



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Sotheby's Institute of Art, London, March 2017

### Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Sotheby's Institute of Art, London has made commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the February 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

### Changes since the last QAA review/monitoring visit

2 Sotheby's Institute of Art, London (the Institute) has 152 full-time students on its four postgraduate programmes, which is a reduction of 33, or nearly 18 per cent, since the Higher Education Review in February 2016. The current total includes 77 Tier 4 Sponsored overseas students. The number of academic staff has fallen from 22 to 20 over the same 12 month period. A series of changes to the provision were approved during 2015-16 as part of a revalidation by the University of Manchester. The number of MA/Pg Diploma programmes has been reduced from six to four. The awards in Photography and Contemporary Design have been discontinued with two of the other awards re-named as Fine and Decorative Art and Design, and Modern and Contemporary Asian Art. The revalidation also agreed the introduction of cross-programme elective units and the option of a practice-based dissertation.

### Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The key findings underpinning the commendable progress outcome of the monitoring visit are as follows. All of the actions arising from the 2016 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) have been fully implemented or are on course for completion by the published date. Evaluation is proceeding fully in line with the internally published timetable. Actions in the four areas of good practice have resulted in clear enhancement. The admissions arrangements have been reviewed against external criteria, student research is being more widely disseminated, a counselling service has been added to the range of student support and opportunities for career development have been widened (see paragraph 4). All six recommendations have been appropriately addressed, with measurable improvements achieved. External examiner reports are being formally addressed within the enhanced committee structure, within which the role of students is clearly defined. Students have ready access to programme learning outcomes, the results of annual monitoring are formally recorded and a published protocol is in place to ensure the accuracy of information (see paragraphs 5-6). There are comprehensive arrangements for the recruitment, selection and admission of students (see paragraph 7) and annual programme monitoring fully meets the requirements of the awarding body (see paragraph 8). Student data indicate high levels of retention and achievement (see paragraph 9). The Institute continues to engage effectively with external reference points, including the UK Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) (see paragraphs 10-11).

4 The actions taken in response to the 2016 review have ensured that the four areas of good practice have been sustained and enhanced. The Institute is maintaining the effective management of the admissions process and is working with the University of

London Housing Service to better support students in acquiring accommodation. It has also reviewed all of its admission policies and procedures against the good practice guidance of the Competition and Markets Authority (see paragraph 7). The distinctive research environment is being further strengthened by extending the dissemination of student research outcomes, initiating shared staff and student research seminars, and introducing practice-based dissertations. Students confirm the continued high quality of the support they receive, including the recently introduced student counselling service. The raft of new initiatives to strengthen career development and employability provide links to a wider range of art world employers, extend the alumni network and introduce a new work placement elective unit for 2017-18.

5 There is commendable progress with actions to address the six recommendations from the 2016 review. The reports of external examiners are being shared across the Institute through a more systematic consideration at key committees. The process is described in the Quality Handbook and within the committees' terms of reference. The new terms of reference, which are clear and comprehensive, have resulted in a more coherent structure, with greater clarity in decision making and reporting. The Institute is implementing a comprehensive and detailed Student Engagement Strategy, which is built around the principle of partnership between the Institute and its students at institution, programme and unit levels. Students are now represented on all deliberative committees. Student representatives are supported in their role through training workshops and a guidance pack.

6 Intended learning outcomes for all programmes and units are now published in the relevant handbooks. The actions arising from the institution-wide annual monitoring process are formally reviewed within the revised committee structure. Action points are better targeted, with responsibilities and deadlines clearly recorded. This is evident in the internal management of the 2016 review action plan. The Institute has introduced a revised protocol for ensuring the accuracy of information, which provides more explicit guidelines and responsibilities. This has resulted in a recognition of the need for more consistency and standardisation, for example in handbooks and the presentation of intended learning outcomes. All publicity materials must be approved by the awarding body before release.

7 Student admissions are rigorously managed, reflecting the good practice identified at the 2016 review. There are clear and explicit procedures, which align with the Quality Code *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*. The procedures are detailed in the Graduate Admissions Policy, as well as in the extensive materials and guidance published on the Institute's website. They were reviewed in 2016 to ensure they meet the Competition and Markets Authority's best practice guidelines, which reflect consumer law and protection. Individual student admission files are maintained to provide a detailed record of all stages of the process. The Institute has appropriate and supportive arrangements in place to deal with complaints and appeals about admissions, although these are not currently provided in the form of a published policy. The high levels of student completion and achievement (see paragraph 9) offer evidence for the effectiveness of the admissions process. Unsuccessful applicants are given detailed feedback and helpful guidance as reported at the 2016 review.

8 The Institute has clear and established arrangements for the annual monitoring of programmes, which meet the requirements of its awarding body, the University of Manchester and the expectations of the Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*. The annually updated Quality Handbook defines the processes for ensuring academic standards and includes an explanation of what is expected from annual monitoring. In responding to the outcomes of the 2016 review, the Institute has strengthened the links between the elements of its cycle of quality activities, for example in the reporting between programmes, institutional committees and the awarding body. The annual quality cycle includes a reporting visit by the University of Manchester. Each programme produces

an annual monitoring report, using a well-structured, standardised template. The reports, which draw upon student feedback and external examiner reports, reflect on the curriculum, its delivery and assessment, student data, support, resources, programme organisation and the maintenance of standards and quality.

9 Statistical data provided by the Institute show a consistently high level of retention and achievement over the three years 2013-14 to 2015-16. There are only small variations between years and across the six one-year MA programmes. Over the three year period, some 93 per cent of enrolled students completed their programmes and 97 per cent of those completing achieved their MA award. The figures for each year are as follows: in 2013-14, 151 of 161 enrolling students completed the MA and 149 gained the award; in 2014-15, 147 of 156 completed and 142 gained the award; in 2015-16, 163 of 177 completed and 157 gained the award. The data are reviewed at Examination Boards and Academic Board, and are reported on as part of programme monitoring. The Institute recognises that its monitoring of data, though highly diligent, could be more evaluative to better inform review and action planning.

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

10 The Institute makes effective use of academic and professional external reference points. It continues to build on its use of the Quality Code in the development and revision of policies and procedures. This is evident in the revalidation of the provision in 2016, the new Student Engagement Strategy and the decision to publish a teaching and learning strategy. Institute policies and procedures have been routinely aligned to the relevant chapters of the Quality Code, although this is not always denoted explicitly within the documents themselves. The Institute has drawn on Subject Benchmark Statements in so far as they are relevant to postgraduate provision.

11 Staff make regular use of a range of professional links to inform the curriculum and its delivery. These links include specialists employed by the parent company, alumni, employer contacts, visiting contributors from the art world, and professional associations. As indicated in paragraph 7, the Institute has also drawn on guidance from the Competition and Markets Authority.

## **Background to the monitoring visit**

12 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

13 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Julie Andreshak-Behrman, Reviewer, and Mr David Lewis, Coordinator, on 8 March 2017.

### **QAA1842 - R8240 - Apr 17**

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2017  
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050  
Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)