

Royal College of Music

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Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To this end, QAA carries out institutional audits of higher education institutions.

In England and Northern Ireland QAA conducts institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector, to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council in England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations to assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills (now the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills). It was revised in 2006 following recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, a representative group established to review the structures and processes of quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland, and to evaluate the work of QAA.

Institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework established in 2002 following revisions to the UK's approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aims of the revised institutional audit process are to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree-awarding bodies in a proper manner
- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications
- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and feedback from stakeholders.

Institutional audit results in judgements about the institutions being reviewed. Judgements are made about:

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the academic standards of its awards
- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the learning opportunities available to students.

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes
- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

If the audit includes the institution's collaborative provision the judgements and comments also apply to collaborative provision, unless the audit team considers that any of its judgements or comments in respect of the collaborative provision differ from those in respect of the institution's 'home' provision. Any such differences will be reflected in the form of words used to express a judgement or comment on the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

The reports of quality audits have to be useful to several audiences. The revised institutional audit process makes a clear distinction between that part of the reporting process aimed at an external audience and that aimed at the institution. There are three elements to the reporting:

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students
- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences
- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary and the report, without the annex, are published in hard copy. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Institutional audit handbook: England and Northern Ireland 2006 -Annexes B and C refer*).

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Royal College of Music (the College) from 23 to 27 April 2007 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the College offers.

To arrive at its conclusions the audit team (the team) spoke to members of staff throughout the College and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the College manages the academic aspects of its provision.

The words 'academic standards' are used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the United Kingdom (UK).

Academic quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their awards. It is about making sure that appropriate teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for the students.

In institutional audit, the management of both academic standards and academic quality are reviewed.

Outcomes of the institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the College is that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards
- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Overall, the audit team found that the College was committed to enhancing the quality of the students' learning experience, and is taking appropriate steps in that direction, but considered that there is scope for a more formal and strategic approach at the institutional level.

Postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the institution's arrangements for its postgraduate research students met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, with the exception of precept 23.

Published information

The audit team found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution published about its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the development of a method of assessing musical performance which pays close attention to the maintenance of academic standards

- the systematic approach to widening participation
- the care and attention given to the professional development of students
- support for research which aims to enhance the quality of the student learning experience.

Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that the College consider further action in some areas.

Recommendations for action the team considers advisable:

- reconsider the remit and operation of the Board of Professors to ensure that the Board is discharging its responsibilities for the management of quality and standards
- establish an overarching framework for the management of the quality and standards of collaborative provision, which reflects both the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2* and the experience of other UK institutions in identifying and managing any associated risks
- amend the procedures for the DMus so that a student's supervisor cannot also act as his or her internal examiner.

Recommendations for action the team considers desirable:

- revise its criteria for external appointments to periodic review panels to ensure that chairs have not recently been external examiners for the College's provision
- review the operations of the subcommittees of the Board of Professors with a view to ensuring they each plays a specific and unambiguous role in supporting the Board to discharge its responsibilities
- continue to take steps to improve the effectiveness of student representation.

Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings the audit team investigated the use made by the College of the Academic Infrastructure which provides a means of describing academic standards in UK higher education. It allows for diversity and innovation within academic programmes offered by higher education. QAA worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure which are:

- the *Code of practice*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements.

The audit found that the College took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students, with the exception of parts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* respectively. These areas are discussed in the following report.

Report

1 An institutional audit of the Royal College of Music (the College) was undertaken during the week commencing 23 April 2007. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the College's management of the academic standards of its awards and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Dr C Baxter, Mrs B Howell, Professor C Park and Dr C Rivlin, auditors, and Ms H Placito, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mr W Naylor, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The College was founded in 1882 under Royal Charter. The Charter gave the College degree and diploma awarding powers to doctoral level, which, at the time of the audit, made it unique amongst English conservatoires.

4 According to its Mission Statement, 'The Royal College of Music is committed to being a world leader in practical education and research by and for musicians working primarily in the field of Western art music. It seeks to ensure the continuing dynamism of this tradition through innovation, the expansion of cultural boundaries and widening the relevance of this music to all groups of society. The College strives to offer fair access for talented performers and composers from all backgrounds to an environment which encourages musicians to realise their potential, not only as artists with high executant skills but also as individuals with the vision, intelligence and resourcefulness needed to contribute significantly to musical life in this country and internationally'.

5 At the time of the audit, the College offered a single four year full-time undergraduate degree programme, the Bachelor of Music (Honours) (BMus), and contributed to a four-year Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Physics with Studies in Musical performance awarded by another institution. It also offered postgraduate degrees and diplomas in music including a Master of Music (MMus), a Doctor of Music (DMus) and a MMus in Performance awarded jointly with another institution. The College had 644 taught students: 484 (75 per cent) from within the European Union (including the United Kingdom (UK)) and 160 (25 per cent) from outside. Just over half (346 or 54 per cent) of the students were on the BMus, and most of the rest (269 or 42 per cent) were on taught postgraduate programmes; 16 students were registered on the DMus.

6 The governance and management structure of the College has three main elements:

- Council, which is the governing body of the College. It has four subcommittees - the Audit Committee, Executive Committee (Finance and General Purposes Committee), Board of Professors, and Nominations Committee.
- Directorate, which has executive managerial responsibility for operational matters and for developing and implementing strategy. It is chaired by the Director, who is the head of the institution, and comprises the Director of Academic and Administrative Affairs, Director of Finance and Estates, Director of Communications, Director of Resources, and Dean (Director of Studies).
- Board of Professors. Under the College's Royal Charter the Board advises the Director on, '...all aspects of the College curriculum...[and] the conduct and syllabus for College examinations'. In practice however, the College has adopted the 1988 Department for Education and Science Model Articles of Government for Academic Boards, which confer responsibility for quality and standards on the Board of Professors acting as an Academic Board.

7 Teaching staff at conservatoires are traditionally called professors. Most of the College's 200 professors are professional musicians, composers or conductors, who are appointed on part-time hourly paid contracts to provide one-to-one teaching to students in their chosen musical field (known as the principal study). At the time of the audit, there were 34 full-time salaried academic staff, most of whom also performed administrative roles.

8 The College is divided into five faculties: keyboard; strings; woodwind, brass and percussion; vocal studies; and composition. All are led by full-time academic staff.

9 The information available for the audit included the following recent documents:

- the report of a review of research degree programmes, conducted by QAA, July 2006
- the report of the institutional audit, conducted by QAA, May 2003.

10 The College provided QAA with a series of documents and information including:

- an institutional Briefing Paper (the Briefing Paper) with appendices
- access to the College's intranet.

11 In addition, the president of the Students' Association of the College prepared a student written submission (SWS) on behalf of the College's students. The team is grateful for the students' engagement with the process.

12 During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was given convenient access to a range of the College's internal documents. The team identified two programmes for which sampling audit trails were requested to illustrate further aspects of the College's provision, and additional documentation was provided for the team during the audit visit. The team is grateful for the prompt and helpful responses to its requests for information.

13 The previous institutional audit at the College took place in May 2003. It concluded that broad confidence could be placed in the College's management of the quality and standards of its academic programmes and made three recommendations, all of which the audit team regarded as desirable. The first recommendation was that the College should meet its stated targets for rolling out its staff appraisal scheme. As part of a revised College Human Resources (HR) Strategy published in November 2004 all salaried staff now participate in annual appraisal, but the College noted in its Briefing Paper that it still faced challenges with respect to conducting full appraisals for all hourly paid professors.

14 The second recommendation was that the College should revisit its strategy for implementing Personal Development Plans to more fully meet the intentions set out in the BMus Handbook. In response, the Personal Development Plan has been replaced by online Study Plan following the July 2006 periodic review of the BMus.

15 The third recommendation was to consider the provision of a structured system of support for newly appointed professors' deputies who had limited experience of teaching. The College has since begun to provide the same HR and Health and Safety induction programme for professors' deputies who deputise most frequently as is provided for permanent professors.

16 In response to the 2003 audit report, the College also reviewed its quality assurance procedures during summer 2006 to ensure they were fit for purpose and aligned with the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA.

17 At the time of the 2003 audit, the College was in the process of reviewing its committee structures in order to clarify the roles and responsibilities of its various committees and reduce any overlaps amongst them. As a result, the Quality and Standards Group was disbanded and the responsibilities of the Board of Professors for quality assurance strengthened. Further refinements to the committee structure included the merger in October 2006 of the Board of the Academic Management Group and the Artistic Planning Committee into a new Artistic and Academic Management Group which is chaired by the Director.

18 A new Director was appointed in July 2005. At the time of the present audit, the Director was in the process of developing a Vision Statement to support the implementation of the College's new Strategic Plan 2007-17.

19 Two of the College's core degree programmes have also been subject to periodic review since the 2003 audit - the DMus in July 2005 and the BMus in July 2006.

20 In fulfilment of key priorities articulated in the Strategic Plan 2002-07, the College has made the master's qualification the standard award to students who have completed the second cycle of higher education, and has expanded its strategic academic partnerships in the UK and overseas. The College has also been active in the development of new collaborative programmes, including a new joint doctoral programme within a consortium of European conservatoires.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

21 The College's arrangements for managing academic standards are described in the Quality Assurance Handbook. At the centre is the Board of Professors whose formal role is to advise the Director of the College. According to the College's Royal Charter the Council has overall responsibility for academic matters, but in practice the Board of Professors acts as an academic board.

22 The College conducts reviews of its approach to quality assurance according to the cycle of QAA audit, seeing the QAA audit itself as the culmination of the review process. This process has replaced a system of institutional review, which the College conducted independently of the QAA audit cycle. The audit team were concerned that the College might regard an audit conducted by QAA as a substitute for a self evaluation. The team therefore suggests that the Board may wish to explore how other small and specialist higher education institutions approach self-evaluation with a view to considering the reintroduction of a mechanism for self-evaluation which is separate from the College's preparation for QAA audit.

23 In January 2007, the Board of Professors conducted a review of its own effectiveness against the framework of the Committee of University Chairmen Governance Code of Conduct. The review took the form of a self-assessment questionnaire. The Board considered that the responses reflected a broadly satisfactory view of its working. The audit team noted however, that some of the responses raised questions about the effectiveness of the Board, for example, to what extent the Board sat at the centre of the committee structure and whether the level of debate at the Board was appropriate. It therefore took the view that the College might wish to look further at some of the other issues raised in the review.

24 The College sets out its procedures for the appointment of external examiners, and a policy statement describing their duties and responsibilities, in the Quality Assurance Handbook. The Quality Assurance Handbook also describes the College's arrangements for programme approval and review. The audit team regarded these procedures as robust in the main. However, the team noted that while the Handbook allows for the initial approval or review event to be conducted by correspondence, it does not explain how or why this might occur. The team were told that the College had never conducted an initial approval or review event in this way. Nevertheless, it would encourage the College to develop clear criteria and procedures for the conduct of such processes by correspondence, to ensure they are as robust as approval or review events carried out on campus.

25 There was evidence that the Graduate School Committee had not received a formal written report of the approval event for the joint MMus, although this was provided to the Board of Professors. The Graduate School Committee, which, according to the College's committee handbook has responsibility for the implementation of curriculum development, therefore, was not involved in considering the detailed report of this important event. The College's collaborative provision is discussed further in Section 5 of this report.

26 The audit team noted that the external chair for the BMus review in 2006 had also acted as the external examiner for that programme during the period covered by the review; and that the external chair of the DMus Review in 2005 had been an external examiner for a different postgraduate award at the College until the end of the previous academic year. Although in neither case was the chair a current external examiner, the team took the view that the College's use of former external examiners as review panel chairs so soon after their term as external examiners had expired might not provide periodic review with the appropriate level of independence. The team therefore considered that it would be desirable for the College to revise its criteria for external appointments to periodic review panels to ensure that chairs have not recently been external examiners for the College's provision. The College may find the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* a useful point of reference in this respect.

27 The College manages proposed modifications according to the scale of the proposal and when it arises. Proposals for minor modifications arising between periodic reviews, including to regulations, are subject to approval by the relevant programmes committee (the Undergraduate Programmes Committee or Graduate School Committee). Proposals for major modifications arising between periodic reviews are most commonly considered by correspondence by the panel that last reviewed or approved the programme, although if the modification is very significant it will also involve a meeting of the review panel. All major modifications are subject to approval by the Board of Professors. Proposals for modifications arising from periodic review fall within the remit of the review panel to consider. The reports of reviews are then subject to approval by the Board. However, the audit team noted one instance where changes to regulations affecting the calculation of final award classifications for the BMus were made on the recommendation of a review panel without any evidence of discussion by the Board. The team regarded this as inconsistent with the Board's stated responsibilities for the approval of regulations and the management of academic standards.

28 The audit team learnt that at programme level careful attention was given to management information, such as data on progression and achievement, and to issues raised by external examiners and the response by the course. However, it found limited evidence of how the Board of Professors was engaging with these matters at institutional level. One example of an annual summary report to the Board concerning external examiners' comments on taught postgraduate provision did not refer to academic standards. It was therefore difficult to see how the Board had been able to assure itself about the security of academic standards of taught postgraduate provision in that particular academic year.

29 The audit team recommends that it would be advisable for the College to reconsider the remit and operation of the Board of Professors, with respect to the issues raised in paragraphs 23, 27 and 28, to ensure that the Board is discharging its responsibilities for the management of quality and standards.

30 The Board of Professors is supported by other committees with particular responsibilities set out in the Committee Handbook. The audit team noted that the Artistic and Academic Management Group played a significant role; but in some areas, for example, arrangements for assessment and engagement with the Academic Infrastructure, there was an overlap with the role of other committees. The team heard how some issues were commonly discussed by a number of Committees and that explicit responsibility for collaborative provision had not been allocated to any committee. In this context the team concluded that it would be desirable for the College to review the operations of the subcommittees of the Board of Professors with a view to ensuring they each plays a specific and unambiguous role in supporting the Board to discharge its responsibilities.

31 The College's assessment regulations are set out in programme handbooks and a handbook on practical examination procedures, which staff and students clearly understood. There is an effective system of external examining and the College has strengthened the assessment process

further by the use of external specialist examiners. The audit team regarded as good practice the careful development by the College of this method of assessing musical performance which pays close attention to the maintenance of academic standards. The team was also able to confirm that the College operated a well documented, fair and open admissions policy.

32 The College engages with the QAA Academic Infrastructure in a number of ways including its processes for approval, monitoring and review of award standards, programme handbooks and the Quality Assurance Handbook.

33 The audit team concluded that confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standard of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

34 According to the College's Learning and Teaching Strategy, 'management of learning opportunities takes place within the principles laid out in the Learning and Teaching Strategy's strategic goals - in particular, the emphasis placed there on fairness and openness and the commitment to innovation and the sharing and embedding of good practice'.

35 The College's procedures for the approval and review of programmes ensure that the requisite learning resources and infrastructure are in place before a programme can begin or continue beyond a formal periodic review. Students are invited to contribute to the periodic review of existing programmes, although the review reports do not always include their comments.

36 The College also undertakes annual monitoring of programmes, which draws substantially on student feedback, to ensure that learning opportunities are being effectively managed. Annual monitoring reports are submitted to the Undergraduate Programmes or Graduate Schools Committees for approval, depending on the level of provision. Sections of the reports are dedicated to learning resources and the effectiveness of the programme in promoting equal opportunities including racial equality and supporting students with disabilities. The reports also include an action plan proposing how the programme could be improved in response to the issues raised within the report. Heads of programmes are required to report back to the committee in the next annual report on progress in prosecuting the previous action plan.

37 In addition to the responsibilities of the Undergraduate Programmes and Graduate School committees, the Artistic and Academic Management Group has responsibility for monitoring and reviewing all aspects of the College's programmes of study, including approving principal study and other individual study syllabi; determining the levels of one-to-one tuition provided by the professoriate to students; and ensuring that there is an appropriate interface and balance between students' artistic programmes and the demands of academic study. The audit team was not clear however, about how the work of the Group in managing these areas of learning opportunities related to the work of the Undergraduate Programmes and Graduate School Committees, since there is no formal route for referring matters from these two committees to the Artistic and Academic Management Group or vice versa. This contributed to the team's conclusion that it would be desirable for the College to Review the operations of the subcommittees of the Board of Professors with a view to ensuring they each plays a specific and unambiguous role in supporting the Board to discharge its responsibilities.

38 Dialogue with external examiners relating to learning opportunities is encouraged; however, the audit team noted that this was an informal expectation and suggests that it could be made more explicit. The College also engages with a range of other external reference points, including through the employment of professional musicians, to undertake most of the College's teaching. The College has responded to developments in the European arena, including by becoming an active member of the European association of conservatoires, the 'Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen'.

39 The College has developed a number of mechanisms to ensure that students' views inform the management of learning opportunities, including through questionnaires, meetings with review panels and external examiners and weekly surgeries with the Director. Students are also represented on many of the College's key committees. However, the audit team noted limited evidence of student representatives attending or speaking at these committees. Discussions with student representatives revealed that few of them (apart from the Student Association President) had received any formal training or briefing for the role from the College. The team concluded that it would be desirable for the College to continue to take steps to improve the effectiveness of student representation.

40 At the time of the audit, the College's distance and flexible-learning provision was confined to one unit of the MMus, which could be completed through distance learning for students who had already completed a postgraduate diploma at the College. The Quality Assurance Handbook does not include any separate arrangements for managing learning opportunities for distance learning and the audit team were therefore unable to establish the extent to which the College had formally considered the *Code of practice, Section 2*, in this regard. In light of the College's plans to develop a virtual learning environment and its possible applicability to further development of on-line and flexible learning, the College may wish to reconsider its management of learning opportunities for programmes offered in this way, with a view to developing a more formal and systematic approach.

41 The College provides a wide range of specialist learning resources. They include the Concert Hall, Opera Theatre and other recital spaces and a great number of instruments which students may use. The Centre for Performance History also hosts a museum of instruments and a substantial library. Students confirmed the very high standard of the facilities available to them. The Briefing Paper acknowledged that the number of practice rooms in the College is not as great as it would like. This was however a function of the size of its estate.

42 The College systematically encourages and supports students from a wide range of backgrounds to seek admission to the College. It has received a grant from the Higher Education Funding Council for England to improve its provision for students with disabilities, including by the development of learning agreements, the publication of Disability Good Practice for staff and students and the creation of a new Assistive Technology Room. The audit team identified the College's systematic approach to widening participation as good practice.

43 The relationship between students and their professors is the cornerstone of the College's student support. Students are allocated to professors on the basis of a request made by the student when they are offered a place. Final allocations are concluded just before the start of teaching and are based on student choice, professorial preference and professorial availability. Students whom the audit team met were very positive about this form of tuition.

44 Undergraduate students are expected to keep a Personal Development Plan in order to set and record personal development targets, measure progress and evaluate success across the academic year. These paper-based plans are gradually being replaced by an online Study Plan.

45 The College is committed to the professional development of its students. This is manifest in a range of activities, including a survey of 1000 recent alumni to identify the skills required by musicians in the early stages of their careers, and the introduction of new professional skills development units into the curriculum to reflect the survey results. The audit team regarded the care and attention given to the professional development of students as good practice.

46 At the last audit in 2003, it was recommended that the College should consider the provision of a structured system of support for newly appointed professor's deputies who had limited experience of teaching. Since then the College has provided the same HR and Health and Safety induction programmes for deputies as is provided for permanent professors. The audit team heard that new staff were supported by the heads of faculties and programme leaders and

given the College's Code of Practice for matters relating to teaching. The team considered that the success of these arrangements depended to a large extent on the willingness of new staff to engage with them, and suggests, therefore, that a more formal framework for induction might be beneficial.

47 The audit team concluded that confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunity available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

48 The College claimed in its Briefing Paper that its, '...approach to managing quality enhancement is essentially inseparable from its approach to the management of learning opportunities...and every academic cycle sees a range of small enhancements identified and acted upon'. This approach is reflected in the Quality Assurance Handbook, which identifies opportunities for quality enhancement in annual monitoring, programme review and student engagement, but does not deal with enhancement as a separate theme. Themes of enhancement also run through the College's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

49 The work of the Woodhouse Centre and of the Music Education Research Team - particularly the survey of the College's alumni - has led to demonstrable enhancements to the BMus in terms of students' development of professional skills. The student learning experience is also informed by the College's research output, which is a priority area in the College's bid for Teaching Quality Enhancement Funds in 2006-09. Examples of the synergy between research and learning which the audit team observed included the introduction of units in the psychology of music and the development of the first year curriculum to recognise the stress of musical study and performance, both as a result of research by the Centre for Performance Science. The team identified the College's support for research which aims to enhance the quality of the student learning experience as good practice.

50 At the time of the audit, the College was also improving learning resources to promote enhancement through the development a virtual learning environment, improvements to practice rooms, and exploration of the uses of a video-conferencing facility.

51 Disseminating and embedding examples of good practice is one of the College's strategic goals for learning and teaching. This is pursued in several ways including the annual professors' conference, annual staff development sessions, and the circulation of a termly newsletter to teaching professors. Securing the engagement of its many part-time staff in identifying and sharing good practice in teaching and learning continues to be a challenge for the College.

52 The audit team concluded that the College is committed to enhancing the quality of the students' learning experience, and is taking appropriate steps in that direction. As yet, however, it has largely chosen not to codify this activity. The development of a more formal and strategic approach to quality enhancement is something which the College may now wish to consider.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

53 At the time of the audit visit the College's collaborative provision was confined to one programme: MMus in Musical Performance awarded jointly with another institution. The audit team noted that this programme did not have any students enrolled on it. It had previously admitted one student in 2005 who successfully gained the award in 2006.

54 Alongside its existing collaborative activity, the College is involved in a consortium of European conservatoires seeking to launch a joint DMus programme in 2008, although the consortium has not yet agreed which of them will make the award. The College is also considering validating some provision at an overseas institution.

55 In addition to these formal collaborations, the College maintains links with several UK and international institutions, which facilitate research and artistic collaboration and overseas students spending a period of study at the College. The audit team recognised that these links provided valuable opportunities for staff and students.

56 The College did not describe how it manages the quality and standards of its current collaborative programme in its Briefing Paper. This is reflected in the Quality Assurance Handbook, which does not make any reference to collaborative provision.

57 The audit team noted that the 2003 institutional audit report observed that the College was planning to keep under review arrangements for the management of quality and standards of collaborative programmes as it embarked on the Joint MMus and began to explore collaboration with European Conservatoires. The 2003 audit team felt assured that the planned review would serve to ensure the College's procedures continued to be appropriate to the demands of collaborative relationships. The 2003 team also stated, '...that as the College begins to familiarise itself with the challenges to quality and standards management presented by overseas collaboration, it will wish to proceed with caution, and to draw on the accumulated experience of other UK higher education institutions in identifying and managing any associated risks'.

58 Against this backdrop, the audit team sought to explore the extent to which the College had developed its framework for managing quality and standards of collaborative awards since 2003. The team was unable to find evidence of the planned review mentioned in the 2003 audit report. Rather, the team found that since 2003, each collaborative engagement had developed separately and, while there was some evidence in each case of the College giving consideration to the management of quality and standards, it did not appear to have been systematic. The team noted that the responsibility for managing the quality and standards of collaborative provision is not included in the formal terms of reference for the Board or any of its subcommittees.

59 The audit team further noted that the College had chosen not to follow some of the bespoke quality assurance procedures set out in the Memorandum of Agreement for the Joint MMus, including a Joint Board of Examiners, provision for student feedback to each partner and a Joint Annual Monitoring Report, presumably because only one student had enrolled. While the team were assured that this had not jeopardised quality and standards in this case, nonetheless it meant that not all of the College's procedures for managing the quality and standards of this programme had been tested. Furthermore, evidence of the College's plans for future collaborative activity showed that planning was taking place in the absence of an overarching framework which would allow the College to identify at an institutional level its minimum requirements for collaborative programmes leading to one of its awards.

60 The audit team concluded that would be advisable for the College to establish an overarching framework for the management of the quality and standards of collaborative provision, which reflects both the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2*, and the experience of other UK institutions in identifying and managing any associated risks.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

61 The College awards the DMus degree under its Royal Charter. It has admitted students to the DMus since 1995 and at the time of the audit there were 16 students registered for this award.

62 The DMus is overseen by the Research Committee. Doctoral students belong to the Graduate School, and the DMus programme is managed directly by the Deputy Head of the School.

63 The DMus programme was reviewed in July 2005 by a panel which included three external assessors (including the chair). The panel made 11 recommendations. The audit team were unable to find any evidence in the minutes of the Graduate School Committee, Research Committee or Board of Professors that these recommendations had been followed up. The review

process therefore appears to be incomplete, and the College may have failed to make effective use of it in enhancing the student experience and improving its procedures.

64 The DMus was also reviewed as part of the 2006 QAA Special Review of research degree programmes, which recommended that the College consider student representation on the Research Committee for non-reserved business, which the College has since done.

65 The College provides a vibrant and productive environment within which the DMus students operate, including visiting performers and teachers from around the world, specialist research collections, three specialist research centres, a fortnightly research seminar series, and financial support for DMus students to attend conferences.

66 The admissions process is clearly documented and entry requirements are clearly defined. Students are normally required to attend for interview, and applications are considered by a panel of three. Students who are accepted for admission are required to follow an Initial Period of Study (12 months for full-time, 18 months for part-time), during which they undergo skills training and prepare a research proposal under the guidance of the Directing Supervisor. Doctoral students usually have two supervisors, the main (Directing) Supervisor being responsible for managing the supervisory process and agreeing the students individual study plan. The 2005 DMus Review panel recommended that consideration should be given to formalising the ways in which training needs for new supervisors, but there was no clear evidence that the College had followed this up.

67 In the view of the audit team, progress and review arrangements for research students are fit for purpose and, since 2005-06, all DMus students have a personalised Learning Agreement and a Personal Development Plan with targets set for each year of study. DMus students are subject to annual progress review, which includes reports written by the student and the Directing Supervisor, which are reviewed by the Deputy Head of the Graduate School. The Research Committee confirms the student's continued registration, subject to receipt of evidence of satisfactory progress.

68 Skills development is appropriate for the College's emphasis on practice-based research. It centres mainly on the Arts and Humanities Research Council Collaborative Research Training Programme, which students must attend during their Initial Period of Study.

69 Student feedback is collected through both formal and informal routes. Formally, students are asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire during the summer term. According to the College's submission to the 2006 QAA Special Review, responses to this questionnaire are collated by the Deputy Head of the Graduate School, who reports to the autumn term meeting of the Research Committee, and the response of the Research Committee is subsequently reported back to students at a specially convened meeting. The audit team however, found no evidence of this process in minutes of meetings of the Research Committee. Students are also encouraged to express their views informally with their supervisors, in the fortnightly DMus research seminars and through the annual renegotiation of their learning agreements.

70 Assessment of research students is tailored to practice-based research; the terms under which DMus students have their work assessed is subject to negotiation with the students. Final assessment, which has two stages (preliminary assessment and viva), is by a panel of three, two of whom must be external. The DMus regulations allow for the student's supervisor to serve as the internal examiner, and whilst this has apparently never happened in practice, it does not meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1*. The audit team therefore regards it as advisable for the College to amend the procedures for the DMus so that a student's supervisor cannot also act as his or her internal examiner.

71 DMus students are represented on the Graduate School Committee and, since November 2006, the Research Committee. They are subject to the General Academic Regulations which include complaints and appeals procedures.

72 The audit team concluded that the College's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes are clearly documented and fit for purpose.

Section 7: Published information

73 The College publishes a wide range of information for prospective and current students on its website and in printed form. All students are provided with comprehensive Programme Handbooks which include programme and module specifications as well as programme regulations and helpful advice and guidance relating to their studies at the College.

74 The audit team noted that the College ensures the accuracy and completeness of its published information through hierarchical sign off procedures. The team were able to confirm that these arrangements worked appropriately in practice and that the College ensured that its publications are reviewed periodically.

75 The students whom the audit team met confirmed that they had found the information provided by the College to applicants and to students to be accurate and complete, although some students suggested that they would welcome further development of the intranet and internet sites as they did not always find it easy to locate the information they were seeking. The team noted that at the time of the audit, the College was reviewing the internet and intranet with a view to an imminent relaunch of both and had consulted the President of the Students Association about planned changes as part of this review.

76 The audit team concluded that the published information provided by the College was accurate, frank and complete and that the College was able to demonstrate that it had in place appropriate mechanisms for reviewing and updating its current publications on a regular basis.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the College is that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards
- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as good practice:

- the development of a method of assessing musical performance which pays close attention to the maintenance of academic standards (paragraph 31)
- the systematic approach to widening participation (paragraph 42)
- the care and attention given to the professional development of students (paragraph 45)
- support for research which aims to enhance the quality of the student learning experience (paragraph 49).

Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that the College consider further action in some areas.

Recommendations the audit team considers advisable:

- reconsider the remit and operation of the Board of Professors to ensure that the Board is discharging its responsibilities for the management of quality and standards (paragraphs 23, 27, 28, 29)
- establish an overarching framework for the management of the quality and standards of collaborative provision, which reflects both the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2* and the experience of other UK institutions in identifying and managing any associated risks (paragraphs 58, 59, 60)
- amend the procedures for the DMus so that a student's supervisor cannot also act as his or her internal examiner (paragraph 70).

Recommendations for action the audit team considers desirable:

- revise its criteria for external appointments to periodic review panels to ensure that chairs have not recently been external examiners for the College's provision (paragraph 26)
- review the operations of the subcommittees of the Board of Professors with a view to ensuring they each plays a specific and unambiguous role in supporting the Board to discharge its responsibilities (paragraphs 30, 37)
- continue to take steps to improve the effectiveness of student representation (paragraph 39).

Appendix

The Royal College of Music's response to the institutional audit report

The Royal College of Music welcomes the report of the QAA's institutional audit and its overall conclusion that confidence can be placed in the soundness, both of the College's present and future management of the academic standards of its awards and of the College's present and future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. The College is also pleased that the following features of good practice have been highlighted:

- the development of a method of assessing musical performance which pays close attention to the maintenance of academic standards
- support for research which aims to enhance the quality of the student learning experience
- the systematic approach to widening participation
- the care and attention given to the professional development of students.

The report will add to the resources used by the College as it further develops its approach to continuous enhancement and development, both of the quality of the learning experience of its students and of the artistic and academic standards that, as an international conservatoire, it vigorously upholds. The College's response to the report's recommendations will be overseen by its academic board, the Board of Professors.

