

**Leeds College of Music**

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*Printed copies are available from:*

Linney Direct  
Adamsway  
Mansfield  
NG18 4FN

Tel 01623 450788

Fax 01623 450481

Email [qaa@linneydirect.com](mailto:qaa@linneydirect.com)

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## Preface

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

In England and Northern Ireland, QAA conducts institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector, to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council in England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations to assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills (now the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills). It was revised in 2006 following recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, a representative group established to review the structures and processes of quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland, and 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 Leeds College of Music (the College) from 26 to 30 November 2007 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the College offers on behalf of the University of Leeds and the Open University.

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

In institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities is 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 Leeds College of Music 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 the University of Leeds and the Open University
- 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 audit team identified that the College takes some deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the learning opportunities available to students. Some of the College's mechanisms for achieving this, notably the establishment of the Quality and Standards Unit, are of recent development.

### Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The College has no postgraduate research students.

### Published information

The audit found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College 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 annual programme evaluation process as a mechanism for annual course review
- engagement with the music industry and expert professional practice
- the pastoral support provided by the Student Services Unit.

## Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the College to:

- keep under review recent changes to the terms of reference and operation of the College's committees, in order to assure itself that the new arrangements meet its aspiration to ensure timely implementation of action plans and achievement of targets
- continue to develop institutional oversight of policies, processes, documentation and associated roles and responsibilities
- develop its framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities to enable the College to meet fully the requirements of the Open University's Handbook for Validated Awards
- develop a set of comprehensive assessment regulations clarifying the arrangements for the classification of Open University-validated awards, progression from these awards, the consideration of borderline cases, and the application of compensation; and communicate these arrangements consistently to staff, external examiners and students
- develop the management of assessment marks
- improve the timetabling of learning activities.

It would be desirable for the College to:

- develop and express more clearly the links between intended learning outcomes, generic grading criteria and assignment marking criteria
- develop mechanisms to ensure that it can draw and reflect upon qualitative and quantitative data from the institution and the wider sector, in order to benchmark and to monitor institutional performance
- consider the development of internal periodic review, in order to promote greater College ownership of programme development
- take more effective action to address student concerns evident in the results of the National Student Survey
- revise internal student feedback questionnaires, and other student consultation processes, to provide more and better information about the higher education student experience
- establish a focus for the development of pedagogical support and research for academic staff that takes more into account internal and external models of effective practice.

## Reference points

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

- *the Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (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, generally, the College took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

## Report

### Preface

1 An institutional audit of Leeds College of Music (the College) was undertaken during the week commencing 26 November 2007. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the College's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers on behalf of the University of Leeds and the Open University, and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team was Professor Graham Chesters, Dr Karen King, Mr John Last, auditors, and Ms Denise Cooper, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mr Alan Bradshaw, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The mission of the College is that 'the College provides high quality music education, enhanced by research, and continually evolving to meet the needs of the profession and the community'.

4 The College was established in 1971, and is an affiliated college of the University of Leeds and an accredited institution of the Open University. The College moved from further education college status to become a higher education institution in August 2005.

5 The College offers courses in music, music production and, for further education only, musical theatre; it is the UK's largest music college. At the time of the audit the College had in higher education programmes approximately 700 full-time equivalent undergraduate students and approximately 25 postgraduate students. The College has approximately 330 students in further education courses, and some 1,000 students on Access and outreach courses.

6 The College has not previously undergone a QAA audit or subject review. The College has close links with the University of Leeds (which, until August 2008, validates some of the College's higher education courses) and previously had collaborative arrangements with Leeds Metropolitan University. These last franchise arrangements ended at the conclusion of the 2006-07 academic year.

7 In 2002, the College underwent a periodic review of its higher education provision conducted by the University of Leeds, and, in November 2003, the Open University undertook a similar institutional review. Reports from both of these events expressed confidence in the College's provision, and the College affirms that it implemented all recommendations arising. The University of Leeds conducted another periodic review of higher education in the College in autumn 2007; the outcome was also positive for the College. The College is currently working towards achieving a level of delegated authority from the Open University as an outcome of the forthcoming Open University institutional review in 2008-09. In May 2007, the College's further education and adult and community education provision was inspected by Ofsted, with successful outcomes in all areas. This inspection was a re-inspection, occasioned by an earlier less successful Ofsted inspection.

8 The last decade has seen major improvements in the accommodation of the College. The College is housed in purpose-built accommodation, developed during three phases between 1998 and 2005. The accommodation includes a new teaching block, and a student hall of residence with 190 beds, which was opened in 2005. The College has an adjacent 350-seater auditorium, The Venue, physically linked to the main building. This plays a major role in expanding performance opportunities for College ensembles and other performers.



## Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

9 The institutional framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities in the College relies on a balance of a deliberative committee structure and executive roles, a comprehensive set of policies and processes documented in a Quality Handbook and the development of a central support unit dedicated to quality and standards. Formal responsibility within the College for the maintenance of academic standards on behalf of the College's validating bodies, the University of Leeds and the Open University, lies with the Academic Board, supported by the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Quality and Standards Committee and their subcommittees. The Board of Governors is advised by a Governors' Quality Monitoring and Standards Committee. At operational level, boards of studies have responsibility for monitoring academic standards and the quality of programmes.

10 The committee structure beneath the Academic Board (the prime academic committee) has been the subject of recent and repeated review. The College informed the audit team that it was considering amalgamating two major committees (the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Quality and Standards Committee) into a single committee, supported by working groups, in order to streamline the management of academic standards and quality. The team was of the view that any revised structure should aim also to secure more effective implementation of action plans and achievement of targets, and should be closely monitored.

11 Executive responsibility for quality and standards lies with the Director of Studies, shared at the next level with the head of the two departments delivering higher education. The audit team acknowledged the important role played by senior postholders in maintaining an institutional oversight of all matters relating to quality and standards, but was of the view that broader responsibility for such oversight might be also attributed to deliberative committees and, as it develops its role, to the Quality and Standards Unit.

12 The programme validating procedures operated by the Open University through the Open University Validating Services ensure that programmes have taken due regard of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), subject benchmark statements, and that a programme specification is compiled. The College is required by the Open University to carry out a regular review of its responses to the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. The audit team concluded that the College had engaged with the Academic Infrastructure through these processes and that the new action plan developed to remedy shortcomings identified by the College in the area of academic appeals and student complaints was effective. The College had recently developed a more structured mechanism, relying on the Quality and Standards Unit, for consideration of external benchmark documentation such as the Academic Infrastructure. Due to the Quality and Standards Unit having been established for only three months at the time of audit, the team was unable to form a view of its effectiveness.

13 Programme specifications are available for all programmes, and the audit team found them to be comprehensive and consistent. The team did, however, find the programme specifications for the Open University-validated programmes confusing regarding the three sets of learning outcomes included; the educational outcomes of the programme, the 'threshold' and the 'focal' outcomes. It was not clear how these sets of learning outcomes were linked to each other, to module learning outcomes, and to assessment criteria. The team heard from students, and saw evidence, that students and external examiners are unclear about what is required to attain a particular grade in assessment at different levels. It is desirable that the College develops and expresses more clearly the links between intended learning outcomes, general grade descriptors and assignment marking schemes.

14 The College uses external expert opinion in several ways, including in programme approval panels, external specialist assessors for final year recitals, external examiners, and in external membership of several of the College committees. The audit team concluded that the College used external input in the management of academic standards effectively.

15 Until the end of the year 2006-07, the responsibility for determination of awards lay with the Results Ratification and Awards Classification Panel (without external examiner representation) supported by boards of examiners (with external examiner representation). From 2007-08 this system is replaced by a two-tier system: boards of examiners at the module level, without external examiner representation; boards at the subject level of music, music production and master's, with external examiner representation. The audit team concluded that these proposals did not meet the Open University requirement that external examiners attend subsidiary assessment committees, such as module assessment boards. The team advises the College to ensure that any changes in committee structure and boards of examiners enable effective management of assessment procedures.

16 The procedures for the appointment, the role and the reporting mechanism of external examiners were clearly articulated in the College's documentation. External examiners' reports are effectively considered at programme level through the annual programme evaluation, and forwarded to the validating body, along with copies of the annual programme evaluations. At the time of the audit, the College had just completed its first cross-college summary of external examiner reports for consideration by the Quality and Standards Committee. Overall, and apart from the need for the College to answer the requirements of the Open University, the audit team found the external examining process to be effective in assuring the academic standards of the programmes and awards that it delivers on behalf of the validating bodies.

17 For all the courses validated by the University of Leeds, the University's assessment regulations apply. There is no such overarching set of assessment regulations for the Open University-validated courses. Although the lack of overarching assessment regulations for these courses had been raised by an external examiner in 2006, and noted in an action plan from the programme examination board concerned, no action of substance had been taken by the College. The audit team identified issues which should have been covered by such assessment regulations. Examples included: the definition of how condonement and borderline cases were dealt with in examination boards, responsibilities for ensuring correct recording of marks, and differences in award calculation at both honours and Foundation Degree levels. The team advises the College to develop a set of comprehensive assessment regulations clarifying the arrangements for the classification of Open University-validated awards, progression from these awards, the consideration of borderline cases, and the application of compensation; and that the College communicates these arrangements consistently to staff, external examiners and students.

18 The role of course leader has recently been reintroduced in order to strengthen course management, and to give an unambiguous, leading academic contact for students on the course. Despite the deliberate emphasis on leadership in the title, such an emphasis is almost entirely absent from the role description. In the context of developing a firmer institutional oversight of how roles are changed and articulated, and given the pivotal position of course leaders and the significant issues raised by students on course organisation and management, it is advisable for the College to take further steps in order to emphasise the leadership and oversight role of course leaders in the management of quality and standards at course level.

19 Programme leaders are responsible for the recording of student assessment marks within the College. The College identified that incorrect inputting of marks into departmental spreadsheets had occurred during 2006 because the approved procedures had not been applied to some marks. The audit team advises the College to develop the management of assessment marks in order to ensure that approved procedures such as penalties and condonement are fully and accurately applied to marks.

20 The College has recognised problems with the quality and availability of internal statistical information. The audit team found the College's use of internal statistical management information in order to inform the development and implementation of strategy and policy in the management of academic standards to be effective, with comprehensive data used in

programme review procedures and at senior management committees. However, from the relative lack of external references, the team formed the view that the College had not fully exploited the use of management information from external sources such as comparator institutions for benchmarking in strategy and policy development. It is desirable for the College to develop mechanisms to ensure that it can draw and reflect upon qualitative and quantitative data from the institution and the wider sector in order to benchmark and to set targets to monitor institutional performance

21 The audit team found that confidence could be placed in the soundness of the College's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards that it delivers on behalf of the University of Leeds and the Open University.

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

22 Formal responsibility for the quality of learning opportunities rests with the Academic Board, chaired by the Principal. The Academic Board delegates to other committees, as well as to key senior staff and the Quality and Standards Unit. Currently, the Quality and Standards Committee and the Learning and Teaching Committee jointly advise the Academic Board on issues concerned with the use of the Academic Infrastructure, published by QAA. The audit team was told of proposals to the Academic Board that would merge these two committees, such that matters of standards, quality of learning opportunities and enhancement would be dealt with by one committee. The team noted these proposals as a means of streamlining the current processes, and advises the College to keep these developments under review so that the College may assure itself that the new arrangements meet its aspiration of ensuring timely implementation of action plans and achievement of targets.

23 The College has been reviewing its alignment with the *Code of practice*. The audit team learned of proposals to encourage increased ownership and timely response to section updates through a move from a central approach to one where working groups of committees will each monitor relevant sections of the *Code of practice*, supported by Quality and Standards Unit administrative staff.

24 Subject benchmark statements are considered through the procedures for approving new programmes described in the Quality Handbook. External examiner reports confirmed effective use of subject benchmark statements by the College. The Quality Handbook also requires that course handbooks meet the requirements of the FHEQ, and that they contain programme specifications written to a standard template. The audit team read and confirmed that there is consistent and effective use of programme specifications and level descriptors for programme content within course handbooks.

25 The audit team was able to examine course life cycles from proposal, through approval, monitoring and review to discontinuation. A recent report from the University of Leeds confirmed that reasonable arrangements were in place to secure the quality of the programmes validated by the University that were in process of discontinuation by the College.

26 Documentation for course development and review follows the processes of the Open University, the College's major validating body. The audit team scrutinised the course development and annual programme evaluation processes, which it found to be rigorous and operating well. Annual programme evaluation reports, which use a standard format, include actions taken as a result of previous monitoring and as a result of student feedback, plus detailed consideration of data. Annual programme evaluations are considered by boards of studies and approved by the Quality and Standards Unit, which also monitors the implementation of the associated action plans. An executive summary of the annual programme evaluations, prepared by the Head of Quality and Standards, is submitted to the validating universities, the Academic Board and a subcommittee of the Board of Governors.

27 The audit team concluded that the operation of these processes was thorough and effective, and that it constituted a feature of good practice. However, the team noted that the College does not have a separate system of internal periodic review, as periodic review has been organised and undertaken by the validating universities. As the College moves to a relationship of increased devolution with the Open University, it is desirable for the College to consider the development of internal periodic review of programmes to assist it in keeping a clear overview of the programme portfolio and any developing strengths and weaknesses, in order to promote greater College ownership of programme development.

28 Student views at the College are formally sought through internal surveys which have historically demonstrated high levels of student satisfaction. However, the College has noted that National Student Survey results for the College are 'disappointing' and do not align with internal survey results. The audit team found that material collected through internal student surveys was insufficient to obtain data to allow the College to make comparison between internal survey results and those from the National Student Survey. The team considers it desirable that the College revise its internal surveys and that it take more effective action to address student concerns evident in the results of the National Student Survey.

29 In meetings with students the audit team learned of various formal and informal ways in which student feedback contributes to the management of the quality of learning opportunities. These ranged from formal Students' Union representation on the College's key committees to participation in boards of studies, and formal and informal meetings with staff. Students are represented at boards of studies through elected course representatives and at the Academic Board and the Board of Governors by the Student Union President. Student representatives are given guidance on their role, prepared by the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Manager and made available on the College's virtual learning environment. The new post of Student Liaison Officer has been established to further this work.

30 Students who met the audit team had a clear understanding of the role of student representatives on boards of studies, and that these consider Annual Programme Evaluation reports and allow for student involvement in course development. However, students reported poor attendance by student representatives at some boards of studies, and also reported that formal feedback mechanisms were often less effective than informal conversations with staff. Students also stated that communication between course representatives and the Student Union was not entirely clear. The Students' Union President is not a full-time sabbatical officer. The President noted that the part-time nature of the role created difficulties both with attending meetings and with understanding the business of the senior committees. The team considers it desirable for the College to consider ways in which a more effective role for the Students' Union in this area could be achieved.

31 The College's research strategy is overseen by the Research and Enterprise Committee. All higher education staff are expected to undertake scholarly activities, research or professional practice in order to inform their learning and teaching. Annual programme evaluations identify development activities, such as research projects, industry involvement and conference attendance, for College staff. Research and Enterprise Committee minutes show evidence of support for pedagogical projects, for which remission from teaching is awarded. This support is also given to part-time staff. The audit team was told of plans to introduce a new teaching observation and mentoring scheme, and a new annual teaching awards scheme to reward and celebrate good practice in teaching and learning. Students confirmed their knowledge of the research and professional practice work of their staff, and were enthusiastic about the significant contribution that it makes to their learning, a contribution that the team found to be good practice. Notwithstanding the activities above, the team found that there was relatively little engagement with the general higher education sector. It is desirable for the College to consider strategies to further such engagement and to establish a focus for the development of pedagogical support and research for academic staff that takes more into account internal and external models of effective practice.

32 There were no programmes delivered by flexible or distributed learning methods offered by the College at the time of the audit, although the audit team was able to view the College's development of its virtual learning environment, and to note the College's plans to place more material in support of student learning on this virtual learning environment.

33 The College produced a new estate strategy to operate from 2007-12; this has been developed against space utilisation benchmarks for specialist higher education institutions. The Estate Strategy concurs with the student view expressed in the National Student Survey and at meetings, that the College requires additional space to meet the needs of its current students and of any future growth. Some aspects of the learning resources at the College were commended by students in their formal written submission to the audit team; information technology provision and systems, the Library and the Venue received overall approval. However, meetings held by the audit team with students identified dissatisfactions with late issuing of, and last-minute changes to, timetables, and dissatisfactions with access to practice rooms outside of taught course hours. Staff acknowledged some past difficulties in these areas, but stated that remedial actions had been taken. The team recommends that it is advisable for the College to continue to monitor the effectiveness of timetabling, and, in particular, of timetabled access to practice rooms.

34 The College's higher education admissions policy was approved by the Academic Board and aligns with the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*. The policy sets minimum entry requirements for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes consistent with the admissions requirements of the validating universities. The policy sets clear matriculation requirements expressed as tariff points, in addition to a minimum practical musical performance threshold for entry to undergraduate courses in music. The College has an Access Agreement with the Office for Fair Access, providing financial incentives to encourage applicants from lower income households. The audit team concluded that in its approach to admissions and access the College had well-established processes, and had achieved a balance between maximising access to learning opportunities and minimising the likelihood of student failure.

35 Student support is available to students from a central Student Services Unit. This has responsibility for welfare advisers, student counsellors, the Student Fees and Funding Manager, the Careers Adviser, the Student Union Liaison Officer and the Student Services Administrator. During meetings with the audit team, students acknowledged, in particular, the work of staff involved with counselling, learning support and support for students with disabilities. Careers support through the virtual learning environment was also identified by students as useful in the integration of employability into the curriculum. Students spoke highly of the general support and the individualised help that is made available to them. The team was able to confirm the view in the student written submission that the Student Services Unit provides excellent information and advice, and the College's view that the work of the Student Services Unit was an example of good practice.

36 Staff support, development and reward are in a period of rapid development within the College, and reflect its evolution from a further education to a higher education institution. In 2007, the Staff Development Committee took control of a central staff development budget, in support of the College's desire for increased strategic oversight of expenditure. The Committee has supported academic staff in postgraduate study, and promotes the integration of part-time staff, using HEFCE Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund monies to provide bursaries. The successful integration of part-time staff into the College was confirmed by students.

37 An Academic Promotion Scheme was recently introduced, and, in August 2006, the College introduced a job evaluation scheme linked to a single pay spine. A new pay structure has been introduced which includes reward for exceptional performance. The main vehicle for identifying staff development needs is an annual individual appraisal. At the time of the audit the College was revising this appraisal system.



38 From September 2007, all new teaching staff are expected to obtain a teaching qualification, or Higher Education Academy accreditation. Staff appointed before this date have a set period to gain similar qualifications. The College peer observation of teaching scheme is being revised to place emphasis on mentorship and the dissemination of good practice. A new Annual Teaching Award scheme is under development, as is an annual Learning and Teaching Conference. The audit team noted that these developments were recent.

39 The audit team found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the College's present and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

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

40 The College's strategic approach to quality enhancement is more fully recorded in the College's practice than in general College statement, although the Quality Handbook does contain a definition of the purpose of enhancement that stresses improvement in processes and efficiency, as well as compliance with the changing expectations of the education sector. The Quality Handbook also explains that the Quality and Standards Committee and its subcommittees and occasional working groups develop and enhance quality processes and procedures through consultation, feedback and dialogue with staff and students. Evidence showed how examples of such an approach at institutional level did bring improvements; examples include the development of the virtual learning environment, the extension of access to rehearsal rooms, and the greater involvement of students in the new boards of studies.

41 According to the College's Briefing Paper for the audit, the Learning and Teaching Committee 'oversees the College's strategies for learning and teaching and...encourages and promotes innovations in teaching and learning'. One of the main aims of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, newly revised in 2007, was to provide a systematic enhancement framework, closely allied to the objectives of the College's Strategic Plan. Another significant development has been the establishment of the Quality and Standards Unit which seeks 'to enhance, monitor and develop the College's learning and teaching' and 'to reinforce the focus on enhancement issues'. The Quality and Standards Unit is to provide the infrastructure, as in the creation of the post of Learning and Teaching Enhancement Manager, to support a more deliberate, institutional approach towards enhancement. The College aims at a better strategic articulation of what was in some cases happening through local initiative, and also at a more explicit linkage between quality assurance processes, quality enhancement and the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

42 One key objective of the Learning and Teaching Strategy concerns support and reward for academic staff in developing learning and teaching. The College has some basic criteria for recognising teaching excellence, which it rewards through promotion and accelerated incremental progression. Noting that the College's involvement with the Higher Education Academy is small, the audit team considered it desirable that the College provide an internal focus as part of the development of pedagogical support and research for academic staff that takes more into account internal and external models of effective practice.

43 Internal good practice is identified through specific sections in annual monitoring documents; it is disseminated at staff development days and through the open, sometimes informal, channels of communication typical of a small, cohesive institution. Overall, the audit team judged the various mechanisms for identifying and disseminating good practice to be adequate.

#### **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

44 At the time of the audit the College did not have any collaborative arrangements for delivery of higher education provision.

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

45 At the time of the audit the College had no postgraduate research students. It was, however, seeking to become an affiliated research centre of the Open University, which status would allow it to deliver doctoral programmes for the first time. The College's aspiration is that accreditation will be gained by 2010.

## **Section 7: Published information**

46 Corporate publications and the College's website are the responsibility of the Director of Development and Head of External Relations, supported by a marketing team which liaises with the Quality and Standards Unit to ensure that information is correct. The higher education prospectus is subject to final check by the Director of Studies and the Principal. Responsibility for the accuracy of information lies with those providing it (for the most part, course leaders and assistant heads). The students who met the audit team expressed general satisfaction with the accuracy of corporate publications. A reading of the higher education prospectus and the College's website, confirmed the accuracy and completeness of the information for prospective students. The team formed the view that the College had effective procedures in place.

47 With its recently acquired status as a higher education institution, the College is now engaged with the requirements of Unistats, and the College had already submitted the necessary information to that body. Responsibility for the submission of data lies with the Quality Assurance Manager located in the Quality and Standards Unit.

48 Responsibility for checking the accuracy and completeness of information that is given to students through course handbooks and module handbooks lies with course leaders and assistant heads of department. Templates govern the format of the handbooks. Handbooks are now available only on the College's virtual learning environment, having previously been issued on paper. Overall, students who met the audit team welcomed the availability of handbooks in electronic form, emphasising that ready access to lecturing staff made it easy to clarify points. Neither the student written submission nor students met during the audit had any critical comments to make about the content of course handbooks.

49 The audit team concluded that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of information that the College publishes externally about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards. However, the team concluded that information on the classification of degrees and on progression arrangements for Foundation Degree students could be improved in accuracy, completeness and clarity. The team recommends that, when developing a set of comprehensive assessment regulations clarifying the arrangements for the classification of Open University-validated awards, it is advisable for the College to bear in mind the need to communicate these arrangements consistently to staff, external examiners and students.

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

### **Features of good practice**

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

- the annual programme evaluation process as a mechanism for annual course review (paragraphs 26, 27)
- engagement with the music industry and expert professional practice (paragraph 31)
- the pastoral support provided by the Student Services Unit (paragraph 35).

## Recommendations for action

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

51 Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- to keep under review recent changes to the terms of reference and operation of the College's committees in order to assure itself that the new arrangements meet its aspiration to ensure timely implementation of action plans and achievement of targets (paragraphs 10, 22)
- to continue to develop institutional oversight of policies, processes, documentation and associated roles and responsibilities (paragraphs 11, 18)
- to develop its framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities to enable the College to meet fully the requirements of the Open University's Handbook for Validated Awards (paragraph 15)
- to develop a set of comprehensive assessment regulations clarifying the arrangements for the classification of Open University-validated awards, progression from these awards, the consideration of borderline cases, and the application of compensation; and communicate these arrangements consistently to staff, external examiners and students (paragraphs 17, 49)
- to develop the management of assessment marks (paragraph 19)
- to improve the timetabling of learning activities (paragraph 33).

52 Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- to develop and express more clearly the links between intended learning outcomes, generic grading criteria and assignment marking criteria (paragraph 13)
- to develop mechanisms to ensure that it can draw and reflect upon qualitative and quantitative data from the institution and the wider sector in order to benchmark and to monitor institutional performance (paragraph 20)
- to consider the development of internal periodic review in order to promote greater College ownership of programme development (paragraph 27)
- to take more effective action to address student concerns evident in the results of the National Student Survey (paragraph 28)
- to revise internal student feedback questionnaires, and other student consultation processes, to provide more and better information about the higher education student experience (paragraphs 28, 30)
- to establish a focus for the development of pedagogical support and research for academic staff that takes more into account internal and external models of effective practice (paragraphs 31, 42).



## Appendix

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

Leeds College of Music welcomes the outcome of the QAA Institutional Audit and the audit team's judgement that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards it delivers; and that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available for students. The College is pleased that the audit team identified the following features of good practice:

- the annual programme evaluation process as a mechanism for annual course review
- engagement with the music industry and expert professional practice
- the pastoral support provided by the Student Support Unit.

The College welcomes the advisable and desirable recommendations made by the audit team, and considers them to make a constructive contribution to the College's ongoing enhancement agenda. The College's response to the report's recommendations is being overseen by the Academic Board.

