

Degree awarding powers (DAPs) assessment report for Northern School of Contemporary Dance

**Full degree awarding powers (Full DAPs)
assessment**

Provider legal name: Northern School of Contemporary Dance

Provider trading name: Northern School of Contemporary Dance

UKPRN: 10008816

Assessment conducted: 31 May 2024 to 29 April 2025

Reference OfS 2025.51

Enquiries to regulation@officeforstudents.org.uk

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Executive summary

Type of assessment:	Quality and standards assessment for Full degree awarding powers
For:	Northern School of Contemporary Dance

1. This report represents the conclusions of an assessment for degree awarding powers (DAPs) at Northern School of Contemporary Dance ('the school'). The school is seeking authorisation for Full taught DAPs (for awards up to and including Level 7) in all subjects.
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 an on-site visit to the school. This report contains the advice and judgement of the team following its assessment.
3. The team concluded that the school met all the criteria for a Full DAPs authorisation (see Table 1). This report does not, however, represent any decision of the OfS to authorise these powers.

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 degree awarding powers 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.¹

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 degree awarding powers'.

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

- foundation degrees only
- awards up to, and including, bachelor degrees
- all taught awards
- research awards (if Full DAPs for taught awards are already held or are applied for at the same time).

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 (the OfS's regulatory framework).²

¹ For a summary of different types of degree awarding powers, see [Degree awarding powers - Office for Students](#).

² See [Regulatory framework for higher education in England - Office for Students](#).

Assessment and decision-making process

Before deciding 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.³

OfS officers first undertake an eligibility and suitability assessment of the provider. This 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.⁴

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

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.⁵

Further information

We have published further information about providers seeking New DAPs and Full DAPs in Regulatory advice 12.⁶

³ See the regulatory framework: [Annex C – Guidance on the criteria for the authorisation for DAPs - Office for Students](#).

⁴ See: [Higher Education and Research Act 2017, section 46](#).

⁵ See: [Higher Education and Research Act 2017, section 2](#).

⁶ See: [Regulatory advice 12: How to apply for degree awarding powers - Office for Students](#).

4. Northern School of Contemporary Dance ('the school') is a higher education provider, founded in 1985. The school provides a range of undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses in Dance and related subjects.
5. Since 2006 the school has worked in partnership with the University of Kent. Prior to 2022, this was as a part of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (CDD). The University of Kent currently validates all the school's 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 taught DAPs (for awards up to and including Level 7) in all subjects. This is 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 28 March 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 Quality Assessment Committee (QAC) on 21 May 2025. QAC will formulate its advice to the OfS regarding quality and standards at the school, having considered this report.
10. The OfS will have regard to this assessment report, and QACs 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 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.

Introduction and background

11. This report represents the conclusions of an assessment for degree awarding powers (DAPs) at Northern School of Contemporary Dance ('the school').
12. The school is seeking authorisation for Full taught DAPs (for awards up to and including Level 7) in all subjects following its delivery of higher education since 1985. The school has worked in partnership with the University of Kent since 2006. Until 2022 this was as a part of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (CDD).
13. The OfS's Quality Assessment Committee (QAC) will consider the report and formulate its advice to the OfS regarding the quality and standards at the school.
14. The OfS will have regard to this assessment report, and the QAC's advice when deciding 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 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.

Context

15. Northern School of Contemporary Dance is an OfS registered provider (Approved (fee cap – higher)) that was registered on 13 June 2022. Prior to its registration, the school was one of six constituent school members of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (CDD), a provider that was registered with the OfS on 28 September 2018. All members of CDD, including the school, were specialist performing arts higher education providers. CDD decided to pursue voluntary winddown and voluntary de-registration from the OfS, with effect from 31 July 2022 and the school therefore required independent registration with the OfS to continue to receive the benefits of registration; thus, the school has been subject to the requirements of OfS registration since 28 September 2018.
16. The school is a private higher education provider established in 1985 and has been delivering degrees from 1991, validated by the University of Kent. It operates from its campus in Leeds. The school offers the following undergraduate degree course: BA Hons Dance (Contemporary).
17. It also offers a variety of postgraduate degree courses including in:
 - MA Contemporary Dance Performance (Verve)
 - MA Contemporary Dance Performance (Professional Placement)
 - MA Interdisciplinary Dance Performance
 - MA Dance and Creative Enterprise
 - MA Dance Teaching and Facilitating.
18. The school also offers the Certificate of Higher Education (Cultural Dance Forms) and Certificate of Higher Education (Contemporary Dance).

19. The school has plans to grow provision beyond the above listed courses. It has plans, described to the assessment team as within the next decade, to deliver provision in the following CAH codes:
- CAH22: Education and Teaching
 - CAH22010101: Education
 - CAH220010: Teacher training
 - CAH25: Design, and creative and performing arts
 - CAH250101: Creative Arts and Design
 - CAH250201: Performing arts
 - CAH250202: Music
 - CAH250203: Drama
 - CAH0203: Dance
 - CAH0206: Applied Health
 - CAH020607: Counselling, Psychotherapy and Occupational Therapy.
20. Overall, based on the latest available 'Size and shape of provision data dashboard', the school had a student population in year 2022-2023 of 270 students. This included 200 undergraduate students (all full-time). There were 60 postgraduate students; ten of these students were part-time.⁷
21. Current data held by the OfS following the provider's 2023-2024 Annual Financial Return states that the provider currently employs 57 staff, which includes an average of 30 academic staff.
22. On 19 May 2023, the school applied for Full taught DAPs (for awards up to and including Level 7) in all subjects.
23. 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; and
 - apply, and maintain the application of, appropriate standards to that higher education.

⁷ Available at [Size and shape of provision data dashboard: Data dashboard - Office for Students](#).

24. The OfS appointed an assessment team on 28 March 2024, which consisted of three academic expert assessors and a member of OfS staff in the following roles:
- Professor Michael Rofo – committee chair and lead assessor.
 - Caitríona Price – deputy committee chair and assessor.
 - Dr Pamela Karantonis – deputy committee chair and assessor.
 - Catriona Shatford - committee member and case manager (28 March 2024 – 8 November 2024).
 - Charlotte Chamberlain-Hare – committee member and case manager (replacing Catriona Shatford on 8 November 2024).
25. 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.
26. The assessment team considered a range of information submitted by the school in support of its application for Full DAPs.

Assessment process

Information gathering

27. In accordance with the process outlined in the operational guidance for providers on DAPs assessment by the OfS, the school submitted a self-assessment document on 31 May 2024 setting out how it considered it met the DAPs criteria in full.⁸
28. To support the statements made in the self-assessment document, the school also submitted a range of documentary evidence including course documentation, samples of assessed student work, information related to academic policies and processes, and governance information.
29. 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 the provider's self-assessment as the basis for the full scrutiny process.
30. On 20 June 2024, 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 5 August 2024.
31. 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 7 November 2024.
32. The assessment team held online meetings with governors and external examiners on 29 October 2024. The team also undertook a two-day visit to the school's campus in Leeds on 20-21 January 2025. During the visit the team met with a range of the school's staff and students and observed a range of teaching sessions.
33. In addition, the team observed a meeting of Senate on 18 July 2024 and Board of Governors meeting on the 22 October 2024. In each case, papers for discussion were shared with the team in advance of each meeting.
34. The assessment team received a demonstration of the provider's online systems and virtual learning environment (VLE) on 29 October 2024.
35. Abbreviations of terms used in this report and their meanings are listed in Annex A.

⁸ See OfS, [Operational guidance for providers on DAPs assessment](#).

Assessment of DAPs criterion A: Academic governance

Criterion A1: Academic governance

Advice to the OfS

36. The assessment team's view is that the school meets Criterion A1: Academic Governance because it meets subcriteria A1.1, A1.2, and A1.3.
37. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows in summary that the school has effective academic governance, with appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities. However, these lines of accountability are not always clearly articulated in documentation due to an isolated issue of a lack of robust quality control mechanisms relating to documentation. The school engages students as partners in the academic governance and management of academic standards and quality. It has clear and credible plans in place to ensure that, where it works with other organisations in the future, these arrangements will uphold the academic standards and quality of courses delivered by partner organisations. Given weaknesses in the school's quality control mechanisms relating to documentation, academic governance is an area of risk that the assessment teams suggests requires ongoing monitoring by the OfS. However, in the view of the assessment team, weaknesses are sufficiently isolated that they do not impact significantly on the effectiveness of academic governance overall, and as such the school meets criterion A1: Academic Governance.
38. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

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.

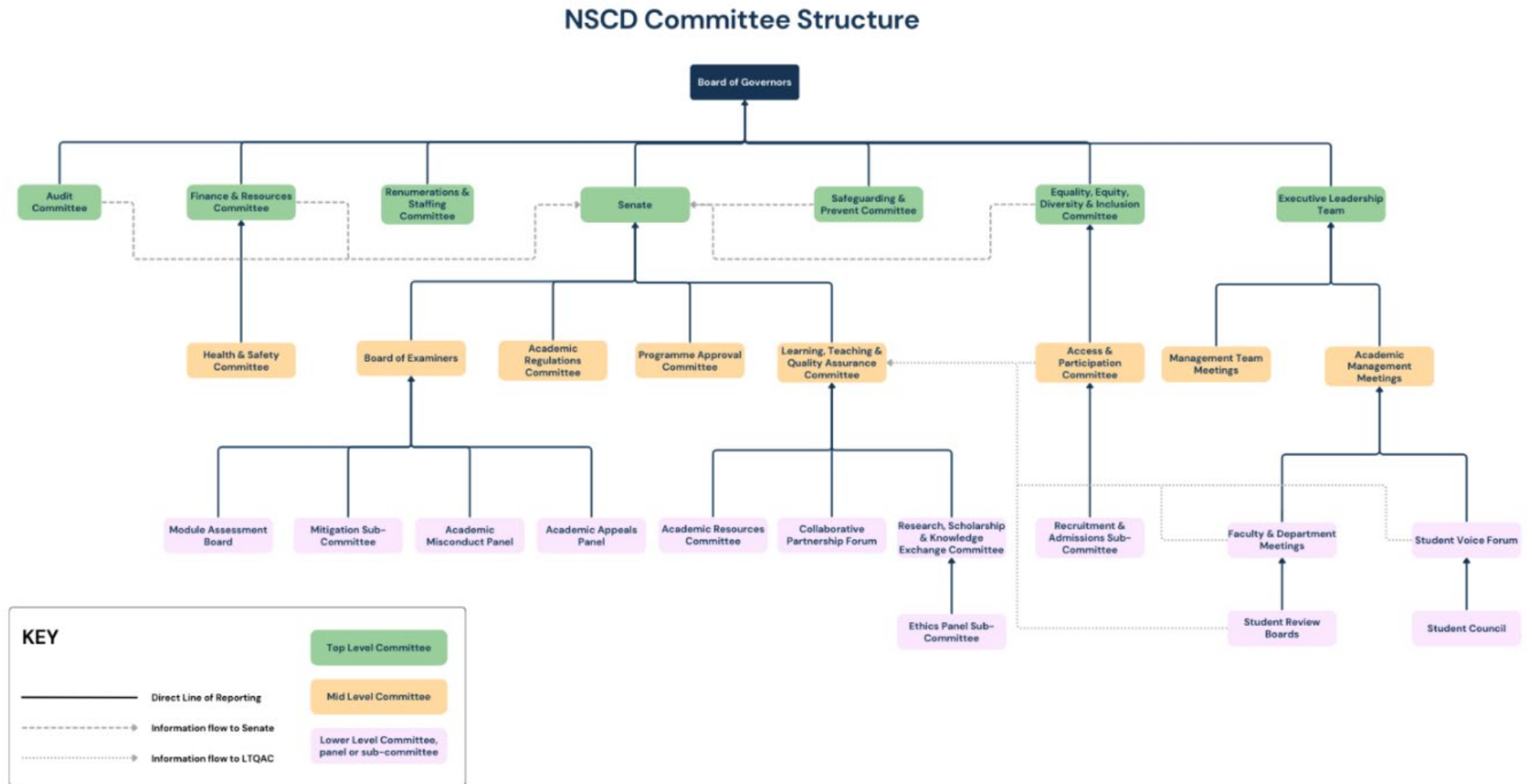
Advice to the OfS

39. The assessment team's view is that the school meets criterion A1.1 because it has effective academic governance with appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities, though with the weakness that these lines of accountability are not always clearly articulated in documentation due to an isolated lack of robust quality control mechanisms.
40. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows that the school has met the majority of the evidence requirements for A1.1 and any other relevant evidence requirements, and where evidence requirements have not been met then issues are sufficiently self-contained that they do not impact upon effective academic governance overall.

Background

41. To inform the assessment team's consideration of its academic governance arrangements, the school provided the following contextual information regarding its management and governance structures.
42. The key governing document within the school is its Instrument and Articles of Government, which establishes, amongst other things, a Board of Governors and an Executive, each with defined responsibilities, and a Senate, which constitutes the senior academic authority. Along with an accompanying Scheme of Delegation, these two documents also set out several other key subcommittees. Overall, the school's committee structure includes a large number of subcommittees, as shown in Figure 1; the senior most of these are further detailed in the school's Committee Terms of Reference.

Figure 1: NSCD committee structure



43. The school has a single overarching strategy and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place with its validating partner.⁹ The school adopts core policy documentation from its validating partner, as would be expected in a validation agreement, including its validator's Academic Regulations and Credit Framework.

Reasoning

44. To test the extent to which the school's higher education mission and strategic direction are coherent, published, understood and applied consistently, the assessment team reviewed the school's strategy, observed a presentation from senior staff on the future direction of the school, and spoke with staff and students.
45. The assessment team found that the school has an overarching 2023-2030 strategy, which is made available publicly on its website. With a clear and simple mission of being 'a world-leading centre of dance education and creative development', the strategy is formed of four key pillars: (1) Shaping who we are; (2) Building our foundation; (3) Building our visibility and profile; and (4) Shaping our future. Each of these four pillars is in turn underpinned by four subcomponents, leading to what assessors believe to be a highly coherent strategy. For example, 'Building our Foundation' is underpinned by 'Financial Sustainability', 'Environmental Sustainability', 'Centre of Cultural Knowledge' and 'People and Place' – each, in the view of assessors, is a clear component that builds towards a strong foundation. As such, the assessment team found the mission and strategy to be clear and coherent.
46. Assessors found there to be a good level of understanding regarding the strategy. For example, assessors met with teaching and support staff, and found they were able to describe the key components of the strategy without preparation. The assessment team also found that the students' union has its own student-created strategic plan, which maps closely onto the school's corporate strategy.
47. Beyond this basic level of understanding, assessors found that the school uses the strategy to coordinate and control activity. At an organisation-wide level, examples include the setting of key performance indicators (KPIs) against the strategic aims, along with performance reports against the strategy that are reviewed by the Board of Governors. At a more local level, examples include the school's course proposal process, wherein any new potential course includes an assessment of alignment against the school's strategy. As such, assessors found that the strategy is applied throughout the school in a consistent manner to control activity.
48. Assessors requested a presentation from senior staff at the school on where they saw the organisation heading, and how holding DAPs supported this. Two key issues came to light through this presentation.
49. First, it emerged that the school intends only to operate within the subject areas listed in paragraph 19. The assessment team considers this set of Common Academic Hierarchy (CAH) categories to be appropriate, as they are all based around provision that the school offers currently. The least akin to current provision is CAH020607: Counselling, Psychotherapy and Occupational Therapy, though discussion with the senior team assured

⁹ See NSCD, Strategic Plan 2023-30.

assessors that staff understood the work that would need to be done to develop this type of provision – for example, staff described the need for local clinical expertise.

50. Second, it emerged that the school has ambitious growth plans – specifically, in addition to organic growth, the school intends to double its student numbers over the next five years through partnership provision. This therefore constitutes a key driver for why the school is seeking DAPs – so that it can begin to validate the provision of other dance providers. The senior team described to assessors that a key limitation of the current provision is the constrained nature of its physical estate, which can accommodate a relatively low maximum number of students; as such, collaborative provision offers a different avenue for growth. Assessors agree that there are plenty of opportunities for the school to collaborate in this way and are of the view that growth targets are ambitious but achievable. However, as will be described in paragraphs 62-83, assessors found issues as relate to quality control of documentation within the school. So, while the assessment team is of the view that the school's strategy and targets for growth are appropriate, assessors note a degree of risk associated with this expansion, as the school will become responsible for oversight of the quality control of others when it currently does not have full grasp of its own quality control. This will be discussed in more detail in paragraphs 121-124.
51. From a strategic perspective, though, assessors were satisfied that the plans were clear, coherent and achievable, and that, overall, the school's higher education mission and strategic direction are coherent, published, understood and applied consistently.
52. To test the extent to which the school's policies are coherent, published, understood and applied consistently, and the extent to which its policies support its higher education mission, aims and objectives, the assessment team reviewed the school's policies, and spoke with staff, students and senior management.
53. As would be expected of an organisation at this point in its development, the school's policies are largely based on those of its validating partner. This includes, for example, using its validating partner's regulatory framework, which underpins all of its higher education provision. In support of these documents is a series of additional policies that has been developed by the school itself. For example, its Staff-Related Policies & Procedures include staff recruitment, induction, teaching observation and guest tutor policies.
54. Assessors found that the school has done a lot of work to develop new policies for implementation in the event of a successful DAPs application. Examples include the development of a new set of Academic Regulations and Credit Framework. New documents in many cases are based, to varying extents, on those of the school's current validating partner, with the ambition to retain this methodology for reasons of consistency and best practice. In the experience of the assessment team, this is typical for providers at this stage in their development and it considers this approach to be appropriate for a provider in this context. Assessors also noted that the school's current validation partner is satisfied to enable the school to continue to use its intellectual property in this way in the event of a successful DAPs application.
55. Taken together, assessors found that the school's policies are coherent and made available to staff and students on the school's VLE, with some also published on the school's public website. Conversation with staff and students showed that policies were understood. For

example, staff were able to describe course development processes in conversation with assessors. The assessment team did not find any examples of inconsistent application of policy during its review of the school.

56. As a specialist dance school, assessors found various bespoke policies and procedures in place within the institution. Examples include the school's extensive injury prevention and support programmes, which includes in-curriculum sessions on strength, and on-site physiotherapy for students. The school also has a robust approach to risk assessment as relates to events – this is of importance for a performance-based subject.
57. In summary, the assessment 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.
58. 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 assessment team spoke with staff, students, senior management and the school's external examiners, and reviewed various school consultation documents.
59. The assessment team found that a wide range of stakeholders are involved in the development, implementation and communication of strategy, policy and procedure at the school. For example, teaching staff reported to the assessment team numerous instances of having been consulted on, or having been involved with, strategy or policy development and implementation, and students report having been consulted frequently on a wide range of issues, including on the current DAPs application itself. The assessment team spoke with two of the school's external examiners, who also reported on having been consulted on the current DAPs application, and on various other matters such as the development of alternative assessment criteria for solo or group work.
60. Given the small nature of the school, the assessment team found that many staff and students sit on school committees, leading to their direct involvement in governance, including policy and procedure development and approval, implementation oversight, and communication back to other staff and students. The assessment team also found that policies and procedures were kept up to date on the VLE, with notifications made when necessary to communicate to staff and students that a change has taken place.
61. In summary, the assessment team concluded that the school develops, implements and communicates its policies and procedures in collaboration with its staff, students and external stakeholders.
62. To test the extent to which there is clarity and differentiation of function and responsibility at all levels in the organisation in relation to its academic governance structures and arrangements for managing its higher education provision, and the extent to which the function and responsibility of the senior academic authority is clearly articulated and consistently applied, the assessment team:
 - reviewed the terms of reference of the various committees within the school
 - reviewed papers and minutes from the last two years of the Board of Governors, Senate, and Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee

- observed the July 2024 meeting of the Senate
- observed the October 2024 meeting of the Board of Governors
- spoke with staff, students and Governors, including two lengthy conversations with senior management on the topic of governance.

63. The initial submission made by the school contained various documents relating to governance arrangements. Upon first inspection, the assessment team found a number of apparent inconsistencies in these documents. For instance, the school's Scheme of Academic Governance and its Committee Terms of Reference both contain terms of reference for various committees, but in some cases these contradict one another. The school also submitted a School Committee Structure chart, some details in which also contradict one or both sets of terms of reference.
64. As such, as part of the 12 September 2024 Additional Evidence Request, the assessment team asked the school to 'ensure information in all documents is accurate and up to date', and in particular to 'confirm that the organisational governance structure is accurate, and, if not, to amend and reupload'. In response, the school provided on 7 November 2024 a new governance structure chart and confirmed that the reason for the discrepancies between the Scheme of Academic Governance and the Committee Terms of Reference were because the former document was now obsolete, and had been replaced by the latter.
65. Taking, therefore, the updated Committee Structure and the Committee Terms of Reference as the latest documents as of 7 November 2024, the assessors nonetheless found a significant number of remaining discrepancies. These discrepancies were put to the senior management team of the school in two sessions during the January 2025 site visit.
66. One set of discrepancies concerns differences between the initial and updated structure charts. Examples of this include the Nominations and Governance Committee, which has been missed off the new structure chart; and the Research, Scholarship and Knowledge Exchange Committee, which is shown on the initial and updated versions, but in practice does not exist (it is an ambition). In total, assessors found 11 errors or discrepancies. In some cases, errors in the initial version that have been corrected in the updated version; in other cases, new errors that have been introduced into the updated version; and in further cases, errors carried over from the initial version into the updated version.
67. As such, and as confirmed by senior management in conversation with assessors, the school therefore did not have a definitive, error-free version of its governance structure, either visually or in prose form, at the time of assessment.
68. This situation is compounded by the fact that, at the time of assessment, the school's public website contained a third version of the governance chart, from the 2021-22 academic cycle. This version is different again from the two versions submitted to assessors by the school, and indeed contains a number of the above-stated errors (for example, the 2021-22 version shows the Research, Scholarship and Knowledge Exchange committee, which did not exist then or now). This means that (a) the school has been without a definitive version of its governance chart for at least the last three years, and (b) the public version is three years out of date, adding additional confusion because some things have genuinely changed since its production.

69. Discrepancies on the governance chart constitute one group of errors; assessors found a second group of errors relating to committee terms of reference. As described in paragraph 64, the school confirmed that its consolidated Committee Terms of Reference document was the most up-to-date version as of 7 November 2024.
70. This document contains terms of reference for the most senior committees in the school, including Senate, which is the senior academic authority. However, terms of reference are incorrect in a number of ways. For example, the terms of reference for Senate lists Research and Ethics Committee as a subcommittee. Not only does this contradict the structure chart (see Figure 1), which has a Research, Scholarship and Knowledge Exchange Committee and an Ethics Panel Subcommittee, neither of which report to Senate, but (as described in paragraph 68) the structure chart is itself incorrect, as there is no Research, Scholarship and Knowledge Exchange Committee. In practice, the senior team confirmed that there is an Ethics Panel Subcommittee, reporting to the Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee, meaning that both the chart and the terms of reference are incorrect.
71. Assessors found multiple instances of these types of errors throughout the consolidated Committee Terms of Reference document. In most cases, it appears to assessors that as changes to governance structures have been made over the years, the master document has not been updated, and indeed when it was checked by the school in November 2024 (see paragraphs 64-65), the above-listed errors were not spotted.
72. Assessors asked senior management at the school about these errors during its January 2025 site visit, and assessors were told that, in some cases, the reason for the errors was that we were looking at the wrong version; senior management gave the example of Senate terms of reference, a more recent version of which was adopted at the October 2024 Board of Governors meeting, which senior management asserted had corrected all errors.
73. Assessors were concerned with this justification, given the request to the school to provide the assessment team with the latest version of documents (see paragraphs 64-65). This means that in the time between the October 2024 approval of the revised terms of reference, and the submission of what the school considered to be the most up-to-date versions in November 2024, the changes adopted by the Board of Governors were not updated into the master document, and indeed this omission was not noticed when the school provided assessors with what it considered to be the latest documents in November 2024.
74. When assessors reviewed the revised terms of reference for Senate, multiple errors in fact remained: for example, terms of reference for Senate continued to list incorrectly its subcommittees. This means that the assertion made by senior management in their meeting with assessors that errors had been corrected in this latest version was itself incorrect. Moreover, the incorrectly revised version was approved by the Board of Governors in October 2024, prior to which assessors assume the revised terms of reference would have been reviewed by multiple people and committees within the school.

75. In summary, the assessment team concluded that, given the volume of errors, the school does not have proper quality control in place over the documentation associated with its governance arrangements. Categories of problem identified include:
- Committees that do not exist being shown to exist; committees that do exist not being shown
 - Committees being inconsistently named across different documents
 - Reporting lines between committees being shown inconsistently across different documents and, in particular, confusion around the difference between a formal subcommittee and information being provided to a committee (i.e. a dotted report)
 - Latest terms of reference containing errors
 - The consolidated set of Committee Terms of Reference not including the latest versions of individual committee terms of reference
 - Senior committees, including the Board of Governors, having approved incorrect versions of terms of reference
 - Online, publicly accessible versions of the governance chart and terms of reference being three years out of date
 - At the time of assessment, the school not having a definitive and error-free governance structure chart nor a definitive and error-free set of terms of reference.
76. The assessment team therefore concluded that there is **not** clarity of function and responsibility at all levels in the organisation in relation to its academic governance structures and arrangements for managing its higher education provision, and that the function and responsibility of the senior academic authority is **not** clearly articulated.
77. During the January 2025 site visit, the assessment team asked senior management to reflect on the number of errors that assessors had found, and to offer some perspectives on what might have gone wrong (assessors gave senior management 24 hours to consider this question, to enable a considered response). Senior management provided assessors with some context around how quality control takes place in the school, and explained that responsibility for documentation associated with governance arrangements fell somewhat through the cracks between the Quality Office and the Clerk's Office, thus explaining the volume of errors. Senior management reflected that the school does not have a single member of staff or team with a clear accountability for maintaining these documents, and that it would implement changes to ensure this happened in the future.
78. The school has communicated with the assessment team that a number of these measures have been put in place since assessors undertook the site visit. The school has also produced a fourth version of its governance chart, which is now error-free, and is available on the school's public website in place of the 2021-22 version.¹⁰ However, while it is helpful to see that these changes have now taken place, the assessment team's focus as outlined

¹⁰ See NSCD, [Committee Structure](#).

above was on the information that the school made available at the time of the visit (January 2025).

79. During this site visit, senior management asserted that while there were errors in documents associated with governance arrangements, these errors did not translate into ineffective governance itself. In other words, senior management asserted that the problem was one of document quality control, not governance in the broader sense.
80. The assessment team spent a substantial amount of time considering this assertion, in order to determine whether the lack of clarity of function and responsibility at all levels in the organisation in relation to its academic governance structures and arrangements for managing its higher education provision, and the lack of clear articulation in the function and responsibility of the senior academic authority, translated into a lack of effective academic governance, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities.
81. The assessment team established the following:
 - Errors of the sort described above are confined to documentation associated with governance arrangements – specifically, committee terms of reference and the governance chart. Assessors did not find similar errors, for instance, in policy documents. And although many of the school's policies are based on those of its validating partner (see paragraph 53), this lack of errors outside of governance arrangements also holds true of policies developed by the school itself (for example, the school's new documentation associated with collaborative provision). In the view of the assessment team, this lends evidential support to senior management's assertion that the root cause problem giving rise to the observed errors is that governance documentation falls in the gap between the quality office and the clerk's office - other policies are handled solely by the quality office, creating a clearer line of accountability and oversight.
 - In fact, assessors found many examples of the school taking great care when developing or editing policy documents more generally. For example, a paper discussed at the July 2024 meeting of the Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee analysed whether a new marking matrix on the school's VLE aligned to the requirements of the school's validating partner; likewise, a paper discussed at the October 2022 Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee shows significant attention to detail in the development of new re-sit requirements, again ensuring that the validating partner's requirements are met as part of the change. These, and many other examples, satisfied assessors that the quality control issues related to governance documents is an isolated issue, rather than an issue related to quality control more generally.
 - With the exception of one misunderstanding within senior management as regards the difference between a subcommittee (i.e. a direct report) and information being made available to a committee (i.e. a dotted line report), senior management were able to articulate clearly, and with agreement, the 'correct' governance structure – the errors noted above were corrected quickly by the senior team in conversation with assessors. This led assessors to the conclusion that there is good understanding within the school over its governance arrangements, even though these were not written down accurately at the time of the assessment. Likewise, assessors spoke to teaching and support staff

within the school, who were able to describe correctly governance arrangements within the school.

- The school's Instrument and Articles of Government are clear, and indeed in line with the 'correct' descriptions of governance provided by senior management in conversation with the assessment team. The Instrument and Articles also include responsibilities associated with the three most senior bodies within the school – the Board of Governors, the Senate (which is the senior academic authority) and the Executive Leadership. In the view of the assessment team, responsibilities are clearly articulated, differentiated, and appropriate – for instance, the role of the Principal includes 'preparing annual estimates of income and expenditure, for consideration by the Board of Governors', while the role of the Governors includes 'approving annual estimates of income and expenditure'.
- The assessment team reviewed the last two years of papers and minutes from the Board of Governors, the Senate, and the Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee, and also observed the July 2024 meeting of the Senate and the October 2024 meeting of the Board of Governors. The assessment team found substantial evidence of highly effective governance taking place. First, committees contain very detailed papers and minutes, demonstrating a clear and long-standing commitment to ensuring that committee members are provided with the necessary information to undertake their roles. Second, both the committee minutes, and the committee observations undertaken by the assessment team, demonstrated an extremely high quality of discourse and debate within committees – there is a robust culture in which members challenge one another openly, respectfully and intelligently, leading to improved outcomes that are clearly documented and clearly actioned. For example, at the October 2024 Board of Governors meeting observed by assessors, one governor asked senior management whether the school really understands the reasons for course closures nationally, rather than basing their views on assumptions. Senior management gave an extremely robust response, based on the fact that one member of senior management sits on a national board for dance education. This type of discourse is typical of committees at the school, demonstrating self-criticality and effective governance.
- Papers, minutes and observations of these committees confirm that they align both to the Instrument and Articles of Government, and to the way in which senior management describe their function.
- Overall, the assessment team found the school to show the consequences of good governance. Were governance to be truly ineffective, assessors would expect to have seen consequences of that ineffectiveness. On the contrary, scrutiny by the assessment team – as will be described over the course of this report – shows an organisation in which standards and student support are very good, student satisfaction is high, and self-critical reflection and consistent implementation of quality systems are the norm.

82. Taking the most recent, online version of the governance chart as the definitive version, the assessment team is satisfied that this structure constitutes a sound and robust approach to

academic governance.¹¹ Further, the assessment team is satisfied that the management structure within the school is clear and sound, with clear and logical lines of reporting.

83. The assessment team thereby came to the conclusion that although the school's governance documentation does not show clearly the function and responsibility of its governance structures, and does not clearly articulate the function and responsibility of the senior academic authority, this does not impact the effectiveness of the school's governance. This is because there is, nonetheless, differentiation of function and responsibility of its governance structures, and there is a consistent application of the function and responsibility of the senior academic authority. In other words, the assessment team found that the weakness is not a weakness of governance in its entirety, but is limited to substandard quality control as relates to governance documentation. As such, the assessment team concluded that despite this weakness, the school does have effective academic governance, and despite the lack of clear articulation in documentation, the school does have clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities.
84. To test the extent to which there is appropriate depth and strength of academic leadership within the school, the assessment team reviewed CVs of the senior management team and governors, and spoke with teaching staff, senior management and governors.
85. Assessors found that staff involved in the leadership of the school have a wide range of appropriate experience and expertise. Members of the Executive Leadership Team, and the wider senior leadership (including programme directors and department heads), include individuals with industry and teaching experience, a number of staff with doctoral degrees and with research publications, staff with prior experience of leadership positions elsewhere, and with existing external memberships and affiliations currently, and (where appropriate) staff with relevant professional qualifications and associations.¹²
86. Likewise, assessors found that governors have a broad and appropriate range of expertise and experience, covering backgrounds in education and industry, finance, legal and compliance, and represent a good mix both of local and national knowledge and experience.¹³
87. As described in paragraphs 62-83, assessors found numerous errors in school documentation as related to governance arrangements. Assessors found that although errors were confined to governance documents (rather than more generally, for example, policy documents were not affected), there were a sufficiently high number of errors to suggest a systemic issue – a lack of adequate quality control processes. That this issue had not been recognised by senior leadership nor governors constitutes an area of weakness within the leadership and oversight of the organisation.
88. As will be described shortly, the school has plans to expand significantly its provision over the coming years, and, to achieve this in a safe and controlled way, assessors believe that

¹¹ See NSCD, Committee Structure.

¹² See Staff - Northern School of Contemporary Dance.

¹³ See Staff - Northern School of Contemporary Dance.

greater headcount and experience will be required within the school as relates to quality to ensure the types of issues described above do not come about again.

89. However, overall, assessors concluded that expertise within the organisation sufficiently meets the needs of the current operation and are confident that with the aforementioned expansion in resource – which is an easy issue to solve in the view of assessors – will meet the needs of the future operation.
90. In summary, the assessment team concluded that the school does have appropriate depth and strength of academic leadership in general, though with the weakness that more experience and expertise is needed in the area of the quality control of documentation.
91. 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 assessment team requested a presentation from the senior leadership team outlining its strategic plans in the event of a successful DAPs, and correlated this with the relative strengths and weakness already identified in this report with respect to academic governance.
92. The assessment team found that the school has clear plans in place for how it intends to operate in the event that DAPs is successfully awarded. The school's decision to self-limit around subjects related to dance is a decision that the assessment team endorses, given the specialist staff and facilities the school has in place. The decision to continue to base some of its policies on those of its validating partner again is a decision that assessors endorse, as this will ensure stability and build upon existing good practice.
93. The robustness of the school's current approach to strategy, policy, procedure and governance is, in the opinion of assessors, sufficient for the school to operate its current provision without the support of its validating partner.
94. However, as discussed in paragraph 50, the school intends to expand its provision significantly over the coming years in the area of collaborative provision (see also paragraphs 111-120), and with this will come significant additional work, much of which will be new to the organisation. As noted in paragraphs 62-83, there are at present a number of oversights and errors as regards governance documentation. As the school moves into collaborative provision, it will become responsible for overseeing the quality control of other organisation's governance and management documents which in turn will require extremely robust documentation quality control processes within the school. This therefore constitutes a risk when the school has (albeit contained) gaps in its own quality control of documentation.
95. The assessment team spoke at length with senior management about this issue, and was reassured to hear a number of appropriate mitigations currently being put in place, including the expansion of the quality team, a closer alignment between the quality office and the Clerk's office, a thinning out of the Vice Principal's role through the appointment of a new Director of Studies (thus enabling the Vice Principal to concentrate on new provision), and the appointment of new external expertise in quality control. The assessment team is satisfied that these changes will ensure that the errors in governance documentation should be rectified quickly, and should not happen again.
96. Moreover, as discussed in paragraphs 81-83, the assessment team is satisfied that errors in the quality control of governance documentation are an isolated issue (because of the fact

that there was not a single owner of governance documentation within the school at the time of assessment). This issue does not spill over into other aspects of policy and procedure and indeed does not represent an ineffective approach to governance more generally. Taken together with the school's clear strategic plans, which include growth only within a contained subject range, the assessment team believes that the risk is under control.

97. Overall, the assessment team is therefore satisfied that senior management understands the risk, and that the measures being put in place should constitute sufficient mitigations. However, assessors cannot directly assess the robustness of the school's approach to quality control within collaborative working, as this has yet to commence at the time of assessment.
98. In summary, the assessment team thereby concluded that the school would manage successfully the responsibilities that would be vested in it were it to be granted DAPs, though with the risk that the school's historic issues associated with quality control may undermine the school's ability to undertake more complex collaborative working. Assessors are satisfied that this risk is under proper control by the school, but advises the OfS to keep this risk under review over the coming years, and for the assessment team that reviews the school at the next variation assessment to pay close attention to this issue.

Conclusions

99. The assessment team found there to be a particular weakness within the school as regards the clarity and consistency with which governance arrangements are described within terms of reference and the school's committee chart, and that this weakness stems from an isolated lack of robust documentation quality control primarily due to governance arrangements falling between the responsibilities of the quality office and the clerk's office. However, the assessment team found that this issue was confined to documentation associated with governance arrangements, and did not spill over into other types of documentation such as strategy, policy or procedure. The assessment team also found that this weakness does not adversely affect the quality and effectiveness of governance arrangements more generally.
100. As such, the assessment team concluded that the school meets Criterion A1.1 with weakness, because it has effective academic governance and, despite a weakness around governance documentation, nonetheless 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

101. The assessment team's view is that the school meets criterion A1.2 because all aspects of the control and oversight of its higher education provision are conducted in partnership with its students.
102. The assessment 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

103. To test the extent to which students individually and collectively are engaged in the governance and management of the organisation and its higher education provision, with students supported to be able to engage effectively, the assessment team reviewed the various ways in which the school involves students in governance, and spoke with the school current student representatives.
104. The assessment team found that the school has multiple channels for collecting feedback from students, including the Student Voice Forum, Student Council, Student Experience Survey and module feedback. As a small organisation, staff and students also report an open culture in which feedback is welcome at any time.
105. The school has a system of student-elected representatives, at course level, at school level, as student governors, and as part of the student council. Students sit on several school committees, as full voting members, including on the Board of Governors and Senate; these responsibilities are set out in committee terms of reference and the school's Instrument and Articles of Government. In all cases, assessors found that appropriate and accurate training and support is provided to student representatives, both at the onset of their roles in the form of detailed written guidance and over the course of the year, in particular to help representatives in the development of individual goals.
106. The assessment team spoke with a sample of seven student representatives, including year, school and student council representatives, and student governors, and also to a sample of students not currently working as representatives. In all cases, students spoke extremely highly of the support they receive from the school, and in particular of the way in which they are supported and enabled to put their ideas forward as part of organisational governance.
107. Student representatives reported feeling supported to undertake their roles, and student governors feel supported and empowered to contribute to committee meetings. Having observed two committee meetings, assessors likewise observed student governors being regularly included in conversation, and their thoughts being taken seriously as part of the debate.
108. Students report feeling that their voice is heard, and that action is taken in response to their feedback. Students who spoke to the assessment team gave multiple examples of this, including a recent instance where students requested greater staff diversity amongst assessment panels, and that this request was actioned within a matter of days.
109. In summary, the assessment team concluded that students individually and collectively are engaged in the governance and management of the organisation and its higher education provision, with students supported to be able to engage effectively.

Conclusions

110. In conclusion, the assessment team found that the school meets criterion A1.2 because its academic governance, including all 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

111. The assessment team's view is that the school meets criterion A1.3 because where it 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. However, because of the above-stated weakness with respect to criterion A1.1, the assessment team notes that there is risk associated with the school's ability to oversee partner provision. The assessment team advises that this risk would benefit from being monitored by the OfS over the coming years, and be looked at in detail by any future assessment team at the point of DAPs variation.
112. The assessment 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.

Reasoning

113. The assessment team reviewed the school's current and planned arrangements for higher education delivery. This was to test the extent to which, where the school works with, or proposes to work with, other organisations to deliver learning opportunities, the arrangements are based on a strategic approach, informed by the effective assessment of risk including the carrying out of due diligence, and the extent to which such arrangements are defined in a written legal agreement and are subject to the same robust oversight and governance as the rest of the organisation's provision.
114. The most significant partnership the school currently has in place is the one with its validating partner. Having reviewed the Memorandum of Understanding for this relationship, as well as various course validation and institutional audits undertaken by the validating partner, it is clear to assessors that there is a very positive and productive relationship between the two parties.
115. Outside of this relationship, the school currently does not offer co-delivered learning opportunities. As such, it was not possible for assessors to determine the extent to which arrangements are based on a strategic approach, informed by the effective assessment of risk including the carrying out of due diligence, and the extent to which such arrangements are defined in a written legal agreement and are subject to the same robust oversight and governance as the rest of the organisation's provision.
116. However, as discussed in paragraph 50, the school has ambitious plans to double its student numbers over the next five years, through the instigation of collaborative provision in the area of dance, and subjects closely related to dance.

117. To facilitate this strategic ambition – which is a key driver in the school’s desire to obtain DAPs – the school has prepared a substantial body of new documentation. This includes a new Collaborative Academic Partnerships policy, as well as a partnership approval flowchart, a risk-based assessment checklist, a validation agreement proposal form, an Authorised Signatories of Agreement Table, boiler plate Letters of Intent, MOU, memorandum of association (MOA) and website text, and a partnerships list template.
118. Based in some cases on the partnership arrangements of its validating partner, the school has, in the view of the assessment team, drawn from good existing industry practice in the production of this new body of policy, and has done much to personalise its approach relative to that of its validating partner. For instance, the Collaborative Academic Partnerships policy sets out clearly the strategic basis on which it will assess what partnerships to pursue.
119. It is not possible to assess the extent to which the school’s arrangements are based on a strategic approach, informed by the effective assessment of risk including the carrying out of due diligence, and the extent to which such arrangements are defined in a written legal agreement and are subject to the same robust oversight and governance as the rest of the organisation’s provision. The assessment team is nonetheless satisfied with the school’s proposed approach, both from a strategic perspective, and a quality control perspective.
120. However, it should be noted that, as described in paragraphs 62-83 the assessment team found a notable shortcoming in the school’s own documentation quality control process. Given that collaborative working is a new area of provision for the school, the assessment team notes that the current shortfall in the school’s governance does present risk as the school moves into new areas. However, as described in paragraphs 95-98, the assessment team is satisfied that the school’s plans, both to rectify its current shortcomings, and to develop new provision, are credible and achievable. Nonetheless, given the risk, the assessment team suggests that the OfS keeps under review over the coming years the effectiveness which the school ensures the accuracy of its partners’ documentation, and that any future assessment team reviews in detail this aspect of the school at the point of DAPs variation.

Conclusions

121. In summary, the assessment team concluded that where the school plans to work with other organisations to deliver learning opportunities, 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.
122. In conclusion the assessment team found that, despite an isolated weakness as relates to governance arrangement documentation:
- the school has effective academic governance, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities
 - its academic governance, including all aspects of the control and oversight of its higher education provision, is conducted in partnership with students

- where the school plans to work with other organisations to deliver learning opportunities, its plans 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.

123. However, because of the current weakness as relates to governance documentation, the assessment team suggests that the OfS continues to monitor the school in this regard over the coming years, and that any future assessment team considers this aspect of the school in detail at any future DAPs variation assessment. The current assessment team would expect this weakness to have been addressed by then.

124. 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

125. The assessment team's view is that the school meets criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks because it meets subcriteria B1.1 and B1.2.
126. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows that the school has in place transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications comparable to those employed by other UK degree awarding bodies. It also shows that it maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification that it approves (and of subsequent changes). This record 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.
127. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

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

128. The assessment team's view is that the school meets criterion B1.1 because there is evidence to show that the school has in place transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications. These are appropriate to its current status and are implemented fully and consistently. The school has also created, in readiness, one or more academic frameworks and regulations, which will be appropriate for the granting of its own higher education qualifications.
129. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows that the school has met the evidence requirements for B1.1 and any other relevant evidence requirements.

Reasoning

130. To test whether the academic frameworks and regulations governing the school's higher education provision are appropriate to its current status and are implemented fully and consistently, the assessment team reviewed the school's academic regulations, and its comprehensive suite of policies, procedures and associated documents and templates, including (but not limited to):

- Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy
- Student Engagement Policy

- Student Handbook
- Student evaluation policy
- Marking and assessment templates
- Peer observation policy
- Relationships policy
- Interruption of studies policy
- School assessment overview.

131. The assessment team also spoke to staff and students during the visit, to ascertain their understanding of the policies.

132. The school currently operates under the academic regulations and credit frameworks of its validator. These regulations specify:

- the relationship between credit values and learning time in line with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)
- specify the minimum standards for a passing grade
- outline attendance criteria
- specify how student work is to be assessed, marked and moderated
- specify how module and degree outcomes are arrived at.
- prescribe how extenuating circumstances, appeals and complaints should be addressed.

133. The framework of academic regulations is currently supported by a range of other policies created, owned and updated by the school, for example, the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and the Student Engagement Policy.

134. The assessment team found these frameworks and regulations to be appropriate, as they provide detailed processes for managing key aspects of the school's higher education provision, including student assessment, progression, awards, appeals, and complaints, providing a clear and comprehensive scaffolding for the school to deliver teaching. For example, the assessment team found that the assessment framework for each programme works effectively alongside the academic regulations to clearly define appropriate methods, modes and tools to evaluate student performance. This was cross referenced with grades and selected examples of student work and found to align effectively by the assessment team. The assessment team found that the academic frameworks and regulations were appropriate to the school's size and context, for example, encompassing the styles of assessment (including practicals and performances) appropriate for the subject areas taught at the school. The team also noted that the academic frameworks made appropriate

allowance for the placement-based elements of learning found within some of the school's programmes.

135. The assessment team were able to assess whether the school's academic frameworks and regulations are implemented fully and consistently through observations of teaching sessions. For example, aspects of ongoing developmental feedback for learning during practice-based studio work was evidenced by the assessment team during the visit teaching observations, aligning with the school's approach to assessment and development in the learning teaching and assessment strategy, which requires staff to tailor feedback and consider effective modes of communications. Moreover, responses to questions from the assessment panel in visit meetings with staff and students verified that the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy was operationalised effectively in practice. For example, both students and staff reported the school's proactivity and commitment to ensuring access to learning for those with additional needs, in line with one of the strategy's objectives: 'The needs and identity of all our students are considered in the creation of high quality learning experiences, including learning support'.
136. The understanding of academic frameworks and regulations and full consistent implementation of these was further triangulated during the assessment team visit in meetings with senior staff, meetings with teaching and support staff, meetings with students involved in governance, a meeting with a cross section of self-selected students which included representation of students from the undergraduate and postgraduate array of programmes. Students shared their perspectives and their individual experiences of the implementation of frameworks and regulations as well as views on the effectiveness of the student support model in operation (see paragraph 225). Through discussion, students provided specific examples of the implementation of policies and practice, assuring the team that policies were well understood by students and staff, and implemented consistently and appropriately.
137. The assessment team found that in addition to the standard text-based version of the academic regulations framework for taught programmes there are inclusive materials in the current Staff and Student Areas on the VLE that further facilitate understanding of practice. This includes a range of materials on the school's approach to assessment and feedback, explanations of module and programme learning outcomes, designing of inclusive assessment modes, grade descriptors, level descriptors, approaches to assessment and feedback. The team also found that there are:
- user-friendly (e.g. providing terminology glossaries)
 - inclusive multi-media materials that aid understanding of the comprehensive academic framework and regulations that govern how the school awards its academic credit (e.g. the assessment section of the VLE where there are written materials as well as PowerPoint and video presentations)
 - the student handbook has a comprehensive outline of all relevant policies, procedures and guidelines.

The assessment team considered that the comprehensive and inclusive nature of the guidance given showed a commitment by the school to ensure that all staff are aware of, and

fully engaged with, the academic regulations in place. In meetings with staff, it was apparent to the assessment team that staff members had a good understanding of both the academic frameworks in place, and the policies surrounding them, with staff members able to speak to, if not quote verbatim, elements of policy ranging from assessment and credit to student relationships.

138. It is the opinion of the assessment team that these frameworks and regulations are appropriate to the school's status. For example, through specific examples of student journey scenarios, the assessment team found evidence of bespoke admissions tailored to the needs of each applicant, supportive and comprehensive induction approaches, and holistic learning, teaching and assessment support for all students indicated effective implementation. The assessment team's view is that the school's policies and processes are underpinned by a commitment to inclusive principles to support the needs of all students, including individuals who identify with intersections of diversity of experiences – such as neurodiverse students, students with English as an additional language (EAL) and international applicants. The assessment team found that specific personal examples shared in meetings by staff and students effectively illustrated that the school frameworks and regulations are implemented consistently.
139. The assessment team's view is that the school's academic frameworks and policies are being applied fully and consistently in practice. Discussions with teaching staff showed that they fully understood the academic frameworks and associated policies and provided verbatim excerpts during meetings with the assessment team.
140. In summary, it is the view of the assessment team that the school's academic frameworks and regulations to govern its higher education provision are comprehensive, transparent, appropriate to its status and are implemented fully and consistently.
141. In order to test whether 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, the assessment team reviewed documents that the school has created. The majority of the documents have passed through the school's internal approval processes and received sign off from either LTQAC or Senate, with a few in draft form. The documents reviewed by the assessment team include (but are not limited to):
- Student admissions policies
 - Learning Teaching and Assessment policies
 - Progression and award policies
 - Appeals and complaints policies, as well as meetings with staff and students.
 - Academic Misconduct Policy
 - Academic regulations and credit framework
 - Other related policies and regulations.

142. The school has, in readiness for DAPs, created a suite of future-facing documents, including academic regulations. The majority of these documents are based in current practice, and reflect the policies and practices of the validating partner, with minor amendments to remove the role of the validating partner. The assessment team has seen confirmation from the validating partner that there are no Intellectual Property (IP), or other concerns from the validator around the school basing its ongoing policies on the validator's current documents. As can be seen in paragraphs 132-140, the assessment team found that the validator's policies, procedures and processes currently in place at the school are appropriate to the school's status. The assessment team found the continuation of approach to be credible, as implementation of the post-DAPs policies will not require any significant change to current practices, providing stability and a lower risk in transitioning to holding DAPs. The documents reviewed outline the processes for managing key aspects of the school's higher education provision, including student admissions, assessment, progression, awards, appeals, and complaints.
143. The assessment team was able to triangulate this during visit meetings with senior staff discussing the School's Strategic Plan 2023-2030. In these discussions, senior staff stated that stability was a key concern during a period transitioning into DAPs, noting that any policy developed or amended would, in the short to medium term, be based the current validating partner's regulations and the school's current comprehensive policies and procedures, as these are already aligned with the school strategy, and have tried and tested application in practice. It is the view of the assessment team that understanding of this intention was evident in the visit meetings with teaching and support staff. Furthermore, teaching and support staff, as well as students, conveyed their experiences of how there had been consultation about the DAPs application and the implications if this is successfully awarded.
144. The assessment team concluded that 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.

Conclusions

145. The assessment team therefore concluded that the school meets criterion B1.1 as overall the evidence demonstrates that there are transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications.

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

146. The assessment team's view is that the school meets criterion B1.2 because there is evidence to show 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, is monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

147. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that the school has met the evidence requirements for B1.2 and any other relevant evidence requirements.

Reasoning

148. To assess the school's definitive record of each programme and qualification and how these are reference points for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, the assessment team reviewed definitive records of each programme that the school designs and delivers through the form of programme specifications and module specifications. The assessment team also reviewed the student handbooks, the VLE, documentation and templates associated with student transcripts and spoke to both staff and students during the visit.
149. The assessment team found that the programme and module specifications for each programme and module act as the definitive record of, and reference for delivery from, each programme offered by the school.
150. The assessment team found that the programme and module specifications aligned with the programme and module handbooks available to both staff and students in the relevant sections of the VLE, demonstrating consistency of adherence to the definitive records of the programme. The assessment team scrutinised examples of the relationships between definitive records and delivery materials for teaching sessions on the VLE (Moodle) and found these to be well aligned. For example, comparison of the specification for module MADTL1 is well aligned with its respective Moodle page in terms of specification (e.g. credit value) and content (e.g. modes of delivery). The assessment team triangulated this during the visit meetings and found that staff and students were able to articulate where to locate the reference points for delivery, assessment, and feedback guidance.
151. The assessment team found that under current validation arrangements any amendments to the school's programmes require approval by the validator. This happens annually, and all proposed changes are submitted via a form, creating a log of amendments proposed, agreed or denied. These amendments are then made to the module or programme specification for the following academic year, creating an accurate record of the programme specification in place for each academic year. The provider has created, in readiness for DAPs, its own version of this process, with a school specific programme amendments and changes form. This form requires detailed explanation of the change, which elements of the module(s) it affects, as well as laying out the pathway of approvals, including requiring a student consultation, input from the external examiner for the programme and the approval of the Learning and Teaching Committee. The form also requires a consideration of how the change will be communicated to students, including the alteration of the programme or module specifications. The assessment team found that the school has appropriate methods for ensuring a definitive record of each programme when changes are made.
152. At present, the school maintains a spreadsheet of data for the collation of marks, and the subsequent journey of those marks through moderation and exam boards, and it was noted that the school is exploring the potential using a student records system as it grows over the next few years. The assessment team found that the current use of the spreadsheet is

appropriate for the school's size and context (as discussed in paragraphs 387-391), and were reassured, following discussion with staff, the data within it is held securely, constituting a reliable record of student achievement. The assessment team tested the robustness of the definitive record of study through reviewing several student record 'scenarios', for example tracking the journey of student data for a student re-sitting an assignment, and found the process to maintain the integrity of the data.

153. The assessment team found that students are able to access their records of study through the VLE, including assessment feedback and module marks, with alumni being provided a transcript at the completion of their programme. The team found that the records of study were consistent and coherent across the programmes of study offered at the school. The assessment team found that this was appropriate, as students have easy routes of access to their records of study, which provide relevant and suitable information in a clear and easily usable manner. In meeting with the assessment team, students reported being clear on their progress, their marks for individual assignments and overall grades.
154. Overall, the assessment team found that the school's approach to collating and presenting the data relating to records of study to both students and alumni approach to be fit for purpose for the current size and status of the school. The assessment team concluded that definitive and up-to-date records of each qualification to be awarded and each programme being offered by the organisation are being maintained. Furthermore, it is the opinion of the assessment team that these records are used as the basis for the delivery and assessment of each programme and there is evidence that students and alumni are provided with accurate records of study in the form of transcripts and results letters.
155. In the assessment team's view, the school meets criterion B1.2 and maintains authoritative and definitive records of each programme, which serve as the reference point for programme delivery, assessment, monitoring, and review, as well as for providing study records to students and alumni.

Conclusions

156. In summary the assessment team concluded that the school has in place transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications. These regulations effectively cover the academic standards of qualifications, admissions, the engagement of students and procedures for appeals against academic decisions.
157. Furthermore, the team concluded that the school maintains a definitive record of each programme, 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. In forming its conclusions, the team carefully considered the nature, size and context of the school.
158. Therefore, the team concluded that the school meets criterion B1.

Criterion B2: Academic standards

Advice to the OfS

159. The assessment team's view is that the school meets criterion B2: Academic standards and quality assurance, because it meets subcriteria B2.1 and B2.2.
160. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows that the school has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications, it designs and delivers courses and qualifications that meet the threshold academic standards described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), and the standards 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.
161. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

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

162. To test the extent to which the school's higher education qualifications are offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the FHEQ of UK Degree Awarding Bodies, and the extent to which the setting and maintaining of academic standards within the school takes appropriate account of relevant external points of reference, the assessment team reviewed:
- the school's current validated programme specifications
 - a sample of 17 module specifications spanning multiple courses and levels
 - teaching observations of a sample of ten lectures spanning Levels 4 to 7 and spanning a range of programmes
 - the school's grade descriptors

- a sample of 238 instances of assessed student work, spanning Levels 4 to 7 and spanning multiple different programmes (including the student work plus assessor feedback and marks)
- the school's approach to activities such as curriculum design, validation, monitoring and review.

163. Assessors found that academic standards within the school are well aligned to external points of reference, in particular the relevant levels of the FHEQ, and comparable to similar institutions. For example, assessors saw, through observation of a Level 4 practical dance session, content that evaluated the appropriateness of different approaches to improvisation for students, found in a Level 6 module specification the learning outcome 'allow for and integrate unexpected events and circumstances in performance, adapting to uncertainty and unfamiliarity in the moment', and found Level 7 student work that engaged with ideas at the forefront of dance research.
164. Assessors found that programme and module specifications overall consistently make reference to, and use language consistent with, the FHEQ, and that the school's undergraduate and postgraduate grade descriptors are likewise based on the language of the FHEQ. The school's external examiners confirmed, in conversation with assessors, their view that the school's standards align with external points of reference, and in particular with the FHEQ.
165. The school currently follows the programme development and maintenance procedures of its validating partner, though has also developed a wide array of new documents for use in the event of a successful DAPs application.¹⁴ Across both current and future versions of documents, assessors found that the setting and maintaining of standards takes appropriate account of external and independent points of reference, and in particular the FHEQ, through activities such as curriculum design, programme validation, annual programme monitoring and periodic programme review. For example, validation panel members are required to determine and attest to, amongst other things, the fact that a programme under consideration 'is up to date and aligned with any applicable sector recognised standards'. Likewise, the school's guidance on its annual programme monitoring asks staff to reflect upon, amongst other things, whether 'the learning outcomes [are] still relevant for the topic. Have there been any changes in the discipline, or in the benchmark statements/or industry practice that require these to be amended? If so, how?'. The assessment team further found that the school consistently follows in practice its own approach to activities related to course design, validation, monitoring and review – for example, the school provided the assessment team with all annual course monitoring going back to 2016, which showed a consistent application of the school's monitoring policy.
166. In summary, the assessment team concluded that the school's higher education qualifications are offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the FHEQ, and that the setting and maintaining of academic standards within the school take appropriate account of relevant external points of reference.

¹⁴ See Codes of Practice for Taught Courses of Study - Regulatory Framework - University of Kent.

167. To the extent to which the setting and maintaining of academic standards take appropriate account of external and independent points of expertise, including students, and the extent to which in establishing, and then maintaining, threshold academic standards and comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level qualifications, the school makes use of appropriate external and independent expertise, the assessment team reviewed the various arrangements in place within the school for setting and maintaining standards, and the various ways in which external views are taken into account.
168. The assessment team found that activities the school undertakes to set and maintain academic standards take regular account of external perspectives and expertise, including that of students. Examples include:
- student and industry consultation on new course proposals, which contains multiple practical suggestions
 - guidance to staff as set out in the school's new programme approval materials, which determines that applications require 'Evidence of consultation with relevant external parties (e.g. employers, alumni, business, industry or professional contacts). In programme approval, the involvement of individuals external to the School is required to offer independent insight and objectivity to the decisions taken'
 - programme validation panels, which must include a student and an external member
 - periodic programme review, new guidance for which requires staff to include, reflect upon and, where relevant, detail actions in response to external examiner feedback and student feedback, and for panels to include external members.
169. Specific examples of external suggestions being implemented include:
- an external examiner supporting the school at the point of revalidation of its MA Dance and Creative Enterprise to embed a more flexible approach to assessment formats
 - feedback from a current professional dance artist on the school's development of an MA in Contemporary Dance Performance, in which they promoted the importance of transferable skills for new artists (the school subsequently took this up within the programme).
170. In summary, the assessment team concluded that the setting and maintaining of academic standards take appropriate account of external and independent points of expertise, including students, and that in establishing, and then maintaining, threshold academic standards and comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level qualifications, the school makes use of appropriate external and independent expertise.
171. To test the extent to which credit and qualifications are only awarded by the school where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case of qualification) has been demonstrated through assessment, and that both the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant degree awarding have been satisfied, the assessment team reviewed:
- 238 assessed student work samples

- various school policies and procedures as relate to assessment and the award of credit
 - minutes from recent Boards of Examiners.
172. The assessment team found that the school operates a robust approach to assessment, as set out in its validating partner's policies and procedures related to the authoring and approval of learning outcomes and assessment methods and as further reflected in the school's own proposed academic regulations in the event of a successful DAPs application. The school also has comprehensive set of guidelines in its Assessment Overview, which includes detailed processes and procedures for the calculation and award of credit, as based on those of its validating partner.
173. Having reviewed a sample of 238 instances of assessed student work, spanning Levels 4 to 7, multiple programmes and a mix of practical and theoretical work, and including student work alongside assessor feedback and marks, the assessment team is satisfied that the school's approach to assessment in practice is consistent with its policies and procedures, as set out in the documents described in paragraph 170. Further, because the school's learning outcomes and grade descriptors are well aligned to the language of the FHEQ and to its own academic regulations and credit framework (see paragraphs 162-166), the assessment team is satisfied that, where the school awards credit and qualifications, the relevant UK threshold standards and the school's own standards have been satisfied.
174. The assessment team also found that minutes of the school's Board of Examiners demonstrate a thorough process for awarding credit and qualifications, which reviewed in detail relevant assessment points. Minutes show that the Board of Examiners considers and discusses exceptional cases involving issues such as mitigating circumstances, undertakes a review and analysis of overall results, and provides the opportunity for external examiners to present their report. As such, the Board of Examiners within the school is run in practice consistently with its validating partner's prescribed terms of reference and indeed manifests, in the view of assessors, a robust approach to ensuring that the award of credit and qualifications undergoes rigorous scrutiny.¹⁵
175. In summary, the assessment team concluded that credit and qualifications are only awarded by the school where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case of qualification) has been demonstrated through assessment, and that both the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant degree awarding have been satisfied.
176. The assessment team considered the various policies, procedures and guidance the school has in place currently, and that it intends to implement in the event of a successful DAPs, as related to programme development and maintenance, and also spoke with staff. This was to test the extent to which:
- the school's programme approval arrangements are robust and applied consistently

¹⁵ See Codes of Practice for Taught Courses of Study - Regulatory Framework - University of Kent.

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

177. The assessment team found that the school currently follows its validating partner's processes and guidance for the development and maintenance of programmes, which in turn align with its validating partner's academic regulations and credit framework. This includes, in the view of the assessment team, detailed and robust approaches to course development, approval, validation, monitoring and review.

178. The assessment team also found that the school applies these policies and procedures with consistency. For example, the school provided assessors with seven years of Annual Programme Monitoring Reports, which are consistent with, and fulfil the principles of, its validator's code of practice for continuous monitoring.¹⁶ In conversations with assessors, staff were able to demonstrate a good level of understanding of these policies and procedures.

179. In preparation for the school being successful in its DAPs application, it has developed a substantial array of new policies, procedures, guidance and templates related to the development and maintenance of programmes. These include:

- Policy and guidance to support the proposal, writing and approval of new programmes, including templates for programme specifications and module specifications
- Policy, procedure, guidelines and templates for the validation of new and existing programmes
- Policy, guidance and templates for annual monitoring
- Policy, procedure, guidance and templates for periodic review
- Guidance and templates for amendments to, or the cessation of, programmes.

180. Underpinning these new policies, procedures, guidance and templates is a new set of academic regulations and credit framework. In all cases, new documents follow broadly the school's current approach, as defined by its validating partner, though with appropriate optimisations where relevant. For example, the school's new policy regarding periodic review largely mirrors its current validating partner's policy, though modified to ensure that committees, departments and people named within the policy are those of the school.¹⁷ As such, assessors are confident that the school's new policies, procedures and guidance will

¹⁶ See Codes of Practice for Taught Courses of Study - Regulatory Framework - University of Kent.

¹⁷ See Codes of Practice for Taught Courses of Study - Regulatory Framework - University of Kent (current validating partner's policy).

continue to function with the same level of robustness as is currently the case, in the event of a successful DAPs application.

181. As described in paragraphs 162-166, the assessment team found that the school's existing and new programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements explicitly address the UK threshold standards, as set out in the FHEQ, and also make explicit reference to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. They also take account of the school's own academic standards. For example, programme approval requires that applications set out how a proposed programme aligns with the brand and educational values and standards of the school, as well as to broader expectations in the sector.
182. In summary, the assessment team concluded that the school's programme approval arrangements are robust and applied consistently, the school ensures that academic standards are set at a level that meets UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with the school's own academic frameworks and regulations. Assessors also concluded that the school's programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements are robust, applied consistently, explicitly address whether the UK threshold standards are achieved, and that the academic standards required by the individual degree awarding body are being maintained.

Conclusions

183. In summary, the assessment team concluded that the school meets criterion B2.1 as the evidence demonstrates that the school has clear mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications, and that these are consistently applied.
184. The assessment team further concluded that the school meets criterion B2.2 as the evidence demonstrates that the school designs and delivers programmes and qualifications that meet the threshold academic standards described in the FHEQ and that it reflects appropriate sector-recognised standards. The evidence also 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.
185. Therefore, the assessment team concluded that the school meets criterion B2.

Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience

Advice to the OfS

186. The assessment team's view is that the school meets the requirements for criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience.
187. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that the school can demonstrate it is able to design and deliver course 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. Furthermore, evidence scrutinised by the assessment team demonstrated that learning opportunities are consistently and rigorously quality assured.
188. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

Criterion 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

189. To test the extent to which the school operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes, the assessment team reviewed its validating partner's processes and guidance for the development and maintenance of programmes currently in use by the school, as discussed in paragraph 165. The assessment team reviewed examples of these processes being used for the approval of new programmes via Course Validation Reports. The assessment team also reviewed the school's curriculum design policy and programme approval guidelines, alongside associated templates, created in readiness for DAPs. The team also reviewed the curriculum design and programme writing guide.
190. The current processes for the design, development and approval of new programmes operates a three phase approach covering initial development, submission to the validator's business case committee, formal submission and then validator approval via a panel, providing a clear pathway for the development of a new programme, from initial concept through various stages of review to the point of final approval. The process requires consultation with internal (including current students) and external stakeholders, as well as comment on student support and resources required. The process reflects a structured and clear approach to the development and approval of new programmes, which the assessment team found appropriate in the context of the provision offered by the school.

191. The assessment team found that the school can be seen to be operating these procedures effectively through the validator's validation reports relating to examples of three courses, including major amendments to the MA in Contemporary Dance Performance, and the introduction of the Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) in Contemporary Dance. The validator's panel report for the latter notes the stages that the process has followed, providing a summary of recommendations and noting some minor amendments required, such as the removal of references to placement mentors, as no placements are present in this programme. The new CertHE programme can then be seen appearing in the school's annual programme monitoring at the end of the following academic year. The assessment team therefore found that the school is currently operating effective processes for the design, development and approval of new programmes.
192. The school's proposed post-DAPs process for the design, development and approval of new programmes is held in the Curriculum Design Policy and Programme Approval Guidelines, which was approved by the school's Academic Board in July 2023. This document outlines a multi-stage step by step process covering the process from initial idea, through departmental and faculty approvals, student and external consultations and the path through the committee structure for approval. The proposed Curriculum Design Policy and Programme Approval Guidelines broadly aligns with the validator's process, which is currently used, amended for the academic governance structure and small faculty at the school. It contains detailed explanation of how each stage should proceed and clearly outlines expected timelines for the process. The assessment team found that this process is appropriate, as it ensures that expertise will be sought of all types (e.g. staff, student, external) and at all levels (through the committee structures). The Curriculum Design Policy and Programme Approval Guidelines also provides extensive guidance on what is required for a new programme proposal, covering the business case, alignment with the school's strategy, external benchmarking, internal reference points and proposed entry requirements. It asks staff to address a wide range of appropriate areas, including the following:
- the programme structure, student support mechanisms and provision required
 - the mechanisms through which students are able to demonstrate meeting learning outcomes
 - accessibility of the programme, study abroad or placement options and organisational delivery and resource implications.

The assessment team found this to be a very thorough and suitable approach to the design and development of a new programme, providing both the academic rationale and considerations for the new programme, but also the wider context within the school and the sector.

193. The Curriculum Design Policy and Programme Approval Guidelines document provides a clear and detailed explanation of both the path that the programme proposal takes through the committee structures for approval, but also an explanation of the role of each in the process. For example, the policy states that a proposal will go to student council, explaining that 'Student Council will supply objective insight ... and offer scrutiny to support the decision-making processes'. The assessment team found that the detailed nature of the explanations provided alongside the process make the process more effective, as they will aid

understanding and ease of implementation. While the team identified some concerns with the articulation of committee structures in governance (see paragraphs 62-83), the documentation for this process does not replicate those issues, and lays out a function in accordance with the Terms of Reference for these committees.

194. The proposed Curriculum Design Policy and Programme Approval Guidelines document appends the proposed template for the programme approval design, development and approval process. The team found that the template is very detailed, including covering projected student numbers, costing and timelines. The assessment team consider the fields required to aid in the effectiveness of the programme design and development process, providing clear, practical understand of the requirements of the programme, and how it aligns with both the school's strategy and current portfolio.
195. The assessment team is satisfied that the school operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.
196. To ascertain whether relevant staff are informed of and provided with guidance and support on programme design, development and approval procedures and their roles and responsibilities in relation to them, the assessment team reviewed the process documentation and templates, the Curriculum Design and Programme Writing guide and the staff handbook. The assessment team also met with teaching and support staff during the visit.
197. The assessment team found that the school provides staff with a Curriculum Design and Programme Writing guide. This guide is aimed at academic staff completing the early design and development stages of the program approval process and is, in the view of the assessment team, comprehensive in its coverage of curriculum considerations. The guide supports staff with all elements of the design process, from explaining credit values and modules per level, writing program learning outcomes, through to inclusive assessment design and how to design a curriculum to best engage students. It covers not only how to build and design and consider the academic aspects of the course but also provides advice and guidance for staff on how to compile the business case, which is a requirement of the program design policy and associated paperwork. The language throughout is inclusive and specific to the school. It is the view of the assessment team that this document provides significant guidance and support to staff on the program design development and approval process and their roles and responsibilities within it; and that that guidance and support it contains is clear, appropriate and tailored to the school's context.
198. During the visit the assessment team triangulated this documentation in discussion with academic and support staff. Staff were able to demonstrate understanding of procedures and give specific examples of their experiences to date as aligned with their individual roles and responsibilities in relation to the school's programme design and development procedures. Staff members reported being clear on where to access the school's policy, procedure and guidance documents, and that the majority of staff hold at least one committee position within the school, which enabled them to take roles in aspects of curriculum design or approval. Staff members were also clear that they understood the avenues available to them for assistance with policies, such as amendments to a programme, both in terms of peer support and within senior management. Staff members also reported that this was underpinned by a very supportive induction process for new staff including opportunities to shadow other team members, being involved in mentoring and peer review processes as well as opportunities to

contribute to the array of school committees. In addition, some staff members spoke about their experience of the free access to participation in continued professional development (CPD) on the school's Postgraduate Diploma in Arts Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PG Dip-ALTHE) or MA Education, which includes content on scholarship of learning and teaching that pertains to curriculum design and review. The assessment team also noted that the proposed Curriculum design policy and programme approval guidelines contains extensive detail and guidance notes for staff, in readiness for internalising the procedure, should they be awarded DAPs.

199. The assessment team concluded that relevant staff are informed of and provided with appropriate guidance and support on, processes for the design, development and approval of programmes and their roles and responsibilities in relation to them.
200. To assess whether the responsibility for approving new programme proposals is clearly assigned, including the involvement of external expertise, where appropriate, and subsequent action is carefully monitored, the assessment team reviewed the validator's requirements for programme approval, course validation reports, consultation feedback for new programmes and spoke to external examiners and staff. The assessment team also reviewed documents produced in readiness for DAPs, including the curriculum design policy and programme approval guidelines and associated templates and policies.
201. At present, the school operates under the validator's arrangements for programme approval. This process clearly lays out ownership of elements of the programme approval pathway, for example, with the initial development happening within the school, in liaison with the validator's quality office. It is clear throughout where the responsibility lies, either within the validator, or at the school. For example, the validation reports provided by the validator as an outcome of the panel assessment for a new programme clearly identify that modifications at this stage (for example, that a wider range of texts should be included in proposed reading lists) are reverted to the school to amend within the documentation, before the school can begin implementation of the new programme through its own committee structure.
202. The current procedures also ensure the involvement of external expertise is where appropriate, for example, the process requires the school to upload the 'relevant extract of the Student Voice Forum minutes that notes the student discussion of the proposed course specification'. For example, this can be seen in practice in minutes of a student meeting held to discuss the creation of three courses now in operation (including the Certificate in Higher Education and the MA in Contemporary Dance Performance), within a document of student and industry consultation feedback. From the questions raised, it is clear that students had been given detailed background information and were invited to query all aspects of the new courses. Feedback was not only sought at the meeting, but also via email and an online form. This set of feedback on a proposed course also contained a section of written feedback from employers and graduates. The assessment team found that the responsibility for approving new programme proposals within the school is clearly assigned and does include the involvement of external expertise, where appropriate.
203. In readiness for DAPs, the school's curriculum design policy and programme approval guidelines sets out clear ownership and responsibility for aspects of the proposed process. For example, one element reads 'Faculty heads to coordinate a course design working party to prepare documentation for consultation'. The policy is clear that that the design and

development aspects are owned at the faculty level, and when progressing, approval points are owned by respective committees as it progresses through the approval journey. A flow diagram provided with the policy shows the movement of this policy, with the faculty retaining responsibility for consultation and review in response to comments.

204. The proposed curriculum design policy and programme approval guidelines also prescribes engagement with students and external parties in 'Stage 4: Facilitate and document consultations with external parties and students on new course'. The new course proposal form requires the proposer to outline space in the schedule to ensure that both student and external consultation take place. The post-DAPs policy specifies that relevant external parties may be employers, alumni, business, industry or professional contacts. In discussion with external examiners, the assessment team concluded that the school is conducting appropriate consultation with external examiners, for example, one examiner noted having been formally involved in amendments to programmes, and involved in discussions within the faculty regarding a new Level 7 programme. This is supported by the External Advisors Policy and Procedure document, which references an expectation that the director of programmes should seek input from the external examiner during the early stages of programme design.
205. The assessment team found that the templates for programme approval indicate whether a programme has been approved, refused, or referred back to the faculty by the programme approval sub-committee. The form then contains the following two criteria 'reasons for refusal or for asking the team to reconsider' and 'conditions attached to planning' where the amendment required to a proposed program would be listed. The proposal form, according to the flow diagram within the policy, requires approval from the Programme approval sub-committee (PAsC) to progress from the faculty into the approvals stages, and so any changes required at this stage are added to the proposal form and returned to the faculty for amendment. Once amended, the form can be resubmitted to the PAsC. The faculty is also responsible for ensuring consultations with external parties and students, with the flow chart noting that they should then 'create final draft of documentation responding and logging feedback' before progressing to LTQAC.
206. The assessment team found that the responsibility for approving new programme proposals within the school is clearly assigned, does include the involvement of external expertise, where appropriate and that subsequent action is carefully monitored.
207. To test the extent to which close links are maintained between learning support services and the school's programme planning and approval arrangements the assessment team reviewed the school's programme approval process documentation and associated templates, as well as meeting with student and staff.
208. Through a review of the validator's documentation for programme approval, the assessment team found that the school is required to submit a 'self-assessment of the infrastructure of support for student learning and student welfare'.¹⁸ The validator's course validation reports comment on student support and resources under section D – in one example reviewed by the assessment team, a revision to reading lists was requested. The assessment team noted that there were very few requests for amendments in response to this criterion, across the sample of four validation reports reviewed. The assessment team found that the learning

¹⁸ See Codes of Practice for Taught Courses of Study - Regulatory Framework - University of Kent.

support services teams and academic teams work closely together to holistically ensure that the school's programme planning and approval arrangements are effective. During the visit the assessment team explored this in meetings with both staff and students. The assessment team found that students could identify examples of how the close links between learning support services and programme planning, delivery and review with the input of student voice mechanisms and a commitment to enhancement was effective and that this impacted positively on student experience. For example, it had led to facilitating the needs of individual students with cognitive diversity, as well as students with English as an Additional Language (EAL) – learning which was then applied across courses. In the area of injury prevention and support, there is evidently a clear and coordinated approach to ensuring that students are supported not only to ensure their wellbeing, but to be able to achieve academically. During a meeting with staff, it was explained that academic and wellbeing staff meet half-termly to discuss all students, and put in place any required academic or wellbeing support. This support structure is factored into the support package at the school and would apply to any new programmes going through the approval process.

209. The assessment team found a consideration of the learning support services required for each programme is an integral part of the post-DAPs programme approval form. Staff submitting the form are required to address fourteen key areas according to the policy, the ninth of which is 'Student support mechanisms and provision'. This is underpinned by the writing guidance, which prompts staff to commit to 'providing the necessary student support processes'. It also prompts them to consider the differentiated role between the academic or programme team, and the student advice and wellbeing team in delivering student support. The LTQAC, through which the programme proposal goes for approval, has several members of the school's learning support team as members, for example, the Learning support tutor, Librarian, student support and wellbeing manager. This ensures that all new programme proposals are appropriately scrutinised by both academic and learning support staff, prior to approval.
210. The assessment team concluded that close links are maintained between learning support services and the school's programme planning and approval arrangements.
211. To test whether the coherence of programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways is secured and maintained at the school, the assessment team reviewed the validator's programme design, development and approval process documentation, programme and module course specifications, and documentation relating to annual monitoring procedures.
212. Programme approval documentation shows that the coherence of a programme with multiple elements is a key consideration during the design and planning phase, with proposed programmes required to show consideration of how the mode of delivery, structure and components form a coherent programme of study. Through review of programme and module handbooks, alongside the programme approval documentation, the assessment team found that programmes with multiple elements were carefully scaffolded and any decisions regarding selection of alternative specialist pathways were supported with guidance from expert staff and consultation with industry. The assessment team found that programmes are carefully monitored through the annual programme monitoring process, and show careful planning around the coherence of programmes, for example, the 2019-2020 annual monitoring notes 'Classes continued to be programmed to support the work happening at the time in creation or rehearsal, either offering similar physicality or something complementary to

bring contrast to the students and assist them in developing their versatility', with the balance of formal and improvised classes flexing to provide coherence between modules.

213. The team considered that each of the school's programmes had a good balance between breadth and depth of content and are built appropriately across the programme, with key concepts introduced at appropriate points. The team were satisfied that the multiple pathways offered were appropriate, allowing students to specialise in specific areas of curriculum, for example, the MA Contemporary Dance Performance is split into the Verve and Professional placement pathways, reflecting the sector into which students wish to graduate.

Learning and teaching

214. To assess whether the school articulates and implements a strategic approach to learning and teaching which is consistent with its stated academic objectives the assessment team reviewed the school's strategic plan 2022-2030, the learning and teaching strategy, programme and module specifications, student codes of practice and learning culture; student charter; mental health charter; student engagement policy; inclusivity protocols and other relevant documents. The assessment team also met with students, senior staff, and both professional services and teaching staff during the visit.
215. The school's learning teaching and assessment strategy is split into three key aims, which are further broken down into a series of key performance indicators. The three stated aims are:
- Aim 1: To further deliver excellence in teaching, learning and assessment, through an individual and personalised learning experience.
 - Aim 2: The creation of an Inspiring and Purposeful Curriculum, where students are partners in the learning journey.
 - Aim 3: Develop Professional Teachers and Managers through resources and professional development.
216. The assessment team found that the school's range of policies and procedures support its learning and teaching strategy, for example, the requirements for student consultation within the programme design and approval documentation contributes towards 'students are partners in the learning journey'.
217. The assessment team observed an array of approaches to practical studio-based dance teaching including a ballet lesson, observed guided independent creative choreographic movement exploration and a range of approaches to contemporary dance technical lessons, for example drawing on aspects of Cunningham technique and Somatic movement practices. The assessment team's opinion of the learning and teaching visit observations was that of cohorts of students who were engaged and on task with positive professional rapport, respect and between the facilitators of the learning environments, students, and amongst peers.
218. Some examples of support of all students as diverse individuals were observed during the visit when in studio practice, the assessment team observed opportunities for individual exploration within set dance movement phrases and dialogic questioning. The assessment team observed effective use of 'scaffolding', which is an effective approach to dance teaching in which facilitators provide a framework for learning in distinct segments such as sharing new

information or demonstration and then guide students' individual exploration and problem solving with differentiated feedback to encourage independent learning as well as opportunities for stretch and challenge. The assessment team also evidenced effective layering of teaching approaches to address a range of preferred learning styles, e.g. in the ballet class the teacher used a range of modes within activities to support the diverse groups of students address the learning outcomes by sharing visual and aural information as well as opportunities for kinaesthetic learning (experiential learning by doing). This included professional level physical demonstration in tandem with descriptive language which was inclusive of students with a variety of dance backgrounds, i.e. not always assuming all students were familiar with codified dance genre terminology and addressing potential scenarios by using the relevant lexicon but also accompanying this with verbal descriptions as appropriate to the cohort. The assessment team observed effective use of anatomical terminology, e.g. conveying the concept of 'turn-out' of the legs from the hip joint by referring to the angle of the femur bone within the pelvis that facilitates this and how the patella (knee bone) and ankle need to be aligned with this to prevent injury as well as serving an aesthetic purpose. This is an example of good practice in the sector as it focuses on working safely within the fixed architecture of each individual student's body rather than just referring to a codified position such as an turned out 'first or fifth position from Ballet or Cunningham technique'. The assessment team also observed a focus on effective use of breath, imagery, and sonification to convey safe movement principles, expressive movement qualities and dynamics in modes that were inclusive for all students, for example of EAL and neurodiversity. The team observed a sense of students as active agents in their learning journey following principles of safe guided discovery with the facilitators as subject experts sharing the learning journey with students. An illustration of this was evidenced in the teaching observation of an undergraduate contemporary dance lesson wherein one facilitator was refining a set movement sequence and used inclusive collaborative prompts such as 'where is my weight in this transition' and 'I am checking my pelvis is aligned here...' This was reinforced through recapping criteria for self-assessing and allowing time to individually embody principles which was then followed up as appropriate with some open and directed questioning strategies. This triangulation activity illustrated an effective example of how live learning and teaching observed aligned with the school's values of dignity, courtesy and respect of all individuals. The assessment team also found that observations of teaching aligned with the school's student codes of practice and learning culture and student engagement policy.

219. The assessment team observed that every level of the students in each learning and teaching excerpt observed was aligned with sector expectations of a specialist dance provider and content related to the stage in delivery of the individual module within the context of the specified programme. The assessment team observed some CertHE students, different undergraduate FHEQ levels and postgraduate programme participants including the Verve Company engaging with an intense professional level class on the Riley Theatre stage with a guest teacher and live interactive percussion. In the latter the facilitator referred to an inclusive range of options which allowed for differentiation and individual artistic exploration as aligned with the programme's stated ethos, and the school's overall learning and teaching strategy.
220. Therefore, the assessment team concluded that the lessons it observed during the visit to the school illustrated a positive inclusive environment with opportunity for student choice evident

and an ability to express diverse individual identities which aligns with the stated school ethos that respect for the difference of every individual is paramount within the stated academic objectives of the implementation of the strategic approach to learning and teaching.

221. The view of the assessment team was that the lesson observations during the visit to the school triangulated Aim 1 of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (see paragraph 204) illustrating 'excellence in teaching, learning and assessment, through an individual and personalized learning experiences'. Furthermore, the assessment team's view is that visit observations evidenced examples of Aim 2 of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (see paragraph 204) of an 'inspiring and purposeful curriculum, where students are partners in the learning journey'. Moreover, the team found that the school creates positive inclusive environments with opportunity for student choice evident with visit observations and meetings with staff and students triangulating the claim of facilitating opportunities to express diverse individual identities as aligns with the stated school ethos that 'respect for the difference of every individual is paramount'. In summary, the assessment team concluded that the school articulates and implements a strategic approach to learning and teaching which is consistent with its stated academic objectives.
222. To test the extent to which 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 assessment team, the team reviewed documents relating to the use of space, the school's estate strategy, and reviewed the school's VLE. During the visit the assessment team undertook a tour and observation of teaching as well as meetings with staff and meetings with students.
223. To assess the school's VLE, the assessment team accessed the school's VLE. The assessment team found that it was easy to navigate, accessible, and reliable, containing the resources required for student to complete their studies, such as reading lists, module handbooks and the school's body of policies. The assessment team were also shown the school's online study resources on the VLE (such as writing guides), which students are introduced to during induction, and found them appropriate for supporting study. Through meetings with the assessment team, the school emphasised accessibility in its approach to safe learning spaces, for example, it has amended its online documentation and communication to be more user-friendly for neurodiverse students. This was triangulated by the assessment team's tour of the school's facilities, and in discussions with students, who noted the school's pro-active approach.
224. The assessment team found that the school promotes safe, courteous and respectful use of both VLE and physical spaces via the student codes of practice and learning culture; student charter; and inclusivity protocols. For example, within the student codes of practice and learning culture there are specific expectations placed on students about behaviour, ranging from 'be considerate and respect everyone else at the school' to 'Be considerate of others when moving about the learning areas, studios, classrooms, offices, reception areas, car park and grounds', to prohibitions on anti-social behaviour. In discussions with staff and students the assessment team triangulated the school's statement in its DAPs application that 'respect for the difference of every individual is paramount'. It is the view of the assessment team that this value is embedded in the practice of the school.

225. During the visit staff referred to positive learning culture and environments that were underpinned by the values of courtesy and respect, with one making reference to the recent changes made to assist students with neurodiversity (as described in paragraph 224). Student representatives and staff also noted that staff and student feedback was highly effective at prompting change, especially in ensuring the accessibility and reliability of learning spaces. Examples given also included supporting a student with navigating their diabetes in the context of a highly intense physical training environment. This practice was reflected further in a meeting with students involved in governance and a parallel session of a diverse mix of self-selected students not involved in governance. In the latter students shared specific individual examples of their engagement with the '5 pillars of holistic support' model. This focuses the school's support into 5 key 'pillars': wellbeing, learner, English Language, Financial and Bodywork Support, aligning with the four key pillars of academic support within the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy of physical support, learner support, English Language support, and well-being support. In meetings with the assessment team, students used this model to articulate the support on offer and identify where their support needs are centred. For example, one student noted how when accessing the counselling service offered by the school that they requested a preference to see a counsellor who also identified as a 'person of colour'. The student noted that the school followed up on this request swiftly.
226. The assessment team found the school's physical learning environment is well maintained, and appropriate for the courses offered by the school, consisting of traditional teaching rooms, a library space, a theatre, studios, a gym, and health facilities. These facilities are owned by the school and would therefore remain in place if the school were to be awarded DAPs. During the visit the team observed that there were clear signs around the building to direct students, and accessibility features, such as lifts clearly marked. The assessment team noted that the student codes of practice and learning culture provides clear expectations about respectful and safe use of space, for example, 'Corridors and the areas surrounding doors should always be kept clear to ensure everyone can move freely through the space at all times'.
227. The studio spaces viewed by the team appeared to be aligned with the needs of subject specialist expectations such as sprung floors with industry standard surfaces, ventilation or temperature control options as well as flexible options for live or pre-recorded soundscapes. The staff to students ratio in group classes in studios was aligned with other specialist dance providers. Clear direction and classroom management instructions were evident in transitions between class activities. The team observed that there was specialist equipment such as ballet 'barres' and mirrors that could be used as learning tools or covered with curtains as appropriate. Studio doors could be left ajar without posing a safety issue or closed over as appropriate to the activity and most had a window pane, making the space visible from corridors. During the visit the assessment team observed that many windows in teaching and learning spaces faced the public, without blinds or curtains to ensure privacy for students. The assessment team queried this with the school and was informed that in mitigation, and to allow students to use the space with dignity, the window surface was specialist and minimised glare while also being one-way glass, preventing the public from seeing directly into the school spaces, which mitigated the team's concern.
228. During the visit and observations, the assessment team observed there was an inconsistency in adequate health and safety signage in the learning and teaching spaces including the Riley

Theatre. Different posters and information were displayed in different rooms, with some containing multiple versions, and others none, which the team considered to present risk in event of an emergency or incident. The assessment team found that the school operates a centralised emergency number which, when dialled from an institutional phone, progressed the call through a list of relevant staff, which the assessment team found to be an appropriate given the size and context of the school. However, the assessment team found a lack of phones in studio spaces to contact the centralised emergency number, necessitating a student presenting at the reception desk to instigate a call. The assessment team also noted that there is an occasional practice of lone working as was observed during the tour when a student was on their own in the lighting studio physically exploring creative movement. The team found that the inconsistent signage and lack of ability to directly contact the emergency line in event of injury or incident (i.e. via a phone in all rooms, security summons alarms) placed individuals working alone at higher risk. This is further discussed under criterion D, in paragraphs 399-401. The team raised its concern regarding inconsistent adequate health and safety signage during meetings with staff at the visit, and were informed that signage was regularly reviewed, with current signage concerns an oversight. Senior staff spoke to the issue of lone working being rare, as studio spaces usually contain multiple individual or group users, due to space constraints. However, senior staff noted that they were looking into the issue, and in the meantime, ensured that security staff conducted regular building 'sweeps'.

229. Therefore, the view of the assessment team is that this aspect of how the school maintains physical learning environments that are safe has weaknesses at present, but the assessment team is confident that this was an oversight rather than indicative of a systemic issue. It was clear when this was flagged with the school that there is a clear commitment to addressing this oversight promptly with the facilities team, reviewing effectiveness of enhancement in this area as part of regular health and safety monitoring practice and ensuring this is documented fully in annual reporting.
230. It was the opinion of the assessment team that in the learning and teaching extracts observed during the visit that students clearly knew what was expected from them and their conduct aligned with codes of conduct, the school's student engagement principles and respect for others. For example, this was evident when there were transitions to shifting from whole group activities and breaking into sections to work out and embody a set movement phrase within the architecture of their individual bodies. There was a clear sense of respect and professional practice etiquette in ensuring that their physical explorations didn't restrict space for the expression of others within the groups.
231. Moreover, during the visit an extract of a ballet class was observed where it was noted by the assessment team that there was a variety of gender-neutral attire evident rather than traditional ballet 'uniforms' (e.g. conventional leotards, close fitted tops and tights with a requirement for long hair to be in a 'bun' or similar hairstyle). The range of selected gender-neutral attire still facilitated safe movement practice. For instance it was noted that many students elected to have clothing options such as 'shorts' that end above the knees and that this facilitated the vital assessment of correct alignment of knees and rotation in the hip and ankle joints which is especially important when working in 'turn out' and observing this as an assessment team effectively addressed concerns with regard to clothing aspects for this specialist highly codified dance genre practice. Another point to note is that during the ballet barre section many students elected to wear socks rather than traditional ballet footwear, but this was not a potential hazard due to the nature of 'barre' work being set either facing the

'barre' and or working alternative sides 'at the barre' and not transversing space beyond this. Later it was observed when moving around the building that in the same ballet class some students elected to put on traditional ballet footwear for 'centre practice' and others who had socks on used these to cover the 'demi-pointe' to avoid potential friction burns but rolled the socks back from the heels to minimize slip hazards. The team noted that this approach to flexible use of socks and bare feet is part of sector practice and is often seen in approaches to contemporary dance techniques as well as in creative and somatic movement practice environments.

232. Overall, the assessment team, after scrutiny of the array of evidence and wider school visit observations, found that 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, but with a weakness identified during the visit tour and teaching observations pertaining to lone-worker use of physical learning environments and an inconsistency in adequate health and safety signage in some learning and teaching spaces.
233. To evaluate whether robust arrangements exist for ensuring that the learning opportunities provided to those of its students that may be studying at a distance from the school are effective the assessment team reviewed module and programme specifications, the school's VLE, observed teaching sessions and spoke with staff and students.
234. The school does not currently offer any programmes fully via distance learning, although this is currently an area being explored by the school for expansion into new programmes. However, the school does have students who undertake placements away from the school, through the MA Contemporary Dance Performance (professional placement) programme. For these students, the school has in place a mentoring scheme, to provide the student with informal guidance and feedback throughout their placement, as well as formally feeding into the assessment and feedback processes for the student's achievement in the areas of Technical Practice, Company Practice and Performance Practice/Artist as Facilitator. This is covered in the detailed guidelines for mentors document and provides an extensive list of the responsibilities of the mentor towards the student. It also outlines how this is covered in the induction to the programme, ensuring that students are aware of the arrangements in place for their placement at the outset of their programme. At this induction, peer learner groups are established, so that students can support each other whilst on placement.
235. The assessment team, during observations, found that students occasionally participate in classes through distance learning, via a video link into a studio. The team were informed this was a route occasionally used to mitigate short-term illness for an individual or inability to attend in person, so that the student could observe the session taking place. The school were clear that this was not a long-term measure, however, and a student unable to attend more than a few sessions would be referred to the wellbeing team for assessment. The team found this to be a robust measure for ensuring that a student who could attend, but not in person, could still partially benefit from the session.
236. The assessment team found that the school's current VLE and library resources supported students studying at a distance. The majority of the library's catalogue is available to students digitally, and students have access to SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries), meaning that they can borrow books and journal articles from all other libraries belonging to the scheme. Staff and students reported being able to find relevant policies and

procedures on the VLE, as well as accessing signposting support. The VLE also contains the other materials requisite for study, for example module handbooks, assessment criteria, tutorial timetables and reading lists. The assessment team, in discussion with senior staff, found that there are plans to expand these resources in a post-DAPs context, by looking at the available features of the VLE platform, especially in the areas of student interactivity, as the school seeks to grow and begin new partnerships.

237. The assessment team found that robust arrangements do exist for ensuring that the learning opportunities provided to those of its students that may be studying at a distance from the school are effective.
238. To assess the extent to which whether every student is enabled to monitor their progress and further their academic development, the assessment team met with staff and students, reviewed assessed work, accessed the VLE and reviewed the academic regulations and student handbook.
239. The school uses the VLE for students to be able to monitor their progress and further their academic development. Every student submits assignments and receives marks and feedback via the VLE, allowing them to monitor their progress. In the summer of 2024, the school adopted a new method of presenting marks to students, by using rubric based presentation, with marks allocated against each assessment criterion within the VLE. Students are able to see the completed marking grid alongside the assessment mark, allowing them to better understand their strengths and weaknesses within the assessment.
240. The assessment team reviewed 238 samples of assessed work, including the feedback given to the students, and found that feedback given was directly focused on assessment criteria, and that the feedback approach considered the consolidation of achievement and clear identification of areas for development and enhancement. The team considered that the comprehensiveness of the feedback, alongside the 'feed-forward' as well as 'feed-back' approach demonstrates that the school appropriately enables each student to further their own academic development.
241. The assessment team found that the student support systems in place enable student to monitor progress and further their academic development. Students have timetabled academic tutorials with teaching staff, enabling them to receive targeted support, and ask questions relating to study. Students can also use the VLE to book additional tutorials and academic skills tutorials with respectively. In meetings with the assessment team, staff noted that this gave student a broader range of staff from whom they could draw expertise, aiding to their academic development. The assessment team considered that the availability of academic and learning support staff to provide tutorials and advice enables students to both monitor progress and develop academic skills.
242. In summary, the assessment team concluded that every student is enabled to monitor their progress and further their academic development.

Assessment

243. To test the extent to which 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 assessment team reviewed the school's assessment documentation, framework for recognition of prior learning, program and module specifications, assessed work, and other relevant documentation.

244. Beyond the validator's academic framework, the primary document outlining the school's assessment methods is the Assessment Overview document. This is aligned to the academic framework and provides clear guidelines for assessment, including on the types of assessment in use at the school, how to ensure these are inclusive, classifications, grading, moderation and processes for submission of work. The team viewed a wide range of these assessment types being applied through programme and module specifications and 238 samples of assessed work across all programmes offered. The assessment team observed that learning outcomes are stated in all course and module specifications, with assessments designed to respond to the learning outcomes. Samples of assessed work showed adherence to the assessment processes detailed in the module and programme specifications, with a range of assessment methods used, including recorded practical work, self-reflective work and written assessments, which the team found to be, in their experience, appropriate to the provision offered. The undergraduate and postgraduate assessment mapping matrices show how assessments across all undergraduate programmes intersect with the relevant learning outcomes to allow students to demonstrate achievement against each learning outcome, as well as indicating the roles of continuous, formative and summative assessment. The assessment team also found that staff are provided with extensive guidance on the creation of programme learning outcomes and other elements of assessment through the curriculum design and programme writing guide.
245. The assessment team found that the processes described in the assessment overview document and exemplified in practice through assessments and module and programmes specification to be valid and reliable. The view of the assessment team is supported by external examiner reports examined by the assessment team (covering the last six academic cycles) that evidence external examiner confidence in the validity and reliability of the school's assessment processes with statements including 'confident that the assessments are appropriate ways of measuring student attainment' and 'assessment modes are well designed to support their achievement ... could see the specific outcomes evidenced in work submitted'.
246. The assessment team reviewed evidence of the procedures for recognition of prior learning (RPL) and was satisfied that the procedures in place at the school are sufficient. At present, the school uses the validator's process for RPL, whereby a student is considered for RPL by the relevant tutor at the school and a recommendation made to the validator for approval. The first stage of this process of RPL, known within the school as RPEL (Recognition of Prior or Experiential Learning) and is governed by the Recognition of Prior Learning Framework, sets out a comprehensive set of guidelines. These guidelines require the school to take into account the learning outcomes of the prior learning, and the mapping of these to the requirements of the school. This document also is clear in the responsibility assignment of this, where the mapping will be undertaken by a member of the quality office supported by a portfolio supervisor. The framework also outlines the parameters for RPL, noting required deadlines, and the maximum RPL credits allowed for each level of qualification, which the assessment team found to, in their experience, align appropriately with other providers across the sector. The school notes an intention to retain this process, and exchange the validator's approval for an internal approval point, should it be awarded DAPs. The assessment team

saw examples of this process in practice, for both Level 6 and Level 7 programmes. The paperwork for the examples examined clearly shows a mapping exercise between the applicant's prior experience and the programmes learning outcomes, and the progression of the paperwork through the approval stages, including references to the academic regulations regarding credit values.

247. The assessment team concluded that 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.
248. To test 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 assessment team reviewed assessment policies and associated documentation, student and staff handbooks, student voice arrangements, reviewed student assessed work and met with staff and students.
249. The assessment team reviewed the mechanisms through which the school informs students of the basis on which academic judgements are made. The assessment team found that both the validator's academic frameworks and the school's own academic policies regarding assessment are available to all students via the VLE. The Assessment Overview document, which contains the information for students on how academic judgements are made, is written in a student-facing way, for example 'assessment is used to reset and evaluate your skills and knowledge' and provides explanation of continuous and summative assessment overview. It also signposts to students to where they can find further information, for example, linking to the credit frameworks and student engagement policy. In addition, the team found that the student handbook provides students with grade descriptors, level descriptors and an overview of assessment at the school. It also signposts students to their module guides for further information. The information contained in these documents correlates with the information given to staff around assessment and the basis on which academic judgements are made via the academic regulations and credit frameworks, promoting a shared understanding.
250. The student handbook also provides an overview of the student voice within the school. Here, it notes that the school commits to 'Support student representation in a wide range of contexts to ensure that students contribute to the development and improvement of NSCD's provision' and notes that student representation is present on the school's primary governing committees. The handbook also outlines the role of the student representatives (both course representatives and diversity representatives) to act as a 'point of liaison between students on the course and [the school's] staff'. The school also seeks feedback from its students, for example on assessment processes. A survey completed by students in June 2024 on assessment asks how students would best prefer to receive marks and feedback, including whether written or verbal is more useful to the student in understanding their performance. The assessment team noted that student representatives are encouraged to bring up issues relating to curriculum and teaching which, in the assessment team's view, provides suitable space for dialogue promoting the shared understanding between students and staff of the basis on which academic judgements are made.

251. The assessment team considered that the introduction of a new marking matrix, which presents students with their grades cross-referenced against the assessment criteria, is evidence of the school's commitment to both transparency within assessment and supporting students' understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made. The matrix was presented and approved at the LTQAC and received scrutiny from both academic staff and student representatives. The assessment team also found that student feedback on assessment and academic judgement is taken seriously by the school and quickly addressed. For example, students reported that in a previous assessment they had raised concerns about the diversity of an assessment panel with academic staff and that this had been swiftly remedied by the school.
252. In discussion with the assessment team, students also noted that the use of continuous assessment, alongside formative and summative assessment, assisted in facilitating their understanding of academic judgment and assessment criteria. Students reported that ongoing consolidation and developmental feedback for learning, as well as receiving verbal and/or written feedback on formative assessment, enabled them to engage in dialogues with academic staff about their learning and engage with further opportunities available for student feedback with any queries.
253. The assessment team found that staff and students are engaged in dialogue to promote a shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made.
254. To test the extent to which students are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice, the assessment team reviewed student handbooks, student-facing guidance and policies and spoke to students, and both professional services and academic staff.
255. In meetings with the assessment team, students described a very open culture of discussion around understanding good academic practice, reporting that topics including referencing and avoiding academic misconduct were covered at the start of each module, and again during assessment periods. Students also reported receiving a comprehensive introduction to the library and the services that it offers during their induction, which can be seen in the school's induction timetables.
256. Support staff confirmed to the assessment team at the visit that they hold sessions on independent research and study skills, with resources available on these topics within the library. These tutorials teach the necessary skills for students to demonstrate good academic practice, such as referencing, bibliographies, research skills and finding resources are advertised widely, including on noticeboards on campus and on the library website with a link to book via the VLE. Students reported to the assessment team that they are actively encouraged to use resources available, such as these bookable learning support tutorials, which take place in a room within the library.
257. To enable students to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice, the school also provides guidance, for example, a writing guide including topics such as the school's house style, the principles of academic integrity, how to reference, how to paraphrase, and how to compile a bibliography. This guide is written in plain, inclusive language. The school's approach to assessment, especially formative

assessment, allows students to practice their academic skills, demonstrate good academic practice, and receive feedback on how to improve.

258. External examiners confirmed, via discussion with the assessment team, that they felt that the school provided appropriate skills training for students and had been responsive in adding targeted training (for example, in essay writing) where the need had been raised, either by themselves or by student representatives.
259. The assessment team concluded that students are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice.
260. To test the extent to which the school operates processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice, the assessment team reviewed the school's academic misconduct policy, procedures and templates. The team also reviewed various supporting documents, including student handbooks, and spoke with staff and students.
261. The assessment team found that the academic misconduct policy clearly outlines the academic expectations for students and the consequences of misconduct. In discussion with the assessment team, students reported that the prevention of academic misconduct was a general theme discussed by teaching staff around points of assessment. Both staff and students reported an emphasis being placed on the support mechanisms available for the understanding of good academic practice (as discussed in paragraphs 254-259), and the visibility of the support (i.e. to identify where a student is at risk of committing academic misconduct due to other, non-academic reasons, and to provide relevant support to the underlying cause), within teaching but also on the VLE, in the student handbook and in posters, flyers and screens on campus. As a part of induction to modules, academic staff are required by the academic misconduct policy to provide 'clear guidance and instruction on academic integrity...must clearly indicate that all types of academic misconduct are serious and the potential consequences of committing an academic offence'. The academic misconduct policy is available to students through the VLE, and provides a comprehensive and detailed list of behaviours that would be considered unacceptable academic practice as well as reflecting the most common forms of academic misconduct offences across the sector, such as cheating and plagiarising. For example, the academic misconduct policy lists failure to obtain relevant ethics approvals or attempting to influence a member of staff to gain an advantage among its list of unacceptable forms of academic practice. The assessment team therefore found that the school operates appropriate processes for the prevention of academic misconduct.
262. The primary vehicle used by the school to identify unacceptable academic practice is Turnitin (software which has various functionalities, including providing reports on plagiarism within text), the report from which can be used as the basis for an investigation into academic misconduct. In discussion with staff during the visit, the assessment team found that the small nature of the school also allows for the staff to be aware of the varying abilities of their students. Every student's progress is discussed at a half termly meeting, where any concerns (academic or otherwise) are flagged. Staff reported that they feel able to identify where students are at risk and provide intervention, as well as identify where a student's performance is unexpectedly high or low.

263. The school's academic misconduct policy sets out a three-stage approach to investigation responding to academic misconduct – Stage 1: Informal Review; Stage 2: Academic Misconduct Panel; Stage 3: Formal Appeal. The process is clearly laid out and explained in detail, with indicative penalties listed against the different severity classes of offence, ranging from a formal warning and intervention to teach good practice, to withdrawing the student from the programme. The policy clearly identifies the persons or team responsible for each stage of the process, for example, the quality team is identified as responsible for communication with the student, and other tasks such as reporting the decision of an Academic Misconduct Panel to the Board of Examiners. One of the external examiners, in discussion with the assessment team, anecdotally referenced a case of academic misconduct through the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools. The external examiner spoke to how the school had followed the academic misconduct policy in this case and taken, in their view, appropriate action, both as regards the student but also in subsequently raising awareness of this as a category of misconduct with the student body. AI usage and academic misconduct were also mentioned to the assessment team by students as an area currently being discussed with them, and that a recent guidance document on the use of AI had been circulated. The assessment team considers that the school's academic misconduct policy is clear and suitable for investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice, with an appropriate range of process outcomes and reporting.
264. The assessment team found that the school had no incidents of academic misconduct during the year prior to the assessment, demonstrating that its approach to prevention is working. The school had one incident of non-academic misconduct, which the assessment team views as having been handled appropriately, and in line with procedure, by the school. The assessment team therefore concluded that the school operates processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice.
265. To test the extent to which processes for marking assessments and for moderating marks are clearly articulated and consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process, the assessment team reviewed marking and moderation procedures, external examiners reports, board of examiners minutes and other related documentation. The assessment team also scrutinised a sample of 238 instances of assessed student work, met with the school's external examiners and spoke with academic and support staff.
266. The assessment team found that marking procedures are contained within the Academic Regulations and Credit Framework document. This document is available to student on the VLE. The assessment team found that the marking process is clearly articulated and covers appropriate topics, including student anonymity, the provisional nature of marks prior to an exam board and explicitly stating that marking must be conducted in line with the relevant assessment criteria. The academic regulations note where other policies may need to be considered or applied, for example, referencing the potential need to consider the Mitigating Circumstances Policy and Procedures where student work is submitted late.
267. The assessment team, in a review of 238 samples of assessed student work across all courses covering the full range of marks, found that the relevant marking and moderations procedures had been consistently operated. This review showed the consistency of application of the relevant undergraduate and postgraduate grade descriptors and the use of the school supplied templates, including marking grids. In discussion with staff, the assessment team ascertained that marking practices are well understood, and that staff are

supported in the correct application of them. External examiners' reports over the past six years confirm that the school's external examiners consider marking policies and criteria to be being consistently operated. For example, one external examiner's report for 2022-023 notes 'the moderation of all students on practical performance modules is rigorous'.

268. The processes for moderation are also found within the Academic Regulations and Credit Framework document, where it states that all assessment must be subject to moderation. It then covers, in detail, the principles of and available modes of moderation available. The moderation options made available to assessment at the school are: a) double marking; b) sampling; c) moderation by mutual review. For each, the framework clearly articulates how the moderation method should take place. The assessment team found that the moderation processes within the school are clearly articulated within the academic regulations. The team reviewed samples of module marks and moderated module marks for all courses, and through a range of grade bands. The assessment team found that moderation policy was consistently applied, and appeared appropriate in context. The assessment team also reviewed external examiners' reports from the last six academic cycles, in order to assess the consistent operation of moderation practices. The team found numerous references within these reports to involvement in moderation practices, all of which reflected activity in accordance with policy. This is reflected in the minutes of board of examiners meetings, for example, the September 2023 Board of Examiners minutes note that 'moderation was robust'..
269. Through discussion with academic staff, the assessment team found that there was a clear understanding of marking and moderation processes within the school's assessment processes. Staff reported that they had received a thorough induction process, undertook regular peer exchange and refresher training in tandem with ongoing systems that facilitate the calibration of approaches to marking and moderating. In addition, academic teaching staff were able to convey awareness of feedback from the relevant external examiners around marking and moderation processes and how this feedback is disseminated in the school with any recommended enhancement actions embedded where appropriate.
270. In summary, the assessment team found that processes for marking assessments and for moderating marks are clearly articulated and consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process.

External examining

271. To test the extent to which the school makes scrupulous use of external examiners including in the moderation of assessment tasks and student assessed work the assessment team scrutinised external examiner reports, external examiner guidance and the school's academic regulations, as well as undertaking meetings with both provider staff and external examiners.
272. The assessment team met virtually with some of the school's external examiners who had experience of the undergraduate and postgraduate (Levels 4 to 7) programmes over a sustained period to triangulate their experiences of policy, procedures and effectiveness of practice in this area. During discussion, the external examiners confirmed that they maintain a close working relationship with the school. The external examiners reported that they were very involved in the school's processes and are appropriately supported to do so. The external examiners reported that they felt comfortable in making recommendations to the school through the formal channels available, such as a suggestion to update reading lists,

and also that they fulfilled an ad hoc advisory role to the institution. For example, the external examiners reported being consulted in the early conversation regarding the school's readiness to apply for degree awarding powers. External examiners also reported regular attendance at exam boards and feeling well prepared to participate and able to provide challenge to the school around marks if required. It was noted that external examiners are kept up to date with information about students undertaking resits or at risk of failing a programme. Furthermore, the external examiners indicated that they have good access to relevant materials and that the school's assessment and feedback processes meet expected sector standards.

273. The processes and templates in place for use by the external examiners support their explanations of their role within the school. Each programme or part of a programme leading to an award is required by the academic regulations to have an external examiner. The role description requires that the external examiner completes reports that feed into the annual course monitoring reports within the school, as well as attending the board of examiners meetings where they 'should be involved in the consideration of all decisions'. These external examiner reports are produced using a template, which requires the examiner to evaluate the academic experience, whether the standards are appropriate for the awards, student performance and comparability across the sector, an assessment of the support and resources available for students, and processes and outcomes of assessment. It also prompts comment on the school's documentation, to note the sample of student work which they have evaluated, make comment on student achievements and to evaluate the efficacy of work-based learning elements. The form concludes in a 'recommendations to the institution' section. While the school's current approach follows its validator's regulations as regards the use of external examiners, it has prepared a new suite of its own policies and templates for use in the event of a successful DAPs application. Like other aspects of its policies, the school will continue to base its approach on its current working practices (which is to say, it will continue largely to follow the approaches of its validator).
274. The school provided assessors with seven years of external examiner reports, along with the school's responses to these: assessors found reports to be thorough and thoughtful, and responses to be clear and achievable. Likewise, minutes from four years of Board of Examiners meetings show good engagement of external examiners in the process. Therefore, after scrutiny of evidence and triangulation of this in meetings with external examiners and staff during the visit to the school, the opinion of the assessment team is that the provider's approach to use of external examining is scrupulous in respect to the moderation of assessment tasks and student assessed work.
275. In order to test the extent to which 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 assessment team triangulated the external examiner reports and school responses with school monitoring process, policy and guidance documents, meeting with staff and through a virtual meeting with some of the external examiners involved in provision at Levels 4 to 6.
276. The assessment team found that the school carries out a continuous dialogue with its external examiners, including feeding external examiner reports into the annual course monitoring reports within the school. The procedures and frameworks that guide the annual

monitoring state that the process is designed to, amongst other things 'Ensure that appropriate action is taken to address shortcomings identified by ... external examiners'. The reports are fed into the review process, the output of which is an action plan owned and discharged by the LTQAC. The team reviewed minutes from the Academic Board which shows a regular item on external examiner reports, whereby the school summarises the key themes received through the process and its corresponding responses. For example, in the October 2022 report to the Academic Board, an action was noted in response to external examiner feedback to make available recordings of verbally given feedback on students' performances. In discussion with the assessment team, teaching staff were able to convey awareness of feedback from the relevant external examiners and how this feedback is disseminated in the school with any recommended enhancement actions embedded where appropriate.

277. The school provides a written response to external examiners, and in examples of reports and responses given over a six-year period reviewed by the assessment team, the school also consistently feedback on actions taken in response to examiners' reports. For example, in response to the 2022-23 external examiner report, the response notes that the school has opened an action to encourage more students to submit papers or workshops in for at least one conference in the coming year. The external examiners, in discussion with the assessment team, described being in regular contact with the school, and receiving updates on their feedback. The external examiners also reported it to be a constructive and open relationship, where they feel that their feedback to the school is taken seriously and quickly addressed.

278. The assessment team concluded that the school gives full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiner reports and provides external examiners with a considered and timely response to their comments and recommendations.

Academic appeals and student complaints

279. To test the extent to which 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 assessment team reviewed a range of documentation. This included the school's student complaints policy and procedure, the validator's appeals procedure, the student appeals policy and procedure, the student handbook, appeal forms and the student complaint log. The assessment team also reviewed the information regarding appeals and complaints via the school's VLE, through a presentation given on student voice within the school and in discussion with staff and students.

280. At present, academic appeals are considered by the validator. The validator's policy is clearly signposted and advertised within the school's student appeals procedure document, ensuring transparency of the process. The circumstances under which a student may appeal and may not appeal are clearly listed within the validator's policy. This policy has been adapted by the school for use in a post-DAPs context in the school's academic appeals policy, which has been through the school's senate in draft form.

281. The assessment team noted that both the prospective academic appeals and student complaints policy sets out an appropriate three-stage process for the handling of an academic

appeal: stage one is early or informal resolution, stage two is the formal appeal or resolution, and stage three is for appeal review or the appeal of a complaint resolution. The assessment team considered the process to be timely, as both policies set out clear deadlines for each stage of the process, both for the actions required by a student and for actions required by the school, for example, with a statement that the overall appeals process 'should normally take no longer than 90 days'. The assessment team found that this correlates with their experience of practice across the sector.

282. Both the prospective appeals and complaints policies provide a detailed guide to what can be expected at each stage of the appeals process, for example, stating when a student should expect to receive written responses, and offering an alternative of a face-to-face discussion to explain a decision, if the student chooses. The assessment team found that the prospective appeals policy provides a clear explanation of appropriate grounds for academic appeal, as well as clearly noting an appropriate range of matters which would not be considered grounds, for example in appeals, 'Matters that would be more appropriately addressed through the NSCD Complaints Procedure'. This item then provides a footnoted link to the student complaints procedure. The policies provide detailed explanation of each stage of the process, noting any impact this may have on the student's academic journey, for example, the policy is clear that an outstanding academic appeal may delay a student's ability to graduate.
283. The assessment team found the appeals and complaints policies to be accessible, as alongside detailed process guidance, it provides footnoted explanations of terms that students may be unfamiliar with, such as 'completion of procedures letter', 'Office of the Independent Adjudicator' [OIA] and 'Good Cause'. The complaints procedure details the differences between individual and group complaints, noting the slight changes required in procedure. The assessment team considered that the academic appeals and student complaints procedures are both fair and accessible, with both clear explanations of the process and of expectations of both the school and the student. The policies are clear on both a student's recourse to the validating partner and in informing students about the role of the OIA.
284. The policies include a section covering reporting mechanisms, and the use of the process for the improvement of the student experience. Within the school, all complaints and appeals are logged, alongside a timeline for the process, and the eventual outcome, or any action taken. Where there have been appeals or complaints during the year, the policy requires Senate and the governing body (both of which include student representatives) to receive a report from the quality office on the analysis of appeal and complaint statistics, highlighting areas for improvement or of good practice. The academic board receives an annual 'Report on OIA completion of procedures and student cases', which was reviewed by the assessment team and found to be appropriate. The quality office also run ongoing monitoring of procedures, and, where appropriate, liaise with the Students' Union Council and teaching staff to discuss improvements. The assessment team considered that the policy enables enhancement within the school, as it ensures discussion of areas of appeals and complaints at multiple levels within the organisation, as well as regular and ongoing monitoring.
285. In discussion with both staff and student groups, the assessment team established that the complaints and appeals policies are well understood within the school. Students reported understanding where to find the policies on the school's VLE, as well as where they would

find assistance with either the policies or progressing through the procedures. Staff were also able to signpost to the policies and exhibited an understanding of how to respond to a student raising a complaint, and how to differentiate this from a student providing feedback. The assessment team also found that no students had submitted appeals during the period of this DAPs assessment, and that one informal complaint was received: this was dealt with appropriately and in line with procedure, in the opinion of the assessment team.

286. The assessment team concluded that the school has effective procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of the academic experience for its higher education programmes, and that these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.

287. To test that appropriate action is taken following an appeal or complaint, the assessment team considered:

- the validating partner's appeals process
- the school's log of student complaints
- the school's template student cases log
- student complaints policy and procedure
- student appeals procedure
- the school's prospective student appeals policy
- an example evidence audit trail of a student complaint.

288. In general, the assessment team noted that the school has received few complaints and appeals, and as such, evidence confirming the appropriateness of actions taken is limited. The examples of historic complaints provided to the assessment team show a range of outcomes for students, ranging from informal conversations to formal resolutions. The assessment team found that cases were handled within the timeframes specified in the relevant policies and that these dates were logged within the case log for review. The log notes regular updates going to students to inform them of the progress of their cases. The assessment team found that the outcomes of the complaints were appropriate, and represented the outcomes as described in the policy. An example audit trail of communications sent regarding a specific complaint was reviewed by the assessment team. The team considered this to show timely, appropriate action being taken, and the student being presented with all relevant information in a clear and concise manner. In this example, the school wrote to the complainants to advise them of both the categories under which the school considered their complaint to lie, as well as outlining the next steps which the complaint would take.

289. The school also provided evidence of a historic academic appeal, which was conducted by the school's validating partner. The assessment team found that the school provided a timely and suitable response to the validating partner and that the student received clear and timely updates on their case.

290. In visit meetings the assessment team triangulated understanding of the effective implementation of the school's effective procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints with staff members. The assessment team found that there was clear understanding of the current procedures and actions required and an awareness of the potential shift in the school procedures if DAPs was awarded.
291. The assessment team concluded that the school takes appropriate action following an appeal or complaint.

Conclusions

292. The assessment team concluded that the school meets the requirements of B3.1 overall, ensuring that the design and approval of programmes; learning and teaching; assessment; external examining; and complaints and appeals processes provide a high quality academic experience. As discussed in paragraph 228, the assessment team found one aspect of weakness in regard to an aspect of maintaining safety in physical environments in the event of an emergency. The assessment team noted during the visit to the school there was some inconsistency in adequate health and safety signage in the learning and teaching spaces, including the Riley Theatre. The assessment team discussed this during the visit with staff and found that this was an oversight and there was a clear commitment to addressing the issue promptly with the facilities teams and reviewing effectiveness of practice as part of health and safety monitoring and annual reporting. As this concern was limited to a small aspect of wider learning and teaching provision and the assessment team ascertained that this concern was already under consideration with credible plans for swift rectification, the assessment team note this as a weakness rather than a failure of a criterion. The assessment team concluded that the school demonstrates that it designs and deliver courses and qualifications that provide a high quality academic experience to all students from all backgrounds.
293. Therefore, the team concluded overall that the provider 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

294. The assessment team's view is that the provider meets criterion C1: the role of academic and professional staff because it meets subcriterion C1.1.
295. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the evidence. This shows in summary that the school assures itself that it has appropriate numbers of staff to teach its students and that everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning, and in the assessment of student work, are appropriately qualified, supported and developed to deliver the level(s) and subject(s) of the qualifications being awarded.
296. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

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.

Advice to the OfS

297. The assessment team's view is that the school meets criterion C1.1 because it assures itself that it has appropriate numbers of staff to teach its students, and that everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning, and in the assessment of student work, are appropriately qualified, supported and developed to deliver the level(s) and subject(s) of the qualifications being awarded.
298. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows that the school has met the evidence requirements for C1.1.

Reasoning

299. To test the extent to which the school has relevant learning, teaching and assessment practices that are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship, the assessment team reviewed the school's strategy, module handbooks, module and programme evaluation, the performance and development review (PDR) process, and staff CVs, and spoke with staff, students and senior management.
300. The assessment team found that the school's strategy has the objective to establish the organisation as a 'centre for cultural knowledge', demonstrating in the view of the assessment team the significance the school places on thought leadership within its field and

community.¹⁹ This is further unpacked in the school's Learning and Teaching Strategy, which articulates the aim of being known as 'a provider that delivers excellent teaching, and one that actively promotes a culture of identification, dissemination and implementation of the very best practice'.

301. In reflection of these objectives, the assessment team found through its review of programme and module handbooks that student learning is enabled through a range of relevant and appropriate learning, teaching and assessment practices, drawing on the expertise of staff. For example, the Level 4 module 'CHECH1: Choreography' contains, in the view of the assessment team, an appropriate mixture of practical devising work, with supporting theoretical work, and has a mixture of assessment modes that enables this duality to be assessed effectively. The assessment team found that a number of lecturers in the school have backgrounds in the theory and practice of choreography, thus providing the necessary relevant knowledge and expertise to support and enable student learning and assessment in the topic of choreography.²⁰
302. Assessors found many examples within the school of learning and teaching practices being informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific or educational scholarship.
303. Examples include the school's periodic programme review process (both its current use of its validating partner's approach and its future policy), which asks programme teams to comment on, amongst other things:
- (1) evaluation of the effectiveness of the implementation of the school's teaching, learning and assessment strategy
 - (2) evaluation of the effectiveness of the links between student learning and discipline-based research in the school
 - (3) innovation and good practice in the area of programme design and delivery.
304. Teaching, learning and assessment practices are then reviewed in detail by the school's Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee. Examples include recent consideration of a proposal relating to decolonising the curriculum by positioning Afrofusion as a reflective learning practice, with students invited to '[be] yourself through others'. This work was informed by the research of an academic member of staff. The Learning Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee's Action Plan also collates the findings of the Annual Course Monitoring Report, along with the National Student Survey; recent analysis described student evaluations on the balance between tutor-led and independent work as effective. The school also considers the views of industry partners and professional practice in the design and development of its programmes. Examples include feedback from Gracefool Collective, which promoted the importance of practical skills development, such as project management, marketing and funding.

¹⁹ See NSCD, Strategic Plan 2023-30.

²⁰ See Staff - Northern School of Contemporary Dance.

305. At the individual scale, the school enables staff members to self-reflect and self-evaluate through an appraisal system formed of a regular professional development review. In conversation with assessors, staff were able to reflect on their teaching practice and demonstrated a shared commitment to assessors on the significance they place on continual development. Staff further draw from their own subject-specific knowledge and practice as part of the continual development of their teaching and learning, with recent examples including the addition of enhanced content on hip-hop dance, as overseen by specialist members of staff. Subject-specific practice and the excellence of staff teaching was described in an unanimously positive way by students in conversation with assessors.
306. Assessors also found many examples within the school of assessment practices being informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific or educational scholarship.
307. Examples of reflection include a staff consultation with students on feedback methods and timescales, and a related consultation with students specifically on the school's approach to continuous assessment. The Learning Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee also recently considered student views on the usefulness of the school's assessment criteria grid, and a meeting with students that concerned timescales of assessment feedback and a proposal to introduce more verbal and audio-recorded feedback. Extended scrutiny of assessment practices was in evidence at the Board of Governor's meeting on 22 October 2024, at which the Vice Principal entered into a robust discussion with the Board as to how to respond to qualitative comments from the National Student Survey, in relation to perceptions of fairness and favouritism in the assessment of practical work.
308. At an institutional level, assessors found the school's procedures of assessment moderation and reporting, as outlined in the school's Academic Regulations and Credit Framework and the Annual Programme Monitoring Review to be robust and important vehicles for the evaluation of assessment practices. This includes presenting metrics relating to timeliness of assessment. Likewise, the school has robust policies and mechanisms that inform assessment probity in the face of mitigation, extensions, academic misconduct and student appeals.
309. Assessors also found that assessment practices were guided by the school to include reflection on subject-specific scholarship and professional practice. This is demonstrated in particular in the school's Assessment Overview, which details the range of potential assessment methods, and the rationale for using these, in the assessment of different forms of practical work.
310. The assessment team therefore concluded that the school has relevant learning, teaching and assessment practices that are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship.
311. To test the extent to which the school provides staff with opportunities to engage in reflection and evaluation of their learning, teaching and assessment practice, the assessment team reviewed the breadth and depth of opportunities on offer by the school.
312. An update on the school's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, as presented to and discussed by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee in January 2024

states that 'staff routinely review and share practice to enhance the student learning experience [via] Joint Faculty meetings, Module meetings and training sessions, [which] provide ongoing opportunities for staff to discuss approaches and to share practice, with particular focus on developing ever increasingly inclusive and innovative courses and curricula'. In the view of the team, student consultation is embedded, both through the formal mechanism of Student Voice Forum, where students have the opportunity to bring their own ideas and suggestions to staff representatives, often shaping decision making, but also through informal cohort meetings where new ideas and approaches are discussed with students, and the opportunity provided for them.

313. The assessment team found that formal opportunities for staff to evaluate and reflect upon their teaching took place in particular through having a peer observation scheme. Further opportunities to reflect upon teaching and learning practices are provided through the school's PDR process, through the staff Away Day, and in meetings of the Learning Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee, which considers matters relating to student experiences of different teaching methods and course designs.
314. Academic staff receive the opportunity to reflect upon the practice of assessment in the school at the Board of Examiners, which takes in the views of external examiners, and through the school's assessment moderation processes. Furthermore, staff have the opportunity to input into the school's documentation on assessment practices, which comprises evaluative text that explains each distinct mode of assessment to the readership.
315. The assessment team also found that the school's summary of its Academic Staff Meetings evidences a two-year period in which staff were given the opportunity to reflect upon and evaluate the conditions of delivering teaching and assessment. Staff comments in these notes include the safeguarding and enhancement of assessment practices and the need for training in technology to make this effective.
316. The assessment team therefore concluded that the school provides staff with opportunities to engage in reflection and evaluation of their learning, teaching and assessment practices.
317. To test the extent to which staff within the school have appropriate academic and professional expertise, the assessment team reviewed staff CVs, including staff qualifications, research outputs and professional associations, and spoke with staff and students.
318. The assessment team found that staff have a wide range of academic and professional expertise, including members of the team with PhDs and research outputs, and many with backgrounds in dance practice, including portfolio careers as performers, choreographers or creative practitioners, and as artistic directors. Most academic staff have publications or performance credits to their names, including a number who have won awards for their work and have published in prestigious dance journals. Staff also have a range of additional professional qualifications or memberships, from mental health training to members of learned societies. Due to the specialist nature of instruction and the artistic destinations of many graduates, the school makes regular use of guest tutors with significant professional expertise and currency in the rapidly evolving professional dance industry.
319. The professional endorsement by the registered charity, Yorkshire Dance, of the school's regional significance in providing vocational dance training was also notable, as it

demonstrated to assessors the esteem in which staff within the school are held by wider members of the dance community.²¹

320. In summary, the assessment team therefore concluded that staff within the school have appropriate academic and (where applicable) professional expertise.
321. To test the extent to which staff within the school actively engage with the pedagogic development of their discipline knowledge, the assessment team reviewed module specifications, the school's various annual monitoring and self-evaluation documentation, and undertook teaching observations.
322. The assessment team found that staff within the school manifest a good knowledge of pedagogy, and that the school both enables and monitors the development of this knowledge. For example, assessors found that Module Specifications reference appropriate and diverse keywords that include: composition, creation, improvisation, interdisciplinary performance, staging and research. Each of these constitutes, in the experience of assessors, an important pedagogic component of arts education in general, and dance education in particular, thus demonstrating that academic staff have the necessary pedagogic understanding to deliver and develop these modules. Teaching observations conducted by the assessment team further evidenced informed manifestations of discipline knowledge, as delivered to students through relevant pedagogies. For example, assessors observed teaching that ranged from contemporary group improvisation to ballet work, again demonstrating good engagement with relevant pedagogies.
323. The annual conference provides a domain for staff to discuss pedagogic practice as relates to subject-specific discipline, and the Annual Course Monitoring Report, as scrutinised by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee, records the range of significant competencies in discipline-related knowledge and pedagogies across all levels of programmes. Further, the assessment team found that the staff appraisals act as a domain in which staff are encouraged and supported to engage with the pedagogic development of their discipline. For example, one recent staff appraisal shows engagement with various committees within the school, to become more actively involved in aspects of course design, and that she is currently taking a higher-level Pilates qualification in order to better support her teaching practice in that domain.
324. The assessment team therefore concluded that staff within the school actively engage with the pedagogic development of their discipline knowledge.
325. In order to test the extent to which staff within the school understand current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline and that this knowledge and understanding directly informs and enhances their teaching, and also to test the extent to which the school enables staff to engage actively with research or scholarship to a level commensurate with the level and subject of the qualifications being offered, the assessment team reviewed module and programme specifications, spoke with staff and students, and reviewed the school's research conference.

²¹ See Yorkshire Dance - Creating happiness, health, connection and change through dance.

326. Although the school is at a relatively early stage of development in its research activity, staff regularly share current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline as part of an annual conference, the most recent being on 8 January 2025 and entitled 'Igniting Creativity: Art, Education, Transformation and Change'. The event showcased the involvement, through collaborative research, practice-as-research, or scholarly or professional insights, of several of the school's academic staff, including at least two senior leaders. Topics delivered by the school's academic staff included current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline, such as culture as creative catalyst, the dialogue of music and bodies, concepts of co-authorship in contemporary dance techniques and the impact of widening participation in dance. It demonstrated that the school gave opportunities to all staff to engage with research, knowledge exchange, external stakeholders and academics from other institutions, by hosting them at the school. Moreover, assessors found that most staff are research active, with numerous examples of staff with journal publications, conference papers and performance credits and in some cases staff who have won awards for their work.²²
327. Assessors found that such examples of sharing of and engagement in current research informs and enhances teaching at the school, commensurate to the level of qualifications being offered. For example, the assessors found a range of similar topics to those discussed in the conference within modules specification documents.
328. In summary, the assessment team concluded that staff within the school have understanding of current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline and that such knowledge and understanding inform and enhance their teaching, and that the school enables staff to engage actively with research or scholarship to a level commensurate with the level and subject of the qualifications being offered.
329. To test the extent to which the school provides development opportunities aimed at enabling staff to enhance their practice and scholarship, the assessment team reviewed what opportunities the school has in place, and spoke with staff and senior management.
330. The assessment team found that the school clearly values the research and scholarship potential of its academic staff. For example, the school's Future Strategy to 2030 recognises the importance of quantifying advanced qualifications of staff. To align with development opportunities, the school commits to monitoring how many staff have:
- Level 7 qualifications
 - a teaching qualification through either Postgraduate Diploma in Arts Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PG Dip-ALTHE) or MA
 - a fellowship of AdvanceHE
 - enrolment status on a PhD Programme or seeking to undertake a PhD.

The school's objective in undertaking this monitoring is to ensure that it maintains a staff base with the necessary disciplinary and pedagogic knowledge to deliver the school's strategic objectives and, in particular, any new programmes or programme changes in the future.

²² See Staff - Northern School of Contemporary Dance.

331. The school provides support for staff to attain specialised and advanced qualifications, including a discounted or fully subsidised Postgraduate Diploma in Arts Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. A 2022 policy on the standardisation of staff qualifications presented to the Board of Governors further demonstrates the intention to develop staff; this policy's appendix also lists staff who have historically graduated from the Diploma.
332. Training investment appears to assessors to be an important part of ensuring opportunities for the development of staff in their practice and scholarship at the school, with Staff Training and Development constituting Objective 1 of the Human Resources Strategy. The human resources team maintains a log for individual staff training requests and a sample of two recent staff appraisals were well aligned to training and development opportunities. Further, the school has a research project fund for its staff.
333. Assessors spoke to staff about their perceptions regarding the opportunities to develop their practice and scholarship. For early career academics, staff working at the school reported feeling as though they were taking a developmental step and felt supported and encouraged in doing so. For academics with existing higher qualifications and existing research profiles, staff reported that there can be a barrier to further promotion or progression. As such, assessors felt that whilst the school was adept at nurturing scholarship, it is less experienced at supporting research-related career progression. In the meeting with staff, assessors observed the dual challenge of the pragmatic conditions of the teaching, learning and assessments rigours of a physically demanding job and the need for staff more generally to find the time for research.
334. The team felt that providing career progression routes for more experienced members of staff is currently an area of weakness within the school, with a risk that talented staff may move elsewhere to fulfil their career ambitions. However, assessors are familiar with this issue in smaller and newer providers, and what assessors saw at this school was not uncommon in the sector in their opinion.
335. Assessors asked the Senior Leadership Team about any longer-term plans for introducing more senior research positions within the school, such as Professorships, both to attract new staff, and to enable career progression for existing staff. The senior team responded that they were considering introducing a Reader position in the first instance, thus demonstrating to the assessment team that this was an issue that was under consideration by the school.
336. In summary, the assessment team therefore concluded that the school provides development opportunities aimed at enabling staff to enhance their practice and scholarship.
337. To test the extent to which the school provides staff with opportunities to gain experience in curriculum development and assessment design, and the extent to which staff within the school in practice have experience of curriculum development and assessment design, the assessment team reviewed the school's guides and policies around curriculum and assessment design, reviewed staff involvement in these activities, and spoke with staff and senior management.
338. The assessment team found that staff within the school are provided with plenty of opportunities to gain experience of curriculum development and assessment design. First, the school takes a comprehensive approach to curriculum design, assessment and approval, as

set out in its validating partner's policies, and has developed its own approach in the event that DAPs is successfully awarded. Taken together, assessors found these documents to be sufficient to support and develop new staff who have not worked in the areas of curriculum or assessment design previously. For example, the school has produced, in readiness for DAPs, a comprehensive curriculum design and programme writing guide, which provides staff with all the information necessary to begin working in this area.

339. Second, as a small organisation, many staff reported being involved in the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, which functions as a key forum in which to discuss curriculum and assessment design and development. As such, assessors found that many staff have the opportunity to participate in discussions without necessarily taking the lead. The annual Away Day further facilitates staff discussion around curriculum design.
340. Consequent to these opportunities, the assessment team found that many staff are in practice actively involved in curriculum and assessment design within the school. For example, multiple academic staff were involved in the 2022 Major Revision of Undergraduate Programmes as authors and reviewers, and indeed the school's own Assessment Guide is partly authored by members of its own teaching staff.
341. Experience is also evidenced clearly in the evolution of the school's voice in curriculum development when comparing the validating partner's curriculum evaluation documents, dating to 2018, and the school's own framework for proposing and re-validating courses. The Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee Actions evidence in particular the experience and growing influence of the Head of Undergraduate Studies in integrating newer elements of the design of continuous assessment and applying judgement to reduce the number of assessment criteria in each module. The school's action plan likewise evidences several ongoing processes involving the Head of Undergraduate Studies, who is engaged in designing embedded forms of student participation, self-led activities and tutorials into overarching assessments.
342. In summary, the assessment team concluded that the school provides staff with opportunities to gain experience in curriculum development and assessment design, and that staff within the school in practice have experience of curriculum development and assessment design.
343. To test the extent to which opportunities to engage with the activities of other higher education providers, for example through becoming external examiners, validation panel members or external reviewers, and to test the extent to which staff are in practice engaged with the activities of providers of higher education in other organisations, the assessment team reviewed staff development process within the school as related to external roles, and spoke with staff and senior management.
344. The assessment team found that the school has several procedures designed to encourage and support staff to undertake roles within other providers of higher education. For example, the school has a detailed guide for staff on becoming an external examiner, which sets out the benefits to staff, a recommended process for finding and securing external examiner positions, and a process for applying internally for approval as regards matters such as conflict of interest and time commitment. Assessors considered this guide to constitute an excellent example of the school providing opportunities and support in the development of its staff.

345. Conversation between staff and assessors revealed that many staff within the school are involved in external commitments, including external examination, and assessors found that the school keeps a record of these for the purpose, amongst other things, of conflict-of-interest management.
346. In summary, the assessment team concluded that opportunities to engage with the activities of other higher education providers, for example through becoming external examiners, validation panel members or external reviewers exist within the school, and that staff are in practice engaged with the activities of providers of higher education in other organisations.
347. To test the extent to which staff within the school have expertise in providing feedback on assessment that is timely, constructive and developmental, the assessment team reviewed the school's assessment guidelines, a sample of 238 instances of student assessment and feedback, and spoke with staff and students.
348. As described in paragraphs 172-176, the assessment team reviewed a sample of 238 instances of student assessment and feedback as part of its review. Assessors found assessment feedback to be constructive, developmental and timely. For example, one lecturer of a Level 4 module recorded the live assessment feedback with students. This facilitated the feedback to be timely and was additionally made available for further review and reflection afterwards via a password protected area of the VLE. The feedback clearly referred to the assessment brief, with both celebration of student achievement as well as how to address developmental areas in relation to each assessment criterion. Assessors also found that this feedback used language from the school's grade and level descriptors, as aligned with the FHEQ (see paragraphs 162-171). In this aural example, there is also a clear two-way dialogue between the assessor and each individual student, to facilitate an understanding of the relationships between marks, feedback and student work.
349. The assessment team also found that the school's Curriculum Lead for Assessment delivers staff training to consolidate and enhance staff expertise in providing fit for purpose assessment; assessors also found that there is coherent internal moderation procedure. In addition, sessions for staff around the emotional impact of feedback are offered by the Head of Undergraduate Studies, with assessment overview documentation and other resources to support assessment processes and procedures easily accessible on the VLE. The expertise of staff in providing fit for purpose feedback on assessment was further corroborated by external examiners, in conversation with the assessment team, and through their annual reports.
350. The assessment team spoke with students to understand their perspective on the timeliness and quality of feedback they receive on their work. While students gave one example of an instance in which there could have been better alignment between grade descriptors and feedback they received, students were overwhelmingly positive in their opinion on the constructiveness and supportiveness of staff feedback, and on its timeliness. This positivity is further reflected in the National Student Survey, in which there was a 5 per cent improvement in the joint category of assessment and feedback from 2021-22 to 2022-23. External examiners for the school also spoke positively about the quality of student feedback at the school, in conversation with the assessment team.

351. In summary, the assessment team concluded that staff in the school have expertise in providing feedback on assessment that is timely, constructive and developmental.
352. To test the extent to which the school has made a rigorous assessment of the skills and expertise required to teach all students and has appropriate staff to student ratios, the assessment team reviewed the school's staff to student ratios, staff CVs, and the ways in which the school keep these under review.
353. The assessment team found that the school has about 30 academic staff supporting its about 270 students (see paragraphs 20-21), which represents to assessors an appropriate staff to student ratio, in line with similar providers. As described in paragraphs 317-320, staff CVs demonstrate a wide range of experience and expertise that is, in the view of assessors, appropriate to the needs of the school.
354. As described in paragraphs 171-175, the assessment team also found that the school rigorously assesses the skills and expertise required to deliver programmes, and also regularly reviews staff to student ratios. Over the course of a standard academic cycle, this begins with detailed workload planning, which factors in staff-student ratio in tandem with contact hours. It ends with the school's Annual Programme Monitoring Review, which requires an analysis of staff capacity and skills, as mapped to the needs of the programme, to inform the next year's planning.
355. In summary, the assessment team therefore concluded that the school has made a rigorous assessment of the skills and expertise required to teach all students and that it has appropriate staff to student ratios.
356. To test the extent to which the school has appropriate recruitment practices, the assessment team reviewed the school's human resources strategy, along with staff CVs and job descriptions, undertook teaching observations, and spoke with staff and senior management.
357. The assessment team found that the school has a Human Resources Strategy, which sets out six objectives that are designed to ensure that appropriate staff are in place within the school, including the significance of diversity and inclusion, establishing the right pay and conditions, and the provision of staff training and development.
358. The strategy also establishes the objective that the school wants to give 'candidates at all levels an excellent experience during the recruitment process'. To facilitate this, the school has a detailed Human Resources Procedures Manual that (amongst other things) sets out over ten pages the recruitment and selection process. Assessors found this to be extremely thorough, and in line with industry practice, detailing the process from initial approval of a new post through to contracting new staff. The assessment team also found that the school follows this process in practice, with, for example, clearly articulated job descriptions, and staff appointed whose experience and expertise align to these descriptors.²³
359. In summary, the assessment team therefore concluded that the school has appropriate staff recruitment practices.

²³ See Staff - Northern School of Contemporary Dance.

Conclusions

360. The assessment team concluded that the school meets criterion C1.1 as the evidence shows that it has appropriate numbers of staff to teach its students and that 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 qualification being awarded.

361. Therefore, the team concluded that the provider meets criterion C1.

Assessment of DAPs criterion D: Environment for supporting students

Criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement

Advice to the OfS

362. The assessment team's view is that the school meets criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement, because it meets subcriterion D1.1.
363. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence that shows in summary that the school has in place, monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.
364. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

Criterion 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.

Advice to the OfS

365. The assessment team's view is that the school meets criterion D1.1 because the school has in place, monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.
366. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows that the school meets the evidence requirements for D1.1.

Reasoning

367. In order to test the extent to which the organisation 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 assessment team considered the school's 2023-2030 strategy, the work of its Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee, and the various ways in which student development and achievement are determined and evaluated by the school.
368. With an overarching vision of being a 'world-leading centre for dance education and creative development' and a strategic plan that has the 'development of talent' as a core objective, assessors found that student development and achievement are at the forefront of the school's strategy.²⁴
369. These objectives are further unpacked in the school's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, where the school determines its strategic approach to enabling student

²⁴ See [Vision & Mission - Northern School of Contemporary Dance](#); and HSCD, [Strategic Plan 2023-30](#).

development and achievement. Activities and actions include 'continual review and development of what we teach, why we teach it, how we teach it, who teaches it, and who we're teaching for, in order that our students receive the best learning experiences possible, underpinned by robust support processes'.

370. Assessors found that these objectives are operationalised and evaluated in an ongoing manner by the school, in particular by and through its Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee (LTQAC). Examples include termly monitoring of student development, achievement and progress by the Student Review Board, outputs of which are reviewed and discussed at the LTQAC, and a further standing item in the LTQAC in which the committee receives and discusses a paper on marking and feedback. The comprehensiveness of LTQAC's oversight of student development and achievement is further evidenced through its receipt and review of a Student Assessment and Feedback Survey, and its comprehensive mapping of all student-facing policies.
371. Student development and achievement is further monitored and evaluated on a cyclical basis through the school's annual programme monitoring, which includes a comprehensive overview of student achievement through academic excellence, enrichment participation, career destinations, external links, and industry partnerships, and through the school's Board of Examiners, as reported in its record of Student Achievement. Actions arising from these reports are taken up by the LTQAC in the school's Action Plan.
372. As will be described in paragraphs 405-412, the school has an extremely thorough and robust approach to equity, ensuring that development and achievement is personalised to the individual needs and preferences of its diverse student body. The school's Student Dashboard acts as a data repository for staff on the demographics and characteristics of its diverse student body – this includes reporting on gender, ethnicity, nationality, reported disability, Participation of Local Areas (POLAR4) and Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) evidenced the increasingly diverse student body that is attested to, in broad terms, in the DAPs self-assessment document. This data is summarised in the school's Annual EEDI report.
373. This data is used strategically and operationally throughout the school, for example in the school's approach to access and participation, and in the care and attention paid to individual student circumstances as part of the Student Review Board.
374. In summary, the assessment team therefore concluded that the organisation takes a comprehensive strategic and operational approach to determine and evaluate how it enables student development and achievement for its diverse body of students.
375. To test 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 assessment team reviewed the school's induction programme, its student-facing programme information, the school's Student Handbook, and the school's evaluation of its induction, and also spoke with students.
376. Assessors found that the school has a comprehensive induction programme, which contains a large variety of activities and content, some of which is cross-programme, and some catering to specific programme pathways. Induction contains school-wide activity and

programme-specific content, thus ensuring student choices are supported in the context of core information of use to all students. Targeted sessions for students with specific needs are also offered, including:

- International Student Orientation Week
- sessions on financial support
- overview of access arrangements to mental, emotional and physical wellbeing support and to study skills support.

377. An important aspect of induction is guidance offered around student health and safety. Due to the specialist nature of the provision, this includes providing students with the opportunity to disclose pre-existing physical injuries to a member of student support services at the commencement of their studies. The levels of disclosure are reported as good, with one-third of students disclosing a support need early. The fact that the school offers on-site physiotherapy, and keeps and analyses a detailed injury log, shows to assessors that there is a rigorous attitude to surveillance of injury, with duty of care established at the point of induction.

378. Further to induction, there are interconnected policies and practices that provide specialist and specific advice for different student choices and needs. Assessors found that the school's Student Handbook serves as the single source of truth on key operations and policies, and appears to be an enduring resource for students; it is also available online. Programme and Module Specifications provide students with detailed information about the content of their study programmes, and students are also advised about the wide range of additional provision available at the school, including, for example, bodywork, gym and yoga.

379. To determine the effectiveness of induction and student-facing information used throughout the course, the assessment team found that the school has a transparent and self-critical approach to surveying both students and staff on the effectiveness and inclusivity of these activities and materials. An extensive report on the results of this survey, produced for the school's Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee, shows in the view of assessors, rigour and commitment in response to students' needs at a crucial point in any student journey. The chief recommendation of the most recent report was that 'new students [were] to receive information about Induction further in advance' and that the school was to 'consider a "flipped" approach, whereby students receive most/all information ahead of Induction so the week itself is more about reinforcement. This approach may help to reduce information overload/fatigue'.

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

381. To test the extent to which the school monitors the effectiveness of its student and staff advisory, support and counselling services, and that any resource needs arising are considered, the assessment team considered the range of support made available by the school, and the various mechanisms in place to monitor these.

382. The school's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy establishes four pillars of student support: physical support, learner support, English Language support, and well-being support. As such, the school has a wide and integrated array of student advisory, support and counselling services, including a dedicated physiotherapy service, mental health care, and study skills support. The school's students' union also undertakes work to support and advise students, in particular through its wellbeing and student experience reps. Assessors also found that the school has an open-door policy for students to approach staff, be it academic or support staff.
383. Assessors found that the school's advice, support and counselling services are well regarded by students, as reported in their NSS return and through conversation with the assessment team. A notable example given by students involved the school sourcing a counsellor of particular cultural heritage in order to support specific students most appropriately.
384. The school also provides advisory, support and counselling services for its staff. These are set out in the Staff Handbook and related Staff Policies and Procedures, and include access for staff to counselling services. As set out in its Mental Health Charter, the school 'ensures staff feel able to discuss their own mental health and wellbeing and have access to effective, accessible support and proactive interventions to help them improve their own mental health and wellbeing'.
385. The school has in place a number of mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of its advisory, support and counselling services, including opportunities to articulate new resource needs. In particular, this takes place through the school's quarterly Student Support Report, which is received and discussed by the school's Senate (its senior academic authority). Reports included detailed statistics on demand and uptake, as well as commentary and evaluation of the effectiveness of initiatives. Data from these reports is taken forwards into the Annual Course Monitoring Report, which requires an analysis and evaluation of support and wellbeing services. Examples of both the Student Support Report and the Annual Course Monitoring Report reviewed by assessors contain instances of resource needs being articulated, such as the need for additional physiotherapy staff following the departure of an existing member of the team. Assessors were also informed that at busier times of the year, the Vice-Principal and Director of Studies set up an additional service for students, to monitor demand and the types of support needed. These types of activities confirmed to assessors the high levels of accountability the school shows with regards to monitoring the effectiveness of the support they provide and anticipating resource need.
386. In summary, the assessment team concluded that the school monitors the effectiveness of its student and staff advisory, support and counselling services, and that any resource needs arising are considered.
387. To test 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 assessment team reviewed the school's administrative systems, data reports and system evaluation reports.
388. Outside of Microsoft Teams and Moodle, which are used primarily for student-facing interaction, assessors found that Microsoft Excel is used by the school for the majority of its

academic and non-academic management information. While in the experience of assessors this is fairly typical within the sector, particularly as regards non-academic management information such as recruitment reports, unusually in the experience of assessors, the school also uses Excel in lieu of a dedicated and specialised student records system. When questioned by assessors about this decision, senior management explained that they had looked into dedicated software but concluded that their use of Excel was already optimised for their needs. Assessors sought to gain additional assurance around issues such as data security, access and version control given the use of Excel for student records, and the school provided a detailed analysis of its security processes. Assessors were satisfied with the processes and procedures that the school follows to secure and control its student records data, which includes limited access, cloud-based backups and careful version control. While, in the experience of assessors, better software solutions exist in the marketplace (as regards, for example, automation), the team was satisfied that the school's approach is sufficient. The assessment team is of the opinion that a more scalable solution may be needed if the school grows its partnership provision as intended, though the senior team reports that alternatives have already been considered.

389. The school produces accurate and timely reporting from its various administrative systems including Excel, thus enabling staff to monitor student progression and performance within various school committees. For instance, the school's Senate tracks financial performance, student admissions, student transfers and student retention, and receives reports from Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee, which tracks individual student progress and performance data. Results, progression and awards data is overseen by the school's Board of Examiners.
390. By way of evaluating the appropriateness and effectiveness of its administrative systems, assessors found that the school produces a regular systems report, which is reviewed by the school's Senate. Amongst other things, this report analyses the suitability of systems to meet current needs; the report's evaluation by Senate (the school's senior academic authority) provides the opportunity for senior academic leaders to input into any needs-based discussion around the digital estate.
391. In summary, the assessment team therefore 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.
392. To test the extent to which the organisation provides opportunities for all students to develop skills that enable their academic, personal and professional progression, for example academic, employment and future career management skills, the assessment team considered the school's induction programme, the range of skills development resources and activities it provides over the academic year, and the range of student-led initiatives related to skills development.
393. As regards skills to enable students' academic progression, the school provides a wide range of support, from induction to graduation. At induction, students are introduced to study skills, research skills, and the various specialist and generalist materials held by the physical and digital libraries and are supported throughout their course in these areas by a dedicated librarian, who is also a member of the Learning Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee.

As a specialist in dance education, the school's programmes contain a large amount of practical work. In reflection of this, the school provides an equivalent programme of support with respect to dance practice. Again, this begins at induction, with introductions to skills such as injury prevention, improvisation, and devising new practical work. Throughout the year, the school continues to provide students with skills development classes and support sessions in areas such as bodywork, Pilates and fitness. Further, assessors found that the school is in the process of formalising what is expected of students in directed learning and independent study, demonstrating to the assessment team another opportunity for academic skills development.

394. Regarding personal progression, assessors found that students are empowered to develop their own programmes through the students' union. Students are mentored in advocacy and structures of accountability, as seen in the Students' Union Action plan, the Student Rep Goals 2024-25, and the school's Students' Union Council Pack 2023-4. Students are also supported through their programmes to expand their transferrable skills through activities such as group projects, off-site placements, co-devising, and professional development projects.
395. With respect to professional progression, assessors found that programmes contained a wide range of industry-relevant professional training, from marketing and funding generation to the production of showreels. Employability and support resource packs are co-produced with the students' union, and include career management topics such as: Employability Skills; About to Graduate... Now what?; Events Marketing; Budgeting for Events; Events Producing Workshop; and Projects Proposal. Further, the school has a Careers Programme, which is a generic resource of career information and employability structures in place at the school. Assessors noted the school's proud telling of its student success stories, building confidence in current students around career prospects.
396. In summary, the assessment team therefore concluded that school provides opportunities for all students to develop skills that enable their academic, personal and professional progression, for example, academic, employment and future career management skills.
397. To test the extent to which the organisation 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 assessment team toured and reviewed the school's physical and digital estates, reviewed support materials provided to students, and spoke with staff, students and senior management.
398. In general, as described in paragraphs 222-232, assessors found that the school maintains a safe and appropriate physical estate, with specialist dance spaces and equipment. Studio spaces were appropriate and when viewed by assessors with students in them, with good physical distance between students to allow movement and good ventilation. Likewise, assessors found that the school maintains an appropriate and accessible digital estate formed in particular of a student-facing VLE and online resources to supplement the physical library.
399. However, while assessors found that the school's physical estate had undergone suitable risk assessment, externally-facilitated health and safety monitoring, and fire risk assessment,

assessors found that signage within student spaces did not contain adequate instructions for how to act in the event of a student injury – a situation of some likelihood given the physical nature of dance education. In particular, assessors found that there were two different versions of injury emergency instructions, one of which was several years out of date, as it contained the named contact details of a member of staff who had left the school. Assessors also found signage that was at times overly verbose (rather than focusing on key emergency details), and at other times illegible due to wear, tear and age.

400. In discussion with assessors, senior management acknowledged the error, though described how students knew the emergency injury procedure nonetheless through induction (the procedure being to contact the front desk, who would put out a call to first aiders), so signs were only one element of the overall health and safety procedures. While assessors accept this argument to some extent, they were unconvinced overall as new students, guest tutors, visitors, open day attendees and audience members would not have access to this information. Further, assessors noted that there was no mitigation for the risk that lone-working staff or students may injure themselves when alone in a dance studio, outside of security conducting regular walks around the building.
401. Assessors therefore concluded that the absence of clear and up-to-date signage regarding injury emergencies, and the lack of mitigations to the risk of lone-working, constituted weaknesses in the operationalisation of the school's approach to health and safety. However, overall, assessors were satisfied that there is a strong culture of healthy and safe working within the school, and that these oversights are easily fixed.
402. As regards the school's digital and virtual environments, assessors found that the school provides students with opportunities to safely and effectively develop their skills online. The school maintains technologies capable of delivering fully remote learning, though in practice the majority of delivery at present requires in-person attendance, given the practical and physical nature of dance education. However, the presence of a developed digital environment means that the school is ready to deliver more online education in the future, should it wish to do so.
403. As regards the school providing students with opportunities to develop the necessary skills to make full use of the schools learning resources, including its physical and digital estates, assessors found that the school has a comprehensive student induction programme, as described in paragraphs 375-380, which includes introductions to the schools learning resources and estates, and dedicated sessions on Library Skills and Research Skills. Further, upon visiting the Library and its Study Space, assessors found that there was an impressive range of relevant, inclusive and most recent subject area resources, alongside support materials and study guides aimed at enabling students to make best use of these. The library includes a media archive of digital materials, and students could access additional help in digital learning and working with online resources, with there being at least 12 computers and one photocopier that students could access on-site.
404. In summary, the assessment 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, though with the weaknesses that signage regarding injury emergencies needs

to be better maintained, and that mitigations are needed concerning the risks associated with injury during solo work.

405. To test the extent to which the organisation's approach is guided by a commitment to equity, the assessment team reviewed the school's strategy, the terms of reference and minutes of its Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion committee, considered the various ways in which equity informs the school's approach, and spoke with staff, students and senior management.
406. Assessors found that the school has an excellent approach to Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EEDI). This excellence, in the view of the assessment team, comes from the fact that EEDI is a core part of the identity of the organisation, and is clearly embedded within, and crucial to, everything that the school does.
407. This embedding of EEDI begins with the school's mission statement 'To provide an inspirational learning experience, from first contact through into the profession, enabling aspiring dance artists, and dance professionals, regardless of background, to shape the future of dance', and leads to a strategy whose first objective is 'equity'. This in turn leads to the school's public statement on EEDI, which includes a series of commitments designed to ensure that EEDI 'is a core part of who we are and what we do'.²⁵
408. Reflecting this ambition, the school has an EEDI committee, chaired by the CEO, and reporting directly to the Board of Governors, with the remit of 'making recommendations with regard to the strategic direction, priorities and objectives for EEDI at the School; to support school-wide engagement with EEDI; and to help enable the development and delivery of EEDI initiatives, work and action plans'. In the view of the assessment team, the very fact that this committee disaggregates 'Equality' and 'Equity' shows the sophistication with which the concepts of EEDI are understood and applied within the school.
409. Initiatives undertaken by the school to ensure the centrality of EEDI include (but are in no way limited to):
- actions initiated and monitored by the EEDI Committee, such as regularly reviewing the diversity and inclusivity of reading lists
 - the provision of training in micro-aggressions
 - student-led EEDI policy generation.

Alongside these larger initiatives, assessors found numerous subtle and thoughtful smaller interventions, such as the updating of its audition process during admission, by increasing accessibility through the removal of solo work; and the nuanced way in which the health and safety ramifications of jewellery wearing as a dance student needs to be offset against the significance of jewellery to some students' identities and self-expression.

410. In order to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives, the school produces a wide range of reports and analysis on EEDI-related topics, including admissions reports that monitor protected characteristics and cultural identities of applicants and enrolled students ; toolkit mapping of programmes, which contains multiple questions on EEDI; and the

²⁵ See Equality, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion - Northern School of Contemporary Dance.

production of an evaluative and detailed EEDI Annual Report, which is reviewed by the Board of Governors.

411. In conversation with assessors, students corroborated the excellent practice at the school as regards EEDI. In particular, students spoke extremely highly of the extent to which all staff within the school support the diverse range of identities, backgrounds, interests, abilities, and ambitions manifest in the school's student body, along with noting the open, inclusive and supportive nature and identity of the school overall.
412. In summary, the assessment team therefore concluded that the organisation's approach is guided by a commitment to equity.

Conclusions

413. The assessment team concluded that the school meets criterion D1.1 because the evidence shows that it has in place, monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.
414. 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

415. The assessment team's view is that the school meets the requirements for criterion E1: Evaluation of performance.
416. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the evidence, which shows in summary that, with a few isolated weaknesses, 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.
417. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence for this criterion alongside other relevant information.

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

418. To test the extent to which ideas and expertise from within and outside the school (for example on programme design and development, on teaching, and on student learning and assessment) are drawn into its arrangements for programme design, approval, delivery and review, the assessment team reviewed the various data sources used by the school to evaluate performance.
419. The assessment team found that a wide range of internally-generated data sets are collected and analysed by the school. These include multiple methods of collecting student feedback (see also paragraphs 104-109, the Annual Staff Experience Survey, Student Dashboard, Admissions Report and a Student Survey Results and Analysis document).
420. These internal data sets are supplemented by the school seeking input from a range of external sources. These include input from external examiners, from industry experts (and students), and indeed from the local community, as part of consultations on new course proposals.
421. These data sources form the basis of regular reports to the school's Senate (the senior academic authority), and regular reports to the school's Board of Governors, particularly through the vehicle of the Vice-Principal's Report. They also constitute the basis of substantial and thorough self-critical evaluations undertaken by the school, such as its Annual Course/Programme Monitoring Reviews.

422. The assessment team also found that the school regularly analyses the sector, and benchmarks itself in various ways. Examples include the Vice-Principal's regular report to the Board of Governors, which includes latest analysis of the higher education sector and the school's performance in that context, and an annual analysis of National Student Survey results, benchmarked against the school's closest competitors.
423. In summary, the assessment team therefore concluded that ideas and expertise from within and outside the organisation are drawn into its arrangements for programme design, approval delivery and review.
424. 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 assessment team reviewed the various mechanisms through which the school reviews its data sources and overall performance, and spoke with senior staff.
425. The assessment team found that the school has in place various clearly defined mechanisms for assigning and discharging action. Examples include the school's Committee Order of Business, which sets out the annual plan for the school's major committees for what issues are considered at which point within an academic cycle. The school also has a very thorough approach to Annual Course Monitoring, which is controlled by a clearly-articulated process to ensure that a range of data sources are included in the report.
426. As discussed in paragraphs 62-83, one area of weakness within the school identified by assessors is a problem with quality control as relates to academic governance documents, leading to a large number of errors within documents related to governance. That several recent governance effectiveness reviews have taken place (for example, the Senate Effectiveness Review 2023) that did not pick up on various errors within the committee's terms of reference suggests that some quality control mechanisms, including the governance effectiveness review, are not working as intended.
427. However, as discussed in paragraphs 82-83, assessors found that these issues were confined to the area of governance documentation, and did not result in ineffective governance more generally. Likewise, assessors concluded that, in general, good mechanisms for self-critical evaluation exist within the school, and that weaknesses around governance oversight are an exception, not a norm.
428. In summary, the assessment team concluded that the school largely does have clear mechanisms for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny and monitoring of its academic provision, but with the weakness that some aspects of quality control of documentation, including the governance effectiveness reviews, are not working as intended.
429. 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 assessment team reviewed recent examples of action taken in response to identified weaknesses, as well as the effectiveness of these identification and resolution processes.
430. The assessment team found that there is a strong culture of self-critical reflection in the school, as evidenced in particular through the tenor of conversation and debate within senior committees such as the Senate and Board of Governors. Examples include a robust

discussion on a new Staff-Student Relationship Policy, which the assessment team observed during the July 2024 meeting of the school's Senate.

431. The assessment team had direct experience of this culture of self-critical reflection during its conversation with senior management on our concerns as related to governance (see paragraphs 62-83). When asked to speak to causes within the organisation that may have given rise to these issues, the senior team gave thoughtful and transparent responses, noting honestly weaknesses within the organisation, but also pushed back to assessors where they felt they disagreed.
432. The assessment team found numerous examples of the school taking action in response to internal and external monitoring and feedback, including feedback from external examiners, from the school's validating partner and from industry.
433. A significant example of action in response to monitoring, which included input from staff, students and external examiners, was a recent major reworking of the course structure. This change resulted from an analysis of physical estate usage, leading to several structural changes to enable more efficient use of the school's relatively limited space. External examiners report that these changes have proven extremely successful.
434. One area of weakness identified by the assessment team concerns the school's approach to risk management. The school has a clear risk management policy, which outlines how risk is monitored, reported and reviewed, including clearly defined roles and responsibilities. However, upon reviewing the detailed risk register, assessors had some concerns about how some of the risks are described, and indeed some risks that might be missing. Examples of what the assessment team considers to be unhelpful descriptions of risk include risk 9 'Failure to attract and retain the most talented students'. Assessors consider this to be unclear due to the fact that it conflates three dimensions: recruitment, retention, and standards (i.e. talent).
435. Upon discussion of this risk with senior management, assessors were presented with a new version of the risk register, which had already updated this wording, demonstrating good self-criticality. However, other issues that the assessors had with the risk register had not been changed. For example, as a dance specialist, the provider does much to support students as regards physical injury – as described in paragraph 377, the school has a strong injury prevention and support programme. However, despite staff reporting that up to 25 per cent of students are accessing physiotherapy at any one time, largely to manage underlying conditions though also to rehabilitate injuries, 'risk of student injury' and/or 'underlying physical conditions increase risk of student injury', do not appear on the risk register.
436. When asked about this, senior management reported that it was not on the risk register because serious physical injury has not previously been a problem within the organisation. Assessors agree that the school has good injury prevention mitigations in place, but were concerned with this response, as it shows a lack of understanding between a problem and a risk more generally.
437. However, overall, the assessment team found this weakness to be relatively minor, firstly because the school's approach to injury prevention generally is strong and shows a good

understanding of mitigation (see paragraph 377), and secondly because, overall and otherwise, the school's approach to self-critical assessment is excellent.

438. In summary, the assessment team concluded that, excepting a weakness with respect to risk management, 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

439. The assessment team concluded that, excepting weaknesses as relate to risk management and the quality control of governance documentation, 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.

440. 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

441. The assessment team's view is that the school meets the overarching criterion for Full DAPs, limited to the subject areas identified in paragraph 19, because it meets all the underpinning criteria.
442. 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 clear commitment to the assurance of standards, supported by effective and robust quality systems.
443. This view is based on consideration of the evidence requirements for the DAPs criteria alongside any other relevant information.

Reasoning

444. The assessment team found that self-criticality is demonstrated through:
- the school's robust approach to collecting and responding to feedback from staff, students, industry and external examiners
 - the school's thorough approach to module and programme monitoring and evaluation
 - the quality of scrutiny and debate taking place within the school's committees.
445. The assessment team found the school to be a highly cohesive academic community, in part facilitated by its small size, and in part because of the extensive efforts undertaken by senior management and staff to foster a spirit of enquiry, creativity and mutual support within the school.
446. The assessment team found that the school has a proven commitment to the assurance of standards, as demonstrated through:
- its robust approach to curriculum development
 - its design and delivery of learning and teaching that aligns with the FHEQ
 - its consistently high quality approach to teaching and assessment
 - its student support systems.

447. The assessment team considers the effectiveness of the school's quality systems is apparent in the alignment of standards with the FHEQ, the high quality of student work being produced, and the esteem in which students hold the school and its staff.

Conclusions

448. The assessment 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
CAH	Common Academic Hierarchy
CDD	Conservatoire for Dance and Drama
CertHE	Certificate of Higher Education
CPD	continuous professional development
DAPs	degree awarding powers
EAL	English as an additional language
EEDI	Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
FHEQ	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
HERA	Higher Education and Research Act 2017
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
KPIs	key performance indicators
LTQAC	Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee
MOA	Memorandum of Association
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NSCD	Northern School of Contemporary Dance
OfS	Office for Students
OIA	Office of the Independent Adjudicator
PAsC	Programme approval sub-committee
PG Dip-ALTHE	Postgraduate Diploma in Arts Learning and Teaching in Higher Education
POLAR	Participation of Local Areas [geographical area-based measure of young people's participation in higher education]
PDR	performance and development review
QAC	[OfS] Quality Assessment Committee
RPEL	Recognition of Prior or Experiential Learning
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SCONUL	Society of College, National and University Libraries
VLE	virtual learning environment



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