# Degree awarding powers assessment report for Point Blank Limited

## Full degree awarding powers assessment

**Provider legal name:** Point Blank Limited

**Provider trading name:** Point Blank Music School

**UKPRN:** 10019178

**Assessment conducted:** 10 December 2024 to 17 December 2025

**Reference** OfS 2026.06

**Enquiries to** regulation@officeforstudents.org.uk

**Publication date** 17 March 2026

# Contents

# Executive summary

| Type of assessment: | Quality and standards assessment for Full degree awarding powers |
|---|---|
| For: | Point Blank Limited |

1. This report represents the conclusions of an assessment for degree awarding powers (DAPs) at Point Blank Limited, trading as Point Blank Music School ('the school'). The school is seeking authorisation for Full bachelors' DAPs (for awards up to and including Level 6) in the following Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH)-coded subject areas: creative arts and design (CAH25-01), performing arts (CAH25-02), engineering (CAH10-01), materials and technology (CAH10-03), combined and general studies (CAH23-01).[1]

2. To carry out the assessment, the Office for Students (OfS) appointed an assessment team, which included three academic experts and one member of OfS staff. The assessment included two visits to the school's London campus. This report contains the advice and judgement of the team following its assessment.

3. The team concluded that the school met all criteria for a Full DAPs authorisation (see Table 1). This report does not, however, represent any decision of the OfS to authorise these powers.

---

[1] See Higher Education Statistics Agency, CAH.

**Table 1: summary of findings against the DAPs criteria**

| Underpinning DAPs criteria | Summary |
|---|---|
| Criterion A: Academic governance | Met |
| Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks | Met |
| Criterion B2: Academic standards | Met |
| Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience | Met |
| Criterion C: Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff | Met |
| Criterion D: Environment for supporting students | Met |
| Criterion E: Evaluation of performance | Met |
| **Overarching Full DAPs criterion** | **Summary** |
| The provider is a self-critical, cohesive academic community with a proven commitment to the assurance of standards supported by effective quality systems | Met |

**Full DAPs assessment**

The OfS may authorise a registered higher education provider to grant taught awards, or research awards, or both, under section 42 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA).

A provider that is registered with the OfS and has a three-year track record of delivering higher education, either through an arrangement with a degree awarding body or under its own existing powers to award degrees, can apply for a Full degree awarding powers (Full DAPs) authorisation.[2]

A Full DAPs authorisation will normally be awarded on a time limited basis. At the end of the specified time limited, the provider will be able to apply for an authorisation to grant awards without a time limit. This is referred to as 'indefinite DAPs'.

A provider may seek authorisation for Full DAPs for the following awards:

- foundation degrees only;

- awards up to, and including, bachelors' degrees;

- all taught awards; and/or

- research awards (if Full DAPs for taught awards are already held or are applied for at the same time).

---

[2] For a summary of different types of degree awarding powers, see OfS, Degree awarding powers.

Providers may apply for these authorisations on a subject-specific basis or covering all subjects. When choosing which level of DAPs authorisation it wishes to apply for, the provider must:

- have no fewer than three consecutive years' experience, immediately preceding the year of application, of delivering courses at a level at least equivalent to the level of DAPs authorisation for which the provider is applying

- meet the criteria set out in paragraph 249 of the OfS regulatory framework for higher education in England.[3]

**Assessment and decision-making process**

Before making a decision about whether to award a Full DAPs authorisation, the OfS will undertake a Full DAPs assessment. The purpose of a Full DAPs assessment is to gather evidence to inform a judgement on the extent to which a provider's arrangements:

- meet the DAPs criteria, including the overarching criterion for Full DAPs

- provide, and maintain the provision of, higher education of an appropriate quality

- apply, and maintain the application of, appropriate standards to that higher education.

The full requirements of the DAPs criteria are detailed in Annex C of the OfS's regulatory framework.[4]

OfS officers first undertake an eligibility and suitability assessment of the provider. This initial assessment determines the scope and level of detail of the assessment, and an initial position on whether the assessment should be desk-based or include a visit to the provider.

Assessments for DAPs are conducted by teams that include academic experts appointed by the OfS. The outcome of the assessment is typically a report, produced by the assessment team, summarising its findings.

The report is then considered by the OfS's Quality Assessment Committee (QAC). The QAC is responsible for providing advice to the OfS under section 46 of HERA on the quality of and standards applied to the higher education being delivered by providers for which the OfS is considering granting, varying, or (in certain circumstances) revoking authorisation for DAPs.[5]

After considering the assessment report, the QAC provides advice to the OfS regarding quality and standards.

---

[3] See OfS, Regulatory framework for higher education in England.

[4] See the OfS regulatory framework Annex C – Guidance on the criteria for the authorisation for DAPs.

[5] See Higher Education and Research Act 2017, section 46.

In making its decision about whether to authorise Full DAPs on the basis sought by the provider, the OfS will have regard to any assessment report and the QAC's advice. The OfS will also consider its own risk assessment of the provider and will have regard to advice received from others where this has been sought. It will also take into account other relevant considerations, such as the OfS's general duties under section 2 of HERA.[6]

**Further information**

We have published further information about providers seeking New DAPs and Full DAPs in Regulatory advice 12.[7]

4. Point Blank Limited, trading as Point Blank Music School ('the school') is a private limited company, which was incorporated on 30 August 1994. The school provides a range of undergraduate courses including in music production, sound engineering, vocal performance, DJ performance, music business, radio and podcasting.

5. Since 2012 the school has worked in a validation partnership with Middlesex University to deliver its higher education provision.

6. In accordance with the OfS's regulatory framework and the guidance on how to apply for DAPs, the school is eligible to be considered for Full bachelors' DAPs (for awards up to and including Level 6) because it has been delivering higher education for more than three years at this level and meets the eligibility criteria set out in paragraph 249 of the OfS's regulatory framework.

7. The OfS appointed an assessment team on 5 December 2024 that consisted of three academic expert assessors and a member of OfS staff. The team was asked to give its advice and judgements about the quality of, and standards applied to, higher education courses at the school and whether the school meets the DAPs criteria, including the overarching criteria for a Full DAPs authorisation.

8. The assessment team considered a range of information submitted by the school in support of its application for Full DAPs. This report does not represent any decision of the OfS in respect of whether the Full DAPs award the school is seeking should be granted.

9. This report is provisionally scheduled for consideration by the OfS's QAC on 19 January 2026. QAC will consider the report and formulate its advice to the OfS regarding the quality and standards at the school.

10. The OfS will have regard to this assessment report, and QAC's advice when making a decision about whether to grant the school Full DAPs on the basis requested. The OfS will also consider its own risk assessment of the school and have regard to advice received from others where this has been sought. It will also take into account other relevant considerations, such as the OfS's general duties under section 2 of HERA.

---

[6] See Higher Education and Research Act 2017, section 2.

[7] See OfS, Regulatory advice 12: How to apply for degree awarding powers.

# Introduction and background

11. This report represents the conclusions of an assessment for degree awarding powers at Point Blank Music School ('the school').

12. The school has been delivering higher education since 2012 in partnership with Middlesex University, which validates all of the school's UK-based higher education provision.

13. The school is seeking authorisation for subject-specific Full bachelors' DAPs (for awards up to and including Level 6).

## Context

14. Point Blank Music School is the trading name for Point Blank Limited, a private limited company with a network of music schools. The school, which started out as a recording studio in 1994, began delivering higher education online in 2012 and then in-person at its London school from 2016. The school also delivers short courses overseas from its schools in Ibiza and Los Angeles. The Los Angeles school is also accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music to deliver associate and bachelors' degree programmes in the USA.[8]

15. The school operates its UK-based higher education provision from its London school in Hoxton, East London.

16. The school offers Certificates of Higher Education and bachelor's degrees, including an option for accelerated (two-year) study and an integrated foundation year. It specialises in the following subject areas:

- music production

- sound engineering

- vocal performance

- DJ performance

- music business

- radio and podcasting.

17. Overall, based on the latest available 'Size and shape of provision data dashboard', the school had a student population in 2022-23 of 980 students. Of this number, 30 students were part-time and 110 were studying wholly outside the UK.[9]

18. The school reports that it currently employs 158 staff, which includes 13 full-time academic staff, 83 part-time or sessional academic staff and 62 professional staff.

---

[8] See National Association of Schools of Music, Accredited Institutions Search.

[9] Available at OfS, Size and shape of provision data dashboard: Data dashboard.

19. On 19 December 2023, the school applied for subject-specific Full bachelors' DAPs (for awards up to and including Level 6) in the following CAH-coded subject areas:

- creative arts and design (CAH25-01)

- performing arts (CAH25-02)

- engineering (CAH10-01)

- materials and technology (CAH10-03)

- combined and general studies (CAH23-01).

20. In accordance with the OfS's regulatory framework and guidance on how to apply for DAPs, the OfS undertook an initial eligibility and suitability assessment of the school. It decided that a Full DAPs assessment should be undertaken to gather and test evidence to inform a judgement about whether the school meets the DAPs criteria and has the ability to:

- provide, and maintain the provision of, higher education of an appropriate quality

- apply, and maintain the application of, appropriate standards to that higher education.

21. The OfS appointed an assessment team on 5 December 2024, which consisted of three academic expert assessors and a member of OfS staff in the following roles:

a. Professor Michael Rofe – committee chair and lead assessor.

b. Dave Wibberley – deputy committee chair and assessor.

c. Dr Patrick John Ainsworth – deputy committee chair and assessor (up to 11 April 2025)

d. Rose Gridneff – deputy committee chair and assessor (from 23 April 2025)

e. Thea Jones – committee member and assessment manager.

22. The OfS asked the team to give its advice and judgements about the quality of and standards applied to higher education courses at the school and whether the school has met the DAPs criteria, including the overarching criteria for a Full DAPs authorisation.

23. The assessment team considered a range of information submitted by the school in support of its application for Full DAPs.

# Assessment process

## Information gathering

24. In accordance with the process outlined in the operational guidance for providers on DAPs assessment by the OfS,[10] the school submitted a self-assessment document on 10 December 2024 setting out how it considered it met the DAPs criteria in full.

25. To support the statements made in the self-assessment document, the school also submitted a range of documentary evidence including course documentation, information related to its academic regulations, policies and processes, and details of its academic governance arrangements.

26. In accordance with the process outlined in the OfS's regulatory framework and the guidance on how to apply for DAPs, the assessment team undertook an initial assessment of the school's submission. The purpose of the initial assessment is to assess the credibility of a provider's self-assessment as the basis for the full scrutiny process.

27. On 3 February 2025, the assessment team recommended to the OfS that the school was ready to proceed to the full scrutiny stage of the assessment. The provider was informed of the decision to proceed on 6 February 2025.

28. Following a more detailed review of the school's initial evidence submission, the assessment team requested further evidence from the school which was submitted on 28 February 2025.

29. The team undertook a visit to the school's Penn Street campus on 15 May 2025. During the visit the team met with a range of the school's staff and students, observed a number of teaching sessions and received a tour of the school's facilities.

30. Following the visit, the team requested additional evidence from the school on 9 June.

31. As part of the scrutiny activity, the team remotely observed the following meetings:

    - Executive Committee on 26 February 2025

    - Academic Board on 10 March 2025

    - Board of Directors on 26 March 2025.

32. The team also held online meetings with academic, professional and support staff, external examiners and online students on 2, 5 and 24 June 2025. This included a virtual demonstration of the school's virtual learning environment (VLE), online library resources and student record system.

33. The team undertook a second two-day visit to the school's London campus on 8 and 9 July 2025, and met with senior staff.

---

[10] See Annex D: Operational guidance for providers on DAPs assessment by the OfS at Regulatory advice 12: How to apply for degree awarding powers.

34. Following the visit, the team submitted a final additional evidence request to the school on 22 July.

35. A draft version of the report was shared with the provider on 24 November 2025 for its consideration of any factual inaccuracies per the guidance set out in the operational guidance for providers on DAPs assessments. This was returned to the OfS on 5 December 2025, with the final version of the report being completed on 17 December 2025.

# Assessment of DAPs criterion A: Academic governance

## Criterion A1: Academic governance

### Advice to the OfS

36. The assessment team's view, based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion alongside any other relevant information, is that the school meets criterion A1: Academic governance because it meets subcriteria A1.1, A1.2, and A1.3.

37. The team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows in summary that the school has sound academic governance and management structures that deliver effective academic governance, largely with clear and appropriate lines of accountability. With some limited exceptions, the school engages students as partners in the academic governance and management of academic standards and quality. The school intends to work with other organisations to deliver learning opportunities, and it has appropriate plans in place to ensure that its governance and management of such opportunities is robust and effective, and that decisions to work with other organisations are the result of a strategic approach rather than opportunism.

38. The team identified a shortage of skills and expertise across a number of key areas in the school. It considered that this impacts the school's ability to meet all of the underpinning evidence requirements for this criterion, and that evidence requirements across other criteria are also impacted. However, the team was assured that the risks posed by this weakness are understood by the school. It was also assured that the school has clear plans in place to rectify this weakness, and that these plans are achievable and will be quick to implement.

### Subcriterion A1.1

**A1.1: An organisation granted degree awarding powers has effective academic governance, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities.**

### Advice to the OfS

39. The team's view, based on its review of evidence, is that the school meets subcriterion A1.1 because it has effective academic governance, largely with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities.

40. The team noted a number of weaknesses, and found in particular that the school does not have appropriate depth and strength of academic leadership across the areas of quality, pedagogy and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). However, the team concluded that the school understands these weaknesses, and that the school has clear and achievable plans in place to mitigate these and the risks they pose.

## Background

41.  To inform the team's consideration of its academic governance arrangements, the school provided the following contextual information regarding its management and governance structures.

42.  The school has an overarching strategic plan, supported by a 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy'. Governance arrangements are set out in the school's 'Institutional Governance Document', which includes terms of reference for all of its committees, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Point Blank Music School committee structure**
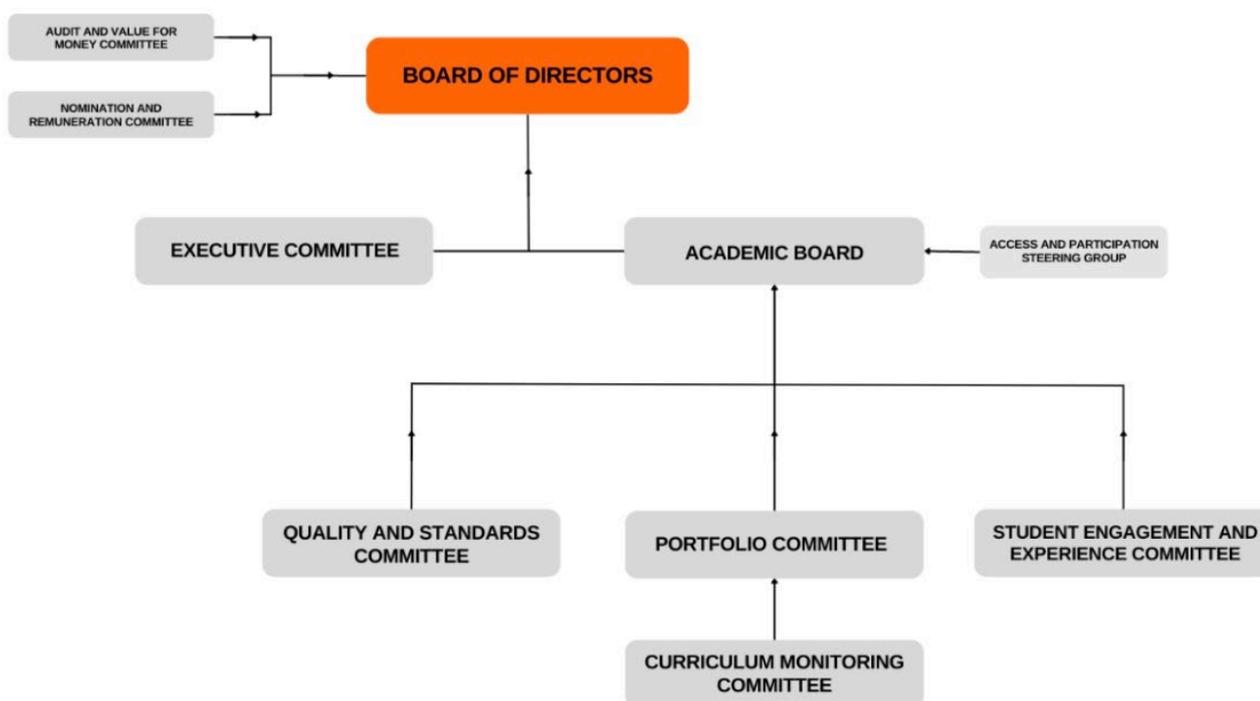


43.  As illustrated in Figure 1, the key accountable body is the Board of Directors. The Executive Committee, which oversees the management of the school, and the Academic Board, which constitutes the senior academic authority within the school, both report into the Board of Directors.

44.  As would be expected of an organisation at this point within its development, the school largely follows the academic regulations, and adopts the policies and procedures, of its validating partner. However, the school has also developed and implemented many of its own policies and procedures, and has additionally developed a large body of new regulations, policies and procedures in readiness for the scenario in which it successfully secures DAPs.

## Reasoning

45.  To test the extent to which the school's higher education mission and strategic direction are coherent, published, understood and applied consistently, the team reviewed the school's strategic plan and how it is used. The team also met with senior academic and professional services staff.

46.  The school's 2025 to 2030 strategic plan sets out a clear mission statement:

'[The school] believes in the transformative power of music. Our mission is to empower the next generation of music professionals with world-class education, cutting-edge facilities and unparalleled industry connections. Dedicated to fostering creativity, diversity and innovation, pointblank has always ensured its students are at the forefront of the evolving music landscape'.

47.  The plan also clearly defines the school's vision, underpinning values and states three high-level aims:

- innovate and diversify educational content

- elevate student resources and academic support

- extend global reach and collaborations.

48.  The team found that these aims, along with a set of clearly articulated objectives, consistently formed the backbone of the school's activity. For instance, the team observed that objectives, priorities and actions set out in the school's 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy' implicitly relate to the school's strategic plan. Examples include the stated priority that 'our curriculum is informed by the industry, prioritising employability, creative expression, and the latest sector-specific innovations', or the stated intention to 'enhance academic and professional skills [of staff] through provision of training programmes, workshops and other developmental activities'.

49.  These and similar objectives, priorities and actions are unpacked within other strategies or work programmes in the school. For example, the school's strategy on teaching, learning and assessment states an intention to provide staff with training programmes. This is reflected in the school's more detailed staff development strategy, which sets out the types of intervention that are already in place, or those that will be further developed or enhanced.

50.  Although the team felt that there could be more explicit alignment between the school's strategic plan and the various sub strategies and work programmes (for example, through nesting actions into strategic aims and the use of repeated phrases across documents), the team was satisfied by the overall coherence and consistency of the school's plans and actions.

51.  The school reported that it does not publish its full strategic plan publicly due to commercial sensitivity reasons. Instead, the team found that there is a short-form version published on its website,[11] which sets out the main principles. The school's staff are reminded of the key principles in the plan through periodic recirculation of the strategy via email and during all-staff meetings.

52.  The team found that academic and professional services staff with whom the team met struggled to recall some of the core principles in the strategy, when asked. The team considered that this may be because the full strategy is not published publicly, and that the language of the strategy is not consistently used across substrategies and work programmes.

---

[11] See Point Blank Music School, Mission statement.

However, when the team explored this further with this group of staff, it was clear that staff understood the core principles of the strategy, even if they couldn't at times name them as coming from the strategy. While noting this as a minor weakness, the team did not therefore feel that the coherence of the strategy, nor the consistency with which it is applied, was disrupted.

53. In summary, the team concluded that the school's higher education mission and strategic direction are coherent, published (albeit in a relatively limited way) and applied consistently, but that staff understanding of the school's strategy is limited to its broadest principles.

54. To test the extent to which the school's policies are coherent, published, understood and applied consistently, and the extent to which its academic policies support its higher education mission, aims and objectives, the team reviewed the school's policies, and spoke with senior staff, academic and professional services staff and students.

55. As a provider that delivers higher education under a validation agreement, the school currently follows in large part the academic regulations of its validating partner. To support the implementation of these regulations, the school has created an extensive array of its own policies and procedures, including for:

- student complaints and grievances

- assessment design

- financial assistance

- staff recruitment and selection.

56. The school has further examples of policies that it has adapted from, or based on, the policies of its validating partner, for example the 'Marking, Moderation and Feedback Policy', 'Academic Misconduct Policy' and 'Admissions Policy'.

57. Altogether, the team found that all aspects of the validating partner's academic regulations are supported by the school through dedicated policies, which creates a coherent approach to policy within the school. The team also found that the school's policies aligned with new academic regulations that the school has developed in the event of a successful DAPs application (see paragraphs 168 to 177).

58. Many of the school's policies are also optimised to enable the school to meet its higher education mission, aims and objectives. For example, as a specialist provider of higher education in music production, students need access to a computer and various pieces of specialist software. The school provides all necessary facilities on campus, and has a laptop loan policy for full-time students who do not have access to a laptop at home. It also has a financial assistance policy to support students with equipment. To further keep costs to a minimum, the school restricts its teaching to two main software applications. In the experience of the team, both are widely used in the industry, relatively cheap, and relatively comprehensive in their contents (i.e. they do not necessarily need additional plugins or sample packs).

59.   In all cases, the team observed that all policies and procedures are published within the 'Essential Programme Information' pages of the school's VLE, which can be accessed by staff and students. Furthermore, key policies are introduced to new staff during onboarding, and to students during induction week. The majority of policies are also available publicly on the school's website.[12] The team found that both staff and students had a good knowledge of many of the school's policies and procedures and know where to locate information when needed. For example, academic and professional services staff could describe in detail attendance policies for both home and international students.

60.   Through the team's review of papers and minutes of meetings of the Board of Directors, Executive Committee and Academic Board from the last two years, in addition to papers from various assessment boards, the team also found no significant instances where practice deviated from policy.

61.   In summary, the team concluded that the school's policies, are coherent, published, understood and applied consistently. It also concluded that its academic policies support its higher education mission, aims and objectives.

62.   To test the extent to which the school develops, implements and communicates its policies and procedures in collaboration with its staff, students and external stakeholders, the team spoke with senior staff, academic and professional services staff, students and the school's external examiners.

63.   As a small, specialist provider, the school makes use of many of its staff to sit on committees and working groups. Likewise, student representatives sit on a range of school committees, including its Executive Committee and Academic Board. As a result, the team found that staff and students are regularly involved in the development, approval, implementation and communication of policies and procedures.

64.   The team also found through discussion with staff, students and external examiners, that they are frequently asked to input on policy or procedure development activities. A recent example is the development of the school's new policy on sexual harassment, which has involved working groups with staff and students. Similarly, external examiners reported that they are frequently approached for their views and ideas when the school makes substantial changes to its policies and procedures. For instance, they were approached in 2024 for their views on the school's evolving policy on the acceptable use of artificial intelligence (AI). New policies, or changes to existing policies, are updated on the school's VLE, and the school emails staff and students to update them on any significant changes to policies or to share reminders.

65.   In summary, the team concluded that the school develops, implements and communicates its policies and procedures in collaboration with its staff, students and external stakeholders.

66.   The team reviewed the school's governance arrangements and spoke with senior staff in addition to academic and professional services staff, to test the extent to which:

---

[12] See Point Blank Music School, Public policies.

a. There is clarity and differentiation of function and responsibility at all levels in relation to the school's academic governance structures and arrangements for managing its higher education provision.

b. The function and responsibility of the senior academic authority is clearly articulated and consistently applied.

67. The team also observed three board and committee meetings, which included the Executive Committee, the Academic Board and the Board of Directors.

68. The team found that the school has a clearly articulated governance structure, with differentiation of function at all levels. As set out in its 'Institutional Governance Document', and as shown in Figure 1: Point Blank Music School committee structure, the school has a Board of Directors as its highest authority. The board includes shareholders, the senior leadership team, and four non-executive directors. The team found that the Board of Directors has clear terms of reference, a clear and consistently applied agenda cycle, high levels of critical discussion and debate, in particular critical scrutiny from non-executive directors, and detailed minutes that track discussions, actions and decisions.

69. Below the Board of Directors, the school adopts a two-part structure. The team considered this to be typical in the sector, based on its experience. The structure includes:

- an Executive Committee responsible for making recommendations to directors on 'non-academic strategic decisions in relation to institutional operations, infrastructure and finance'

- an Academic Board, which 'is established as the principal academic body of [the school], overseeing the overall planning, co-ordination, development and supervision of the academic work of the institution'.

70. The team's observation of the Executive Committee and Academic Board meetings and its review of papers from the last two years further demonstrated clear and differentiated terms of reference, a clear agenda cycle, high levels of scrutiny and debate and detailed minutes. The evidence also confirmed that terms of reference are adhered to consistently. Furthermore, there is an associated clarity of differentiation in function between the two committees that reflects the scope of committees, as set out in terms of reference. For example, the team found that matters such as programme amendments are considered and approved at Academic Board, whereas matters such as marketing campaigns are considered and approved at Executive Committee.

71. During a discussion with senior staff, the team identified a small discrepancy between the school's schedule of delegation and actual practice with regards to who approves new posts. However, this discrepancy was quickly resolved, with senior staff reporting that the scheme of delegation was out of date on this matter. The team found that the document has since been updated.

72. With regard to the clarity and differentiation of the school's committee structure, including the function and responsibility of the senior academic authority, and how committees give rise to effective governance and clear and appropriate lines of accountability, the team was satisfied with the school's approach.

73. However, the team identified a number of weaknesses in relation to roles and responsibilities and organisational structure, where the team considered that the school's current practice was unclear. In particular, the team identified concerns about the clarity of roles and responsibilities within two departments in the school: quality and information technology (IT).

74. The school has a Head of Quality and a Registrar who report in parallel to the General Manager. Both are members of the school's Executive Committee. According to the job description:

    'The Head of Quality plays a critical role within our organi[s]ation, providing leadership in quality assurance and enhancement, governance, policy management, and curriculum standards. The Head of Quality oversees the Quality and Governance department and is responsible or the management of internal regulations, quality assurance and enhancement, academic standards across the School. Externally, the School will require the role-holder to manage applications for funding and awards, research grants and in ensuring the School meets external regulatory requirements.'

75. According to the Registrar job description, responsibilities for this role include:

    - student experience (students' union, the National Student Survey (NSS), student engagement, induction, complaints, student welfare, counselling, hardship fund, widening participation support)

    - disability support (policy, learning support plans, effectiveness reviews)

    - academic engagement (student attendance, international students, at-risk students, related policies)

    - admissions (end-to-end recruitment process, accreditation or record of prior learning, data collection and reporting, student visas)

    - programme and assessments (meeting regulatory requirements, compliance with policy, compliance with academic regulations, external examiners, appeals and misconduct, related policies)

    - institutional initiatives (e.g. DAPs).

76. Based on its experience, the team considered that there are a number of unusual features of these roles relative to both equivalent sized organisations and the wider sector. In particular:

    a. The Registrar role is extremely large, encompassing work that the team would typically expect to see split across multiple senior managers.

    b. The Registrar role appears to include some activities that might be described as falling under the role description of the Head of Quality. For example, as detailed above, the Head of Quality is responsible for the management of academic standards, but the Registrar is responsible for ensuring programmes comply with academic standards.

    c. Major initiatives such as the current DAPs application, including the authoring of new proposed academic regulations, are being led by the Registrar rather than the Head of

Quality. However, the Head of Quality is responsible for internal regulations and for alignment with external regulatory requirements.

d. [redacted]

e. The Registrar role does not manage the register of data (which is done by the Head of Quality) but does manage admissions data.

77. The team found that some other projects or project elements that the team expected, in line with the job descriptions, would fall within the Head of Quality's or Registrar's remit are led by other staff. For example, the school's DAPs transition plan, which includes sections entitled 'Quality Strategy' and 'Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework', is currently being led as a project by the school's Head of Widening Participation.

78. The team recognised that, as a relatively small provider, the school might need to resource itself in untraditional ways, for example through the sharing of work between staff. However, the team formed the view that overall, the features noted above constitute a confusing picture of responsibilities, at least as they are presented within the job descriptions. It was notable to the team therefore that the school has a number of minor weaknesses in the area of quality assurance (see paragraphs 93 to 97), several of which the team considered may be due to a lack of clear ownership.

79. The team found that there are three roles within the school that have responsibility in some way for leading IT: the Creative Director, Head of Digital Development and IT Manager. From their titles, the team considered there to be a clear relative seniority of roles, which was corroborated in discussion with senior staff.

80. However, of the three roles, it is the Head of Digital Development who is a member of the Executive Committee, even though this role is primarily designed to lead the in-house developers, as opposed to leading the IT strategy overall, which is the domain of the Creative Director.

81. In terms of reporting, the team found that while the Head of Digital Development role reports to the General Manager, the Creative Director role reports directly to the Group CEO, thus missing out both the General Manager and the Managing Director. The team considered this to be a confusing shape that is further complicated by the fact that the IT Manager, who has operational responsibility for existing IT systems, reports to the Creative Director, while the Head of Digital Development, who leads the in-house developers, does not. The team considered that this puts unnecessary responsibility on the General Manager. This is because in practice, this role must ensure that the Creative Director's input on IT issues is suitably represented on the Executive Committee, and that the Head of Digital Development's output is in line with the needs of the Creative Director.

82. When the team discussed this matter with senior staff, it was reported that this shape was an historical anomaly that had not been rectified, and one that senior staff recognised was potentially confusing.

83. Taken together, the team considered that the school's role descriptors for quality and IT roles are confusing, giving rise to an unclear allocation of responsibilities. For roles responsible for leading IT, the team also identified a consequent lack of a key department head within

Executive Committee meetings. Furthermore, the team also noted the absence of Human Resources and Finance functions within the membership of the Executive Committee, which are covered by the General Manager.

84. When the team discussed these examples with staff across the school, the team found that, perhaps as a consequence of the small size of the school, everyone in practice did seem to know who was doing what, and who was responsible for what. For example, senior staff articulated clearly who had been leading the different components of quality assurance in the absence of a single team leader, although staff were less able to articulate why they had chosen this approach.

85. The team therefore concluded that the lack of clarity and differentiation of roles and responsibilities manifested more in the way in which these characteristics are described formally within the school's documentation, rather than in the actual lived experience of staff, where clarity, differentiation and a shared understanding do appear to exist within the school nonetheless. The team was thereby satisfied that this significant weakness does not manifest in a lack of effectiveness around governance more generally. However, the team also considered that, as the school grows, it will be increasingly important to ensure the school's governance documents are clearly aligned with its practice in this area, in order to prevent confusion.

86. In summary, the team formed the view that, for the most part, there is clarity and differentiation of function and responsibility at all levels in the school in relation to its academic governance structures and arrangements for managing its higher education provision. Nevertheless, it noted that some reporting lines, job descriptions, responsibilities and authority delegations were either confusing or out of date. The team also found that the function and responsibility of the senior academic authority is clearly articulated and consistently applied.

87. To test the extent to which there is appropriate depth and strength of academic leadership within the school, the team reviewed job descriptions and CVs of senior staff, and spoke extensively with senior staff, academic and professional services staff.

88. The team determined that the school has a group of directors with wide-ranging senior leadership experience. Both the school's Group CEO/Founder and the Managing Director/Head of Provider come from music industry backgrounds, and the team found that their insights and connections very much drive the academic identity of the school. For both, their main educational leadership experience is in the context of the school rather than elsewhere. Still, having built the school from the ground up, the team found that both have exceptional insight into the school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and possess above and beyond the necessary skills to lead the school. They are supported on the Board of Directors by non-executive directors with a wide range of financial, legal and educational expertise, including a current vice-chancellor of another UK higher education provider.

89. Furthermore, the team identified that the school has a strong group of programme leaders and lecturers, with appropriate subject knowledge and up-to-date industry experience. Academic staff collectively hold a wide range of academic qualifications and professional associations.

90. The school is led operationally by department heads who are overseen by the General Manager and constitute the executive team. The executive team includes Heads of Marketing, Education, Quality, Registry, Digital, Facilities, Data and Widening Participation.

91. In general, the team saw evidence to demonstrate that the executive team has wide-ranging and sufficient skills and experience. The executive team's experience ranges from record label ownership and music technology sales, through to roles within universities. The team also heard that a number of these staff have worked at the school for many years, working their way up to their current position, and therefore have extensive institutional knowledge.

92. However, the team saw limited evidence to assure itself that the school's academic leadership has sufficient expertise across three key areas: quality assurance, pedagogy outside of current practice, and equality, diversity and inclusion.

## Quality assurance

93. The team found that there was limited evidence of strength and depth of academic leadership in the area of quality assurance within higher education, with the executive team collectively having relatively little professional experience of quality-related roles in higher education prior to working at the school. For example, at times senior staff struggled to speak to principles and processes outside of their immediate and current practice.

94. This lack of wider experience was most apparent in discussion with senior staff on future collaborative provision (see paragraphs 140 to 145), whereby staff struggled to describe and provide examples of the additional work that the school would need to take on in relation to quality assurance, if granted DAPs. Nonetheless, the school later provided more detailed written plans following further reflection.

95. The team also found multiple small examples of problems or issues which it considered to be reflective of a lack of expertise in this area. Examples include:

    - the incorrect calculation of contact time as this relates to credit (see paragraphs 261 to 263)

    - a data integrity risk due to a flaw in the process by which the accuracy of student attainment is verified at the point of marks entry (see paragraphs 491 to 493)

    - a scheme of delegation that was not up-to-date, and so not in line with current practice (see paragraph 71)

    - an unusual line-management structure that lacks clarity in regards to who holds responsibility for quality assurance (see paragraphs 74 to 77).

96. Though the team considered that each of these were quite isolated and relatively minor, the team concluded that overall, the evidence indicates a lack of experience and expertise in this area at senior level.

97. While the school has a number of senior staff who clearly understand quality assurance within the context of the school, the team noted that in general there is a limited depth of experience among senior staff in this area both within and outside the context of the school. For example, the team was unable to find evidence of senior staff having held a senior quality role in a

substantially different provider. The team considered this to be important given the school's stated intention (see paragraph 140) to develop new collaborations. Such collaborations may include working with other organisations to deliver learning opportunities that may fall outside of the school's current experience and expertise. Furthermore, the team found that there is no single member of staff with an overall mandate for quality assurance at the school.

98. As a result, though the team was satisfied that, on balance, the school has sufficient expertise to operate current quality assurance systems, the team concluded that the school will need greater depth and strength of academic leadership in this area if it is to operate DAPs securely. This is because the school will not be able to rely on its validating partner to design and deliver quality systems and processes, and to oversee their proper operation.

## Pedagogy

99. The team found that, in general, there was limited evidence of strength and depth of academic leadership within the executive team, in the area of pedagogy.

100. As discussed in paragraphs 295 to 304, the school's current approach to assessment is robust and consistent. However, although the school has numerous group tasks within its curriculum (as would be expected, given the collaborative nature of much of the music industry), the team found that these group tasks are not themselves assessed. Instead, they form the start point for solo work, and it is this solo work that is assessed.

101. The team considered this to be unusual within the sector and therefore raised this in a meeting with senior staff, to better understand the school's approach and rationale behind this decision. However, staff reported that they would like to assess group work, but are not sure how to go about doing this. It appeared to the team that staff in the meeting did not realise that group assessment is common both in the sector and in assessment literature.

102. This example highlights what the team concluded to be a lack of expertise among senior staff in the area of pedagogy as it relates to academic leadership. Though the team was satisfied that the school's current provision is underpinned by appropriate understanding of relevant pedagogy, it found that staff knowledge often stopped at the limits of the school's current practice. [redacted] While directors later asserted that the school does have the expertise internally to develop its approach to group work, it was not clear to the team why this had not been implemented.

103. In light of the school's plans to develop new collaborative partnerships (discussed further in paragraphs 140 to 145), the team considered this to be a weakness. This is because, where partnerships include validating other providers' programmes, the school may find itself in a position in the future where it needs to review and approve pedagogic methodologies and practices that, potentially, members of the school do not fully understand.

## EDI

104. The team saw limited evidence to demonstrate that there is strength and depth of academic leadership in the area of EDI.

105. As will be described in more detail in paragraphs 513 to 527, the team found that the school has a strong cultural commitment to EDI but there are areas of EDI that are less developed.

106. When the team spoke with senior staff about EDI, the team found there to be a lack of expertise, which was demonstrated by the fragmented nature in which staff were able to speak about the subject. For example, while senior staff could discuss disability and poverty in some detail, they struggled to describe how the school ensures equity across other protected characteristics and how it collects and uses data to assure itself that it doesn't have any issues in relation to EDI.

107. In summary, the team concluded that while the school has strong academic leadership in many respects, the school does not have appropriate depth and strength of academic leadership in the areas of quality assurance, pedagogy and EDI. While this poses relatively limited risk to the school's current provision (given the presence of expertise from the validating partner), the team formed the view that this would not constitute sufficient depth and strength of academic leadership to operate DAPs securely, and indeed were the school to begin, as it intends, to oversee the delivery of academic provision by third parties.

108. The team also considered the limited strength and depth of academic leadership across the three identified areas to be the root-cause of the majority of other weaknesses identified in this report. This demonstrates the impact that it is having across the school, albeit in relatively minor issues.

109. Nevertheless, the team found that the school is aware of its weaknesses and has plans in place to fill current gaps of knowledge through recruitment, training and restructure. Directors also shared case studies to demonstrate how the school has previously addressed skills gaps and, more generally, developed effective staff recruitment practices that includes multi-stage processes that the team considered to be very robust. The team was therefore assured that, although at the time of the assessment there was limited evidence to confirm that there is appropriate depth and strength of academic leadership in certain areas, the school's plans indicate that it would be able to efficiently resolve its current gaps in expertise, and thereby quickly resolve many of the other issues noted in this report, such as those listed in paragraphs 93 to 106.

110. As a result, the team formed the view that the limited strength and depth of academic leadership in the identified areas were only having minor impacts on the effectiveness of the school's current academic governance. This is due to the contained nature of the school's current provision and the role of its validating partner. Although the current gaps in expertise could have a larger impact if the school is successful in its DAPs application, the team formed the view that with appropriate recruitment, these gaps can be filled easily and therefore ought not impact the effectiveness of the school's governance were it to be granted DAPs.

111. To test the extent to which the school will manage successfully the responsibilities that would be vested in it were it to be granted DAPs, the team requested a presentation from the school on its future plans, which the team considered in the context of the relative strengths and weakness identified in this report.

112. As described in paragraphs 154 to 167, the team found that the school operates a robust approach to academic governance and quality assurance under its validation agreement. The school also has clear strategic plans in place for how it will use its DAPs (discussed in paragraphs 139 to 146), supported by a detailed DAPs transition plan and substantial work on a new body of policies and regulations.

113. As described in paragraphs 92 to 108, the team identified a need for the school to develop or acquire new skills in the areas of quality assurance, pedagogy and EDI, in order to confidently meet the demands of holding DAPs if it is successful in its application. This will then enable the school, for example, to expand the role of the quality team and the Quality and Standards Committee to take on the new work required post-DAPs, to develop new EDI impact monitoring mechanisms, and to safely oversee the academic robustness of any collaborative provision.

114. However, the team was also satisfied by the school's own analysis of current skills, its proven track record of expanding its staff skills and education provision, and its robust, multi-stage approach to recruiting senior staff. As such, although the team found weaknesses within the current executive team's ability to manage DAPs, the team was assured that quick and simple solutions exist to fill skills gaps, and ready the school to operate independently of its current validating partner.

115. In summary, the team concluded that the school would manage successfully the responsibilities that would be vested in it were it to be granted DAPs.

## Conclusions

116. In conclusion, the team observed a number of weaknesses with regards to academic governance. In particular, the team found that while staff expertise is sufficient to deliver the school's current provision in the context of a validation partnership, additional experience and expertise would be needed were the school to be granted DAPs. The team therefore formed the view that at present, the school does not have appropriate depth and strength of academic leadership.

117. Furthermore, the team identified minor weaknesses in relation to:

- the extent to which staff within the school understand the strategy

- some lack of clarity around reporting lines, role descriptions and authority delegation.

118. However, the team considered that, on balance, these weaknesses were not significant enough to result in ineffective academic governance or, overall, a lack of clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities. Where weaknesses were found to be significant enough to have the potential to foster ineffective academic governance (as in the case of staff expertise), the team was satisfied that the risk was well understood by the school, with clear and achievable mitigation plans in place.

119. Otherwise, the team found that:

- the school's higher education mission, strategic direction and associated policies are coherent, published, understood and applied consistently

- its academic policies support its strategy and are developed in partnership with its staff and students

- in general, there is clarity and differentiation of function and responsibility at all levels in the school in relation to its academic governance structures and arrangements for managing its higher education provision

- the function and responsibility of the senior academic authority is clearly articulated and consistently applied.

120. The team also considered that the school's current practice, combined with its plans to deal with its current weaknesses in relation to academic governance, leads to the conclusion that the school will manage successfully the responsibilities that would be vested in it were it to be granted DAPs.

121. The team therefore concluded that the school meets subcriterion A1.1, because overall it has effective academic governance and, in general, has clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities.

## Subcriterion A1.2

**A1.2: Academic governance, including all aspects of the control and oversight of its higher education provision, is conducted in partnership with its students.**

### Advice to the OfS

122. The assessment team's view is that the school meets subcriterion A1.2, because most aspects of the control and oversight of its higher education provision are conducted in partnership with its students.

123. The team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that the school has met the evidence requirements for A1.2 and any other relevant evidence requirements.

### Reasoning

124. To test the extent to which students individually and collectively are engaged in the governance and management of the school and its higher education provision, with students supported to be able to engage effectively, the team reviewed the school's various strategies for gathering and responding to student opinion. The team also spoke with students, including UK and international students studying on campus or online, and student representatives.

125. The team found that students are regularly canvassed for feedback and ideas by the school, for example:

- at the end of all modules

- in the development of new policy (for example, the school's new sexual harassment policy)

- through a quarterly student feedback report

- through the school's own annual survey that is run in parallel with the NSS for Foundation Year, Level 4 and Level 5 students.

126. Data from these sources forms the basis of various annual reports generated by the school, including its programme-specific Educational Monitoring and Enhancement (EME) reports.

127. The team found that students are involved in various formal aspects of school governance. For example, student representatives sit on the school's Executive Committee and Academic Board, and also form part of activities such as programme validation. The school does not allow student representatives to sit on the Board of Directors, but instead uses reports from the Academic Board and Executive Committee (whose chairs are in attendance at the Board of Directors) as a means of representing the student voice. The team saw evidence that student feedback and perspectives were adequately represented in this manner during its observation of a Board of Directors meeting.

128. The school also runs a programme of student representatives, with students representing different areas of focus. The team found that roles and areas of responsibility are defined clearly, with roles such as Disabled Students' Representative, Global Majority Students' Representative, and Mature Students' Representative, and representatives are provided with detailed training, including an introduction to the school's governance structures. Student representatives reported to the team that they felt confident to undertake their roles.

129. The team also spoke with on-campus and online students, including international and mature students, during in-person and online meetings. In general, students spoke very positively about the school, drawing attention to the school's industry-focused approach to music education, and to the quality of teaching. The team heard that some students had a desire to see more collaboration in their courses, particularly those students learning remotely, and also that they felt workload to be higher than they were informed at application. This is discussed in more detail in paragraphs 261 and 500 respectively.

130. Some students also reported a concern that they did not know whether their module feedback might influence the marks they receive. This anxiety was known by the school: at the time of assessment, senior staff were working on new messaging for students about how their feedback is used, and the fact that it is anonymous. The team was therefore satisfied that the school had this concern under control.

131. During the assessment, the team found that the school had not undertaken any consultation with students during the process of deciding whether or not to apply for DAPs, nor during the application process itself. Instead, students were informed shortly before the team's first assessment visit, as part of the school's DAPs transition plan.

132. The team discussed the rationale for this decision with senior staff. The team found that students had not been informed due to:

- a desire to preserve confidentiality

- a desire to avoid disrupting students, given the school may be unsuccessful in its application

- the fact that any students who were consulted would not themselves have been affected by the outcome, given the timeline of the application.

133. The team considered this rationale, but noted that it was unusual for there to have been no student consultation on a decision and project of the magnitude of a DAPs application, to understand, for example, whether students felt that the school was ready or able to hold DAPs. While the team recognises that students' opinions might not have been the sole

determining factor, it may have highlighted areas for development prior to the school's application. Furthermore, although current students may not be affected by the outcome of the application, it is often the case that feedback from current students will be applied to the next or future cohort(s), for example for major changes to, or the development of, a new programme.

134. However, the team spoke with students and found that they were wholly supportive of the school's application for DAPs, and expressed pride in the school and their membership of it. The team consequently formed the view that the omission of student involvement in the decision to apply for DAPs was an oversight. Moreover, the team found this example to be an exception to the school's regular involvement of the student voice within decision making.

135. In summary, the team concluded that, despite the lack of student involvement in the DAPs application, students individually and collectively are engaged in the governance and management of the school and its higher education provision, with students supported to be able to engage effectively.

## Conclusions

136. In conclusion, the team found that the school meets subcriterion A1.2, because most of its academic governance, including most aspects of the control and oversight of its higher education provision, is conducted in partnership with its students.

## Subcriterion A1.3

**A1.3: Where an organisation granted degree awarding powers works with other organisations to deliver learning opportunities, it ensures that its governance and management of such opportunities is robust and effective and that decisions to work with other organisations are the result of a strategic approach rather than opportunism.**

## Advice to the OfS

137. The assessment team's view is that the school meets subcriterion A1.3, because where the school intends to work with other organisations to deliver learning opportunities, it has clear plans in place to ensure that its governance and management of such opportunities will be robust and effective and that decisions to work with other organisations will be the result of a strategic approach rather than opportunism.

138. The team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that the school has met the evidence requirements for A1.3 and any other relevant evidence requirements. However, the team considered that additional staff expertise would be needed to oversee this type of provision.

## Reasoning

139. The team reviewed the school's plans for collaborative provision in the event of a successful DAPs application, and spoke with senior staff in two separate sessions on this topic to test:

- whether collaborative working arrangements are based on a strategic approach

- whether collaborative working arrangements are informed by the effective assessment of risk, including the carrying out of due diligence

- the extent to which such arrangements are defined in a written legal agreement

- the extent to which such arrangements are subject to the same robust oversight and governance as the rest of the school's provision.

140. In a presentation to the team during its first visit to the school, directors clearly articulated their intention for the school to eventually deliver collaborative provision. The team asked the directors and other senior staff what the school would need to change, if it was awarded DAPs, to deliver these objectives, and found that staff initially struggled to describe the type of additional work that would be required at a strategic level.

141. The team was concerned that the school's response indicated a lack of understanding of what the team considered to be a substantial amount of new work, requiring robust governance and management.

142. However, prior to the team's second visit to the school, the school had developed a more detailed partnership strategy. This document outlines, among other things:

- the way in which partnership working is designed to deliver the school's overarching strategic aims

- the types of objective that any new partnership should aim to achieve, including a commitment to only pursuing strategically aligned opportunities

- high-level guiding principles of good practice, as related to the school's Quality Handbook, including oversight arrangements and risk management

- types of partnership that the school foresees as being strategically relevant

- a new process for mobilising a new relationship, including the evaluation of strategic fit, evaluation of risk, and the establishment of the necessary contracts/legal basis of any partnership

- resources requirements for each stage, along with identification of person or committee with responsibility for delivery.

143. The team was satisfied that this represented a significant step forward in the school's planning, which filled in some of the gaps the team had identified in its initial conversation with senior staff. However, the team noted that the school's partnership strategy remains a relatively high-level first step. It considered that new policies, processes and procedures, contract types and, in particular, a new and expanded approach to academic standards oversight, would need to be developed prior to launch.

144. The team heard that the school already has experience in partnership working, on an international basis, through its existing and historic short course provision in Ibiza, USA, India and China. However, the team recognised that this provision is not at higher education level, and the school's current experience does not include franchising (also known as

subcontracting) its own degrees internationally, nor the validation of others' programmes, potentially delivered internationally.

145. Consequently, the team's confidence in the school's ability to deliver its ambitious partnership plans is impacted by the lack of depth and strength of academic leadership in the areas of quality assurance and pedagogy, as identified in paragraphs 92 to 102.

146. Overall, the team took the view that the school's track record of delivering high quality academic provision, its historic experience of international partnership delivery, its robust first step towards a partnership strategy, and, crucially, its recruitment approach (see paragraph 109) offsets this weakness. As described in paragraph 110, the team has confidence that filling skills gaps should be quick and easy to do.

147. In summary, the team therefore found that the school's proposed approach will be strategic, informed by the effective assessment of risk including the carrying out of due diligence, defined in a written legal agreement, and subject to the same robust oversight and governance as the rest of the school's provision. However, the team observed the impact of the current weaknesses in relation to staff expertise in the areas of quality and pedagogy, insofar as these skills will be crucial to deliver effectively this new programme of collaborative work.

## Conclusions

148. In summary, the team concluded that the school meets subcriterion A1.3, because, overall, its plans present a credible methodology for ensuring that its governance and management of such opportunities will be robust and effective, and that decisions to work with other organisations will be the result of a strategic approach rather than opportunism. However, greater staff expertise will be needed to deliver this plan.

149. In conclusion, the team found that:

- the school largely has effective academic governance in order to operate DAPs securely, with the notable exception of a lack of expertise in the areas of quality assurance, pedagogy and EDI, but clear and achievable plans are in place to quickly fill these gaps

- with a few minor exceptions relating to role descriptions, responsibilities and reporting lines, the school has clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities

- its academic governance, including most aspects of the control and oversight of its higher education provision, is conducted in partnership with students

- pending recruitment of additional expertise, its plans for the co-delivery of learning opportunities present a credible methodology for ensuring that its governance and management of such opportunities will be robust and effective

- decisions to work with other organisations will be the result of a strategic approach rather than opportunism.

150. Overall, the team concluded that the school meets criterion A1: Academic governance.

# Assessment of DAPs criterion B: Academic standards and quality assurance

## Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks

### Advice to the OfS

151. The assessment team's view, based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion alongside any other relevant information, is that the school meets criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks because it meets subcriteria B1.1 and B1.2.

152. The team's view, based on its review of evidence, shows that the school has in place transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications. The team found that the school has a range of aligned policies and procedures that are robust and consistently implemented.

### Subcriterion B1.1

> **B1.1: An organisation granted degree awarding powers has in place transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications.**

### Advice to the OfS

153. The team's view, based on its review of evidence, is that the school meets subcriterion B1.1 because the school has in place transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications. Furthermore, the school has created academic frameworks and regulations that will be appropriate for the granting of its own higher education qualifications.

### Reasoning

154. To determine whether the academic frameworks and regulations governing the school's provision are appropriate to its current status and implemented fully and consistently, the team undertook a thorough and detailed scrutiny of key documents, including:

- the school's current academic regulations (those of its validating partner)

- the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook

- current policies covering admissions, enrolment, assessment, assignment design, marking, moderation and feedback, academic appeals, student complaints and academic misconduct

- the Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy

- the access and participation plan.

155. The team also met with senior staff to discuss the implementation of these policies.

156. As identified in paragraph 55, the school currently adheres to the academic regulations of its validating partner. The team found these regulations to establish a coherent statement of requirements covering admissions, assessment, progression, course design, examination and credit, and encompass the domains of practice in which the school operates.

157. The school has adapted several aspects of these regulations, under the permission of its validating partner, to make them more appropriate to its needs. These adaptations permit the school to, for example:

- cap late submissions at Level 4 (rather than at Level 5 and 6 only) to establish with students a way of working early on in their course

- operate a parallel mark scheme to the validator's approach, to align more with the sector more generally.

158. The team discussed these adaptations in detail with senior staff, including the rationale behind them. The team found that, for example, the capping of late submissions at Level 4 has led to an increase in the number of students submitting assessments on time. The team considered these adaptations to be sensible, and saw evidence that they are being implemented fully, consistently and with the full authorisation of the validating body.

159. The team noted one instance where it initially considered the school was not consistently operating in line with its validating partner's regulations. This was in relation to the total study time of some programmes, which had been described incorrectly on the school's website. However, when the team discussed this during a meeting with senior staff, staff confirmed this was a mistake, and the team note that this has since been corrected. This is considered in more detail in paragraphs 261 to 263.

160. The school's academic regulations are underpinned by a comprehensive set of policies and procedures, which the school has developed and contextualised from the regulations and guiding principles of its validating partner. The policies cover areas including admissions, enrolment, assessment, assignment design, marking, moderation and feedback, academic appeals and academic misconduct.

161. The team found that the majority of these are implemented fully and consistently, such as the policy on admissions, which sets out each stage of the admissions process for different applicants. The team reviewed admissions case studies for five applicants to test how the policy works in practice, covering different entry points and backgrounds. For example, it considered application forms and qualification evidence for Level 4 entry together with the unconditional offer letters provided by the school. The team found that these aligned with the process and criteria for unconditional offers as outlined in the admissions policy.

162. The team also reviewed example international applications which confirmed that, in line with the policy, international applicants had provided additional evidence of English language proficiency via the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Furthermore, for Level 5 entry, student applications, which required evidence of prior learning, were found to be further supported with details of existing certificates and transcripts. A 'Record of Prior Learning' (RPL) form maps the module content of the prior learning against the school's Level 4 curriculum, and is signed off by the programme leader and submitted to the validating partner. The team also saw evidence of full policy implementation for the 'Assessment Policy'

and the policy and procedure for academic appeals, which are discussed further under criterion B3.

163. One exception to the otherwise thorough implementation of policies was found to be the operationalisation of the 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy', which the team determined was not fully implemented throughout all aspects of the school's provision. This is discussed further under criterion D1 (see paragraphs 513 to 529). However, the team concluded that weaknesses in relation to EDI are not sufficient to undermine or impede the school's otherwise full and consistent implementation of its academic frameworks and regulations.

164. Each policy contains a 'Document Control' box, which outlines the stakeholders (staff and/or students), scope (onsite or online) and publication of the policy (internal or external). The date of approval is included alongside details of previous versions, and a useful table of related information identifies where a policy intersects or overlaps with others. The team further found that procedures to accompany each policy were especially thorough in describing the process to be followed with many containing flowcharts that delineate responsibility, for example in the 'Marking, Moderation and Feedback Procedure'.

165. The team found that all policies are reviewed on an annual basis, which is documented in a report to the Academic Board. The document provides a timeline for the review, update, approval and publication of policies and by whom, in addition to a lead policy owner for each department who has responsibility for the implementation of updates within their department. The team found this to be operationalised, with evidence of discussion of updates to and approval of policies including the 'Academic Appeals Procedure' and 'Academic Integrity and Misconduct Policy' at the Academic Board.

166. The Executive Committee also receives a report to note updates to policies, and any policies requiring approval by the Executive Committee. For example, the 2024-25 annual policy review evidences major updates to ten policies and procedures, minor updates to 16 policies and procedures, and 29 policies to be approved with no changes. These updates are implemented through the relevant committee as outlined within each policy.

167. In summary, the team found the academic frameworks and regulations governing its higher education provision are appropriate to its current status and are implemented fully and consistently.

168. To determine whether the school has created, in readiness, one or more academic frameworks and regulations that will be appropriate for the granting of its own higher education qualifications, the team reviewed:

- the school's academic regulations, which will come into operation if DAPs are awarded

- policies that the school has developed in readiness for DAPs, such as the academic appeals policy and procedure

- the school's 'DAPs Transition Plan'

- papers from Academic Board and the Board of Directors detailing the policies to be reviewed through the process of applying for DAPs.

169. The team also met with senior staff and held a detailed discussion regarding the school's strategic approach to new frameworks and regulations, and how these will be implemented.

170. In readiness for DAPs, the school has developed its own academic regulations and begun reworking its policies. The team found that the school's new regulations are based on those of its validating partner, which the team considered to be a sensible approach to ensuring consistency across the school's higher education provision during its initial transition away from its validating partner. Senior staff reported that the school will begin to personalise its approach from this starting point.

171. The team found there to be minimal change planned to the school's current academic frameworks if it is awarded DAPs, as policies are either already owned solely by the school or developed in accordance with the principles of the validating partner. The school confirmed that the changes to these policies would be minimal and are summarised as the removal of the external reference point (the validating partner) and minor adaptations to align with the school's own regulations which would come into force. The school has also developed a new 'DAPs ready' policy and procedure for academic appeals which sets out that the formal stage of the appeals process would be managed by the school, rather than its validating partner.

172. The team sought to understand if the school had discussed the above approach with its validating partner, to ensure that there were no intellectual property considerations or restrictions. The school subsequently provided evidence from its validating partner to confirm that the similarity of approach presents no cause for concern and that where there remains overlap, the validating partner is happy for the school to continue to use language originally developed by the validator. The team determined that this had been considered in depth by the school, through a thorough review of its current practice as outlined below.

173. The process of determining the regulations and policies for review in preparation for DAPs has been undertaken by a working group, which consists of members of the school's subcommittees covering Quality and Standards, Portfolio, Curriculum Monitoring, Student Experience and Engagement. The group has developed a comprehensive DAPs transition plan which contains an outline for implementation including:

- a timeline with key milestones

- teach-out and student transfer arrangements

- student consultation

- considerations regarding compliance with consumer protection law

- resources needed to undertake validation activity.

174. The team found the plan to be extremely well considered, and saw evidence that it had undergone review by Academic Board before it was approved by the Board of Directors.

175. The draft 'Quality Assurance Framework' demonstrates how the school plans to operationalise its own regulations through the governance structures following the award of DAPs. The team considered this document to be comprehensive and appropriate for an organisation of this size.

176. The team found that the Quality and Standards Committee currently serves predominantly as a board to review new and significant revisions to academic regulations and policies, but a thorough discussion with the executive team identified some reflections on its current status, including the requirement for a broader remit if the school is awarded DAPs. The team determined that senior staff are aware of the actions required to enable this to function more effectively, for example, additional staffing and expertise.

177. In summary, the team found that the school has created, in readiness, one or more academic frameworks and regulations which will be appropriate for the granting of its own higher education qualifications.

## Conclusions

178. The team concluded that the school has in place transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications.

179. Therefore, the team concluded that the school meets subcriterion B1.1.

## Subcriterion B1.2

> **B1.2: A degree awarding organisation maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification that it approves (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.**

## Advice to the OfS

180. The assessment team's view, based on its review of evidence, is that the school meets subcriterion B1.2 because there is evidence to show that the school maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification that it approves.

## Reasoning

181. To ascertain whether the school maintains definitive and up-to-date records of each qualification to be awarded, and whether each programme being offered by the school is being maintained, and used as the basis for the delivery and assessment of each programme, the team reviewed:

- the school's academic regulations

- nine programme handbooks

- nine module narratives

- a sample of four module change requests

- minutes of the Academic Board and a Curriculum Monitoring Committee summary report

- a student notification of grade release template.

182. The team also reviewed the school's VLE, where programme documentation is published, and was provided with a virtual tour of its student records system.

183. Programme handbooks are the definitive document for each programme offered by the school. The school has established a set format for these to ensure each handbook contains information on the structure of the programme for each mode of study and programme learning outcomes; module information including level of study, number of credits, pre-requisites and progression requirements. The team found that the module narratives also include learning outcomes, which are linked directly to assessment criteria on assignment briefs, and modules are mapped against programme learning outcomes. The team reviewed the school's programme handbooks and found them to be robust and demonstrate that up-to-date records of each qualification are used as the basis for delivery and assessment of each programme. For example, the programme handbook for BA (Hons) Songwriting outlines the programme outcomes and using a table, maps each outcome against each module. The module narratives further break down the content of each module which the team found to be aligned to the programme outcomes, such as in the Level 4 module 'Music Production', which requires students to produce an original piece of material using a digital audio workstation. The module is mapped to programme outcome B5 ('select and operate music and media hardware/software to perform creative and technical processes effectively').

184. The school's programme development and review procedures as set out in the 'Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook' outline that the development of new programmes, or changes to existing programmes or modules are reviewed at the Curriculum Monitoring Committee, approved at Academic Board and reported to the Quality and Standards Committee to ensure that records of programmes are accurately maintained. The team saw evidence of this in practice through a module change request for the school's 'Marketing and Branding' module, requesting to change the language of a learning outcome to ensure currency with industry practice, and to change the associated method of assessment. This change was debated at the Curriculum Monitoring Committee and subsequently signed off at Academic Board.

185. The school utilises a programme and module change request planner as a 'centralised repository' for information relating to past, present and future programmes. It documents module(s) affected, a description of the change, deadlines for consultation with students and external examiners, and hyperlinks to relevant documentation including the request form, consultation feedback, updated module narrative or programme handbook. It also assigns ownership of these processes to relevant staff, with deadlines given for publishing the updated programme handbook on the VLE. The supplementary programme and module change trackers further document details such as dates of the request, approval and implementation, programmes using the module and who the change has been recorded by. The information in these documents was found to be consistent with the individual module change requests reviewed.

186. The team found that students are able to access their grades and transcripts through the VLE, and the school provides clear and advance communication on grade release. The school reported that, under its validating partner, its students currently receive transcripts that detail programme and modules studied, level and mode of study, grades achieved and credits obtained. The school further reported that it will continue to operate this process and provide records of study on its own branded templates, which are currently under development. The

pages where students access these on the VLE allow them to view live assignment marking progress, element marks and feedback, and module marks. These can be viewed side by side to enable them to review their progress and are available for two years following graduation.

187. In summary, the team found that the school maintains definitive and up-to-date records of each qualification to be awarded and each programme being offered. These records are used as the basis for the delivery and assessment of each programme through the VLE. There is evidence that students and alumni are provided with accurate records of study in a timely manner.

## Conclusions

188. The team concluded that the school maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification that it approves (and of subsequent changes to it), which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

189. Therefore, the team concluded that the school meets subcriterion B1.2.

# Criterion B2: Academic standards

## Advice to the OfS

190. The assessment team's view, based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information, is that the school meets criterion B2: Academic standards, because it meets subcriteria B2.1 and B2.2.

191. The team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows in summary that the school has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the standards of its higher education qualifications. Furthermore, that the school is able to design and deliver courses that meet the threshold academic standards described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), and that these are reliable over time and reasonably comparable to those of other UK degree awarding bodies.

## Subcriteria B2.1 and B2.2

**B2.1: An organisation granted degree awarding powers has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications.**

**B2.2: Organisations with degree awarding powers are expected to demonstrate that they are able to design and deliver courses and qualifications that meet the threshold academic standards described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). Organisations with degree awarding powers are expected to demonstrate that the standards that they set and maintain above the threshold are reliable over time and reasonably comparable to those set and achieved by other UK degree awarding bodies.**

## Reasoning

192. To determine whether the school's higher education qualifications are offered at levels that correspond to the FHEQ, and that the setting and maintaining of academic standards takes appropriate account of relevant external points of reference and external and independent points of expertise, including students, the team undertook a detailed review of:

- programme specifications

- programme handbooks

- module narratives

- external examiner reports, including programme leaders' responses.

193. The team also met with senior staff, academic staff and students.

194. The school's 'Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook' states that procedures are in place to ensure that all new programmes align with the FHEQ, and:

'have learning outcomes that are consistent with the levels of knowledge, skills and competencies and quality across all new programmes and as prescribed in the relevant FHEQ level descriptors, and QAA Subject Benchmark Statement'.

195. The team saw evidence of this in practice through its review of programme specifications, programme handbooks and module narratives, which explicitly connect and make reference to the FHEQ, relevant QAA subject benchmark statements, and the OfS's sector-recognised standards.[13]

196. In a meeting with the school's programme leaders, the team observed that these staff demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the FHEQ and other external points of reference and how these are applied both within their respective programmes and across the school's higher education provision. Programme leaders and other academic staff meet regularly to discuss programme delivery, with outcomes and suggestions feeding into the Curriculum Monitoring Committee, of which programme leaders are appointed members. For example, at the time of this assessment, the updated QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Music had recently been published,[14] and the team heard that programme leaders were engaged in conversations on how to include the newly developed cross-cutting themes within their curricula. It was clear to the team that working in a small, specialist organisation is clearly of benefit to programme leaders in facilitating sharing of practice.

197. The team met with senior academic staff to further determine how the more challenging attributes of the FHEQ, for instance how an understanding of the ambiguities and complexities of knowledge, are interpreted and understood within the highly practical nature of the school's programmes. Staff gave the example of how the school uses innovative technology to ensure that its student body is at the cutting edge of new knowledge and developments that can be practically applied within the music industry. This was described as central to the ethos of the school. Staff explained that the use of innovative technology is embedded at Level 4 through encouraging students to experiment with different technologies, such as Dolby Atmos. They also shared an example of the Level 6 Portfolio Project, which is delivered across a number of programmes, as an example of the space within curriculum where students are supported and encouraged to test the limits of the discipline in relation to their own interests.

198. [redacted]

199. The team found this interpretation of the FHEQ to be appropriate and relevant within the context of the school's vocationally driven provision, although it determined that a more strategic approach to the interpretation of national frameworks at senior level had the potential to enhance the provision further. The team undertook a detailed review of student work submitted for the Level 6 Portfolio Project, and determined that students were well supported in undertaking projects aligned to their interests and aspirations, and that projects demonstrated technical confidence and proficiency. While the team concluded that the

---

[13] See OfS, Sector-recognised standards.

[14] See QAA, Subject Benchmark Statement - Music.

threshold standards had been met, they determined that a potential area of development for the school would be to academically stretch students to engage with the ambiguity and complexity of their discipline. The team determined that largely delegating the responsibility of interpreting external frameworks to the programme leaders poses a potential risk to maintaining consistent academic standards.

200. The team found further evidence of the application of external points of reference in revalidation documentation, including the critical review document for the BA (Hons) Music Industry Management, which was revalidated and renamed as BA (Hons) Music Business. The document sets out how the programme review and proposed changes align with the school's teaching, learning and assessment strategy and employability strategy. It also includes a statement confirming that the programme learning outcomes and aims are aligned with the QAA subject benchmark statements for Business and Management, and Music.[15] The team found this to be underpinned by external examiners who confirmed that relevant external reference points, such as subject benchmark statements, are appropriate and utilised.

201. The school's 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy' states that in addition to these relevant external points of reference, the school aligns its curriculum to industry and proactively engages with internal and external industry professionals through the design, development and delivery of all programmes. For example, in the validation report for the BSc (Hons) Music Software Engineering, the team found evidence of relevant technical input from industry including Ableton, Spitfire Audio, Focusrite, and PioneerDJ.

202. The school's programme development, approval and modifications procedures require students to be consulted at the development stage (for new programmes) and as part of the validation event (where a programme is being revalidated). The team found some evidence to demonstrate this in practice, such as results of a student survey relating to a change to the learning outcomes for the Vocal Musicianship programme, a report from an external review of the foundation year, which involved student focus groups, and the validation report for the BA (Hons) Music Business programme.

203. Student input is also formalised through the Student Engagement and Experience Committee, which reviews student feedback from different mechanisms including NSS results and module feedback, in line with institutional key performance indicators (KPIs). These are reported for consideration by the Academic Board.

204. However, the team found there to be some lack of clarity around student involvement and input into the approval of new programmes. For example, academic staff were unable to provide specific examples of how input from students had contributed to the design and development of new programmes, or describe how they had undertaken student consultation. Further discussion revealed this to be a known issue throughout other aspects of provision, with staff citing that students are often not concerned with providing feedback on something that does not directly affect them, despite being given the opportunity to do so. Despite this, the team was assured that the school is proactively seeking feedback from students, and

---

[15] See QAA, Subject Benchmark Statement - Business and Management. The Subject Benchmark Statement for Music has been updated since the critical review document was written. The new statement is available at QAA, Subject Benchmark Statement - Music.

putting in place different methods of formalising feedback from students to mitigate any risk (see paragraphs 240 to 242 for further detail).

205. In summary, the team found that the higher education qualifications are offered at levels that correspond to the FHEQ, and that the setting and maintaining of academic standards takes appropriate account of relevant external points of reference and external and independent points of expertise, including students. Some minor discrepancies were found in the application of student consultation within the design of programmes, but these were not deemed to impede on the overall process due to ongoing student feedback received through other mechanisms.

206. To determine the extent to which the school makes use of appropriate external and independent expertise in establishing, and then maintaining, threshold academic standards and comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level qualifications, the team undertook a review of external examiner reports and met with three of the school's external examiners.

207. The school's 'Quality Assurance Enhancement Handbook' sets out that it employs external examiners to 'act as independent moderators' and support the maintenance of 'nationally comparable standards' in line with the FHEQ and subject benchmarks.

208. The team found that external examiners typically engage with the school four times per year in alignment with attendance at programme assessment boards.

209. The team found through its review of external examiner reports that the school asks external examiners to confirm and comment on whether the standards set are appropriate for the qualification and whether the standards of student performance are equivalent to other UK institutions. External examiners are required to complete a report annually, following a programme assessment board, in which the team further found external examiners are asked to confirm grades and comment on module run, results and overall student performance.

210. The team saw evidence to demonstrate that the school makes use of this expertise through minutes of the programme assessment board, which identified actions in response to external examiner feedback. Further evidence was seen via programme leaders' responses to external examiner reports.

211. The school's draft 'Quality Assurance Framework' outlines the school's continued approach to making use of external and independent expertise if awarded DAPs. It states that external examiners will undertake their duties through the scrutiny of materials that may include completed assessment samples, draft assessments, the VLE, programme handbooks and programme and module specifications.

212. In summary, the team found that the school makes use of appropriate external and independent expertise in establishing, and then maintaining, threshold academic standards and comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level qualifications.

213. The team undertook scrutiny of the school's processes for development, approval, modification, annual monitoring and enhancement of programmes, to test the extent to which the school's arrangements are robust, applied consistently and also:

- ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations

- explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree awarding body are being maintained.

214. The team found evidence of a robust four-step programme approval process, outlined in the school's 'Quality Assurance Framework', which consists of an approval in principle, programme development, a validation event, and final approval. The 'Validation Project Plan' also keeps record of where each new programme is at within this process, mapping the timeline for each. Further discussion on the design and approval of programmes can be found under criterion B3.

215. The school ensures the maintenance of academic standards through the annual monitoring and enhancement process, known as the EME process. The team reviewed EME reviews for four programmes including BA (Hons) Music Production and DJ, and BA (Hons) Music Production and Vocal Performance. It found all reviews were comprehensive and included information and critical analysis of:

- interaction with accrediting, professional or statutory bodies

- staffing changes

- complaints, appeals and academic misconduct

- detailed data on student recruitment, continuation, completion and progression.

216. Furthermore, the reviews outlined feedback from external examiner activity and reports, with reflections made on positive actions and improvements. The team considered that the EME reviews provided evidence of a robust monitoring, review and improvement process at programme level. It also identified that any subsequent changes to programmes are planned and tracked, with input from students and external examiners.

217. These current processes are all undertaken under the school's current regulations, which it operates in line with its validating partner. The school's DAPs transition plan documents considerations that the school has made in preparation for undertaking its own programme development, approval and modifications and annual monitoring, if awarded DAPs. It outlines the overarching approach, which is to continue with the current processes, to ensure minimum disruption to students and to make any 'teach-out' arrangements as smooth as possible. The school has detailed these processes in its draft 'Quality Assurance Framework', which covers programme and module approval and changes, in addition to internal and external quality reviews.

218. The proposed alterations to the annual monitoring and enhancement process relate primarily to governance as opposed to the data and information that is captured and acted upon through annual monitoring, which will remain the same as within the current EME reviews. Additional responsibility will be assigned to members of staff with a sign-off process that includes programme leaders, the Head of Quality and the Head of Education and Curriculum. The annual monitoring reports will be signed off at the Quality and Standards Committee, which will hold delegated authority to manage the quality and standards of the school's programmes and continue to report into Academic Board.

219. The team undertook in-depth discussions with academic and professional services staff in addition to senior staff to understand how the school will manage these processes. The team found there to be an understanding at all levels within the school of the role that the validating partner currently takes, with a direction provided through the transition plan on how to ensure that programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements continue to be robust and applied consistently. The team was confident that the additional resources required to undertake this had been adequately considered by the school – from additional areas on the VLE to manage the process of programme approval through to additional staffing to support the quality team.

220. As described in paragraphs 93 to 97, while the team was satisfied with the school's current provision, and its current plans in the event of a successful DAPs application, the school currently lacks expertise and experience in the area of quality assurance. The team considered that this introduces risk to the organisation if or when it needs to undertake more substantial changes to its own frameworks and policies, relative to those already planned. However, the team also considered that this risk is easily mitigated through the development or recruitment of additional expertise.

221. In summary, the team found that the school's programme approval arrangements are robust, applied consistently, and ensure that academic standards are set at a level that meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification, and are in accordance with the school's own academic frameworks and regulations. The team also found that its programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements are robust, applied consistently and explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree awarding body are being maintained.

222. To determine whether credit and qualifications are awarded only where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment, and both the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant degree awarding body have been satisfied, the team scrutinised the school's:

- draft academic regulations (developed in readiness for DAPs)

- 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy' and 'Assessment Policy'

- programme handbooks

- approximately 20 samples of student work that had recently been assessed, including written and practical components across all grading bands such as Level 6 units 'Professional Portfolio II' (MP617, 40 credits) 'Advanced Composition' (MP611, 20 credits) and 'Business Portfolio Project' (MB614, 60 credits)

- minutes from assessment boards.

223. The team found that programme handbooks contain programme outcomes that are linked to how these are evidenced for each level of award. The programme outcomes are separated into 'knowledge and understanding' and 'skills', with each individual programme outcome mapped to the relevant modules. The team determined this to be clearly presented to enable students to see where they can expect to learn different aspects of their programme. These programme outcomes were found to support the development of student learning throughout the modules undertaken. For example, one of the programme outcomes for BA (Hons) Songwriting is for students to 'demonstrate a technical awareness of compositional approaches'. This outcome is mapped against three Level 4 modules, two Level 5 modules, and three Level 6 modules, which the team found to be good practice in enabling students to build on prior learning. To meet this outcome at Level 4, students are required to 'utilise foundational techniques in music composition'. To meet it at Level 6, they must 'demonstrate expertise and innovation in musical composition'.

224. Assignment briefs are contained within the module pages on the VLE. These briefs are separated into four distinct sections: the assignment task, the purpose of the assignment, requirements for submission, and additional information dependent on the module such as guidance or expectations. A rubric with assessment criteria is published on each assignment brief. This outlines each learning outcome alongside the relevant assessment criteria. The team found this to clearly show how students are expected to meet each learning outcome, and the level at which they have achieved it. It found the assessment of student work to be undertaken in alignment with these outcomes, consistently applied and rigorously quality assured through internal and external moderation (see paragraphs 295 to 299 for more information on the process of assessment).

225. Furthermore, minutes from the school's Tier 2 assessment boards evidence that the school adheres to the regulations and confirmation from external examiners that module and programme outcomes are met.

226. The current 'Assessment Policy' is underpinned by the regulations of the validating partner. This has a two-tier process for assessment boards, with Tier 1 focusing on the modules and Tier 2 focusing on progression and award. Minutes from the school's Tier 2 assessment boards evidence confirmation from external examiners that module and programme outcomes are met. If awarded DAPs, the school plans to continue with the same two-tiered approach to assessment boards, with Tier 2 chaired by the Head of Education and Curriculum. Additional staff training is planned to enable more members of academic staff to perform the role of chair.

227. The team considered student work for modules that contained both written and practical outputs and ranged in credit weighting from 20 to 60 credits, with a particular focus on Level 6 modules to determine whether the work submitted met the threshold standards as outlined within the FHEQ and QAA subject benchmark statements. The team found the submitted work to evidence a wide range of attainment, which it confirmed was assessed in relation to learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

228. The outcomes of project assignments reflected the vocational nature of the programmes and the team found these to be broadly comparable to equivalent courses at similar higher

education providers. The team further found that the threshold standards outlined in the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Music were met, with students demonstrating the requisite knowledge and understanding of their discipline. The team found the technical skills of students to be a particular strength, with work 'demonstrating nuance, creative flair and professionalism with the technology in a stylistically appropriate way'.[16]

229. The team reviewed examples of student work on the VLE to test the extent to which students had achieved the intended learning outcomes. The work included written assignments, audio, video, and presentations, across modules of different weightings (20 to 60 credits) at Levels 4 to 6 where marks had been moderated and agreed. The team found the feedback on the assessed work to be detailed and thorough, with feedback directly linked to the learning outcomes per module. This allows students to monitor the extent to which these outcomes have been achieved. Written feedback provided some helpful guidance on how to improve future submissions of work. The team found this process to be understood and valued by students and staff alike.

230. In summary, the team determined that credit and qualifications were awarded only where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes had been demonstrated through assessment, and when both the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant degree awarding body had been met.

## Conclusions

231. The team concluded that the school meets subcriterion B2.1 as the evidence demonstrates that it has clear mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications, and that these are consistently applied.

232. The team further concluded that the school meets subcriterion B2.2 as the evidence demonstrates that it designs and deliver programmes and qualifications that meet the threshold academic standards described in the FHEQ and that reflects appropriate sector-recognised standards. The evidence demonstrates that the standards that it sets and maintains above the threshold are reliable over time and reasonably comparable to those set and achieved by other UK degree awarding bodies.

233. Therefore, the team concluded that the school meets criterion B2.

---

[16] Available at QAA, Subject Benchmark Statement - Music.

# Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience

## Advice to the OfS

234. The assessment team's view, based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information, is that the school meets criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience, because it meets subcriterion B3.1.

235. The team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that, in summary, the school is able to design and deliver courses and qualifications that provide a high quality academic experience. The school has robust methods in place for the design and approval of programmes, learning and teaching, and assessment. These are monitored and enhanced through appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. The school also has effective procedures for handling appeals and complaints and takes appropriate action following these.

## Subcriterion B3.1

**B3.1: Organisations with degree awarding powers are expected to demonstrate that they are able to design and deliver courses and qualifications that provide a high quality academic experience to all students from all backgrounds, irrespective of their location, mode of study, academic subject, protected characteristics, previous educational background or nationality. Learning opportunities are consistently and rigorously quality assured.**

## Reasoning

### Design and approval of programmes

236. To ascertain whether the school operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes, the team reviewed:

- the 'Institutional Governance Document'

- the school's current and draft academic regulations

- the 'Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook'

- sample programme validation documentation including academic provision proposal forms for BSc (Hons) Music Systems Engineering and BSc (Hons) Songwriting, associated market research, validation event agenda and overview documents.

237. The 'Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook' identifies a four-stage process for programme approval:

- an approval in principle

- programme development

- validation event

- final approval.

238. Proposals for new programmes may originate from the Curriculum Monitoring Committee, the Portfolio Committee, or the Board of Directors as a result of, for example, programme monitoring, market and sector developments or opportunities for innovation.

239. The Portfolio Committee will appoint an academic lead to act as project manager and oversee the programme development process. This includes completion of an academic provision proposal form, which is discussed and approved at Academic Board.

240. Once approved, a programme development team is appointed to develop the programme and associated documentation in line with external reference points and stakeholder consultation, including students and external expertise. The team includes two external members – one academic and one industry expert. This stage also includes a pre-validation event arranged by the Quality and Standards Committee, to ensure documentation is complete, appropriate and accurate.

241. A programme approval panel is then appointed by the Quality and Standards Committee, which includes senior academic staff and two external academic and industry advisers. If the programme is endorsed for approval, any conditions must be signed off before a final decision is made by the Academic Board.

242. The team found evidence of this process in practice in sample end-to-end programme approval documentation for two recent programme approvals, including validation overview documents, a sample revalidation timeline and new programme handbooks. Validation reports detail where there has been both student and external consultation.

243. The team found the validation reports to be comprehensive and to clearly demonstrate thorough discussion in addition to commendations, conditions and recommendations. For example, the report for the revalidation of the BA (Hons) Music Business shows evidence of two conditions of validation:

    a. To revise the programme specification and module narratives in line with panel discussions during the event, with particular reference to EDI, AI and the live events that take place.

    b. Revise the formative and summative assessment strategy to review word counts and equivalencies, diversify assessment types and ensure the formative tasks align with the summative.

244. The responses to these conditions were itemised in a list alongside the relevant page number of the programme handbook and module narrative. A total of 34 revisions were made to meet these conditions, and the team found that these were evidenced in the final programme handbook.

245. In readiness for DAPs, the school has developed a new 'Quality Assurance Framework', which articulates the planned process for the design, development and approval of programmes, if successful. This follows a near identical process to the current one that is overseen by the school's validating partner, which the team considered should enable it to build upon an already effective process. Discussions with senior staff confirmed a strategic approach to continue developing courses within the same subject area where there is a high level of expertise.

246. In summary, the team found that the school operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.

247. To confirm whether relevant staff are informed of and provided with guidance and support on these procedures and their roles and responsibilities in relation to them, the team met with academic and professional services staff responsible for aspects of the design and approval of programmes.

248. The roles and responsibilities for the design, development and approval of programmes are summarised in the school's 'Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook'. As set out in paragraph 239, it establishes that the academic lead coordinates the process and convenes a programme development team. This includes the Quality Manager, an internal academic subject specialist, an external academic and an external industry specialist. Once developed, a senior curriculum manager or programme leader, two senior academics and the Head of Quality are responsible for critically reviewing and endorsing the programme for approval.

249. The production of a validation timeline document also sets out the items and action required (and by whom) for each stage of the project. The team reviewed an example that indicated that this includes, for example, members of the programme development team attending the pre-event workshop and the Quality Manager undertaking a quality check of validation documentation.

250. This process was articulated by both academic and professional services staff who had recently been through the approval of new programmes, all of whom were able to describe the programme approval process in detail and were clear on their input into the process, reflecting thoughtfully on their engagement. The team found that programme leaders in particular play an instrumental role in the design, development and approval of programmes.

251. Though guidance and support on the role of academic staff in programme design and approval is not explicitly outlined in the 'Academic Staff Development Strategy', the team was confident following discussion with academic staff, that a culture of ongoing personal and professional development (as outlined in paragraphs 406 to 407) has enabled staff to successfully undertake this aspect of their roles. Additionally, information published on the lecturer portal on the VLE has been designed to support all academic staff. This contains information on how to design assignments in alignment with learning outcomes. The team found this to be thorough and to demonstrate good practice. Programme leaders confirmed to the team that this is a useful resource that is continually updated and added to, and of particular value given the high number of sessional lecturers that the school employs.

252. The team reviewed job descriptions for programme leaders, module leaders and senior lecturers. The documents state that these roles will be involved in course development, with programme leaders assigned to lead on the process. The team found this to be understood and consistently applied in practice.

253. In summary, the team found that relevant staff are informed of and provided with guidance and support on these procedures and their roles and responsibilities in relation to them.

254. To determine whether the roles and responsibilities for the design, development and approval of programmes are clearly assigned, including the involvement of external expertise where appropriate, and that action is carefully monitored, the team reviewed:

- the 'Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook'

- the 'Institutional Governance Document'

- the school's current academic regulations

- terms of reference and a summary report from the Portfolio Committee

- minutes from Academic Board.

255. The 'Institutional Governance Document' outlines that it is the newly developed Portfolio Committee (established in 2024) that provides a steer to the Academic Board on the strategic development of programmes. This is evidenced within a summary report from the Portfolio Committee where details on the proposed revalidation of the foundation year were discussed and approved. The associated report from Academic Board provides further evidence of discussion of this, with the revalidation approved for 2026. The team found that the summary reports from the Academic Board all contained evidence to confirm that the board holds responsibility for the design, development and approval of programmes. This process was found to be understood through discussion with both academic and professional services staff who input into the process.

256. The team reviewed sample reports from validation events, a validation event attendee list, an external assessor appointment form and a confirmed validation report, which demonstrated clear and consistent engagement from external experts, both academic and industry-focused. The team also saw evidence of external involvement at the development stage. For example, the school had drawn on its close links with industry to gain feedback from a range of leading experts in the creation of the newly developed BSc (Hons) in Music Systems Engineering.

257. The monitoring of subsequent actions from this external expertise is outlined in a validation report confirmation that includes amendments, conditions and recommendations and the programme team's response to these. The team found these to be appropriate and considered. Through discussion with programme leaders, the team determined that these conditions have played a role in enabling academic teams to enhance the curriculum.

258. In summary, the team found that the roles and responsibilities for the design, development and approval of programmes are clearly assigned, including the involvement of external expertise where appropriate, and that action is carefully monitored.

259. While the school does not have programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways per se, it does offer a number of different modes and models of delivery, including online and two-year accelerated degree programmes. Furthermore, there are common modules across the undergraduate programmes. To determine the coherence of these elements, and how they are secured and maintained, the team reviewed programme handbooks, and met with academic staff, students and external examiners.

260. The team found that the curriculum of shared modules is coherently delivered and quality assured, and that programme leaders, senior academic staff and external examiners have oversight of the performance of individual modules. These shared modules, which are delivered both within and across programmes, are thoroughly embedded within the delivery structures and the team found no evidence of concerns around parity of experience for students enrolled on different programmes. There is mitigation of risk in place through the established EME process (see paragraphs 215 to 216 and 218) should this occur in the future.

261. Through discussion with staff and students, the team identified some differences between the online, in-person and accelerated modes of delivery, particularly in relation to the scheduled learning hours. Online students cited a mismatch between the 18 hours they had been advised that they would need to spend on their studies and what has been required in practice, which is that they undertake two 20 credit modules consecutively. Students reported that this has resulted in more significant workload. This prompted a longer discussion with the staff team about how credit is assigned, which the school interprets as 10 hours per credit, in alignment with the majority of the sector. For students enrolled on a three-year programme, this averages approximately 40 hours per week. The team therefore found there to be some lack of clarity around how the school defines independent learning hours and how these are understood by students. For in-person students, it is clear that there is access to studios and facilities but for the online students there was found to be a lack of published information on managing their time per module.

262. The team had a long discussion with senior staff regarding this discrepancy. Staff acknowledged that the potential for students to misinterpret the number of learning hours required to complete a programme could have a detrimental impact on the school's provision. The team found the school to be open in discussion of this oversight, accepting that information published online had not been communicated with enough clarity. The information on learning hours for potential applicants has subsequently been updated online to reflect current practice, with clear expectations on the independent study required to achieve the credit awarded.

263. The team found that students enrolled on the accelerated two-year programme undertake three 20 credit modules in the first term, meaning they need to allocate 50 hours per week to their studies. Applicants' suitability to study via the accelerated route is currently considered in discussion with applicants through the admissions process, to ascertain their ability to undertake such a significant workload.

264. In summary, while the team found that the coherence of programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways is largely secured and maintained, there are some inconsistencies across different modes of programme delivery.

265. To ascertain whether close links are maintained between learning support services and the school's programme planning and approval arrangements, the team reviewed reports from validation events and met with learning support staff.

266. The team found that the academic leadership of the planning and approval of programmes was clearly underpinned by relevant contributions from learning support staff who had input at both the proposal and validation stages. For example, the team identified an appropriate

range of both academic and professional services staff on all relevant committees involved in the programme approval process, including the Curriculum Monitoring Committee, Portfolio Committee and Academic Board, to ensure clear and appropriate lines of communication between the two. Through discussion with both academic and professional services staff, the team determined that staff are aware of, and confident in, undertaking the different aspects of their role that relate to programme planning and approval.

267. The team therefore determined that the school ensures that close links are maintained between learning support services and programme planning and approval arrangements.

## Learning and teaching

268. To review the extent to which the school articulates and implements a strategic approach to learning and teaching which is consistent with its stated academic objectives, the team reviewed the 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy', agendas and minutes of the Academic Board and the school's Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023 panel statement.[17]

269. The team also met with staff and students and observed a meeting of the Academic Board.

270. The school has a clear and detailed 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy' that outlines the strategic vision for teaching, learning and assessment. It states an intention to:

'create an academic environment that fosters academic excellence, facilitates creative expression, encourages student engagement, and promotes inclusive and equal learning opportunities.'

271. These are realised through the principles of:

- collaboration and community

- problem-based learning

- situated and experiential learning

- equality, diversity and inclusivity.

All are rooted within practical and vocational courses that have a strong integration with the music industry.

272. The objectives within the strategy are put into operation and centred within all activities at the school. The team observed that students were clear on how these are embedded within their day-to-day learning experience, commending the situated, experiential and industry-facing learning as a defining factor of their programmes. This was supported by a clear and shared vision by academic staff, in particular programme leaders.

273. Alongside the stated academic objectives, the strategy outlines the KPIs used to measure the fulfilment of these objectives. This strategy is regularly reviewed, monitored and updated as evidenced by minutes of the Academic Board and the team's observation of an Academic

---

[17] Available at TEF 2023 Outcomes, Point Blank Limited.

Board meeting. The team found evidence of detailed discussion of KPIs including continuation, completion and progression in line with condition B3 of the OfS's regulatory framework and NSS responses. The team further found that these have led to tangible actions, including an increase in staff contact and improved opportunities for students to provide feedback on modules.

274. The team considered that its findings aligned with the school's TEF 2023 panel statement, which cited that the TEF panel had judged the school's teaching, assessment and feedback as an 'outstanding quality feature'.[18] In particular, the statement noted the school's small class sizes with one-to-one tutorials, regular feedback, 'responsiveness to industry input into curriculum design', and tailoring of provision to the needs of industry and new students. The statement also referred to 'innovation and resources that are highly regarded by industry and external examiners' in respect of the school's learning resources and cited 'highly effective support for educational gains'.

275. In summary, the team found that the school articulates and implements a strategic approach to learning and teaching which is consistent with its stated academic objectives. This approach is comprehensive, and consistently applied across all aspects of learning and teaching.

276. To ascertain whether the school maintains physical, virtual and social learning environments that are safe, accessible and reliable for every student, promoting dignity, courtesy and respect in their use, the team considered relevant policies including the 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy', the 'Disability Support Framework' and the 'Access and Participation Plan'.

277. The team also met with senior staff, undertook a physical tour of the school's London campus and a virtual tour of the VLE.

278. The school has two campuses in London, with studios that the team observed are well equipped with industry-level equipment and appropriately designed for the small cohorts of students (up to 20). The majority are designed for teaching and demonstration, and configured for remote delivery. The teaching sessions that the team observed were recorded live on Zoom, with work uploaded directly to the VLE during the session. This enabled students to share work and reflect upon it collectively, promoting engagement and inclusivity.

279. The learning spaces are fully accessible, with significant recent structural work undertaken in the new space at the school's Penn Street campus to ensure that it is accessible to wheelchair users. Many spaces are bookable up to 2330 on weekdays and available to all students irrespective of the course they are enrolled on, or whether it is an undergraduate or short course. Specialist studios can be booked after an induction. Safety of the physical learning environment is assured through a robust risk assessment process, with all technical staff trained as fire marshals and first aiders. For further detail on the management of safety and risk within the physical learning environments, see paragraph 507.

280. The VLE plays an integral role in the delivery of courses and serves as a single point of reference for all information, both academic and pastoral. Accessibility of the VLE has been

---

[18] Available at TEF 2023 Outcomes, Point Blank Limited.

considered and the 'Disability Support Framework' sets out what specialist advice, support and guidance is available for students, with a wide range of access requirements including the use of bigger fonts, choice of background colours, digital voice readers and captions for tutorial videos. The recording of teaching sessions enables all students to revisit these as required.

281. The VLE is developed and overseen in house, which the team found provides a significant amount of flexibility for the school to adapt and make improvements as necessary. A digital learning research project was recently undertaken for which the school gathered feedback from users of the VLE and considered other platforms that could be adopted to meet their requirements of scalability, such as Blackboard, Canvas and Moodle. The decision was made to continue to update the bespoke VLE and integrate new features as required, particularly those that facilitate accessibility. A redesign is underway that focuses on implementing sidebar navigation. The team found the VLE to be a strength of the school that was well resourced.

282. The team found that the school's social learning environments play a key role in supporting a high number of extracurricular activities, for example, the school organised over 120 events in 2023-24. Senior staff reported that these activities are a defining feature of the school's provision and designed to reflect the working practices and demands of the music industry. Activities are generally hosted on site from the London school, although online students are permitted to attend. The team heard that there are some planned initiatives underway to facilitate online students' participation.

283. The team sought to understand how the school's social learning environments and, by extension its activities, are made accessible for all students. It considered that students who, for example, have other responsibilities outside of the course they are enrolled on may find it more challenging to engage in these environments and associated activities. This concern was echoed by online students who reported that they found there to be a lack of community among the student body (discussed further in paragraph 288). Through discussion with senior staff, the team was not able to ascertain any tangible actions that the school has put in place to promote inclusivity and access to its social learning environments (such as the performance hub and bar) for **all** students. However, the team was not able to determine to what extent there are barriers to students engaging in practice, particularly as this information is not currently recorded by the school.

284. Further discussion with senior staff identified some inconsistencies in how the school is able to articulate how it monitors its learning environments to ensure that they are safe, accessible, reliable and promote dignity, courtesy and respect in their use for **every** student. For example, senior staff were able to provide examples of how the school has considered access arrangements and the design of the new building for students with a disability. The team also saw evidence that some aspects of EDI, in particular support for disabled students have been discussed at the school's committees. However, the team found that this was not consistently put into operation. Furthermore, it found that the 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy' had not been formally put into operation through the committee structure. It also found that the EDI working group had not been established and data on aspects of EDI was not monitored in a consistent or effective manner (see paragraph 521 to 522 for more information). As a result, senior staff could not confidently answer questions on how **all** students are supported. The team considered that this appears to have left a gap in the

school's approach to ensuring that all students are able to access learning environments with dignity, courtesy and respect.

285. In summary, the team observed some clear examples to demonstrate how the school maintains physical and virtual learning environments through its onsite facilities and bespoke VLE. It also observed high quality social spaces, although it noted that these are more readily accessed by some students than others. Nevertheless, the team determined that the promotion of dignity, courtesy and respect for every student within these environments had **not** been fully considered, put into operation and monitored by the school.

286. To ascertain whether robust arrangements exist for ensuring that learning opportunities provided to those of its students that may be studying at a distance from the school are effective, the team reviewed the VLE as the primary learning environment, and met with students enrolled on online modes of study.

287. The team found that the school has an established approach to online learning and has been delivering online courses in tandem with its provision in London for 30 years. The teaching and learning for this mode of study has been designed and adapted accordingly, with activity focused around two weekly masterclasses, video content and a high level of one-to-one tutorial support. This is augmented by comprehensive material on the VLE that includes course materials, online tutorials, recorded lecture content and some pages that are specifically designed for online students. Students spoke very positively about the high level of support available to them, and the overall organisation of the VLE was described as 'fantastic'. This was understood to be the single point of reference and enabled them to seek further information where necessary, for example access to study support and wellbeing services. Online journals are also available to online students to assist with their studies, along with support from the Library Manager.

288. When the team met with online students, they reported some minor issues around the lack of opportunities to collaborate with other students, and felt that more could be done to build an online community. This was alongside issues raised regarding a workload and number of hours required per week to meet the credits awarded (see paragraphs 261 to 262). The team discussed these issues with senior staff and found that staff were working on various ideas to address some of these issues, including online streaming of live events, and an investigation of group assessment.

289. Overall, the team concluded that robust arrangements exist for ensuring that the learning opportunities provided to students studying at a distance are effective.

290. To determine whether every student is enabled to monitor their progress and further their academic development, the team reviewed the 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy', the VLE and met with students.

291. The team found that the 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy' outlines a clear commitment to empowering students to monitor their progress, employing the 'assessment for learning' principle, as a tool to enhance and support student learning, empowering students to take ownership of their learning, reflect on their progress and set goals for future development. This is supported through an approach to teaching that enables students to regularly review their progress through 30-minute one-to-one tutorials, undertaken twice a

term for each module. Through these tutorials, students and staff reported that they are given the opportunity to discuss work both before and after submission. They can further monitor their progress through the VLE where assignment schedules, moderation and release information, detailed written feedback and moderator comments are published. All grades can be viewed simultaneously to review progress.

292. The team found the communication on grade release to be clear and comprehensive, signposting students to other support mechanisms as appropriate, including how to apply for extenuating circumstances or access wellbeing and other support services. Students were able to explain to the team how they are enabled to monitor their progress through the VLE (for further information see paragraphs 299 to 309). During the team's teaching observations, it found that the VLE is continually referred to and referenced throughout teaching sessions.

293. In addition to monitoring their progress through the VLE, the team found that the students were clear on how they could further their academic development through the tutorial process and the written feedback provided on assignments, which focused upon how to further their practice. This approach to 'feedforward' was also evidenced in the written feedback that the team reviewed on the VLE. This approach is supported by guidance provided for staff within the 'lecturer portal' of the VLE, which outlines methods for writing feedback to support the academic development of students.

294. In summary, the team concluded that every student is enabled to monitor their progress to further their academic development.

## Assessment

295. To ascertain whether the school operates valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought, the team scrutinised:

- the school's current and draft academic regulations

- the 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy'

- programme handbooks and module narratives

- policies on assessment and marking, moderation and feedback

- minutes from Assessment Boards

- annual external examiner reports and responses from 2021 to 2023.

296. The team also met with staff and students.

297. The school undertakes outcomes-based assessment, with programme outcomes outlined in each handbook for each level of award. These outcomes are mapped to modules and included within the module narratives. These in turn connect the aims of the module with the learning outcomes, the module syllabus and formative and summative assessment information.

298. The school currently uses the full 100 percentage points when assessing student work, as opposed to the 20-point marking scale implemented by its validating partner. The team discussed this at length with senior staff to understand the process, rationale behind the decision and the mitigations in place to ensure assessment integrity. The team heard that the percentage scale was initially introduced to ensure that academic staff use the full range of marks available to them, which has been useful in assessing a practical discipline and ensuring that nuances are accounted for, and discretion can be applied. This process has been supported through dedicated training with those responsible for assessing work, which covers the marking and moderation procedure alongside standardisation meetings to ensure parity.

299. Marks are inputted to the VLE and subsequently converted into the 20-point scale to satisfy the requirements of the assessment boards. The student outcome report lists both the original mark, and the mark on the 20-point scale. The team found there to be no significant risks with the conversion of these marks or the subsequent degree classifications, beyond the additional complication that this adds to the assessment processes. These processes are being reviewed in preparation for DAPs, with a new degree classification algorithm being tested that does not adopt the 20-point scale. Senior staff reported that preliminary results are broadly comparable and will be under review following the next assessment boards. The team found this to be well articulated, and was satisfied that research had been undertaken on how other providers undertake this calculation.

300. The team found that the 'Assignment Design Policy' outlines a rigorous process for designing assessment. The policy provides guidance for staff on a number of learning outcomes, word counts and component weightings dependant on the credit weighting of the module. It also includes a table of assessment equivalences, based on the type and level of assessment. Further information for lecturers on the VLE is thorough, including step-by-step guides on assessment rubrics and how to use the VLE for the submission of assignments. It also contains information on best practice of providing feedback to students, and how to structure formative and summative feedback.

301. Assessment briefs are contained within student-facing module pages on the VLE. The team found these briefs to contain well written tasks, helpful additional guidance and links to referencing guides where appropriate. The grading criteria were clearly linked to module learning outcomes on the assessment grading criteria rubrics, which were also found to be detailed and well written.

302. External examiner comments at the Tier 2 assessment boards confirmed assessment to be rigorous, fair and undertaken in accordance with the published regulations. One external examiner noted that feedback was detailed, focused and signposted students to areas of improvement. Another stated that feedback was used to identify and highlight key strengths. Minor recommendations for enhancement were made at each board, including the individual modules where feedback was deemed to be less comprehensive than others. These comments support those made within the external examiner reports and responses.

303. Appropriate recognition of prior learning is evidenced via the school's RPL admissions process, which is currently determined by the school's validating partner. The team found this to be a robust and evidence-based process, which was consistently applied. Sample applications for Level 5 entry were reviewed, which included transcripts of previous

qualifications, IELTS scores (in the case of an international applicant), supporting statements, and audio links to prior work. The 'Alternative Entry Arrangement' is under proposal to be implemented if the school is granted DAPs, and has been designed to work alongside the RPL process. This additional process is specifically for applicants who have no formal qualifications or fall below the entry requirements, and will require the submission of a portfolio, a written summary of their experience, and a short essay to be assessed by an internal panel.

304. In summary, the team found the school to operate valid processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought. The team found these to be mostly reliable, with a minor risk regarding the reliability of inputting grades and how this is controlled.

305. To review the extent to which staff and students engage in dialogue to promote a shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made, the team reviewed examples of assessment feedback and met with staff and students.

306. The team found that dialogue between lecturers and students is formally structured within each module, through two 30-minute one-to-one tutorials each term, which are designed to provide feedback on undertaking assignments. These are supported by a structured approach to formative assessment, which is outlined within module narratives and typically includes a range of practical activities reviewed by both peers and academic staff and accompanied by oral feedback. No grades are given at the formative stage.

307. In discussion with students, the team observed that students generally praised this process and cited a high level of support in preparing work for assessment. They did, however, note some disparities between how permanent and sessional staff undertook formative assessment. Specifically, they reported that permanent staff are often more adept at discussing work in relation to the learning outcomes of the module. This was discussed with senior staff and the team found that support has been put in place for sessional staff to mitigate this risk, including further developments to the in-house 'Preparing to Teach' module and appraisals for all sessional staff. This is covered further in paragraphs 402 to 404.

308. The team observed three in-person teaching sessions (two at Level 5 and one at Level 6) which all consisted of one tutor and small cohorts of students. In some of the sessions, students were working independently on practical exercises, following discussion around a theme or technical skill. In others, students were working together collaboratively. The team saw evidence of peer review and active discussion, in addition to ongoing testing of understanding by the tutor, which demonstrated a proactive approach to promoting a shared understanding.

309. This 'live' dialogue is underpinned by the VLE, which plays an instrumental role in how students and staff record and communicate academic judgements. The comprehensive range of information published to students on the assessment process, as outlined in paragraph 301, is further supported by a high level of written feedback and feedforward provided to students. Examples include advice on drawing from a broader range of contextual sources to provide a more well rounded argument, and methods for making connections between theory and practice more explicit. The team found that the development of skills is also addressed

within student feedback, in alignment with learning outcomes that focus on skills development. For example, feedback on a vocal performance module advises a student on how to strengthen their breath support to enhance the diction of consonants.

310. Overall, the team found there to be a positive approach to creating a culture of dialogue between staff and students that promoted a shared understanding on the basis of which academic judgements were made.

311. To determine whether students are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice, the team reviewed the information, support and opportunities available to students.

312. The team found that programme handbooks clearly signpost students towards the 'Study Essentials Module' on the VLE, which contains clear and comprehensive guidance on developing aspects of academic practice, including:

- selecting academic sources

- project planning

- research skills

- writing techniques

- proof reading

- referencing and plagiarism

- AI tools and ethical AI usage

- presentation of work

- reflective practice.

313. In addition to the content on the VLE, all enrolled students are able to book one-to-one academic support sessions with the Academic Success Centre, either in-person or online. These sessions offer a wide range of dedicated support on academic writing, planning for deadlines, understanding feedback and other strategies for learning. A report to the Student Engagement and Experience Committee shows that the take up of these support sessions is satisfactory, particularly among students on the 'at risk' register. These are students who are identified as requiring further support, through a range of metrics including low attendance and academic failure. In total, 92 per cent of academic support sessions were booked, with attendance ranging from 52 per cent to 65 per cent dependent on the time of year. The team noted that engagement with this process appears to be increasing over time, as students are made aware of the support available and through reminders sent by the Academic Engagement Team.

314. The team found that students were aware of the support available to them in developing the necessary skills to demonstrate good academic practice, and how to access this. Many of the students who the team spoke to cited a high level of support from all staff (academic, technical and professional) in developing their academic skills to enable them to succeed on

their course. Furthermore, the team saw evidence to demonstrate that students have an understanding of good academic practice, as appropriate to the level of study, in the student work it reviewed on the VLE. The team considered that the wide adoption of the VLE as a teaching tool further enables students to benefit from peer learning through observing how other students have applied skills in academic practice.

315. In summary, the team found that students are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice.

316. To ascertain whether the school operates processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice, the team scrutinised a range of policies including the current and draft academic regulations.

317. The team found that both sets of regulations contain clear guidance on academic integrity, academic misconduct and student responsibilities in relation to academic practice. The regulations are supported by student-facing information in programme handbooks, which contain specific sections focusing on academic integrity and misconduct, signposting students towards the 'Academic Integrity and Misconduct Policy', the 'Academic Misconduct Procedure and Flowchart', the 'Research Ethics Policy', and information on the use of AI. The team found these to be consistent, coherent and in alignment with the academic regulations.

318. The 'Academic Essentials Writing Module' is also used as a prevention tool, to help students understand what constitutes unacceptable academic practice and direct them to plagiarism and AI checkers. Turnitin is used for all submissions as a tool for both preventing and identifying plagiarism.

319. The 'Academic Misconduct Procedure and Flowchart' outlines clear steps to be taken to investigate and respond to unacceptable academic practice, dependent on the nature and severity of academic misconduct. The team scrutinised records of investigations and responses to unacceptable academic practice and a review of nine case studies of academic misconduct where the 'Academic Integrity and Misconduct Policy' was applied and the 'Academic Misconduct Procedure and Flowchart' was followed. The sample of case studies included plagiarism (including evidence from Turnitin similarity reports), unauthorised use of AI, collusion, and copying. The team identified outcomes including retracted allegations, reduced marks and other supportive responses, including the referral of students to specific academic skills workshops. The team found these responses to be appropriate to the issues that had been discovered. Investigations are summarised by category and recorded as alleged and upheld cases within the EME reports, which the school completes and submits under its validating partner.

320. The emergence and widespread adoption of AI have led the school, in common with much of the higher education sector, to consider how the use of AI among the student body could constitute unacceptable academic practice. To understand how the school is approaching this, the team met with key academic members of staff who outlined some of the steps that have already been taken, such as two events with staff and students, the results of which will feed into an update to the 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy'.

321. The team learnt that, in response to an increase in inappropriate use of AI in assessments, the 'Academic Misconduct Policy' has already been updated alongside an introduction of a

viva voce to assess student understanding in cases of suspected misuse. The increase has also prompted further school-wide consideration, with a dedicated AI policy in development at the point of discussion. Permanent and sessional staff are updated through amendments to the lecturer guidance on the VLE, which assist in identifying inappropriate use of AI. The team noted that this consideration of AI in relation to academic misconduct is underway alongside more holistic discussions on how AI can be embraced and used positively in the development of student work. The team found this approach to be appropriate and measured, balancing both opportunity and risk.

322. In summary, the team found that the school operates processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice.

323. To ascertain whether processes for marking assessments and moderating marks are clearly articulated and consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process, the team reviewed the school's current and draft academic regulations, the 'Assessment Policy', the 'Marking, Moderation and Feedback Policy' and the 'Marking, Moderation and Feedback Procedure'.

324. The team also met with academic staff, and reviewed work on the VLE and minutes from assessment boards to test whether these are understood and applied.

325. The team found there to be a clear process articulated through the policies scrutinised. For example, the 'Marking, Moderation and Feedback Procedure' includes a flowchart which outlines the responsibilities of each party (the assessment team, the marker and the moderator) and the actions required. It also sets out the sample required for moderation, what to look for when moderating assessed work, and action to take if a discrepancy is noticed.

326. In terms of support and guidance for those involved in the assessment and moderation process, the team found that information is available to staff on the VLE, with video guides on the lecturer portal covering marking assignments in relation to learning outcomes, providing feedback, using Turnitin, academic misconduct, grade release and moderation. New staff are inducted into this through the 'Preparing to Teach' module.

327. The team considered that the assessment and moderation process was well understood by all academic staff involved. For instance, they were able to articulate the key role that assessment moderation had in their quality assurance processes and reflect upon its success. The team learnt that the process is both collaborative and discursive, with programme leaders holding standardisation meetings to undertake benchmarking and calibration. The effective operation of the moderation process was further demonstrated on the VLE, alongside the confirmation and commendation of the process from external examiners within the minutes of the assessment boards.

328. In summary, the team determined that the school's processes for marking assessments and for moderating marks are clearly articulated and consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process.

## External examining

329. To determine whether the school makes scrupulous use of external examiners in the moderation of assessment tasks and student assessed work, the team reviewed:

- the 'Marking, Moderation and Feedback Policy'

- the 2023-24 annual external examiner report summary

- annual external examiner reports and responses from 2021 to 2023

- minutes of the Assessment Board.

330. The team also met with three of the school's external examiners.

331. The team learnt that each undergraduate programme has a dedicated external examiner, with their responsibilities for the moderation of assessment tasks clearly outlined in the 'Marking, Moderation and Feedback Policy'. The examiners confirmed that this process was robust and transparent, with an appropriate representative sample of assessed work and evidence of internal moderation provided to each examiner. This work is made accessible to examiners via the VLE, although they also have the opportunity to visit the school and meet with staff and students.

332. Through its review of external examiner reports, the team saw evidence of the school's thorough engagement with this process. This was further demonstrated by the minutes of the Tier 2 assessment board. The minutes capture how external examiners also discuss any recommendations, commendations and suggestions on the assessment and moderation process during the meeting. In addition to their engagement with the assessment of student work, there is evidence of programme teams engaging external examiners in in-depth discussion of curriculum in the annual reports submitted. For example, external examiners provided suggestions on how programme teams could further embed emerging theory that relates to electronic music production and performance, with others providing reflections on how programme teams had rolled out new modules. The team found that the majority of external examiners praised the school for providing a current and industry-focused curriculum.

333. While the approach to the moderation of assessment tasks was found to be robust, the team noted from its meeting with external examiners that, prior to discussion at the most recent Tier 2 assessment board, there had been no formal consultation with external examiners on the school's decision to apply for DAPs. The team determined that, while external examiners were fully involved in the programmes they were appointed to, this was a missed opportunity to make full use of their expertise at an institutional level. However, this lack of consultation did not appear to impede their understanding of the overall strategic direction of the school, which they cited as industry-focused and ambitious. The team recognised that external examiners were in support of the application, feeling that the school was ready.

334. In summary, the team found that the school makes scrupulous use of external examiners in the moderation of assessment tasks and student assessed work.

335. To determine whether the school gives full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiners' reports, and provides external examiners

with a considered and timely response to their comments and recommendations, the team observed a meeting of the Academic Board and met with external examiners.

336. Each programme has a dedicated external examiner who is responsible for submitting an annual report to the school. Responses to the reports by the programme leaders confirm how this advice has been acted upon, for example, enabling students to explore their practice in greater depth through the introduction of larger modules.

337. The external examiners commended the school for transparent and open communication, describing it as well organised and responsive to feedback. The team found that the external examiners could articulate how their suggestions for enhancement had been implemented on the courses they were responsible for. For example, a 'Music Business' module shifted its focus from larger business models to small and medium-sized enterprises in order to keep abreast of changes in industry. Furthermore, those external examiners who had experience of other, larger higher education providers, described the access provided to student work and assessment moderation on the VLE as 'exemplary'.

338. At a meeting of the Academic Board, the team observed how the 2023-24 annual external examiner report summary was formally reviewed, with the report highlighting both positive feedback and areas or issues that require further attention or improvement. The observation provided evidence that feedback is discussed and acted upon at an institutional level. The team considered the school's approach to external examining to be thorough and well organised, with good communication between examiners and programme teams. There is clear evidence of the role that external examiners play in enhancing quality assurance.

339. In summary, the team found that the school gives full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiners' reports, and provides external examiners with a considered and timely response to their comments and recommendations.

## Academic appeals and student complaints

340. To ascertain whether the school has effective procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of the academic experience and that these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement, the team reviewed the school's policy and procedure for academic appeals.

341. The team found that the policy and procedure are in alignment with the school's current regulations in operation under its validating partner, and clearly outline the stages of the process from early resolution through to formal appeal. Furthermore, the policy clearly articulates the grounds on which students can submit an academic appeal.

342. Student complaints and grievances are dealt with through the 'Student Complaints and Grievances Policy' and the 'Student Complaints and Grievances Procedure', which make reference to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator Good Practice Framework.[19] The team found the policy to outline to students what is considered a complaint, including examples of those which may be discounted on the basis of being frivolous or vexatious. The policy states that the school reserves the right to reclassify a complaint as an academic appeal, and vice

---

[19] See Office of the Independent Adjudicator, Good Practice Framework.

versa. The team considered the policy and procedure to be robust, and observed that details are provided on how to take complaints further with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator where necessary. The team also found examples of the school using appeals and complaints to enable enhancement (see paragraph 347).

343. Students are signposted towards these documents through programme handbooks and the VLE, where they are presented to students alongside guidance on how to make appeals and complaints. Students are advised to make contact with the student experience team in the first instance, before submitting a formal complaint. The team is also referenced within the 'Student Complaints and Grievance Procedure' as being able to provide support for complaints, such as arranging reasonable adjustments to the procedure. Although the students who the team met with had not made use of these formal processes, they were aware of where to find the information should they require it. Further information on academic appeals and student responsibilities is outlined in both the school's current and draft academic regulations.

344. In summary, the team found that the school has effective procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of the academic experience and that these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.

345. To determine whether the school takes appropriate action following an appeal or complaint, the team reviewed a sample of 36 academic appeals considered at the early resolution stage. These included requests for the removal of late submission penalties due to extenuating circumstances and technical issues, and appeals based on academic judgements and errors in the assessment process.

346. Through its review, the team found that all academic appeals were resolved at the early resolution stage, with a summary of outcomes including 'extenuating circumstances refusal due to insufficient evidence', 'extenuating circumstances upheld', 'pass compensation applied', and 'uncapped marks applied'. The team further found that, where evidence provided for extenuating circumstances indicated it was necessary, students were referred to the wellbeing team for further support. These outcomes were found by the team to be appropriate and in accordance with the 'Academic Appeals Policy' and the 'Academic Appeals Procedure'.

347. The team also reviewed case studies for complaints to test the application of these policies and procedures. One of these complaints had two elements: a perceived change in course fee and the purchasing of unnecessary equipment. The second aspect was partially upheld, as the school determined that there had been conflicting information provided by staff. The outcome letter stated how this was a learning opportunity for the school in how it communicates equipment purchase information. Another complaint regarding an administrative error was partially upheld with the student receiving a partial refund of fees. Both complainants accepted the final outcomes.

348. In summary, the team found that the school takes appropriate action following an appeal or complaint.

## Conclusions

349. The team concluded that, in general, the school demonstrated that it is able to design and deliver courses and qualifications that provide a high quality academic experience to all students from all backgrounds, irrespective of their location, mode of study, academic subject, protected characteristics, previous educational background or nationality. The team concluded that learning opportunities are consistently and rigorously quality assured.

350. The team noted some weaknesses in the coherence of different study modes, and some discrepancies in the communication and application of scheduled learning hours in relation to the credit awarded.

351. A further weakness was identified through the lack of implementation of the EDI policy or the monitoring of students in relation to their protected characteristics. The team determined that while this issue impacts all aspects of provision, the overall quality of the academic experience remains high.

352. The team found there to be many strengths within the academic experience, including robust methods of assessment, industry standard facilities, a curriculum rooted in practice and opportunities for students to further their academic development.

353. Therefore, the team concluded that the school meets criterion B3.

# Assessment of DAPs criterion C: Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff

## Criterion C1: The role of academic and professional staff

### Advice to the OfS

354. The assessment team's view, based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information, is that the school meets criterion C1: the role of academic and professional staff because it meets subcriterion C1.1.

355. The team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows in summary that the school has demonstrated that it has appropriate numbers of staff to teach its students and that all staff are appropriately qualified, supported and developed to the level of the subjects and qualifications being awarded. While the team considered there to be weaknesses in relation to the school's staff recruitment practices and its assessment of the skills/expertise required to teach **all** students, it was assured that on balance the school meets the requirements of this criterion.

### Criterion C1.1

**C1.1: An organisation granted powers to award degrees assures itself that it has appropriate numbers of staff to teach its students. Everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning, and in the assessment of student work, is appropriately qualified, supported and developed to the level(s) and subject(s) of the qualifications being awarded.**

### Reasoning

356. To determine whether the school's learning, teaching and assessment practices are relevant and informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, subject-specific and educational scholarship, the team reviewed evidence including:

- 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy'

- an example external examiner report and response from the Programme Leader

- a sample of five annual 'Education Monitoring and Enhancement Reports'

- the school's 'Scholarship and Development Activity Summary' for the 2023-24 academic year

- staff CVs.

357. The team also met senior staff, academic staff and students.

358. The school's 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy' sets out the school's priorities in relation to its learning, teaching and assessment practices. In particular, it focuses on being data-driven, informed by industry and delivered by staff with the latest skills, training and

qualifications, who can meet the needs of an evolving curriculum, a diverse range of students and be willing to share pedagogical best practice.

359. The team's review of programme handbooks, including BA (Hons) Songwriting and BA (Hons) Music Business, demonstrated that programmes clearly draw from relevant expertise in learning, teaching and assessment. For example, in the 2024-25 academic year the school implemented a new approach to the allocation of guided learning hours for its London degree provision. As a result, weekly lectures on campus now combine lecturer-led delivery, student exercises and independent or group study, supported by module content on the VLE. Lectures are recorded and saved on the VLE for students to return to at any time during their programme.

360. Students are taught and assessed in a wide variety of formats, with a focus on experiential learning and practical approaches to assessment that simulate, and prepare students for, current industry practice. The team learnt that many of the school's teaching staff are active, commercially successful and well respected music industry practitioners, and that these diverse and contemporary professional experiences provide learning and teaching insights, such as information on new and emerging software, and collaboration opportunities. For example, the module narrative for the Level 6 Emerging Technologies module states that there will be an emphasis on AI and virtual reality, and students may study different technologies year-on-year depending on the extent to which they are currently used in industry. These practices are supplemented by guest speakers and masterclasses delivered by industry representative bodies and lecturers' own professional contacts.

361. Academic staff also reported that there have been developments in the way they teach theory modules, so that they now engage with students to find current and relatable content to use as a teaching vehicle. The team heard that this technique has proved popular and has since been rolled out across all programmes.

362. Following a review of staff CVs, the team saw further evidence that staff expertise meets the needs of the school's programmes. For example:

- the module leaders for the Level 4 Music Production module, which teaches students technical skills for contemporary music production, have over ten years' professional experience of using industry standard music production software, with one of the module leaders being a certified trainer

- the module leader for Level 5 Advanced Sound Design has recently undertaken a funded research project looking into the use of a piece of software as an accessible tool for teaching audio programming, therefore demonstrating the integration of educational scholarship into the curriculum

- the programme leader for the BA (Hons) Music Production and Vocal Performance programme, and module leader for the Level 5 Studio Vocal Production module holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Performance from a well established music conservatoire.

363. The Curriculum Monitoring Committee is responsible for scrutinising existing learning, teaching and assessment methods and considering areas for development. The team

considered a number of summary reports from the committee to the Academic Board and found evidence of discussion including:

- proposed improvements to assignment briefs

- the usability of the VLE

- changes to an assessment as a result of a number of academic misconduct cases

- a trial of video assessment feedback.

364. Programme leaders also present termly programme reports to the committee, exploring programme and module performance, teaching observations, external examiner feedback, calibration or programme standardisation meetings.

365. The school's annual programme monitoring process is the primary mechanism for reflecting and evaluating learning, teaching and assessment practices at programme level. The EME report form requires programme teams to detail how they have implemented the learning, teaching and assessment strategy, and analyse its practices in comparison with the data. For example, the EME report for BA (Hons) Music Production and Sound Engineering comments on how the new on-campus delivery system, which now includes a one-hour recorded Zoom seminar, has resulted in more consistent messaging to students, as they can access the recording at any time. The report also discusses recent changes to some of the assessment practices on the programme, in order to more readily develop students' research, critical analysis and reflective skills ahead of Level 6.

366. Furthermore, the school has previously commissioned an external review of its foundation year programmes, which looked specifically at the content and assessment of this provision.

367. At an institutional level, the school also uses its KPIs as a mechanism for identifying areas of learning, teaching and assessment requiring further development.

368. At an individual level, staff are encouraged to reflect upon their learning, teaching and assessment practice through mechanisms including peer observation and annual appraisals. The team reviewed a sample of five lecturer observation reports and saw evidence of how the reflection process informs practice. For example, one report identified an issue with the pacing of a lecture and suggested implementing class exercises earlier in the session to support student understanding and engagement. Another report identified how the lecturer's use of an internal microphone may mean that lecture recordings are not as effective as they could be and queried whether the school's portable microphones had been discontinued.

369. The team found that the reports demonstrated in particular strong subject knowledge and passion for the subjects being taught. The team also found other processes such as assessment scrutiny by programme leaders, standardisation and calibration meetings, and regular training to prompt reflection and evaluation.

370. In summary, the team found that the school's learning, teaching and assessment practices are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, subject-specific and educational scholarship.

371. The team further considered whether the school provides staff with opportunities to engage in reflection and evaluation of their learning, teaching and assessment practice and found that there is a range of formal and informal opportunities for staff to do so.

372. The school's peer observation policy sets out that the school aims to observe all permanent and sessional teaching staff, covering in-person and online teaching, at least once a year. Observations are conducted by a member of the academic team, normally at module leader level or above, and captured via a lecturer observation form.

373. In addition to the standard observation cycle, which is used to support continued staff development, the team found that the school also undertakes probationary and induction observations for new teaching staff with limited or less teaching experience, or lecturers teaching a new module. In addition to completion of a lecturer observation form, the observation is also followed up with a face-to-face meeting.

374. The team reviewed five recent lecturer observation reports, which demonstrated this two-way evaluative and reflective process in practice and ask the observer to confirm if a re-observation is required.

375. Alongside the observation process for academic staff, the school operates an annual staff appraisal process. For sessional lecturers, this involves a meeting to discuss progress, and identify good practice and areas for development. For permanent academic staff, this also involves completion of an appraisal form to reflect on performance over the past 12 months and identify relevant goals and objectives. The team considered a sample of redacted appraisal forms and saw further evidence of a two-way reflective and evaluative process. Furthermore, the forms demonstrated how appraisals are also informed by data including feedback from students, module leaders and external examiners, observation reports and student performance data.

376. Alongside these processes, the school also shares and discusses reports at the Student Engagement and Experience Committee, which compile and analyse data drawn from, for example, the NSS, the school's own annual student satisfaction survey (which mirrors the NSS and is shared with non-final year students) and termly student feedback surveys. The team considered that this provides staff with an opportunity to consider how the data can inform their evaluative and reflective considerations of teaching, learning and assessment practice. At programme level, annual programme monitoring conducted via EME reports also provides staff with an opportunity to reflect and evaluate on feedback, including from external examiners, to inform learning, teaching and assessment practices, as discussed in paragraphs 215 and 216.

377. The school also reported that it organises termly training events for lecturers, which are informed by updates to policies, matters arising from student feedback or lecturer observations and sector developments. These are usually delivered by internal staff on a specific topic. For example, the team saw evidence of group training sessions for module leaders and lecturers, covering topics such as disability awareness and inclusive teaching and embedding AI tools into curriculum and assessment.

378. In summary, the team found that the school provides opportunities for its staff to engage in reflection and evaluation of their learning, teaching and assessment practice.

379. To ascertain whether staff have academic and, where applicable, professional expertise, the team reviewed staff CVs, scholarship activity and spoke with staff and students.

380. The team found that staff have academic expertise that the team considered, based on its experience, to be commensurate with the wider sector. This included staff with degrees in, for example, Sound Production and Recording Engineering, masters' in Audio Production and PhD in Music Theory. Staff also have significant professional expertise as active practitioners throughout various sectors of the music industry. For example, staff have worked professionally with significant popular music artists including Kylie Minogue, Phil Collins and Jimmy Cliff.

381. The school's 'Scholarship and Development Activity Summary' also tracks staff who have been engaged in gaining academic qualifications and awards, including Advance HE Fellowships and PGCEs.

382. Due to the specialist and vocational character of the school, it also makes significant use of the professional practitioner knowledge and insight of its regular guest lecturers and student mentors, sourced from within the music industry. Some of these staff members have taken on an ongoing role regarding the delivery of special events including live events featuring students from the school, in particular the school's own annual Music Futures event, and practical work experience projects such as the Artists and Repertoire project, which is led by respected music industry entrepreneur Kwame Kwaten.

383. Furthermore, students stated how impressed they were with the professional insights and subject-specific expertise of their lecturers.

384. In summary, the team concluded that staff within the school have academic and extensive professional expertise.

385. To understand the extent to which staff have active engagement with the pedagogic development of their discipline knowledge, the team reviewed programme handbooks, the 'Assignment Design Policy' and spoke with academic staff.

386. The team found that programme handbooks demonstrate that staff have a good knowledge of contemporary music pedagogy. Programme learning outcomes across Levels 4, 5 and 6 are clearly mapped to the relevant levels of the FHEQ and QAA subject benchmark statements. For example, the BA (Hons) Music Business is benchmarked against subject benchmark statements for Music,[20] and Business and Management.[21] The learning outcomes are also balanced across knowledge, skills and understanding, which are assessed through a wide range of assessment methods including essays, reports, case studies, critical reflection and analysis, presentations, performances and practical portfolios. This is underpinned by a strong emphasis on employability and entrepreneurial skills. For example, BA (Hons) Music Production and Vocal Performance includes 'strategies for career development' as a stated programme learning outcome, which is addressed at each level of study but with a clear emphasis at Level 6.

---

[20] See QAA, Subject Benchmark Statement - Music.

[21] See QAA, Subject Benchmark Statement - Business and Management.

387. The team found further evidence that staff have active engagement with the pedagogic development of their discipline knowledge in conversation with programme leaders. For example, as described in paragraph 196, staff demonstrated an understanding of the new subject benchmark statement for music, and were actively involved in developing a number of potential modifications to programmes in light of these changes. They were also able to describe how they use the FHEQ as they develop new programmes or revise existing provision. Furthermore, the team heard that staff have scope to enhance their practice through further research (discussed further in paragraphs 395 and 397).

388. The team also found that the school is taking active steps to support its staff to engage with the pedagogic development of their discipline. For example, the school's summary of training and continuing professional development document demonstrates that academic staff are engaged in a range of activities including postgraduate study at masters' and doctorate level, and internal training to enhance teaching and learning such as inclusivity and disability awareness training.

389. These findings were further supported by the team's discussion with external examiners, which confirmed that sector standards for vocational popular music and music industry business teaching and learning are appropriately met. This was evident in both the teaching practices and assessment submissions reviewed by the external examiners.

390. In summary, the team found that staff involved in teaching and supporting student learning, and in the assessment of student work, have been and continue to be engaged with the active pedagogic development of their discipline.

391. To determine whether staff have an understanding of current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline and that such knowledge and understanding directly inform and enhance their teaching, the team reviewed evidence including:

- the minutes of the school's Research and Enterprise Committee meetings

- the 'Academic Staff Development Framework'

- the 2024 annual review of the 'Academic Staff Development Framework'.

392. The team also met with programme leaders and reviewed staff resources on the VLE.

393. The vocational teaching character of the school leads to a requirement for academic staff to have an understanding of current research and advanced practice, rather than traditional mainstream higher education advanced scholarship.

394. The team observed that the school's VLE contains a significant and impressive library of learning and research resources for staff and students, mainly focusing on the latest developments in music technology and their associated uses. These resources are wide-ranging and utilised by academic staff to inform and develop their teaching and practice. For example, the team noted a thorough technological guide to utilising digital audio workstations, and from a more pedagogical perspective, a 'Working with Diversity' training package.

395. The terms of reference for the school's Research and Enterprise Committee set out a responsibility for the subcommittee to 'facilitate opportunities for knowledge exchange in

regard to research and enterprise and other scholarly activity'. The team considered minutes of the Research and Enterprise Committee, which evidence the school's engaged commitment to facilitating its academic staff's understanding and engagement with a range of research, scholarship and knowledge transfer activity. For example, the team found that the school's Research and Scholarship Development Fund had been used to fund a member of academic staff to develop a scholarly book on the creative mindset. Further funding had been approved for another member of staff to write a journal article on 'Anarchism and Wuhan Punk'.

396. The school's programme leaders spoke very positively about the academic freedom they had in being able to bring their understanding of contemporary developments in their discipline into their teaching. To further enhance their shared best practice and understanding, they meet together every week in a semi-formal forum to discuss and explore various ideas, subjects and developments, both pedagogical, operational and developmental.

397. The team also found that the school supports staff to engage with research through the allocation of time, as detailed in the school's staff development strategy. The team consequently found that staff have active engagement with research and/or advanced scholarship commensurate with the levels and subjects of the qualifications being offered. For example, the 'Scholarship and Development Activity Summary' details two academic staff engaged in separate research projects funded by the school's Research and Scholarship Development Fund and 15 staff members either submitting for or achieving Fellowship and Senior Fellowship awards from Advance HE. Furthermore, a further five members of academic staff are engaged in higher level qualifications including masters', PhD and PGCE.

398. The research culture at the school is active, though the team found that it is at times not recognised as research, but rather engagement with understanding and advancing the cutting edge of industry and technological development. This was evidenced in a comment during discussion with programme leaders that a group of staff had recently attended an external academic conference on understanding the latest developments in AI, without it being evidenced as a research or scholarship activity.

399. In summary, the team concluded that staff evidence a strong understanding of current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline and that such knowledge and understanding directly inform and enhance their teaching. It further concluded that staff have active engagement with research and/or advanced scholarship commensurate with the levels and subjects of the qualifications being offered.

400. To understand the extent to which staff have development opportunities aimed at enabling them to enhance their practice and scholarship, the team considered the school's 'Academic Staff Development Strategy' the 'Academic Staff Development Framework', and spoke with academic and senior staff.

401. The team found that the school's 'Academic Staff Development Strategy' sets out how the school supports the development of academic staff, including through financial support and allocated time, to advance their knowledge, skills, engagement and understanding.

402. For example, the school has developed its own in-house 'Preparing to Teach' module, which is modelled on key elements of a PGCE programme to provide foundational pedagogic training. It covers:

- the fundamentals of higher education and structure of learning

- theories of learning and pedagogical approaches

- developing as a lecturer, including planning and structuring learning activities

- assessment, including how to assess learning and how to create assessments that align with learning outcomes

- lecturing at Point Blank, including timelines, schedules and how to use the systems.

403. The module also includes reflective written tasks that are reviewed by programme leaders, who provide feedback on the lecturer's responses and engagement.

404. Furthermore, as part of the induction process, new teaching staff deliver a short mock lesson and receive developmental feedback on their teaching practice. To further enhance their teaching capability, new lecturers are given opportunities to shadow experienced colleagues and typically begin by teaching short courses to build confidence and experience. Programme leaders also provide ongoing support through informal monthly appraisal discussions during the probation period, ensuring continuous reflection, feedback and professional growth.

405. The school reported that lecturers are also expected to engage with training events, which are informed by updates to policies, matters arising from student feedback or lecturer observations and sector developments. These are usually delivered by internal staff on a specific topic. For example, the team saw evidence of group training sessions for module leaders and lecturers in the school's training and continuing professional development tracker, covering topics such as disability awareness, inclusive teaching and embedding AI tools into curriculum and assessment. The team also observed that a range of resources are available for teaching staff to access within the lecturer portal on the VLE, covering topics such as feedback and teaching strategies, blended learning, and signposting to further training and recorded workshops.

406. In anticipation of DAPs, the school has further enhanced its work in this area with the appointment of an Academic Staff Development Coordinator to support the development and promotion of staff development opportunities.

407. The team found that staff are also supported to engage in development activities such as Advance HE's Fellowship scheme, external examiner training and internal funding to support research or postgraduate study. In the 2024 annual review of the 'Academic Staff Development Framework', which was submitted as a report to the Board of Directors, the team found that 14 members of staff were working towards Fellowship or Senior Fellowship with Advance HE, three members of staff had been enrolled on Advance HE external examiner training courses and three projects had been approved for funding under the school's Research and Scholarly Development Fund. The school also has a Knowledge Transfer Projects page housed on its VLE, which enables staff to detail development opportunities aimed at enhancing their practice and scholarship.

408. In summary, the team found that staff have development opportunities aimed at enabling them to enhance their practice and scholarship.

409. In order to consider the extent to which staff, including programme leaders, have opportunities to gain experience in curriculum development and assessment design, the team reviewed the 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy', which states that the school will 'enhance academic and professional skills through the provision of training programmes, workshops, and other developmental activities.'

410. The team found that all programme leaders are, by terms of reference, members of the school's Curriculum Monitoring Committee and Academic Board and thereby have an opportunity to be involved in and impact curriculum development and assessment design. Programme leaders reported that they are heavily involved in curriculum development from the beginning and commented positively on how they are 'given agency' to shape the curriculum in conjunction with module leaders and lecturers who bring a wide range of industry experience. Furthermore, programme leaders meet semi-formally each week to discuss any emerging issues from modules that may impact curriculum development and assessment design. The team heard that an open and collaborative culture fosters opportunities to share knowledge and experience both across programmes and across providers, for example by sharing materials to support learning.

411. The width and depth of staff engagement in curriculum development is well demonstrated by the attendance list for validation events, such as for the BA (Hons) Music Business, which included programme and module leaders in addition to quality staff, the Library and Learning Resources Manager and Quality and Academic Support Officer.

412. The school's 'Programme and Module Change Request Planner' evidences an active pedagogical engagement by programme and module leaders in amending and enhancing their curriculum and assessment design in line with technological or regulatory developments or to improve the student learning experience. This is exemplified by requests to, for example, 'reduce the assignment components from three to two (merging reflective written work into second component)'. The team found that these requests are all subject to a full and documented scrutiny and consultation process, concluding with the involvement of external examiners.

413. In summary, the team found that staff within the school, including programme leaders, have opportunities to gain experience in curriculum development and assessment design.

414. To understand the extent to which academic staff have opportunities to engage with the activities of other higher education providers in roles such as external examiners or validation panel members, the team reviewed the school's 'Staff Development Strategy' and spoke with academic and senior staff.

415. The team found that the staff development strategy sets out that the school will review, agree and support opportunities for staff to engage with the activities of other higher education providers, for example, through becoming external examiners. The school reported that it currently has one member of staff acting as an external examiner and three further staff have since undertaken Advance HE external examiner training.

416. While there is limited evidence of staff engagement with the activities of other higher education providers, the team considered that this was appropriate to the size of the school and number of permanent teaching staff. The team also considered that this is balanced by sessional lecturers, who are also employed by other higher education providers, and the Board of Directors, which includes two members with significant high-level experience both in academic and leadership roles within higher education. Furthermore, the team did not find this potentially limited engagement to have a negative impact on the delivery of good quality teaching and assessment.

417. In summary, the team concluded that the school supports opportunities for its staff to engage with the activities of other higher education providers.

418. To assess the extent to which staff have expertise in providing feedback on assessment, which is timely, constructive and developmental, the team considered a range of evidence, including the assessment feedback policy and procedure, external examiner reports and meetings with students.

419. The school's 'Marking, Moderation and Feedback Policy' and procedure provide clear guidance for academic staff to follow, for example by indicating that marking is expected to be completed in ten calendar days.

420. The team found that external examiner reports refer to constructive feedback that was provided within an appropriate timeframe. This was further supported by minutes of the Tier 2 assessment boards whereby external examiners confirmed, as discussed in paragraph 302 that feedback was detailed and focused, identified strengths and signposted students to areas of improvement. These comments were also supported by NSS survey results from 2022-23 and 2023-24, which were both above the sector benchmark in the area of feedback and organisation.

421. The team reviewed a range of feedback across modules at Levels 4 to 6 covering both written and practical submissions. The team found feedback from module tutors was engaging, clearly focused on each specific module's learning outcomes and included a constructive and relevant amount of feedforward guidance. The team further found that the vocational character of the school's mission is reflected in the tone and focus of the feedback and developmental feedforward to students.

422. Feedback to students is presented on the VLE via a summary relating to the extent to which a student has met each of the stated learning outcomes, which is supplemented by a succinct and coherent paragraph of developmental feedforward. The second marker also details a short commentary and approval of the final given grade mark. The team considered that this approach supports an effective feedback and feedforward process.

423. For example, the team considered feedback for the Level 4 'Music Industry' module, which included the learning outcome 'communicate the findings of study and research'. The feedback stated:

'The report is clearly written, findings are relevant and appropriately presented, and the structure is generally effective with a clear conclusion.'

The feedforward included practical advice, suggesting exploration grassroots revenue streams for new independent artists.

424. Similarly, for the learning outcome 'communicate the key aspects of brand identity', on the Level 5 'Marketing and Branding' module, the feedback states:

'A limited range of branding elements displayed/considered that are relevant to the stated target market. Suitable use of Harvard referencing with a reference list and bibliography included.'

The developmental feedforward includes practical advice, recommending that the student makes use of the draft process to ensure that they do not miss any requirements of the task in future. In this instance, the student had submitted two rather than three marketing materials.

425. The team also considered feedback on practical modules, including the Level 4 module 'Vocal Performance'. One of the learning outcomes requires students to evidence 'versatility and stylistic awareness in the performance of a range of music repertoire'. In response to the student's performance, the team found that staff had clearly presented feedback via subheadings covering interpretation of style, musicality and lyrics. The developmental feedforward was succinct and practically focused, for example:

'You perform with a good sense of timing and rhythm. Continual attention to breath control will reduce instability'.

426. Furthermore, the feedback for the Level 5 module 'Creative Production and Remix', against a learning outcome to 'combine a range of production, composition and mixing skills that are appropriate to a specified context', stated:

'Limited additional parts, flaws are evident. Underdeveloped production values. Limited structure and arrangement'.

The developmental feedforward adds:

'Adding playful delays and experimenting with different reverb send automation could imbue the vocals with further character. You could extend this technique to other parts of the track as well, enhancing the overall sonic experience. There is room for more effective melodic and rhythmical content within the production.'

427. In conversation with students, the team found that feedback is clearly understood and appreciated, and students are positively engaged with the grading and feedback process. Students also recognised that some of the commentary they received was feedforward guidance. The team did not see or hear any evidence of issues regarding the timeliness, constructive structure or developmental character of the feedback they received.

428. In summary, the team concluded that staff involved in teaching or supporting student learning have expertise in providing feedback on assessment, which is timely, constructive and developmental.

429. To test the extent to which the school has made a rigorous assessment of the skills and expertise required to teach all students and the appropriate staff-to-student ratios, the team reviewed the school's 'Teaching Staff Recruitment and Selection Policy', 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy' and 'Lecturer Resource report', and considered how practice aligns with policy.

430. The school's 'Teaching Staff Recruitment and Selection Policy' emphasises that the school's ambition is to be a 'world-class institution of vocational, industry focussed skills'. The team found this was implemented in a specific requirement for all teaching staff to have at least five years of relevant or current music industry experience for the subject(s) being taught. This is to ensure that the school's programmes and content remain relevant, and students can develop skills to support their employability in the industry. The team reviewed a range of staff CVs provided, including for module leaders, senior and sessional lecturers, and found that these reflected the requirements set out in the relevant job descriptions.

431. Furthermore, in order to design and deliver a new module or programme which is 'particularly innovative or at the forefront of music education', the school stated that it may also recruit industry practitioners who have the relevant specialist skills and expertise required to teach students, but may not have experience of teaching higher education. The team found that this is confirmed in the sessional lecturer job description, which focuses its requirements on industry experience, experience of teaching, training or working with groups of adults and a willingness to undergo training. 'Experience of teaching higher education modules' is desirable. The induction and training of new teaching staff is discussed in detail in paragraphs 444 to 446.

432. The team found in general that the skills of staff are extremely well matched to the requirements of the school's programmes and the needs of its students. Student survey results, including for the NSS and the school's own annual student satisfaction survey, reflect a satisfaction from students in the area of teacher expertise and the provision of interesting learning experiences. The team considered that the school's TEF 2023 outcome,[22] for which the school achieved a Gold rating, both overall and for student experience, also speaks to its findings.

433. Nevertheless, the team considered that it was unable to state unequivocally that the school has made a rigorous assessment of the skills and expertise required to teach all students. This is because, as described in paragraph 284, the school's EDI working group is not yet operational. This group, according to the school's EDI policy is responsible for considering data and information relating to EDI. As a result, the school does not currently undertake any significant data collection or analysis relating to, for example, protected characteristics. The team therefore considered that the school cannot determine for itself whether the skills and expertise of staff are appropriate to teach students in all cases.

434. Although the team considered this to be a weakness, it did not encounter or hear of any specific issues, including during conversations with students. The team therefore formed the view that the limited monitoring of data currently represents more of a risk than an area of actual deficiency.

---

[22] Available at TEF 2023 Outcomes, Point Blank Limited.

435. The school evidences a pedagogical approach that is focused on small class sizes, lots of one-to-one and small group tutorials, and a positive and vocationally appropriate informality across its teaching and learning practice. For example, the 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy' states that the school will, for on-campus provision, 'offer small class sizes of a maximum of 16 or 20 students, which aim to encourage collaboration and discussion'. This ambition was borne out in conversation with teaching staff and students who spoke of small classes being the standard mode of delivery on campus. The team found that the staff-to-student ratio was also obvious from the physical campus, with class sizes being naturally limited by the number of workstations within any given teaching space.

436. More generally, the school's 'Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook' makes it clear that all programme development should identify human and other resources required to deliver a programme successfully. This ensures that any new programmes, or any changes to existing programmes, require a rigorous assessment of the skills, expertise and resources needed. In practice, the team found a few instances where it appeared that this had not taken place. For example, a recent programme change form did not include any reference to the impact or otherwise of this proposed change on the requisite staff skills, or the staff-to-student ratio. However, the team considered that this instance may have been because of little to no relevance to the type of change, which was a request to change the programme title to better reflect the programme content.

437. In summary, the team concluded that the school has made a rigorous assessment of the skills and expertise required to teach its students, and the appropriate staff-to-student ratios. However, it identified shortcomings in the school's approach to implementing its EDI working group, which meant that the team could not confidently determine whether all students are properly supported by staff expertise.

438. To confirm whether the school has appropriate staff recruitment practices, the team considered the school's 'Teaching Staff Recruitment & Selection Policy', its 'Staff Induction Policy', and the 'Equal Opportunities (Staff Recruitment & Development) Policy'.

439. The team also met with the senior and academic staff.

440. The school's 'Teaching Staff Recruitment and Selection Policy' states that 'selection decisions should be explicitly based upon evidence, though the evidence required may differ according to the type of role'. This is evidenced in the CVs of academic staff, some of whom demonstrate particular strengths in professionally applied experience, while others have a more academic background as evidenced by qualifications up to and include PhD study, as discussed in paragraph 380.

441. The policy also evidences a transparent and appropriately equitable process in regard of interview practice and candidate selection. This is evidenced by the use of consistent questions across all candidates, which are based solely upon the relevant person specification and informed by the school's 'Behaviours Framework'. The policy paper also makes clear that it should be read 'in conjunction with...the school's Equality and Diversity Policy'.

442. This approach to appropriate staff recruitment practices is further consolidated by the school's 'Ethics Policy', which lists the school's four key values, one of which is to 'ensure equality of

opportunity for all'. The 'Equal Opportunities Policy (Staff Recruitment and Development)' further embeds a commitment to equal opportunities throughout the recruitment process and goes on to address how this commitment will underpin the support, rights and development of the school's staff following recruitment.

443. In conversation with senior leadership, the team heard how the school has introduced a two-stage interview process to add rigour to its selection process and thereby help ensure that the school does, as detailed in the 'Teaching Staff Recruitment and Selection Policy', select 'the best candidate...on the grounds of merit'. The minutes of the Board of Directors meeting note that a 'staff recruitment' summary will be an ongoing agenda item, which indicates that the importance of this process is being taken seriously at the highest level of the school.

444. Furthermore, programme leaders shared that all new teaching staff must go through an in-house 'Preparing to Teach' module on the VLE, which has been designed to reflect the primary elements of a PGCE programme. The module has been developed by other internal academic staff who have successfully completed the PGCE externally.

445. The team found that all new lecturers, including sessional lecturers, must complete the eight-hour course. The course includes tasks that require the lecturer to write notes in response to questions. These can be reviewed by the lecturer's programme leader in order to observe the standard of answer and engagement with the tasks. Once completed, the new lecturer receives feedback from their programme leader.

446. After completing the module, new lecturers attend a training session led by the Head of Education and Curriculum and programme leaders to induct them into the VLE and provide guidance on using resources. During this session, lecturers also deliver and receive feedback on a mock five to ten-minute lesson. The team found new lecturers also have an opportunity to shadow colleagues in class and, if they are new to teaching higher education, will normally teach short courses initially. Programme leaders also hold informal monthly appraisal discussions with new lecturers throughout the probation period.

447. The team identified a weakness in the school's staff recruitment practice, as a result of the limited implementation of the school's EDI policy (as described already in paragraphs 284 and 433). For example, the team did not see evidence of any systematic methodology for evaluating what might be considered the ideal demographics of staff, nor a strategic approach to recruitment designed to meet such objectives. Likewise, while the team recognised the advantages of internal promotion within the school, the team did not find any clear mitigations for the risks to EDI brought about by this approach.

448. While the school has a representative mix of staff genders and ethnicities in some departments and levels, the team was unclear whether this was intentional, and were not clear on how some other protected characteristics are treated.

449. In summary, the team concluded that in general, the school has appropriate (and, in some ways, excellent) staff recruitment practices. However, the team identified a weakness in relation to how its recruitment practices take proper account of some elements of the school's EDI policy and wider EDI matters.

## Conclusions

450. The team concluded that, with the exception of a weakness in the school's understanding and engagement with certain aspects of EDI practice, the school has evidenced that it has an appropriate number of qualified subject-specific staff and that those staff are supported and developed by the school to the level of the qualifications being awarded.

451. Therefore, the team concluded that the school meets criterion C1.

# Assessment of DAPs criterion D: Environment for supporting students

## Criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement

### Advice to the OfS

452. The assessment team's view, based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information, is that the school meets criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement, because it meets subcriterion D1.1.

453. The team's view is based on its review of the evidence, which shows in summary that, in general, the school has in place, monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. However, the team found that the school does not sufficiently implement its EDI policy, which creates weaknesses in its commitment to equity.

### Subcriterion D1.1

> **D1.1: Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.**

### Reasoning

454. To understand the extent to which the school takes a comprehensive strategic and operational approach to determine and evaluate how it enables student development and achievement for its diverse body of students, the team considered:

- the school's 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy'

- terms of reference for the Curriculum Monitoring Committee and Student Engagement and Experience Committee

- the 'Disability Support Framework'

- policies relating to financial assistance, additional consideration (formerly known as extenuating circumstances), EDI

- the school's reference guide to teaching students with special educational needs and disability (SEND)

- summary reports from the Student Engagement and Experience Committee.

455. The school's 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy' outlines a set of strategies, policies and operational plans that detail the school's approach to enabling student development and achievement. It states, for example, that the school's vision is to foster 'a dynamic learning environment that inspires student engagement, aspiration, and potential realisation'. The latest version of the strategy also mentions using 'differentiation' in teaching

practice to take account of 'learning preferences of diverse students in the same classroom', therefore pointing to how diversity of learning styles is taken into account.

456. The team found that this strategic commitment is operationalised by a data-centric approach to determining and evaluating student progress. The updated 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy', for example, states that the school's approach will be 'data driven' and utilise 'predictive analysis'. A section of the strategy is entitled 'Data Driven Quality Assurance and Enhancement' and speaks of 'Comprehensive Data Collection and Analysis' and says that the school will 'Triangulate quantitative data against qualitative data'.

457. The team saw evidence of this data driven practice in the Student Engagement and Experience Committee. For example, a summary report to the school's Academic Board includes data used to evaluate initiatives to support student development and achievement. The report provides evidence-based insights on matters including student retention and engagement, disability support and student experience. For example, it notes the school has introduced an 'Actioned Reasonable Adjustments strategy' in response to data which showed that over 50 per cent of its students with a disclosed disability had a learning support plan. The report goes on to conclude that the strategy has proven successful and the school has since implemented 28 adjustments to enhance assessment methods and overall student support.

458. Furthermore, the team found that the annual EME reports collate and analyse qualitative and quantitative data (including survey data on recruitment, data on continuation, completion and progression, and external examiner feedback). This is used to guide actions and measurable outcomes, to better enable the engagement and achievement of the school's diverse range of students. For example, the 2023-24 EME report for BA(Hons) Music Production and Vocal Performance identifies the addition of a 40-credit research project module at Level 6, in response to external examiner feedback and wider validation work. Another EME report documents further discussion and student consultation around pass rate levels in term 1, in order to determine whether a module change was required. Taken together, the team considered these examples to constitute clear manifestations of the school's commitment to using data both to determine and evaluate student development and achievement.

459. As discussed in paragraphs 104 to 109, the team found that a lack of expertise in the area of EDI currently gives rise to underdeveloped approaches to ensuring equity. In the context of ensuring development and achievement for a diverse body of students, the team found that while the 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy' makes reference to how the school's EDI policy might impact learning and teaching activities, these connections remain high-level, and are not implemented consistently. This will be discussed in more detail in paragraphs 521 to 527.

460. An area of strength is the school's approach to student hardship, where its 'Financial Assistance Fund Policy' clarifies how the school provides financial assistance and interventions when required to students in financial hardship to mitigate the chances that those students may fail. The school reported in its self-assessment that, in 2022-23, 75 per cent of the students who applied for and received support from the school's hardship fund 'fully re-engaged with their learning and are making progress while maintaining good attendance'.

461. Likewise, the team found the school's approach to student disability to be well developed, with clear guidance on appropriate and practical actions to support the development and achievement of students with specific additional needs. For instance, the VLE provides a disability support training video for lecturers, with links to policies and services, such as the school's 'Disability Support Framework'. Training is further enhanced by resources such as the 'Teaching Students with SEND Handbook', which was developed by the school's disability support coordinator. The handbook provides a detailed reference guide on reasonable adjustments and inclusive teaching for classroom and online provision, with annotated examples.

462. Furthermore, the team found that following the introduction of a dedicated disability support coordinator role, the number of students having declared a disability or support need had increased. To promote greater inclusion, most assessments now feature, as standard, an alternative assessment design.

463. The team found that the development and achievement of students with other protected characteristics, such as sex or race, are not monitored as extensively within the school's data, and consequently the school has fewer interventional programmes that relate to other characteristics.

464. The team found this weakness to be something of an outlier within an otherwise strong approach to determining and evaluating student development and achievement. It also considered that this weakness could be rectified relatively quickly, if the school was to develop its expertise in the area of EDI (see paragraphs 528 to 529). The team was also assured, through speaking with students, that students had not been noticeably impacted by this weakness.

465. In summary, the team found that, overall, the school takes a comprehensive strategic and operational approach to determine and evaluate how it enables student development and achievement for its diverse body of students.

466. To understand the extent to which students are advised about, and inducted into their study programmes in an effective way and account is taken of different students' choices and needs, the team considered minutes of the school's Induction Working Group, induction resources on the VLE, and spoke with staff and students.

467. The school has a clear and easy to navigate public facing website where potential applicants can access the initial application form and discover digestible summaries of each programme, their modules and the careers that may be open to graduates. The website also presents details of the many events, from open days and studio tours, to seminars and live performance events that the school produces. The team considered that these resources allow potential applicants to gain a thorough insight to the school's offer, culture and activities.

468. As part of the applicant journey, the team found that the school has introduced 'offer holder days', where applicants who have been given a potential place on a programme are invited into the school to meet staff, see the resources and discover more about what studying at the school will be like in practice. Once enrolled, the school's 'Student Induction Welcome Talk' is used at on-campus and online induction events to introduce and outline the school's student-facing services. The school's VLE also contains what the team considered to be an excellent

and comprehensive range of content for students to reference not only as induction material, but also as ongoing resources for revision and learning across the full student experience. As discussed in paragraphs 461 to 462, the school also has dedicated support for students with disabilities, and students with financial difficulties, these being made highly visible as part of the school's induction programme.

469. In addition, the team found that the VLE features 'always available' teacher-led induction videos that provide clear and accessible explanations of essential academic and technical skills. This 'always available' approach ensures that both on-campus and online students can receive equitable induction and post-induction information on demand. Students reported that they found the VLE system 'easy to navigate' and referred to it as 'fantastic'.

470. Once students are enrolled on their course, the team found that they are provided with appropriate and informative programme handbooks, published on the VLE for students to easily access. An example of this is the handbook for the BA (Hons) Songwriting programme which runs to 122 pages and features extensive detailing of every key operational, academic and regulatory element of the programme in respect of the student and the student journey.

471. To coordinate all of the above activities, the school has an Induction Working Group, and the team found that all key induction stakeholders from across the school have recently been brought together within the Registry department.

472. In summary, the team concluded that students are advised about, and inducted into, their study programmes in an effective way and account is taken of different students' choices and needs.

473. To understand the extent to which the effectiveness of student and staff advisory, support and counselling services is monitored, and any resource needs arising are considered, the team reviewed:

- the school's 'Institutional Governance Document'

- minutes of the Executive Committee

- the 'Academic Staff Appraisal Policy'

- a sample of EME reports.

474. The team also met with academic and senior staff.

475. The team found that the Student Engagement and Experience Committee is responsible for monitoring 'the effectiveness of student support mechanisms', supporting the delivery of improvements and reporting on the effectiveness of student support services. To do this, it receives reports from key staff across the school's academic support services in addition to analysis of student feedback mechanisms including the NSS, the school's own annual survey and student representatives. The committee reports its findings in a summary report, which is presented as a standing item at Academic Board. In turn, Academic Board reports on this data to the Board of Directors.

476. The 'Student Risk Report', which is also a standing item at Academic Board, monitors student retention and attendance data and provides contextual information, including actions taken in response. For instance, the team saw evidence to demonstrate how the school had expanded the support staff team, specifically academic engagement, in response to data showing an overall pattern of falling attendance to help increase the capacity for early interventions.

477. Minutes of the Executive Committee also demonstrate that staff resources, and resource requirements are monitored, discussed and action taken where needed. The Executive Committee meeting of February 2024, for example, looked ahead at staff requirements from September 2024 to July 2025 in light of the school launching new programmes, staff turnover and expected growth.

478. At programme level, the effectiveness of student services is also monitored through the annual EME process, which requires programme teams to consider and comment on the effectiveness of student services in line with programme performance data. For example, in the EME report for Music Industry Management, the commentary notes that 'a disability support coordinator has been employed since September 2023 to ensure that we have appropriate support for students with learning challenges'.

479. In conversation with programme leaders, the team heard that staff appraisals occur annually in line with the policy on appraisals for academic staff, including sessional lecturers. These are used as a mechanism to identify any support requirements for staff. Programme leaders also confirmed that they are responsible for overseeing their teaching teams, with weekly meetings to discuss any matters that may impinge on programme teams and their work with and for the school's students.

480. The team found that, outside of the formal appraisal process, many of the school's staff advisory, support or counselling processes and structures are more informal in nature, for example senior staff are based in the same area as academic and professional services staff to support constant and intuitive engagement. The school's 'Behaviours Framework' sets out a requirement for 'sensitivity to student related issues' and for staff to demonstrate 'positivity' but the team noted that this does not include a formal requirement for staff to demonstrate sensitivity or empathy towards other staff. The framework is a staff facing 'can do' document that lays out an energetic and positive outlook to the school's behaviours; and this, by virtue of omission, informs the absence of any formal staff support and counselling services.

481. In the meeting with the team, academic and support staff stated that 'in general staff feel supported', though this support is mostly informal and exists as an outcome of good management and governance.

482. In summary, the team found that the effectiveness of student and staff advisory, support and counselling services is monitored, and any resource needs arising are considered.

483. To understand the extent to which the school's administrative support systems enable it to monitor student progression and performance accurately and provide timely, secure and accurate information to satisfy academic and non-academic management information needs, the team reviewed evidence including the school's risk register, minutes of Board of Directors meetings.

484. The team also undertook a virtual tour of the school's student record system, including the Student Outcomes Report and met with senior staff.

485. The school has developed in house a bespoke data management system, which sits as an integrated staff feature within the student-facing VLE. The VLE overall is custom built and managed in-house, holding student records with assessment data that is hosted within a reporting section. It has been designed with interlinked backend and frontend systems to pull data backwards and forwards as appropriate, between report and student submissions and feedback. The team found this bespoke system was thorough, straightforward, secure and rigorously monitored by the in-house development team, who are continually updating and integrating new features.

486. Overall, the team was extremely impressed with the school's VLE and its related reporting functionality. Likewise, as regards non-academic management information, the team found that the school uses sophisticated data reporting across a number of functions. For example, the Board of Directors regularly reviews internal data reports on finance, risk, enrolment and retention and action trackers as evidenced in the Board of Directors' minutes.

487. The risk register identifies that the school is aware of the risks of using a bespoke, in-house system. For example, knowledge and understanding of the system is reliant on staff retention. The team found that the school, in light of this, has recently expanded its team of developers and is training the team to have a wider range of insight and skills, rather than each member of staff having singular system specialisms.

488. The team noted that the risk register also identifies an increase in regulatory reporting requirements, which has raised concerns about the school's ability to respond to internal reporting requests and needs quickly enough. The report further details various controls which have been implemented to address these concerns, for example the relevant working group has started working on the return much earlier than previous years and additional resource has been assigned. Despite these concerns, the team saw evidence through the EME reports that the system enables the school to monitor student progression and performance accurately, including providing data on admissions, protected characteristics and awards.

489. The VLE is also used to record and monitor student attendance data, including engagement with resources on the VLE. In line with the 'Student Attendance and Engagement Policy' and 'Sponsored Student Attendance Policy'. Through discussion with academic and professional services staff, the team found there to be an inconsistency between how attendance is monitored for UK-based students and how it is monitored for international students to meet visa requirements. For international students, a check is undertaken every two weeks by the Academic Engagement Team. This is compiled into a report which categorises students depending on the level of risk. Those who fall below the minimum requirements for attendance are contacted, receiving tailored communication depending on the assigned level of risk and individual circumstances.

490. The team found that there are currently no minimum attendance requirements for UK-based students, who are not withdrawn on the basis of non-attendance, although attendance that falls below 75 per cent is used as guidance for triggering an intervention. A range of metrics are used to determine the attendance and engagement of UK-based students, which include

the submission of assignments and logging into the VLE. Students who are not engaging are withdrawn at the point of the assessment board.

491. Staff attributed this difference in practice to the attendance policy of the school's validating partner, which staff reported did not cover UK-based students. However, when the team reviewed the validating partner's 2024-25 policy on attendance,[23] it found that the policy covers both UK and international students, meaning that staff belief in this regard was incorrect. The team found this misunderstanding, and the lack of alignment between the school's monitoring of UK and international student attendance, to pose some concerns in terms of parity of experience. Nevertheless, the team did not identify any concerns regarding the extent to which the VLE enables the school to monitor and provide timely, secure and accurate student attendance data, in relation to student progression and performance.

492. An area of concern that emerged for the team was the process by which student marks are inputted and verified by lecturers. The marking of assignments is carried out by the full range of teaching staff, including sessional lecturers, and it is the first marker's responsibility to enter marks into the VLE. However, all subsequent quality checks on the accuracy of this mark (i.e. that it has been inputted correctly) are undertaken by permanent staff only, through activities such as moderation, exam board preparation and exam boards. Therefore, while sessional lecturers are told clearly that they must check carefully that they have inputted their marks correctly, the school cannot actually verify that this has taken place, as the only person who knows whether or not the first mark is accurate (i.e. the first marker) is not involved subsequently if they are sessional staff.

493. The team raised this issue with programme leaders, and with senior staff, all of whom recognised the potential oversight, committing to add an additional layer of quality control going forwards. The team considered that this oversight constitutes a weakness within the school's current quality systems, as the school cannot therefore verify with 100 per cent certainty that all of the marks within its management system are accurate. However, the team also recognise that human error at the point of entering a mark can happen by anyone, in any organisation, and that the school had recognised the vulnerability by asking staff to double check that marks were entered correctly. The team also recognised that any major anomaly would in likelihood be picked up by programme leaders and exam boards, given the small size of the school. Nevertheless, the team concluded that the addition of another step within the process – where first markers are asked to sign-off the accuracy of a marks report – would easily close this vulnerability and mitigate the risk of human error.

494. In summary, the team concluded that the school's administrative support systems enable it to monitor student progression and performance accurately and provide timely, secure and accurate information to satisfy academic and non-academic management information needs, though with the weakness that the process for mark entry required an additional accuracy check to mitigate the risk of human error.

495. To understand the extent to which the school provides opportunities for all students to develop skills that enable their academic, personal and professional progression, the team

---

[23] Available at Middlesex University, Our policies.

considered the school's 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy' and met with students, academic and professional services staff.

496. The pedagogical philosophy of the school, as set out in the 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy', focuses on helping students to develop appropriate academic, personal and professional skills, to enhance their post-graduation futures. The team found this to be well evidenced through curricular and extracurricular opportunities, such as the annual Music Futures event, accelerator modules, the Academic Success Centre and the Careers Hub.

497. The team found that the school allocates weeks 10 and 11 each term for the delivery of extracurricular modules known as accelerator modules. These are designed to enable students to develop skills and knowledge in subjects including freelancing, branding in the music industry and referencing. The modules are delivered via Zoom and archived on the VLE under the heading Accelerator Modules Archive. The team found that the content is of tangible benefit to students and covers academic skills including reflective writing and professional industry insights such as Monetising your Music and CV Writing. Other activities include career development activities such as panel discussions and networking events with industry experts. The school also hosts an excellent and accessible range of content on the VLE covering academic, personal, professional and technical skills. For example, topics range from academic integrity, engaging with diversity, to guides on professional portfolios, to technical skills such as frequency modulation synthesis techniques.

498. The role of and contact details for the student support team are clearly outlined in programme handbooks, and, on the VLE there is a welcome page detailing academic support meetings that act as a drop in facility, whether online or in-person; students can access these for advice, guidance and assistance with academic skills and study strategies. Students are allowed to schedule a series of meetings to scaffold their assignment work throughout a term if they feel that would be of benefit to their learning.

499. Though not a specific requirement of this assessment process, the team considered that collaboration is, in its experience, a core skill in the music profession. Therefore, the lack of any summative assignment designs require collaborative working may leave students with a gap in their preparation for the professional environment.

500. This consideration was further reinforced when the team spoke with students. For example, one online student had reached the end of their course without ever having to formally collaborate with other students as part of their learning experience. Similarly, students studying on-campus reported that their experience was 'not as collaborative as expected' and that they had noted 'limited interaction with other courses'.

501. Following up on this subject of collaboration with senior staff and programme leaders, the team found that collaboration was presented to students 'early on' as a good way to work and approach projects within the disciplines taught by the school. Staff pointed to the difficulty of marking collaborative work as a reason for summative assessments across the school's curriculum being compulsory collaborative projects. An example was given of a sound engineering module on 'mixing,' which is taught to a group that collaborates on project development in class however, the summative assignment consists of an individual practical project and an individual written reflection on that project.

502. Staff did stress that the school excels at fostering collaborative experiences in extracurricular activities and projects. On reflection, the team considered that collaborative working as part of assignment design is an area for development for the school, rather than a specific concern.

503. These discussions led the team towards a second, broader concern about equitable student experiences, especially since a significant number of students study online at a distance and cannot practically engage in some of the school's extracurricular collaborative activities. While the school explained it uses technology to help online students collaboratively participate as much as is possible, the team concluded that there are still barriers that impede online students' full and equitable engagement.

504. Overall, the team considered that student evaluation and commentary evidenced in NSS reports indicate reasonable overall satisfaction with the broad provision of the school. The school's TEF 2023 outcome, for which the school achieved an overall Gold rating, supports the efficacy of the school's approach.[24] Likewise the team found that, in general, skills development is considered by the school, and woven into its provision. However, the team considered that several areas could be improved, in particular more collaboration, and further development and facilitation of extracurricular activity for online students to ensure parity of experience.

505. In summary, the team concluded that the school provides opportunities for all students to develop skills that enable their academic, personal and professional progression. However, the team identified a lack of formal and assessed collaborative work and facilitation of collaborative and extracurricular activities for online students as two areas, which would have the potential to improve the student experience.

506. To understand the extent to which the school provides opportunities for all students to develop skills to make effective use of the learning resources provided, including the safe and effective use of specialist facilities, and the use of digital and virtual environments, the team reviewed the school's 'Health & Safety Policy', 'Library Policy' and external examiner reports.

507. The team considered the school's extensive 'Health and Safety Policy', which sets out that all electrical and technical equipment is regularly tested and maintained. During the team's visit to the school's London campus, it noted that appropriate health and safety signs and tools were clearly present and in working order, in particular notices and information regarding electrical safety and standard fire and emergency exits. The team was also informed of regular maintenance and safety checks on the technology being utilised by teachers and students. As a specialist music education provider, the team was pleased to see signage on ear health and the need to avoid unnecessary loud sound. School technicians are on hand on both of the school's physical London sites to assist with the safe use of equipment, and students require an induction to use specialist facilities.

508. The school has a Library and Learning Resources Manager who works closely with the Academic Success Team to assist students in developing their academic skills through the appropriate and efficient utilisation of the library's resources. The role also requires the post-holder to work in collaboration with the education, quality and academic teams to ensure that both the physical library resources and the online facilities are constantly updated, enhanced

---

[24] Available at TEF 2023 Outcomes, Point Blank Limited.

and made appropriate to the content and learning outcomes of the school's programmes. This practice is similarly reflected in the school's 'Library Policy'.

509. The team found that there are many impressive assets and learning resources available on the school's VLE that explain, guide and provide access to the technological and creative facilities that the school utilises for teaching and learning both on campus and online. These resources include teacher-led videos explaining to students, both online and on campus, academic and technological processes. This use of digital content provides an equitable level of information sharing and provision for all students, both on campus and online.

510. The external examiner reports and response documents evidence that the facilitation of students to use the resources provided by the school is of a high standard and in particular, the commentary of the external examiner report for the BA (Hons) Music Production and Sound Engineering programme states that 'the institution's VLE is an impressive digital platform that facilitates teaching through an intuitive interface and a vast range of valuable learning resources'.

511. The minutes from the school's Induction Working Group demonstrate that the school employs a holistic approach to its induction process, which includes instruction on the appropriate use of technology and related health and safety procedures. The minutes also note that a re-induction programme will be provided for returning students.

512. The team concluded that the school provides opportunities for all students to develop skills to make effective use of the learning resources provided, including the safe and effective use of specialist facilities, and the use of digital and virtual environments.

513. To understand whether the school's approach is guided by a commitment to equity, the team considered and reviewed evidence including:

- the school's 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy'

- the 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy'

- the school's reference guide to teaching students with SEND

- student representative job descriptions

- the school's 'Access and Participation Plan 2025/26-2028/29'

- a summary report from the Access and Participation Steering Group.

514. The team also met with academic and professional services staff, senior staff and students.

515. The school's EDI policy states that it 'is committed to promoting equality and providing an environment where all members of its community are treated with respect and dignity'. Similarly, the school's 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy' sets out five core principles, one of which concerns EDI, and states:

'We aim to develop strategies to recruit and retain students and staff from a diverse range of backgrounds and promote a teaching and learning environment that values and celebrates diverse perspectives.'

516. The school's stated commitment to equity is also evident in the following policies, which all have the core objective of delivering against the school's intentions on equity:

- the 'Access and Participation Plan'

- the 'Disability Support Framework'

- the 'Laptop Loan Scheme'

- the 'Alternative Entry Proposal'

- the 'Student Retention and Risk Intervention Report'

- the 'Financial Assistance Fund Policy'.

517. Beyond policy, the school hosts a range of internal in-person and online staff training courses for teaching staff covering best practice in relation to EDI, including unconscious bias training and disability support training. The school also has a well informed and thorough module on the VLE entitled 'Engaging with Diversity', which forms part of the new lecturers' induction process and provides a strong insight into the regulatory environment, as well as the school's own ethical good practice and ambitions in this area.

518. These training modules are further enhanced by resources such as the 'Teaching Students with SEND Handbook'.

519. Furthermore, the school's commitment to supporting students in financial hardship can be seen through a number of different mechanisms, from initiatives such as its laptop loan scheme, through to pedagogic decisions, such as ensuring programmes focus primarily on two core industry standard software. The latter aims to limit financial outlay for students while also ensuring industry standard software is covered.

520. The school's ongoing engagement with equity has also seen the development of five student representative posts, which each focus on a specific protected characteristic:

- Disabled Students' Representative

- Global Majority Students' Representative

- LGBTQ+ Student Representative

- Mature Students' Representative

- Women's Representative.

521. The team found that this infrastructure of policy, staff training, support initiatives and student representation has given rise to a number of areas of strength in relation to the school's approach to equity. However, the team found some inconsistencies in the extent to which the school's approach is guided by a commitment to equity. Most notably, though the team saw evidence of monitoring and support for the areas of disability and poverty, there was limited evidence across other protected characteristics aside from the data and actions considered by the Access and Participation Steering Group.

522. Relatedly, the EDI policy defines an EDI working group which is responsible for:

'considering current issues and matters arising relating to EDI across [the school] and will consider data and information relating to EDI matters to inform activity'.

However, the team found that the working group has not yet been established outside of the policy. Senior staff explained that this is because, on reflection, the school had been wary of siloing EDI activity and felt that embedding the school's EDI policy across its committee structures and the 'Access and Participation Plan' would be a more constructive and action-based approach. Nevertheless, the team was not able to see evidence of any formal or evidenced actions to support this approach.

523. Consequently, the team found that there is no central group (either working group, committee or team) that is responsible for monitoring EDI across the school. Furthermore, the EDI policy states that it is owned by the Academic Board, but the team considered Academic Board agendas from the last two years and could not see any references to EDI as either a standing or exceptional item in the sample. The team therefore found that there seems to be no clear responsibility for EDI within the school, and no clear vehicle for operationalising the school's EDI policy in a meaningful and systematic way.

524. The team also found inconsistent approaches to EDI in relation to monitoring staff characteristics, in as much as the school only monitors the protected characteristics of its staff in line with the data that is formally required by HESA.

525. The team discussed this with senior staff, which pointed to examples of initiatives the school had established, including:

- the tangible efforts the school had taken when building its new campus in order to ensure there was clear disability access and design throughout the project

- working with a consultancy organisation to develop a 'toolbox' to guide and assist with improving the school's delivery of EDI policy and compliance with EDI regulations

- one of the school's Directors is working with staff on a newly formed Intervention Strategy Working Group, informed by the school's 2025-26 access and participation plan, to support the academic achievement of Global Majority students at the school.

526. The team found these and other examples to be representative of a sincere desire to ensure that equity is a guiding principle at the school. In particular, the team found that all of the staff that it met with spoke passionately about the importance of equity.

527. However, senior staff were not able, at this time, to point to a fully formed operational approach to the delivery of equity. In discussion with the team, senior staff acknowledged that there was some way to go in enhancing and embedding the school's understanding of and engagement with EDI principles and practices. The team considered these shortcomings to be the symptom of what it perceived to be a lack of professional expertise and experience in the area of EDI, as described in paragraph 106.

528. In summary, while the team was in no doubt of the school's desire to create an equitable environment, and saw many effective interventions to achieve this, the team was not able to

conclude that the school's approach is guided by a commitment to equity. This is primarily due to the lack of a coherent plan to operationalise the school's EDI policy, which the team determined is caused by a limited organisational understanding of EDI.

529. However, the team also noted a clear cultural commitment to EDI across all levels of the organisation and found the school's EDI policy to be appropriate. Furthermore, the team is confident that with greater professional management of the school's delivery of equity and its own EDI policy, the school would be able to address the gaps within current practice.

## Conclusions

530. The team therefore concluded that, despite some weakness in the school's implementation of its EDI policy, the school otherwise has in place, monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

531. Therefore, the team concluded that the school meets criterion D1.

# Assessment of DAPs criterion E: Evaluation of performance

## Criterion E1: Evaluation of performance

### Advice to the OfS

532. The assessment team's view, based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information, is that the school meets the requirements for criterion E1: Evaluation of performance.

533. The team's view is based on its review of the evidence, which shows in summary that self-criticality is integral to the school, with action taken via clearly articulated mechanisms, in response to insights gleaned from internal and external data sources. The team noted a number of blind spots within the school, where the team considered better self-criticality ought to exist, but found these to be outliers rather than the norm.

### Criterion E1

**E1: An organisation granted degree awarding powers takes effective action to assess its own performance, respond to identified weaknesses and develop further its strengths.**

### Reasoning

534. To test the extent to which ideas and expertise from within and outside the school are drawn into its arrangements for programme design, approval, delivery and review, the team considered the types of data sources that the school uses to assess its own performance.

535. The team found that the school systematically collects and analyses a wide range of internal data. For example, the Executive Committee agenda contains standing items to review up-to-date reports on student recruitment and retention, department budgets, the risk register, and a set of KPIs that includes the monitoring of performance against the NSS questions, and several OfS, access and participation plan and internal requirements or targets.

536. Likewise, the school's Academic Board reviews regular reports from its Access and Participation Plan Subcommittee, which contain:

- basic information on the continuation rates of students with protected characteristics

- a student risk report, which includes, among other things, student engagement rates and highlights any at-risk students

- a report from the Curriculum Monitoring Subcommittee, which summarises any emergent issues for consideration within programmes.

537. These data sets are augmented with regular insights from other stakeholders, including:

- external examiner reports and their analysis

- external reviews commissioned by the school, such as research into the impact of the school's foundation year

- an extremely detailed termly student feedback report, which contains wide-ranging quantitative and qualitative data relating to student feedback

- regular forums for teaching and support staff to input their ideas and suggestions.

538. For the design and approval of new programmes, the team found that external expertise is included both in the process of proposing new programmes and through the inclusion of external experts within their validation. For example, the school's 2023 academic proposal for a new bachelors' degree in Songwriting resulted in feedback from a range of external parties, including the school's validating partner. This resulted in the school making revisions to the proposal prior to formal validation. Likewise, the school's development of a new BA (Hons) in Music Systems Engineering evidenced in its validation document how the school consulted with a range of its industry partners as part of designing the course.

539. The school synthesises and analyses its data within its annual programme level EME reports that are reviewed by the school's validating partner. It also does so within its summary reports from the Executive Committee, Academic Board and 'Head of Provider Report', all of which are reviewed as standing items within the school's Board of Directors meetings.

540. The team identified two gaps in evidence where it considered that the school could demonstrate further insights and self-criticality. Firstly, as described in paragraphs 131 to 133133, the team found that the student body had not been meaningfully consulted prior to applying for DAPs. Secondly, as described in paragraphs 521 to 524, the team found that data concerning equity is not as widely used as it could be. Both cases result in domains within the school that could be, or could have been, strengthened if the school had had a better self-understanding.

541. However, the team formed the view that, in both cases, the gaps are relatively self-contained rather than being indicative of any broader issues in relation to the robustness of the school's overall approach to self-critical reflection. The team therefore came to the conclusion that although these gaps constitute weaknesses, they do not undermine the school's otherwise strong approach to self-criticality.

542. In summary, excepting the two gaps previously described, the team concluded that ideas and expertise from within and outside the school are drawn into its arrangements for programme design, approval, delivery and review.

543. To test the extent to which clear mechanisms exist for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny and monitoring of its academic provision, the team reviewed the mechanisms through which the school critiques itself, and spoke with staff and students.

544. As described in paragraphs 535 to 539, the team found that the school has a clear and consistent approach to data analysis through its inclusion of standing items on its various committee agendas. This means that the school is regularly analysing its data, and doing so in a coherent and organised fashion. This in turn leads to clear mechanisms for assigning and discharging action. Specifically, committees contain discussion and analysis of detailed action trackers to ensure actions are clearly assigned, progress against assigned actions are

reported and, ultimately, actions are completed. For example, an action in the February 2024 Academic Board to consolidate recommendations from a recent review of the 'Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy' is marked as complete in the May 2024 Academic Board minutes, leading to a number of new actions in the May 2024 meeting in which these recommendations are turned into projects.

545. The school has numerous additional mechanisms to ensure that action in response to scrutiny and monitoring is clearly articulated and consistently applied. For example, the school's approach to reviewing and responding to external examiner reports involves a well organised process through which reports are received and reviewed, actions determined and monitored, projects are signed off and closed down, and responses are sent back to external examiners.

546. While at present a number of the school's mechanisms for self-critical reflection are based on those of the school's validating partner (for example, the EME report), the team found that the school has also developed its own mechanisms, such as the 'Annual Development Review'. In both cases, the team found the school to be diligent in its approach to using these methods as defined mechanisms for undertaking self-critical reflection.

547. In summary, the team concluded that the school has clear mechanisms for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny and monitoring of its academic provision.

548. To test the extent to which critical self-assessment is integral to the operation of its higher education provision, and that action is taken in response to matters raised through internal or external monitoring and review, the team reviewed recent examples of action being taken in response to critical self-assessment.

549. The team also spoke with staff, students and external examiners, and observed three committee meetings.

550. In general, the team found the school to have a strong culture of open and honest self-critical debate, which provided assurance to the team that critical self-assessment is integral to the school. The team witnessed this culture in multiple contexts, most notably in its observations of committee meetings, including the Board of Directors and Academic Board, where the team noted the comfort and frequency with which staff challenged one another and debated ideas, including the ease with which more junior colleagues' views were included within any debate. The team also found that these debates led to clear and robust conclusions. For example, in the March 2025 meeting of the Academic Board, the team witnessed a discussion around proposed changes to the school's library policy. Discussion ranged from picking up on an error within a flow chart, to debating whether and how the new policy should overlap with its predecessor, and the committee concluded that it wanted to see an amended draft before approving the policy.

551. Likewise, during the team's two visits to the school, it noted the ease with which both senior and academic staff, often together, slipped into a 'workshopping' mode, where they would suggest things openly to one another, including in the presence of the team. For example, in a discussion with senior staff (including senior leadership) about the function of the school's Quality and Standards Committee, senior staff openly noted an area for improvement, and the team observed how staff naturally gravitated to co-designing a solution. This gave the

team confidence in the ease with which senior staff within the school felt comfortable undertaking self-critical discussion and problem solving in an open and honest manner.

552. In terms of action being taken in response to matters raised through internal and external monitoring and review, the team found that the school is disciplined and successful at following actions to completion. As described in paragraph 544, the use of action logs in all major committees means that actions are strictly assigned, reported against and tracked until completion. Likewise, responses to external examiners result in closing the feedback loop, as does the school's 'You said, we did' approach to reporting back to students how their feedback has been actioned.

553. The team found numerous detailed examples of action in response to monitoring and review, including:

- detailed descriptions from programme leaders outlining the actions taken in response to external examiner feedback

- the tracking of these actions through into EME reports

- critical reviews of programmes, which include detailed analysis of feedback from staff, students, external examiners and industry partners, along with proposed actions in response to these recommendations.

554. The team found numerous examples of the school successfully implementing change as a consequence of self-critical reflection. For example, students taking the Vocal Musicianship module, which features in several programmes, reported to staff that they found it difficult to incorporate aspects of music analysis into their podcasts. In response, staff reviewed the module and initiated a formal module change process, which saw a re-mapping of learning outcomes in order to remove this requirement, and instead constrain music analysis to a separate assessment task.

555. The team spoke with students studying online and on campus, and found that students spoke highly of the school's willingness and ability to respond to student feedback. As described in paragraph 130, though students did report some reticence in giving feedback, the team was satisfied that this was not systemic, and that the school is taking actions to improve this.

556. The team also spoke with external examiners who reported many examples of when their feedback had led to meaningful action. For example, one examiner reported to the school that he felt there could be more focus on small, medium enterprises within the music industry, to offset existing content on larger companies. The team heard that the school subsequently implemented this change in the next cycle.

557. In summary, the team concluded that critical self-assessment is integral to the operation of its higher education provision, and that action is taken in response to matters raised through internal or external monitoring and review.

## Conclusions

558. The team concluded that, with the exception of the two gaps in evidence where the team considered self-criticality should exist, the school takes effective action to assess its own performance, respond to identified weaknesses and develop further its strengths. This is

because self-critical reflection is integral to the operation of the school's higher education provision, with clear action taken in response to matters raised, clear mechanisms in place to discharge that action, and with robust and wide-ranging internal and external data sources that form the basis of insight.

559. Therefore, the team concluded that the school meets criterion E1: Evaluation of performance.

# Assessment of overarching criterion for the authorisation of DAPs

**Full DAPs: A self-critical, cohesive academic community with a proven commitment to the assurance of standards supported by effective quality systems.**

## Advice to the OfS

560. The assessment team's view, based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for the DAPs criteria, alongside any other relevant information, is that the school meets the all the underpinning criteria for the overarching criterion for Full DAPs.

561. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the evidence, which shows in summary that the school develops and encourages a self-critical and cohesive academic community. It has a clear commitment to the assurance of standards, supported by effective and robust quality systems.

## Reasoning

562. The assessment team found that **self-criticality** is demonstrated through:

- the extensive collection of data that the school undertakes, including input from external partners and sources, for use as the basis of the school's approach to self-criticality

- the quality and extensiveness of the school's annual monitoring and enhancement process

- the robustness, respectfulness and openness of debate within its committees, and between staff of all levels in the organisation.

563. The assessment team found the school to constitute a highly **cohesive academic community**, in part because of its small size, but largely because of the shared ethos that the school manifests at all levels on the centrality of industry-led education.

564. The school has a proven committed to the assurance of standards, as demonstrated through:

- a robust approach to curriculum development

- learning, teaching and assessment standards that align to the FHEQ

- its student support systems, in particular its excellent in-house VLE.

565. The team considers the **effectiveness of the school's quality systems** is apparent in the alignment of student work with the FHEQ, the positive ways in which students describe their experiences of the school, and the long-term positive relationships that the school has maintained with its validating partner, industry partners and external examiners.

## Conclusions

566. The team therefore concluded that the school meets the overarching criterion as the evidence demonstrates that the school has a self-critical, cohesive academic community with a proven commitment to the assurance of standards as supported by effective quality systems.

# Annex A: Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Meaning |
|---|---|
| AI | artificial intelligence |
| DAPs | degree awarding powers |
| EDI | equality, diversity and inclusion |
| EME | educational monitoring and enhancement |
| FHEQ | Framework for Higher Education Qualifications |
| HERA | Higher Education and Research Act 2017 |
| IELTS | International English Language Testing System |
| IT | information technology |
| KPI | key performance indicator |
| NSS | National Student Survey |
| QAA | Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education |
| QAC | [the OfS's] Quality Assessment Committee |
| RPL | record of prior learning |
| SEND | special educational needs and disability |
| TEF | Teaching Excellence Framework |
| VLE | virtual learning environment |