

**Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance**

MAY 2008

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ISBN 978 1 84482 879 1

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

## 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 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 United Kingdom's approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the revised institutional audit process is to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges of higher education 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 academic standards of awards
- the confidence that 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.

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 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 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 Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance (Trinity Laban) from 28 April to 2 May 2008 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 Trinity Laban offers on behalf of City University and the University of Westminster, together with the awards offered under its own authority.

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

In institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is 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). The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

### Outcomes of the institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance is that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers on behalf of City University and the University of Westminster, and of those that it offers under its own authority
- 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

The enhancement strategy of the newly merged institution is still at an early stage of development. There are existing strengths to build on and newly introduced initiatives should support enhancement. As it develops its approaches to quality enhancement Trinity Laban will wish to ensure that appropriate systems are in place for the co-ordinated planning, resourcing, implementation and evaluation of its initiatives in this area.

### Postgraduate research students

The supervision and support arrangements for the small number of postgraduate research students at Trinity Laban are satisfactory and meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, (*Code of practice*) published by QAA.

### Published information

The audit found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that Trinity Laban publishes about the quality of 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 institution's procedures for benchmarking of programmes at validation

- the strong level of engagement with the local and professional community
- the focus that is given to performance-related aspects of the curricula and the high quality of this aspect of provision
- the manner in which the institution's programmes aim to address the whole student experience and student well-being.

### **Recommendations for action**

The audit team recommends that Trinity Laban consider further action in some areas.

The team advises the institution to:

- review the current committee processes so as to ensure that Academic Board can effectively discharge its institutional responsibility for the overview of quality and standards
- develop and implement more expeditiously a comprehensive institutional staff development policy
- review the attendance policy for the undergraduate provision at the institution with regard to its impact on student assessment and the equitable treatment of students across the institution
- consider carefully the evidence from student feedback relating to the timeliness of the return of student work, to ensure that agreed policy is followed.

It would be desirable for Trinity Laban to:

- progress rapidly towards a more consolidated and harmonised institution wide quality management structure
- clarify the focus of institutional responsibility for the overview of quality enhancement
- implement a more effective method for strategically linking learning resource planning and academic planning
- ensure that committee minuting practice provides adequate evidence of engagement with the matters under discussion, with a view to internal and external accountability

### **Reference points**

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by Trinity Laban 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*
- frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

The audit found that Trinity Laban 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.

## Report

### Preface

1 An institutional audit of Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance (Trinity Laban) was undertaken during the week commencing 28 April 2008. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on Trinity Laban's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers on behalf of City University and the University of Westminster, and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team was Dr C Dawson, Ms H Marshall, Dr H McKenzie and Professor I Robinson, auditors, and Mrs J Taylor, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr P J A Findlay, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

3 Trinity Laban was formed in 2005 through the merger of Trinity College of Music with Laban, a leading centre for the training of professional contemporary dance artists. In this report, these two constituent colleges are referred to as Trinity and Laban, or as the colleges (lower case); the former Trinity College of Music is referred to as the College. Trinity Laban is a small specialist higher education institution that builds on its constituent colleges' long heritage in training musicians and dance artists who intend to make careers as practitioners. While a corporate identity for the new institution is in development, Trinity Laban aims to retain the well-regarded historical identity of its two colleges. Programmes of study offered by Trinity and Laban at degree level are validated by the University of Westminster and City University, respectively for the two colleges. The institution intends to move toward a single validating partner in the near future. Its strategic plan states that it intends to apply for taught degree awarding powers during the next five years.

4 Trinity Laban is located on two separate main sites in south-east London. Trinity occupies premises within the Old Royal Naval College, where the music provision is located, and Laban has recently occupied new purpose-built premises at Deptford, which hosts the dance provision. The two main sites are a short distance apart. The institution has 680 full-time equivalent undergraduate students, 191.4 full-time equivalent postgraduate students, three full-time equivalent postgraduate research students and 48 students undertaking flexible programmes of study. Trinity Laban provided the audit team with a briefing paper and access to a wide range of internal and published documents, many of which were made available on the institutional intranet. The documents included prospectuses, the Business Case for Merger, the Academic Strategy, the Academic Quality Handbook, details of the recently introduced committee structure and the minutes of a wide range of meetings at course, college, and institution level. The institution also provided the team with audit trails of two recent programme-level reviews, including all submitted documentation, the minutes of review meetings and consideration by relevant course and college committees and the resultant action plans. At the request of Trinity Laban, additional documentation was provided to inform a supplementary trail relating to the employability of students. During the briefing and audit visits the team met senior academic and administrative staff, students and Students' Union representatives.

5 This audit was the first time Trinity Laban had been audited as a single institution. Prior to this audit, its constituent colleges were each scrutinised as separate institutions, or in the context of the collaborative provision of its validating partners. Trinity College of Music was the subject of an institutional audit in 2003 and Laban was inspected as part of the *Outcome of Independent Dance and Drama Schools Quality Review* of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded provision in 2000. Trinity's previous audit in May 2003 resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of the College's current and future management of the standards of its awards and in the College's current and future management of the quality of its awards.

6 Trinity had considered the recommendations of this audit formally in committee, and since 2003, some progress had been made in taking forward actions. Recommendations relating to improvements in course documentation and the review of its processes in the light of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, had been addressed. The audit team recognised that the institutional merger which took place in 2005 had changed the context of the recommendations, and it acknowledged that the merger process itself was a demanding one. Nevertheless, it considered that there were grounds to question whether the level of institutional responsiveness to the recommendations of the last audit had been sufficient in some areas. This was particularly evident with regard to previous recommendations relating to staff development and to revisions in the management structure to ensure clarity concerning channels of communication and lines of accountability.

7 The audit team found evidence that Laban had addressed all the recommendations from the HEFCE review. A major feature of the actions involved the move to the new building at Deptford which addressed many of the information technology and dance-related technology issues. Work had been progressed with the validating university (City University) to address recommendations relating to external examiner reports, clarity of course documentation, careers guidance and improvements to quality processes including student feedback mechanisms. The team were able to see evidence of these developments working well to support student learning.

8 As a general point, the audit team found that, understandably, the institutional merger had clearly preoccupied management, and taken priority over other developments in recent years. This meant that the refinement and embedding of Trinity Laban's quality assurance processes at institutional level were still in progress, while many of the systems designed to assure standards and quality of provision continued to operate securely but unchanged within the colleges. Similarly, Trinity Laban's Academic Strategy, while presenting a thorough and detailed programme for institutional development, was published in 2007 and at the time of the audit still remained aspirational in many of its aspects. The team was clear that work now remained to be completed in ensuring that it is the merged institution, rather than either of its legacy colleges, that establishes and maintains institutional oversight and accountability for the academic standards and quality of its awards.

## **Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards**

9 Trinity Laban's Academic Board retains the ultimate responsibility for the approval and review of awards, subject, where necessary, to the requirements and processes of the validating universities. The two constituent colleges implement slightly different processes, driven by the requirements of the validating universities, their previous background and the particular institutional culture.

10 The academic structure retains much of the original shape of the two constituent colleges, and many staff appear in committees and executive groups at different levels. The audit team found it difficult to track the progression of business through the committees by reading the committee records provided in the documentation, and believed that minuting practice could benefit from review. There was an evident risk that key matters could become submerged and overlooked. The team thus welcomed Trinity Laban's recent decision to refine its committee structure. While acknowledging that most of the newly established committees had only met once or twice, the team would encourage Trinity Laban to empower the new structure to take decisions and set policy for the combined institution, rather than for the constituent colleges.

### **Approval and periodic review of awards**

11 The development of new programmes is carried out by planning committees working with the institutional Curriculum Development and Enhancement Board. Following scrutiny and approval of the proposal by the Academic Board, the final approval event is managed by the



validating university. In the case of programmes for which Trinity Laban has awarding powers, it manages the final validation event itself. External peer input is evident both during planning and at validation, and planning committees consult with internal stakeholder groups, including students. The final outcome of the validation event is reported back to the Academic Board. In their scrutiny of the audit trails, the audit team confirmed that these processes were largely adhered to. The team identified an isolated case where a validation condition requiring formal signature of an agreement between academic partners was not achieved until many months after students had been enrolled. Trinity Laban will no doubt wish to ensure that procedures are put in place to ensure that the institution is not thus put at risk again in the future.

12 The audit team observed that programme specific information, including programme specifications, was provided through detailed course handbooks. Of particular note was the mapping of programme curriculum and outcomes onto a variety of national and international benchmarks, including the subject benchmark statements, published by QAA, Credit Consortia Level Descriptors, distinctive characteristics identified by the Association of European Conservatoires and the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Skills Training Requirements. The team considered this to be a feature of good practice.

13 The audit team learned that resourcing matters were considered during the planning process, and where necessary they would be referred to the Joint Principals' Strategy Group, the senior executive group of the institution, for resolution. The team considered that resourcing decisions would have been better addressed earlier during consideration of the initial case to plan new provision. Trinity Laban might wish to consider how best to bring together resource and academic planning more formally at an earlier stage in the evolution of new programmes.

14 Programmes are generally approved for five years of operation, and are then formally submitted for a periodic review and re-approval. The re-approval process is identical to the initial approval process for new courses.

15 Both colleges have their own thorough processes for making minor changes to programmes and modules during their normal period of approval. The audit team noted significant numbers of such minor modifications occurring each year, with no consideration of the cumulative impact on the overall programme or student learning experience. The team found no evidence, however, that this had affected standards or quality adversely, and with regard to student interests the implementation of modifications was appropriately managed.

16 The audit team, in its consideration of programme approval activities, concluded that Trinity Laban conducts an appropriately robust initial and periodic scrutiny of both new and established provision, and thereby assures the setting of appropriate academic standards in its provision. The institution will no doubt wish to ensure that processes are reviewed to ensure that the Academic Board always retains an appropriate oversight of curricular development and modification in both colleges.

## **Annual monitoring**

17 Programme teams conduct annual monitoring processes, reporting upon student performance, external examiner input and student feedback. The institutional policy is for these reports to be considered and approved via the course committee, the Subject Board and the Academic Board. Following this internal institutional reporting cycle, the report is submitted to the relevant validating university. The audit team identified some instances where time constraints had meant that the report had been submitted to the University before consideration in the Academic Board.

18 The audit team noted an instance where relatively critical matters of concern had been noted in the annual reports of a collaborative programme, which had subsequently not attracted discussion or action from any of the deliberative committees considering the report. The team was reassured that the particular case had been properly addressed by the executive and by the

validating university. The team was not convinced, however, that the current deliberative committee processes were consistently able to identify and address matters that could potentially have major impact upon the maintenance of academic standards. The team therefore considered it advisable that Trinity Laban review the current committee processes so as to ensure that the Academic Board can effectively discharge its institutional responsibility for the overview of quality and standards.

### **External examiners**

19 The process for appointment and the duties of external examiners are largely subject to the practices of Trinity Laban's validating universities. For its own awards, processes are informed by the practices of the colleges' validating universities and are informed by the precepts of the *Code of practice*.

20 External examiners attend assessments of students' performance in dance and music, in many cases acting as a member of the assessment team. They also sample academic coursework and assessments and attend assessment boards. Their reports are considered by the relevant programme committees, whose discussions inform the formal response prepared by the programme leader. The audit team noted that while the relevant college's subject board and academic board subsequently received the examiner's report and the response to it as part of the annual monitoring process, the response might have first been sent from Trinity Laban to the validating university without the benefit of oversight and input from the Academic Board or other senior bodies at institutional level.

21 Following programme committee deliberations, the external examiner's report also forms part of the annual monitoring report. These are scrutinised by the respective subject boards and academic board, prior to submission to validating partners. The audit team strongly welcomed the decision by the Academic Board that it should in future receive an annual summary report of all comments from external examiners.

22 External examiners confirm that the academic and performance standards of awards granted following study at Trinity Laban are secure, and comparable with those of similar programmes elsewhere.

### **Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points - standards**

23 The *Code of practice* is fully reflected in the Trinity Laban's Academic Quality Handbook. The audit team noted that the various *Code* sections are reviewed regularly as part of the institution's enhancement processes.

24 Trinity Laban has fully embraced other aspects of the Academic Infrastructure. Programme specifications are presented during validation, and form a useful source of information both for staff and students. The relevant subject benchmark statements are used during the approval of new and re-designed programmes, and in addition the institution makes use of a number of other appropriate benchmarks. *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) serves as the map for defining detailed learning and assessment outcomes at each level.

25 The audit team considered that Trinity Laban makes good use of the Academic Infrastructure; indeed the systematic use of external benchmarks was considered a feature of good practice.

### **Assessment policies and regulations**

26 The Academic Quality Handbook details generic matters such as attendance, disabilities, late submission, coursework extensions and sets out Trinity Laban's Code of Practice for Assessment, in which the various responsibilities relating to assessment policy are clearly established. Marking and moderation processes, academic malpractice regulations, appeals and complaints procedures are also well defined. There is some variance in regulations between the

two colleges, Trinity and Laban, due to the differing requirements of the two art forms, and of the two validating universities.

27 The audit team became aware of inconsistencies across the institution in attendance policies and associated academic penalties; students on the undergraduate dance programme were subject to significantly more stringent requirements than those on the music programme. The external examiner for the dance programme had commented on this matter, and the annual programme evaluation acknowledged that other approaches might be more appropriate.

28 Students commented on inconsistencies in the approach of individual staff to the return of marked coursework. In meetings with staff, the audit team was informed that late return of work was rare. Further exploration revealed that the relevant National Student Survey results indicated notable student dissatisfaction with the timeliness of the return of marked work, and this was reinforced in student course questionnaires.

29 The audit team concluded that while in general, assessment policies were fit for purpose, the institution appeared somewhat inflexible in hearing the voices of its students regarding assessment practices. The team, therefore, advises that Trinity Laban review its attendance policy, and also give careful consideration to its policy on return of assessed work. It will no doubt wish to consider how best to take student feedback on these aspects of its provision into account, as it develops a more consistent approach across all its programmes.

### **Management information - statistics**

30 Trinity Laban has recently established a student record system, building on previous databases established by the two colleges. This is used to monitor student performance and progression and meet its reporting obligations to funding and other bodies. The validating universities maintain their own records for the students registered for their awards. Trinity Laban is asked to meet different requirements for each of its validating universities for the production of records of assessment.

31 Progression statistics are produced for validating partners on an annual basis and are monitored through the committee structure by course/programme committees, subject boards and the Academic Board for consideration and approval. Transcripts are produced either by the institution or by the validating University.

32 The new cross-institutional internal student record system had been commissioned and had thus far met all expectations. The audit team discerned a reluctant reliance on the record system of one of the validating universities, and it agreed that using multiple student record systems significantly increased the likelihood of errors in the records management of registration, assessment and student progression. The team would encourage Trinity Laban to re-engage with its validating partner to explore whether it might itself produce the records for all assessment boards, thereby reducing a possible risk to the academic reputation of all the partner institutions.

### **Summary**

33 The audit team found evidence in Trinity Laban's approval and review processes of thorough procedures and a comprehensive reflection by the programme team, with the proposal of appropriate remedial action when matters required attention. There was similarly evidence in subsequent reports indicating that action had been taken. The team, however, came to the conclusion that the sometimes variable paths taken by quality assurance-related reports through the institution's deliberative processes may not always enable the Academic Board to gain a sufficiently holistic overview of the continuing health of its provision.

34 Assessment and external examination were well defined and well managed at the college level. However, the audit team observed that key processes necessary for the assurance of academic standards were not systematically considered as part of a regular and holistic reflection

on the health of academic programmes at institutional level. The various routes (from the College, from the Subject Board, or from the Academic Board) whereby different programme reports might reach the validating university brought an element of inconsistency to the Academic Board's ability to take an institutional overview on matters regarding academic standards. The team considered that the recent decision for the Academic Board to receive annual summary reports of external examiners' comments was a positive move, and believed that Trinity Laban would wish to consider whether other indicators of academic standards might warrant a similar strategic overview.

35 In its consideration of the overall management of academic standards, the audit team found that standards were secure and appropriately assured at the level of the constituent colleges. At institutional level, the team strongly encourages Trinity Laban to continue its progress towards a more consolidated and harmonised quality management structure. This will assist in avoiding inconsistencies in practice, and enable the Academic Board to lift its horizon from the consideration of individual programme matters, commission the provision of comparative cross-institutional data, and take a broader overview of institutional-wide trends and concerns.

36 The audit team judged that confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of Trinity Laban's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

### **Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities**

37 The locus for managing the quality of students' learning opportunities lies with the Subject Board of each of Trinity Laban's colleges. The Academic Quality Handbook provides a guide to the policies, systems and codes of practice that Trinity Laban has developed. The Handbook presents two separately defined quality frameworks at Trinity Laban, for dance and for music, and these reflect the expectations of the two validating partners. This approach enabled those precepts of the *Code of practice* to be mapped against the Handbook and to be used consistently across the institution.

38 The use of practising dancers and musicians in the delivery of the curricula enhances the student learning experience and helps to produce employable students. Trinity Laban relies substantially upon the work of these practitioner staff members who are part-time or sessionally employed. Full-time staff members, while also providing teaching and tutorial support, mostly hold the key management posts within the institution.

39 Programme management at subject level is focused on effective teaching of the art form via practice-based curricula, creating a lively performance-based learning environment across the institution. It was evident to the audit team that enabling students to learn a performance-based art form from professionals who practice the art form makes a significant contribution to the quality of Trinity Laban's programme provision. The team concluded that the focus that is given to performance-related aspects of the curricula, together with the high quality of this aspect of provision constituted good practice.

40 During programme approval events, there is an appropriate focus on linking learning outcomes to the continued or improved availability of learning opportunities. The audit team found it difficult, however, to establish the formal process by which such discussions and outcomes, particularly in relation to learning resource planning, were taken forward and embedded into academic or strategic planning. Within its terms of reference the Academic Board is responsible for considering the development of academic activities and the resources needed to support them. The absence of any minuted discussions regarding learning resource planning suggested a weakness in the Board's exercise of responsibilities defined in its terms of reference. The team considered it desirable that Trinity Laban implement a more effective method for strategically linking learning resource planning and academic planning.

41 Programme specifications are routinely prepared for newly validated and reviewed programmes and their content is ultimately approved by the Academic Board. The specifications

made available to the team showed differences in presentation as between the two colleges, perhaps deriving from the expectations of the validating universities. Trinity Laban may wish to consider the value of a greater institutional consistency in this context, which could be achieved by aligning the presentation of its programme specifications with the model framework developed and used for the BMus programme.

42 While Trinity Laban sought to protect the interests of existing students on programmes that were to discontinue, a prescribed process for the discontinuation of programmes had not been developed. The institution will wish to consider the development of a formal procedure for programme discontinuation in the future.

43 The consistent use of anonymised student feedback for programme modules is built into the institution's monitoring and review processes. This feedback process is consistently implemented across Trinity Laban's programmes and it feeds into the annual monitoring process via a statistical analysis and written commentary from relevant component and module leaders. During the first year of a programme, nominated student representatives receive advice and training appropriate for their role. It was evident to the audit team that students considered that, in general, their views were heard, but they viewed resolution of their concerns primarily as a function of the their particular college and not of the institution as the overarching authority. Consequently, there was a risk that localised practice could preclude the equitable treatment of students across the institution.

44 Feedback to students on assessment was highlighted as receiving a particularly low score in the 2007 National Student Survey when compared to scores for other aspects of Trinity Laban programmes. Students from both Trinity and Laban were forthright in their view that assessment feedback often occurred later than stated in the relevant policy. The audit team concluded that the representative comments from students and the quantitative data from the National Student Survey could not be ignored and that it was advisable that Trinity Laban consider carefully the evidence from student feedback relating to the return of student work, to ensure that agreed policy is followed.

45 Trinity Laban promotes the active participation of students in quality assurance policy and decision-making processes. Students feel welcomed and valued in this role and are able to contribute to maintaining the quality of their own learning experience. The audit team concluded that, in general, effective use is made of student involvement in the quality management process.

46 In recent times there has been substantial investment in new estate, equipment and facilities to deliver music and dance. The purpose-built Laban centre is an example of this investment. It is a highly specialised building that is designed to provide a tailored environment for dance and is in itself a resource that is clearly valued by staff members and students. Trinity is primarily located in historic buildings at Greenwich. These have been comprehensively renovated for purpose, offering high-quality practice facilities, specially built recording studios as well as recital rooms, percussion pods, a music technology suite and listening stations in the library. Students also benefit from the the Jerwood Library of the Performing Arts, and special research collections and archives. Students praised the excellent library facilities and were also complimentary regarding the intranet support provided at Trinity but commented that no such resource was available at Laban. This was an established institutional shortcoming long recognised by staff and it is a matter that Trinity Laban will wish to resolve expeditiously.

47 The audit team judged that Trinity Laban's admissions policy was professionally implemented. An admissions/selections committee for each college authorises offers, based on general entry requirements and an audition. Auditions are standard across the institution and feedback is always available to applicants. Students were very positive about their experiences of the admissions process.

48 A system of student support, both academic and non-academic, is in place that embeds personal development planning within a personal tutor system. Separate systems operate in Trinity and Laban, but both encompass academic and pastoral care, with the issue of employability specifically addressed within some programmes. Students were satisfied with the support that they received.

49 The student services department in each college forms a hub for student support. Across the institution these services include the management of disability issues in relation to teaching and learning, student health and nutrition, personal counselling, chaplaincy, and careers advice. These initiatives, together with a planned general review of student services, indicated a clear institutional ambition to develop a more distinctive and centralised student services concept.

50 Many part-time and sessional staff are employed by Trinity Laban. This presents the institution with considerable staff support challenges. The audit team saw in draft stage a generic Trinity Laban staff handbook, and individual college staff handbooks. These last had not yet been updated to reflect the changed situation of staff in the merged institution. While the development of the generic handbook was a welcome sign, it was evident to the team that its introduction had been delayed and that policies were not yet implemented. The team noted that both annual appraisal and other staff support activities such as peer observation were relatively underdeveloped at the institution. Some staff development opportunities have taken place including community engagement projects, support for staff conference attendance, and some strategic work to help staff to attain Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. The team noted that Trinity Laban had now identified the need for development in this area and institutional priorities and action plans had been drawn up within a People Strategy. The team welcomed these initiatives, which were clearly now overdue. In view of the considerable setbacks experienced with regard to action points that had been recommended in the previous audit of Trinity, the team would advise that Trinity Laban now implement more expeditiously a comprehensive institutional staff development policy.

#### **Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement**

51 The institutional infrastructure for quality enhancement contains three central elements. Firstly, the Academic Strategy 2007-12 sets out a number of key aims for enhancement of the student experience, in terms of learning and teaching, research and scholarship, knowledge exchange and public engagement, staff development, and resources. Secondly, 'Creative Futures' (a centre for research, enterprise, and academic enhancement) is responsible for the project management of initiatives in learning and teaching, research and scholarly activity, knowledge exchange and transfer, and public and community engagement. Thirdly, the Academic Quality Handbook sets out the institution's procedures for quality enhancement in line with the *Code of practice*, the FHEQ, and national benchmarks.

52 The audit team identified a number of distinctive features of the academic strategy and its realisation in the work of Trinity Laban, which it found to be effective initiatives for enhancement. Prominent among these was the ongoing and active engagement with the local community. Trinity Laban sees itself as a knowledge exchange and centre of cultural excellence, and there was substantial evidence of a systematic commitment to public engagement in many areas. All students at the institution have the opportunity to participate in community-based projects, and there are a number of strong links with the local community, schools, and local and national activities and education in dance and music. Trinity Laban makes many of its facilities available to the local community and performances by students are open to the public.

53 The audit team also considered that Trinity Laban's support for students to care for their physical health and wellbeing was a distinctive and significant feature of its work. At Laban there is a specific commitment to look after the whole student, and in this respect the College offers a commendable level of service, which is being progressively developed through its work in the area of dance science. At Trinity, there are aspects of the student support system that, although

less focused upon student health and nutrition, nevertheless provide support for a level of care, particularly in regard to the response to student injury and physiotherapy. Trinity Laban is in the process of bringing these initiatives together in a strategic manner as an essential support of its student support framework. The team judged this to be an aspect of good practice in the work of the institution.

54 At the request of Trinity Laban, the audit team also considered issues of employability. From the validation documents it was found that the curricula for both dance and music were clearly and extensively oriented to the professional competences required within the respective professions of music and dance. The importance of music and dance within education, and within the community, was also very evident. A substantial commitment to the support for employability was evident in many aspects of the institution's work, but the team found that this aspect of support still remained to be fully developed, and to be properly understood and recognised by students.

55 Enhancement also occurs in response to the use of information derived from quality assurance procedures at Trinity Laban. Evidence from the audit trails confirmed that the colleges draw upon a comprehensive range of student feedback and course information. External examiner reports were discussed at subject boards within each college, and in annual monitoring reports; and minor modifications were made to programmes as a result, with a view to improvement. However, it was not clear at what point the Academic Board had oversight of enhancement issues. Nor was it clear that the information was harnessed, and actions directed, in a systematic way as part of an institutional approach to the quality enhancement of learning opportunities. The audit team therefore considered it desirable that Trinity Laban should seek to clarify further the institutional responsibility for the overview of quality enhancement.

## Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

56 Two programmes constitute the small amount of collaborative provision in Trinity Laban's portfolio of higher education work. The first of these is a pathway through the BMus (Hons) Performance in Indian Classical Music, delivered by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan UK, an Indian cultural centre for music and dance. The second is the FdA degree in Musical Theatre, delivered in conjunction with Reynolds Performing Arts, which is part of Reynolds Group PLC, a private limited company. Both partnerships are located in London and are validated by the University of Westminster through a tripartite agreement. Memoranda of Collaboration have been signed by all parties. In addition a Memorandum of Agreement between Trinity Laban and the providers clarifies the obligations and rights of each party.

57 The audit team noted that a robust first-recognition process had been followed and accorded due diligence. It was also noted that the validation of the programme was a separate and independent process to that of recognition. The Memoranda of Agreement set out extensive mechanisms for quality management and enhancement, including staff development and support arrangements.

58 Institutional processes for assuring the academic standards and quality of collaborative provision are in place, and these are set out in the Academic Quality Handbook. These align with the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. The provision is subject to the same monitoring and review processes that apply to internal provision at Trinity Laban, including scrutiny by the external examiner and a report to the validating University. In addition, Trinity Laban appoints a liaison officer, who makes at least two visits per term to the partner institution. Written reports of these visits are presented at the relevant subject board.

59 However, the audit team found that it was not clearly established how, or at what point, the Academic Board received reports on the establishment and monitoring of collaborative provision. The team also noted one instance of a delay in completing the formal signature of the parts of an agreement, which at the time could have put the college (Trinity) at risk. The team,

therefore, advises Trinity Laban to review its current committee processes so to ensure that the Academic Board receives the necessary information to formally approve and monitor any collaborative provision.

60 Together with the validating universities, Trinity Laban was, more generally, operating appropriate quality assurance arrangements to secure academic standards and quality of learning opportunities in its collaborative partners. Overall, the team can confirm that the judgements on the management of academic standards and learning opportunities made in other sections of this report apply to the collaborative provision.

## **Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students**

61 Trinity Laban currently has a very small number of postgraduate research students registered. These are pursuing their research studies at Laban and are registered under City University regulations. Trinity has no history of registering postgraduate research students. Laban has not sought to increase these numbers over the last few years, waiting until clearly identified priorities for research are identified within the merged institution. At the time of this audit, Trinity Laban was about to submit for approval a new MPhil/PhD programme to its validating partner (City University), which will enable students of music, as well as those of dance to enrol on postgraduate research degrees. The audit team noted this positive example of the institution taking a major initiative as a merged corporate body. Supervision of postgraduate research student activity is exercised by the Research Degree Programme Committee, which reports to the Research Board. The Research Degree Programme Committee is responsible for nomination of supervisors and their training, monitoring the progress of students, the quality of supervision and addressing students feedback.

62 There are clearly identified and satisfactory arrangements for the selection, admission, induction, training monitoring and progress of the postgraduate research students. Induction focuses on academic, administrative and social element of students' needs. Mechanisms are in place to obtain student feedback, and a variety of approaches are effective in capturing the views of the small part-time student population.

63 The complaints and appeals procedures set down by City University apply to all postgraduate research students. A range of informal mechanisms exists to try to resolve issues with recourse to the formal process. The one student the audit team met had no experience of these processes, but confirmed that staff were responsive to student feedback. Students are assessed in line with the regulations set down by City University.

64 The audit team concluded that the institution's arrangements for its postgraduate research students meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

## **Section 7: Published information**

65 The approval of academic documentation is carried out at several levels. For example, the programme handbooks are approved by the programme leader and publicity material such as the prospectuses, are overseen by the Academic Registrar while web-based information is checked by the newly appointed Web Content Manager. The same arrangements apply to material produced in print and web-based form by the collaborative partners delivering Trinity Laban courses.

66 The audit team learned from the students it met, through reading the students' written submission and through examination of programme committee minutes, that the information available to students, both before and during their courses of study, was accurate and helpful. This applied to module content and assessment, award criteria, as well as regulations on both academic and non-academic appropriate conduct.



67 The small size of Trinity Laban means that its entry on the Unistat website unavoidably consists of largely factual demographic data of only limited evaluative use. National Student Survey data are considered in the course monitoring process through course committees and subject boards.

68 Overall, the audit found that published materials are viewed by Trinity Laban's students as being accurate and complete, and that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

## **Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations**

### **Features of good practice**

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

- the institution's procedures for benchmarking of programmes at validation (paragraphs 12, 25)
- the focus that is given to performance-related aspects of the curricula and the high quality of this aspect of provision (paragraph 39)
- the strong level of engagement with the local and professional community (paragraph 52)
- the manner in which Trinity Laban's programmes aim to address the whole student experience and student well-being (paragraph 53).

### **Recommendations for action**

70 Recommendations for actions that are advisable:

- to review the current committee processes so as to ensure that the Academic Board can effectively discharge its institutional responsibility for the overview of quality and standards (paragraphs 18, 35, 59)
- to review the attendance policy for the undergraduate provision at Laban with regard to its impact on student assessment and the equitable treatment of students across the institution (paragraph 29)
- to consider carefully the evidence relating to the timeliness of the return of student work, to ensure that agreed policy is followed (paragraphs 29, 44)
- to develop and implement more expeditiously a comprehensive institutional staff development policy (paragraph 50).

71 Recommendations for actions that are desirable:

- to progress rapidly towards a more consolidated and harmonised institution-wide quality management structure (paragraphs 8, 10)
- to ensure that committee minuting practice provides adequate evidence of engagement with the matters under discussion, with a view to internal and external accountability (paragraph 10)
- to implement a more effective method for strategically linking learning resource planning and academic planning (paragraphs 13, 40)
- to clarify the focus of institutional responsibility for the overview of quality enhancement (paragraph 55).

## Appendix

### **Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance's response to the institutional audit report**

Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance welcomes the outcome of the QAA's 2008 Institutional Audit which places confidence in the current and likely future management of the standards of its awards. This Audit is the first recognition of Trinity College of Music and Laban as a merged institution and has thus helped contribute to the establishment of the new institutional identity as well as serving as a benchmark for future academic achievements.

Trinity Laban will build on the good practices cited by the Audit team by continuing to focus on the holistic approach to the development and well-being of students which we believe is an integral part of our identity and ethos. QAA's encouragement for the ongoing focus on performance-related activities and engagement with both professional and local communities likewise reinforces the institution's aim to produce professional artists with portfolios of skills that will enhance their future employability.

The findings demonstrate that the institution has begun to align and consolidate the quality management processes of its constituent colleges in an effort to provide a strong institution-wide base for the oversight of academic standards. This process of embedding the quality assurance and enhancement procedures of the institution will continue under the guidance of Creative Futures, which has overall responsibility for oversight of Trinity Laban's quality management agenda. Since the Audit, for example, Creative Futures has supported the institution in introducing an institutional Staff Development Handbook, both as a source of guidance to a wide variety of development events, and to provide staff with a clear statement of the institution's commitment to the provision of opportunity for development. Such initiatives, as well as the wide range of internal quality reviews currently planned or in progress, will ensure that the institution is well equipped to face future challenges and audits with confidence.

Alongside the implementation of Trinity Laban's 2007-2012 Academic Strategy, the QAA's Audit has proactively focused the institution's development of its quality management and enhancement strategy. The ongoing development of structures for the discussion and documentation of quality management activities will provide a clear focus in the consideration of enhancement initiatives and their resourcing implications. The Audit has also been instrumental in encouraging participation in such processes by staff and students, as well as helping facilitate the alignment of these processes across the HEI and promoting a shared sense of good practice in the oversight of academic standards. This Audit report will thus supplement the sources used by the institution as it continues to develop its institutional strategies for enhancing the educational and artistic opportunities available to students in both its taught and research degree programmes monitored by the Trinity Laban Academic Board.

