



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of BIMM Limited January 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 BIMM Limited (the Institute) has made commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the January 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#). The monitoring visit was extended to allow the team to visit Institute constituent colleges in Brighton and Birmingham.

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 At the time of the monitoring visit there were 5,009 students enrolled on a variety of level 6 programmes at the Institute's five UK colleges. This compares with a total of 4,337 students recorded in the 2016 HER (AP) report. A new college opened in Birmingham in October 2017, with 96 enrolments on the BA (Hons) programmes in Music Business, Music Production, Professional Musicianship, and Songwriting. Fractional academic staff have been appointed to deliver the Birmingham programmes and four new posts of College Principal (Birmingham), Head of Education, Head of Student Services and Head of Estates and Facilities were created. In 2016-17 the Institute acquired the Brighton Institute for Contemporary Theatre Training (BRICCT), broadening its creative arts provision. BRICCT has been fully integrated into the Institute's quality infrastructure and 33 students were admitted in September 2017 to a new BA (Hons) Performing Arts.

3 The Institute currently has three awarding bodies, the University of Sussex, Bath Spa University and the University of West London. For 2017-18, validation of all of the Institute's provision for the new intake has been consolidated with the University of Sussex. This allows the Institute to operate under a single academic regulatory framework in anticipation of the future acquisition of taught degree awarding powers (TDAP).

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The Institute has built on the four areas of good practice identified in the 2016 HER (AP) report. Effective action has also been taken in respect of the two affirmations. Music industry practitioners have been utilised effectively in the development of new programmes and in providing additional work placement opportunities. Concerted action has been taken to address retention rates, which has had a positive impact, and action to improve student survey response rates has also produced improvements. The Institute is proactive in its use of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and other external reference points to inform its academic policies and procedures.

5 Good practice in the use of music industry professionals in providing master classes, guest lectures, mentoring and careers advice continues to be developed, with a strong focus on the career aspirations of students. Careers and Industry Hubs ensure parity of experience across Institute colleges by offering an extensive range of events and support for future employability. Music and creative industry specialists provide valuable expertise, networking channels, and careers advice on CV writing, interview techniques and auditions. The Institute has doubled students' creative industry engagement in events, festivals and

concerts. The cross-college role of the Music Industry Ambassador further enhances support for student employability, in collaboration with sector bodies such as UK Music. There are innovative pilot projects for students, including 'Mapping Brighton as a Music City' and Brighton Music Office, based at Wired Sussex. UK Music has chosen these collaborative projects as priorities for research funding applications to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

6 The Institute continues to develop its good practice in the engagement of staff at all levels in its annual monitoring process by providing improved training and support. Additional emphasis is being placed on identifying and sharing good practice. Centralised online training on academic report writing for course and module leaders has enhanced the quality of annual monitoring reports.

7 The Institute has continued its good practice in the extensive use of industry practitioners in programme design and development. Industry Advisory Panels (IAPs) are involved in the introduction of new programmes and revalidation processes, which ensures that courses have current music industry relevance, including knowledge and practitioner skills.

8 Established good practice in the diversity of work placement opportunities, supported by highly informative guidance in handbooks for staff, students and employers, continues to be a priority. Work placement opportunities have increased substantially during the past academic year. The Institute supports an increasing number of student led, work-based learning activities, including a record label, an event management agency, and a music magazine. The Institute has made organisational changes to improve its management of careers and employability, including a Business Development and Creative Careers Director, and a Group Head of Careers and Employability. The recently formed Careers and Employability Steering Group (CESG) focuses on research and enhancing student careers, employability, and entrepreneurial skills.

9 The 2016 HER (AP) report affirmed the work being undertaken by the Institute to improve student retention. The Institute identified the actions needed as reviewing and revising its Learning and Teaching Enhancement Plan (LTEP) to ensure that improvements to retention and progression are prioritised. Entry requirements for all programmes have been reviewed as part of the Institute's preparation for TDAP. The introduction of a student engagement policy has resulted in more effective and rigorous monitoring of student attendance, and engagement with students at risk. Progression rates have improved, especially between years two and three. An annual Learning and Teaching Conference promotes the sharing of good practice, as part of wider collaborative interventions, such as additional study skills support and the proposal to introduce a categorical marking scheme whereby assessed work is assigned to a defined achievement band rather than given a specific numerical mark.

10 Following the affirmation in the 2016 HER (AP) report, further steps are being taken to improve the response rate to student surveys. Following discussions with student representatives and pilot trials, module surveys are now conducted in class in the second term. Survey completion rates have much improved, and the latest survey of leaver destinations had a 79 per cent response rate. Similarly, participation in the National Student Survey (NSS) has increased from 61 to 75 per cent in 2017.

11 The review of the Admissions Policy ensures a fair and consistent set of criteria for the selection of students. Entry requirements are subject to awarding body approval through the programme approval and revalidation process. Admissions tutors are trained to interview applicants and undertake auditions. Selection processes are monitored and reviewed for consistency. There are appropriate policies for the accreditation of prior and experiential

learning (APEL). Students are offered guidance by admissions tutors, student services, and course leaders to support applications for APEL. International students must satisfy appropriate English language requirements. Successful applicants receive detailed information packs in advance of starting their studies. Any changes to programmes offered are notified to students prior to enrolment. Students have a comprehensive two-week induction and enrolment period. Information is provided on the use of the virtual learning environment and the electronic library.

12 There is a robust cycle of quality monitoring and reports evaluate a comprehensive set of information, including feedback from students and external examiners. Monitoring reports are amalgamated into an institutional report, with action plans for programmes which are monitored by relevant academic committees. Staff training workshops are provided in response to annual quality monitoring. Examples include improving consistency in using assessment criteria. The Academic Registrar coordinates schedules for periodic reviews, revalidation and reapproval of programmes, as required by the awarding bodies.

13 The comprehensive student representation and feedback system underpins the strategic engagement of students in enhancement activities. Student representatives are elected to all committees, and attend programme validation and approval meetings. Curriculum design and new course proposals are informed by student representative feedback.

14 Work ongoing to improve student retention and progression rates was recognised as an affirmation in the 2016 HER (AP) report. This is a continuing priority, and year one to two progression has increased from 73 per cent in 2015-16 to 75 per cent in 2016-7. Year two to three progression has shown improvement at some colleges. It is too early for the full impact of the initiatives and actions to be realised, and many students who discontinue their studies go into employment related to their programmes, or develop their own business using the networking opportunities supported by the Institute.

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

15 Programmes are mapped against *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. There is strong alignment with the expectations of the Quality Code.

16 The Institute has recently worked to ensure that policies comply with Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) requirements, and that its complaints and appeals policy is aligned with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) Good Practice Framework. The Institute subscribes to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the OIA. It is also a member of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), and engages with the survey of student destinations (DLHE).

5 Background to the monitoring visit

17 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.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Elizabeth Briggs, Reviewer, and Professor Nicholas Goddard, Coordinator, on 30 and 31 January 2018.

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