



## Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of The Arts Educational Schools, October 2018

### 1 Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that The Arts Educational Schools (ArtsEd) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [2017 Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

### 2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 There are currently 269 students studying on higher education programmes at the School. This compares with a total of 266 higher education students in 2016-17 as reported in the previous Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER (AP)). The data return shows a total of 60 members of staff, 32 full and 28 part-time. The School also employs approximately 150 freelance/part-time visiting tutors each year from the acting and musical theatre industry.

3 The School's higher education provision continues to be validated by City, University of London. Some students are additionally assessed for a level 6 diploma awarded by Trinity College London, making them eligible for Dance and Drama Award (DaDA) scholarships. No other external reviews have taken place since the last QAA review.

4 The School has planned to close the Post Diploma BA (Hons) Performance Studies (PDBA) programme in March 2019 after the current cohort have completed their studies.

### 3 Findings from the monitoring visit

5 ArtsEd has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan and demonstrates a good level of engagement with external reference points including the QAA Quality Code (paragraph 16). Information that it produces is trustworthy, accessible and fit for purpose. It has built on the two areas of good practice identified in the 2017 HER (AP) (paragraph 6). The recommendation to review and amend information available to prospective students with disabilities to ensure that they do not perceive unnecessary barriers to admission has been fully addressed (paragraph 7). Students' Union representatives are now provided with appropriate training and support in relation to pastoral and welfare issues (paragraph 7). There has been satisfactory progress in the development of information technology to improve the effectiveness in supporting student learning (paragraph 8) but the development of policies to further promote effective assessment and feedback has yet to be fully implemented (paragraph 9).

6 ArtsEd has continued to build on good practice. Firstly, the commitment to support students' mental health and wellbeing, continues to be a strong feature. ArtsEd has undertaken a number of further initiatives to enhance their services to support students' mental health and well-being. Student Wellbeing representatives have had Mental Health First Aid training and produced a Well-being Freshers Pack for new students. In relation to the second feature of good practice, ArtsEd has a well-established structure for engaging high profile professional practitioners to deliver the curriculum. This has been developed

further this year by the appointment of a part-time Industry Liaison Officer to make new contacts. Students were very appreciative of the constructive feedback and workshops provided by professionals and the opportunities they provide for mock auditioning for current West End shows. The range of employment roles gained by ArtsEd students is impressive.

7 ArtsEd has made satisfactory progress on the four recommendations from the HER (AP) 2017. The website has been reviewed and amended to ensure there is clear and unambiguous information that there are no barriers to admission for disabled students. Further steps are being taken to make adjustments to the environment and demonstrate that courses are fully inclusive. The role of the Students' Union officers has been defined to clarify that they are not expected to provide personal support or advice. The revised Student Representative Handbook makes clear that class representatives should only signpost to sources of support. This will be re-iterated at a training event for student representatives with the Principal and Deputy Principal.

8 The School acted promptly to initiate the development of its use of information technology. It commissioned a consultant who has formulated a wide ranging, seven year strategic plan for improving IT infrastructure and use for student learning. A budget has been agreed for next year and a new post of ICT Network Manager will have responsibility and strategic overview of implementation of the plan. The priorities are for a student information system, staff development and development of a VLE. Further action is required to fully address this recommendation.

9 The recommendation to develop formal policies for effective assessment and feedback is yet to be fully implemented. ArtsEd has replaced its Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy with a new Learning Teaching and Student Support Strategy. The School is continuing its consultations with staff and students to formulate a separate assessment and feedback policy. The website now carries information about deadlines for assessment feedback to students, and these are not consistent across the two undergraduate degrees. Students were satisfied that they received feedback in time to be able to make improvements for subsequent assessments and they have received marking schedules which indicate when written feedback will be given. Staff are well experienced in assessment. The School has a record of a high level of student achievement and external examiner reports are very positive; there can be confidence in academic standards.

10 ArtsEd has a comprehensive Admissions Policy, which states its commitment to equal treatment for all. The same criteria for selection apply to all applicants. Recruitment and selection is by audition and interview carried out by senior, experienced academic staff who are trained and aware of the Equal Opportunities Policy. Students appreciated the detailed communications with the School during the admissions process and supportive feedback after audition. The Registrar oversees the admissions process, and the Executive teams (Musical Theatre and Acting) have ultimate responsibility for admissions decisions. ArtsEd does not use agents to recruit students. Unsuccessful candidates are able to appeal and are provided with ArtsEd's clear audition appeal procedure.

11 Fluent spoken and written English is a requirement for all courses. Entry qualifications are clearly laid out on the website. An IELTS score of 6 or TOEFL of 100 is required for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. All candidates have to show proof of their qualifications and English language competency. However, entry is by audition and entry requirements may be waived for those without formal qualifications if successful at audition and with fluent English. Candidates are required to demonstrate their strong intention to study at interview and audition as there is considerable competition for places. Staff are industry experienced and trained to identify candidates with potential to succeed.

12 The audition is a rigorous process. Each element is overseen by at least two core members of staff. Staff make decisions about each candidate at a meeting following the auditions. To test the integrity of the admissions process ArtsEd reviews its Admissions Policy annually and uses statistics to monitor its attainment of inclusivity. As a result of team discussions auditions for the BA (Hons) Acting programme have been changed from individual to group performances which enhances the audition as a learning experience.

13 ArtsEd has effective practices for ensuring student work is genuine and there has been no academic malpractice. The majority of student work is assessed through performance and classwork. Written work is in the form of professional practice portfolios and production journals where students reflect specifically on their own work. Students are made well aware of assessment procedures and regulations and warned about academic misconduct in the handbook for each programme, at induction and in study skills and contextual studies sessions. New staff have regular meetings with their line managers and receive training in assessment procedures before marking any students work. Staff are vigilant about academic misconduct.

14 Learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria are clearly laid out in comprehensive and detailed programme handbooks, guidance notes and discussed in class. The involvement of several members of staff in the marking process secures the fairness, reliability and integrity of assessment. Written work for the undergraduate degrees is second marked but not for the MA Acting. In 2017-18 ArtsEd reviewed assessment criteria across all courses in terms of clarity and fairness and concluded that no changes needed to be made. Students reported that they were clear about what was expected of them and how their work would be assessed. They agreed that the marking was fair and consistent. External examiners attend performances and Assessment Boards. Their reports are very positive and confirm that student work demonstrates achievement of learning outcomes, has been marked fairly and is comparable with academic standards of similar institutions.

15 Over the past three academic years, retention, progression and achievement rates for all programmes have been high. For example for the 2015-16 BA (Hons) Musical Theatre cohort the retention rate was 96 per cent (49 of 51) and the pass rate 100 per cent (49 of 49), for BA (Hons) Acting the retention rate was 93 per cent (28 of 30) and the pass rate 93 per cent (26 of 28), and for the MA Acting retention was 93 per cent (28 of 30) and pass rate 100 per cent (28 of 28). For the 2016-17 cohorts the average retention rate for all three courses was 95 per cent and for the 2017-18 cohorts it was 100 per cent. The MA Acting pass rate was 100 per cent (28 of 28) for the 2016-17 cohort.

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

16 ArtsEd makes good use of the QAA Quality Code to monitor its provision. It has produced a thorough and detailed action plan mapped to the Quality Code which is updated every two years. The previous update was in 2016 and the next review will be in November 2018. Academic staff use the Subject Benchmark Statement for Dance Drama and Performance when reviewing the curriculum and making course amendments. The 2016-17 external examiner report for BA (Hons) Acting confirms that the course aligns with the Subject Benchmark statement and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). Strong industry links ensure courses are maintained at the cutting edge of vocational acting and musical theatre and meet criteria for the 'universal standard' for drama training as agreed by recognised industry professional groups.

17 The well set out and comprehensive guidance information about conduct of auditions and entry criteria for undergraduate programmes is aligned with the *Code of*

*Practice for Auditions* prepared by Drama UK and the Council for Dance Education and Training (CDET).

## **5 Background to the monitoring visit**

18 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.

19 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mrs Patricia Millner, Reviewer, and Ms Helen Uglow, QAA Officer, on 15 October 2018.

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