

Academic Assurance Working Group report

The Academic Assurance Working Group met on Tuesday 22 October 2019 to consider, for recommendation to the Board of Governors, whether the Principal, as the accountable officer and as a governor on behalf of all the governors, could sign off the academic assurances for the period 1 August 2018 to 31 July 2019 by 1 December 2019.

The Academic Assurance Working Group members present were:

- Professor Geoffrey Crossick, co-opted member of the Board with HE experience (in the Chair)
- Professor Maria Delgado, co-opted member of the Board with HE experience
- Lynne Williams, Principal
- Dave Muncey, Students' Union President

In attendance were:

- Katharine Lewis, Secretary & Dean of Students
- Kalpesh Khetia, Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance)

Apologies were received from:

- Vivienne Littlechild, Chair of the Board of Governors
- Ann Holmes, Common Council member of the Board of Governors.

The Working Group considered a briefing document prepared by the Secretary & Dean of Students on the quality framework for the School and the academic assurance documentation the Board of Governors had received over the period 1 August 2018 to 31 July 2019. The substance of that briefing document is embedded within this report (text in italics as revised by the Working Group). A range of documents (including External Examiner reports for 2017/18 and 2018/19 cycle, Annual programme evaluations, Academic Board minutes, and student survey results) were provided in a shared drive for sampling by the working group. Tabled at the meeting was a document providing the extracts from the External Examiner reports on academic standards.

Academic Assurances

Assurance 1a: The governing body **has received and discussed a report and accompanying action plan** relating to the continuous improvement of the student academic experience and student outcomes.

Noted: that the Board of Governors had received the following during 2018/19:

- *Regular Principal reports (public and non-public) highlighting academic strategic issues and student activity with matters of interest relevant to academic assurance flagged*

(including reports in November and February concerning action taken to address specific concerns in NSS and WSS in Music and Production Arts)

- *Assurances concerning the promotion of equality and diversity (September 2018).*
- *Academic Board 2017/18 annual report and action plan (November 2018)*
- *Research & Knowledge Exchange Annual report 2017/18 (February 2019)*
- *HE Student data (February 2019)*
- *Office for Students Prevent Return (February 2019)*
- *Access Monitoring summary to Office for Students for 2017/18 (February 2019)*
- *Update on AB Action plan (May 2019)*

Further noted:

- *that at the request of the Governors, the Principal's reports now included specific reference to the work of the Academic Board (initiated September 2019).*
- *that Board would receive at its next meeting in November 2019 the Academic Board 2018/19 annual report and action plan.*

Assurance 1b: This includes **evidence from the provider's own periodic review processes**

Noted:

- *that the Academic Board Annual Report for 2019/20 would include reference to revalidation (which is the School's process of periodic review). During 2019/20 the following programmes had been through the revalidation process:*
 - *BA in Performance & Creative Enterprise (PACE)*
 - *PGCert in Performance Teaching**The PGCert had met the conditions of revalidation, the BA in Performance & Creative Enterprise was still being worked through and the programme closure process has been initiated with paperwork going to the November Board of Governors (see elsewhere on the Board agenda). The programme closure aims to ensure that there is no adverse impact on the student experience for those currently enrolled on the programme, and the value of their degree and those of previous graduates is maintained.*
- *that the BA & MA in Acting had been due to be revalidated during 2018/19 but a one-year extension had been requested and approved by the Academic Board to accommodate the arrival of the Vice-Principal for Drama.*
- *that the BA in Production Arts (previously Technical Theatre Arts) had been due to be revalidated during 2019/20 but a one-year extension had been requested and approved by the Academic Board to allow alignment with the revalidation for the BA in Video Design for Live Performance and to accommodate the new shorter academic year due from 2023/24 onwards. This would now also accommodate the appointment of a new Vice Principal for Production Arts.*

Further noted:

- that the Academic Assurance Working Group was reassured that these were exceptional one-off extensions and that the period of revalidation was within the six-year maximum sector norm.
- that the Board of Governors would, in the programme closure documentation, be looking for assurance that the BA in PACE students were secure that they could complete their degrees.
- that Advance HE had approved the HEA Fellowship accreditation for the Catalyst Professional Development scheme and the PG Cert programme.

Assurance 1c: which **fully involves students and include embedded external peer or professional review.**

Noted: that the revalidation process within the School was as follows and involved students and at least one external peer:

In the twelve months prior to the revalidation, the programme team reviews the performance of the programme over the period of validation taking into account, admission and enrolment statistics, assessment results, student satisfaction feedback, External Examiner reports, and their own annual programme evaluations. Proposed programme developments were discussed with the current student body and industry professionals as appropriate.

Revised programme documentation with an accompanying self-reflective account covering the above is presented to the relevant Programme Board. If signed off, the programme is presented for revalidation.

The revalidation panel is chaired by a Vice-Principal (or other senior academic member of staff) not drawn from the proposing department. Other members were drawn from the teaching staff of other departments, preferably with HEA fellowships. There is a paid student representative (again from another department and the role is advertised) who receives specific training for the event. There is at least one external peer (nomination approved by the Academic Board) who brings knowledge of the wider higher education sector and/or the profession. The Secretary & Dean of Students is also a member of the panel.

The revalidation panel gets the documentation two to three weeks in advance of the event and formulates questions to pose not only to the programme team but also to the current student body. The students, who need to represent all years of the programme, are seen

first by the panel so that any relevant matters arising can later be discussed with the programme team

The panel makes a recommendation on the revalidation and sets conditions and/or recommendations (and commendations) as appropriate.

The Academic Board receives the report and recommendation and makes a decision whether to approve the revalidation subject to any conditions being met by the defined timeline.

The programme team must report back to the Academic Board on how it has met or will meet any conditions and/or responded to the recommendations. Depending on the timing of the Academic Board meeting, the Board will receive the programme team's response and action plan either at the same meeting or at the next meeting. Quality Assurance officers in the School provide the confirmation to the Board when the conditions have been met. Some recommendations will relate to the period of revalidation (eg during the period of revalidation the programme team is asked to consider ...). A recommendation is not a requirement but how a programme team has responded to this type of recommendation is considered at the next revalidation.

Further noted: that it was clear that students were at the centre of the process, and that there was strength in their contribution.

Assurance 2: The **methodologies used as a basis to improve the student academic experience and student outcomes** are, to the best of our knowledge, robust and appropriate

Noted: that the School's methodologies aligned with standard sector practice and encompassed amongst other things:

Student feedback

There is the National Student Survey (final year undergraduates) in spring, and annual whole school survey (WSS) in summer. Staff student liaison committee meetings are twice a term, and there is student representation on Programme Boards and the Academic Board.

External input is as follows ensuring alignment with both industry standards as well as academic expectations:

- *In drama and production arts - in the delivery of the curriculum via external directors and designers and their feedback into the assessment process*

- *In music - in the delivery of the curriculum the use of external conductors, visiting artists and artists-in-residence offering masterclasses, and side-by-side opportunities with professional orchestras and ensembles*
- *In the delivery of assessment - external assessors on music recital panels and an external assessor for Music Therapy viva.*
- *In the quality assurance of assessment - use of external examiners for each programme (at least one per programme).*
- *In Academic Board oversight - an external peer appointed to the Board (three-year appointment). The three-year appointment period for the current Academic Board external peer would expire at the end of the autumn term 2019 and the School is in the process of recruiting a replacement. The Working Group recommended the School seek someone who had held a senior position in higher education with experience in teaching and learning, quality standards and the student experience.*

Annual review

- *Annual programme evaluations, including action plans, were prepared by the programme leader and seen and discussed by the relevant programme board and the Academic Board. These also include consideration of student outcomes (degree results and graduate destinations and achievements) and employability.*
- *External Examiner annual reports and the response from the programme leader were seen and discussed by the relevant programme board and the Academic Board. Student representatives have full access to these papers.*
- *Analyses of student feedback were seen and discussed by the relevant programme board and the Academic Board with operational matters also overseen by the School's Operations Board and information provided to the Staff/Student liaison committee.*
- *Regular updating of programme and module specifications with approval required of the relevant Programme Board and the Academic Board with annual publishing (the "Gold" copy).*

Periodic review

Each programme must be reviewed (as above) at least once every five years, depending on the period of revalidation.

Comprehensive complaints (including admissions) and appeals processes

Statistics are presented to the Board of Governors via the annual report.

Further noted:

- that during the 2018/19 academic year, the Internal Audit team had undertaken an audit of the School's academic programme development. The audit report was "green" and had no recommendations.

- that during 2017/18 the School's disciplinary, appeals and complaints processes with the *Academic regulatory framework*, had been reviewed by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education as part of an outreach visit. Minor amendments had been recommended to the School and incorporated for 2018/19 academic year.

Assurance 3: the **standards of (taught) awards** for which we are responsible have been appropriately set and maintained

Noted:

- that the **standards of assessment were set** by:
 - *Assessment methodology in programme (re)validation documentation*
 - *Assessment activities, pass marks, assessment schemes (eg contribution to the overall module mark, and contribution to the year mark or final mark) in Programme and Module specifications*
 - *Assessment criteria (mapped to School level criteria) in Programme specifications*
- that the **standards were maintained** by:
 - *Robust assessment processes – use of panels for practical assessments and vivas (including external assessors), moderation of written assessment, standard assessment reports within each programme*
 - *Oversight by external examiners [There are specific questions about standards in the External Examiner annual report. A summary of responses for the 2018/19 cycle will be given in the Academic Board annual report 2018/19.]*
 - *Cross-School committee to consider mitigating circumstances*
 - *Irregularities committee for consideration of irregularities in recitals*
 - *Two tier approval of results via Programme Assessment Board (at which External Examiners are present) and School Board of Examiners. [Standards were considered during the assessment boards and School Board but minutes cannot be shared as they contain the personal information of named students.]*
 - *Analysis of degree outcomes by key protected characteristics to the Academic Board*
 - *Academic misconduct process (and statistics reported to the Board of Governors)*
 - *Transparent appeals process (and statistics reported to the Board of Governors)*

Further noted:

- that going forward the analysis of degree outcomes by key protected characteristics should reference any attainment gaps on the same basis as OfS data sets.

Assurance 4: the **standards of (doctoral) awards** for which we are responsible have been appropriately maintained.

Noted:

- *that the Research & Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) had oversight of the doctoral programme and made regular reports to the Academic Board.*
- *that there was an annual meeting with the School's validator City, University of London (spring term) to review the doctoral programme including City staff meeting with doctoral students. City was also required to sign off the School's doctoral regulations. Amendments to the regulations had been approved by the Academic Board during the year and signed off by City in the summer.*
- *that the Board of Governors had received the annual report for 2017/18 from the Research & Knowledge Exchange Committee at its February 2019 meeting.*

Further noted:

- that the Working Group felt that the Board of Governors should receive a regular report on compliance with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. This would be incorporated into the annual reporting due February 2020 in the first instance.

Assurance 5: The governing body has received a report that confirms that the provider continues to meet the **standards of Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines**.

Noted:

- that standard 1 overlapped significantly with the first four assurances
- that the statement below constituted this report.

Standard 1 requires institutions to:

- *Have a policy for quality assurance - this is incorporated in the Academic regulatory framework publically available and supplemented by a range of policies also available on its public webpages, and internal templates and guidance notes.*
- *Have student centred teaching, learning and assessments - students are encouraged to engage in all programme development activity, and to give feedback on all activity across the student life-cycle.*
- *Consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle" - the School's regulations and policies cover the student life-cycle and their application is monitored through a variety of mechanisms.*
- *Assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff - the School follows the City of London's employment policies and processes.*

- *Have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided – the School has excellent, industry-standard facilities; appropriateness is considered under periodic review and student satisfaction is monitored through Staff/Student Liaison Committee and the NSS and the WSS.*
- *Should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities – data usage is embedded within the annual and periodic review processes, other data is also collected and considered under both academic governance and management arrangements.*
- *Should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible. – the prospectus and website text is updated regularly and degree programme information is checked by quality assurance officers.*
- *Should monitor and periodically review their programmes - see above.*

Infrastructure to support quality assurance

Noted:

- *that the School had been without its Quality Assurance Officer (Programme Development) for over a year due to a series of unconnected unfortunate circumstances. The role had now been expanded and upgraded to **Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance)** and Kalpesh Khetia has been appointed, starting Monday 21 October 2019.*
- *that support for teaching staff in pedagogic and programme development was to be provided by the role of **Associate Dean for Teaching & Learning** and the recruitment process was underway.*

Recommendations:

- (1) That the Principal should sign off the assurances on behalf of the Board based on the evidence presented.
- (2) That the Board of Governors should receive themed in-depth reports on academic matters (eg grade inflation) on a regular basis with a clear executive summary.¹

Katharine Lewis
 Secretary & Dean of Students
 November 2019

¹ The Board will be asked to consider the School's degree outcomes statement at its May 2020 meeting.