



Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts, October 2018

1 Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts (the Academy) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the October 2017 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 The Academy continues to offer a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in performance and production arts, all of which are validated by the University of East Anglia (UEA). The Academy has recently relocated from Wood Green in North London to new purpose built facilities in Peckham, South London. Student numbers have broadly remained stable since the last review and 384 students are enrolled across the various programmes. The Academy employs 82 core staff (35 academic and 47 administrative and support staff) as well as approximately 50 freelance and sessional staff per term. Due to slow recruitment in the Theatre Production Arts programme, a revised programme was revalidated in 2017 with three distinctive pathways. From September 2018 the Academy is also offering a new FdA programme in Scenic Art and Prop Making to strengthen the Theatre Production Arts portfolio. The postgraduate provision will be expanding with two new master's programmes in Site-Specific Theatre Practice and Theatre for Community and Education commencing in 2019.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The Academy has made commendable progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision. It continued to develop the areas identified as good practice in the 2017 review to further enhance student experience. The Academy further refined and enhanced its admissions processes (paragraph 8). The student support network has been further developed and strengthened, in particular in regards to employability and career planning (paragraphs 5-6). Continued development of outreach and partnership working has enhanced the diversity of the student body (paragraph 7). The Academy's approach to enhancement has led to a further improvements in learning and teaching, resources and infrastructure (paragraph 9). All action points in response to recommendations made at the last review have been fully addressed and an impact evaluation is in progress (paragraphs 4).

4 The Academy has made adequate and effective responses to the recommendations. Working with the University responsibilities for the process of updating and publishing the definitive programme records have been clarified and the University has updated its Partnership Handbook. Changes in external accreditation have been appropriately communicated to students and handbooks updated accordingly. Plans are in place for the further development of the intranet and the Academy is implementing its action plan for the provision of electronic online resources for students. Students confirm that

course materials are available on the current virtual learning environment (VLE). The facility for room bookings online is proving both useful and popular. Library resources and librarian support are commended by students. The EBSCO subscription, due to go online in the near future, will provide further access to relevant and up-to-date resources. Careers advice for students who wish to pursue a career outside the industry is available when needed (see paragraph 6).

5 The Academy has built on the good practice identified in the 2017 review. The network of support for students has been further strengthened, co-ordinated by the Student Welfare Manager. A comprehensive range of policies to support student welfare are in place. The personal tutor system is now well developed and all personal tutors have attended training in the support of those with mental health issues. Students confirmed that they feel supported and able to approach staff with any problem. Support was also available for students relocating to Peckham to find suitable accommodation. In addition, a dedicated counselling and well-being room is available in the new facilities and more time has been allocated for the counselling service. Students expressed an interest in moving away from the use of a chiropractor and having physiotherapy support instead. This is now in place. The Student Welfare Manager effectively works with any student requiring additional learning support for example DSA applications, or dyslexia assessment. The increasing diversity of the student population is being supported through the Diversity School Initiative who work with students to improve inclusivity. Staff are also ensuring that academic work is increasingly diverse by the use of a wider range of writers and resources. Students commented favourably on their involvement in the enhancement of their learning experience. Student representatives meet regularly with staff and Board members for formal feedback. They confirmed that issues raised were quickly addressed and suggestions for changes to curriculum content and delivery, for example new writers, were well received, considered and if appropriate implemented. Students also commented on the collegiate atmosphere during workshop seasons giving them opportunities for professional discussion to support their development.

6 The Academy has further developed its system for ensuring that students are well prepared for employment. Employability sessions are embedded in all courses and opportunities for students to work shadow and gain work experience continue to develop. For example, Musical Direction students have recently been able to sit in the orchestra pit and observe rehearsals and performances in some commercial theatres. Links between students on different courses have also been made so that Musical Direction students have supported others to learn to read music and play instruments. The Academy offers vocational courses and most students leave to work within the theatrical and related industries. Links are being forged with business to provide an insight into the wider industry. When a student expresses an interest in other careers their personal tutor and the Industry Liaison Managers work with them to develop their networks and support their career ambitions. Recently, the Academy supported a student who developed an interest in writing. He has been supported to join a young writers group with the Royal Court Theatre and will be taking part in the alumni-organised Maiden Speech Festival later this autumn. Student destination data is regularly collected and shows a high percentage of agent representation. Contact is maintained with alumni and provides a continuing support network.

7 In relocating from North London to the new premises in South London, the Academy had to relinquish much of its previous community involvement. All participants in those community programmes have been supported to join other provision and the Academy is now working to develop similar provision in the new area. Contact with the local authority has been positive and a programme for community projects has been published. The Academy plans to use a 'picture window' method to ensure that the local community can see into the Academy and its activities. In addition to the community and out-reach activities

planned, a new MA course in Theatre for Community and Education is due to start in April 2019 and has already attracted six applications.

8 The Academy has a detailed Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy supported by procedures detailing the audition process, and its Access and Participation Statement. Recruitment for the courses offered is supported through the Academy's own community connections and through its network of national and international partnerships. The Academy has strengthened its admissions procedures, applications are now made online and students confirm that they very quickly received a response from the admissions team including a pack giving the dates of auditions or interviews. This includes detailed requirements for the audition or interview and these are now more closely linked to the proposed course of study. International applicants are able to submit audition materials on DVD or more recently using online methods. In addition to UK-based auditions, these are now also held in France and links are developing in Norway, China and the USA. Students commented favourably on the developing diversity of the cohorts and the encouragement given to the Students Union to help them develop support networks. The Academy noted that by working with a range of other community theatrical groups across the UK they have been able to recruit 85 per cent of their UK students from state schools. The extensive use of auditions, workshops and interviews supports staff in assessing applicants' competence in the understanding and use of spoken English to underpin the requirement of IELTS 6.5. It also supports their recognition of students who will gain most from the vocational nature of the courses. Students confirmed that, although demanding, the system of auditions and workshops helped them to confirm their commitment to the course and to develop a team relationship in advance of the official start date.

9 The Academy is currently implementing a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and will review the impact that the new premises and facilities have on their goals. Most assessment is undertaken at the culmination of practical multi-disciplinary projects. The student handbook clearly describes how these are assessed and the criteria used. Assessment is by a panel of assessors concentrating on their specialist area. Feedback may be verbal or written and students confirmed that it is always constructive and timely and they find the interim feedback on developmental activities particularly useful. The briefs for written assessments are clear, and all are second marked. Support is given for students to develop academic writing skills and for the avoidance of academic malpractice. The Academy has strengthened its processes for addressing academic malpractice and recent use of the process has confirmed that these are robust. The Academy is investigating the use of online plagiarism-detection software. External examiners consider both practical and written assessments and attend moderation meetings as well as the annual Exam Board. Their reports are positive, confirming the rigour and integrity of assessment and standard of work presented. The reports are considered as part of the Annual Monitoring Review. The move to the new facilities provides an enhanced supportive learning environment and is highly appreciated by students.

10 The Academy has shown consistently high retention and pass rates for all MA and BA courses. In 2016 the 82 MA students achieved 100 per cent retention and 100 per cent pass rates. This was mirrored in 2017 by the 79 MA students also achieving 100 per cent pass and retention rates. Retention rates for the 90 MA students completing in 2018 are also at 100 per cent, final pass rates for this cohort are not yet available. Similarly high rates have also been achieved for BA students where the 103 students originally enrolled in 2015 achieved a retention rate of 94 per cent and a pass rate of 99 per cent after one student withdrew before completing the course. All who completed achieved their qualification. The small numbers on the FdA Theatre Production Arts courses mean that percentages may be misleading. Of the nine students who started the course in 2015, four were retained (44 per cent) and all of those completed successfully (100 per cent). In 2016 only seven students were enrolled, one withdrew and five transferred to the BA course. The remaining

student successfully achieved the FdA in 2018. Of the seven FdA students enrolled in 2017 currently three are continuing. Enrolments across all FdA programmes in 2018 have increased to 10. It is hoped that the new facilities will support better retention for them.

4 Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

11 The Academy has demonstrated highly effective engagement with external reference points. It works closely with its awarding body, the University of East Anglia, to ensure that all policies and procedures meet the requirements of the regulations of the latter. This was demonstrated particularly in the use of the malpractice procedures (paragraph 9). The Academy ensured that it has addressed all Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). Staff are aware of the changes to the new Quality Code and are awaiting the publication of guidance before undertaking a mapping exercise to ensure continued compliance.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

12 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

13 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mrs Sue Miller, Reviewer, and Dr Monika Ruthe, QAA Officer, on 17 October 2018.

QAA2280 - R10302 - Nov 18

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2018
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050
Web www.qaa.ac.uk