QAA

University for the Creative Arts

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

April 2012

Contents

About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University for the Creative Arts. The review took place from 23 to 27 April 2012 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Amanda Dowd
- Dr Clive Marsland
- Mrs Rebecca Rock (student reviewer)
- Mr Peter Watson (review secretary).

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

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

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

In reviewing the University for the Creative Arts the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The theme for the academic year 2011-12 is 'the first year student experience'.

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

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

Key findings

This section summarises the QAA review team's key findings about the University for the Creative Arts.

QAA's judgements about the University for the Creative Arts

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the University for the Creative Arts.

- Academic standards at the University **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at the University for the Creative Arts.

- There is a comprehensive and systematic deployment of learning and teaching innovations, led by the Learning and Teaching Team, across the University (paragraphs 1.3.2, 1.4.1, 2.1.1, 2.1.2 and 2.1.3).
- The library has a comprehensive and focussed approach to delivering a service to students and staff that supports learning and teaching. This is strengthened by an effective commitment to continuous improvement (paragraphs 2.2.1, 2.2.3 and 2.2.4).
- Employability is embedded within the curriculum, and a range of opportunities is provided by the University to enhance the employability of its students (paragraphs 2.7.1, 2.7.2 and 2.7.3).

Recommendations

The QAA review team **recommends** the University for the Creative Arts to:

- ensure that all students receive timely feedback on their assessed work and develop mechanisms for identifying that reasonable feedback timescales are being met, by the start of the next academic year 2012-13 (paragraph 1.3.4)
- pay particular attention to achieving consistency in the application of policies, procedures and strategies, particularly at the course level, to be initiated from the academic year 2012-13 with demonstrable achievement of results at the end of that year (2012-13) (paragraphs 1.3.4, 1.3.5, 2.3.1 and 3.1)
- ensure that all current and future outcomes of University initiatives are effectively communicated to staff and students, work to begin from the publication of the review report (paragraphs 2.2.2 and 2.12.2)
- work with the Students' Union to ensure that students are properly prepared for their role as members of validation and review panels, starting with validations and reviews in the next academic year 2012-13 (paragraph 2.3.1)
- ensure that actions taken as a result of consultations with students are fed back to students in a timely and consistent manner, work to begin from the publication of the review report (paragraph 2.3.3).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that the University for the Creative Arts is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The University plans to implement the recommendations to improve the consistency of application of extenuating circumstances as set out in the University's draft Assessment Report 2011 (paragraph 1.3.5).
- The University will implement a student charter by the beginning of the academic year 2012-13 (paragraph 2.14.1).
- The University is furthering enhancement activity and reinforcing a systematic approach in this area by introducing an enhancement theme to annual academic monitoring from 2011-12 (paragraph 4.2).

Public information

The information the University provides about its higher education is valid, reliable, useful and accessible.

The First Year Student Experience

The University provides focussed support for all students in their transition into the first year of UK higher education, including international students and students with disabilities. This begins with pre-arrival information which is provided through the Applicant Portal and continues with an extended course induction over a period of some weeks. Curriculum design pays particular attention to the experience of the first six months of study by, for example, allowing more contact time with academic staff in the first year.

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

About the University for the Creative Arts

The University for the Creative Arts is a provider of specialist art and design education. Its mission is 'to excel as a university for the arts which fosters creativity through local connections and global aspirations'.

The University has 6,774 students in total from over 80 countries studying on pre-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the areas of art, design, architecture, media and communication. There are campuses across five towns in the South East of England (although this will be reduced to four by 2014).

Since its last review in 2007-08, the institution has successfully gained university title and has moved from a college-based structure to a faculty-based one. A new Vice-Chancellor was appointed in September 2011 with subsequent implications for the future strategic direction of the University. For example, a new Strategic Plan was published in 2011 and an academic management restructuring was nearing conclusion at the time of the review visit.

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/IRENI/pages/default.aspx

The University believes that, as a small, specialist institution, one of the key challenges it faces is the new funding regime coupled with the fact that it operates across multiple sites, which brings operational challenges. It has plans in place to mitigate against these challenges and to diversify its income stream.

A long-term collaborative partnership with the Arts Institute Bournemouth has been phased out since the last review of the University, and a small number of strategically aligned new collaborative partnerships have been developed with the aim of consolidation rather than expansion. Five collaborative partners are now validated to deliver University for the Creative Arts awards.

Explanation of the findings about the University for the Creative Arts

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

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

1 Academic standards

Outcome

The academic standards at the University for the Creative Arts **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 The University exercises authority in the approval and modification of its courses to ensure that they are matched to the appropriate level of the *Framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

1.1.1 Specific advice is provided for course teams working to align courses with the FHEQ in course approval processes, and programme specifications refer appropriately to the levels of the FHEQ.

1.1.2 The University has recently introduced a new 30-credit framework; the move to this framework has been carefully managed and the programme of revalidation required has been informed by a consistent alignment of all courses, including those within collaborative provision, to the FHEQ.

Use of external examiners

1.2 The University's use of external examiners is strong and scrupulous. The roles and functions of external examiners within the University are defined in accordance with QAA's *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*). External examiners are given clear contracts setting out the expectations of their role. They also receive briefing documents at both a University and course level which define their responsibilities. Academic staff confirmed that they are able to see their external examiners for development meetings in addition to formal examination board events, and that they find such meetings useful. Student representatives were aware of the availability of external examiner reports.

1.2.1 The University responds to external examiners' reports in detail through its annual academic monitoring (AAM) process, and the external examiners' report template makes clear that an examiner can write directly to the Vice-Chancellor for immediate response and action at that level. The University might consider making detailed, individual responses to

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external examiners before the AAM process to ensure timeliness of response and of action to comments made in the reports.

1.2.2   An overview of themes arising from external examiners' reports is considered at the Academic Policy, Quality and Standards Committee (APQS). This is a valuable summary of thematic issues arising from external examiners' reports; however, the University could generate more comprehensive and detailed reports for its senior committees, aligning external examiners' reports with other management data.

1.2.3   The University has recently established an external examiners' forum to brief and update external examiners and to share good practice and ensure consistency of external examiners' responsibilities across the University. Its introduction is a useful mechanism for strengthening the coordination of external examining within the University. An external examiners' newsletter has also been introduced recently with a view to informing external examiners of university-wide developments, thus helping to contextualise their role within the institution.

Assessment and standards

1.3   The University's assessment strategies are effective in ensuring that students have the opportunity to demonstrate the learning outcomes of awards.

1.3.1   Assessment strategies are considered at the design, approval and review of courses and are included in programme specifications. An annual Assessment Overview Report is considered by APQS with the intention of reviewing the effectiveness of assessment processes across the University.

1.3.2   The Learning and Teaching department offers workshops to support course design and assessment, and provides guidelines for new staff which refer to the Assessment Policy handbook among other handbooks and policies.

1.3.3   Students receive assessment briefs in their course handbook. They told the review team that they receive full and informative briefings to help them understand what is required of them in relation to each assessment. A standard University pro forma is used to provide them with feedback on their assessment. Much of this feedback is developmental, supporting the student to identify areas for improvement in future pieces of work. Blind and double marking and moderation of marks are employed.

1.3.4   Students were not clear as to when they should receive feedback or how to raise concerns if they had not received it within a certain period of time. Examples of feedback being provided ranged from between one week to several months. The review team **recommends** that the University should ensure that all students receive timely feedback in their assessment and that mechanisms are developed for identifying that reasonable feedback timescales are being met. It also **recommends** that the University pay particular attention to achieving consistency in the application of policies, procedures and strategies, particularly at the course level.

1.3.5   The review team found several references to the inconsistent or inappropriate application of extenuating circumstances. The University has identified this as a concern - the draft Assessment Report (2010-11) identifies inconsistent application of the policy and acknowledges that there have been instances of inappropriate application to progress groups or individual students. The team **affirms** the University's actions to improve the consistency of application of extenuating circumstances as set out in the draft Assessment Report 2010-11. It also **recommends** that the University pay particular attention to achieving

consistency in the application of policies, procedures and strategies, particularly at the course level.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.4   The University's processes for the design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes, as set out in its Quality Handbook, enable standards to be set and maintained. Students are able to demonstrate the learning outcomes of awards.

1.4.1   Processes and documentation are clear, sound and accessible, with appropriate references to subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice*. Helpful guidance and a workshop is provided by the Learning and Teaching department in relation to designing courses. Chairs of validation and review panels receive informal training, and there is guidance for students invited to meet with the panels. However, student members of panels are not trained (see paragraph 2.3.1). Professionals from the world of art and design are involved in validation where possible and external examiners' comments contribute to the AAM process.

1.4.2   The large number of revalidations due to the introduction of the new credit framework has been a developmental experience and, as a result, the University is considering moving to school-based review in future. An output log for Validation and Review, detailing the outcomes of each event, gives the University good oversight of the progress and outcomes from validations and periodic reviews. Minor changes to programmes are handled appropriately by Boards of Studies.

1.4.3   The AAM process at course level feeds into faculty-level discussion and all faculty AAMs are received by APQS. An Annual Monitoring Overview report is produced. The AAM reports include action plans that are kept under review through Boards of Studies.

1.4.4   Owing to the heavy programme of revalidations, periodic review had been postponed for a year. A Quality Enhancement Review Process has been introduced to disseminate good practice, by asking courses that have demonstrated strengths through quality assurance processes to mentor courses that have demonstrated weaknesses in a specific area.

Subject benchmarks

1.5   Reference points such as subject benchmark statements and qualification frameworks are used consistently and effectively in the University's processes for the design, approval, delivery and review of its courses.

1.5.1   Initial approval forms, validation reports, programme specifications and periodic review documentation all routinely refer to subject benchmark statements and qualification frameworks. Consideration of updated reference points is also clear. The requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies are considered in conjunction with subject benchmark statements where appropriate.

2   Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at the University for the Creative Arts **meets UK expectations.** The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1   The University supports professional standards for teaching and support of learning comprehensively and effectively.

2.1.1   Professional standards for teaching and the support of learning are supported in a number of ways at the University. The Learning and Teaching department works closely with the Human Resources Learning and Development team to provide a comprehensive programme of induction, mentoring and continuing professional development. The Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in the Creative Arts is a requirement for staff new to the University with less than three years' full-time teaching experience and no teaching qualification. Many other opportunities for professional development exist.

2.1.2   The University's peer observation scheme ('peer supported review activity') has recently been reviewed and revised and is valued by staff. The success of the scheme will be evaluated at the end of the academic year. Mentoring for new staff is facilitated by the Human Resources Learning and Development team. Induction is at course level with reviews after three and six months of employment.

2.1.3   The comprehensive and systematic deployment of learning and teaching innovations across the University, led by the Learning and Teaching department, was viewed by the team as a **feature of good practice**.

Learning resources

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

2.2.1   Central oversight of the quality and effectiveness of the Library, Learning Services and Information Technology is maintained annually by APQS. A Capital Investment Plan forms part of the strategic measures to meet the challenges of providing specialist learning resources for the Creative Arts, and the AAM process comments on the suitability of resources. Students are consulted about the development of facilities.

2.2.2   The student information portal, myUCA, is supported by the Learning and Teaching department. Its use varies across course teams. The University has prescribed a minimum content which helps to ensure that students have access to the information they need during their course and includes the relevant programme specification, external examiners' report(s) and course handbook. myUCA was unpopular with students who met the review team. There had been a recent review, but the student written submission indicated that many students were unaware that improvements had been made. The review team looked at various sites on myUCA and found it to be fit for purpose. The University may wish to consider strategies for demonstrating its full range of benefits to students. The team **recommends** that the University ensures that all current and future outcomes of University initiatives are effectively communicated to staff and students.

2.2.3   The Library and Learning Service strategic plan states that it is 'user-led'. The Library and Learning Service has detailed targets as set out in the Customer Charter. The

review team saw many instances of the Service achieving those targets. It feeds back improvements to its service to students via a 'you said, we did' section of its website and through articles in their E-zine, an online magazine/blog. Challenges in resourcing a multi-site operation and in meeting student expectations with regard to library opening hours have been alleviated by the introduction of self-service machines which allows for extended opening hours without significant resource implications.

2.2.4   The Library's comprehensive and focused approach to delivering a service to students and staff that supports learning and teaching and which is strengthened by an effective commitment to continuous improvement was viewed by the review team as a **feature of good practice.**

Student voice

2.3   Students contribute effectively to quality assurance. The review team made two recommendations to ensure that the University maximises this contribution (see paragraphs 2.3.1 and 2.3.3).

2.3.1   Students are represented on University committees and School and Faculty Boards of Study. They are also involved in periodic review and validation processes and are members of the panels associated with those events. Support for student representatives can be accessed via the Students' Union; however, support at course level is variable. The University has identified a need to promote consistency in this area and has been working with the Students' Union to improve the representation system. Training for course representatives has been developed for 2011-12. Students who had been panel members on validation and review panels told the review team that they felt underprepared for their role and, as a result, found it difficult to contribute effectively to the process. The review team, therefore, **recommends** that the University work with the Students' Union to ensure that students are properly prepared for their role as members of validation and review panels.

2.3.2   Informal meetings between staff and students occur at all levels, including a meeting between the deputy Vice-Chancellor and student representatives before each meeting of APQS.

2.3.3   The University provides students with the opportunity to feed back their views at many levels, for example, at the annual Student Experience Conference and through internal and national surveys, the results of which are considered at institutional and at course level. However, students consistently told the review team that they did not feel that they had been heard, as they were unaware of any changes that had been made as a result of their feedback. The University has established an Internal Communications group which reports to the Leadership Team to develop a student communication and action plan. The team **recommends** that the University ensure that it promptly communicates to students the outcomes of student consultation and feedback processes.

Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.4   Management information is provided at both institutional and course level. It is detailed and comprehensive but has the potential to be used more widely and effectively.

2.4.1   Annual Academic Monitoring forms are pre-populated with management information for each course, along with information on comparative national and institutional norms. The information is comprehensive but could be made more valuable if support was provided to staff to enable to them to consider the information at course level in a more strategic and operational manner.

2.4.2   An annual Equality and Diversity overview report is published and the information it contains is provided in the data sets to support the AAM process. However, it focuses mainly on staff matters. The information could be better used by the University to analyse the progression data of students with disabilities in a more thorough and timely manner.

2.4.3   The data to support postgraduate and undergraduate annual monitoring is comprehensive. A new online portal, DocShare, makes management information available and staff can access this through its reporting system. Online support is provided for staff who wish to access the information.

Admission to the University

2.5   Clear, fair and explicit admissions policies and procedures exist and are consistently applied.

2.5.1   The University admissions policy sets out admissions criteria clearly along with the admission process. Admissions tutors are trained to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively.

2.5.2   The applicant portal supports students in preparing for application and interview, and provides written interview feedback. Further information for applicant students is available in the form of programme specifications, which can easily be accessed through the course pages of the University's website.

Complaints and appeals

2.6   The University has formal complaints and appeals procedures which are supplemented by informal discussion mechanisms.

2.6.1   Formal complaints and appeals procedures can be found on the University's website. Forms to support the process are also available through the site. Students are directed to the Students' Union for help and support with the process. Annual overview reports are received by Academic Board and a 'lessons learned' paper for 2010-11 was considered by APQS and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee.

2.6.2   Students who met the review team were aware of the complaints and appeals procedures. They said that there were good relationships between student representatives and course leaders and that it was possible to resolve problems informally via this route. Staff also confirmed that student focus groups, campus fora and other informal mechanisms were effective in dealing with problems at an early stage.

Career advice and guidance

2.7   The University's approach to career education, information, advice and guidance is comprehensive and effective.

2.7.1   The University's approach to employability is holistic and student-centred and aims for parity across campuses. Various central and course-level measures have been implemented to enhance the employability of students. Focus groups with students have been conducted regarding the nature and scope of the careers advice provided, and other strategic developments within the University point to a systematic deployment of employability initiatives for the benefit of students. A cross-university Enterprise Summer School with the University of Surrey encourages student career motivation across a number of disciplines.

2.7.2   Assessment within the University reinforces employability through real-world or simulated real-world briefs, carefully managed placement learning opportunities and the updating of curricula to reflect current sector imperatives.

2.7.3   The embedding of employability within the curriculum, and the range of opportunities provided by the University to enhance the employability of its students, was seen by the review team as a **feature of good practice**.

Supporting disabled students

2.8   The University manages learning opportunities appropriately to enable the entitlements of disabled students to be met. There is a strategic commitment to equality and diversity which could be strengthened by a firmer emphasis on the needs of disabled students (see paragraph 2.4.2).

2.8.1   A wide range of mechanisms is used to support students with disabilities, and these are both strategically and operationally effective. The Statement of Service of the Student Disability Service is appropriately directed towards providing advice to students, developing an inclusive curriculum and promoting independent study, thus providing an appropriate framework for the good management of learning opportunities. Students met by the review team felt well-supported and noted the University's efforts to be as inclusive as possible in terms of the opportunities offered to students across the institution.

2.8.2   Staff development on disability awareness is provided and the Student Disability Service runs an annual development day for staff. Specific disability and diversity events are held as part of the 'Supporting the Supporters' programme.

Supporting international students

2.9   International students are well supported and the quality of learning opportunities is appropriate.

2.9.1   An important thread in the University's Strategic Plan is a commitment to further internationalising the student body by developing an integrated International Strategy which will have cross-institution benefits. The University recently commissioned a review of its developments in this area and the suggested action has been appropriately implemented and monitored.

2.9.2   Support for international students is provided within a framework of policies and procedures which are intended to support the entire student body. However, significant efforts are made to support international students, including pre-induction material and a 'Meet and Greet' scheme at UK airports. This is supported by targeted student information. Students met by the review team agreed that their transition to UK higher education had been well managed by the University. UK students are encouraged to participate in Study Abroad programmes as a means of strengthening the international culture of the whole University.

2.9.3   The University acknowledges the importance of conversion and retention figures for international students. It has implemented new summer courses which were having a positive impact on international students' language proficiency and feeling of inclusion by the time of formal enrolment.

2.9.4   As noted in paragraph 2.4.1 in relation to management information, the University could make better use of data on international students at course level to monitor their progress and achievement.

Supporting postgraduate research students

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

2.10.1   While the awarding body for research degrees is the University of Brighton, the University has its own research degree management structure which effectively manages research students' progress through their programmes of study. The research infrastructure is complex and, while students met by the review team confirmed appropriate levels of support by supervisory teams and looked to the Research Office for guidance on day-to-day matters, the roles of the many other personnel and fora in relation to research were not entirely clear to the team. The University may wish to review the extent and scope of these roles and groups in relation to existing research capacity at the University.

2.10.2   Supervisory teams for research students are provided with training and if the supervisory team is inexperienced, appropriate arrangements for its support is made. There is a comprehensive, if not entirely streamlined, network of information for research students.

2.10.3   The admissions policy for research students is consistent with sector expectations. Students are clear on how to progress and oversight of their progression is provided through the AAM process.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.11   The quality of learning opportunities delivered as part of collaborative arrangements is managed effectively to enable students to achieve their awards.

2.11.1   The University has a targeted and incremental approach to the development of its collaborative provision portfolio. Programmes are developed in areas that are relevant to the ethos and specialisms of the University and are carefully managed to assure both quality and standards. Oversight of collaborative provision within the deliberative structures of the University is appropriate. Documentation in relation to the institution's development and ongoing assurance and monitoring of its collaborative portfolio is also appropriate. Course handbooks varied according to the nature of the provision but all were comprehensive and student-centred. A collaborative provision register is maintained but, as acknowledged by the University, would benefit from revision.

2.11.2   In one case, rather than a formal due diligence procedure being carried out, a number of due diligence questions had been asked at site visits and a successful application on behalf of the British Council had been considered. The University intends to carry out a due diligence exercise for the imminent revalidation of the programme. The review team encourages the University to carry out this due diligence exercise in advance of the revalidation and to adhere to its intention to automatically precede all future new approvals with a due diligence procedure. The University should also consider carefully any plans to develop new awards to ensure that the relevant level of expertise at the level of the award is available within the home institution to support partners.

2.11.3   There is an arrangement in place for students studying at the American International University London on courses validated by London Southbank University to transfer to a programme validated by the University for the Creative Arts. This would lead to a situation where some students are studying for a London Southbank University award while others in the same cohort are studying for a University for the Creative Arts award.

While it is unlikely that this would occur, the University may wish to consider avoiding arrangements of this kind.

2.11.4   The University's plans to review its collaborative provision policy and procedures in 2012-13 are appropriate and will strengthen further its management and oversight in this area.

2.11.5   Students on collaborative provision programmes are supported appropriately and staff at partner institutions are provided with a mutually supportive environment, for example with regard to staff development opportunities, where possible.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.12   The quality of learning opportunities delivered through flexible and distributed arrangements, including e-learning, is managed effectively.

2.12.1   The University's strategic aims with regard to flexible and distributed learning are set out in the Learning and Teaching Strategy. One collaborative partnership, with the Open College of the Arts, has significant expertise in online delivery, and the University will want to be sure that the ongoing quality of learning opportunities for any collaborative partnerships that involve e-learning are maintained and enhanced.

2.12.2   Virtual support for campus-based learning is provided through the myCourse element of myUCA. myCourse is fit for purpose, with appropriate information about learning materials and induction arrangements for IT skills that are effective in supporting the first year student experience. However, the University still has work to do to convince students of the value of myUCA as an efficient and user-friendly online learning resource (see also paragraph 2.2.2).

Work-based and placement learning

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

2.13.1   The University has procedures in place to ensure that students develop a 'real world' experience during their programme of study (see also paragraph 2.7.2). The University's Placement Learning Policy is clear and is implemented effectively.

2.13.2   Placements may be arranged either formally, as part of a student's programme of study, or informally by the students themselves. Both are properly overseen and proactively supported by academic staff, and care is taken to ensure that summative assessments with regard to placement work are assessed by University staff.

2.13.3   Each programme that features a placement has a placement tutor. Placement reports are completed by placement providers and by students on placement. These are considered by course leaders and, where relevant, by Boards of Study. Risk assessments are undertaken and the University monitors placement arrangements at institutional as well as course level. Students produce a self-reflective report on their placement activity and this is an effective aid to their learning experience.

Student charter

2.14   A draft student charter setting out the mutual expectations of the University and its students is available and will be implemented in 2012-13.

2.14.1   The draft student charter has been jointly drafted by the University and the Students' Union. The draft is currently displayed in central student areas so that students can feed back their views. The draft clearly sets out the ethos and expectations for the students' learning experience. The review team **affirms** the action taken by the University to implement a student charter by the beginning of the academic year 2012-13.

3   Public information

Outcome

The University for the Creative Arts **makes information about academic standards and quality publicly available** via its website. The information is clear, accessible, accurate, and up to date. Students find the information useful both in helping them make an informed choice when applying to the University for the Creative Arts, and in preparing for what they might expect when they join. However, given comments made earlier in this report (paragraphs 2.2.2 and 2.12.2) about student views on myUCA, the University will wish to ensure that information for prospective and current students is as accessible and accurate as possible. The team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

Findings

3.1   The information specified in HEFCE 2006/45 is made publicly available via the University's website and also, where appropriate, in course handbooks. The University will wish to ensure consistency of information and of its translation into the student learning experience.

3.2   Responsibility for managing the accuracy of information published in prospectuses and on the website is shared between the Head of Marketing and Communications and the Head of Quality and Standards, who is responsible for the accuracy of academic information. Contracts with collaborative partners require information published about the University by those partners to be signed off by the Head of Quality and Standards. This responsibility is shared with the Head of Marketing and Communications if the information goes beyond the academic.

3.3   Students were divided in their views as to whether or not information was useful, both in terms of advance information and with regard to what was published about their courses on myUCA (see paragraph 2.2.2). However, the information that the team viewed on myUCA was clear and accessible and included the specified minimum content. The University will wish to continue its work on the usability of myUCA.

4   Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at the University for the Creative Arts **meets UK expectations.** The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Findings

4.1   The University described to the review team a reflective approach inherent to arts disciplines which generates a culture of enhancement across the institution. The twin aims of assuring and improving the students' learning opportunities which sit at the heart of the Quality Strategy emphasise the University's commitment to continuous improvement. The review team found various examples of enhancement across the University; however, a

means by which all enhancement initiatives are captured into a coherent, consistent and systematic enhancement-driven strategy for learning would be beneficial.

4.2   The review team **affirms** the introduction of an annual enhancement theme to the AAM process from 2011-12 as a means of furthering enhancement activity and reinforcing a systematic approach (see also paragraph 1.4.4).

5   Theme: First Year Student Experience

Each academic year a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams. In 2011-12 the theme is the **First Year Student Experience**.

The review team investigated the first year student experience at the University for the Creative Arts. It found that students were effectively supported at application through to induction stage, with particular efforts made for those students who were entering UK higher education from overseas for the first time.

Supporting students' transition

5.1   Induction is provided at institutional and at course level. Some courses have moved away from a single induction week to a more extended approach, thus avoiding an overload of information at the start of a course. Effective support for international students is provided to assist in the transition to UK higher education over the first few weeks of their being in the country. The University is proactive in contacting those students who have declared a disability ahead of enrolment to discuss their needs and put in place individual support packages.

5.1.1   The review team saw examples of well-considered curriculum design that places a greater emphasis on year one in art and design and includes higher contact time with academic staff. Changes to the credit framework will also mean that students are assessed in a way that will provide them with an early indication of their performance.

Information for first-year students

5.2   Information, including programme specifications, for first-year students is provided through the applicant portal and through the course pages on myUCA (see also paragraph 2.5.2).

5.2.1   Students are supported in preparation for application and interview through the applicant portal, which also includes tips on preparing a portfolio and writing a personal statement. Course information is provided via myUCA and course handbooks (see also paragraph 2.2.2). The extended induction referred to in paragraph 5.1 is also beneficial in terms of providing staged information to new students.

Assessment and feedback

5.3   Students are effectively introduced to academic conventions and, as reported in paragraph 5.1.1, they will have an early opportunity to gauge their performance due to changes in the credit framework.

5.3.1   The university has a well developed approach to introducing academic conventions to students through its Academic Integrity Site. This site, for staff and students, supports a

clear policy with resources including online tutorials and the use of Turnitin submission software.

Monitoring retention and progression

5.4   The University monitors the progression and retention of first-year students at course and faculty level (see also paragraph 2.4.3).

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

credit(s) A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

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

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

framework A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

framework for higher education qualifications A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

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

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

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

programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

programme specifications Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

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

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

subject benchmark statement A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

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

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