clearly communicated to staff and to the examiners.

1.2.3     Evidence was provided of the effective use of the external examiners' appointment procedures.

1.2.4     Most aspects of the Academy's work with external examiners align with the relevant Chapter of the Quality Code. However, the period that must elapse before reappointment, as defined in the Academy's Regulations as two years, is not in alignment with *Chapter B7: External examining* of the Quality Code, which specifies five years. This was discussed with the senior academic staff and acknowledged as an oversight, which they intended to rectify. In practice, the Academy has never reappointed after a two-year period, with seven years being the most usual period.

1.2.5     When appointed to the Academy, external examiners are provided, through induction, with access to a full range of information pertinent to the role. This includes a detailed letter of appointment, Guidelines for External Examiners, Quality Assurance Procedures, Guidance on External Examiners, and access to full regulations, programme handbooks and examination procedures.

1.2.6     The Academy has clear procedures for ensuring that the role of the external examiner is carried out effectively. The Academy has explicit guidance for reporting and attendance at boards, clear forms for reporting, and effective mechanisms for processing these through undergraduate and postgraduate programme committees and on to Academic Board and its Standing Committee.

1.2.7     The Academy currently shares external examiners' reports with the student body through the mechanism of the Programme Board, where student representatives are present, but there was no evidence of other more proactive approaches to sharing these more widely with students. Student representatives acknowledged that they had access to reports by this means, but they did not make systematic use of them. Senior academic staff recognised that they could do more to support students in accessing external examiners' reports, and the review team **recommends** that, by the start of the academic year 2013-14, the Academy should share external examiners' reports with the student body beyond the student representatives and provide advice and guidance that enables effective engagement with the reports.

1.2.8     A **feature of good practice** is the Academy's systematic use of specialist external assessors (SEAs), including the formal reporting mechanisms that bring additional objectivity and externality to the student's learning opportunities and the assessment process, and the way that the SEA appointment process and guidance reflects and supports the Academy's quality assurance and enhancement processes. The conditions of service for SEAs are

currently more closely aligned to the Quality Code than are those for external examiners (see paragraph 1.2.4). The impressive use of SEAs is supported by clear guidance. The Academy considers carefully the appointment process, looking at discipline needs and structure. It has recently started to use questionnaires to SEAs to gain their feedback on the Academy's processes, and is now reflecting on how to feed back results from the questionnaire to the SEAs.

1.2.9    The Academy takes seriously the role of the external examiner in their processes and in respect of Academy staff, who are encouraged to work as external examiners in other higher education institutions. The Academy sees external examiner duties as important work related to the understanding of academic standards, and as core part of the role of academic studies tutors, who also work as SEAs in other conservatoires.

## Assessment and standards

1.3    The guidance about design, approval, monitoring and review of assessment strategies is clear and comprehensive, and appears to be effective in operation. The array of assessment methods reflected in the programme specifications and handbooks (specifically through the module descriptions) is appropriate to the subjects offered and to the institution.

1.3.1    The Academy has a clear and comprehensive Assessment Strategy, supported by a Learning and Teaching Strategy developed in consultation with students, academic staff and staff from the Academic Secretariat and Registry. This has been mapped onto the Quality Code. There is evidence of review and enhancement of the strategy, for example from the LRAM Periodic Review, and through the feedback on it from external examiners and SEAs.

1.3.2    The Academy is committed to the use of assessment in supporting students - by providing feedback on assessed work - and in measuring students' achievements objectively against intended learning outcomes, and has clearly defined the principal forms of assessment and their purposes. Students confirmed the effectiveness and educational value of assessment feedback.

1.3.3    All assessment and examination procedures, including the use of external examiners and SEAs and the conduct of Boards, are outlined in the quality procedures and clearly laid out in regulations. The regulations also specify clearly the arrangements for different types of examination. There are detailed guidelines for the conduct of assessments. All programme handbooks reflect this clear guidance. The Academy has Codes of Practice for assessment design, marking and feedback.

1.3.4    Programme design at the Academy includes consideration of assessment strategies and mapping of assessment methods against the intended learning outcomes, and these are detailed in programme specifications. Programme approval events require panels to examine the links between assessment and teaching and intended learning outcomes. Reports do not make the positive judgements explicit, but there is evidence of scrutiny of assessment in the recommendations from the panels.

1.3.5    The student written submission is positive about the range, operation and process of review of assessment methods, commenting favourably on the use of assessment criteria in the learning and teaching environment, on the process of drafting assessment criteria, and the appropriate fit between intended learning outcomes, delivery strategies and assessment strategies.

1.3.6    Specifically tailored assessment criteria are published for each programme, and different sets of criteria exist for written and practical work, with performance-based criteria

enhanced in 2011 following discussion with a wide constituency. The balance and timing of assessments and the approaches to marking and grading are considered during programme design and approval. The fit between intended learning outcomes, delivery strategies and assessment strategies is tested in the Academy's processes for programme design, and assessment activities are clearly defined in programme specifications. Full information about assessment methodologies, criteria, marking and grading scales, and degree classifications is available in programme handbooks. In practice, students indicated an awareness of the location of this material and were happy with the approach to assessment, but did not retain much detailed knowledge of degree classification or other grading approaches.

1.3.7    Staff development supports the understanding and operation of the Academy's assessment regulations. An example of this is the focused attention to assessment in the case of the 'Staff Development Events' (examples of which have dealt with assessment and progression in research degrees; changes in assessment regulations; feedback from external examiners and SEAs; and assessment operations, including performance descriptors and revisions to panel guidelines).

## Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.4    The design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes at the Academy enable standards to be set and maintained and allow students to demonstrate learning outcomes of the award.

1.4.1    The Academy takes a responsible approach to the design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes and provides detailed guidance through the Quality Assurance Procedures, supported by the Academy's Full Regulations which stipulate criteria for approved programmes of study. The Teaching and Learning Strategy outlines the values and precepts that inform the design of programmes.

1.4.2    The exercise of authority from and through Academic Board is clearly set out in the Quality Assurance Procedures, and the principles and practice of Academy approval are defined in detail, including the roles of the senior management team, academic and administrative staff, external examiners and SCAB. The effectiveness of this was confirmed in meetings with staff and students.

1.4.3    Student and external views are sought in the design stages and pre-approval of programmes, and student representatives are involved in review panels. The Academy provided evidence of detailed work with focus groups and working parties on programme design, which clearly follows the Quality Assurance Procedures.

1.4.4    Programme design and approval emphasises the connection that the Academy makes between the programme design stage, module-wide learning outcomes, and delivery and assessment strategies. The Academy's monitoring and review processes confirm effectiveness of those processes.

1.4.5    The Academy has clear protocols for modifications to programmes, including use of external examiners for major modifications and new principal study disciplines.

1.4.6    The purpose and operation of and detailed procedures for the annual monitoring and Periodic Review processes are clearly defined in the Quality Assurance Procedures, and dates are set annually to ensure timely delivery of material. Heads of departments write reports informed by staff and student input, and external examiners' reports identify actions for the programme team or relevant committee. SCAB receives and considers reports, agrees action plans, confirms any additional monitoring need, and determines appropriate

circulation of the report. Learning resources and support services are monitored in a similar fashion.

**Subject benchmarks**

1.5      Subject benchmark statements and qualification statements are used effectively in programme design, approval, delivery and review to inform standards of awards.

1.5.1      The Academy maintains standards through reference to the FHEQ and the *Subject benchmark statement: Music*, and systematically engages with the subject benchmark statement. The process was considered in detail at the revision of the procedures for approval, monitoring and review of programmes in 2008-09. The Quality Assurance Procedures have clear guidelines for the use of the subject benchmark statement and ask external examiners to take account of or comment on the use of both the subject benchmark statement and the FHEQ.

1.5.2      The subject benchmark statement is considered in programme design and in approval and review panels, and is supported by the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

1.5.3      Programme specifications and approval and review panel events provide evidence that consideration is given to the appropriate use of terminology.

# 2      Quality of learning opportunities

**Outcome**

The quality of learning opportunities at the Royal Academy of Music **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

**Professional standards for teaching and learning**

2.1      The professional standards for teaching and support of learning are upheld.

2.1.1      The Academy prioritises the recruitment and retention of leading practitioners, scholars and teachers. Current staff are well qualified to deliver and support programmes, and their expertise was identified by students as an important reason for attending the institution. All new staff receive an induction and training, new teaching staff are mentored through team teaching, and new supervisors are mentored by existing supervisors.

2.1.2      The Academy's staff are supported and encouraged to engage extensively with other conservatoires, for example through partnerships, and to undertake external examiner and specialist external assessor duties at a range of other higher education institutions. Staff are supported to complete the UK Professional Standards Framework if they choose to, but the Academy does not strategically prioritise such training because it considers there to be other more relevant courses of action available to conservatoire staff.

2.1.3      While the Academy is not a research-led institution, it is strategically committed to sustaining an active research culture (not least in relation to its collections, including instruments, scores and recordings), staff are well supported in pursuing their research, and during meetings with students the links between research and teaching were commended.

2.1.4      There is staff understanding of the student learning environment, for example in relation to appropriate workload and professional development, especially in respect of performances.

## Learning resources

2.2      Learning resources are appropriate to allow students to achieve the learning outcomes of their programmes.

2.2.1      Academy staff have a high degree of professional expertise, and an understanding of their key role in supporting students' development. The Academy has a strategic commitment to staff development, and training is identified as part of the annual appraisal process. Although the current policy is for most staff to complete paper appraisals, in practice most academic and administrative (as opposed to hourly paid) staff undergo face-to-face appraisals on an annual basis, and this process helps to identify appropriate training needs.

2.2.2      The high level of ongoing contact with principal study tutors and academic staff means that the Academy's personal tutoring system functions as a safety net to catch any students who are struggling.

2.2.3      The Academy's technical equipment and IT resources are appropriate. The Academy has expanded its administrative support, and both IT support staff and administrative staff were commended by students during meetings. Resources are considered in the annual monitoring process and allocated primarily through the principal study areas, with the Deputy Principal having overall responsibility for this. Programme approval, review and modification procedures include explicit consideration of the resources that will be required.

2.2.4      The Academy's librarian has an 'open-door' policy for students and adds new items to the collection (which is extensive) when requested by staff or when additions are included in reading lists. The library resources were broadly commended in meetings with students. Students can and, especially at postgraduate level, do make use of the University of London's Senate House Library.

2.2.5      The Academy's collection of musical instruments is exceptional. The Academy continues to prioritise student access to those instruments, while also considering the preservation implications.

2.2.6      In meetings with staff and students, the teaching accommodation and performance venues were considered suitable, and the Academy is considering issues of limited practice space proactively and in partnership with students.

## Student voice

2.3      There is an effective contribution of the Academy's students to quality assurance.

2.3.1      Students are represented at all of the Academy's major committees and are encouraged to contribute at those committee meetings. This is detailed in the terms of reference and membership of committees, and in discussion with student representatives it was confirmed they were comfortable participating at these meetings. The Academy specifies how students can contribute to quality assurance more broadly in the Student Charter and in programme handbooks. The Academic Secretary provides training to student representatives, though this is not extensively taken up.

2.3.2      There is a productive working relationship between the Academy and the students' union, and the latter is accessible to students. The close working relationship between staff

and students allows students to provide feedback through informal routes and, for instance, to contact the Principal directly.

2.3.3    More formally, student feedback is gathered at module and course level and across the institution on an annual basis, and the results are considered in the annual monitoring process and at appropriate committees. Information is available to students on how they can feed back to the Academy. Students receive appropriate responses about any issues that they raise. The procedures for attaining student feedback have been reviewed with particular reference to response rates. The National Student Survey results are considered by the Senior Management Team and Undergraduate Programmes Board.

2.3.4    The Student-Staff Liaison Committee, a sub-committee of SCAB, is the main forum through which students are represented. It meets regularly, is well attended, and has input on matters concerning students. Minutes of the Student-Staff Liaison Committee are received and considered by SCAB.

2.3.5    Student consultation forms a core part of programme approval and review processes, as evidenced in the development of the Advanced Diploma in Opera and the LRAM (see paragraph 1.1.2).

## Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.4    There is effective use of management information to safeguard quality and standards and to promote enhancement of student learning opportunities.

2.4.1    The Academy has undertaken action to respond to the recommendations of the previous QAA Institutional Audit (2007) in this area. The Head of Academic Administration now manages this area and there are plans to improve the available management information by working more closely with the Academy's IT department. The Academy has requirements and templates for all annual monitoring and Periodic Review processes which make use of management information. Annual monitoring reports for academic programmes and support departments include extensive management information and appropriate consideration of it, with appropriate committees considering the reports.

2.4.2    Joining the Conservatoires UK Admissions Service (CUKAS) for the 2013 application cycle will enable the Academy in the future to gain access to further useful management information about admissions (see paragraph 2.5.3).

## Admission to the Academy

2.5    Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

2.5.1    The application and audition processes, and entry requirements, are clearly specified in the Academy's regulations, which are due for review in 2013. The Academy reviews its audition and application processes annually, taking into account the views of students.

2.5.2    Information for applicants is clear and accurate, and it was said in meetings with students that the application process was, in part, good preparation for life at the Academy. Information on auditions is clear and accurate, and the audition process was commended by students as well run and welcoming.

2.5.3    A **feature of good practice** is the systematic and effective approach to admissions processes, which is underpinned by clear information and is responsive and adaptive to feedback. This was further demonstrated in 2012 when the Academy proactively gathered and considered information in relation to its application and audition procedures, and took the decision to join CUKAS for the 2013 application cycle.

## Complaints and appeals

2.6      There are effective complaints and appeals procedures.

2.6.1    The Academy's complaints and appeals procedures are clear and accessible to students. The close working relationship between staff and students means that problems are identified early and can often be handled effectively without reference to the formal complaints procedure. When issues are escalated, the complaints procedures are followed precisely, as demonstrated by a recent Office of the Independent Adjudicator judgement. The Academy reflects on the effectiveness of those procedures.

## Career advice and guidance

2.7      There is an approach to career education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) that is adequately quality assured.

2.7.1    The Academy has an Employability Strategy that supports the integration of professional development into the curriculum, and the continuing development of the Professional Development Portfolio component of students' learning. Professional development (including CEIAG) is a core component of students' learning at the Academy, which is facilitated through the focus on one-to-one and small group teaching, master classes, concerts and placements. The Academy provides a range of supporting sessions and services, and takes a flexible approach to students' career development by allowing appropriate external opportunities through leave of absence procedures. In particular, undergraduate courses are designed to provide an essential academic grounding in the first two years of their programme, while encouraging more professional engagements in the second two years. Students can opt to gain the additional LRAM music teaching qualification, which acts as an adjunct to their main programme of study.

2.7.2    A **feature of good practice** is the embedding of professional opportunities within the curriculum, and the range of opportunities provided by the Academy to enhance the employability of its students. This is especially demonstrated through the Professional Development Portfolio that was first introduced to taught postgraduate programmes in 2008, and is focused on building each student's individual development through key professional documents and critical self-reflection. Drawing on the positive experience of the taught postgraduate programmes, and after due consideration, the Academy will introduce the Professional Development Portfolio to undergraduate courses in 2013; the review team **affirms** that the Academy's continuing work to improve career development opportunities includes the introduction and enhancement of the Professional Development Portfolio.

2.7.3    There are plans to further develop the alumni network, which offers career support to graduates, and the Head of Alumni Development is working with the Head of Professional Development to arrange events and develop the new alumni mentoring scheme.

## Supporting disabled students

2.8      The quality of learning opportunities is managed effectively to enable the entitlements of disabled students to be met.

2.8.1    Effective procedures are in place to identify and manage the needs of disabled students, from admissions and throughout their course of study. The Guide for Prospective and Current Academy Students with Disabilities and Specific Learning Difficulties provides detailed support for disabled students and identifies the Personal Learning Plans, which are developed for individual disabled students and are specifically geared to individual needs. Personal Learning Plans are shared with department administrators and heads of department to enable a support infrastructure to be put in place. Information about Personal Learning Plans is available via the 'Access and Disability' site on the Academy's intranet.

2.8.2    In November 2010, a mapping against the relevant chapter of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* was undertaken by the Academic Secretary, identifying action to be taken where necessary and appropriate.

2.8.3    The Academy takes equality and diversity seriously and uses Equality Impact Assessments as a matter of course for all new procedures, policies and programmes. An initial rigorous screening identifies whether a full Equality Impact Assessment is necessary. The Equality and Diversity Policy is available as a direct link from the Student Charter. Equality and diversity is included in the terms of reference for all committees. Equality and diversity issues are a standing item on SCAB.

2.8.4    Enhancement of the learning opportunities for disabled students is identified through the Academy's Strategic Plan.

## Supporting international students

2.9    The quality of learning opportunities for international students is appropriate.

2.9.1    The Academy has a diverse international community, emphasised in the Academy's Strategic Plan 2009-14. Support for international students is embedded in Academy procedures, from the admissions processes and then throughout their time of study. Students said that, importantly for them, auditions take place in London, North America and Asia. The Academy offers support to international students when they are obtaining their visas, and in meetings with students this support was commended.

2.9.2    The Academy includes special induction arrangements for international students that complement the 'welcome week' that is provided for all new students, rather than replacing it. A detailed International Handbook is provided to international students to help with the transition to UK study and culture.

2.9.3    The Academy monitors attendance, which forms part of weekly reports for all students. These weekly reports are used as part of the monitoring of progress, and in picking up on individual support issues where necessary. Students were very complimentary about the support available.

2.9.4    Specialist language support is available, together with a language helpdesk.

## Supporting postgraduate research students

2.10    Appropriate support and guidance is provided to enable postgraduate research students to complete their programmes and to enable staff involved in research programmes to fulfil their responsibilities.

2.10.1    The Academy has carefully managed processes for research students that are supportive for both students and staff, and are in line with published material, including the

Quality Code. Supervision arrangements are in line with the Quality Code; postgraduate research students have one main/principal supervisor, a subsidiary supervisor, and they also have the Postgraduate Tutor for support. There is a detailed research handbook called the Research Degrees Code of Practice.

2.10.2    The admissions process is carefully managed to ensure a match of expertise between the supervisor and applicant. Staff new to supervision (appointed by the Postgraduate Board) are supported and mentored by another principal supervisor and training is provided.

2.10.3    Students are prepared for study at postgraduate research degree level through attendance at sessions organised by the Institute of Musical Research (University of London) and by providing tailored support on the basis of identified needs, which can include working with external professors and practitioners, as required for their studies. Research seminars bring research-active students and staff together to share research. Students and staff are provided with mock viva experiences which can include external input.

2.10.4    Research student progress is monitored through annual monitoring. This is undertaken through Postgraduate Programmes Annual Monitoring Reports and identifies data in respects of applications, retention and outcomes, with analysis. The most recent report refers specifically to the University of London (which awards the Academy's doctoral degrees) statement that no further updates to the Academy's regulations are required.

2.10.5    Postgraduate research students are represented specifically on relevant committees, and research students confirmed in meetings with the team that their voice is heard. The Academy's research strategy is currently being revised through a thorough and robust process, including involvement with student representatives. Research student matters are also considered through the Postgraduate Programme Board.

2.10.6    Where research students are involved in supervising other students, such as supervising Professional Development Portfolios, they are supported through mentoring and the provision of bespoke training. There are, however, few opportunities for PhD students to be involved in teaching due to nature of their study and the nature of the institution.

## Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.11    The Academy does not currently have any collaborative arrangements with other institutions.

## Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.12    The Academy does not currently deliver any of its provision via flexible or distributed learning arrangements.

2.12.1    The Academy's programmes are based on intensive one-to-one and small group teaching, conducted face-to-face. All students are full-time, and as such e-learning plays a less important part at the Academy than it does at most universities. Nevertheless, support materials for Academic Studies classes are available on the Academy Intranet Resource (AIR), and the library portal on AIR gives access to a large number of e-resources. Students spoke positively about e-music resources, which are well profiled in the AIR 'Media Library' section and in Library Resources.

2.12.2    Management of AIR is decentralised, which the Academy has recognised can sometimes have negative implications for the consistency of information and ease of use.

The review team **affirms** that internal electronic communication for students and staff is under review.

## Work-based and placement learning

2.13    The quality of learning opportunities delivered through work-based and placement learning is effective.

2.13.1    Placements are an important aspect of provision for students at the Academy, providing both a 'lived experience' of their studies and future career opportunities. Placements are also of benefit to the Academy in terms of its reputation, and careful consideration is given to the appropriateness and timing of a placement, its impact on Academy business (balanced with Academy public performances), whether it meets programme learning objectives (including impact on timing of assessment), and career aspirations and development. The Academy aims to facilitate such placement opportunities but there are occasional restrictions, the reasons for which are explained to the students.

2.13.2    Students wishing to undertake a placement complete a leave of absence form, which is then considered by a number of staff, with final sign-off by the Programme Tutor. Placement opportunities are seen as an integral part of what the Academy provides: 'they begin their career before they leave here'. The approach is flexible but, at all times, the priority is to protect the student learning experience and ensure students are able to meet the learning outcomes for their programme.

2.13.3    Students are hugely positive about the opportunities they have for work placements, and the range of opportunities is comprehensive. The flexibility of the Academy and its staff in responding to the individual learning needs of its students is a **feature of good practice**.

## Student charter

2.14     A Student Charter, setting out the mutual expectations of the Academy and its students, is available.

2.14.1    The Student Charter was developed in partnership with the students' union and, while not widely disseminated, the Student Charter is available on the Academy website. Although the Student Charter is accessible, students use a range of information available from other sources. The Student Charter has been referenced in SCAB minutes with regard to return of examination results within four weeks. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator made reference to the Student Charter as evidence for its judgement.

# 3    Information about learning opportunities

## Summary

The information about learning opportunities produced by the Royal Academy of Music **meets UK expectations**. This information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

3.1     The Academy produces information for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.2     The public information published by the Academy on its website is clear and up to date, and there is a process for managing the consistency of content. If students

cannot find the information they require, they can refer to personal tutors or administrative staff to help them.

3.3     The information relating to the application and audition process is clear and up to date, and was commended by students. The information provided to new students in advance of their arrival and during the induction week is clear and comprehensive, and was felt to be useful by students.

3.4     Programme handbooks for current students are comprehensive, accessible and up to date. Handbooks were reviewed for consistency as a result of the BMus Periodic Review in 2010, and are kept under ongoing review through the annual monitoring process. The Academy is now reviewing the balance of information between programme and department handbooks. Class descriptors are in handbooks and on feedback forms. However, in some cases, information on calculation of degree classification is not consistently presented across all relevant handbooks, and students are not always aware of how their final degree classification is calculated (see paragraph 1.3.6).

3.5     The Academy has a code of practice on the feedback it provides, and the standard of feedback provided to students on their assessed work (both academic and principal study) is high.

3.6     The Academy Intranet Resource is a key source of information and administrative interface for current students, but despite improvement since its launch in 2009 it is not always easy to use, sometimes requiring physical demonstrations of where information is located. The review team **recommends** that, by the end of the academic year 2013-14, the Academy should ensure appropriate procedures are in place to assure itself of the consistency, editorial control, location and intranet structure for all documentation.

3.7     The Key Information Set (KIS) is available both on the institution's website and via Unistats. The Wider Information Set is up to date and available. Key strategic documentation, regulations (including external examining procedures and complaints and appeals procedures), prospectuses, programme specifications, and information about links with other musical organisations are publicly available. Results of internal surveys and programme approval, monitoring, and review documents are kept internally and are available on request.

# 4     Enhancement of learning opportunities

**Outcome**

The enhancement of learning opportunities at the Royal Academy of Music **is commended**. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1     Deliberate steps are being taken by the Academy at institutional level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.2     In the QAA Institutional Audit in 2007, a desirable recommendation was made for developing institutional-level mechanisms to ensure deliberate and systematic enhancement of the student learning experience. This has developed to such an extent that enhancement is now demonstrably embedded across all Academy activities. While there is no discrete enhancement strategy, the Academy's Strategic Plan fulfils that role through its emphasis on enhancement: 'The strategy, above all, outlines the Academy's commitment to **enhancing** the student experience through regular cyclical review of teaching, research, resources, staff development, pastoral and academic support, and the quality of concerts and events as they

impact on student's professional aspirations, as well as the community of the Academy, local residents and the musical world at large'*.*

4.3     Enhancement is evidenced through terms of reference for all committees and by the examples of Academy practice given below.

4.4     Annual monitoring is used formally to identify enhancements. Support departments produce annual reports, as well as the programme annual monitoring reports. Evidence of enhancement can be demonstrated through the Professional Development Portfolio development, which drew on external and internal sources to develop an appropriate experience for students embarking on a professional career, initially piloted for postgraduate taught programmes and **affirmed** as being introduced for undergraduate programmes shortly (see paragraph 2.7.2).

4.5     Students feed into enhancement through the annual monitoring process (use of feedback and so on), through their presence on deliberative committees, and through the Staff-Student Liaison Committee. The Staff-Student Liaison Committees cover a range of issues, including consideration of National Student Survey results, with agenda items from students and staff and with follow-through on action taken.

4.6     Already highlighted as a **feature of good practice** (see paragraph 1.2.8) is the use of specialist external assessors (SEAs) to bring objectivity and externality to assessment processes, and in enhancing the student experience. The appointment process for SEAs mirrors that of the Academy's external examiners. Clear instructions are available on roles and responsibilities and their contribution to the assessment panel. They provide direct feedback to the students, and the SEA reports feed directly into the Academy's annual monitoring review process.

4.7     The professional development day set up for both current and recent Academy graduates offers a selection of 'clinics' to help students and graduates engage effectively with a rapidly changing professional music environment. The professional development day contributes to a **feature of good practice** about the embedding of professional opportunities within the curriculum, and the range of opportunities provided by the Academy to enhance the employability of its students (see paragraph 2.7.2).

4.8     Weekly meetings are used by staff to monitor students' progress and identify actions to support individual students. Students acknowledge the wide range of staff they can approach to talk to, and state that any issues with performance or wider engagement with their studies would be supported in this way. International students were very positive about receiving the necessary additional support they needed.

4.9     A **feature of good practice** is the flexibility of the Academy and its staff in responding to the individual learning needs of its students, managing students' learning effectively so that student aspirations are enhanced, while appropriate academic rigour and regard to meeting intended learning outcomes of the programme are maintained (see paragraph 2.13.3).

4.10     As mentioned in paragraph 2.4.2, the Academy has moved to the Conservatoires UK Admissions Service (CUKAS) for the undergraduate applications process for 2013-14 entry (piloted for UK and USA audition centres, to be rolled out in 2014-15). Students are very positive about the applications and audition process. The Academy is retaining the positive aspects of the previous system but, by using CUKAS (which is an electronic system), will provide robust statistics more easily for analysis while also bringing the Academy in line with other conservatoires.

4.11      The Academy maintains close links with other conservatoires both in the UK and internationally, and with relevant performing organisations, to ensure the appropriateness and currency of the student experience.

# 5      Thematic element

Each academic year, a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams. In 2012-13 there is a choice of two themes: the First Year Student Experience, or Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

## First Year Student Experience

The review team investigated the first year student experience at the Royal Academy of Music. The review team confirmed through meetings with students, student representatives and staff that the Academy has a student cohort drawn from all over the world and seeks to engage with the broad range of students' cultural backgrounds and prior learning experiences, while providing them with a supportive environment. The Academy devotes significant resources to supporting and enhancing the first year experience. The Academy has a strong record in student retention and progression. Issues particular to the Academy include the need for first-year students to understand very quickly the formal elements of music, and the professional ethos of musical training at the Academy and its implications for their professional development and employability.

### Supporting students' transition

5.1      The Academy's policy is to contact each new student immediately after a place has been offered with a personalised letter in which tailored advice and guidance is offered, including contact information for the principal study department, and other relevant services such as support for international students. Prior to enrolment, students have access to a website including detailed information for new starters. Students commented that they found this information helpful.

5.2      There is an enrolment week, which aims to provide a relaxed and friendly introduction to key departments and staff members in order to inform new students about the support available to them, and to encourage them to use it. Students commented that the enrolment week met this objective.

5.3      Enrolment week includes an international day for international students to attend before enrolment week begins, which international students indicated was useful to them.

### Information for first-year students

5.4      There is a student handbook for each undergraduate award, and for postgraduate programmes. These include appropriate programme specifications and module details. There is a student handbook for each principal study department, which contains information on professional matters and faculty activities. The handbooks are available on the Academy's intranet pages, as are resources such as lecture notes and handouts. The Academy has established a review of the intranet to improve and systematise the way information is made available.

5.5      A separate handbook is provided for international students prior to enrolment, which international students found useful.

5.6     All students who do not have English as their first language are required to attend a structured programme of English-language support during the first year of their programme, unless exempted due to their high standard of English. A pre-sessional English programme is also available.

## Assessment and feedback

5.7     The Academy assesses students' academic and musical level of achievement as part of a rigorous application process which includes an audition and a written test, and uses this information to provide a personalised first-year study package. Academic studies are streamed in accordance with students' previous experience of academic study. There are regular small assessments which provide feedback to students on academic progress. There is continuous dialogue and feedback from tutors about the performance aspects of the programme.

5.8     Students confirmed that assessment criteria are clear, that they receive sufficient feedback, and that the feedback is of high quality.

## Monitoring retention and progression

5.9     Undergraduate year tutors meet once a week and will identify any problems or concerns relating to student progress. A similar system is in place for postgraduate programmes. If progression problems are identified, the matter is quickly raised with the head of department and the student, and support is offered. The drop-out rate at the Academy is very low.

# Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions. For example, pages 18-19 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of threshold academic standards, learning opportunities, enhancement and public information.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.


**Academic Infrastructure** Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

**academic standards** The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

**Code of practice** *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

**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.

**enhancement** Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

**feature of good practice** A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

**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.*

**learning opportunities** The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

**learning outcome** What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

**operational definition** A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

**programme (of study)** An approved course of study which 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.

**public information** Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

**Quality Code** Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements, along with additional topics and overarching themes.

**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.

**threshold academic standard** The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

**widening participation** Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.