QAA

Royal College of Music

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

May 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 Royal College of Music (the College). The review took place on 30 April and 1 May 2012 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Michael Byde
- Professor Sue Frost
- Professor Mark Hunt
- Ms Rebecca Watson.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the Royal College of Music 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
- provides commentaries on public information and the theme topic
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

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 Royal College of Music 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] For background information about the Royal College of Music see page 3. 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/pages/default.aspx
[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx

QAA's judgements about the Royal College of Music

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the Royal College of Music.

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at the Royal College of Music.

- The support for student representatives and the encouragement of and opportunities for student engagement in quality assurance activities (paragraph 2.3).
- The high level of individual support provided for prospective students including open days, the applicant portal, information packs, and the well managed audition process (paragraph 2.5.1).
- The support provided by the College for the professional development of students and the promotion of career opportunities, exemplified by the highly successful work of the Woodhouse Professional Development Centre (paragraph 2.7.1)
- The exemplary support for disabled students including the support offered through the application stage, comprehensive handbooks for students and staff, and the individually tailored learning agreements (paragraph 2.8).

Recommendations

The QAA review team **recommends** the Royal College of Music to:

- prioritise development in the College's information technology infrastructure (including access to Wi-Fi) to support the core requirements of the programmes of study, the demands of research activity, and the expansion of the College's intranet ('MUSE'). This is to be implemented by July 2013 (paragraph 2.2.3)
- further enhance communication with students to facilitate the dissemination of information about institutional developments - including changes to programme expectations and assessment criteria. This is to be implemented by July 2013 (paragraph 1.3.3).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that the Royal College of Music is already taking to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The work to develop and promulgate revised assessment criteria for student performance, including the recital assessment project (paragraph 1.3.3).
- The steps that are being taken to further integrate hourly paid professors in the life and work of the College's academic community (paragraph 2.1.2).
  The emphasis being given to personal development planning through the development of individual study plans (paragraph 2.2.6).

Public information

The Royal College of Music makes information about academic standards and quality publicly available via its website. The information is clear, accessible, accurate, and generally up to date. Students have found the information useful both in helping them make an informed choice when applying to the College and in preparing for what they might expect when they join.

The first-year student experience

The College has established a series of events and processes to ensure that students are well prepared on entry to their programmes of study and well supported during their first year in the College. All students have personal advisers who monitor their academic progress and they have regular access to a wide group of staff, particularly in the area of their subject specialism.

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 Royal College of Music

The College's mission statement is as follows: 'The Royal College of Music provides specialised musical education and professional training at the highest international level for performers and composers, within an environment that stimulates innovation and research. This enables talented students from all backgrounds to develop the musical skills, knowledge, understanding and resourcefulness which will equip them to contribute significantly to musical life in this country and internationally.'

Founded in 1882, the College has a worldwide reputation as a music conservatoire where performers, conductors and composers are trained to the highest international standards. The College has its own degree awarding powers. It offers programmes of study leading to awards at bachelors (with honours), master's and doctoral levels. Its current student numbers are approximately 700 including a significant number of international students from over 50 countries. Almost all students study full-time.

The College offers its awards in partnership with two other institutions. There is a joint BSc (Hons) programme in Physics and Music Performance taught with Imperial College London, and a validated BMus programme delivered by Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) in Singapore.

In line with other conservatoires the College places a great deal of importance on the performance of its students and their technical competence in their principal study. Entrance to the College is determined principally through audition, and the assessment of performance forms the main component of the measurement of student achievement. A public recital is the key summative method of assessment for performers. The College sets high standards for its students and provides a supportive environment to ensure that they have every opportunity of achieving them. Its approach to quality assurance is focused on the pursuit of excellence rather than simply meeting threshold standards.

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

The Royal College of Music has sound procedures for quality assurance and enhancement, a deep commitment to its students and to the subject, and well established links with the music profession and the local community in London.

Explanation of the findings about the Royal College of Music

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, also on the QAA website.[7]

1   Academic standards

Outcome

The academic standards at the Royal College of Music **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1   The College approves and reviews its programmes of study with reference to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). Learning outcomes, specified for the individual programmes of study, are clearly aligned to the FHEQ. The volume of study required of students at both bachelors and master's levels is sufficient to ensure that the outcomes are achievable. The College also ensures that the standards of its awards are at least comparable with similar programmes offered internationally.

1.1.1   Learning outcomes are described in the programme specifications for each award. Outcomes for individual modules or units appear in the respective module or unit guides and in the programme handbooks. Additional information is provided in the assessment guide.

1.1.2   The College ensures that its collaborative programmes match the expectations of the FHEQ. Module descriptors and learning outcomes are published on the College's intranet and are made available to staff and students at the partner institutions. The lead officer for the College's principal partner in Singapore provides support and guidance to staff at the institution to ensure that the programme is operating according to the College's requirements.

Use of external examiners

1.2   The College has secure arrangements for the external examination of the standards of its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes which fully meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*). The procedures for the appointment of examiners are set out in a formal policy document. Appointments are approved by the College's Senate. Examiners are selected from both the UK and overseas. The Heads of Programme provide induction and briefing for new external examiners.

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[5] The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However it is available on request for inspection. Please contact QAA Reviews Group.
[6] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx
[7] See note 4.

1.2.1   The examiners' reports are thorough and informative. They deal with academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities and the conduct of the assessment process, including performance assessment. The reports are considered by the relevant academic committees. They are also referenced in annual monitoring reports. The College writes to each external examiner to inform them about the response to their recommendations by programme teams. Undergraduate external examiner reports are made available to students. External examiners have commented on a number of issues including anonymous marking, the definition of failure, inter-faculty parity, mark ranges for individual modules, and assessment criteria for written work and for principal study assessment. These matters are being actively considered by programme teams.

1.2.2   The use of external examiners for collaborative provision is systematic and scrupulous. The current examiner for the College's programme delivered in Singapore is also the examiner for the undergraduate BMus programme. The examiner attends performance assessments in Singapore as well as participating in assessment and examination boards. The College has appointed a subject specialist assessor to assist with the oversight of assessment in relation to traditional Chinese music.

1.2.3   A joint programme committee oversees assessment arrangements for the partnership with Imperial College London. Subject specific examiners are appointed by each institution to cover areas of specialism. The assessment of the music components is undertaken in the same way as other undergraduate assessments at the College.

Assessment and standards

1.3   The College's procedures for the design, approval, monitoring and review of assessment requirements ensure that students are able to demonstrate their achievement of programme learning outcomes. Assessment details are provided in student guides and programme handbooks. Programme assessment strategies are discussed at senior committees and examination boards. Particular attention is paid to the alignment of the assessment of performance with other aspects of study.

1.3.1   The College's Committee Handbook includes terms of reference and membership for examination boards. Separate boards operate for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. There is also a mitigating circumstances board that considers the cases of individual students. The same procedures are followed for the programmes delivered with collaborative partners. The operation of examination boards has been endorsed by external examiners. The review team confirmed that the procedures for the oversight of assessment at the College are comprehensive and operate effectively.

1.3.2   Both undergraduate and postgraduate students who met with the team confirmed that expectations and requirements for assessment are generally clear. However, some students had identified a need for more detailed and specific assessment criteria, both to give a better understanding of expectations and to ensure a greater degree of consistency across the range of assessment activities.

1.3.3   The team learned that the College's Assessment Working Group has been considering revised assessment criteria and has contextualised these criteria in relation to programme objectives. A Recital Assessment Project, conducted in two faculties, has focused on explaining how assessment panels apply and operate performance assessment criteria and marking. **The review team affirms** the work that is being done to develop and promulgate revised assessment criteria for student performance, including the recital assessment project. However, these developments have not been systematically communicated to all students. **The review team recommends** that the College should enhance further its communication with students to facilitate the dissemination of information

about institutional developments, including changes to programme expectations and assessment criteria.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.4 Details of the College's procedures for the design, development and review of programmes of study are included in the College's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook. The procedures are clear and are managed effectively. Annual reports include comments from teaching staff and are compiled by programme leaders into a report that is considered by Programme Committees and by Senate. There is guidance for staff involved, including the evidence needed to inform the reports. The same procedures apply for the College's partner in Singapore, with appropriate minor modifications to reflect cultural differences and local context.

1.4.1 Individual programmes are reviewed on a five to six-year cycle. The procedures for review are detailed in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook and the team confirmed that they are clear and accessible and are implemented effectively. Review teams include appropriate representation from College staff and external members with expertise in the subject area. Review reports are considered by Senate and follow-up actions are monitored by the relevant programme committee. The approval, monitoring and review of research degree activity is achieved through reports to Senate, following a similar review process.

1.4.2 The College has also established a Value for Money Steering Group that has a key role in the development of new institutional strategies. The Steering Group is not simply concerned with cost savings but has a clear remit to enhance the student experience through prudent investment and planning. The Steering Group considers a broad range of academic and service functions from a business perspective and fulfils an audit function for the academic support services. It has also considered the College's compliance with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), including *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review*. The Steering Group makes recommendations to the Directorate and to the Artistic and Academic Management Group about improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of College systems and procedures.

Subject benchmarks

1.5 Subject benchmark statements are used effectively by the College in programme design, approval, delivery and review to inform the standards of awards. The team confirmed that programme specifications make direct reference to the *Subject benchmark statement: Music* and the FHEQ. For the joint programme in Music and Physics, both benchmark statements are referred to. Taught postgraduate programmes have been evaluated against the description of specialised or advanced study in *Master's degree characteristics*, published by QAA.

1.5.1 The College has also followed guidance from Conservatoires UK and the Association of European Conservatoires to interpret the requirements of the FHEQ in the context of the specialist nature of the College's programmes.

2   Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities the Royal College of Music **meet UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 The review team confirmed that professional standards for student learning are given high priority and are well supported. The College emphasises the academic and professional development of its students and ensures that they have access to tutors who have achieved a high degree of recognition in their specialist areas. Students are assigned to an individual study professor who has overall responsibility for monitoring their progress. Students confirmed that the role of the individual study professor is key to the student experience at the College and that they provide positive role models in their personal and professional development.

2.1.1 The College's partner in Singapore (NAFA) supports teaching and learning through the provision of highly experienced study professors. NAFA provides induction and training for new members of staff, with support and guidance from the College. There are plans to augment the work of the study professors through a visiting professor scheme and through regular visits of the College's lead officer for the management of the partnership. The quality of the NAFA teaching team was scrutinised as part of the programme approval process.

2.1.2 Part-time hourly paid study professors have access to the same level of staff support as full-time members of staff and are encouraged to play an active part in the academic and professional life of the College community. There is an annual professors' conference to share information and experience, and opportunities are provided for continuing professional development. Part-time staff are engaged with the College's staff appraisal scheme and participate in faculty and College committees. Team teaching has been adopted in some cases to manage the varying commitments of part-time staff. A variety of formal and informal arrangements have been established for monitoring the performance of study professors including the evaluation of master classes and a project to produce video recordings of expert teachers. **The review team affirmed** the steps that are being taken by the College to further integrate hourly paid professors into the life and work of the College's academic community.

Learning resources

2.2 The College recognises the need to provide sufficient and appropriate facilities for learning and for the development of performance skills. Oversight of the effective use of learning resources is carried out by the Artistic and Academic Management Group and through faculty committees. Learning resource budgets have been increasingly devolved to faculties to support local decision making. Annual programme reviews include detailed consideration of learning resources. The College also appreciates feedback from students and staff on resource issues and takes active steps to ensure that concerns are addressed.

2.2.1 Concerns raised by students about learning resources largely relate to the provision of an effective information and communication infrastructure as well as the need for specialist resources for research activity and the problem of securing sufficient practice space.

2.2.2 The College has established a virtual learning environment ('MUSE') to provide access to key college documents and online support materials for programmes of study. The review team appreciated the value of this resource and its potential for the future development of the students' learning experience.

2.2.3 Students who met the review team raised a number of concerns about the reliability and accessibility of information technology resources. In particular there were concerns about the use of Wi-Fi, the speed of the broadband service, and the lack of IT support. They also made reference to problems with the submission of assignments online. The ICT

Steering Group oversees work to improve the system, and it was clear to the team from the minutes of its meetings that considerable work has been done to respond to the students' concerns. However, some of the fundamental issues are yet to be fully addressed. **The review team recommends** that the College should prioritise the development of the information technology infrastructure (including access to Wi-Fi) to support the core requirements of the programmes of study, the demands of research activity and the expansion of the College's intranet (MUSE).

2.2.4   The difficulty of securing appropriate practice rooms at reasonable times was an issue highlighted by students in their written submission. Since the previous Institutional audit conducted by QAA, the College has taken steps to extend and improve practice facilities. In particular an online booking system has considerably eased the pressure. The review team confirms that the College has listened carefully to student views and has taken effective action to address this issue, within the constraints of its existing estate.

2.2.5   Students have also raised concerns about access to specialist equipment and facilities. Comments were included in responses to the National Student Survey (NSS) in 2010 and 2011. The issue has been discussed at staff-student committees and the College has taken steps to improve technical resources. The College has also initiated a project to improve access to its world-class collection of highly specialist materials. The review team came to the view that the College had fully acknowledged the need to address the concerns raised by students and was taking appropriate action to improve the situation.

2.2.6   The College has introduced a scheme to support the personal development planning of students through the use of individual study plans. In discussions with students, the review team learned that all students have a personal tutor and generally feel well supported, but the implementation of individual study plans is not consistent across the College. Students who had used study plans found them to be of varying utility. The College is committed to supporting students in their personal development and the current arrangements have only recently been introduced. The team acknowledged that the scheme offers excellent potential in shaping the future plans for a more comprehensive learning portfolio. **The review team affirms** the emphasis that is being given by the College to personal development planning through the development of individual study plans.

2.2.7   The College has undertaken a scrutiny of the resources at its partner institution in Singapore as part of the due diligence checks when the link was established. Comments on the adequacy of resources are included in the annual report from the Lead Officer for the partnership link. There have been concerns about the limited specialist library facilities and the need for a subject librarian in Singapore. The team learned that both these issues were being addressed and confirmed that the College was monitoring provision and supporting further enhancements in resources.

Student voice

2.3   Students make an effective contribution to quality assurance at the College. They play an active role in institutional decision making by participating in committees at central and local levels. They are well briefed before meetings and encouraged to participate fully in discussions. The review team considered that the support for student representatives and the encouragement and opportunities for student engagement in quality assurance activities is **a feature of good practice.**

2.3.1   Students particularly value the regular open-door surgeries with the Director, which reflect the positive and effective links that exist between senior management and the student body. Students also confirmed the usefulness of the staff-student committee in ensuring that students' views are heard and acted upon.

2.3.2   The College has developed a number of routes for student feedback, including an internal College survey and provision in the annual monitoring process for considering students' views. The team observed that as a relatively small institution the formal procedures for considering students' views were underpinned by regular informal contact and close links between students and study professors.

2.3.3   The principles of student engagement established at the College, have also been replicated at the partner institution in Singapore. Information and feedback is collected from students and reported back to the College by the Lead Officer. There are also links between students in Singapore and the Student Association at the College.

Management information used to improve quality and standards

2.4   The College has developed effective systems for the collection and application of management information to assist in the management of the College and to safeguard the quality and standards of its academic provision. Key performance indicators include measures of student progress and achievement, retention rates, destination data, the analysis of assessment outcomes, and the results of the National Student Survey (NSS) for the College. The review team saw evidence that both the senate and the individual programme teams use this data to inform improvements and enhancements for students. The College Council receives periodic reports on progress against key performance indicators.

2.4.1   The development of management information for the partner in Singapore is being undertaken, in line with the expectations of the College. The information provided for the establishment of the link indicates that the partner is able to produce clear and comprehensive data, and the partnership agreement specifies reporting arrangements to ensure that the College has access to the information that it needs to monitor the quality of provision in Singapore.

Admission to the College

2.5   The College's policy and procedures for the admission of students are clear, fair, explicit, and consistently applied. Prospective students are required to attend a performance-based audition as well as achieving prescribed academic requirements. Students indicated to the review team that the audition process is well managed and gives a useful insight into the life of the College. In addition, open days provide a guide to the process of admission from application to induction and effective preparation for the course.

2.5.1   The College also provides a range of online material in the form of an applicant portal to assist students in making applications. A pre-arrival 'success' website gives access to relevant information and there are online information packs for individual programmes of study. The review team confirmed that the College provides a high level of individual support for prospective students including open days, the applicant portal, information packs, and a well managed audition process. This is considered **a feature of good practice**.

Complaints and appeals

2.6   The College's procedures for complaints and appeals are clearly explained in the Student Handbook. They follow closely the guidance provided in *Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals* of the Quality Code. In discussions with students and staff, the review team learned that, given the small and coherent nature of the College, issues are generally dealt with informally. Staff are supportive and will refer matters to a more senior level if there is a need to secure a resolution to particular complaints. If matters require more formal intervention they are handled by the College's registry. Any significant matters arising from

student complaints are considered by the Artistic and Academic Management Group and by senate.

Career advice and guidance

2.7   The College's revised learning and teaching strategy explicitly refers to the enhancement of student employability as a strategic focus.

2.7.1   The College has established the Woodhouse Professional Development Centre to provide a focused facility for students (and alumni) to gain advice and guidance on their professional development and opportunities for working in the music business and related areas of employment. The Centre is able to draw on the expertise of eminent practitioners associated with the College and offers a personal service to students, helping them to chart their own career paths and advising them on relevant opportunities. It acts as a point of contact for both students and employers and has established a significant track record in securing performing contracts for students. It is well regarded by staff, music professionals and students. It also contributes to the students' learning experience through the encouragement of enterprise and support for professional development. The students whom the review team met commended the Centre. The team recognise that the support provided by the College for the professional development of students and the promotion of career opportunities, exemplified by the highly successful work of the Woodhouse Centre, is **a feature of good practice**.

Supporting disabled students

2.8   The College has given particular priority to the support and personal development of disabled students. Guidance is provided in a comprehensive handbook. Students met by the review team considered this to be appropriate and useful. Programme teams develop individually tailored learning agreements and study plans for disabled students which contain a scheduled programme of activity and identify specific requirements. In addition the student services department provides a dedicated help service for disabled students and special arrangements are made for students at audition and in performance assessments. The review team consider that the provision made for disabled students by the College is focused, appropriate and highly supportive. The team identifies, **as a feature of good practice**, the exemplary support for disabled students including the support offered through the application stage, a comprehensive handbook for students and staff, and the individually tailored learning agreements.

Supporting international students

2.9   International students are well integrated into the life of the College and there are a range of services and initiatives that have been developed to help with the transition to the UK and with the progress of their studies. The College recognises the benefits to all students and staff from involvement with international students and the particular contribution they make to the life of the College community.

2.9.1   The College has a clear and concise code of practice for English language requirements. Normally students are expected to have achieved at least International English Language Testing System (IELTS) 5.5 before entry, although the College will allow some discretion for students with exceptional musical abilities. The College offers an intensive English language development programme for students who need further support in their language skills. Achievement of the appropriate level in language is a prerequisite for progression at the College.

2.9.2   English is the language of tuition at the College's partner in Singapore and the same expectations about language skills and support are applied.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.10   The College provides appropriate support and guidance for postgraduate research students, and promotes a culture of research and innovation involving both research students and staff.

2.10.1   Oversight and development of research activity is provided by the College's Research Committee, while a separate Research Degrees Committee acts as an examination board for research degrees and oversees student supervision, registration and progression. There is also a Research Ethics Committee which approves applications to undertake research under the auspices of the College's Centre for Performance Science.

2.10.2   Research students are assigned at least two supervisors and there are clearly documented arrangements for the monitoring of student progress. Students confirmed that they had regular supervisory meetings for different aspects of their research studies and benefited from advice and guidance from other members of staff and fellow students. The College has produced Guidance on Academic Writing which research students have found particularly helpful.

2.10.3   Postgraduate research students are encouraged to develop their research skills through the Open Studio initiative which involves both research students and academic staff. Students are also actively encouraged to engage in external programmes for the development of research skills and to participate in conferences and international master classes. Postgraduate students also have the opportunity to become Graduate Teaching Assistants at the College which was recognised as an important opportunity for those wishing to progress into a career in higher education.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.11   The College has partnership agreements with the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) in Singapore and with Imperial College London. Both of these have been agreed following careful and detailed consideration and both fit well with the College's strategic objectives. The College has no current plans for the further expansion of collaborative links.

2.11.1   Liaison arrangements with NAFA are undertaken by a Lead Officer, who is normally the programme coordinator at the College. There is also a Lead Officer designated by the partner organisation. The Memorandum of Understanding for the partnership is detailed and outlines specific responsibilities and requirements. It reflects good practice in the sector. The review team confirms that the College has been diligent and thoughtful in planning the arrangements with its partner organisation and has effective liaison arrangements in place.

2.11.2   The arrangements with Imperial College London are long standing and the degree programme in Physics and Music Performance now leads to a joint award of both institutions. The Memorandum of Agreement clearly identifies the respective responsibilities and covers all matters concerning the joint nature of the programme. A joint programme committee has been established to oversee the management of the programme. The review team met staff and students from the programme who confirmed that current arrangements are working effectively.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.12   The College has very little provision that is offered through flexible and distributed arrangements. One MSc programme can be taken partially via distance learning. Lectures are available on the College's intranet (MUSE) in audio format. The programme is supported by regular email contact. The College has plans to make video recordings of its research training seminars and make these available to research students.

Work-based and placement learning

2.13   The College does not have any formal elements of its programmes delivered through work-based and placement learning, but students do engage in a wide range of placement-type activities, particularly to gain performance experience. These activities are largely provided by the Woodhouse Professional Development Centre (see paragraph 2.7.1). The BMus programme includes outreach modules that focus on the development of professional skills. The College has been guided by the precepts in the Quality Code, where appropriate, in the management of placement activities.

Student charter

2.14   The College is developing its student charter as a joint enterprise with the Students' Association. It is due to be introduced at the beginning of the 2012-13 academic year.

3   Public information

Summary

The Royal College of Music **makes information about academic standards and quality publicly available** via its website. The information is clear, accessible, accurate, and generally up to date. Students have found the information useful both in helping them make an informed choice when applying to the College and in preparing for what they might expect when they join. The team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

3.1   The College meets all its obligations to provide information for the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). There is a clear table of responsibilities for statutory data returns and a College Data Quality Statement which sets out the College's policy and objectives in the quality of data returns.

3.2   The results of the National Student Survey (NSS) are collated by the College and key issues are discussed at the relevant College committees and within each faculty. An action plan is developed to respond to all matters that require further development.

3.3   The College's website includes valuable information for students including programme specifications, application information and audition information. Students commented specifically on the usefulness of pre-entry information, particularly the applicant portal, which provides a useful guide for prospective students (see paragraph 2.5.1). Students also confirmed that the College prospectus is informative, attractive and easy to access. The student written submission referred to the lack of accuracy and currency of some of the information on the website. The College's Director of Communications explained that work was underway to ensure that all information was kept up to date.

3.4   Preparation for the implementation of the College's Key Information Set (KIS) is advanced and all required information will be available for 2012-13. Only one programme (BMus) meets the necessary criteria for the publication of a KIS.

3.5   The review team concluded that the College takes a conscientious approach to the provision of a range of useful information for students and acknowledged that a more systematic approach was now being taken to maintaining the accuracy of the material published.

4   Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at the Royal College of Music **meets UK expectations.** The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1   The review team confirmed that the College had made significant improvements in the quality of students' learning opportunities since the previous Institutional audit conducted by QAA. The College takes a progressive approach to quality enhancement in identifying targets and monitoring progress. College management provides support for developments by programme teams and individual faculties.

4.2   Enhancement is driven primarily by the College's Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy, annual monitoring reports, and the overall steer on development provided by the Value for Money Steering Group. The College also learns from feedback from staff and students, and is responsive to identified needs for improving learning opportunities. New ideas and good practice are shared widely across the College. Recent examples which were shared with the review team include the recital video project and the special enhancement project, which aims to create a video bank of one-to-one teaching lessons from across the faculties that will capture good practice, create an accessible resource for students, and build a research repository for the College.

4.3   From discussions with teaching staff the review team learned that a range of opportunities exist for the sharing of good practice, including the annual professors' meetings, team teaching development days, and participation in special enhancement projects. Experience of learning improvements at the College has informed developments at NAFA.

4.4   Enhancement of learning opportunities focuses largely on performance and practice where there is a strong focus on reflection and development. As a conservatoire the nature of the learning experience for students is influenced by the relationship with study professors and exposure to high standards of performance. The College maintains close links with other similar institutions in the UK and internationally. It monitors best practice in music education and endeavours to ensure that teaching at the College meets or exceeds the very high standards of instruction that characterise this sector.

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 Royal College of Music. The College has established a series of events and processes to ensure that

students are well prepared on entry to their programmes of study and well supported during their first year in the College. All students have personal advisers who monitor their academic progress and they have regular access to a wide group of staff, particularly in the area of their subject specialism.

Supporting students' transition

5.1   Students are supported through the process of admission into the College through open days that start to welcome them to the 'family' before they commence their programme of study. Induction is effective, warm and welcoming. The review team learned of the exceptional support provided by individual study professors who offer one-to-one help and guidance and take account of student needs at each stage of their course.

Information for first-year students

5.2   Information is provided for first-year students in programme handbooks and through the College's intranet (MUSE). The introduction of study plans has provided students with an opportunity to keep track of their progress and to discuss their development with relevant members of staff (see paragraph 2.2.6). There are also weekly drop-in surgeries where students can gain help and advice.

Assessment and feedback

5.3   The College has initiated a recital appraisal project, including the use of video feedback, to help first-year students understand the nature of performance assessment and how to manage exposure to personal critique.

Monitoring retention and progression

5.4   The Students' Association has been instrumental in the development of two significant projects aimed at supporting students during their first year in College. The Parenting Scheme links new students on the BMus programme to students in later years. It gives them access in an informal and personal way to day-to-day information about the operation of the College and provides friendly advice and guidance. The Language Tandem Scheme is for all students at the College who wish to develop or improve their language skills - either for international students wishing to improve their English or English-speaking students who wish to learn another language. Students are paired with students who have the relevant language skills and learn through informal contact and support.

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.