Degree awarding powers assessment report for The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts

New degree awarding powers assessment

Contents

Executive summary

Type of assessment:	Quality and standards assessment for new degree awarding powers
For:	The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts

1. This report represents the conclusions of an assessment for New degree awarding powers (New DAPs) at The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts ('the institute').

2. The institute is seeking authorisation for New DAPs for taught awards up to and including Level 7 in the following Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) codes:

   - CAH10 – engineering and technology

   - CAH17 – business and management

   - CAH25 – design, and creative and performing arts.

3. 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 a two-day visit at the institute's campus. This report contains the advice and judgement of the team following its assessment.

4. The team concluded that the institute is ready to operate with New DAPs (see Table 1). The team also concluded that specified changes are required to the institute's New DAPs plan, to ensure this will provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment (see Table 2). This report does not, however, represent any decision of the OfS to authorise these powers.

Table 1: Summary of advice against the DAPs criteria

Criteria	The provider has a credible New DAPs plan	The provider has demonstrated a full understanding of the DAPs criteria
Criterion A1: Academic governance	Met	Met
Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks	Met	Met
Criterion B2: Academic standards	Met	Met
Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience	Met	Met
Criterion C1: Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff	Met	Met

Criteria	The provider has a credible New DAPs plan	The provider has demonstrated a full understanding of the DAPs criteria
Criterion D1: Environment for supporting students	Met	Met
Criterion E1: Evaluation of performance	Met	Met
The standards set for the proposed courses are at an appropriate level		
Met		
Overarching New DAPs criterion		
The institute is an emerging self-critical, cohesive academic community with a clear commitment to the assurance of standards supported by effective (in prospect) quality systems.	Met	

Table 2: Summary of specified changes to the New DAPs plan

Criteria	Specified changes
Criterion A1: Academic governance	Include in the New DAPs plan any relevant actions relating to the institute amending its Articles of Association to formally embed the student voice into governance at Council level.
Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks	N/A
Criterion B2: Academic standards	N/A
Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience	N/A
Criterion C1: Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff	N/A
Criterion D1: Environment for supporting students	N/A
Criterion E1: Evaluation of performance	N/A

What are new degree awarding powers?

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).[1]

A provider that has been delivering higher education for less than three years does not have a sufficient track record to apply for a full degree awarding powers (Full DAPs) authorisation. It can instead apply for a new degree awarding powers (New DAPs) authorisation.[2]

New DAPs authorisations are granted on a probationary time-limited basis. A provider that has held New DAPs for a period of four years will normally be eligible to seek time-limited Full DAPs at the end of the probationary period.

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

- foundation degrees only

- awards up to, and including, bachelors' degrees

- all taught awards.

Providers may apply for these authorisations on a subject-specific basis or covering all subjects.

Assessment and decision-making process

Before deciding whether to authorise a provider with New DAPs, the OfS will undertake a New DAPs test. The purpose of a New DAPs test is to gather evidence to inform a judgement on the extent to which a provider:

- has a credible New DAPs plan which demonstrates how it will be able to meet the DAPs criteria, including the overarching criterion for New DAPs, by the end of the probationary period

- demonstrates a full understanding of the DAPs criteria

- has or will set academic standards for the proposed courses at an appropriate level / has arrangements that can take effect from the date of the New DAPs authorisation, to make awards at the level for which it has applied.

The full requirements of the criteria are detailed in Annex C of the OfS regulatory framework.[3]

A provider that is granted New DAPs will be required to implement its agreed New DAPs plan and to engage in monitoring and scrutiny activities during the probationary period.

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[1] See Higher Education and Research Act 2017, section 42.

[2] For a summary of different types of degree awarding powers, see Degree awarding powers - Office for Students.

[3] See the OfS's regulatory framework at Annex C – Guidance on the criteria for the authorisation for DAPs - Office for Students.

OfS officers first undertake an eligibility and suitability assessment of the provider. This initial assessment determines whether the provider is eligible and suitable for the New DAPs test, including the scope of the assessment.

Assessments for degree awarding powers are conducted by teams which include academic experts that the OfS has appointed. 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 New DAPs 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 authorising New DAPs in Regulatory advice 12.[6]

5. The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts is a specialist creative and performing arts institution established in 1995. The institute operates from its campus in central Liverpool and offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses in acting, dance, filmmaking, management, music, sound technology, and theatre and costume design and production. The wider LIPA Learning Group also includes a multi-academy trust and sixth form.

6. On 19 December 2023, the institute submitted an application for New DAPs for awards up to and including Level 7.

7. In accordance with the OfS's regulatory framework and guidance on how to apply for DAPs, the institute is eligible to be considered for New DAPs for taught awards (up to and including Level 7) because it meets the eligibility criteria set out in paragraph 221 of the OfS's regulatory framework.

8. The OfS appointed an assessment team on 10 December 2024, which consisted of three academic expert assessors and a member of OfS staff.

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[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.

9. The team was asked to give its advice and judgements about whether:

- the institute has a credible New DAPs plan

- the institute has demonstrated a full understanding of the DAPs criteria

- the standards set for the proposed courses are at an appropriate level.

10. This report does not represent any decision of the OfS about whether the New DAPs authorisation the institute is seeking should be granted.

11. This report will be considered by the QAC at its meeting of 16 July 2025. The QAC will formulate its advice to the OfS regarding quality and standards at the institute, having considered this report.

12. The OfS will consider the assessment report and the QAC's advice in deciding whether to grant the institute's New DAPs authorisation on the basis requested. The OfS will also consider its own risk assessment for the institute and have regard to the advice received from others where this has been sought, as well as other relevant considerations such as the OfS's general duties under section 2 of HERA.

Introduction and background

13. This report represents the conclusions of an assessment for new degree awarding powers (New DAPs) at The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts ('the institute').

14. The institute is seeking authorisation for New DAPs for taught awards up to and including Level 7 in the following CAH codes:

    • CAH10 – engineering and technology

    • CAH17 – business and management

    • CAH25 – design, and creative and performing arts.

15. The OfS's QAC will consider the report and formulate its advice to the OfS regarding the quality and standards at the institute.

16. The OfS will consider this assessment report and the QAC's advice in deciding whether to grant the institute's New DAPs authorisation on the basis requested. The OfS will also consider its own risk assessment of the institute 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

17. The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts is a specialist creative and performing arts institution established in 1995. The institute operates from its campus in central Liverpool and offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses in acting, dance, filmmaking, management, music, sound technology, and theatre and costume design and production. The wider LIPA Learning Group also includes a multi-academy trust and sixth form.

18. Since 1996, the institute has delivered undergraduate and postgraduate courses awarded by Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) through a validation agreement.

19. Based on the latest available OfS 'Size and shape of provision' data dashboard, the institute had a student population in 2022-23 of around 970 students across all its higher education provision, with the majority of these (around 930) on first degree programmes.[7]

20. Data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency shows the institute employed 95 academic staff in academic year 2023-24, 35 were full-time and 60 were part-time.[8]

21. In accordance with the OfS's regulatory framework and operational guidance on how to apply for DAPs, the OfS undertook an initial eligibility and suitability assessment of the institute and

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

[8] See Who's working in HE? | HESA.

decided that a New DAPs test, including a visit, should be undertaken. The purpose of the New DAPs test is to gather evidence to inform a judgement on the extent to which a provider:

- has a credible New DAPs plan which demonstrates how it will be able to meet the DAPs criteria, including the overarching criterion for New DAPs, by the end of the probationary period

- demonstrates a full understanding of the DAPs criteria

- has or will set academic standards for the proposed courses at an appropriate level / has arrangements that can take effect from the date of the New DAPs authorisation, to make awards at the level for which it has applied.

22. The OfS appointed an assessment team on 10 December 2024, which consisted of three academic expert assessors and a member of OfS staff in the following roles:

- Professor Timothy Blinko – committee chair and lead assessor

- Dr Rachael Newberry – deputy committee chair and assessor

- Tom Sowden – deputy committee chair and assessor

- Lee Shotton – committee member and assessment manager.

23. The OfS asked the team to give its advice about the quality of and standards applied to higher education courses at the institute and whether the institute has a credible New DAPs plan and has demonstrated a full understanding of the DAPs criteria.

24. The assessment team considered a range of information submitted by the institute in support of its application for New DAPs.

Assessment process

Information gathering

26. In accordance with the operational guidance on assessment for degree awarding powers, the institute submitted a detailed New DAPs plan and self-assessment document on 21 November 2024, setting out how it will meet the DAPs criteria in full before the end of the probationary period. The self-assessment also set out its arrangements to make taught awards up to and including Level 7 from the intended start date of the probationary period.

27. To support the statements made in the New DAPs plan and self-assessment document, the institute submitted a range of documentary evidence. This included programme documentation and information relating to academic policies, processes and governance structures. The team was also granted access to the institute's virtual learning environment (VLE).

28. Following the assessment team's initial analysis of the institute's New DAPs plan and evidence submission, the assessment team requested further information from the institute. The institute submitted a response to this request on 5 February 2025.

29. Following a review of the additional information submitted by the institute, the assessment team undertook a desk-based assessment of all the available evidence and made a further request for additional evidence. The institute submitted a response to this request on 19 February 2025.

30. The team undertook a two-day visit to the institute between 26 and 27 February 2025. During the visit, the team met with a range of the institute's staff and students and toured the institute's campus and specialist facilities.

31. The assessment team requested further information following its visit and this was submitted by the institute on 29 April 2025.

Assessment of DAPs criterion A: Academic governance

Criterion A1: Academic governance

Advice to the OfS

32. The assessment team's view is that the institute's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion A1: Academic governance.

33. The assessment team's view is that the institute has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion A1 because, in summary, its review of evidence shows that the institute already has sound academic governance and management structures. These structures deliver effective academic governance with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities. These findings are reinforced by the institute's New DAPs plan, which demonstrates effective planning, with effective new policies and frameworks in readiness for awarding its own degrees.

34. However, the assessment team recommends that consistent and effective student representation be enabled at Council meetings so that the student voice demonstrably impacts academic governance at the highest tier of governance with evidenced outcomes. To reflect the intentions of senior management to consider redrafting its Articles of Association to embed the student voice into its governance at Council level, the assessment team has identified this as a specified change to the New DAPs plan (see paragraphs 96 and 119 to 120). More generally, the team recommends that changes to student voice and the impact of this area on governance at the institute should be monitored during the institute's probationary monitoring (see paragraph 102).

35. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the institute's New DAPs plan and supporting evidence, alongside any other relevant information. This shows that the institute can be reasonably expected to meet criterion A1 in full by the end of the probationary period.

Sub-criterion 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

36. The assessment team's view is that the institute's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to sub-criterion A1.1.

37. The assessment team's view is that the institute has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion A1.1 because the institute's values, vision, purpose and strategic themes are clearly published, understood and applied and they are effectively supported by its academic policies. The assessment team noted the clarity and differentiation of function and responsibility at all levels in the institute in relation to its academic governance and management of higher education provision. The assessment team also noted the significant

effectiveness of the senior academic authority and the depth and strength of academic leadership, which demonstrated how the institute has effective academic governance with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities.

38. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the institute's New DAPs plan and supporting evidence, alongside any other relevant information. This shows that the institute can be reasonably expected to meet sub-criterion A1.1 in full by the end of the probationary period.

Background

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

40. The institute's Strategic Plan for 2023-2026 sets out its overall higher education vision to be a world-leading centre of excellence for creative learning and vocational training, as well as its purpose and values. The main strategic themes are excellence, equity, environment, empowerment, employability and entrepreneurship.

41. Alongside the strategic plan sits the current LJMU undergraduate and postgraduate Academic Framework Regulations and related documents that detail the academic principles regarding the award of qualifications, academic credit and other matters related to LJMU. LJMU currently awards the institute's courses through a validation agreement. The institute's own planned academic regulations have been developed by its Academic Regulations Working Group to replace and build upon these documents. The LJMU Learning and Teaching Strategy 2023 to 2030 will be replaced by the institute's own Education (Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Feedback) Strategy (ELTAFS). The team found the ELTAFS aligns closely with the LIPA Strategic Plan with a clear purpose and six strategic goals together with shared values and themes. In summary, the institute's learning ethos is to emphasise the intensive nature of its learning environment with a commitment to the principle of professional practice.

42. The LIPA Council is the institute's most senior decision-making committee, with responsibility for setting the strategy of the organisation, policy issues and monitoring management performance as outlined in the institute's Articles of Association. Council meets a minimum of three times a year, and the institute has recently reviewed its composition and recruited new members, including those with expertise in higher education, quality assurance, and strategic leadership. This is to ensure the Council has the skills and experience to support and challenge the executive team while overseeing the institute's degree awarding responsibilities.

43. The institute is led by the Principal, who is also the institute's chief executive officer (CEO). The Principal and CEO is responsible for the overall leadership and strategic direction of the institution, ensuring its mission and vision are achieved while fostering an environment that promotes excellence in performing arts education. The Principal and CEO oversees academic programmes, financial management, and the development of partnerships to support students and staff, while ensuring the institute's reputation and growth within the higher education sector and creative industries. The Principal and CEO also oversees the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) which sits alongside the senior academic authority of the

institute, the Academic Board. The ELT provides strategic direction, oversees the operational aspects of the institute, and ensures alignment with the institution's mission and values. In addition to the Principal and CEO, the ELT is comprised of the:

- Chief Operating Officer

- Director of Students

- Director of the School of Creative Technologies, Design and Enterprise

- Director of the School of Music

- Director of the School of Performance

- Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment

- Director of Learning and Teaching.

44. The Principal and CEO chairs the Academic Board, which is key to the governance structure of the institute and is a subcommittee of the Council operating autonomously from LJMU. The Academic Board is the senior academic authority responsible for setting and maintaining academic standards across all programmes. Composed of senior academic staff, student representatives and professional services staff, the Academic Board has authority over curriculum development, assessment policies, quality assurance and academic resources. The Academic Board's terms of reference make clear its responsibilities and functions and those of its associated subcommittees.

45. The subcommittees of the Academic Board are the:

- Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee

- Student Experience Committee

- Research and Innovation Committee

- Boards of Examiners.

46. The Student Voice Forum, Programme Boards and Industry Advisory Board also report to Academic Board through its subcommittees. The other committees that report to Council are the Audit Committee, the Finance Committee, the Nominations and Governance Committee and the Renumeration Committee.

Reasoning

47. To assess whether the institute's higher education mission and strategic direction and associated policies are coherent, published, understood and applied consistently, the assessment team examined the institute's academic governance arrangements and reviewed a range of documentary evidence. This included the institute's strategic plan, its ELTAFS and draft LIPA Academic Regulations.

48. The assessment team found that there is coherence between the focus of the institute's strategic plan and the ELTAFS. For example, the ELTAFS states that 'this strategy intersects

with and should be undertaken in conjunction with [among other things] the LIPA Strategic Plan'. The key purpose of the institute is common to both documents – 'enabling and empowering the creatives of the future to secure sustained work'. The team found that the ELTAFS is aligned specifically to Strategic Goal 1 from the strategic plan, which is 'to be recognised as a world-leading centre of excellence for creative learning and vocational training within the performing arts and creative industries'. All of the institute's strategic goals, as well as the vision, objectives and strategic principles of the strategic plan, are highlighted in the ELTAFS.

49. The assessment team noted that the institute's values, vision, purpose, organisational chart, and a summary of the strategic plan, together with details of Council directors, are publicly accessible on the institute's website and easily accessible to staff and students,[9] while academic policies are clearly communicated to students in the LJMU Programme Guides. In reviewing the institute's VLE – Moodle – the assessment team found that it contains a wide range of appropriate policies for students in an easy to access form. In addition, during the visit to the institute, the team met with students who expressed that Moodle was a clear and effective platform to navigate.

50. During the team's visit to the institute and meetings with senior management, the assessment team was satisfied that significant steps had been taken in relation to the publication, understanding and consistent application of the institute's higher education mission and strategic direction. During these meetings, the team was informed that three meetings with all institute staff (including hourly-paid Visiting Professionals) take place each year and that these reinforce the 'strategic spine' of the institute, including the six strategic themes. Senior management also explained that programme validation has the mission and themes built into the design, as does the appraisal process incorporating the six core strategic themes. Visiting Professionals are required to follow the 'Teaching and Learning in the Performing Arts' (TLIPA) scheme, the institute's own teaching programme, which also embodies the strategic themes in its design.

51. During the meetings with institute staff, it was further confirmed to the assessment team how the institute has been embedding its mission and strategic direction, with a strong sense of understanding and ownership expressed by different staff groups. In a meeting with programme leaders, staff expressed knowledge of the six strategic themes well; as all six themes begin with the letter 'e', in the assessment team's view this is a highly effective mnemonic to embed them in the minds of staff. One member of staff described them as 'a framework for all we do', and others asserted that they are not only embedded into the curriculum, but also in the institute's culture and delivery. A meeting with teaching staff, which included Visiting Professionals, further demonstrated to the assessment team that an understanding of the institute's strategic direction reached throughout its different teaching staff and out to students. For example, one tutor explained that in a film project module, students are required to reflect the institute's strategic aims in their work from the student perspective.

52. The assessment team concluded that the institute's higher education mission and strategic direction are currently coherent, published, understood and, through its developing academic policy framework, will be applied consistently if it awards its own degrees. The team also

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[9] See LIPA, Governance - Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts.

agreed that the institute has robust processes for ensuring staff understand its strategic aims and policies, and that they apply them consistently throughout the staff base and that this supports effective academic governance. The assessment team concluded that these robust processes would be effectively and consistently applied if the institute awards its own degrees.

53. To understand how the institute operates its academic governance arrangements, such that its academic policies support its higher education mission, aims and objectives, the assessment team reviewed a range of academic policies and frameworks. The assessment team found that the Strategic Plan 2023-2026 and the LIPA Quality Framework 2024-25 demonstrate how the vision, mission and values of the institute inform its strategic purpose and integrated strategies. Similarly, the team found that the institute's own operational plans, draft quality assurance and enhancement processes and draft academic regulations support its higher education mission, aims and objectives.

54. The assessment team found further evidence of connectivity between the institute's governance and academic policies to its mission, aims and objectives in the academic regulations the institute has prepared in readiness for its own DAPs. The proposed regulations state that 'all programmes leading to LIPA awards are expected to operate within the academic regulations and be designed in accordance with the LIPA Curriculum Design Guide and [ELTAFS]'. The regulations also assert the second theme of the strategic plan, that of equity – 'the purpose of the academic regulations is to ensure equity of treatment for students and assure the academic integrity of the awards' – further supporting the institute's higher education aims and objectives.

55. The assessment team reviewed documentation relating to the BA Sound Technology Periodic Review, the LJMU Periodic Programme Review and Validations Event Report and the LIPA Quality Framework 2024-25 and again found very clear alignment of academic policies with the institutional vision, purpose and strategic themes. For example, the LIPA Quality Framework 2024-2025 not only refers to the vision, purpose and values set out in the institute's Strategic Plan 2023-2026, but also lists in full the strategic goals and recognises that 'the achievement of these aims and goals ultimately depend on the ability and commitment of our Council, senior management, staff and students'. It then continues by detailing the seven principles embedded within the institute's method for achieving these aims.

56. To investigate whether the draft policies and frameworks are on track to be approved and implemented in a timely manner, the assessment team reviewed the New DAPs plan and the draft LIPA Academic Regulations. The New DAPs plan is a meticulous document detailing each new policy, framework or training requirement required, the start of the process, the length of the process and the deadline for completion and implementation. The assessment team was impressed with the high level of thought and preparation demonstrated to prepare the institute for awarding its own degrees. For example, prioritising critical documents such as student-facing mental health and wellbeing policies and reviewing and updating the staff induction process for permanent staff and Visiting Professionals. Strategy development, such as creating and disseminating a research and professional practice strategy, is appropriately given more time to complete. The draft LIPA Academic Regulations approved in November 2024 are robust in detailing the requirements for structural regulations, award regulations and assessment regulations and connect and refer to the LIPA Curriculum Design Guide and

ELTAFS. All policies reviewed state the next policy review date and the academic regulations are next due to be reviewed in June 2027.

57. The assessment team considered that the institute's approach to embedding its higher education mission was consistent and, given the strong sense of ownership of the strategic themes operating throughout the staff base and the quality of the policy documentation, it demonstrated excellent practice. The team therefore concluded that the institute's academic policies support its higher education mission, aims and objectives and underpin the delivery of effective academic governance and that through its developing academic policy framework, will be applied consistently if it awards its own degrees.

58. The team considered that the institute's New DAPs self-assessment document illustrates a clarity and differentiation of function and responsibility across all levels of the institute in relation to its academic governance structures and arrangements for managing its higher education provision. The assessment team confirmed these arrangements by reviewing the following evidence:

- Governance Structure Chart

- LIPA Organisational Structure

- terms of reference and minutes and reports of the Academic Board and the Teaching and Learning Board

- terms of reference of the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (which has recently superseded the Teaching and Learning Board).

59. These documents clearly demonstrated to the assessment team the lines of responsibility in governance, and the differentiation of functions and responsibility as outlined in the institute's New DAPs self-assessment document. For example, the assessment team concluded that the Governance Structure Chart clearly illustrates the governance framework of the institute, with seven key bodies reporting to the institute's Council. The ELT is the first devolved body in terms of governance, while the Academic Board, on the same tier, is the senior academic authority of the institute, and five further bodies report to the Academic Board. Two further bodies currently make up the fourth tier of the structure and the planned Industry Advisory Board will join this tier. The purpose of the new Industry Advisory Board is outlined in its draft terms of reference and it will advise on curriculum development aligning with industry trends and practices as well as facilitating networking opportunities, internships, student skills development and knowledge exchange. In a meeting with senior managers it was explained that the range of the planned advisory board will be further expanded, and several school-specific industry advisory panels are also being planned to be launched in March 2025.

60. The assessment team found the Governance Structure Chart was clear and noted that the direct line from the Student Voice Forum through to the ELT was a strength of the structure. For example, in a meeting with the Student Voice team during the assessment team's visit to the institute, the team noted that the Student Voice representatives have direct and frequent access to key members of the ELT with monthly meetings to discuss issues, with actions captured and discharged. The team also considered that linking the new Industry Advisory Board and panels to both the Teaching and Learning Quality Committee and the Research and Innovation Committee would help maximise the benefits of this emergent board and the

subject-specific panels to the institute. The assessment team concluded that this governance and committee design not only demonstrated clarity and differentiation of function, but that this was demonstrably across all levels, connecting students, the ELT (including the Principal and CEO) and external specialists as well as the research and academic quality communities.

61. Reviewing the LIPA Organisational Structure, the assessment team noted the clarity and differentiation of function and responsibility across all levels of the institute from the Principal and CEO through to ELT, all of whom have clearly defined roles and who each manage their own teams. The Director of Students, for example, manages the following teams: Admissions, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Higher Education Administration and Timetabling, Learning Resources Centre, Quality, and Student Wellbeing and Disability. The assessment team concluded that there is equivalent coherence of governance and function in the other team groupings in the LIPA Organisational Structure.

62. By reviewing the terms of reference and minutes and reports of the Academic Board and the Teaching and Learning Board, the assessment team formed the view that the terms of reference for each committee are appropriately defined and clearly articulated, and that each committee has a distinct purpose and remit. The assessment team also concluded that schedules confirmed that committees undertake business in line with their terms of reference. The assessment team noted that while the membership of Academic Board was mostly drawn from senior posts at the institute, as is appropriate for this senior academic board, the membership of the Teaching and Learning Board included a range of teaching staff and a wide range of invited staff from across the institute, with students represented at both boards. In reviewing the minutes of Academic Board, the assessment team noted the appropriate function of the committee, for example, the appropriate recording of declaration of interests, review of previous minutes, details and discussion of new matters and the effective capturing and discharging of actions.

63. The Teaching and Learning Board has been superseded by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee which has delegated responsibility for oversight of Learning, Teaching and Assessment, Pedagogy and Curriculum, Professional Development and Quality Assurance. The committee is also responsible for monitoring the delivery of the ELTAFS. The academic quality function of the former Institute Quality Committee has also moved to the new Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee as part of the new 2024-25 LIPA Governance Structure. The assessment team concluded that the terms of reference for this committee, approved in October 2024, are also appropriately defined and clearly articulated. It concluded that the committee has a distinct purpose and remit, with membership comprising a range of senior and teaching staff as well as the Student Voice President, access and wellbeing representatives and a learning technologist in attendance.

64. The assessment team concluded that there is clarity and differentiation of function and responsibility at all levels in relation to the institute's academic governance structures and its arrangements for managing its higher education provision. This provided further assurance to the assessment team that the institute has effective academic governance, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities that would be consistently applied if it awards its own degrees.

65. In preparation for applying for DAPs, the institute created its Academic Board. The assessment team reviewed the terms of reference for the Academic Board, as well as the

Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, in paragraph 62, and found that the function and responsibility of the senior academic authority is clearly articulated and consistently applied. The assessment team also noted that the Academic Board, as the institute's senior academic authority, has prime responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards and the development, oversight and monitoring of the institute's higher education policies and provision. The Academic Board is also required to provide assurance to Council as one of its subcommittees. An example of the consistent application of the senior academic authority's function and responsibility is demonstrated in its October 2024 minutes where key aspects of the institute's academic regulations were considered in detail. These discussions demonstrated to the team the Academic Board effectively exercising its role in weighing-up where the institute needs to remain consistent with the existing LJMU regulations to account for the programmes being taught out and where changes could be made, for example to module frameworks, compensation and extensions. The assessment team found that this approach was consistently applied in subsequent minutes where the institute's academic regulations were further refined by the Academic Board with effective discussion and decision making in evidence.

66. To demonstrate reporting lines and decision-making authority, together with leadership in academic strategy, the assessment team reviewed the institute's current governance and organisational structures. The assessment team concluded that the institute's recent updates to its governance structure in readiness for awarding its own degrees were strategic and consequential. For example, the addition of the Student Voice Forum and the Student Experience Committee, established in 2023, have enhanced student inclusion in governance in comparison to the previous governance structure, while the development of the new Industry Advisory Board and subject-level panels will provide the opportunity for additional, focused stakeholder input from industry. The assessment team concluded that these changes demonstrate effective decision-making authority.

67. To demonstrate how senior academic leaders develop and implement institutional strategy, the assessment team reviewed the institute's Policy on Policy Development and its Policy Matrix. The assessment team found that the Policy on Policy Development is a well-considered and streamlined document that enables the institute to establish a 'standardised process for the creation, review, approval, and implementation of all policies'. After identifying the need for a new or revised policy, a new policy proposal is submitted to the relevant member of the ELT, who has authority to decide whether the policy or a policy review is necessary. Student consultation is emphasised, with the policy stating 'student-facing policies, especially those that impact on student experience should be developed in consultation with students'. The team considered that this demonstrated effective governance practice.

68. The assessment team also reviewed the institute's Policy Matrix, an extensive spreadsheet for implementing and tracking the large number of strategic policy developments in train during the institute's New DAPs development phase. The assessment team concluded that this is a highly effective tool that enables senior managers to see at a glance the progress of all policy developments and to decide where further resources may need to be deployed to keep developments on track. This further demonstrated to the assessment team that senior management strategises, plans effectively and fulfils its roles responsibly. The assessment team also noted that the New DAPs plan sets out future reviews of the revised governance

structure with the next review taking place between June 2026 to September 2026 'to ensure it is effective and upholds accountability across all levels of the organisation.'

69. The assessment team agreed that the function and responsibility of the senior academic authority is clearly articulated and consistently applied and that it maintains appropriate accountability for, and good oversight of, its academic responsibilities. The team concluded that this approach would be effectively and consistently applied if the institute awards its own degrees.

70. To determine whether there is appropriate depth and strength of academic leadership, the assessment team reviewed job descriptions for academic leaders, the institute's Governance Structure Chart and the LIPA Organisational Structure, as well as the CVs and qualifications of senior managers and the leadership experience of the Council.

71. The assessment team noted the detail and clarity of the Governance Structure Chart and the LIPA Organisational Structure in defining the accountability and responsibilities of academic leaders. Through a review of CVs, CV summaries and qualifications of a selection of Council directors and senior managers from among the institute's academic leaders, the assessment team found that they had significant senior level higher education experience and knowledge, together with professional qualifications and memberships appropriate to their roles and professorial appointments.

72. During the site visit to the institute, the assessment team was impressed by the depth and strength of the ELT, which was clear in the presentation on organisational strategy delivered by senior management. The presentation demonstrated to the assessment team the institute's strategic vision and direction, evidence-based decision making, clear and often innovative stakeholder engagement, operational efficiency, and effective resource management with ongoing development and improvement. For example, the assessment team found that the strategic case for the institute's application for New DAPs was clearly articulated and that innovative stakeholder engagement was being developed with organisations and businesses from the wider community and globally. During the visit, management explained that external partners enrich and benefit the institute and ensure the institute's programmes remain relevant to the needs of students. Details from the presentation by the institute's leadership were further backed up in the documentary evidence and data supplied in its application, including the Risk Register September 2024 and the Risk Management Policy.

73. In preparation for and in anticipation of awarding its own degrees, the institute made a significant senior appointment to the new post of Director of Learning and Teaching in 2024, initially on a 12-month fixed-term basis. As detailed in the New DAPs plan this post has a remit 'to oversee and ensure the quality of provision of the institution's degree programmes and the student experience', particularly in relation to overseeing curriculum design and currency and improving the quality of learning and teaching.

74. The assessment team concluded from its review of job descriptions and CVs demonstrating the qualifications and experience of senior leaders and Heads of Department that the institute has in place appropriate depth and strength of academic leadership to support its academic functions. This evidence, together with the clear strategic vision and direction demonstrated

by the ELT, confirmed to the assessment team the depth and strength of academic leadership at the institute.

75. To determine if the institute develops, implements and communicates its policies and procedures in collaboration with its staff and students and external stakeholders, the assessment team reviewed the membership, terms of reference and minutes from a range of academic committees dealing with academic policies and processes. The assessment team also reviewed a 2023 Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre (CDMT) accreditation report to assess further how external stakeholders contribute to the development, implementation and communication of its policies and procedures.

76. The assessment team observed that teaching and professional support staff, students and an external stakeholder are represented on Academic Board as members, while membership of the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee includes teaching staff, support staff and an external stakeholder. A student observer was indicated within the membership of the Teaching and Learning Board (the predecessor body of the Academic Board) but this role was marked as 'vacancy' in the minutes up to October 2023. The assessment team noted the regular attendance of the Student Voice President in meetings since October 2023 and that the Student Voice President took part in a Teaching and Learning Board discussion undertaking two actions in the minutes and that these actions had been completed in a subsequent action plan. The assessment team agreed that the institute has taken significant steps to develop student voice and student representation in recent years and this is detailed in sub-criterion A1.2 below.

77. The institute created several short-term development groups to manage its New DAPs plan and new policies, and the assessment team observed that these groups did not contain student representatives. The institute's response to the team's observations was that these were short-term administrative groups that were not creating policies and that all committees in the new governance structure have student representation. As all new policy developments will have input from students, the assessment team concluded that this was an acceptable position.

78. In a meeting with students from the Student Voice team, students described how the student voice 'chain' works through the committee structure, with minutes of committee meetings helping them hold the institute accountable on student issues. The Student Voice team's work was also said to show students how institutions are run and how changes are brought about. Examples of this working in practice are given in paragraph 97.

79. In meetings with staff during its visit to the institute, the assessment team concluded that there is strong evidence that staff collaborate in the development, implementation and communication of the institute's policies and procedures. For example, in a meeting with Heads of Department, one member of staff said they had enjoyed writing new policies and having input to make them more relevant and aligned to what the institute does; for example, the institute had seen challenges in recent years posed by artificial intelligence (AI) and, in collaboration with staff, had developed and was enhancing its own policy in response to these. The assessment team reviewed the new draft AI policy and confirmed that it is already well advanced, considered, and current in its approach. The assessment team also noted significant discussion of AI across several meetings of the Teaching and Learning Board with a wide range of staff with the Student Voice President present in 2024. The team found that

clear guidance on the appropriate acknowledged use of AI is published for students and staff on the LIPA Moodle. In a meeting with programme leaders, staff explained that there are processes to request equipment or suggest curriculum developments, as well as weekly Heads of Department meetings to discuss ideas and how things are working within the schools. The assessment team agreed that these demonstrate further evidence of staff collaborating in the institute's development of policies and procedures.

80. To further assess the appropriate development and implementation of a new policy and its communication to staff and students, the assessment team reviewed the institute's Attendance Policy approved by Academic Board in November 2024. The assessment team concluded that the policy was developed appropriately at Academic Board, being reviewed and approved across two meetings with a wide range of staff and the Student Voice President in attendance. It has since been implemented and communicated to staff and students in a transparent way by being embedded in programme handbooks, which are published on the on the institute's VLE.

81. To consider the input of external stakeholders, the team reviewed CV summaries and online biographies, and noted that Council Directors have a wealth of external experience from a range of high-level professional backgrounds. From reviewing Council minutes and reports, the assessment team noted examples where Council Directors and invited external specialists had assisted the institute to develop and implement its policies. For example, an independent governance professional reviewed all the institute's governance documentation and reported back to the relevant committees. This independent review included a skills audit, the revision of terms of reference for all subcommittees and a review of the scheme of delegation for the governance handbook. The assessment team also noted the recommendations of the 2023 external CDMT accreditation report, which included, for example, advice on procedures to enhance recruitment initiatives and advice concerning the further enhancement of student employability.

82. The assessment team reviewed the handbooks for the institute's CPD 'Professional Recognition Scheme for the Performing Arts' (PReSPA) and the TLIPA schemes, which demonstrated effective development and implementation of policies and procedures with external stakeholder Advance HE. The schemes deliver Advance HE Fellowships with guidance and accreditation received from Advance HE as well as teaching and learning support to part-time teaching staff (Visiting Professionals). This development has helped the institute enable over 90 per cent of teaching staff to hold fellowship status, which the assessment team agreed was an impressive result. As previously mentioned, the assessment team also noted under the new committee structure that an Industry Advisory Board together with subject-level panels have been developed to bring formal external representation to the institute and to further encourage the input of external stakeholders into the development of policies and procedures.

83. In a meeting with programme leaders, the assessment team heard about a strong integration of external stakeholders within the institute's programmes and procedures, and the need for collaboration with the performing arts industry and this being the institute's ethos. Staff also explained how they utilise the success of their own alumni working across the industry and that the institute is constantly bringing graduates back in so programmes and students can benefit from their knowledge and connections.

84. The assessment team therefore concluded that the institute develops, implements and communicates its policies and procedures in collaboration with its staff and students and external stakeholders.

85. The assessment team considered the institute's context and collaborative validation agreement with LJMU to better understand how it would successfully manage the responsibilities that would be vested in it were it to be granted New DAPs.

86. The institute has been established for 30 years, with its first cohort of BA (Hons) students graduating in 1998. The institute has delivered its higher education provision under a collaborative validation agreement with LJMU since 1996. Indicators of the institute's successful management of its higher education responsibilities were noted by the assessment team in senior management's presentation on organisational strategy during the team's visit to the institute, including its designation as a higher education institution in 2006 and its award in 2015 of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Quality Mark for meeting or exceeding UK expectations for quality and standards in its Higher Education Review. Additionally, in 2017 the institute was awarded Gold in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), and in 2023 it was rated Gold for student outcomes and Silver for student experience, with an overall TEF rating of Silver. The assessment team also noted that in 2023 the institute was awarded specialist provider funding by the OfS.

87. The assessment team noted the significant progress the institute has made to create its own equivalent academic regulations and policies in preparation for New DAPs status. The Policy Matrix is a highly effective document tracking all new policy developments and their progress, and the assessment team agreed that the institute is managing the process towards gaining New DAPs efficiently and effectively, as demonstrated throughout the team's analysis against this criterion. The New DAPs plan is credible, comprehensive and strategic. The team reviewed the Principal and CEO's 'Update to Council' in June 2024, which was a highly effective document demonstrating critical awareness of key threats and presenting a balanced financial analysis. Likewise, the Principal and CEO's strategic reports to Council between 2022 and 2024 and the reports of other senior staff to Council are strategic, informative and balanced, and these further strengthen the assessment team's conclusion that the New DAPs plan as a whole is credible and demonstrates how the institute would successfully manage the responsibilities that would be vested in it were it to be granted New DAPs.

88. The assessment team determined that the strengths of the institute's academic governance, based on the evidence it reviewed and discussed above (paragraphs 59 to 66), demonstrated clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities that would enable the institute to successfully manage New DAPs, were they to be granted. This strategic approach to governance is further demonstrated in the institute's Risk Management Policy and Risk Register 2024, which are analytical and robust, demonstrating to the team that the institute is self-reflective and aware and that it analyses, plans and reflects effectively.

89. Based on the evidence reviewed, the assessment team concluded that the institute has effective academic governance structures, together with clear and appropriate lines of accountability. The assessment team therefore considers that the institute is successfully managing the responsibilities under its current externally validated awards and would do so under its own degree awarding powers.

Sub-criterion 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

90. The assessment team's view is that the institute's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to sub-criterion A1.2.

91. The assessment team's view is that the institute has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion A1.2 because it develops, implements and communicates its policies and procedures in collaboration with its staff and students and external stakeholders, and has plans to continue doing so in future under its own degree awarding powers. The majority of its control and oversight of its higher education provision is conducted in partnership with its students and is predominantly a strength of the New DAPs plan.

92. However, the assessment team recommend that consistent and effective student representation be enabled at Council meetings so that the student voice demonstrably impacts academic governance at the highest tier of governance with evidenced outcomes. To reflect the intentions of senior management to consider redrafting its Articles of Association to embed the student voice into its governance at Council level, the assessment team has identified this as a specified change to the New DAPs plan (see paragraph 96). More generally, the team recommend that changes to student voice and the impact of this area on governance at the institute should be closely monitored during the institute's first year of its probationary monitoring (see paragraph 102).

93. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the institute's New DAPs plan and supporting evidence, alongside any other relevant information. This shows that the institute can be reasonably expected to meet sub-criterion A1.2 in full by the end of the probationary period.

Reasoning

94. To assess whether students are engaged individually and collectively in the governance and management of the institute and its higher education provision, with students supported to be able to engage effectively, the assessment team reviewed the institute's self-assessment document, which states that it 'values student engagement as a cornerstone of effective academic governance and management'. The team tested this statement against a range of evidence including the Student Experience Committee minutes and terms of reference, the Dance and the Music Programme Board minutes and Action Plan, Council minutes and reports, Student Voice Forum minutes and the Student Voice section of the institute's VLE.

95. The assessment team reviewed the Student Experience Committee minutes and terms of reference and found that students were very engaged, for example presenting and discussing their issues around timetabling, creating a space on the LIPA Hub where they can report issues, and the issues of wi-fi access. Likewise, in the Dance Programme Board minutes and Action Plan, students raised, discussed and actioned issues such as requesting a talk from the technical team at the beginning of a rehearsal process so they could understand what is required of them and how they can best help the technical team.

96. The assessment team reviewed Council minutes and reports and found that there had not previously been consistent and effective student representation. In the minutes from September 2022 to June 2024, the team found that no student representatives were present, and in the meeting of November 2024 a student representative was present for part of the meeting but made no minuted contribution to the proceedings. In a meeting with senior management during the visit, it was acknowledged that they were aware that student representatives had not yet had as effective a voice at Council as they should or will have in the future. Senior managers reassured the assessment team that a student representative is now present at meetings going forwards, which the team confirmed in the Council minutes of November 2024. The institute is planning to redraft its Articles of Association as a result, to embed the student voice into its governance at Council-level. While the team did not see any documentary evidence of the latter, it was satisfied from other sources that the institute had already taken steps to improve the student voice and would continue to do so going forward. In a meeting with students in the Student Voice team, students expressed that they would welcome an enhanced opportunity to go to Council and speak about student issues directly there. To reflect the intentions of senior management to consider redrafting its Articles of Association and embed the student voice into its governance at Council level, the assessment team has identified this as a specified change to the New DAPs plan.

97. The assessment team had discussions with students in several meetings to gauge whether they feel engaged as partners in the governance and management of the institute and its higher education provision. In a meeting with members of the Student Voice team, the students were energised in expressing their increased roles in governance and management. They said the student perspective was now present on all boards and that there was a close relationship and good communication between staff and students. They also explained that 'minuted meetings developed action plans' that ensure the institute is held accountable. Students also noted that written reports are provided, and that student issues are tabled.

98. However, the team heard how not all Programme Board meetings achieved the same effective follow-up of actions compared to institutional meetings. The team triangulated this by reviewing the example cited at paragraph 99 relating to the Dance Programme Board minutes and Action Plan, where the team found good evidence of follow-up of actions. In contrast, upon reviewing the BA Music Programme Board minutes of December 2022, the team noted that there were actions still live from 2017 and 2018 and the status of all actions was 'ongoing'. The team also considered that some actions seemed unrealistic in expectation. For example, Module Evaluation Feedback responses are typically low in the sector, so setting an action in the music programme board to 'ensure 100% Module Evaluation Feedback' is unlikely to have effective follow-up. In the June 2023 minutes, the action plan still contained the three actions from 2017 as ongoing, but the assessment team did also note that there was an improved action plan format and that three more recent actions had been completed. The students' views of an uneven approach to resolving actions across different programme board subject areas appeared to the assessment team to be corroborated by the evidence it had seen, and the issue of actions and discharging actions across the institute is discussed in further detail in paragraphs 512 to 515. In summary, the assessment team concluded that while the institute does consistently use mechanisms for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny and monitoring of its academic provision, these mechanisms should be enhanced as indicated in paragraph 515 and be of consistent design across the institute if it awards its own degrees.

99. Overall, however, the students from the Student Voice team felt that the student voice roles have become more important over the past few years. The assessment team's other meetings with students confirmed this view and also evidenced how the students were being supported to be able to engage effectively; for example, first year students believed the institute wanted student views, pointing for example to monthly student forums and adding they can voice concerns and positive feedback and know this reaches Council. Dance students also said that at their Programme Boards, issues are resolved very quickly, such as access to on-site physiotherapists for dance students. The assessment team also noted that since 2023-24 the Student Voice President role has been a paid position, which the team judged to be evidence of the institute recognising the importance of this role and enabling and incentivising the postholder to prioritise this work.

100. To assess further whether students are supported to be able to engage individually and collectively in the governance and management of the institute and its higher education provision, the assessment team reviewed the institute's New DAPs plan, the Student Voice section of its VLE and the Student Voice Forum minutes. The New DAPs plan explains the role of the Student Voice team, which consists of a paid part-time sabbatical president and a team of six volunteer officers who assist in coordination of all the student representation and engagement activities of the institute. The assessment team gained a very positive impression from discussions with the Student Voice team, with students expressing a real sense of being supported to engage both as a team and individually in the governance and management of the institute. This supported the assertion given in the New DAPs plan that the institute 'actively seek[s] to involve students as partners in decision-making processes related to academic standards and quality assurance'.

101. The assessment team found that this was further supported by evidence from the Student Voice team section on the VLE which is described as 'a space for every voice to be heard'. This area of the VLE details how students can get involved by joining the Student Voice team, providing feedback through meetings and papers, and also provides resources and support information on health and wellbeing. It provides details of training sessions for student representatives and student officers as well as announcements on a range of relevant topics. The assessment team also concluded that the minutes from the Student Voice Forum demonstrated that every student is enabled to get involved in providing input and feedback from the various schools on a wide range of issues often concerned with the procedural aspects of their experience and governance, such as the late attendance rule, communication regarding their course and notice of class cancellations.

102. The institute's New DAPs plan includes an action to review the structure and operational aspects of the Student Voice team between June and September 2026. The assessment team considered this an appropriate step to allow sufficient time for the recent development of the Student Voice team to become fully embedded while ensuring the institute has a formal review point to test whether its intentions in this area have been fully realised. Ahead of this formal review point, however, the team recommends that the institute provides an update on student voice developments, including in relation to effective input into the Council, in the first year of its probationary period.

103. Based on the evidence reviewed, the assessment team concluded that the institute has taken significant action to ensure its students are engaged as partners in the governance and management of almost all aspects of its higher education provision, and that it has been

increasingly supporting their students to be able to engage effectively. The team also concluded that the institute would continue this approach under its own DAPs. However, the assessment team recommends that consistent and effective student representation be enabled at Council meetings so that the student voice demonstrably impacts academic governance at the highest tier of governance with evidenced outcomes. To reflect the intentions of senior management to consider redrafting its Articles of Association to embed the student voice into its governance at Council-level, the assessment team has identified this as a specified change to the New DAPs plan. The demonstrable impact of student voice on governance at Council should be monitored during the institute's first year of its probationary monitoring.

Sub-criterion 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

104. The assessment team's view is that the New DAPs plan is credible in relation to sub-criterion A1.3.

105. The assessment team's view is that the institute has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion A1.3 because it works effectively with other organisations to deliver placement learning opportunities for students with a strategic approach informed by the effective assessment of risk and the carrying out of due diligence. Placement opportunities are agreed in a formal written agreement with the same robust oversight as the rest of the organisation's provision. Where the institute plans to work with other organisations to deliver learning opportunities, it is developing processes to ensure that its governance and management of such opportunities are robust and effective and that decisions to work with other organisations are the result of a strategic approach rather than opportunism.

106. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the institute's New DAPs plan and supporting evidence, alongside any other relevant information. This shows that the institute can be reasonably expected to meet sub-criterion A1.3 in full by the end of the probationary period.

Reasoning

107. The institute has delivered awards through a collaborative partnership with LJMU since 1996 and throughout this period the institute has operated under the academic regulations and frameworks of its validating partner. The institute has always remained an independent organisation and while conforming to LJMU's academic regulations it has developed its own parallel systems and delegated processes. To assess whether its governance and management of this partnership have been robust and effective during this period the assessment team reviewed the QAA's Higher Educational Review of the institute in 2015. The QAA assessment concluded that the institute met all four key quality and enhancement

judgements, provided two areas of good practice and gave one recommendation. The report states: 'Overall, the institute discharges its responsibilities effectively within the context of its agreement with its awarding body. The institute meets its awarding body's threshold academic standards, and has robust internal processes to manage its responsibilities.'

108. The institute works with a range of employers to provide work placements linked to higher education programmes. To determine whether these arrangements are based on a strategic approach, informed by the effective assessment of risk including the carrying out of due diligence, the assessment team reviewed the institute's Placement Policy and Handbook.

109. The Placement Policy and Handbook was written by the institute in line with the QAA Quality Code Advice and Guidance on Work-Based Learning. The minimum requirements of the institute's policy are that:

- students are appropriately briefed and supported in preparation for and during their placement

- the placement provider is appropriately briefed, and clear about their responsibilities

- the placement is approved as suitable prior to commencement and formally signed off by all relevant parties

- placement activity is reviewed annually.

110. The institute's Placement Policy and Handbook also requires a risk assessment, defined and achievable learning outcomes, appropriate instruction and training in work practices, and that employers hold Employers Liability (compulsory) and Public Liability insurance and hold current certificates. In addition, the handbook covers health and safety aspects, compliance with equality legislation, reasonable adjustments for disabled students and DBS checks where relevant. A formal written agreement containing contact information and placement details, placement activities, checks on DBS requirements and commercial sensitivity and a risk assessment is signed on behalf of the institute, by the student, and on behalf of the placement provider.

111. The assessment team concluded that the Placement Policy and Handbook contains detailed processes that ensure the institute's governance and management of existing placement opportunities is robust and effective.

112. In its self-assessment document, the institute made a clear statement on its position in relation to working with other organisations to develop collaborative arrangements and the assessment team formed the view that this statement was appropriate at this stage:

'We have no aspirations currently to develop collaborative arrangements and recognise that this is not possible under probationary powers. If in the future we were to develop such agreements we would establish rigorous evaluation processes to assess potential partnerships, considering factors such as alignment of mission and values, academic quality assurance mechanisms, and reputational considerations.'

113. The assessment team confirmed that there are no planned developments of this kind in the New DAP's plan.

114. The assessment team explored this further during discussions with senior management, who confirmed that while the institute currently has no plans for validating degrees elsewhere there may be future opportunities across Liverpool, such as partnering with local theatres to offer Certificates of Higher Education to communities who might not otherwise access higher education. The assessment team concluded that because of the institute's effective governance and management structures as noted under A1.1 and A1.2, should it decide to work with other organisations, the institute would adopt a strategic approach to ensure arrangements are robust and effective.

115. Based on the evidence reviewed, the assessment team concluded that the institute has appropriate arrangements to facilitate effective working with other organisations to deliver placement learning opportunities, while validation arrangements with other providers are not currently planned.

Conclusions

116. Based on its findings, the assessment team concluded that the institute demonstrated a full understanding of criterion A1 and has a credible New DAPs plan which can be reasonably expected to enable the institute to meet the criterion in full by the end of the probationary period.

117. The assessment team found that the institute has effective and robust arrangements for academic governance, with sound academic structures and clear lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities. At the senior governance level, Council provides structured academic oversight of higher education provision, with effective reporting lines to the committees that sit underneath it and the ELT. The Academic Board, as the institute's most senior academic authority, provides assurance to Council on academic matters and the function of the Academic Board is clearly defined through its terms of reference and membership. The remits of its subcommittees are also clearly defined, with a new subcommittee – the Industry Advisory Board – being established to foster greater external stakeholder input to strategic development and policy. The ELT demonstrates breadth and strength of academic leadership to ensure the effective operation of academic governance arrangements. Academic policies and procedures are developed collaboratively with staff, students and, where appropriate, external stakeholders.

118. Although the great majority of the control and oversight of its higher education provision is conducted in partnership with its students, as set out in paragraph 102 the team considers that the institute should review the effectiveness of changes it has made to date in the area of student voice sooner than the scheduled review point in 2026 and that this should be monitored during its first year of probationary period. This is to ensure that changes are generating tangibly improved student engagement in the institute's governance.

Specified changes to the New DAPs plan

119. As set out in paragraph 96, the team's view is that the following specified change is also required to provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment of criterion A1. This change should be made to the New DAPs plan before the probationary period begins. It is intended to provide further evidence during the first year of probationary monitoring of student engagement in governance, specifically active participation at Council, and tangible examples of changes this engagement has brought about.

120. The specified change is:

Include in the New DAPs plan any relevant actions relating to the institute amending its Articles of Association to formally embed the student voice into governance at Council level.

Assessment of DAPs criterion B: Academic standards and quality assurance

Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks

Advice to the OfS

121. The assessment team's view is that the institute's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks.

122. The assessment team's view is that the institute has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion B1 because, in summary, it successfully operates under a range of robust academic frameworks and regulations in collaboration with its validating partner. The institute has built on this experience to begin developing equivalent regulations and frameworks more tailored to its context in readiness for governing awards under its own DAPs. There are definitive records of the institute's programmes and these act as the reference point for delivery and assessment, and records of study are provided to students. The institute has credible plans to ensure it has in place its own programme and student record systems so it can successfully assume these responsibilities from its validating partner if awarded DAPs.

123. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the institute's New DAPs plan and supporting evidence, alongside any other relevant information. This shows that the institute can be reasonably expected to meet criterion B1 in full by the end of the probationary period.

Sub-criterion 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

124. The assessment team's view is that the institute's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to sub-criterion B1.1.

125. The assessment team's view is that the institute has demonstrated a full understanding of sub-criterion B1.1 because the institute is developing transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it will award academic credit and qualifications under its own DAPs. The institute is drawing on the existing academic frameworks and regulations it already operates under as part of its relationship with its validating partner, and the team found evidence that the institute is using these to develop its own tailored frameworks and regulations to match its institutional context.

126. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the institute's New DAPs plan and supporting evidence, alongside any other relevant information. This shows that the institute can be reasonably expected to meet the sub-criterion in full by the end of the probationary period.

Reasoning

127. The institute has delivered awards through a collaborative partnership with LJMU since 1996, during which time the institute has operated under the academic frameworks and regulations of its validating partner. In preparation for obtaining its own DAPs and this partnership subsequently coming to an end, the institute has developed (and will continue developing throughout its probationary period) the frameworks and regulations necessary to govern its own higher education provision. In doing so, the assessment team found the institute has been able to draw heavily on the policies of its current validating partner, while also welcoming the opportunity to adapt policies to more appropriately suit its own context as a small specialist performing arts institute. This is reflected in minutes of the institute's New DAPs Policy Group – created to identify and develop the policies necessary to operate under its own DAPs – which describes how 'where feasible, LIPA policies should build from existing LJMU policies with adaptations to suit LIPA students'.

128. To determine whether academic frameworks and regulations governing the institute's higher education provision (covering, for example, student admissions, assessment, progression, awards, appeals and complaints) are appropriate to its current status and are implemented fully and consistently, the assessment team reviewed the institute's current arrangements in these areas. This included a review of:

    • the validating partner's academic regulations

    • the institute's programme and module specifications for 2024-25

    • the institute's admissions policy and admissions information available on its website

    • the validating partner's Assessment Policy

    • external examiner reports for 2021-22 and 2022-23

    • sample of assessed student work.

129. The institute currently operates under the academic regulations of its validating partner LJMU. These regulations lay out specific and detailed processes in respect of structure, awards and assessment, including adherence to the criteria and qualification descriptors of the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) as regards naming conventions, level and credit volumes. They also provide for assessment processes, including marking and moderation, grading classifications, the use of external examiners, managing student progression, academic appeals and academic misconduct.

130. The team saw evidence of the institute actively engaging with its validating partner to shape these general regulations to the institute's specific context. For example, the validating partner agreed to the institute's request to vary the regulations to allow modules of 15, 30, 45 and 60 credits (in comparison to modules of only ten or 20 credits generally permitted) from academic year 2023-24. In its application for this variance, the institute's rationale was that the option of students studying larger credit modules was more consistent with its practice-intensive interdisciplinary environment and the sector at large, and that an overreliance on a large number of smaller modules inhibited its students' learning. This example demonstrated to the assessment team that, within the limits of the requirements of its validating partner, the institute has academic regulations appropriate to its current status.

131. The assessment team reviewed programme and module specifications from an extensive suite of programmes across the institute's schools to consider whether these regulations are implemented fully and consistently in practice. It was satisfied that they were. For example, programme titles and award descriptions are clear and consistent, and module credit values demonstrate how the institute actively exercises the variance it has agreed with its validating partner.

132. The team also reviewed the validating partner's Assessment and Feedback Policy and found this set out valid and reliable processes in these areas. The policy is consistent with the overarching academic regulations and clearly sets out, for example, the role and responsibilities of external examiners and the approach to marking and moderation of student work. A review of external examiner reports from 2021-22 and 2022-23 relating to the institute's programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level demonstrated to the team that these processes are operated fully and consistently in practice.

133. The team then considered evidence from a selection of assessed student work and found that assessment is appropriate and implemented fully and consistently. Assessment briefs, such as the 'Genre Review' in 'The Producer' module, provide clear instructions, including component weightings, submission methods, grading criteria, feedback expectations, and referral procedures for failed submissions. Furthermore, the team found practical assessments used clear, structured criteria. For example, in the 'Studio Operational Test' assessment for the 'Audio Practice' module, the institute uses a points system to reflect the extent to which students are able to complete the task independently without prompting.

134. The team also found that module handbooks clearly outline module structure, assessment methods, and expectations, using student-friendly language. For example, the handbook for 'The Producer' module states that the 'best way to understand what a module is attempting to teach you is to think about what we expect you to achieve by the end of it', which the team considered a good method of making assessments understandable to their target audience. The handbook then goes on to explain the four learning outcomes students are expected to meet, and how students can go about achieving these. Assessment briefs and module handbooks are made available to students on the VLE and through programme handbooks, ensuring in the team's view they are reasonably accessible to students. Assessment processes are discussed further in paragraphs 286 to 324.

135. The assessment team found that the institute currently operates its own admissions policy which, while aligned with its validating partner's general admissions code of practice, is appropriately tailored to the specific provision the institute offers. The assessment team noted the policy has been developed with reference to the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education and UCAS Admissions Guide. The policy sets out the general admission requirements for programmes – a Level 3 qualification for undergraduate programmes and a Level 6 qualification for postgraduate programmes – while also providing for recognition of prior experiential learning (RPEL), credit transfer, contextual admissions and consideration of those who do not otherwise meet the basic entry requirements. The policy sets out six key attributes the institute looks for in prospective students, including knowledge, ability and experience, commitment and the ability to work effectively with others. The team considered the policy offered a suitably holistic approach to admitting students capable of succeeding on the institute's programmes. All applicants who are deemed to meet the entry requirements for their programme are invited to an interview or audition, and the policy sets out what the

institute looks for through those processes according to programme type in deciding whether to make an offer of admission.

136. The team found the institute's admissions policy to be appropriate to its status, with general entry requirements for higher education programmes consistent with sector norms, while allowing an appropriate degree of flexibility to recruit students with the capacity to succeed where these requirements may not be met. The team found evidence of the admissions policy being fully and consistently implemented through a review of programme information on the institute's website: alongside stating minimum academic requirements for entry, mature applicants with relevant experience are also invited to apply, and prominence is given to the six key candidate attributes mentioned earlier.

137. The team considered frameworks governing the institute's approach to student complaints and academic appeals. The institute is responsible for student complaints, and its approach is set out in its Student Complaints Procedure. This document clearly defines what a complaint is (relying on the definition given by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education); which complaints are in scope of the policy; formal and informal routes to resolution; timeframes; and how to appeal a complaint outcome. The assessment team concluded this document outlined an appropriate framework within which the institute currently handles student complaints. The team also reviewed the institute's Complaints Log. While the log did not include dates which would have allowed the team to ascertain whether complaints were resolved within the timeframes stipulated in the Complaints Policy, the team was nonetheless satisfied the Student Complaints Procedure was being fully and consistently implemented. In reaching this view, the team took assurance from the outcomes given in the log in response to a mix of formal and informal complaints. The team also noted that annual statistics from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education show complaints about the institute are very rarely escalated, which may suggest most complaints are resolved satisfactorily at the local level. Overall, therefore, the team was sufficiently assured the institute was operating its complaints framework in a full and consistent manner.

138. Academic appeals by the institute's students are currently managed and decided by its validating partner under the framework set out in the validator's 'Appeals information and guidance for students and staff' document. The team found the processes described in this document to be appropriate as they were fair and accessible, and consistent with how appeals are treated elsewhere in the sector. Further analysis on student complaints and academic appeals is given under criterion B3 in paragraphs 334 to 347.

139. The assessment team concluded that the academic frameworks and regulations already governing the institute's higher education provision are implemented fully and consistently and are appropriate to its current status. It considered the institute's current policies to be fair, transparent, student-facing and informed by relevant external reference points, as well as being subject to an established approval process, ensuring continuous oversight and responsiveness to student and sector needs.

140. Having considered the regulations and frameworks under which the institute currently operates, the assessment team then considered whether it has created, in readiness, one or more academic frameworks and regulations which will be appropriate for the granting of its own higher education qualifications. To do this, the assessment team reviewed a range of

documentation laying out plans and processes for policy development and any already created policies, including:

- the institute's New DAPs plan

- terms of reference and minutes from its New DAPs Policy Group and Academic Regulations Working Group

- its own academic regulations (as opposed to those of its validating partner which it uses currently)

- its approved Quality Framework for Probationary Powers

- minutes of the Programme Development, Monitoring and Review Working Group and the Curriculum Development and Portfolio Review Group.

141. The institute's New DAPs self-assessment document clearly sets out the context, processes, and progress made by the institute so far in seeking to acquire New DAPs, stating that 'the development and ownership of a more cohesive and continuous approach […] will enable more timely responses to identify weaknesses and improve oversight and monitoring'. The document sets out how the institute has engaged in critical reflection about its academic governance, foregrounding institutional reflection, planning, and continuous improvement. As set out below and discussed previously in relation to criterion A1, the institute has already put in place robust governance structures and developed a quality framework and academic regulations in anticipation of New DAPs.

142. In preparation for applying for and achieving its own DAPs, the institute established a New DAPs Steering Group, under which it created a number of task and finish groups including the Academic Regulations Working Group and the New DAPs Policy Group. The New DAPs Policy Group was formed in April 2024 with the task of overseeing the development of new policy in preparation for the institute achieving New DAPs. The group disbanded in September 2024 and the Self-Evaluation Document and Project Plan Group has continued its work. Minutes of the New DAPs Policy Group meetings evidenced how the institute identified and prioritised policies for development; for example, members of the group initially agreed to focus on policies relating to the student journey, such as academic regulations and programme approval. The group created a Policy Matrix which shows all the approved policies the institute will rely on in exercising its own DAPs, alongside the last and next review points, ownership and approval levels. While some policies are still to be developed (as detailed in the institute's New DAPs plan and discussed further below), the assessment team considered the Policy Matrix to evidence a significant level of preparedness in readiness for the institute achieving its own DAPs.

143. Approved policies on the Policy Matrix include the institute's own academic regulations, developed by its Academic Regulations Working Group. The terms of reference for this group included considering key points of principle where the institute needed to operate differently to its validating partner in regulatory terms. The assessment team reviewed minutes of this group's work to draft the institute's own regulations between February and May 2024. The assessment team scrutinised these academic regulations and found them to have been designed with reference to the FHEQ, the OfS quality and standards conditions of registration and the institute's Quality Framework for Probationary Powers (discussed further below). As

discussed under criterion A1.1, the team also found that the regulations draw on the institute's six strategic themes, providing coherence across the institute's governance arrangements.

144. The team noted that the purpose of the institute's academic regulations is to ensure equity of treatment for students, which the team considered an appropriate aim which would ensure equal opportunity and inclusive policies for its students, as well as to assure the academic integrity of the awards. These aims are to be achieved by ensuring that academic judgement operates within the clearly defined parameters of the regulations and that student-facing processes are transparent. During the assessment team's visit to the institute, it heard from staff that they were proud of the regulations and supporting policies they had created, such as the institute's emerging AI policy (discussed at paragraph 79). Drawing on the six strategic themes, the assessment team noted the institute had welcomed the opportunity to create academic regulations that were more tailored to its students and organisational context.

145. While the institute's own regulations draw heavily on those of its validating partner, the team found evidence of how the institute considered and resolved a range of issues in tailoring the design of their own academic regulations to ensure the most appropriate fit for their institutional context. This included the institute considering its approach to compensation and trailing credits, referral opportunities, difficulties around anonymising some assessments because of the nature of the institute's provision, and extensions and mitigating circumstances. One specific example of the institute diverging from the regulations of its validating partner is in its approach to trailing credits (the number of failed credits a student can carry forward for re-sit into the following academic year). The institute's regulations will allow students to trail 30 credits over Levels 4 to 6, something not currently permitted under the regulations of its validating partner (whereby only 20 credits can be trailed). The team considered this approach to strike an appropriate balance between maintaining rigorous progression requirements and ensuring students are not unnecessarily held back in their studies, and it is a coherent approach in the context of the 30-credit modules now commonly offered in the institute's programmes following the recent variance agreed with its validating partner (see paragraph 130).

146. The institute's academic regulations include links and signposting to relevant policies and procedures which the institute has already developed or which it will develop over the course of its DAPs probationary period. The team reviewed the institute's New DAPs plan to consider the credibility of its plans to develop any remaining policies and procedures, and it was satisfied these were achievable and appropriate. For example, all outstanding policies are scheduled for completion by the end of the 2024-25 academic year, in advance of the institute exercising its own DAPs for the first time. To test the institute's current progress against the timelines in its plan, the team requested access to a number of policies referred to in the institute's academic regulations, including the New Programme / Award Approval Process, Programme and Modular Change Policy, Programme Suspension/Closure Process and Self-Evaluation Document for Periodic Review. While these documents were in draft form at the time of the team's review, they were nonetheless at an advanced stage of completion and set out coherent and appropriate policies and processes in their respective areas. This gave the team confidence that the institute could credibly be expected to have any outstanding policies and processes finalised and implemented in line with the schedule set out in its New DAPs plan.

147. The assessment team then reviewed the institute's 'Quality Framework for Probationary Powers', which sets out the approach it will take to assure the quality and standards of its qualifications and awards. The document espouses principles of externality (such as the OfS conditions of registration, the FHEQ, the UK Quality Code and Subject Benchmark Statements), with a focus on enhancement and a student-centred approach to such enhancement, placing the needs and perspectives of its students at the heart of its activities through involving students in giving written feedback; responding to surveys; and participating in governance and quality processes such as programme approval. The framework details the institute's broad approach to areas such as external examining, programme approval and periodic review, and it clearly assigns responsibilities at institutional, school and programme level. The team therefore concluded this is an appropriate framework for the institute granting its own awards.

148. The creation and implementation of the institute's own policies is supported through associated procedures such as the 'Policy on Policy Development' (discussed above at paragraphs 67 and 68), the purpose being to establish a standardised process for the creation, review, approval, and implementation of all policies. The team's view is that this would ensure consistency, clarity and compliance across the institute's policies, procedures and wider strategic aims. It was clear to the team from the policies it had seen that the 'Policy on Policy Development' was being followed in practice in developing the institute's own policies in preparation for New DAPs, with a large number of policies scheduled for development throughout its probationary period.

149. Based on the evidence reviewed, the assessment team concluded that the institute currently operates, in collaboration with its validating partner, transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern academic credit and qualifications awarded through the partnership. The team was also satisfied that the institute has begun creating, and has credible plans to continue creating throughout its probationary period, the appropriate frameworks and regulations that will be necessary to govern how its awards degrees under its own powers.

Sub-criterion 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

150. The assessment team's view is that the institute's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to sub-criterion B1.2.

151. The assessment team's view is that the institute has demonstrated a full understanding of sub-criterion B1.2 because it maintains, and has appropriate plans for maintaining as an independent degree awarding body, a definitive record of each programme and qualification that it approves (and of subsequent changes to it). This record constitutes the reference point of delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the

provision of records of study to students and alumni. The team was also satisfied that the institute's students and alumni are provided with records of study, and that the institute is developing the systems and processes necessary to assume this responsibility from its validating partner should it be awarded DAPs.

152. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the institute's New DAPs plan and supporting evidence, alongside any other relevant information. This shows that the institute can be reasonably expected to meet the sub-criterion in full by the end of the probationary period.

Reasoning

153. The assessment team considered whether the organisation maintains definitive and up-to-date records of each qualification to be awarded and each programme being offered, and whether these records are used as the basis for the delivery and assessment of each programme. It also considered whether there was evidence that students and alumni are provided with records of study. To do this, the assessment team reviewed a range of documents that constitute the reference point for delivery and assessment of programmes and qualifications, and their monitoring and review, including:

- the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook

- the admissions policy

- programme specification documents and module proformas

- programme guides

- periodic programme review documents

- student transcripts

- the institute's procedure for converting programmes currently validated by its partner into programmes validated under its own powers.

154. The institute's validating partner is currently ultimately responsible for maintaining definitive and up-to-date records of the institute's qualifications and programmes. This does, however, involve significant input from the institute in terms of providing programme documentation, for example as part of the validating partner's processes for validating its programmes. The institute's New DAPs self-assessment document states that the validating partner publishes a definitive record of each programme and module on their online catalogue. The team reviewed this catalogue for the institute's programmes and found it contained comprehensive information covering the available awards (target and exit awards), learning outcomes, programme structure, assessment elements, entry requirements, approved variances, and information on externality such as any applicable Subject Benchmark Statement and the name of the designated external examiner. The assessment team also reviewed programme and module specifications for the institute's validated provision and found these replicated the comprehensive information available in the online catalogue. The team noted that delivery and assessment against these definitive records is reinforced through Programme Boards, which meet at least twice a year to keep the content and operation of programmes under continual review.

155. The assessment team cross-referenced the definitive programme and qualification records with other evidence – such as corresponding programme handbooks, assignment briefs and a sample of assessed student work – and was confident that the institute used these as the basis for delivery and assessment of awards. The team found the programme handbooks to be student-facing, presenting definitive and up-to-date programme information in a more accessible way for students.

156. Periodic programme review documents also evidenced to the team how the institute and validating partner ensure changes to programmes are captured and reflected in the definitive records. The team saw in practice how changes to programmes were highlighted as part of this process. For example, documentation for re-approval to continue delivering the BA (Hons) Sound Technology showed how the institute proposed changes to the previously approved version of the programme. These changes related to adopting different module credit sizes, allowing fewer but larger modules and fewer but more synoptic assessments. The team was able to track this programme through the validating partner's periodic review processes, with the rationale for the amended programme scrutinised by a panel of internal and external peers. The team saw how any actions raised by the panel which would affect the programme specification were checked for completion, thus ensuring all relevant changes were appropriately reflected in the definitive programme record. This gave the assessment team confidence that changes to programme records were systematically approved through the appropriate formal channels and properly reflected in the relevant records for use by the institute going forward.

157. The institute has also set out the approach it will adopt to validating its own programmes if it is successful in achieving DAPs. As the institute's current programmes were very recently validated or revalidated by its validating partner for delivery from 2023-24 for a five-year period, the institute considers it would be disproportionate to newly validate all of its programmes under its own powers ahead of exercising its own DAPs in 2025 or 2026. Instead, the institute is proposing to transfer all programme and module specifications over to its own template and, following scrutiny by the institute's Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, have these approved en bloc by its Academic Board. The assessment team considered this approach reasonable under the circumstances. This transfer is currently scheduled in the New DAPs plan for July 2025. Notwithstanding this date may be subject to change according to when the institute's DAPs take effect, the transfer of programme and module information over to the institute's template will ensure continuity in having definitive and up-to-date records of each qualification to be awarded and each programme being offered, which can be used as the basis for the delivery and assessment of each programme.

158. The institute currently uses the SITS student records system to support its statutory reporting requirements, with all data mirrored in its validating partner's system for the purposes of certifying awards and providing records of study. The assessment team considered a sample transcript issued by the institute's validating partner for evidence that students and alumni are provided with records of study. The transcript clearly identifies the student's programme, award and final award classification, the modules studied at each level, credit ratings and assessment marks, and the date the transcript was generated. The team considered this to provide students with relevant evidence of their studies for themselves and other interested parties, such as other higher education providers or employers.

159. The institute is currently working with a supplier to replace its current student records system. The assessment team found the project plan underpinning this project to evidence an advanced degree of planning, with the new system to be operational by September 2025. The institute intends to outsource the production of degree certificates and transcripts if it achieves its own DAPs, and its New DAPs plan includes a number of actions towards ensuring that the necessary systems and processes will be in place to provide its students with evidence of their studies. These actions include developing an Awards, Certificates and Transcripts Policy, Replacement Certificate and Transcript Guidance and a Degree and Transcript template for implementation from July 2026. The team was therefore satisfied that the institute has credible plans to provide evidence of study to its students and alumni.

160. Based on the evidence reviewed, the assessment team concluded that the institute meets criteria B1.2 as the evidence demonstrates that through its collaboration with its validating partner, it maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification approved (and of any subsequent changes to it). 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. The team also concluded that the institute has credible plans to assume these responsibilities should it gain its own DAPs.

Conclusions

161. Based on its findings, the assessment team concluded that the institute demonstrated a full understanding of criterion B1 and has a credible New DAPs plan, which can be reasonably expected to enable the institute to meet the criterion in full by the end of the probationary period.

162. The assessment team found that the institute currently successfully operates under a range of robust academic frameworks and regulations in collaboration with its validating partner. The institute has built on this experience to begin developing equivalent regulations and frameworks more tailored to its context in readiness for governing awards under its own DAPs.

163. There are definitive records of the institute's programmes and these act as the reference point for delivery and assessment, and records of study are provided to students. The institute has credible plans to ensure it has in place its own programme and student record systems so it can successfully assume these responsibilities from its validating partner if awarded DAPs.

Specified changes to the New DAPs plan

164. The team did not identify any specified changes to the institute's New DAPs plan for this criterion.

Criterion B2: Academic standards

Advice to the OfS

165. The assessment team's view is that the institute's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion B2: Academic standards.

166. The assessment team's view is that the institute has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion B2 because, in summary, the institute is developing its own mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications that are clear, credible, and will be consistently applied.

167. The assessment team's view is that the institute has demonstrated a full understanding of sub-criterion B2.1 and B2.2 because it currently has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications through its current collaborative partnership. It has also outlined clear policies and processes for programme design, approval, and review that will ensure its qualifications continue to align with the threshold academic standards of the FHEQ should it gain its own DAPs.

168. The institute has also provided evidence of mechanisms for maintaining standards above the threshold, ensuring they are reliable over time and reasonably comparable to those set and achieved by other UK degree awarding bodies. The institute is drawing on its experience under its collaborative partnership to develop its own processes for awarding its own degrees.

169. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the institute's New DAPs plan and supporting evidence, alongside any other relevant information. This shows that the institute can be reasonably expected to meet criterion B2 in full by the end of the probationary period.

Sub-criteria 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 Frameworks 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

170. The assessment team carried out an evaluation of the mechanisms in place to set and maintain the academic standards of the institute's qualifications, which included an assessment of the institute's governance structures, academic regulations, external benchmarking, programme validation processes, student engagement initiatives and external examiner reports.

171. As set out in the introduction and background to this report, the institute has almost 30 years' experience of designing and delivering higher education provision. It currently offers higher education qualifications up to and including Level 7 in a variety of subject areas, housed under the School of Music, the School of Creative Technologies, Design and Enterprise, and the School of Performance. As discussed previously under criterion A1 and B1, the institute currently operates under its validating partner's academic regulations.

172. The institute's programmes are currently approved and reapproved via its validating partner's processes. To develop new programmes, the institute must first gain strategic planning approval from its validating partner, after which the programme can seek initial approval to launch ('validation'). Existing programmes undergo periodic review typically every five years for ongoing approval for delivery (or 'revalidation').

173. In considering the institute's current approach to setting and maintaining academic standards, the assessment team reviewed the following primary sources of evidence:

- the validating partner's Guidance for Validation and Periodic Review Process', 'Guidance for Continuous Monitoring and Enhancement' and academic regulations

- a sample of validation and periodic review documentation

- programme specifications

- external examiner reports and the External Examiners' Overview reports for 2021-22 and 2022-23

- a sample of assessed student work.

174. The assessment team first considered whether the higher education qualifications offered by the institute are at levels that correspond to the FHEQ.

175. The institute's current reference point for initial programme approval and subsequent cyclical review is the validating partner's Guidance for Validation and Periodic Programme Review document. This document explicitly states that the validation and periodic review processes have taken account of the FHEQ. The guidance also states that one responsibility of validation and periodic review panels is to ensure that programmes are effectively aligned to relevant external reference points, including the FHEQ. To enable panels to do this effectively, the guidance requires the institute to submit for scrutiny key documentation, including a Design and Delivery Overview (for validation) or self-evaluation document (for periodic review) and programme and module specifications.

176. To assess the application of these procedures in practice, the team reviewed validation documents for the BA (Hons) Acting (Contemporary Performance) and periodic review documents for the BA (Hons) Sound Technology. The team found that the learning outcomes for both target awards align with the qualification descriptors for bachelors' degrees at Level 6, and intermediate exit awards at Levels 4 and 5, of the FHEQ. For example, across the 17 learning outcomes for the BA (Hons) Sound Technology, students are expected to have developed a systematic understanding of their discipline and to be able to effectively deploy established techniques relevant to the field and independently manage their own learning, in line with the generic expectations for programmes at this level of the FHEQ. The volume of

study for both programmes also conforms to the expectations for awards at this level. The team also reviewed the outcomes of the periodic review and validation events at which these programmes were considered, and found that the respective review panels of internal and external peers explicitly confirmed that the threshold academic standards of the programmes were consistent with the relevant UK national qualifications framework (i.e. the FHEQ) and any applicable sector-recognised standards.

177. The assessment team also found that awards, programme and module learning outcomes, and credits are appropriately aligned with the corresponding levels of the FHEQ for postgraduate awards at Level 7. Module specifications for 'Research Skills' (15 credits), 'Costume Skills' (15 credits) and 'Experimentation and Development' (45 credits) all demonstrate alignment with Level 7 descriptors in both design and academic expectations.

178. From its own review of documentation that supports the validation and revalidation of the institute's programmes, alongside sampling the scrutiny this documentation receives through the validating partner's programme approval processes, the assessment team was therefore satisfied that qualifications offered by the institute are at levels corresponding to the relevant levels of the FHEQ.

179. The team then considered whether the setting and maintaining of academic standards take appropriate account of relevant external points of reference and external and independent points of expertise, including students. It also considered whether the institute, in establishing and then maintaining threshold academic standards and comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level qualifications, makes use of appropriate external and independent expertise.

180. The validating partner's 'Guidance for Validation and Periodic Programme Review' tasks review panels with testing and confirming whether proposed programmes are appropriately aligned to applicable external requirements and reference points. The team found externality is built into the review panels themselves, as they include external advisers such as academics from other higher education providers with relevant experience or PSRB representatives. The team saw evidence of review panels discharging their responsibilities in practice through the questions and comments recorded in the periodic review documentation. For example, one panel member sought clarification over the role of the accrediting body in the design of the institute's BA (Hons) Sound Technology programme, while another queried whether external stakeholders, including external examiners and PSRBs, had been consulted on the proposals. The institute resolved both queries to the panel's satisfaction.

181. The team found further evidence of externality embedded in the institute's current arrangements for programme design and approval, including national qualifications frameworks, OfS regulatory requirements, Subject Benchmark Statements, external examiners, and industry links. For example, the periodic review documentation for the BA (Hons) Sound Technology programme demonstrated that it had been designed with reference to the FHEQ, the Subject Benchmark Statement for Engineering, previous feedback from the accrediting body for this programme (JAMES) and industry partners including recording studios and audio production companies. Further evidence on the use of external examiners as part of programme design and review is given in paragraph 193.

182. In relation to accrediting bodies, the team noted that a number of the institute's programmes are accredited by the CDMT or JAMES, demonstrating external validation of academic standards. Through its review of periodic review documentation for the BA (Hons) Sound Technology, the team saw positive feedback from JAMES accreditation reports on how this programme had been developed, finding it to be 'a prime example of excellence of its type'. The documents also evidence how the institute aligned this programme with the Engineering Council's 'The Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes'.

183. In considering student involvement in the setting and maintaining of standards, the assessment team noted that guidance states review panels will normally include a student representative, review documentation should describe how students have been engaged on any proposals, and review panels will generally meet with a group of students in private from the programme team responsible for the proposal. Of the five validation or periodic review event panels for which the team saw full documentation, only one panel included a student representative. Nonetheless, the team was satisfied that sufficient student input had been sought in other ways. For example, the documentation refers variously to feedback having been sought from students through focus groups, from student representatives at Programme Boards, and review panels meeting with groups of students.

184. Based on this evidence, the assessment team concluded that the setting and maintaining of academic standards at the institute, including threshold standards, takes account of relevant external points of reference and external and independent points of expertise, including students. The team was of the view that the institute makes systematic use of a variety of external and independent points of expertise, including independent academic peers, external advisers and examiners, relevant quality reference points such as the FHEQ, OfS conditions of registration and Subject Benchmark Statements, and industry, employer and PSRB input. The assessment team therefore considers that the institute is successfully regulating academic standards and the input of external and independent expertise under its current externally validated awards. As discussed in paragraphs 210 to 214, the team are also of the view the institute would continue to do so under its own DAPs through its own policies and procedures.

185. The assessment team then considered whether the institute's current programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements are robust, applied consistently and ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the relevant qualifications and are in accordance with the institute's academic frameworks and regulations. It also considered whether these arrangements explicitly address whether the UK threshold standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree awarding body are being maintained.

186. The team was of the view that the validating partner's Guidance for Validation and Periodic Review Process sets out a robust set of procedures for initial and ongoing approval of the institute's programmes, including ensuring academic standards are set at a level that meets the UK threshold standards and that the validating partner's academic standards are maintained.

187. From the evidence described above of validation and periodic review in action, the team was also satisfied that these procedures were applied consistently in practice, and that explicit

assurance is given throughout the relevant documentation that threshold standards and institutional academic standards more generally are achieved and maintained as a result.

188. To scrutinise these procedures in action further, the team reviewed a recent programme approval for the BA (Hons) Acting (Contemporary Performance). In line with the guidance, the validation event panel evaluated the proposal, including whether any applicable sector-recognised standards had been met. The panel concluded, among other things, that the threshold academic standards of the programme were consistent with the relevant UK national qualifications framework and any applicable sector-recognised standards.

189. The team also reviewed a larger sample of programme approval documentation to further assure itself that appropriate attention was paid to the setting and maintaining of academic standards. The team found examples in the documentation of review panels requiring specific changes to programme specifications to ensure compliance in this area. For instance, for a number of acting programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, the review panel required the institute to review 'the effectiveness of the content and design in enabling students to achieve the programme(s) aims and outcomes, and to ensure that academic standards continue to be maintained'. The team also acknowledged the institute's considered response to this and other comments, resolving queries to the panel's satisfaction and leading to programmes being approved.

190. The assessment team also concluded that such processes around validation and periodic review are in line with the academic regulations and frameworks of the validating partner, under which the institute currently operates. This is because the Guidance for Validation and Periodic Review states it should be read in conjunction with the validator's academic regulations, and endorsement of a programme proposal confirms that there is alignment with those regulations. The team saw evidence of this alignment in practice in the programme approval documentation for the BA (Hons) Acting (Contemporary Performance). In approving the programme for delivery, the event panel explicitly confirmed that the programme had been designed in line with the validating partner's academic regulations and relevant policies and that any agreed divergence from those regulations had been clearly articulated in the documentation submitted by the institute.

191. To further assure itself of the institute's approach in these areas, the team considered its arrangements for ongoing review outside of initial validation and cyclical revalidation processes. The validating partner's Guidance for Continuous Monitoring and Enhancement (CME) sets out the process for monitoring and reviewing the alignment of programmes with UK threshold standards and the university's own standards. The process is iterative over the course of a programme's validated period of approval, with monitoring taking place at module- and programme-level to reflect on performance and identify actions for improvement. It is a requirement that programme-level reflections and actions are informed by a number of evidence sources, including external examiner reports and key metrics on module performance (such as module and assessment component mean marks and pass rates). Throughout the guidance, the team found there was an appropriate emphasis on the need to focus on standards. For example, programme teams are advised to 'pay particular consideration to any concerns expressed by External Examiners with regard to the academic standards of a programme'.

192. The institute's Programme Boards are tasked with monitoring progress against actions raised through the CME process, and the team confirmed through the evidence that these processes are consistently applied in practice. A sample of Programme Board minutes for 2023 and 2024 show programme-level action plans being considered in line with the CME policy. While no specific actions had been raised in these minutes which would suggest academic standards were not being set and maintained appropriately, the team was confident the processes were sufficiently robust to identify and respond to any issues which may arise in this area.

193. The team then reviewed external examiner comments for 2021-22 and 2022-23 to establish whether academic standards were being set and maintained appropriately. The forms that capture external examiners' comments require them to explicitly confirm whether standards have been set in accordance with the FHEQ and applicable Subject Benchmark Statements, and to confirm that standards are comparable with those of other higher education institutions. In all but one instance, external examiner comments seen by the team explicitly affirm the appropriateness of standards at the institute. For one programme in 2021-22, an external examiner raised an issue over perceived generous marking in relation to some written assessments, leading to a 'Neither agree nor disagree' response to questions around the appropriateness of standards and comparability to other institutions. This response was flagged by the institute in its Overview Report on External Examining for 2021-22 as being of a concern and it was subsequently reported to the Institute Quality Commission. The programme team took action in response to this feedback, including revisiting the language of grade descriptors and processes around moderating student work. External examiner comments for 2022-23 show the same external examiner responding 'Agree' to questions in the area of standards, commenting that students' written work was marked more fairly following actions taken since the previous report. This demonstrated to the team that the institute's monitoring and review processes enable the institute to identify risks to the standards of its programmes, and that the institute responds with targeted and appropriate action to ensure standards remain secure.

194. This evidence demonstrated to the team's satisfaction that the institute's current arrangements were operated in a structured and consistent way with appropriate regard paid to academic standards. The team therefore concluded that the institute's programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements are robust, applied consistently and ensure that academic standards are set at a level that meets the UK threshold standard for the relevant qualifications and are in accordance with the institute's academic frameworks and regulations, including appropriate external input. Furthermore, it concluded that these arrangements explicitly address whether the UK threshold standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree awarding body are being maintained. The team was also satisfied that the institute has plans for ensuring these standards would continue to be upheld should it be granted DAPs, as discussed further in more detail in paragraphs 210 to 214.

195. Finally, to test whether current arrangements mean credit and qualifications are awarded only where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment, and both the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the validating partner have been satisfied, the team reviewed a sample of assessed student work. This sample included work across the grade boundaries for a variety of written and practical assessments across the institute's offering. In reviewing this work, the assessment team

cross-referenced it to the regulations and frameworks governing assessment at the institute and to external examiners' comments.

196. The team found from the sample that assessment is against the stated learning outcomes for the programmes. In many pieces of written feedback, learning outcomes are referenced directly, and the feedback provided to students demonstrates adherence to the relevant assessment criteria and UK threshold standards. Marks awarded for a recorded assessment in the Audio Practice module, for example, span a range of classifications from 1st to 3rd, and include commentary on creative and technical performance, and the use of descriptors such as 'creative and appropriate' reflecting grading expectations outlined in the assessment brief.

197. In written assessments within the Popular Music Contexts module, feedback is provided through a structured tick-box system supplemented by written comments, allowing staff to indicate clearly where students meet or fall short of expected assessment criteria and learning outcomes. The team's view is that the use of such structured formats helps standardise marking and supports transparency.

198. The team found assessment specifically addresses aspects of subject knowledge, conceptual understanding, writing structure and interpretation of ideas — key features of UK threshold standards. While there were some instances where learning outcomes were not referenced in written assessment feedback, they were included in most, and assessment processes demonstrated to the team a clear link between performance and expected learning. Furthermore, in the tick-box system of assessment feedback, reference is made to learning outcomes having been met (for example, subject knowledge, interpreting, writing and structuring, and layout and referencing).

199. Across the sample reviewed the team found that assessment feedback demonstrated that academic judgements were consistent with the standards required for credit and qualification at the relevant level. In reviewing this work, the team found that the institute made robust and reasonable academic judgements in relation to the standard of student work, including in relation to work at the boundaries of the minimum threshold standard for a pass grade (40 per cent for undergraduate programmes and 50 per cent for postgraduate programmes). It was clear throughout the documentation which learning outcomes were being assessed and the rationale for marks awarded against these learning outcomes were clear, well-reasoned, and consistent with the overarching regulations and frameworks governing the institute's approach to assessment.

200. The team was also satisfied that the institute's arrangements for the Board of Examiners ensured achievement of the necessary academic standards which was appropriately recognised by the board. It is the role of Boards of Examiners – convened by the validating partner with representation from the institute and attended by institute staff and external examiners – to confirm moderation has taken place and ensure appropriate assessment standards are maintained. Minutes of Boards of Examiners for March and September 2024 confirmed to the team that external examiners were involved in the moderation of a sample of assessment submissions in line with the validating partner's Moderation Policy, and that the Boards of Examiners discharged its responsibilities in practice in confirming student marks.

201. The team therefore concluded that the institute's current arrangements ensure credit and qualifications are awarded only where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has

been demonstrated through assessment, and both the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the validating partner have been satisfied.

202. Overall, the team was satisfied with the institute's current arrangements for setting and maintaining academic standards through programme design, approval and monitoring, and drawing on external and independent input in those processes.

203. Having considered the institute's current arrangements for setting and maintaining academic standards in collaboration with its validating partner, the assessment team then considered whether the institute has credible plans to meet this criterion should it gain its own DAPs. As set out previously, the institute does not propose to individually validate its existing programmes under its own powers, instead validating the programmes as a group to deliver an award in its name. Given the team's findings above in relation to the processes to which these programmes have already been subject, as part of the institute's collaboration with its validating partner, the team was satisfied that this would mean the institute's own awards would be developed with due regard to academic standards.

204. The assessment team investigated how the institute would continue to maintain the academic standards of its current programmes as a degree awarding body and how any new programmes the institute chooses to develop would secure academic standards. To do this, the team looked at a wide range of evidence, including the institute's New DAPs plan and policies and processes the institute intends to adopt to manage the award of its own degrees, including:

- Academic regulations

- Programme Approval Process

- Periodic Review of Programmes Process

- Draft Annual Monitoring Process

- Draft Programme / Module Change Process

- Draft Design and Delivery Plan

- Draft Self-assessment Document template

- Approach to validating current programmes under probationary powers

- Quality Framework for Probationary Powers

- Draft Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy.

205. In preparation for New DAPs, the institute has demonstrated through its draft policies and procedures that it is developing a clear and robust strategy for monitoring and review. This is demonstrated through the institute's governance structures which provide opportunities for oversight via Programme Boards, the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee and the Academic Board.

206. As set out elsewhere in this report, the institute's approach to creating its own policies and procedures has generally been to replicate the policies under which it has been successfully operating to date, with any changes being targeted at tailoring policies and procedures to the institute's specific context as a small and specialist performing arts institution. In the assessment team's view and from its review of proposed policies, this in practice will generally result in the current arrangements being replicated substantially by the institute as an independent body, albeit with the institute directly running and having ultimate responsibility for these processes itself. This gave the assessment team broad confidence that the positive findings it has made above in relation to current arrangements will likely continue to be true should the institute achieve its own DAPs. To properly assure itself of this, however, the assessment team tested the institute's future plans against the relevant evidence requirements for this criterion, as set out below.

207. To consider whether the institute's higher education qualifications will continue to be offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the FHEQ, the team scrutinised the institute's own academic regulations and supporting policies.

208. In preparation for its own DAPs, the institute has established a Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review Task and Finish Group to develop its own processes to ensure, among other things, programmes are set at levels that accord with the FHEQ. The institute's own approved academic regulations clearly commit the institute to offering awards that adhere to the criteria and qualification descriptors of the FHEQ, and the development of associated policies and procedures are included in the institute's New DAPs plan with overall completion due by December 2025. The team reviewed a number of the institute's draft documents in this area, such as the New Programme / Award Approval Process, Periodic Review of Programmes Process, and New Award Regulations Approval Form. Both the New Programme / Award Approval Process and Periodic Review of Programmes Process reference the FHEQ as a relevant external point of reference, and the approval form requires staff to identify the FHEQ level at which the award is to be set along with relevant information on the type of award, programme title and credit structure. While not all of these policies have yet been finalised, the team agreed that the institute had credible plans for introducing their own policies and that these, based on the versions seen by the team, would ensure programmes were set at levels corresponding to the relevant levels of the FHEQ.

209. The team therefore concluded that the institute's future processes would ensure appropriate alignment with the FHEQ and that the institute had credible plans for ensuring such processes would be in place should it achieve DAPs.

210. The team considered whether the setting and maintaining of academic standards would take appropriate account of relevant external points of reference and external and independent points of expertise, including students. It also considered whether the institute, in establishing and then maintaining threshold academic standards and comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level qualifications, would make use of appropriate external and independent expertise.

211. In this respect, the team noted parallels between the institute's current arrangements under its validating partner and its own proposed approach, which led the team to agree that the institute would appropriately set and maintain standards with appropriate externality and independent input. For example, the institute's Programme Approval Process and Periodic

Review of Programmes Process set out that review panels will normally include external academics, industry representatives and students. Panels would also have access to external examiner and (where relevant) PSRB reports, as well as opportunities to engage with students directly themselves. Programme approval and periodic approval documentation will also require programme teams to undertake external benchmarking, for example with the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and the UK Quality Code.

212. Furthermore, the team noted that the terms of reference for the institute's Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, which replaced the Institute Quality Committee, task it with supporting programme approval and programme changes, and monitoring the use of relevant external reference points (such as the OfS's regulatory requirements) to ensure the institute's compliance and alignment with them.

213. Additionally, the team noted that the New DAPs plan references the introduction of an Industry Advisory Board at institute and school-level, using externality to inform curriculum development. The Industry Advisory Board was formally introduced in March 2025.

214. These findings gave the team confidence that the institute's proposed arrangements will ensure that the institute will to an appropriate degree draw on external and independent points of reference and expertise, including from students, in setting and maintaining the standards of its awards.

215. From the same analysis, the team was also satisfied that the institute's proposed programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements would be robust, applied consistently and ensure that academic standards are set at a level which would meet the UK threshold standard for the relevant qualifications and would be in accordance with the institute's academic frameworks and regulations. The team also considered that these arrangements would explicitly address whether the UK threshold standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree awarding body are being maintained.

216. To evaluate whether future arrangements would ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only when relevant learning outcomes are achieved, the team reviewed the institute's proposed processes for marking and moderation. They also examined the planned role and function of Boards of Examiners in upholding UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the validating partner.

217. The institute's academic regulations set out a requirement for the moderation of assessed student work and empower Boards of Examiners with verifying moderation has taken place and confirming final grades. The institute's New DAPs plan includes actions to develop relevant procedures and policies by June 2025, including an Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy, Board of Examiners Policy and External Examiner Policy and Procedure. The team had sight of an early draft of the Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy, and noted it included a requirement for external examiners to be involved in the moderation of student work at all levels, as is the case under the institute's current arrangements. While the team did not have sight of the External Examiner and Board of Examiners policies as they were still in development at the time of its assessment, the team did note that the academic regulations do make clear the importance of these two aspects in ensuring academic standards are secure.

218. The team was therefore satisfied that the institute's future arrangements – based largely on the existing policies and procedures under which it currently operates successfully – could credibly be expected to ensure that credit and qualifications would only be awarded where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes had been demonstrated through assessment. The team was also confident that both the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the validating partner had been satisfied.

Conclusions

219. Based on its findings, the assessment team concluded that the institute demonstrated a full understanding of criterion B2 and has a credible New DAPs plan which can be reasonably expected to enable the institute to meet the criterion in full by the end of the probationary period.

220. The assessment team found that the institute currently has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications through its current collaborative partnership. It has also outlined clear policies and processes for programme design, approval and review that will ensure its qualifications continue to align with the threshold academic standards of the FHEQ should it gain its own DAPs.

221. The institute has also provided evidence of mechanisms for maintaining standards above the threshold, ensuring they are reliable over time and reasonably comparable to those set and achieved by other UK degree awarding bodies. The institute has demonstrated how it is effectively drawing on its experience under its validation partnership to develop its own processes for awarding its own degrees.

Specified changes to the New DAPs plan

222. The team did not identify any specified changes to the institute's New DAPs plan for this criterion.

Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience

Advice to the OfS

223. The assessment team's view is that the institute's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience.

224. The assessment team's view is that the institute has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion B3 because, in summary, the institute has a good understanding of and, in conjunction with its validating partner, currently operates sound processes for the design and approval of programmes, high quality learning, teaching and assessment, academic appeals and student complaints and the appropriate use of external examiners. The institute has also started to develop its own policies and procedures to ensure it will be able continue to deliver these areas effectively if it is awarded DAPs.

225. The team has made recommendations to monitor the development of some key policies during the institute's probationary period, namely in relation to assessment (paragraphs 293 and 323), academic appeals (paragraph 339) and distance learning (paragraph 277).

226. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the institute's New DAPs plan and supporting evidence, alongside any other relevant information. This shows that the institute can be reasonably expected to meet criterion B3 in full by the end of the probationary period.

Sub-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

227. The assessment team considered whether the institute can demonstrate that it is able to design and deliver courses and qualifications that provide a high quality academic experience to all students from all backgrounds, irrespective of their location, mode of study, academic subject, protected characteristics, previous educational background or nationality. It also considered whether learning opportunities are consistently and rigorously quality assured. To do this, the assessment team reviewed a range of documentary evidence including the institute's current Curriculum Design Guide, Guide to Teaching, Assessment, Feedback and Assessment Regulations, its Internal Review of Proposed New Provision process, and a range of draft versions of processes, guidance documents, templates and forms. The team referenced these against reports and minutes from relevant meetings, as well as discussing the institute's arrangements with students and staff during the provider visit.

Design and approval of programmes

228. To consider whether the institute operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes, the assessment team reviewed a range of existing and draft

documents including the validating partner's current Curriculum Design Guide, the institute's Internal Review of Proposed New Provision process, and draft versions of the institute's New Programme / Award Approval Process and Design and Delivery Plan document.

229. The assessment team found that the Curriculum Design Guide provides institute staff with an effective process for the design and development of programmes, including ensuring the curriculum is inclusive, designed in partnership with students, research-informed, and supports employability. The team's view is that this is a comprehensive guide and a review of programme specifications evidenced to the team that the guide was being used by the institute in practice. As discussed under criterion B2, the team found that the institute's current programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements are robust (see paragraphs 185 to 194). The institute's ongoing work to develop policies and procedures in readiness for DAPs also demonstrated to the team that the institute would operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes if awarded its own DAPs (see paragraphs 210 to 215).

230. Through draft documentation, the team confirmed that the institute has in place plans to design, develop and approve new programmes. For example, the team confirmed that its New Programme / Award Approval Process and Design and Delivery Plan give sufficient guidance, processes and templates for staff to design, develop and approve programmes appropriately. Draft versions of these documents seen by the team build on the validating partner's processes currently in use at the institute, and the team confirmed they set out robust arrangements and also include greater detail on the requirements, responsibilities and processes involved, including on approval by the Academic Board. The institute will monitor these new processes every three years and enhancements will be considered and approved by its Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

231. The team found that the institute's New DAPs plan also gives appropriate timeframes for approving, implementing and briefing staff on any new processes and guidance for programme development. Throughout 2025 and into 2026 the institute will be developing further supporting materials and documentation and will brief staff on programme approval and change processes.

232. The team found that the institute's current Internal Review of Proposed New Provision process – which provides for internal review prior to presenting any changes to its validating partner for approval – outlined clear internal procedures, responsibilities and timelines for reviewing new programmes. The Internal Scrutiny Panel Event Report for the BA Hons Acting programme in April 2024 provided the team with recent evidence of how this process is enacted in practice, and this assured the team that the institute followed a thorough process consistent with the written guidance. As detailed in paragraphs 185 to 194 and 210 to 215, the team found that the validating partner's processes and those the institute will adopt if awarded DAPs set out a robust set of procedures for initial and ongoing approval of the institute's programmes, and the team was satisfied that current procedures were being applied consistently in practice.

233. Having reviewed the evidence, the assessment team concluded that the institute currently operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes under its validating partner. The team concluded that the institute has robust guidance for ensuring that staff understand and adhere to relevant processes and saw evidence that these

processes were followed in practice. The policies and procedures that the institute has begun developing in readiness for operating under its own DAPs also assured the team that it will continue to operate effective processes should it gain New DAPs.

234. To assess whether relevant staff are informed of and provided with guidance and support on procedures for the design and approval of programmes and their roles and responsibilities in relation to them, the assessment team reviewed a range of current and proposed guidance documents and related evidence. This included the institute's current Internal Review of Proposed New Provision process, minutes from its Programme Development, Monitoring and Review Group, as well as policies and procedures being prepared in readiness for New DAPs.

235. The team found that the Internal Review of Proposed New Provision process provides guidance and support on the procedures, roles and responsibilities for institute staff to review proposed new programmes prior to submitting proposals to the validating partner. The team was satisfied from the evidence it had seen – such as the Internal Scrutiny Panel report for the BA (Hons) Acting (Contemporary Performance) – that this guidance and support are used and understood by staff.

236. In looking to the future, a review of minutes from the institute's Programme Development, Monitoring and Review Group confirmed to the team that the institute is actively developing guidance and support to be used by staff if the institute is awarded New DAPs. Example discussions from the group include a discussion on how the institute's process will differ from the validating partner. For example, there would be a two-step process rather than the existing three-step process as per the existing validating partner's procedures. The institute's two-step process would entail first a business case considering resources, facilities and whether the new provision fits the institute. Secondly, an academic case would be presented as part of the validation process and would need final sign off by the Academic Board. These stages would start at least 21 months prior to the programme starting in order to comply with Competition and Markets Authority regulations, and the programme would be fully approved and ready to recruit one year before its start. The proposed new process would also have an option to be less focused on lengthy written proposals as it sets out that 'to be as inclusive as possible for all staff, a presentation could also be considered as a valid form of proposing new provision, with the caveat that if more documentation would be required, it could be requested'. The team considered the planned approach to be well thought through, inclusive and effective.

237. As detailed in paragraph 229, draft documentation in development by the institute in anticipation of being awarded New DAPs confirmed to the team that relevant staff will be informed of and provided with guidance and support on procedures. In addition to the documents named above, the Stage One New Programme Award Proposal Form provides staff with a template that will help the executive team to assess the nature of the proposal. This includes programme information, market research and student numbers and resources. Once approved, the institute's proposed New Programme Readiness Checklist will enable staff to confirm that areas such as staffing, external examiners, induction, resources, timetabling and Programme Board schedules are all considered and any issues are highlighted. All these documents outline the roles and responsibilities of staff involved in relation to the design, development and approval of programmes. As discussed previously

under criterion B2, this documentation is being developed as part of a suite of new policies and procedures that the New DAPs plan confirms will be complete by June 2025.

238. On the basis of the evidence it had considered, the assessment team concluded that relevant staff at the institute are informed of and provided with guidance and support on procedures and their roles and responsibilities in relation to them. The team concluded that the existing information, guidance and support under the validating partner is enacted and monitored, and that the institute is already designing new information and guidance which will provide relevant staff with what they will require in the design and approval of programmes to be awarded under the institute's own DAPs.

239. The assessment team considered whether the institute clearly assigns responsibility for approving new programme proposals, including the involvement of external expertise, where appropriate, and subsequent action is carefully monitored. Alongside its analysis of programme approval arrangements set out under criterion B2, the assessment team also reviewed the institute's current Internal Review of Proposed New Provision process and proposed New Programme / Award Approval Process. The team assessed the efficacy of the institute's current processes through the Internal Scrutiny Panel Event Report for the BA Hons Acting programme, the BA (Hons) Acting (Contemporary Performance) Design and Delivery Overview document, and the Collaborative Validation Overview document.

240. The team found that the current Internal Review of Proposed New Provision process outlined clear responsibilities and timelines for internally reviewing new programmes within their current structure. In summary, the institute's Quality team confirms the dates for review panels; the chair approves the panel and agrees the schedule; the review panel hold the meetings and verbally confirm actions; the Programme Leader or Head of School follow-up on any actions and make amendments; and the quality team submits the final proposal to the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee and the validating partner.

241. The Internal Scrutiny Panel Event Report for the BA (Hons) Acting (Contemporary Performance) programme provided the team with evidence of how this process was enacted recently and assured the team that a thorough process was followed resulting in recommendations, commendations and ultimately a decision that further work was needed before proceeding. For example, within the consideration of 'design and delivery' of the programme, the panel considered that more detail was needed on the ratio of group versus individual work, how this will be assessed to ensure parity for students, and asking for examples of the portfolio elements that would be typical at each level, and how they match to learning outcomes being assessed.

242. The team also reviewed the terms of reference for the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, which task it with supporting the system for programme approval and recommending new programmes and changes to existing programmes to Academic Board, as well as overseeing the validating partner's CME process (discussed in more detail in paragraphs 191 and 192). Minutes from the Institute Quality Committee (which the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee has since replaced) demonstrated to the team that the committee received updates on the development of the BA (Hons) Acting (Contemporary Performance) and any actions arising through the approvals process.

243. As discussed in paragraphs 179 to 184, the institute's current processes, as determined by its validating partner, require it to take account of relevant external points of reference and external and independent points of expertise. Evidence of the involvement of external expertise in the approval of new programmes was demonstrated to the team through the BA (Hons) Acting (Contemporary Performance) Design and Delivery Overview. This document follows the validating partner's process and is presented to the validation panel with key information relating to the design, development, and operation of the proposed programme. It evidences that 'consultation with professional practitioners and companies was undertaken to ensure its content is appropriate' and lists the companies involved as well as confirming that external examiners contributed. In addition, the validating partner's 'Collaborative Validation Overview' document confirmed that the programme was approved and that an external representative was on the validation panel.

244. The institute also provided its own recently approved New Programme / Award Approval Process which outlines what should happen at each stage of the process, who is responsible for approval, how students should be engaged in the process, how actions will be monitored, and a timeline of the complete process. The associated Design and Delivery Plan includes a section to articulate how consultation with external stakeholders – for example, employers, industry and external examiners – has informed the design of the programme. Both documents demonstrated to the team that the institute has credible plans in place to effectively operate the design, development and approval of new programmes.

245. The assessment team concluded that the institute clearly assigns responsibility for approving new programme proposals, including the involvement of external expertise, where appropriate, and subsequent action is carefully monitored. The guidance for staff is clear and internal processes are sound. External expertise is used across the institute with the use of inputs from external examiners, professionals, PSRBs and external benchmarking. In addition, the team concluded that the institute has credible plans in place to continue to assign responsibility for approving new programme proposals, involve external expertise and carefully monitor actions.

246. Currently the institute delivers two programmes that offer multiple pathways: BA (Hons) Management and BA (Hons) Music (routeways). To assess whether the coherence of programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways is secured and maintained, the assessment team reviewed the programme specifications for these programmes. The assessment team also requested further information from the institute about how students are advised of their choices in following specialist pathways within programmes, and also discussed this aspect of provision with staff during its visit to the institute.

247. The assessment team found that the programme specifications for the BA (Hons) Management and BA (Hons) Music (routeways) outline the structures, timing and options for student choice to follow a specialist pathway within the programme. The programme specification for BA (Hons) Management demonstrated to the team that students can choose between three specialist pathways – Theatre and Screen, Music Industry Management or Management of Live Events – or, alternatively, choose not to specialise. The programme specification for BA (Hons) Music (routeways) set out that the programme entails a comprehensive suite of modules across levels that allow students to specialise within one of six coherent pathways: Songwriting and Performance; Songwriting and Production;

Contemporary Pop Voice and Performance; Session Musicianship; Popular, Contemporary and Commercial; or Production.

248. The assessment team confirmed that the choice of pathways on the BA (Hons) Management was coherent. This was because the pathway is determined by the optional modules that a student takes at Level 5, with students able to select two optional modules from one of the three specialist pathways. Where students choose not to specialise, they can select any two optional modules. The remainder of the content delivered is core to all. In the team's view, this choice makes for a coherent offering for students and is maintained as detailed below.

249. The team found that the BA (Hons) Music pathways were also coherent and connected to a student's area of knowledge and skills. The choices are clear and logical to the pathway for which students apply and audition. The BA (Hons) Music programme also has core modules common to all students irrespective of their chosen pathway, with 30 credits of core content at levels 4 and 5 and 60 credits at Level 6.

250. The assessment team requested further information from the institute on how students are advised of their choices in following specialist pathways within programmes. In response to the team's query, the institute made clear that students apply directly onto their pathways at admission, using information from the website, mini guide and open days. If students wish to move pathways mid-programme, the relevant programme leader evaluates the students' progress and checks that all learning outcomes have been achieved (or, in the case of Music, students are auditioned and tested to see if a change of pathway is feasible).

251. From a review of relevant documentation, the team was also of the view that the institute's future approach to ensuring the coherence of programmes with multiple elements or pathways would be appropriate. For example, the institute's Design and Delivery Plan includes instructions for programme designers to justify their proposed approach to programme content and structure in respect of core and / or optional modules and pathways (where applicable).

252. From the evidence, the assessment team therefore concluded that the coherence of programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways is secured and maintained (and would continue to be if the institute were awarded New DAPs). Students are well informed of their choices in relation to available pathways and there is a process to request a change.

253. To consider whether the institute maintains close links between learning support services and the institute's programme planning and approval arrangements, the assessment team reviewed the Internal Review of Proposed New Provision, the Internal Scrutiny Panel Event Report for the BA (Hons) Acting programme, Programme Board Minutes for 2022-23 and 2023-24, the recently approved New Programme / Award Approval Process, the Periodic Review of Programmes Process. In addition, the team received further information in this area through discussions with staff during its visit to the institute.

254. In reviewing current practice under its validating partner, the team found that the Internal Review of Proposed New Provision requires that the Head of the Learning Resource Centre (LRC) (or their nominee) sits as a member of the review panels, scrutinising new provision prior to presenting the programmes and supporting materials for approval by the validating partner. The Internal Scrutiny Panel Event Report for the BA Hons Acting programme

confirmed to the team that the Learning Services Manager was a panel member. The panel also gave a steer to the programme team to consult the LRC for assistance in responding to its recommendation to diversify the proposed indicative reading list, demonstrating close links being maintained between new programme proposals and the institute's learning support services.

255. The team also requested further information or evidence of the involvement of wider learning support staff in programme approvals and periodic reviews and the institute stated that its Programme Readiness Checklist, as confirmed by the team, requires confirmation of engagement with the LRC. Staff in the LRC are also represented on Programme Boards for ongoing engagement with programme teams. Close links between the LRC and the programme planning and approval arrangements in practice were confirmed to the team by regular attendance and input of LRC representatives at Programme Boards, as evidenced through minutes of Programme Board discussions throughout 2022-23 and 2023-24.

256. The assessment team discussed this topic further in a meeting with the institute's student support, feedback and employability teams during its visit. During this meeting it was confirmed to the team that staff from the LRC regularly attend Programme Board meetings and have been involved in pre-validation and validation events where they can make suggestions on resource requirements.

257. The assessment team also found that LRC staff will continue to be part of the institute's own programme planning if it is awarded DAPs. Its New Programme / Award Approval and Periodic Review of Programmes processes, for example, both provide that review panels will normally include the Learning Services Manager.

258. The assessment team concluded that the institute does maintain close links between learning support services and the institute's programme planning and approval arrangements. This was in evidence to the team as staff from the LRC have a consistent presence and input into programme planning and approval and regular contact with programme teams, and would continue to do so if awarded New DAPs.

Learning and teaching

259. To determine if the institute articulates and implements a strategic approach to learning and teaching which is consistent with its stated academic objectives, the assessment team examined a range of evidence including its validating partner's Learning and Teaching Strategy 2023 to 2030, the institute's own ELTAFS and accompanying action plan, its Equity Strategy and its Guide to Teaching, Assessment, Feedback and Assessment Regulations.

260. The assessment team found that the institute currently uses the validating partner's Learning and Teaching Strategy, which aligns with the validating partner's vision and values. The document confirmed to the team that the institute uses strategic priorities to learning and teaching under the headings of people; curriculum; teaching and assessment; physical estate; digital infrastructure; policy, process and regulations; and institutional culture.

261. If awarded New DAPs this strategy will be superseded by the institute's own ELTAFS and action plan, which will be implemented in Spring 2025 and monitored through to 2028. This confirmed to the team the institute has prepared a strategic approach to learning and teaching with a specific focus on its purpose and context for 'enabling and empowering the

creatives of the future to secure sustained work'. Its first strategic goal is 'to be recognised as a world-leading centre of excellence for creative learning and vocational training within the performing arts and creative industries'. The team found that this strategy contains comprehensive objectives and actions to reach its stated aims. The team also found that the institute articulates a strategic approach to diversity, inclusion and belonging, in line with its academic objectives, through its Equity Strategy.

262. The institute's Guide to Teaching, Assessment, Feedback and Assessment Regulations is a document developed by the institute and demonstrated to the assessment team the strategic approach taken by the institute to learning and teaching in line with its academic objectives, and how the institute supports its staff to ensure this approach is applied. The guide has the intention of providing institute staff with 'the information on the processes we need to have consistently applied in all areas and in providing information reinforce as we do, how what we do relates to our ethos, overall intentions and how we protect the integrity of the degrees we are responsible for'. This also relates to the comprehensive list of objectives and actions in the ELTAFS action plan referred to in the previous paragraph. These include an objective to continue to review and develop the curriculum, including new programmes, to ensure that excellence, innovation, collaboration and professional skills are embedded into all programmes, with actions in relation to periodic review and the validation of new programmes.

263. Based on this evidence, the assessment team concluded that the institute articulates and implements a strategic approach to learning and teaching consistent with its stated academic objectives. The team's view is this is the case currently under arrangements between the institute and its validating partner, and would also be the case in the event the institute achieves its own DAPs.

264. To assess whether the institute 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 reviewed the institute's access and participation plan, a range of health and safety documentation and its VLE. It also discussed this area with students and undertook a campus tour during its visit to the institute.

265. The assessment team found that the institute's Health and Safety Policy and Procedures outline safe access to space and resources, and give details on responsibilities, management, training, reporting, monitoring and risk assessing, as well as out-of-hours working, off-site supervision and placement policies. The Health and Safety Committee Terms of Reference, Health and Safety Committee Minutes and Health and Safety Annual Report evidenced to the team that the safety and accessibility of physical and social learning environments is taken seriously and regularly reviewed and monitored.

266. The team found that the Safeguarding and Precautionary Measures Policy, the Student Disciplinary Procedure, the Harassment and Bullying Policy and Procedures and the Sexual Misconduct Policy demonstrated that the institute has in place the frameworks and processes to ensure that (non-academic) misconduct is investigated and addressed to minimise the risk to both students and the institution, including within virtual environments. For example, the Harassment and Bullying Policy and Procedures clearly evidenced a detailed but non-exhaustive list of behaviours that are 'unwanted and could reasonably be considered as

violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment'.

267. The assessment team found that the Summary of Key Access Issues document is a 2023 evaluation from an external consultancy on building access issues, detailing that the building is reasonably accessible within the legal obligations under the Equality Act, and lists issues and improvements to be addressed on the estate and in policy. The institute's access and participation plan notes potential capacity issues in relation to specialist spaces for students who lack suitable study or practice space at home in their accommodation. In response to this risk, however, the institute points to a significant number of timetabled hours, the fact its building is open 24 hours a day during term time and the opportunity to book spaces such as music practice rooms outside of classes. The institute has also introduced pods for individual and small group working and it can lend equipment and instruments to students to avoid the need to carry it between home and campus. The assessment team considered these measures taken to be reasonable and ensure in so far as possible that students have safe and reliable access to facilities and resources.

268. Before the visit, the team was granted access to the VLE and were satisfied that this is also accessible and reliable, with a broad range of information for students. Moodle is the platform that is used, and the team found information was clearly laid out and easy to navigate. There is clear signposting to programme pages, academic support, wellbeing services, student representatives and technology-enhanced learning help.

269. During its visit to the institute, the assessment team undertook a campus tour of space and resources and confirmed the facilities are of a very high quality, designed to industry standards. These include recording studios, audio labs, rehearsal rooms for music, dance and theatre, an aerial dance facility, as well as performance spaces such as the auditorium and TV studio. As mentioned previously, the building is open 24/7 during term time and students can book and use spaces and resources. All resources are open to all students, and they are inducted on how to access, book and safely use the resources during welcome week. The team also confirmed that all social learning environments were open, accessible and well used by students and included those involved in group work, individual work and performance practice. These included spaces in the LRC, which is a specialist creative and performing arts library with an extensive collection of books, e-books, scores, DVDs, online video streaming services, e-resources and print and electronic journals. In addition, there are open and social learning spaces across campus such as group working spaces and pods, practice rooms and ICT facilities.

270. In its meetings with students during its visit, the team heard how students believe the institute maintains physical, virtual and social learning environments that are safe, accessible and reliable for every student. For example, first-year students commented that the VLE resources are good, and second- and third-year students remarked that the resources are excellent, highlighting the access to industry leading equipment, the LRC, 24/7 access to the building and that they feel the institute is very good and a safe place which encourages creativity.

271. The institute also has a Social Media Policy for Students that ensures that virtual learning environments are safe and promote dignity, courtesy and respect in their use. The purpose of this policy is to encourage good practice, provide students with information, ensure students

do not compromise their security, protect the institution, and ensure a consistent approach to social media. The team confirmed that the policy provides effective guidance on the use of social media, whether connected to personal or institutional posts, to encourage safe and effective practice in a digital environment.

272. The assessment team concluded that the institute maintains physical, virtual and social learning environments that are safe, accessible and reliable for every student, and promotes dignity, courtesy and respect in their use. The institute maintains a reliable VLE, has very high quality spaces and facilities, with safety taken very seriously. Access to facilities is as open as is reasonably possible for all students, and the institute promotes the safe use of virtual spaces.

273. To establish whether the institute has robust arrangements for ensuring that the learning opportunities provided to those of its students that may be studying at a distance from the organisation are effective, the assessment team reviewed the institute's self-assessment document, a Periodic Review and Evaluations Report, the Curriculum and Design Guide, and discussed this area with staff during its visit to the institute.

274. The institute does not offer at-distance programmes of study. As stated in its self-assessment document, 'programmes are all delivered in person, on campus and on a full-time basis'. However, in circumstances where a student cannot attend in person there are provisions in place to support those students. For instance, the assessment team found in the Periodic Review and Evaluations Report a response from the MA Music Industry Management programme team on how a blended approach might be taken if a student cannot attend in person due to external commitments relevant to their programme. The programme team's response states that the use of a blended approach has worked well previously, but emphasised that the general expectation is that students will attend face-to-face wherever possible and any remote learning would need to be agreed between the student and course leader in advance of the activity. The team considered this flexible approach to be reasonable and appropriate, especially as it seeks to address potential conflicts between a student's academic study and undertaking relevant work experience.

275. The current Curriculum and Design Guide from the validating partner outlines how programmes should be designed for an active blended learning experience, including the use of the VLE for learning and assessment. As stated, most teaching at the institute needs to happen in person, but the team did consider that a robust active blended learning was provided to the students through content available on the VLE. As detailed in the self-assessment document, the VLE provides students with access to learning systems and institutional information which include programme and module information, learning resources, assessment information and submission points, and handbooks. Access to the VLE was given to the assessment team who confirm there is comprehensive content, guidance and support for those who may be accessing at a distance from the institute for brief and unavoidable periods.

276. During the visit to the institute, the assessment team was also informed of plans to develop a distance learning policy. This policy is in its early stages and would tie into the Lifelong

Learning Entitlement.[10] The ambition of the institute is to target and enable learners from underrepresented backgrounds, international students unable to study in the UK, or those who haven't considered higher education to access some of the institute's postgraduate programmes online. The development of this policy is also included in the institute's New DAPs plan with development to start in January 2027 with an approved policy in place by June 2027. As the institute is new to distance learning, the assessment team suggest the development of this policy is monitored during the probationary period.

277. The assessment team concluded that while the institute does not currently offer distance study programmes, there are nonetheless robust arrangements for ensuring that the learning opportunities provided to those of its students that may need to study at a distance for brief and unavoidable periods from the organisation are effective. The VLE supports students who need to access content at a distance from the institute and the institute has an ambition to develop a distance learning policy in the future. The team recommends that the development of this policy should be monitored during the probationary period.

278. To evaluate whether every student is enabled to monitor their progress and further their academic development, the assessment team reviewed all programme handbooks, the New DAPs self-assessment document, the access and participation plan and samples of assessment feedback, as well as discussing this area with students and staff during its visit to the institute.

279. The assessment team found that programme handbooks detail the institute's commitment that on every programme a student is assigned a personal tutor who they meet throughout their studies and who guides their academic development and finds appropriate support if needed. The success of the personal tutor system was confirmed to the assessment team in its meeting with students. Students highlighted that personal tutors were very visible, accessible and accommodating, and help quickly with many aspects so that students can monitor their progress and further their academic development.

280. The assessment team found that the self-assessment document outlines that 'our ethos, small class size, considerable performance and practice-based activity sets a culture where students get continued feedback enabling them to monitor their progress and further their academic and professional skills development'. This was confirmed to the team in its discussion with undergraduate and postgraduate students and with teaching staff, where attendees reiterated that small cohorts allow for individual contact and collaboration across departments, and that students regularly receive relevant feedback.

281. The institute's access and participation plan states that the institute has a 'student support culture and a strong track record of individually tailored and flexible support for students […] All students are assigned a personal tutor who meet with the students each term. Attendance monitoring systems are designed to identify students early on who may need follow-up support and re-engagement [… The] Student Wellbeing and Disability service is a cornerstone of our approach, offering well-promoted and comprehensive wellbeing, disability, and study support services'. The arrangements set out here confirmed to the team's

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[10] The Lifelong Learning Entitlement is a government funding scheme for flexible post-18 education and training. Over the course of their lifetime, individuals up to the age of 60 will be able to access a loan which will cover the costs for the equivalent of four years of post-18 study.

satisfaction that appropriate systems are in place for students to monitor their progress and further their academic development

282. The assessment team also reviewed a sample of assessment and feedback from across all the institute's schools and from a range of marking bands. The team concluded that marking and feedback is robust in most cases and contains a range of feedback and feed forward to support student progression and growth. For example, the feedback presented to a Level 4 student in one assessment feedback form from 2025 details the strengths in the assessment, where there needed to be more clarity, what could have been expanded upon, and what to do now and in future to improve subsequent submissions.

283. In response to a request for additional information about how students receive feedback and are supported with it, the institute explained that students currently access their grades and feedback through a variety of platforms, including the VLE, and local school-specific methods, and these multiple channels ensure that students receive timely and relevant information to support their academic progress. Going forward, the institute explained that all feedback and assessment information will be delivered through the VLE and the institute's new student records system (referred to in paragraphs 159 and 462). According to the institute's New DAPs plan, a new portal or system for submitting, marking and feeding back on work and for accessing results will be agreed by June 2025.

284. In addition to written feedback, the institute also explained how students are supported through verbal feedback in tutorials or practical sessions, as well as having opportunities for one-to-one meetings. This comprehensive approach enables students to monitor their progress effectively and engage in meaningful conversations about their academic development. This was confirmed by the team during its campus tour at the institute, in which they observed first-hand constructive conversations between staff and students about their development.

285. Based on its analysis, the assessment team concluded that every student at the institute is enabled to monitor their progress and further their academic development. The personal tutor system supports this and was commended by students, and the institute's small class sizes enable a good degree of individual contact and regular feedback on progress.

Assessment

286. The assessment team sought to ascertain whether the institute 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. To do this the team considered the validating partner's Assessment Policy, the institute's own draft Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy and Grade Descriptors as well as a sample of assessment briefs and module handbooks.

287. The assessment team found that the validating partner's Assessment Policy, under which the institute currently operates, sets out valid and reliable processes of assessment consistent with general sector expectations, including requirements around internal and external moderation of work, external examiner approval in assessment design and providing alternative assessments where appropriate.

288. The team reviewed samples of assessed work and feedback to test the validity and reliability of assessment processes in practice. For example, in the MA Acting marking and feedback document seen by the team, internal moderation marks and feedback comments demonstrated how grades and feedback is moderated within the team. The team also found external examiner reports that highlighted the validity and reliability of processes, such as a comment in the 2022-23 report noting an 'excellent use of rubric to refine the content, presentation style of dissertations and ensure standardisation across multiple assessors'.

289. In addition, the assessment team found that the institute operates valid and reliable assessment processes supported by detailed assessment briefs and consistent application of criteria in student work. For example, assessment briefs such as those for 'The Producer' and 'Audio Practice' modules outline clear expectations, including component weightings, submission methods, assessment methods and specific grading criteria. The 'Studio Operational Test in Audio Practice' assessment brief uses a transparent points system that distinguishes levels of student independence in practical tasks, enabling consistent judgements.

290. Module handbooks further support the validity of assessment by clearly articulating module aims, intended learning outcomes and the rationale behind the assessment design. Assessed student work, including feedback given for assessments in the Recording and Popular Music Contexts modules, demonstrates structured and consistent marking. In these modules, tutors apply tick-box marking templates alongside qualitative comments to reflect student performance against stated criteria. Overall, the clarity and structure of assessment documentation and the consistency of feedback provided strong evidence to the team of valid and reliable assessment design and implementation.

291. The team found that the institute's grade descriptors articulate the achievement of students in assessment at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in written, practice and performance-based submissions. These descriptors outline the attainment in connection to the learning outcomes and demonstrated to the assessment team that students understand the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought. The team confirmed that grade descriptors are included in the assessment briefs to provide students with an understanding of how they have performed according to their marks, for example as evidenced in a Level 4 Audio Practice assessment brief. In addition, the team confirmed that the grade descriptor vocabulary is used by staff to shape how they are writing their feedback. For instance, this was demonstrated in the three samples of feedback from the Level 6 Performance Company module, in which the assessor had described the high achieving work as 'outstanding', the high pass work as 'comprehensive' and the mid-pass work as 'good', consistent with the institute's grade descriptors.

292. In November 2024, the institute implemented its own Recognition of Prior (Experiential) Learning (RPEL) Policy, having previously used that of the validating partner. The assessment team reviewed and compared both previous and current policies and concluded that both are reliable guides, containing process structures, and that the institute's own policy comprehensively builds on its validating partner's to include, among other information, principles, definitions, process and governance structures.

293. The assessment team also found that the institute's draft Assessment, Moderation, and Feedback Policy outlines the approach to standardisation and moderation and gives the early

framework for processes of assessment should the institute gain its own degree awarding powers. The development of this is included in its New DAPs plan with a completion date of June 2025. Although only a draft version was available at the time of the team's assessment, it was satisfied from the work already done that the final policy would sufficiently ensure there continue to be valid and reliable processes of assessment in place at the institute to govern how it operates under its own DAPs. The team recommends, however, that the development and implementation of this policy should be monitored during the probationary period.

294. The assessment team concluded that the institute 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. Current and future policies confirmed that the institute has (or would have) the robust processes in place to govern how it assesses student work, and the institute's grade descriptors enable every student to understand their attainment in connection to the learning outcomes. If awarded New DAPs, the assessment team suggest that the development of assessment policies and their operation in practice should be monitored during the probationary period.

295. To determine if staff and students at the institute engage in dialogue to promote a shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made, the assessment team reviewed a range of documentary evidence currently in use. This included the validating partner's Assessment Policy as well as the institute's own policies which it will adopt if it gains its own DAPs, such as the ELTAFS and action plan and the Guide to Teaching, Assessment, Feedback and Academic Framework Regulations.

296. The validating partner's Assessment Policy states that assessment is 'collaborative: where possible, students should be enabled and encouraged to contribute to assessment design, the development of marking criteria or choice of feedback methods'. The team's meeting with Heads of Department satisfied the team that students do engage in dialogue with staff and that regular modular evaluations, Programme Boards attended by course representative and conversations with students all ensure students contribute to assessment design and have a shared understanding of the basis for academic judgements. This was further corroborated by the team by reviewing various Programme Boad minutes. These show students requesting examples of what an 'exceptional' (90 to 100 per cent) grade looks like, a discussion on assessment workload that resulted in an action to review this, and significant change to the timing and nature of an assessment in response to student feedback.

297. The team found that the ELTAFS action plan has an action on the institutional approach to feedback to 'consolidate institutional parity and transparency of attainment and standards by developing commonality of quality processes, student feedback, classifications, credit framework and assessment criteria'. This intention for consistent quality processes and assessment criteria also gave the team confidence that, if the institute gains its own DAPs, it would work to ensure student continue to have a clear and shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made, regardless of which module they are studying. The strategy further confirmed to the team a shared understanding between staff and students on academic judgements by explaining that 'delivery within programmes affords students continuous opportunity to receive and respond to both summative and formative feedback'. The draft Guide to Teaching, Assessment, Feedback and Academic Framework Regulations, although at an early stage of drafting at the time of the team's review, also satisfied it that

there will be appropriate guidance available for staff, should the institute be awarded New DAPs. The guide contains, for example, good practice in relation to giving feedback and requirements for setting assessments, which the team considers will ensure assessment is inclusive and flexible and allow students to meaningfully engage with the institute's academic judgements.

298. As highlighted in paragraph 306, the team found that students are aware of the basis on which they are assessed and the feedback they receive provides a shared understanding of academic judgements. The team also confirmed that the institute's New Programme / Award Approval Process shows that students will be engaged in the approval process, including in the design and delivery of programmes. Minutes of the institute's Academic Regulations Working Group and its Internal Review of Proposed New Provision Process also evidenced to the team that there is appropriate student representation on the development of new academic regulations and on the internal reviews of proposed new provision, ensuring that students are able to shape programmes and processes and in turn better understand how academic judgements are reached.

299. The institute's presentation on organisational strategy during the team's visit set out how students are feeding into assessment, moderation and feedback development through module evaluations, NSS results, the Student Voice President and student representation on working groups and throughout the institute's committee structure. The team's meetings with students further corroborated this, as students confirmed to the team that they engage in dialogue with staff to promote a shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made. Students highlighted that formative assessment was continuous, summative assessment feedback is very detailed and feedback is always given within three weeks.

300. Samples of assessment feedback shared with the team demonstrated that assessment feedback is detailed, as in an example from the Level 6 Actor's Performance: Professional Production I module that showed students were given both detailed feedback and general action points. Students further explained to the team that the institute runs drop-in sessions and extensively uses peer assessment to promote conversations about and understanding of a student's performance.

301. To further test whether staff and students engage in dialogue to promote a shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made, the assessment team reviewed module handbooks, a sample of student research outlines and a selection of amendment submissions (where students set out what amendments they have made to their work in light of any previous feedback they have received on it). The Popular Music Studies module handbook demonstrated to the team that students are encouraged to present sections of their assessed work during seminars and receive formative feedback from both tutors and peers. This ongoing dialogue helps students understand assessment expectations and use feedback to improve their final submissions.

302. Evidence from research outlines shows that students submit draft work and receive formative feedback, allowing them to engage with tutor expectations before a final submission. In addition, the review of amendment submissions evidenced how students document amendments they have made in revising their work in response to specific feedback, addressing areas such as subject knowledge, conceptual understanding, writing and

structure. This iterative process provides clear opportunities for a dialogue between staff and students and opportunities for students to actively reflect on their academic work. Collectively, the sample of assessed work reviewed by the team satisfied it that students are actively supported in developing their understanding of academic judgement through structured opportunities for feedback, revision and formative engagement.

303. The assessment team therefore concluded that staff and students at the institute engage in dialogue to promote a shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made. There are extensive opportunities for dialogue between students and staff in both formal and informal settings that ensure there is a shared understanding of assessment outcomes.

304. To establish whether students are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice, the assessment team reviewed the validating partner's Curriculum Design Guide, the institute's Guide to Teaching, Assessment, Feedback and Assessment Regulations, the Summary TEF 2023 Panel Statement, and discussed this area with students on its visit to the institute. In reviewing this material, the team recognised that the institute is a small specialist provider focused predominantly on performance-based subjects. While the team is satisfied all forms of good academic practice are taken into account by the institute, the team noted the institute's focus is necessarily often on evaluating student performance to demonstrate their learning and achievement of learning outcomes. Therefore, alongside considering more general academic practice, the team's analysis below often emphasises academic practice from this performance-based perspective.

305. The assessment team found that the Curriculum Design Guide gives guidance to staff on how programme assessments should be designed to support student development, as well as methods and questions for developing good assessment practice. The Guide to Teaching, Assessment, Feedback and Assessment Regulations further informed the team that there is guidance and support for staff in the preparation and delivery of teaching, learning and assessment. Timetabled sessions for students to understand what good academic practice looked like confirmed to the team that this guidance is applied in practice. For example, in the Popular Music Studies module, students have regular sessions on research and essay skills throughout the year. As detailed in paragraph 301, students are also encouraged to present sections of their work during seminars to receive formative feedback from both tutors and peers. The team was of the view that this ongoing dialogue supports students in developing good academic practice.

306. The team also confirmed that students get comprehensive guidance on assessment as evidenced in each of the programme handbooks it reviewed. Each handbook contains clear guidance and explanation on the different modes of assessment, as well as a section on understanding assessment which explains marking criteria, the use of AI, feedback and the role of external examiners. In its meeting with first-year students during its visit, the team heard how students felt they have many opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice. Attendees mentioned receiving detailed feedback and areas for improvement are highlighted, which the team considers directly promotes a shared understanding of academic judgements between staff and students. As many of the institute's subject offering is practice-based, students are regularly observed in class and during exams by staff and routinely receive ten-minute one-to-one

detailed feedback sessions with staff throughout their programme. The team also found that students receive help from staff in sessions on writing essays, referencing and compiling bibliographies.

307. The team considered findings from the TEF 2023 exercise, as set out in the Summary TEF 2023 panel statement. The statement notes that the institute 'fosters a supportive learning environment, and its students have access to a readily available range of very high quality academic support', offers 'real-world assessments through public performances, which reflect the creative environment and the high number of neurodiverse students', and 'highly effective teaching, assessment and feedback practices across the provider, that support students' learning, progression, and attainment'. The independent findings of the TEF panel, alongside the assessment team's own analysis, further satisfied the team that students are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice.

308. During the assessment team's meeting with students, students expressed that they understood the importance of formative assessment to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice. Students confirmed they receive verbal feedback and areas for improvement are highlighted. Students are observed in class by staff and regularly receive ten-minute one-to-one detailed feedback sessions with staff.

309. Within the context of summative assessments for performance-based subjects, the understanding and demonstration of good academic practice was evident to the team in the Programme Production Brochures and the Season Brochures. These detail the range of performances and productions completed by the institute's students as part of their assessments. These confirmed to the team that, in so far as it relates to performance-based subjects, these performances and productions provide students with the opportunity to first understand and subsequently showcase their skills to an external audience.

310. The assessment team concluded that students are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice. Guides to teaching, assessment and feedback give staff the knowledge and structure to ensure the students can do this, and students themselves confirmed through discussions with the team that they are given such opportunities.

311. To understand if the institute operates processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice, the assessment team reviewed programme handbooks, the validating partner's Academic Misconduct Policy, the institute's Guide to Teaching, Assessment, Feedback and Assessment Regulations, and minutes from Boards of Examiners.

312. The team found that while cases of academic misconduct are managed by the institute's validating partner in line with its policy, the institute is ultimately responsible for identifying and escalating suspected misconduct. In support of this, the institute's programme handbooks detail the expectations on students regarding assessment, signposting students to the validating partner's policy setting out the processes and procedures to be followed for identifying and pursuing unacceptable academic practice.

313. The validating partner's Academic Misconduct Policy sets out that its Assistant Academic Registrar or nominee will initiate an Academic Misconduct Panel if there is sufficient evidence of misconduct. The results of the panel are received at the Board of Examiners, of which the team saw evidence in minutes of the Board of Examiners between March and September 2024. The institute also produces annual reports on academic misconduct that are discussed at the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee. The team saw evidence of these in minutes from the committee (and its previous incarnation, the Institute Quality Committee) for 2023 and 2024. These reports demonstrated to the team that cases of academic misconduct were very low at the institute, with only two cases being upheld in 2023 and in 2024.

314. The team also reviewed the details of two specific academic misconduct cases that followed the validating partner's process. The two cases were related to each other and in one of the cases it was proven that there was academic misconduct by the student, while in the other this was not proven. For each case, a detailed report was produced containing formal minutes from the hearing. In each case, the student was written to before the hearing and this letter outlined when and where the hearing would take place, the rights of the student including seeking support, and the process that will be followed. The outcome of the hearing was also communicated to the students and, in the case of the proven outcome, the appeals process was clearly outlined to the student. While all panel members were from the validating partner, the institute's active involvement in the process was clear to the team. A Presenting Officer (or nominee) from the institute was responsible for first identifying the suspected misconduct and subsequently setting out both in writing and in the panel meeting the case against the students. This confirmed to the team that while the outcome of academic misconduct cases is ultimately a decision for the institute's validating partner under current arrangements, the institute nonetheless plays a key and active role in identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice.

315. To enable staff to exercise these functions effectively, the institute's Guide to Teaching, Assessment, Feedback and Assessment Regulations supports staff in preparing and delivering teaching, learning and assessment. In a section relating to marking, moderation, mark entry and feedback, the institute gives some guiding principles and definitions as well as practical processes for dealing with unacceptable academic practice.

316. The institute's New DAPs plan details that the institute will develop its own Academic Misconduct Policy by June 2025, and a working version of this policy was seen by the team during its assessment. Similar to the validating partner's process, the draft policy includes help and advice for students, general principles, a description of different types of misconduct, and details of the process the institute will follow in investigated suspected malpractice. Based on the version it had seen, the team was satisfied the institute had credible and considered plans for operating processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice.

317. The assessment team therefore concluded that the institute currently operates, in partnership with its validating partner, processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice. Students are aware of the expectations on them and staff are given guidance for dealing with unacceptable academic practice. Furthermore, the institute is developing its own policy which it will operate, and progress on this policy to date is such that the team are satisfied the institute would, if awarded DAPs, continue to fulfil its obligations in these areas independently.

318. To evaluate whether the institute has processes for marking assessments and moderating marks which are clearly articulated and consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process, the assessment team considered a range of documentary evidence. This included the validating partner's Assessment Policy, the institute's draft Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy and external examiner reports for 2021-22 and 2022-23, as well as programme handbooks and a large selection of assessment documentation including records of assessment and feedback.

319. The assessment team found that the programme handbooks each contain an 'Understanding assessment' section which articulate to students how assessments are marked and moderated. In addition, the team found that example module assignment briefs for the BA (Hons) Sound Technology, BA (Hons) Acting (Musical Theatre) and BA (Hons) Music (routeways) further demonstrated how assessments are articulated to students. These briefs provided clear detail on the tasks and what is expected, assessment grading criteria, weighting of assessment elements and relevant learning outcomes. As highlighted in paragraph 291, the institute's own grade descriptors are used by staff as part of the process for marking assessments.

320. The assessment team found that the process for marking and moderating assessments is clearly articulated to staff via the Assessment Policy, as set by the validating partner. The assessment team reviewed processes for marking and moderation to ascertain whether they are articulated in assessment documentation and reflected in student work and feedback. The team found, for example, that the assessment briefs for the modules called 'The Producer' and 'Audio Practice' and related module handbooks provide detailed grading criteria and present clear learning outcomes and assessment expectations to support staff to apply consistent marking decisions.

321. The team found that assessment feedback on a recording assessment for the 'Audio Practice' module shows a range of marks awarded (from 1st to 3rd), suggesting that assessment criteria are applied rigorously to differentiate performance. In the module 'Popular Music Contexts', the team found that the use of a tick-box marking scheme supports clarity and standardisation, while accompanying written feedback provides justification for grades and identifies areas for improvement.

322. Evidence of moderation was noted in the module 'The Actor's Practice: Professional Performance II', providing full visibility of second marker or moderator commentary. In addition, the external examiner reports 2021-22 and 2022-23 confirmed to the team that external examiners moderate samples of work and comment on the marking of assessments. As detailed in paragraph 288, by reviewing these marking and moderation processes in practice the team satisfied itself that they are consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process.

323. To strengthen assurance of marking reliability if the institute was awarded New DAPs, the team reviewed its own draft Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy. The working document (set to be finalised by June 2025) details how the institute would adopt their own processes for quality control and assurance, assessment strategies, moderation, feedback guidance and procedures for students who do not pass. If awarded New DAPs, the team was of the view that this policy enables the institute to continue ensuring marking and moderation would be consistently operated through a process that includes pre-marking calibration,

anonymous marking and first- and second-marking, as well as internal and external moderation. The team recommends that the development of this policy and its implementation should be monitored during the probationary period.

324. In conclusion, the assessment team found that the institute's current arrangements for marking assessments and moderating marks are clearly articulated and consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process. Students are aware of how assessments are marked and moderated, and external examiner reports confirm that procedures for marking assessments and moderating marks are clearly articulated and consistently operated, with external examiners moderating samples of work. In addition, the institute is developing its own assessment policies and procedures to govern its approach in this area if awarded New DAPs, and the team was satisfied from the working version it had seen that these would be appropriate.

External examining

325. To assess whether the institute makes scrupulous use of external examiners including in the moderation of assessment tasks and student assessed work, the assessment team reviewed policy documents such as the validating partner's Assessment Policy and the institute's own draft Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy, as well as external examiner reports and Overview Reports on External Examining.

326. The team found that the validating partner's Assessment Policy clearly outlines the current roles and responsibilities of the institute's external examiners, who are appointed through the validating partner. The 2024-25 External Examiner Record shows that all the institute's programmes with one exception currently have an external examiner. The exception was the result of a recent vacancy and a replacement was pending confirmation at the time the record was submitted for the team's review in November 2024. Although the team did not see evidence that this role had since been filled, it did not consider the vacancy to represent any wider issue with the institute's engagement with external examiners.

327. The team found that the programme handbooks outline to students who the programme's external examiner is and their role. As discussed previously, the institute is developing its own draft Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy in readiness for DAPs, and the working version seen by the team includes detail on the purpose and role of external examiners and the external moderation of assessed work. The team confirmed that the external moderation detail in the early draft of the policy was broadly reflective of the current validating partner's Assessment and Feedback Policy and in line with the approach taken across the sector, and would enable the institute to continue making scrupulous use of external examiners in the future. The development of the institute's policy is included in its New DAPs plan with a completion date of June 2025.

328. The assessment team found that the external examiner reports clearly evidence how the institute is making scrupulous use of external examiners and including them in the moderation of assessment tasks and assessed work. The external examiners report on multiple areas including academic standards, collaborative provision, and good practice and recommendations. In reviewing the Overview Reports on External Examining for 2021-22 and 2022-23, the scrupulous use of external examiners was evident to the team. The majority of external examiners' reports are very positive, as well as providing constructive feedback on areas for review such as ensuring students are equipped for higher level study on a very

practical programme and benchmarking the feedback process to ensure consistency. These reports are scrutinised by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (previously the Institute Quality Committee), as evidenced to the team in committee minutes from January, March and November 2023 and January 2024. Receiving and reviewing external examiner reports is a standing item on the committee and relevant minutes detail the discussion of positive comments and recommendations from external examiners, as well as approving the appointment of new examiners where applicable.

329. The assessment team concluded that the institute makes scrupulous use of external examiners, including in the moderation of assessment tasks and student assessed work. Existing and draft policies outline the processes to be used, and the external examiner reports, and responses to them from the institute, confirmed they were used scrupulously in practice.

330. To determine if the institute 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 considered the external examiner reports for 2021-22 and 2022-23, the institute's New DAPs plan and Annual Monitoring Reports for 2021-22 and 2022-23.

331. The assessment team found that external examiner reports provide detailed evidence of external examiners' recommendations and comments, and the considered responses to them from institute staff. For example, for the BA (Hons) Music (routeways) programme in 2023 the external examiner recommended the use of 'benchmarking prior to assessment, particularly in modules where multiple tutors are commenting on the same aspect of teaching'. The programme responded that 'an assessment template has been created to address the benchmarking issue'. While the comprehensiveness of external examiner comments and therefore the ability of the institute's staff to respond to them appropriately does vary, in the team's experience this is typical across the sector and therefore not a cause for concern. As confirmed in paragraphs 325 to 329, the team was satisfied that the institute gives full and serious consideration to external examiner comments and recommendations through the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

332. The team also discovered that the institute has recognised, in its presentation on organisational strategy during the team's visit and in the institute's New DAPs plan, that its responses to external examiner reports are not currently as timely as it would like as it does not hold overall responsibility for the process. The institute reported that this is 'due to the number of process steps between external examiners, validating partner staff and institute staff'. For example, the team was aware that its validating partner is responsible for coordinating responses between the institute and external examiners, which invariably makes the process more protracted that it might otherwise be. The team can confirm however, that the institute's New DAPs plan includes credible actions for identifying and appointing its own external examiners if it were successful in obtaining degree awarding powers, and the assessment team's view is that response times are likely to improve once the institute is responsible for liaising with external examiners directly because it will be in direct communication with examiners and reduce the number of process steps. The development of the institute's external examining policy and procedure was confirmed to the team in the institute's New DAPs plan with completion in June 2025. The institute also intends to invite

current external examiners to move over to the institute if it achieves DAPs, which the team considered reasonable.

333. The assessment team concluded that the institute does give full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiners' reports and provides external examiners with a considered and timely response to their comments and recommendations. The team is assured the institute will continue to do so should it gain New DAPs as evidenced through the development of its own policy and procedures, and recognition of how it can ensure more timely responses to external examiner reports.

Academic appeals and student complaints

334. To consider whether the institute has effective procedures in place 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 its New DAPs self-assessment document, Complaints Policy, its validating partner's Academic Appeals Policy and the institute's own draft Academic Appeals Procedure. The team also reviewed examples of the policies working in practice through an overview of complaints in 2023 and 2024, and minutes of the Institute Quality Committee and the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

335. The team found that the institute currently follows the Academic Appeals Policy of its validating partner, and its review of this policy shows the process to be fair and accessible, timely and enabling enhancement. The team found that the institute's programme handbooks detail processes and procedures for assessing student work, and students have links to information and guidance connected to academic appeals and complaints.

336. The assessment team found that the institute's Complaints Policy shows that the institute currently has and operates its own policy in this area, with students having a possible right of appeal to the validating partner in cases of an academic nature. The team found the institute's policy to be comprehensive and provide clarity on access, process and expectations. While the team did not directly view any student complaints, it did review a summary of complaints from 2023 and 2024. In addition to its analysis in paragraph 137, these summaries demonstrated to the team's satisfaction that the institute's complaints procedure is working in practice, with the institute operating a process which is fair and accessible and enables enhancement. The annual complaint summaries, for example, highlight lessons drawn from trends in complaints the institute has received. One example of a lesson learned noted in the complaints summaries was 'making clear to students at induction about their behaviour and professionalism', and this was subsequently covered in training delivered to all students during welcome week.

337. Minutes of the Institute Quality Committee and the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee also confirmed to the team that details of both appeals and complaints are regularly received and noted by these committees to enable the institute to identify if there were consistent issues that would enable enhancement. Minutes of the December 2024 Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee explicitly address whether opportunities for enhancement had been identified, as well as noting that a Case Officer had recently been appointed to help oversee future enhancements and implementation of the policy.

338. As set out in paragraph 138, the institute's validating partner currently handles academic appeals raised by the institute's students. The assessment team's meeting with the Student Voice team and with students during its visit to the institute confirmed to the team that the institute is very attentive to appeals and complaints, but highlighted that the appeals process can currently be challenging as students must go through both the institute and validating partner. The students expressed that this created a double system that meant students were sometimes unsure where to raise issues, and that it extends the time taken to address appeals.

339. The institute's draft Academic Appeals Procedure confirmed to the team that the institute is developing a credible and comprehensive process for handling appeals itself in readiness for New DAPs. The team found that the draft procedure clarifies where and when a student can raise an appeal, outlines each stage of the process (including informal and formal stages), and the review process if a student is unhappy with the outcome of the formal stage. The institute's New DAPs plan details that this draft document will be completed by June 2025. The assessment team recommend that the development and implementation of the institute's appeals process is monitored during the probationary period to ensure it improves the student experience in relation to clarity and timeliness of the process.

340. The assessment team concluded that the institute does have fair, accessible and timely procedures in place for handling academic appeals and student complaints. The institute's current policies, including the involvement of its validating partner, are largely working well, students feel the institute are attentive, and the team saw evidence of these procedures enabling the institute to enhance its approach. The institute also has a credible plan for developing its own policies in the areas of appeals which will enable it to effectively assume these responsibilities from its validating partner if awarded its own DAPs.

341. To assess whether appropriate action is taken by the institute following an appeal or complaint, the assessment team considered the Complaints Policy, the Complaints Log, the draft Academic Appeals Procedure, complaint summaries for 2023 and 2024, and a range of non-academic polices. The team also discussed this area with students during its visit to the institute.

342. The assessment team found that the current Complaints Policy details the actions the institute will take following a complaint, including its investigation, early or informal resolution, formal and appeal stages and signposting students to their right for redress with the OIA. The team considered this policy and early and informal resolution informal and formal complaints stages, appeals process, and further steps. The team considered the policy to set out appropriate actions the institute would take following receipt of a complaint.

343. The Complaints Log provided the team with evidence of the Complaints Policy implemented in practice in previous cases. The log confirmed to the team that there were between 11 and 20 complaints per year between 2022 and 2024. These included a mix of informal complaints usually dealt with in direct communication with the student(s) concerned, and formal cases dealt with in direct communication with the student or escalated to the relevant person or department for resolution. As detailed in paragraph 336, the team did not see evidence of actual complaint cases, but the overviews confirmed that complaints were reviewed and actioned appropriately, and there was evidence that learnings from cases feed into future

approaches. The team's meeting with students during its visit also confirmed to it that the institute does seek to take appropriate action in response to the complaints it receives.

344. The institute currently uses the validating partner's Academic Appeals Policy, which the team found to be clear on process, timelines and outcomes. As mentioned in paragraph 338, however, students found it can sometimes be slow and difficult to navigate in practice as it requires the involvement of both the institute and the validating partner. As mentioned in paragraph 337, academic appeals are received and noted through the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (previously the Institute Quality Committee). The minutes from these committees show that seven appeals were received in 2023, but not all were eligible, and no consistent issue or problem was noted. Minutes from December 2024 also note that no statistics on appeals had been received for consideration from the validating partner.

345. The institute has developed its own draft Academic Appeals Procedure to be used if awarded New DAPs, and this confirmed to the team the institute has a credible process in development. The draft procedure outlines a series of actions the institute could take through each of these processes. These include using initial consideration to enable the appeal to be resolved without further delay in cases where the outcome is clear cut and does not require further investigation. The actions are detailed in the document through clear flowcharts that confirmed to the team that appropriate action would be taken following receipt of an academic appeal.

346. The team also found that the institute's Safeguarding and Precautionary Measures Policy, Student Disciplinary Procedure, Harassment and Bullying Policy and Procedures, and Sexual Misconduct Policy evidence how non-academic misconduct is investigated and addressed to minimise the risk to both other students and the institution.

347. The assessment team concluded that appropriate action is taken by the institute following an appeal or complaint under the institute and its validating partner's current processes. The respective polices detail the processes to be followed and actions to be taken, and the Complaints Log, annual complaint overviews and meetings with students demonstrated to the team that current arrangements are working in practice. The team also found the institute has credible processes in development to assume responsibility for academic appeals from its validating partner should it achieve its own DAPs, with an Academic Appeals Policy due to be in place by June 2025. The team recommend has recommended that the development and implementation of this policy is monitored during the probationary period.

Conclusions

348. Based on its findings, the assessment team concluded that the institute demonstrated a full understanding of criterion B3 and has a credible New DAPs plan that can be reasonably expected to enable the institute to meet the criterion in full by the end of the probationary period.

349. The assessment team found that the institute, in collaboration with its validating partner, can 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.

350. Furthermore, the institute is developing procedures to meet criterion B3.1 in its own right in preparation for exercising its own DAPs. Meetings with the institute's staff and the draft documents prepared in readiness for New DAPs demonstrated to the team that significant progress has already been made, and the timeline for completion of any remaining policies, processes, systems and guidance as set out in the institute's New DAPs plan is achievable.

351. The institute's programmes are supported by spaces and resources that are in line with similar provision in the sector and seek to replicate those found in industry, and are comprehensively accessible to students. Staff have a very clear understanding of their responsibilities and how to design and deliver relevant programmes that fit the institute's strategic plans and are underpinned by an extensive and well received personal tutor system.

352. The assessment team found that assessment processes are robust and fair, and students have a very good understanding of how academic judgements are made and are feeding into assessment, moderation and feedback development. Good use is made of external examiners, and the institute would welcome the opportunity to improve communication with them if awarded New DAPs. There are fair processes in place to resolve appeals and complaints, though due to responsibility for these areas being shared among the institute and its validating partner, students expressed that they can sometimes be confused as to what the proper process to follow is. However, the team was assured that the institute has credible plans to develop its own policies to replace those of its validating partner in the area of appeals, which is likely to reduce student confusion in this area. The team recommend, however, that the development and implementation of the institute's policy on academic appeals be monitored during its probationary period.

Specified changes to the New DAPs plan

353. The team did not identify any specified changes to the institute's New DAPs plan for this criterion.

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

Criterion C1: The role of academic and professional staff

Advice to the OfS

354. The assessment team's view is that the institute's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion C1: the role of academic and professional staff.

355. The assessment team's view is that the institute has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion C1 because, in summary, the institute 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.

356. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the institute's New DAPs plan and supporting evidence, alongside any other relevant information. This shows that the institute can be reasonably expected to meet criterion C1 in full by the end of the probationary period.

Sub-criterion C1.1

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

Reasoning

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

- external examiner reports and overview

- the Staff Qualifications Log

- staff working hours records and information on the staff/student ratio

- Advance HE accreditation documents

- records of professional development activity

- staff's external duties

- staff probationary procedures

- staff training records

- Staff Disciplinary Policy and Procedures.

358. To consider whether the institute has assured itself that it has appropriate numbers of staff to teach its students, the assessment team reviewed evidence from a range of documentation as well as additional evidence gathered on the site visit. The assessment team reviewed the institute's staff working hours records in the School Staff Record to gauge whether there are appropriate numbers of staff to teach across the institute's three schools. For example, there are ten full-time members of staff in the School of Music (five lecturers, four senior lecturers and the Director of School) with similar numbers across the School of Creative Technologies, Design and Enterprise and the School of Performance. Information on the institute's staff to student ratio (SSR) shows there are 53.1 FTE staff across the schools in total, and that the current SSR when calculated on a full-time equivalence basis is 17.1:1 institutionally, which the team notes is in line with the higher education sector average across a range of published league tables.

359. The team also noted that, in comparison with other arts, drama and music subject specialist providers in published league tables, the institute's SSR is within the range of published outcomes. The team concluded that the institute monitors its staffing levels closely through the School Staff Record, and likewise monitors its SSR to provide appropriate numbers of staff to deliver its courses. To test this further, the assessment team asked programme leaders during its visit to the institute how they request additional staffing when they need it. The response was that there is a clear timeline for requests and that there are specified points in the year to put forward staffing proposals with a 'regular channel within the annual cycle'.

360. The team also observed that there are many Visiting Professionals (Associate Lecturers) to support permanent staff and students as part of the total staff base within the SSR calculation; for example, the School of Music employs a total of 30 industry experts to complement the regular staff team. In the team's meeting with Heads of Department during the visit, staff were very clear how Visiting Professionals enriched the staff teaching base by bringing in current practice and innovation. During the team's meeting with the wider teaching staff base, staff expressed that students valued these industry connections and that Visiting Professionals come in from the very beginning of a programme. The assessment team concluded that the institute assures itself it has appropriate SSRs and that it monitors these closely. The team also noted that the expertise, currency and diversity of the teaching team as a whole is significantly enhanced by teaching from a wide range of industry experts and practitioners, as confirmed in meetings with heads of department and teaching staff on the site visit.

361. To test whether 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, the assessment team reviewed the Staff Qualifications Log and noted that almost all staff are qualified to degree level or beyond, and many have a teaching certificate (including the Postgraduate Certificate in Education and Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education). For example, of the 161 staff listed in the log, 38 have masters' degrees. Furthermore, the Advance HE Annual Data Report (2023-24) shows the Advance HE Fellowship recognition rate at 91 per cent, comparing very favourably with the sector average of 49.8 per cent given in the report. The institute also has Advance HE Learning and Teaching Accreditation 2022 to 2026 aligned

with the UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education (2011), which the team considered to reflect effective practice in support of academic staff development. Advance HE states that accreditation raises the profile of teaching and learning and celebrates its importance alongside research activities; demonstrates to students a measurable commitment to the quality of teaching; and benchmarks provision against internationally recognised quality standards. Staff are further supported and developed through continuous professional development practices, as evidenced in the analysis of documentation below.

362. To discover whether relevant learning, teaching and assessment practices are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship, the assessment team reviewed the ELTAFS, which is aligned with the overarching Strategic Plan 2023-2026. The strategy prioritises the review of 'learning and pedagogic innovation within an evolving and developing creative and cultural context'. It also sets out a list of key performance data used for evaluation and review (for example, the NSS, external examiner reports, the institute's access and participation plan, TEF data and student outcomes). The ELTAFS action plan encompasses a manageable timescale and aims, among other things, to:

- ensure excellence in teaching through engagement with national and international teaching and learning events, publications and networks

- promote a staff culture of continuous professional development, and world-leading expertise to inform curriculum content, and pedagogic practice through research and recognition through accreditation, qualification and profile enhancement.

363. To this end, work is underway to develop a Visiting Professional Support Programme, create a year-long professional development programme, and maintain and review the teaching observation scheme. As evidenced in the assessment team's meetings with relevant staff during its visit to the institute, staff are fully informed about, and work collaboratively with, the institute's strategy, and programme leaders are part of the ELTAFS strategy group. The assessment team also gained further evidence of the growing culture of continuous development from the ELT during the site visit, which included:

- future PhD offers to staff as part of CPD

- formal and informal CPD sharing among staff through institute staff lunches

- a refreshed teaching observation scheme in line with guidance from the University and College Union.

364. Further evidence from the site visit confirmed to the assessment team that staff (both contracted and Visiting Professionals) are automatically enrolled on the TLIPA. This is an Advance HE-validated programme which includes two and a half days of Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy-related work. Teaching is observed and feedback provided, and in a meeting with senior management on the site visit they expressed that staff feel supported through this mentorship programme.

365. The PReSPA, reaccredited by Advance HE in 2022 with the next reaccreditation due in 2025, develops and recognises staff and specialists who teach and support students. It draws upon

the sector's Professional Standards Framework and offers staff the opportunity to gain a fellowship at one of three categories (Associate, Fellow and Senior Fellow). Currently, seven staff members at the institute are also on target to achieve Principal Fellowship of HEA (PFHEA), the highest category of Advance HE fellowship. The assessment team concluded that these developments will significantly enhance the institute's learning, teaching and assessment practices informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice and subject-specific and educational scholarship.

366. The institute's Learning and Development Handbook (which includes policies on staff induction, development, appraisals and teaching observations) is a document devised by the institute and approved in September 2024. As well as induction details it emphasises teaching excellence and professional recognition, including Advance HE Fellowship support, accredited teaching qualifications, and support for staff development via training, coaching and peer observation.

367. The Staff Development Policy aims to provide opportunities for all staff to improve the effectiveness of their work to meet the institute's strategic goals, and to ensure that all staff can engage in relevant development activities as identified through the appraisal process. The policy also includes details on coaching, as well as accreditation and recognition. There will be a review and update of staff induction for permanent and Visiting Professional staff to be completed by July 2025 and a review to agree the draft guidelines for teaching observations and peer review by February 2025, in line with the institute's New DAPs plan.

368. The Learning and Development Handbook also outlines a process where staff engage in a thorough review of past performance, assess progress against previously set objectives, and identify areas for further development. The requirement for pre-appraisal reflection, combined with formal discussions and follow-up reviews, also embeds a culture of accountability and continuous enhancement. In order to assess whether the institute is already implementing aspects of the handbook in current CPD, the assessment team reviewed two redacted staff Annual Performance Reviews and noted that points for discussion included the following: 'with reference to the [Association of Higher Education Professionals] Professional Framework, identify and agree two or three behaviours to focus on as part of your CPD for the next twelve months'. Staff are also required to reflect on the previous year's objectives, with prompts such as considering what went well, main achievements, obstacles met, and future strategies. The performance review also provided opportunities to discuss further career developments and to give feedback to further enhance the culture of continuous improvement. This demonstrated to the assessment team that staff reflection and evaluation of practice is already embedded in the institute's staff development practices and that this would be continued within the New DAPs framework.

369. The assessment team concluded that the institute has robust policies and procedures that ensure that relevant learning, teaching and assessment practices are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship and that this approach will be consistently and effectively applied if it awards its own degrees.

370. To consider the academic and professional expertise of staff at the institute, the assessment team reviewed a range of staff CVs and the Staff Qualifications Log, as well as meeting with a wide range of teaching staff during the site visit. The staff CVs demonstrated to the team that staff teaching or supporting student learning had strong, high level industry and professional

experience together with appropriate degree level (including postgraduate and doctoral) qualifications and, typically, significant experience of working in other higher education providers. This further supported the additional evidence assessed in paragraph 361 that a very high percentage (91 per cent) of the institute's teaching staff hold Fellowship of Advance HE as recorded in the Advance HE Annual Data Report (2023-24). Examples of professional and academic expertise in the staff CVs include high level professional theatre directing roles at prestigious theatres, acting, writing and directing roles, significant contributions to professional journals and publications, external examining and academic leadership.

371. The assessment team also reviewed the validating partner's Collaborative Staff Qualifications Policy. All staff involved in teaching, assessment or supporting student learning are appointed subject to this policy with approval by the validating partner and the policy stipulates general minimum requirements, such as an FHEQ Level 6 qualification, an equivalent professional qualification or, exceptionally, appropriate equivalent professional experience. The Staff Qualifications Policy matched well with the institute's own Staff Qualifications Log discussed in paragraph 370, demonstrating to the team that the policy is being implemented in practice. The assessment team also noted that, as evidenced in the institute's New DAPs plan, institute is developing its own Staff Qualifications Policy in readiness for awarding its own degrees, and this is set for approval by the Academic Board in February 2025.

372. The assessment team met with a wide range of teaching staff on the site visit and noted the rich diversity of backgrounds and professional experience in the teaching body – from academic scholars to alumni and Visiting Professionals currently working in the industry. Staff explained enthusiastically to the team that employability (one of the institute's six strategic themes) is key to the institute's pedagogical strategy and that Visiting Professionals and industry experts are integrated into the teaching programme from early in a student's degree programme. For example, one tutor described to the assessment team how a famous costume designer had come in to deliver a masterclass and that this resulted in a productive conversation about what skills are needed as a modern costume designer, which in turn prompted the institute to reconsider a more flexible curriculum. The significance of this comment was that the industry professional did not work predominantly from drawings, leading the staff team and student body to reflect on their own practice and consider other ways of working. This was one of several examples that demonstrated to the assessment team the professional expertise of the wider teaching team, alongside the strong academic and professional experience of the core teaching team.

373. The assessment team reviewed the New DAPs plan to assess whether staff will be actively engaged with the pedagogic development of their discipline knowledge. Under the New DAPs plan, the institute will develop a new 'Curriculum design guide to detail pedagogical principles, requirements, guidance and support for teaching staff on design, delivery and assessment' by September 2025. The assessment team also reviewed the Learning and Development Handbook (Staff Development, Induction, Appraisals, Teaching Observations) which was approved in November 2024. The Learning and Development Handbook is discussed in detail in paragraphs 366 and 368 and it evidences how staff are actively engaged with the pedagogic development of their discipline knowledge. Specifically, it emphasises professional recognition, including Advance HE Fellowship support, accredited teaching qualifications, and support for staff development via training, coaching and peer observation. Staff are also required to actively engage with the pedagogic development of their discipline knowledge through the requirement for pre-appraisal reflection, combined with formal discussions and

follow-up reviews, and the team agreed that this serves to embed a culture of accountability and continuous enhancement. To demonstrate the effectiveness in implementation of this, the assessment team reviewed two redacted staff Annual Performance Reviews, as detailed in paragraph 368.

374. The assessment team also tested whether the ELTAFS requires staff to be actively engaged with the pedagogic development of their discipline knowledge. As further detailed in paragraph 362, the ELTAFS requires staff to prioritise the review of 'learning and pedagogic innovation within an evolving and developing creative and cultural context'. The key performance data used for evaluation and review are detailed in paragraph 362 and the two key goals outlined there apply equally to the active engagement of staff with the pedagogic development of their discipline knowledge:

- ensure excellence in teaching through engagement with national and international teaching and learning events, publications and networks

- promote a staff culture of continuous professional development, and world-leading expertise to inform curriculum content, and pedagogic practice through research and recognition through accreditation, qualification and profile enhancement.

375. The team concluded that through its strong support of staff pedagogical review, reflection and continuous enhancement, the institute's staff are, and will continue to be, actively engaged with the pedagogic development of their discipline knowledge.

376. The team also gained further valuable evidence in discussions with various staff groups on the site visit. For example, in a meeting with programme leaders staff explained how they report on processes for curriculum development, reflecting pedagogical and subject developments through the Programme Leads Forum and that they felt well supported in this by their line managers. Programme Leaders also explained that they are empowered to continue their research activities or CPD, and that the Director of Teaching and Learning supports this through initiatives on curriculum development and weekly Head of School meetings to discuss ideas and ensure collaborative work across schools where suggestions are acted upon.

377. During a meeting with teaching staff and Visiting Professionals, the assessment team noted that staff have been involved in rewriting modules and suggesting ideas for new masters' programmes that are in development. They also explained how they felt supported by the institute's own pedagogical developmental framework to develop ideas in their practice-based subjects. Visiting Professionals also explained that they are asked to input into theory while all the teaching staff present felt that their opinions in this regard are valued. Staff explained that they were attracted to the institute because they are able to shape curriculum content.

378. In conclusion, the assessment team was confident that staff are actively engaged with the pedagogic development of their discipline knowledge and that this would be further enhanced if the institute were to be awarded its own DAPs through the 'Curriculum design guide to detail pedagogical principles, requirements, guidance and support for teaching staff on design, delivery and assessment' being developed for September 2025.

379. The assessment team reviewed the evidence to assess whether staff understand current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline and that such knowledge and

understanding directly informs and enhances their teaching. The team also assessed whether active engagement with research and / or advanced scholarship is to a level commensurate with the level and subject of the qualifications being offered. As noted in paragraph 361, staff are qualified to a high level, including postgraduate and doctoral awards, and the assessment team found evidence that staff are encouraged and expected to continue to enhance their knowledge, skills, attitudes and capabilities, as evidenced in the Learning and Development Handbook. The process for undertaking research activities is clearly laid out in the handbook and 'researching and preparing teaching / learning materials' and 'entrepreneurial scholarly activities' are highlighted as examples of activities that teaching staff can use for professional development.

380. To seek further evidence that staff understand current research and scholarship and that there is a culture of gaining new knowledge and understanding at a level appropriate to the qualifications being offered, the assessment team reviewed a record of staff development activities. This showed a significant range of activities, including attendance at a number of conferences and symposia such as the Annual Conference of the German Society for Popular Music Studies, and the Visual Dramaturgies (1500-1800) Conference, as well as support for staff to undertake postgraduate study.

381. To gain a richer sense of engagement with research and scholarship and how this informs teaching, the assessment team gained further detail from the ELT and in discussions with a range of academic teaching staff on the site visit. In its presentation on organisational strategy to the assessment team during its visit, the ELT outlined a £6.75m bid for AHRC Creative Clusters funding and their ambitions to increase research, scholarship and knowledge exchange further. In a meeting with programme leaders, staff spoke positively about the opportunities for developing research which informs teaching. An example of this is documented in the BA (Hons) Management for the Creative Industries and Performing Arts Periodic Programme Review and Validations Event Report, where a post-doctoral specialist was brought into the team to further strengthen the delivery of supervision for Level 6 research students and to share and enrich activity in the curriculum with the management and wider team. The assessment team also talked with postgraduate students to assess their sense of the research demand in their programmes, and they explained that their masters' study was more demanding than their undergraduate work, with the need for 'extensive research', and that their curriculum contained 'much more specialised content'. This demonstrated to the assessment team that postgraduate teaching staff understood current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline and were embedding this into the curriculum and making appropriate demands of their students, commensurate with the level and subject of the qualifications being offered.

382. Furthermore, the institute's New DAPs plan tracks the creation and disseminating of a new research and professional practice strategy to commence in July 2025 and conclude by July 2026, and the assessment team agreed that this further demonstrated the institute's commitment to developing research-informed teaching.

383. In summary the assessment team concluded that staff understand current research and scholarship in their discipline and that such knowledge and understanding directly informs and enhances their teaching, and that this is at a level commensurate with the level and subject of the qualifications being offered.

384. To evaluate whether there are opportunities for staff to engage in reflection and evaluation of their learning, teaching and assessment practice, the assessment team considered a range of evidence including:

- the ELTAFS and action plan

- the draft Guide to Teaching, Assessment, Feedback and Academic Regulations

- programme leaders' reflections on NSS results

- Learning and Development Handbook (Staff Development, Induction, Appraisals, Teaching Observations)

- Annual Performance Reviews

- Teaching Observation and Enhancement Scheme.

385. The ELTAFS and action plan sets out the institute's framework and detailed action plans to provide focus and opportunities for staff to engage in reflection and evaluation of their learning, teaching and assessment practice. The assessment team formed the view that the scope of the action planning was ambitious and inclusive, with clear timescales and performance indicators provided. For example, one of the many actions is to 'focus upon continual improvement to maintain the highest standards in teaching and innovative pedagogy'. This is mapped against the following professional standard or benchmark: 'The creative and performing arts require a blend of skills, knowledge and understanding. Varied delivery and assessment methods that promote experiential, project based, and collaborative learning activities allow students to develop and be evaluated, whilst addressing the integrity of subject benchmarks, national qualification standards and the expectations of external accrediting bodies'. The assessment team found a valuable correlation in the ELTAFS between the suitably ambitious goal of continuous improvement in teaching and innovative pedagogy set against the requirements in the discipline of creative and performing arts and the requirements of national external bodies. Several other effective examples of opportunities for staff engagement, reflection and evaluation include the development of a Visiting Professional Support Programme, a year-long professional development programme, staff lunches to support CPD activities, and an enhanced teaching observation scheme together with staff and executive leadership reflections on the strength of this provision at the institute.

386. The assessment team reviewed the Teaching Observation and Enhancement Scheme (TOES) to evaluate further opportunities for staff to engage in reflection and evaluation of their learning, teaching and assessment practice. The assessment team found that the scheme provides 'an opportunity for teaching professionals to receive advice and guidance from fellow professional teachers on their strengths and weaknesses, to provide material for professional reflection, and to identify areas for CPD and further training and support'. The assessment team agreed that the scheme also provides clear guidelines on the process to follow during and after observations and recording feedback. Furthermore, the observation record provides an optional opportunity for staff to 'platform aspects of best practice observed in their colleague's practice that may align with the strategic aims of Excellence, Equity, Environment, Empowerment, Employability and Entrepreneurship'. It is a requirement that all members of staff with teaching activity at the institute engage with the annual TOES.

387. The assessment team also considered reflections from programme leaders in response to NSS scores and found these to be forensic and effective in identifying issues and actioning solutions in relation to learning, teaching and assessment. For example, one programme leader identified key issues on assessment and feedback as 'overassessment within the old programme design, and with providing summative feedback to students within the 15 working day timeframe for overlapping assessments for students undertaking roles on productions'. They then outlined the steps that had been taken to remedy this, namely:

'The revalidation of our programme has been designed to help with this problem, and we are already seeing a noticeable change in this area. Furthermore, we have revised our deadline dates for all modules to aid the workload for students and we are confident that this will help the issue.'

388. The document containing programme leaders' reflections in relation to NSS scores is discussed further in paragraph 506.

389. In conclusion, the assessment team was satisfied that the institute provides opportunities for staff to engage in reflection and evaluation of their learning, teaching and assessment practice. Moreover, the assessment team was satisfied that the institute's New DAPs plan will provide even greater opportunities to staff if the institute were to be awarded its own DAPs.

390. To determine how the institute provides development opportunities for staff to enhance their practice and scholarship, the assessment team reviewed information about its Teaching Excellence and Employee Recognition Awards 2024. Awards in the scheme are given in each of the six key themes from the institute's strategic plan. For example, the award descriptor for the entrepreneurship theme is a staff member 'who comes up with ideas, creative practices and innovative thoughts, someone who is trying to push the boundaries and improve the world around them'. The aims of this scheme are to:

- acknowledge the excellent contributions made by staff in all parts of the institute to support the student experience

- recognise and celebrate staff achievements and promote behaviours which link to our strategic pillars and core values

- provide opportunities for dissemination of good practice.

391. The assessment team noted that Advance HE strongly supports awards for teaching excellence and, in the team's view, by fostering a culture of excellence the institute will increase staff motivation and the sharing and enhancement of best practice.

392. The institute provides further opportunities for staff to share and enhance their practice and scholarship in formal and informal 'LIPA Lunches'. In its presentation to the team on the institute's organisational strategy during its visit, the ELT explained how these social occasions provide focused opportunities for colleagues to share innovation and good practice and that all staff engaging in continual professional engagement activity are expected to share new practice and experiences with their colleagues at these events.

393. To find further evidence of opportunities for staff to enhance their practice and scholarship, the assessment team reviewed the Record of Professional Development Activities (2023-24),

which shows that between September 2023 and July 2024, 41 members of institute staff engaged in development opportunities. This is discussed in further detail in paragraph 380.

394. The assessment team also reviewed the handbooks for the institute's PReSPA and TLIPA schemes. These schemes deliver targeted opportunities for staff to enhance their practice and scholarship, with the PReSPA leading to fellowship of Advance HE, while the TLIPA provides teaching and learning support to part-time staff who teach or support learning (including hourly-paid Visiting Professionals). The excellent results of these schemes are detailed in paragraph 82.

395. In summary, the assessment team concluded that the institute gives a high priority to providing imaginative and effective development opportunities for staff to enhance their practice and scholarship, and that this good practice will continue to develop if the institute awards its own degrees.

396. The assessment team reviewed a range of evidence to determine whether teaching staff have opportunities to gain experience in curriculum development and assessment design and to engage with the activities of other higher education providers; for example, through becoming external examiners, validation panel members or external reviewers. The team also investigated how much engagement there was with the activities of providers of higher education in other organisations in these roles.

397. The assessment team reviewed data on staff's external duties for 2024-25 to determine how many staff had taken up opportunities to engage in such roles. The data confirmed to the team that 15 staff members were engaged as external examiners, advisers or panel members at a range of higher education providers in this period and across a range of subject areas. As some staff are external examiners at more than one institution, staff are engaged as external examiners at a total of 20 providers. During its visit to the institute, the assessment team also met with teaching staff who confirmed that these external engagements further enriched collaborations among the institute's teaching staff within and between disciplines.

398. Given the institute's relatively small size, this is a positive level of engagement in these activities, and the assessment team agreed that it was beneficial that these opportunities were spread across the subject areas of music (covering all discipline areas), sound technology, acting, applied theatre and community drama, theatre performance design and production technology, costume making and dance. This demonstrated to the team that opportunities for external engagement in these activities were widely and evenly distributed across the institute's discipline areas.

399. To determine whether teaching staff have opportunities to gain experience in curriculum development and assessment design at the institute, the assessment team reviewed the Periodic Programme Review and Validations Event Report, the revalidation documents for the BA (Hons) Sound Technology and validation documents for the BA (Hons) Acting (Contemporary Performance). These documents demonstrated to the team the engagement of teaching staff in all aspects of curriculum development and curriculum design. As discussed in paragraph 176, these documents provide evidence of staff gaining experience in, for example, aligning programme learning outcomes closely with the qualification descriptors of the FHEQ when proposing new provision or changes to existing programmes.

400. The team also noted that the institute's New Programme / Award Approval Process explicitly provides that academic staff involved in developing programmes should be given appropriate time to undertake these tasks. This further demonstrated to the team that if awarded DAPs, the institute would continue providing meaningful opportunities for its staff to participate in curriculum development and assessment design.

401. Further details on staff experience in curriculum development and assessment design are given in paragraphs 413 to 419.

402. The assessment team concluded that through engagement with the institute's current and future detailed programme approval processes, teaching staff do and will continue to have significant opportunities to gain experience in curriculum development and assessment design within the institute, alongside parallel opportunities to contribute to relevant external activities.

403. To investigate if there is expertise in providing feedback on assessment, which is timely, constructive and developmental, the assessment team reviewed the ELTAFS, external examiner reports and responses for 2021-22 and 2022-23 and samples of assessment feedback, as well as gaining further evidence in discussion with staff and students on the site visit.

404. The ELTAFS contains a comprehensive action plan in preparation for the final policy document and sets effective goals that are targeted and industry and expert focused. One such objective and its underpinning actions includes:

'OBJECTIVE: To enhance our focus on delivery, assessment and feedback that enables and empowers creative practice.

ACTION: Assessment and Feedback: Our assessment and feedback will reflect industry practices and requirements. The structure of learning and the design of assessment and feedback will align to programme and module learning outcomes in pursuit of fostering growth and development. Marking criteria and academic integrity principles will be explicit and clear.'

405. A second objective in the strategy is targeted solely on feedback to ensure that it is 'timely and explicitly linked to learning outcomes and level of achievement and attainment'. A further objective is focused on 'students' continuous opportunity to receive and respond to both summative and formative feedback', with an action to 'ensure that module descriptors explain formative and summative assessment / feedback processes and that the VLE delivers minimum information thresholds for all modules'. The assessment team concluded that this is a carefully considered strategy that will scaffold expertise in providing feedback on assessment, which is timely, constructive and developmental.

406. The assessment team reviewed external examiner reports and responses from across the programme range and concluded that their comments evidenced a high level of expertise in the quality of feedback among teaching teams. The team found the following examples to be typical of the comments made by external examiners:

- 'Feedback given to the students was thorough which allowed them to consider how to move forward on their next projects.'

- 'The process of marking and moderation is robust and fair. There are a range of submissions and feedback given to students is timely and informative for them.'

- 'Unambiguous, clear feedback given, pointing to the areas in need of attention and areas in which the student excels with reasoning why.'

407. To investigate if assessment feedback is constructive and developmental, the assessment team reviewed a significant amount of assessed student work covering all grade boundaries. Feedback given for a recording assessment in the 'Audio Practice' module includes commentary on creative and technical performance, and student progress is tracked with targeted and constructive comments. The use of descriptors such as 'creative and appropriate' also reflects grading expectations outlined in the assessment brief.

408. In the 'Popular Music Contexts 3' module, feedback was provided through a structured tick-box system supplemented by written comments, allowing staff to indicate clearly where students met or fell short of expected outcomes across a range of assessment criteria. The assessment team agreed that the use of such structured formats helps standardise marking and supports transparency.

409. Evidence from research outline assessments showed that students submit draft work and receive formative feedback, allowing them to engage with tutor expectations before a final submission. In addition, the review of amendment submissions shows that students are encouraged to revise their work in response to specific feedback addressing subject knowledge, conceptual understanding, writing, and structure. This iterative process provides clear opportunities for dialogue and reflection.

410. Across the samples reviewed, the evidence suggested to the team that staff give students assessment feedback which is timely, constructive and developmental to supporting their development and understanding of academic judgement. Further detailed analysis of the institute's approach to assessment and feedback is given in paragraphs 286 to 324.

411. During the team's visit to the institute, the assessment team met with first-year students who explained that formative assessment is continuous, and that summative assessment feedback is very detailed and that they also have observed classes and receive very detailed ten-minute one-to-one individual verbal feedback sessions with staff. To investigate if students receive their feedback in a timely manner, the assessment team asked the student group about this and all of the approximately 30 students present confirmed that they receive their written feedback within three weeks, which was noted by the assessment team as a significant achievement, demonstrating staff expertise in providing timely feedback.

412. In conclusion, the assessment team judged that teaching staff provide excellent and expert feedback that is timely, constructive and developmental, and that this approach would continue if the institute were to award its own DAPs.

413. The assessment team reviewed the institute's New DAPs self-assessment document and plan to investigate the support given to teaching staff in gaining and scaffolding their experience of curriculum development and assessment design. The institute is developing a new Curriculum Design Guide 'to detail pedagogical principles, requirements, guidance and support for teaching staff on design, delivery and assessment', which the team consider will enhance support for teaching staff in curriculum development and assessment design. The

self-assessment document also notes that the ELTAFS will inform the Curriculum Design Guide. The assessment team concluded that these developments will support teaching staff in gaining effective experience of curriculum development and assessment design.

414. To gauge teaching and support staff's existing experience of curriculum development and assessment design, the assessment team reviewed the validating partner's Collaborative Periodic Programme Review and Validations Event Report. This document evidenced to the team school and programme teams, together with input from support staff, creating new curricula and assessment designs. This work was scrutinised by academic and industry consultants, and the assessment team agreed that the consultants' review was forensic and detailed. The institute's staff provided detailed responses in all cases to any queries the consultants raised. For example, in a review of a suite of ten awards in the School of Performance, the assessment team was fully satisfied by the staff's considered responses to the queries from the panel of external and internal assessors. All questions and lines of enquiry were effectively resolved by the programme teams as recorded in the documentation. This was also true of the other programme reviews, and the assessment team agreed that all responses reviewed were considered, detailed and authoritative. The assessment team concluded that staff at the institute had created cogent and current curriculum design and assessment and that they robustly addressed critique from internal and external assessors.

415. To further investigate the teaching staff's experience of curriculum development and assessment design, the assessment team reviewed a range of staff CVs and the institute's Staff Qualifications Log. The staff CVs demonstrated to the team that staff teaching or supporting student learning typically had significant experience of working in other higher education providers with a wide range of previous expertise in curriculum development and assessment design. This, together with evidence assessed in paragraph 361 that a very high percentage (91 per cent) of the institute's teaching staff hold Advance HE fellowships, further evidenced staff reflection on, and accredited achievement in, curriculum development and assessment design. Its review of data on staff's external duties for 2024-25 in paragraph 397 also demonstrated that 15 staff members were engaged as external examiners, advisers or panel members at a range of higher education providers in this period and across a range of subject areas. As some staff are external assessors at more than one institution, staff are engaged as external assessors at a total of 20 providers. These external experiences demonstrate additional opportunities staff have had to input into curriculum development and assessment design and leadership in these areas.

416. The assessment team also reviewed the validating partner's Collaborative Staff Qualifications Policy. All staff involved in teaching, assessment or supporting student learning at the institute are appointed subject to this policy and approval by the validating partner, and the policy stipulates general minimum requirements, such as an FHEQ Level 6 or equivalent professional qualification or, exceptionally, appropriate equivalent professional experience. The Staff Qualifications Policy matched well with the institute's own qualifications log discussed in paragraph 370, demonstrating to the team that the policy is being implemented in practice. The assessment team also noted that the institute is developing its own Staff Qualifications Policy in readiness for awarding its own degrees as evidenced in the New DAPs plan which was set for approval by Academic Board in February 2025.

417. The team also gained further valuable evidence in discussions with various staff groups on the site visit. For example, in a meeting with programme leaders staff explained how they

report on processes for curriculum and assessment development through the Programme Leads Forum as well as being well supported in curriculum development by their line managers. Programme Leaders also explained that they are empowered to continue their research activities or CPD, and that the institute supports this through initiatives on curriculum and assessment development and weekly head of school meetings to discuss ideas and to ensure collaborative work across schools where suggestions are acted upon.

418. During a meeting with teaching staff and Visiting Professionals during its visit, the assessment team noted that staff have been involved in rewriting modules and suggesting ideas for new masters' programmes which are in development. Visiting Professionals also explained that they are asked to input into theory while all the teaching staff present felt that their opinions were valued. Furthermore and as mentioned previously, staff explained that they were attracted to the institute because they are able to shape the curriculum and assessment content.

419. In conclusion, the assessment team was satisfied that relevant staff not only have experience of curriculum development and assessment design but feel supported and empowered to make positive contributions. Based on the evidence it saw, the assessment team are confident this approach will continue if the institute is granted its own DAPs.

420. To determine whether the institute has made a rigorous assessment of the skills and expertise required to teach all students, the assessment team first reviewed its Recruitment and Selection Policy. The recruitment of staff includes a rigorous assessment of skills and expertise as stated in the policy:

'The employee specification will describe the type of qualifications, training, knowledge, experience, skills, aptitudes, competencies and personal qualities required for effective performance of the job.'

421. Person specifications and job descriptions are created and updated by directors or line managers with advice and approval from the Head of HR, Culture and Transformation and the Senior HR Manager. Staff then match the skills and experience criteria with those detailed in the candidate's application form and use this information to select which candidates will be invited for interview. The Recruitment and Selection Policy also affirms that 'the screening criteria will be applied consistently to all applicants'. The assessment team concluded that this would enable in practice a fair and rigorous assessment of the skills and expertise required to teach all students.

422. Once new teaching staff are employed by the institute, they are required to engage with the institute's PReSPA and TLIPA schemes (as described in paragraph 394). In both schemes, staff are required to identify key aspects of their skills and experience with reference to Advance HE's Professional Standards Framework, from which a significant range of enhancements are then developed. One purpose of the framework is to 'foster critically evaluative, reflective and evidence-informed approaches to teaching and / or supporting learning in diverse academic or professional settings'.

423. The institute's Learning and Development Handbook (which includes policies on staff induction, development, appraisals and teaching observations) is a document devised by the institute and approved in September 2024. This handbook is discussed in paragraphs 366

and 368, and provided the assessment team with clear evidence of how the institute monitors staff engagement with programmes such as the PReSPA and TLIPA schemes, as well as its process for continuous enhancement and the ongoing rigorous assessment of staff skills through the appraisal process.

424. The assessment team concluded that the institute continues to make a rigorous assessment of the skills and expertise required to teach all students once staff are appointed and to provide excellent opportunities for them to continue to enhance their skills and expertise as they progress.

425. To assess whether the institute has appropriate staff recruitment practices, the assessment team reviewed its Recruitment and Selection Policy, staff job descriptions and the Staff Induction Handbook.

426. The assessment team considered the Recruitment and Selection Policy in paragraphs 420 and 421 and concluded that it and the staff job descriptions were appropriate as they appeared to reflect suitable requirements and responsibilities and referenced and incorporated relevant equity, data protection and complaints policies.

427. Assessing the Staff Induction Handbook, the assessment team noted that it includes a range of induction needs and checklists concerning engagement with HR, line managers and in relation to higher education teaching. The handbook also outlines details of the probationary period and mentorship opportunities.

428. During its visit to the institute, the ELT explained to the assessment team that as part of its longer-term induction process, all newly recruited staff are automatically enrolled on either the institute's TLIPA or PReSPA programmes. This means newly appointed staff benefit early on by having their teaching observed with feedback given, and the team heard during its visit how new colleagues felt supported through this mentorship programme.

429. In summary, the assessment team agreed that the institute has appropriate and clear recruitment processes in place and it demonstrates good practice in supporting newly appointed staff through its own tailored schemes, and that these processes will continue if the institute were to award its own degrees.

430. In conclusion, the assessment team formed the view that the institute meets criterion C1 as the evidence demonstrates 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. Furthermore, the assessment team's view is that the institute would continue its good practice if it were to award its own degrees.

Conclusions

431. Based on its findings, the assessment team concluded that the institute demonstrated a full understanding of criterion C1 and has a credible New DAPs plan which can be reasonably expected to enable the institute to meet the criterion in full by the end of the probationary period.

432. The assessment team found that the institute 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, is appropriately qualified, supported and developed to the level and subject of the qualification awarded.

433. The assessment team also found that the institute has relevant learning, teaching and assessment practices informed by reflection and evaluation of subject, professional practice and educational scholarship. Staff are active in the development of their subject discipline and have opportunities to enhance their practice and scholarship through Advance HE accreditation, peer review and development, as well as external opportunities such as conferences, symposia and forums which enable staff to observe and disseminate good practice.

434. Furthermore, the assessment team found that staff have academic and professional expertise as evidenced by staff holding teaching qualifications and academic qualifications commensurate to the level of award. The assessment team further concluded that staff have experience of curriculum development and assessment design informed by research and professional practice.

Specified changes to the New DAPs plan

435. The team did not identify any specified changes to the institute's New DAPs plan for this criterion.

Assessment of DAPs criterion D: Environment for supporting students

Criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement

Advice to the OfS

436. The assessment team's view is that the institute's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement.

437. The assessment team's view is that the institute has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion D1 because, in summary, the institute has in place, monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources which enable its students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. For example, student inductions are tailored and effective, and students are able to access a range of academic and non-academic support to aid their progression.

438. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the institute's New DAPs plan and supporting evidence, alongside any other relevant information. This shows that the institute can be reasonably expected to meet criterion D1 in full by the end of the probationary period.

Sub-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.**

Reasoning

439. To inform the assessment team's view of whether the institute has in place, monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, the assessment team considered a range of documentary evidence. This included the institute's Strategic Plan 2023-2026, Student Services Framework and the institute's TEF Summary. The team also discussed such arrangements with students and staff during its visit to the institute.

440. To consider whether the institute 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 also reviewed the institute's access and participation plan, New DAPs self-assessment document and plan, and minutes of the Academic Board.

441. The assessment team found that the Strategic Plan 2023-2026 demonstrates the comprehensive strategic approach the institute is taking, with a particular focus on its diverse student body and large numbers of students from underrepresented backgrounds, to enable their development and achievement. The Strategic Plan includes six strategic themes, all of which contain specific strategic aims and objectives. The themes are excellence, equity, environment, empowerment, employability and entrepreneurship. Strategic objectives include enabling students to co-create on interdisciplinary projects across programmes and through

collaborative partnerships; delivering excellence in vocational training, student experience and graduate employability; and promoting opportunities for students and staff to develop their interests and skills in innovation, enterprise and knowledge exchange.

442. The assessment team found that the access and participation plan provides a comprehensive approach to ensure the institute enhances diversity within its student body and the actions and metrics used to measure the success of these. The plan states that 'due to [the institute's] assessment of performance, which has traditionally highlighted indicators of risk at the access phase, [it has] concentrated work in the outreach area [and this] has led to an increased effort and focus in the on-course success and progression phases of the student lifecycle'. The assessment team found in its meeting with students during its visit that the consequence of this is they feel enabled to develop and achieve. Students reported that they are encouraged to improve on their previous work and there is flexibility in tasks to suit the diversity of learners. Students also expressed that the institute offers drop-in sessions on specific areas, and they receive very personalised support.

443. Referencing the institute's access and participation plan and strategic plan against minutes from the October 2024 Academic Board confirmed to the team that there is a cohesive and strategic approach across the institute to enabling student development and achievement for its diverse body of students. For example, minutes from the October 2024 Academic Board meeting show that members of the Board requested specific reference to inclusive assessments be made within the institute's academic regulations. Minutes from the same meeting also show that it was noted that such information is already included in the institute's Curriculum Design Guide and that students can request alternative assessments.

444. The New DAPs self-assessment document and plan demonstrated to the team that further work is in development at the institute to determine and evaluate how it enables student development and achievement for its diverse body of students. According to the institute, the newly appointed Director of Teaching and Learning will 'ensure that assessment practices, student feedback, and learning outcomes are continuously refined to enhance the student experience and graduate employability' and the institute will establish a task and finish group to 'conduct a thorough needs assessment to identify the resources required to maintain a high standard of student support' to ensure these services align with the demands of its diverse student body. The New DAPs plan confirms the timeframe for this review is between February and September 2025.

445. The team also noted that the New DAPs plan includes a formal review of feedback on assessment processes and establishing an institutional system to provide staff training on assessment to run between June 2025 and June 2026. The team considers that this work will further strengthen the extent to which the institute can support the diversity of its student body to develop and achieve.

446. The assessment team concluded that the institute takes a comprehensive strategic and operational approach to determine and evaluate how it enables student development and achievement for its diverse body of students. The team found that the diversity of the student body is clearly very important to the institute, and its developing strategic and operational approach ensures its students can develop and achieve.

447. To review whether the institute's 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 considered the Student Induction Timetable, Central Induction Activities, a sample Induction Timetable from Sound Technology 2024 and the Experiences of 2023 Entrants Evaluation Report. The effectiveness of induction activities was also discussed with students and staff during the team's visit to the institute.

448. Within the documentation the assessment team found that the Student Induction Timetable and the Central Induction Activities outline an appropriate series of induction activities provided to students at the start of the academic year to induct them into their programmes and help them settle into life at the institute, including an introduction to the institute, the LRC and how to access wellbeing support. The sample Sound Technology Induction Timetable 2024 also showed a series and schedule of specific inductions delivered to students on this programme beyond the central induction activities. Specific inductions for this programme included introductions to specialist facilities (such as sound studios) and technical resources. The team also deemed this suite of induction activities appropriate to the subject area in question, with students supported to access the practical resources they will need to succeed on their programme. In addition, in conversation with the institute's student support services during the visit, the team heard how the different choices and needs of students are considered during induction. For example, students are introduced to staff who can support them with academic skills, wellbeing and reasonable adjustment assessments.

449. The institute developed an Induction Survey Action Plan in response to the recommendations included in the Experiences of 2023 Entrants Evaluation report. The Experiences of 2023 Entrants Report reflects on survey responses from students on the effectiveness of the admissions process, programme information, and induction activities. It included questions covering students' experiences from accepting an offer, preparing to start, through to the initial induction period. The report was reviewed by the Induction Working Group, as recorded in its minutes for 2024-25. This review led to the institute developing an Induction Survey Action Plan. In addition, the Comparative Summary New Student Induction Reports showed to the team how reports were compared year on year to assesses progress and identify trends. According to the evaluation report, 83 per cent of students agreed or strongly agreed that induction activities had impacted on their knowledge of what was expected of them to succeed at university, with comments including: '[Induction] gave me just about all the information I needed to know about being a student at [the institute], and what resources I am entitled to'. These reports and evaluations confirmed to the team that the advice and induction activities provided by the institute were effective, and that action is taken to identify and improve any areas of relative weakness in response to feedback from students.

450. To further ascertain the effectiveness of advice and induction relative to student choices and needs, during its site visit the assessment team discussed this area with staff and students at all levels to understand their perceptions. In a meeting with heads of department, staff confirmed to the team that students are introduced to their personal tutors very early through the induction process, and students know who to contact and are signposted to all sources of support. In a meeting with students during the visit, students were complementary of the induction process and confirmed to the team its effectiveness and described how they received relevant talks and saw performances, were introduced to all resources, including the LRC and IT facilities, toured the buildings, undertook social bonding activities and were also familiarised more widely with the city of Liverpool. In its meeting with postgraduate students,

the assessment team heard about different student choices and needs with reference to the orientation for international students provided by the institute. This brings together international students from across all programmes. Students described how this was helpful in making them feel a part of the institute and creating bonds and friendships that have lasted.

451. The assessment team concluded that the institute's 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 activities highlighted to the team were appropriate, and there is evidence in the documentary evidence as well as directly from students that induction activities are valued by students.

452. To establish how the effectiveness of student and staff advisory, support and counselling services is monitored, and any resource needs arising are considered, the assessment team reviewed the institute's Student Services Framework, Safeguarding Policy and Student Wellbeing Policy, and tested the effectiveness of these in practice through a review of Annual Monitoring Reports and in discussion with staff during the team's visit to the institute.

453. As detailed in paragraph 449, the effectiveness of student and staff advisory, support and counselling services is monitored through the use of surveys and feedback. This was confirmed to the team in discussions with students and staff.

454. The assessment team also found that the Student Services Framework details what is offered to students in the areas of student wellbeing and disability support, learner services, student voice and student administration, as well as the overarching objective to 'create a holistic support system that addresses academic needs, personal wellbeing, and student engagement'. For example, in the area of student wellbeing and disability support, the support offerings include counselling services, disability support, wellbeing drop-ins and crisis support. The student voice area offers student representation, surveys and focus groups, student-led committees, events and forums, while student administration services include support on enrolment and registration, programme queries, assessments and graduation and certification. The team found the support in these areas to be relevant and wide-ranging.

455. The team found that the institute's Safeguarding Policy details an effective approach to protect the health, wellbeing and rights of students and staff, including the appointment of a designated Safeguarding Officer, processes for dealing with allegations, training, monitoring and evaluation. The Student Wellbeing Policy confirmed to the team the attributes to study and the expectations of the students, and evidenced how students are monitored, including attendance monitoring, and the stages of intervention and support offered if necessary.

456. The assessment team reviewed Annual Monitoring Reports for 2021-22 and 2022-23 to assess how the effectiveness of such frameworks and policies are monitored. These reports give a holistic review of the institute's provision. They provided the team with evidence of the institute monitoring the effectiveness of its support services, along with potential actions to be taken because of this monitoring. One example of such an action was connected to resource needs [redacted] in the LRC and student wellbeing. In 2022 an action within the Annual Monitoring Report was raised to keep this under review with a view to increasing staffing. The assessment team noted that this was still a concern in the 2023 report and was escalated to the Director of Students to monitor. In the team's discussion with staff regarding student support during its visit, this issue was probed further and the institute confirmed that its

Wellbeing team has plans in place to extend its staffing with general advisers who can support students on a range of topics.

457. The Annual Monitoring Reports were received and scrutinised at the Institute Quality Committee and contain an annual review of student wellbeing with a full action plan as an appendix. For example, staffing shortages and subsequent appointments was highlighted in the 2021-22 report. The limitations of the institute's estate were highlighted in the 2022-23 report, with the Institute Quality Committee giving its endorsement to find more suitable space. This demonstrated to the team that the institute appropriately monitors the effectiveness of its student and staff advisory, support and counselling services.

458. In addition, the team's discussion with staff on student support, feedback and employability confirmed to it that the institute monitors the effectiveness of the wellbeing and support services offered. Staff explained that wellbeing and support are introduced to students in induction week, and this has increased students' awareness and demand for wellbeing services. To ensure the service remained effective in the face of increased demand, the institute addressed any shortfall in supply by introducing a 24/7 helpline and offering every student who needs it a course of seven counselling sessions. The first of these is in person and the remaining six through an app. In the team's meeting with students during its visit, the team heard how students found the counselling offer to be effective and liked the app.

459. The assessment team concluded that student and staff advisory, support and counselling services are effectively monitored, and any resource needs arising are considered. The institute has in place advisory, support and counselling frameworks and policies, and the effectiveness of delivery is monitored through Annual Monitoring Reports, through the Institute Quality Committee and by monitoring the student experience and using the student voice to ensure effectiveness and make changes accordingly.

460. To determine if the institute'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 considered a range of documents including Annual Data Reports for 2022-23 and 2023-24, the Retention Rates document for 2023-24 and the Student Attendance Policy.

461. In reviewing the evidence, the assessment team found that the institute's Strategic Systems Review and Business Transformation Project document outlines the institute's efforts to change its core systems, and particularly its student administration systems, if awarded New DAPs. The document recognises that the institute's current system does not enable certain elements of student administration which the institute will need to do if awarded DAPs. The document details that the current systems can provide timely, secure and accurate information but many are connected to its validating partner, and there are a multitude of software systems that are ageing and can be confusing.

462. In its presentation on organisational strategy to the assessment team, senior management confirmed that work towards a new student management system is progressing well and will streamline many of the current systems. The new system will ensure that the complete student lifecycle from recruitment and enrolment, through to graduation and beyond is all contained within one software system and will be accessible by students. The institute's New DAPs self-assessment document also states that this new system will provide it with robust

data. The institute's New DAPs plan includes relevant actions and timelines associated with developing the new student records system, with work concluding in September 2025 and staff training taking place between September and December 2025 ahead of roll-out. Further comprehensive detail on the implementation of the student management system is detailed in the Project Schedule devised with their chosen supplier, which the team considers represents a credible plan for the institute delivering its own fit-for-purpose system for student administration.

463. The assessment team found that the Student Attendance Policy shows the institute monitors student attendance to ensure students maintain progression and performance. The Student Wellbeing Policy also confirmed to the team that the purpose of attendance monitoring is to ensure the institute can provide timely pastoral and wellbeing support. All teaching sessions are monitored through registers, and the recording of attendance is mandatory. Poor attendance by students is seen by the institute as an indicator of wellbeing concerns, and so attendance below 80 per cent will trigger a first meeting with the student to offer appropriate support. The Attendance Policy was approved in November 2024 and will continue should it gain New DAPs.

464. The Retention Rates document for 2023-24 demonstrated to the team an accurate monitoring of student retention across the academic year and by programme, and the assessment team confirmed that the Annual Data Reports for 2022-23 and 2023-24 provided timely, secure and accurate information. These data reports were reviewed by the Institute's Quality Committee, which monitored related action plans. The reports compare data from across the whole of the institute and ensure it can monitor progression and performance by programme, gender and ethnicity. The reports consider, for example, the link between ethnicity and achievement by observing the relatively low number of programmes with global majority students studying on them where the rate of global majority students achieving a 1st or 2:1 degree is above the average for that programme. These areas will continue to need to be monitored if the institute gains New DAPs and implements its own systems.

465. The assessment team concluded that the institute'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 current systems are used to enable it to monitor accurately, and the institute has identified system improvements for which it has credible plans to introduce should it be awarded New DAPs. These areas will continue to need to be monitored during the probationary period once it implements its own systems.

466. To evaluate whether the institute 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 reviewed documents such as the institute's TEF Summary, the draft terms of reference for the Industry Advisory Board and the ELTAFS. The findings from these documents were also discussed with students and staff to confirm the opportunities that are provided.

467. As mentioned in paragraph 454, the institute has a Student Services Framework which is organised into four core areas, one of which is Learner Services. The team found that the framework outlines the academic support available to students and includes academic support workshops, online academic support materials and one-on-one academic support. As

detailed in paragraph 279, the institute also has a personal tutor system. Students meet their tutor regularly and tutors guide their students' academic development. The success of the personal tutor system was confirmed to the assessment team in its meeting with students during its visit, with students highlighting that personal tutors support them to further their academic progression.

468. The assessment team found that the institute's TEF Summary comprehensively outlines how the institute was judged to have very high quality teaching and the areas highlighted confirmed to the team that the institute provides opportunities for students to develop skills for their academic, personal and professional progression. Of relevance to the team's assessment, the summary included the following positive findings:

- professional practice and employer engagement contribute to a very high quality academic experience for students

- employability skills are taught as core content and are a core theme of the institution's new strategic plan

- the institute clearly explains the employability and career-focused educational gains it intends its students to achieve.

469. These areas of strength were corroborated by the team through the institute's presentation on organisational strategy, in which it was highlighted how all modules have Visiting Professionals attached to them and there is a balance of academic and industry practitioners to shape delivery. In a meeting with students, it was also confirmed to the team that the comprehensive access to campus for students enables them to have safe practice spaces, encouraging them to develop their creativity and hone their academic, personal and professional skills.

470. The team found that the terms of reference for the Industry Advisory Board demonstrated a commitment to seek guidance, foster partnerships, and enhance the quality and relevance of the curriculum with industry professionals to enable students to develop skills that will enhance both their academic and professional progression. As detailed in the institute's New DAPs plan, in March 2025 Industry Advisory Board was formally established at both institute- and school-level. As well as feeding into the personal and professional progression of students to increase employment opportunities, these boards will also feed outwards to help develop the profile of the institute and its students and graduates. The assessment team considered that the development of these advisory boards has the potential to significantly enhance students' academic and non-academic progression, and their implementation should be monitored through the probationary period to ensure they achieve their intended aim.

471. The ELTAFS evidenced to the team the institute's commitment and strategic approach to providing a 'practice-intensive creative learning environment focused on the provision of a rigorous holistic and industry-focused curriculum that nurtures students for successful and sustained careers'. It was clear the to the team that the ELTAFS action plan had been developed in alignment with the institute's overall strategic plan, with priorities such as to 'undertake a comprehensive review of content, design, structure, and delivery of our programme portfolio to ensure that excellence, innovation, collaboration and competitiveness

are embedded and factored into all subject areas and disciplines' and to 'deliver excellence in vocational training, student experience and graduate employability'.

472. In its meetings with students and programme leaders, it was reiterated to the team how collaboration between students across programmes (for example, students using their relevant skills to work together to produce a show) was important to students and a part of the institute's ethos, and how this supports students to understand the context and broader knowledge of the industries they are training to join, which in turn increases their sustainable employment prospects. This is reiterated in the ELTAFS action plan, in which there is apriority to 'enable students to co-create interdisciplinary projects across programmes and via collaborative partnerships'.

473. More generally and as described in paragraph 467, the team found students receive various support from tutors that enable their academic skills. This support includes academic support workshops, online academic support materials and one-on-one academic support. Furthermore, the personal tutoring system allows tutors to give individualised support to guide students' specific academic development needs.

474. The assessment team therefore concluded that the institute 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.

475. To assess whether the institute 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 reviewed documents such as programme handbooks, the New DAPs self-assessment document and plan, and the institute's TEF Summary, and assessed how effective these opportunities were during the visit to the institute and in reviewing its VLE.

476. The institute's New DAPs self-assessment document outlines the specialist facilities available to students and states that, as an institution which has a curriculum that involves a significant amount of experiential learning, it is important to allow students 'the opportunity to have performance experience, especially for those who are on stage, but also for those who are behind the scenes'. Specialist learning resources and facilities available to students include dance and movement studios, rehearsal suites, performance venues, TV, music and recording studios, scenic workshop, and construction and costume facilities. The team was impressed by the quality, size, specification and availability of these resources during its tour of the institute.

477. Opportunities for students to develop the skills needed to make effective use of these resources were tested by the assessment team by referring to the institute's TEF Summary and during the visit. The TEF Summary reports that the institute provides outstanding learning resources, with significant investment in both physical and digital learning resources. During its visit, the assessment team undertook a campus tour of space and resources and were of the view the resources were of a very high quality, intentionally designed to match industry standards. The campus building is open 24/7 during term time and it was confirmed that students use campus facilities extensively to develop the required skills. On its visit, the team saw students accessing and making effective use of campus facilities. Minutes of the Health, Safety and Environment Committee between 2022 and 2024 also confirmed to the team that

the institute ensures that the use of such facilities remains safe and accessible for staff and students.

478. The assessment team found that programme handbooks detail how students are inducted into learning resources and the support they can receive while a student, including safe and effective access to specialist facilities. The Periodic Review Report, which covers the revalidation of all the institute's programmes in September 2023, confirmed to the team how the institute ensured students can make effective use of learning resources, specialist facilities, and the use of digital and virtual environments, across all schools and programmes. The report concluded that there are 'sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources, student support services and appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high quality academic experience'. As detailed in paragraph 448, the opportunity for all students to develop skills to make effective use of both the physical and digital learning resources starts at induction.

479. The institute's LRC is a specialist creative and performing arts library. In its meeting with students, feedback shared with the team confirmed that the LRC was very good and responsive to students' needs. The LRC also includes very good resources that are specific to the needs of the programmes at the institute and, in its meeting with teaching staff, the assessment team heard how the LRC is keen to replicate any relevant resources currently offered by the institute's validating partner.

480. As mentioned in paragraph 271, the institute has a Social Media Policy for Students with the purpose of encouraging good practice, providing students with information, ensuring students do not compromise their security, protecting the institution and ensuring a consistent approach to social media. The team found that the policy includes comprehensive guidance across all areas of social media, for example the need for students to conduct themselves in a manner which demonstrates respect for staff, fellow students and property, and for other members of the local community in general.

481. Access to the VLE was granted to the team in the course of their assessment, and the team was satisfied the VLE contains a good deal of effective material. In its meeting with students, the team heard how VLE resources were good and met students' needs. As detailed under its analysis in relation to criterion B3, the team found the VLE to be effective, accessible and reliable, with information that is clearly laid out and easy to navigate. The VLE is a safe closed system only available to the institute's students and staff, in which students have access to all policies and procedures.

482. The assessment team concluded that the institute provides opportunities for all students to develop skills to make effective use of the learning resources provided, including the safe and effective use of specialist facilities, and the use of digital and virtual environments. The team's view is that the institute's learning resources, specialist facilities and virtual environments are of a high quality, and it gives students the opportunity to develop the skills needed to make most advantage of them.

483. To determine whether the institute's approach is guided by a commitment to equity, the assessment team considered the institute's:

- Equity Strategy

- Access and Participation Plan

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

- Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy.

484. The findings from these documents were discussed with students and staff to confirm the institute's commitment.

485. The assessment team noted that equity is one of the six key themes of the institute's Strategic Plan 2023-2026, and the team found that the related Equity Strategy includes priorities, actions and indicators necessary to create and develop a culture and environment for equality and inclusion at all levels for students and staff. In its meeting with programme leaders, it was confirmed to the assessment team that all the institute's strategic themes – including equity – were embedded into the curriculum, shape the culture and delivery at the institute, and are the framework for all the institute does. The Equity Strategy has its own five themes, which include appropriate definitions and supporting actions.

486. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy demonstrated to the team the commitment to equity for all staff employed by the institute, detailing credible expectations on staff and definitions of discrimination, harassment, victimisation, bullying, equal opportunities, inclusion and training. The institute's Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy, which sits alongside the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, confirmed to the assessment team's satisfaction that the institute has a commitment to an environment based on dignity, trust and respect, and one that is free from discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation.

487. Furthermore, the access and participation plan outlines the institute's commitment to equity and the team found that its intervention strategies 1 to 3 detail the objectives, activities, outcomes and evaluation methods identified by the institute to increase the proportion of underrepresented students and the proportion of students from the global majority. These include outreach, support for applications and sponsorship of the institute's Multi-Academy Trust.

488. Through meetings with senior management, the assessment team concluded that the institute is working hard, and is committed, to increasing its intake of students from underrepresented communities. In 2022, for example, the institute removed audition fees to reduce barriers to students applying. In addition, the institute delivers regional workshops and promotes grassroots work, recognising it is a centre of excellence in a city with a high proportion of low socioeconomic backgrounds. The institute feeds into the community through schools as well as having their own specialist non-fee-paying primary, secondary and sixth form schools that can support students into the institute.

489. The assessment team concluded that the institute's approach is guided by a commitment to equity. At the heart of its strategic plan, equity informs the curriculum, delivery, employment and environment at the institute, and it is continuing to look at ways in which it can be as inclusive as possible.

Conclusions

490. Based on its findings, the assessment team concluded that the institute demonstrated a full understanding of criterion D1 and has a credible New DAPs plan which can be reasonably expected to enable the institute to meet the criterion in full by the end of the probationary period.

491. The assessment team found that the institute has in place, monitors, and evaluates arrangements and resources which enable its students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The institute's strategic approach to enabling student development and achievement is clearly articulated in its strategic plan. All staff are aware of the strategy, and it is embedded into the ethos and delivery of the institute. There is a clear vision and structures for supporting students and the operational means to achieve this. The institute's work is underpinned by a commitment to equity, which is one of its core themes.

492. The team also found that the institute has already developed its own comprehensive support services and industry standard resources, and is continuing to invest in developing its digital resources. The team feel these all ensure that it meets the individual academic, personal and professional progression needs of all its students. The institute has developed effective approaches to deliver, monitor and evaluate these services, and the team's view is that investment in a new student management system will improve this further.

493. Furthermore, the team found that the advice and comprehensive personal and academic induction that students receive are effective, as is clear from the very positive feedback given by students. All students are given the opportunities, support, resources and facilities to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

Specified changes to the New DAPs plan

494. The team did not identify any specified changes to the institute's New DAPs plan for this criterion.

Assessment of DAPs criterion E: Evaluation of performance

Criterion E1: Evaluation of performance

Advice to the OfS

495. The assessment team's view is that the institute's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to criterion E1: Evaluation of performance.

496. The assessment team's view is that the institute has demonstrated a full understanding of criterion E1 because, in summary, it critically reviews its own performance through internal and external monitoring and review and has robust mechanisms in place for disseminating good practice. Furthermore, the institute ensures that actions arising from self-evaluation, scrutiny and monitoring are timely and effectively discharged.

497. The team did, however, identify a recommendation which in its view should be monitored during the first year of the institute's probationary monitoring (paragraphs 512 to 515). Drawing on the assessment team's findings in relation to this criterion, the team recommend that the institute should review the mechanisms it uses to assign and discharge action across all structures involved in the scrutiny and monitoring of its academic provision. This is with a view to ensuring there is parity and consistency within and across all structures as regards effectively identifying, assigning, tracking, resolving and updating any actions arising from internal or external monitoring and review.

498. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the institute's New DAPs plan and supporting evidence, alongside any other relevant information. This shows the institute can be reasonably expected to meet criterion E1 in full by the end of the probationary period.

Sub-criterion E1.1

> **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

499. To assess whether critical self-reflection is integral to the operation of the institute's higher education provision and whether action is taken in response to matters raised through internal or external monitoring and review, the assessment team reviewed a range of internal senior reports to Council, external audit reports commissioned by the institute and external examiner reports and responses, together with analysis of and responses to NSS feedback.

500. The governance arrangements in place that support critical self-assessment at the institute include Council, with responsibility for monitoring management performance as outlined in the Articles of Association; the ELT, which commissions, analyses and presents a wide range of independent annual audits for further scrutiny by Council; Academic Board, with responsibility for maintaining academic standards across all programmes; and the Student Experience Committee, which scrutinises key performance data such as NSS results.

501. The assessment team found the Principal and CEO's reports to Council, which meets a minimum of three times a year, to be critical, strategic and forensic with effective context and appropriate detail. These institutional reports clearly identified and responded to weaknesses and were ambitious and focused in developing strengths aligned with new initiatives. For example, in the November 2023 report to Council, key priorities were highlighted, including finance, the New DAPs process, campus investments and student recruitment. Key external impact factors were also highlighted such as the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and sector AI challenges, together with relevant internal developments. There was a forensic update on the implementation of the institute's Strategic Plan 2023-2026, and a balanced approach to the New DAPs application process ensuring that business as usual continues to function efficiently alongside the New DAPs process. The institute's recruitment detail was presented, as was an effective NSS results analysis. A report from the Chief Operating Officer within this report provided clear and detailed financial details including risks and opportunities and an update from the Audit Committee. A detailed registry and student support report was also provided, as well as a marketing, recruitment and widening participation report, plus detailed analytical reports on each of the individual schools of the institute.

502. A highly detailed action plan tracking all aspects of delivery of the strategic plan was also included and challenges were identified and analysed throughout the report. For example, under 'Goal 2 – Equity' there was an action to develop training opportunities for students and staff on equality, diversity, and inclusion priorities. Delivery and measurement of the action and output target were outlined, and the progress update showed that the review was completed with actions implemented and that training and development weeks were undertaken in June and September 2023. The assessment team concluded that this and the other reports reviewed by the team provided a very comprehensive and highly detailed briefing to Council directors and members.

503. Evidence of independent annual internal audits demonstrated to the assessment team the institute's effective action to assess its own performance by responding to identified weaknesses and developing further its strengths. The 2024 audit undertaken by RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP to review key risks and assurances relating to the institute concluded that the institute has 'an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance, internal control, and economy, efficiency and effectiveness'. The audit team gave substantial assurance in relation to the HR Healthcheck, and reasonable assurance in relation to IT Security Key Controls and the UKVI Student Visa Framework, while follow-up from the previous audit showed 'good progress' with all four management actions from the previous report having been fully implemented.

504. As discussed under criteria B2 and B3, after reviewing a range of external examiner reports and responses the assessment team concluded that a critical and evaluative process of external examination is in place. External examiner reports show clearly that standards accord with the FHEQ and benchmark statements, that academic standards and achievements are comparable with other higher education providers, that assessment is fair and rigorous and that the quality of student work reflects a high standard of teaching. The external examiners reports reviewed by the assessment team provide judicious critical reflections when required and these are responded to in appropriate detail by the institute's programme teams. The team found this external examiner's comment on the BA (Hons)

Management of Music, Entertainment, Theatre and Events programme to be typical of the many positive assessments made by external examiners:

'The work during my tenure has improved year on year, as has the standardisation of feedback. The range of topics covered in student work has been diverse and interesting, suggesting that the teaching team are encouraging students to be active learners, who follow their own interests. The academic work has also been industry relevant and will be beneficial to students as they enter the job market.'

505. The institute's New DAPs self-assessment document states that 'the NSS provides important programme and institutional level data of the student experience', so the assessment team tested how the institute interrogates this data to learn lessons and improve the student experience.

506. The Principal and CEO's September 2022 strategic report to Council contains a detailed NSS analysis, presenting first a summary overview of the significance of the NSS, followed by an analysis of key outcomes in comparison with the previous year. It reflects proportionally on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic in terms of student learning, increased anxiety, depravation and frustration, and focuses on the survey areas that require specific attention. It also notes the development of an NSS Tracker spreadsheet 'to provide detailed oversight of responses and actions to each of the survey's categories on a programme and at an institutional level', with levels of risk to be calculated and applied to each of the categories to enable timeliness of actions and progress. It then presents institution- and programme-level data which is clearly presented and easy to understand. The assessment team next reviewed the NSS Tracker spreadsheet directly and confirmed that this is a detailed document containing colour coded year comparisons and score comparisons for all NSS criteria for each programme in the institute. Of significance is the action planning narrative for each individual criterion in each programme written by the relevant programme leader. The assessment team concluded that this document provides clear and detailed comparative data and focused contextual information for each programme criterion, analysing issues and proposing solutions, mitigations or updates.

507. Finally, the assessment team reviewed minutes from the Student Experience Committee where an effective discussion about NSS outcomes took place between student officers and staff. One student officer commented that in addition to informing students of what issues have been resolved or completed, 'there needs to be communication on what work is in progress as a way of providing accountability and an incentive to continue to act upon student feedback'. It was clear to the assessment team through the minutes that students and staff were working cooperatively together to agree actions that would improve the student experience, and that actions of the committee were collated, monitored and subsequently discharged.

508. In its New DAPs self-assessment document, the assessment team found that the institute has identified enhancements to improve further its critical self-assessment. For example, recurrent issues with data quality are described in the current dual LJMU and LIPA monitoring systems, which include performance indicators regarding student attainment, continuation, pass rates, progression and outcomes, with varying levels of detail in terms of action planning. The institute is therefore intending to implement its own Continuous Monitoring and Enhancement (CME) system of interconnected module evaluations, Programme Board

actions, NSS actions and student data. This process is detailed across several actions in the New DAPs plan with completion dates provided. The New DAPs plan also points to planned increased agility in receiving and responding to external examiner reports, without the need to include LJMU link-tutors in the reporting and response loop. The institute views the achievement of New DAPs 'as an opportunity' and presents four actions in relation to further enhancing its evaluation of performance, including the CME system outlined above. The other actions identified are a review of the revised governance structure to ensure it upholds accountability, a review of the structure and operational aspects of the student voice area and a review of the effectiveness and operation of Programme Boards.

509. The assessment team reviewed the institute's New DAPs self-assessment document and plan and terms of reference of the Assessment and Feedback Working Group to assess the institute's approach to creating its own policies and procedures for self-evaluation and improving on its strengths to replace those of its validating partner. The self-assessment document lists every policy and regulatory framework currently being developed and the assessment team agreed that the production of this comprehensive academic infrastructure would effectively replace the current LJMU policies and regulations, including those related to self-evaluation and developing strengths. The assessment team then mapped this to the extensive New DAPs plan which maps every critical policy and regulation to a timeline for delivery ahead of next academic year, as well as mapping new enhancements and developments the institute is progressing. It was clear to the team that this complex exercise has been carefully considered, and essential policies and regulations, such as the institute's Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy, will complete in June 2025 ahead of the new teaching year, while longer-term self-reflection developments and enhancements such as 'putting in place a holistic and comprehensive system to allow for the sharing of good practice' will complete towards the end of the 2025-26 academic year.

510. The Assessment and Feedback Working Group is taking forward developing the new key academic infrastructure and the first of the terms of reference for the group is to 'consider key points of principle where we want to operate differently to LJMU'. In the ELT's presentation on organisational strategy to the assessment team during the site visit, senior leaders were energised by the opportunity to make enhancements to the LJMU policies and processes better tailored to the institute. For example, they said they find the external examiner appointment process too slow, and plan to introduce a more agile system and will also be able to develop their enhancement plans for student overseas exchanges more quickly under their own authority.

511. In summary, the assessment team agreed that critical self-assessment is integral to the operation of the institute's higher education provision and that action is taken in response to matters raised through internal or external monitoring and review. It further agreed that there are opportunities for enhancement if the institute were to award its own degrees.

512. To assess how the institute uses clear mechanisms for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny and monitoring of its academic provision, the assessment team reviewed action planning across all key committees and concluded that mechanisms for assigning and discharging action arising from scrutiny and monitoring of the institute's academic provision were in place. The assessment team found that while all committees assigned and discharged actions, there was some variance in how this process was presented and how successfully it was achieved. For example, at Council matters arising

from the previous meeting were either tabled after other agenda items with the headings 'Description', 'Who' and 'By when', or presented in lists. Action plans were not used as such until November 2023, and the assessment team's view is that the addition of these has aided clarity. However, these action plans and the majority of other action plans deployed by the institute use a simple format with variations of the headings 'Action', 'Who' and 'By when.' The assessment team also found that in some Programme Boards, sometimes just the binary 'Action' and 'Responsible' or 'Summary' and 'Action' were used without a date for completion or update, limiting the potential to aid effective monitoring and completed actions.

513. While there was some inconsistency in its use, the assessment team found that the Student Experience Committee generally deploys a particularly effective action plan format with the headings 'Area', 'Objective / Goal', 'Action', 'Measurable outcome', 'By when', 'Responsible' and 'Progress'. The assessment team noted that this format enhanced clarity and accountability and allowed greater potential for goal execution, and that this or a similar format should be deployed across the institute.

514. The assessment team found that occasional actions in Programme Boards are not followed up, for example an action for student representatives to remind students that they are given feedback every day and can learn from the feedback given to other students. This action was not carried forward into the matters arising action plan in the next meeting so, while the student representatives may have discharged their action, there was no formal opportunity in the agenda for them to confirm they had done so. The team therefore recommend that the institute monitor the assigning and discharging of actions across Programme Boards and ensure these are captured appropriately.

515. The assessment team noted that actions were generally well captured in the Institute Quality Committee. However, as the action plan format did not include a 'By when' or similar column heading, or a progress or completion column heading, it is not clear whether some actions were completed or ongoing. The assessment team also advises including both the previous action plan and the current action plan together to ensure that all actions are resolved or recorded in the new Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (which has recently replaced the Institute Quality Committee). The institute's New DAPs self-assessment document states that 'Academic Board is currently a subcommittee of Council, ensuring that all processes of performance assessment, review and action planning are transparent at every level in the governance structure'. While the assessment team agreed that actions are generally well captured, the team considered there could be greater transparency and consistency in assigning and discharging the actions, and therefore recommend that this is monitored throughout the probationary period, should the institute gain New DAPs.

516. The assessment team reviewed the LJMU Periodic Programme Review and Validations Event Report to see if the structures and mechanisms in place were clear and led to actions from programme approvals being effectively considered, addressed and discharged. The programmes under review were the MA Music Industry Management, the BA (Hons) Management for the Creative Industries and Performing Arts and the BA (Hons) Filmmaking and Creative Technologies. The comments and questions from internal and external panel members were responded to in detail by the programme team and all were effectively resolved and captured in an action plan with no further action required. The conditions and recommendations from the panel members were also tracked carefully, providing details of the action taken in response with final confirmation and checking by the event officer provided

for all conditions and recommendations. The assessment team concluded that through the effective mechanisms of its academic provision, actions arising from programme review are effectively considered, addressed and discharged.

517. The assessment team reviewed external examiner reports and responses to further assess whether the mechanisms in place for assigning and discharging actions are clear and enable effective scrutiny and monitoring of its academic provision. The format for external examiner responses is efficient, with externals able to cover all key aspects of academic quality, provision and scrutiny with 'Yes' or 'No' answers, but with scope to comment further as they wish. The team found responses from external examiners to be positive and effusive across subject areas with much good practice highlighted, so there is typically little for programme teams to address. However, when an issue is raised, the team saw that programme teams provide detailed and targeted responses. For example, an external examiner commented that 'teaching and learning could be enhanced by a more extensive technical support, most notably for audio and video recording'. To this comment, the tutor responded that 'Technical support is vital for the development of the course and it is and [sic] ongoing request internally' and 'We have requested a 0.6 technician - which had been turned down. We intend to request again'.

518. In relation to an external examiner's comment that the course was too generously marked, a highly detailed response was provided by the programme team: 'Considering the issues addressed (generous marking), and following departmental standardisation meetings, an internal meeting was arranged with the Interim Course Leader (previously Level 4 Module Leader) and the LIPA's Principal and CEO to discuss, with members of the Quality team present'. The programme team went on to provide significant context such as highlighting different approaches in accredited conservatoire programmes to university programmes, the highly selective nature of the intake at the institute with 34 applications for each place typically and the programme team's strong adherence to grading descriptors. The external examiner was invited to take part in further discussion and the team also suggested providing the external examiner with a larger sample of student work in the coming year to assess standards more fully. In summary, the assessment team concluded that the feedback provided by external examiners on academic standards is carefully assessed and responded to, demonstrating that there are clear mechanisms for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny and review of academic provision.

519. The assessment team concluded that the institute does consistently use mechanisms for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny and monitoring of its academic provision, but that these mechanisms should be enhanced as indicated in paragraph 513 and be of consistent design across the institute if it awards its own degrees.

520. The assessment team found that ideas and expertise from within and outside the institute are drawn into its arrangements for programme design, approval, delivery and review. For example, the LJMU Collaborative Periodic Programme Review Event Report and the Periodic Programme Review of the BA (Hons) Sound Technology Self-Evaluation Document demonstrate how ideas from external specialists, students and staff influence all aspects of programme development, teaching, student learning and assessment.

521. The assessment team reviewed the LJMU Collaborative Programme Review, which is designed to assure the 'Academic Board at Liverpool John Moores University that its

undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes continue to meet the university's expectations for quality and standards. Through the articulation of conditions, recommendations, innovative practice and commendations, periodic programme review provides for both the assurance of standards, and the future enhancement of continuing programmes'.

522. The assessment team noted the review process required details of:

- external and internal benchmarking

- student consultation

- admissions, retention and success data

- curriculum and programme structure

- teaching, learning and assessment

- student support mechanisms

- staffing and resource requirements

- programme management and quality assurance

- roles and responsibilities.

523. In a 2023 review of acting, dance and professional practice programmes, the team found there were four external representatives on the panel who asked many forensic and relevant questions such as 'Formative feedback is mentioned, but how is this delivered and how does it support and scaffold the student learning journey toward the summative assessment?'. Other questions covered aspects of teaching and student learning as well as assessment.

524. The assessment team also noted that the institute's responses were detailed and all questions were either resolved or resulted in an outcome of approval. Likewise, there were four staff from LJMU on the panel (in the roles of chair, Event Officer and two university representatives) – alongside staff and senior management from the institute. It was clear to the assessment team that students had been consulted through the provision of feedback during the evaluation phase and the panel met with ten students from the relevant programmes to discuss their views and suggestions. The panel also met with senior managers from the institute and had a tour of specialist facilities and resources.

525. The assessment team found the process to be rigorous, leading to two conditions, eight recommendations and three commendations, with a clear and detailed record of the programme review captured in the documentation.

526. The assessment team also reviewed the BA (Hons) Sound Technology LJMU Self-Evaluation Document. This document describes its primary focus to be 'a reflective, evidence-based appraisal of the programme(s) operation since it was initially validated or last underwent review, as well as a consideration and outline of any proposed future changes or developments to the programme [and] provides the basis for the review event and face-to-face discussions with the review panel'.

527. The document contained details of the same external and internal reference points described in paragraph 522, and it was also benchmarked against the institute's Strategic Plan 2023-2026 and its Guide to Teaching, Assessment, Feedback and the Academic Framework Regulations 2022-23. The following key suggestions arose through student consultation:

- broad agreement that a key driver in review should be to re-evaluate the breadth / depth philosophy of the programme to allow earlier optionality and specialisation

- a re-evaluation of assessment tasks / delivery in some modules to rebalance theory and practice

- a review of the number of individual assessment tasks and their timing towards fewer, larger tasks of a more synoptic nature.

528. The assessment team agreed that the input into the development and continuous improvement of the programme from external stakeholders was significant, including for example:

- PSRB accreditation of the programme from JAMES (Joint Audio Media Education Support)

- Twickenham Film Studios

- Solotech / SSE

- CloudBass Outside Broadcast.

529. The institute created the Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review Task and Finish Group to develop its own programme review process developing from the LJMU model to complete in February 2024, as outlined in the New DAPs plan (210). The assessment team also noted that the Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review Task and Finish Group will provide recommendations on developing, implementing and embedding a CME process that 'enables timely identification, reporting and action planning/oversight on a continuous basis' in the New DAPs plan. This work is due to be completed in August 2025.

530. In the institute's New DAPs self-assessment document and the draft terms of reference for the Industry Advisory Board the institute outline the purpose of the new Industry Advisory Board. The assessment team agree that the institute's plan to create an Industry Advisory Board and subject-specific industry panels could significantly increase the range of ideas and expertise from outside the organisation and bring a range of benefits including enhancements for programme design and delivery. The purpose of the new Industry Advisory Board is to advise on curriculum development aligning with industry trends and practices as well as facilitating networking opportunities, internships, student skills development and knowledge exchange and it is due to be launched in March 2025.

531. The assessment team concluded that the institute ensures that ideas and expertise from within and outside the organisation (for example, on programme design and development, teaching and student learning and assessment) are drawn into its arrangements for programme design, approval, delivery and review.

Conclusions

532. The assessment team concluded that critical self-assessment is integral to the operation of the institute's higher education provision and that action is taken in response to matters raised through internal or external monitoring and review. The team also concluded that the institute's New DAPs plan and the Assessment and Feedback Working Group Terms of Reference show clearly how the institute will create its own policies and procedures on self-evaluation and developing strengths to replace those of LJMU and that these plans are credible.

533. The assessment team also concluded that the institute ensures that ideas and expertise from within and outside the organisation (for example, on programme design and development, teaching and student learning and assessment) are drawn into its arrangements for programme design, approval, delivery and review. While the assessment team concluded that the institute does consistently use mechanisms for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny and monitoring of its academic provision and that these are generally effective and appropriate, the team was of the view that these mechanisms should be enhanced and that a more uniform design be used across the institute. Details of this recommendation are set out in paragraphs 512 to 515.

534. Based on its findings, the assessment team concluded that the institute demonstrated a full understanding of criterion E1 and has a credible New DAPs plan which can be reasonably expected to enable the institute to meet the criterion in full by the end of the probationary period.

Specified changes to the New DAPs plan

535. The team did not identify any specified changes to the institute's New DAPs plan for this criterion.

Assessment of overarching criterion for the authorisation of New DAPs

> **New DAPs: An emerging self-critical, cohesive academic community with a clear commitment to the assurance of standards supported by effective (in prospect) quality systems.**

Advice to the OfS

536. The assessment team's view is that the institute meets the overarching criterion for New DAPs because it can be reasonably expected to meet the underpinning criteria in full by the end of the probationary period.

537. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the institute's New DAPs plan and evidence, which shows in summary that the institute has credible plans to develop a self-critical and cohesive academic community. It further has a clear commitment to the assurance of standards, supported by clear quality systems which can be reasonably expected to be effective.

538. The assessment team's view is that the institute has a credible New DAPs plan, but a specified change is required to ensure the plan will provide a suitable basis for monitoring and assessment. This change is in relation to criterion A1 and is as follows:

- Include in the New DAPs plan any relevant actions relating to the institute amending its Articles of Association to formally embed the student voice into governance at Council level.

539. The assessment team's view is based on consideration of the evidence requirements for the DAPs criteria alongside any other relevant information.

Reasoning

540. The assessment team found that the institute has credible plans to demonstrate **self-criticality** through the governance structures it has established in readiness for DAPs, which are underpinned by its comprehensive policies for review and evaluation. The institute has taken steps to ensure that its students' engagement in governance, an important element of self-criticality, continues to be strengthened ahead of it operating its own DAPs.

541. The assessment team found the institute to have an **emerging cohesive academic community** as evidenced by its current staffing structures and staff engagement. The institute has a strong identify as a small specialist performing arts college and has operated very successfully under policies and procedures determined by its validating partner. The institute has credible plans to implement its own systems appropriately tailored to its specific academic context.

542. The institute has demonstrated a **clear commitment to the assurance of standards** through explicit benchmarking against relevant external points of reference, including the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements, in addition to external and independent expertise

to confirm those academic standards. In developing its approach to the assurance of standards, it has drawn appropriately from the policies and procedures it has securely operated under alongside its validating partner.

543. The assessment team considers the institute to have **effective (in prospect) quality systems**. These systems will be underpinned by clear governance structures and reporting lines, with policies for monitoring and review and engagement with external reference points.

Conclusions

544. The assessment team therefore concluded that the institute meets the overarching criterion as its New DAPs plan and supporting evidence demonstrate that the institute is an emerging self-critical, cohesive academic community with a clear commitment to the assurance of standards supported by effective (in prospect) quality systems.

New DAPs test conclusions

Advice to the OfS: Credibility of the New DAPs plan

545. The assessment team's view is that the institute has a credible New DAPs plan which will provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment, but one specified change is required to ensure the plan will provide a suitable basis for monitoring and further assessment. This is in relation criterion A1 and is as follows:

   • Include in the New DAPs plan any relevant actions relating to the institute amending its Articles of Association to formally embed the student voice into governance at Council-level.

546. The team's view is based on its review of the evidence, which shows that the provider's New DAPs plan credibly sets out how the institute will meet the DAPs criteria in full by the end of the probationary period, and that these plans are comprehensive and appropriate.

547. The team considers that the institute's New DAPs plan is credible in relation to the underpinning and overarching DAPs criteria, such that the institute should be able to demonstrate it fully meets these criteria by the end of the probationary period.

Advice to the OfS: Understanding of the DAPs criteria

548. The assessment team's view is that the institute has demonstrated a full understanding of the DAPs criteria.

549. The team's view is based on its review of the evidence, which shows in summary that the institute has effective academic governance and management structures with appropriate and clear lines of accountability. While the institute intends to keep its student voice area under review, it is the case that academic governance is generally already conducted in partnership with students.

550. The institute successfully operates under a range of robust academic frameworks and regulations in collaboration with its validating partner. The institute has built on this experience to begin developing equivalent regulations and frameworks more tailored to its context in readiness for governing awards under its own DAPs. There are definitive records of the institute's programmes and these act as the reference point for delivery and assessment, and records of study are provided to students.

551. The institute has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications through its current collaborative partnership. It has also outlined clear policies and processes for programme design, approval and review that will ensure its qualifications continue to align with the threshold academic standards of the FHEQ should it gain its own DAPs. The institute has also provided evidence of mechanisms for maintaining standards above the threshold, ensuring they are reliable over time and reasonably comparable to those set and achieved by other UK degree awarding bodies. The institute is drawing on its experience under its collaborative partnership to develop its own processes for awarding its own degrees.

552. The institute has a good understanding of, and – in conjunction with its validating partner – currently operates sound processes for the design and approval of programmes, high quality learning, teaching and assessment, academic appeals and student complaints and the appropriate use of external examiners. The institute has also started to develop its own appropriate policies and procedures to ensure it will be able continue to deliver in these areas effectively if it is awarded DAPs.

553. The institute 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.

554. The institute has in place, monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources which enable its students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. For example, student inductions are tailored and effective, and students are able to access a range of academic and non-academic support to aid their progression.

555. The institute critically reviews its own performance through internal and external monitoring and review and has robust mechanisms in place for disseminating good practice. While some improvements could be made in the consistent assigning and discharging of actions, it is the case that the institute generally ensures that actions arising from self-evaluation, scrutiny and monitoring are timely and effectively discharged.

Advice to the OfS: Academic standards

556. The assessment team's view is that the standards set by the institute for the proposed courses are at an appropriate level.

557. The team's view is based on its review of the evidence, which shows in summary that the provider has developed regulations, policies and procedures in readiness for its own DAPs that will be robust and support the setting and maintenance of academic standards and the security of the award of credit and qualifications.

558. The evidence reviewed shows that the setting and maintenance of academic standards take account of appropriate reference points and external and independent points of expertise.

Conclusions

559. The team therefore concluded that the institute meets the overarching criterion as the evidence demonstrates that the institute is an emerging self-critical, cohesive academic community with a clear commitment to the assurance of standards supported by effective (in prospect) quality systems.

560. The institute's New DAPs plan is credible, the institute has demonstrated an understanding of the DAPs criteria applicable to it, and the academic standards set by the institute are at an appropriate level.

Annex A: Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
AI	Artificial intelligence
CAH	Common Aggregation Hierarchy
CDMT	Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre
CME	Continuous Monitoring and Enhancement
ELT	Executive Leadership Team
ELTAFS	Education (Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Feedback) Strategy
FHEQ	Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications
JAMES	Joint Audio Media Education Support
LJMU	Liverpool John Moores University
LRC	Learning Resource Centre
NSS	National Students Survey
OfS	Office for Students
PReSPA	Professional Recognition Scheme for the Performing Arts
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QAC	(The OfS's) Quality Assessment Committee
RPEL	Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning
SSR	Staff to student ratio
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
TLIPA	Teaching and Learning in the Performing Arts
TOES	Teaching Observation and Enhancement Scheme
VLE	Virtual learning environment

OGL