DQB

Designated Quality Body
in England

Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students

Northern School of Contemporary Dance

Review Report

January 2022

Contents

Summary of findings and reasons

Ref	Core practice	Outcome	Confidence	Summary of reasons
S1	The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications' frameworks.	Met	High	From the evidence seen, the team considers that the standards set for NSCD's courses are consistent with the sector-recognised standards defined in paragraph 342 of the OfS's regulatory framework. The team also considers that standards described in the approved programme documentation are set at levels that are consistent with these sector-recognised standards and NSCD's academic regulations and policies should ensure that standards are maintained appropriately. The team considers that, based on the evidence scrutinised, the standards that will be achieved by NSCD's students are expected to be in line with the sector-recognised standards defined in paragraph 342 of the OfS's regulatory framework. The team also considers that NSCD's academic regulations and policies are clear and comprehensive, consistent with the national framework, and will ensure that these standards are maintained. The team considers that staff understand and apply NSCD's approach to setting and maintaining these standards and that the evidence seen demonstrates that NSCD is committed to implementing this approach. Assessed student work demonstrates that credit and qualifications are only awarded where the relevant threshold standards have been met. Therefore, based on its scrutiny of the evidence provided, the team concludes that this Core practice is met.
S2	The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.	Met	High	The team, based on the evidence presented, determined that the standards set for students to achieve beyond the threshold on the provider's courses are reasonably comparable with those set by other UK providers. The team considered that the standards described in the approved programme documentation and in the provider's academic regulations and policies should ensure that such standards are maintained appropriately.

| | | | | NSCD operates within the University's Academic Regulations as confirmed within the Memorandum of Agreement between the two institutions. The University's Board of Studies and NSCD's internal governance arrangements for monitoring academic standards, which incorporates the structure of deliberative committees, consistently and systematically ensures that academic standards beyond the threshold which are comparable with those achieved in other UK providers are set and maintained.

Assessed student work confirms that assessment tasks and linked criteria provide students with the opportunity to achieve at levels beyond threshold. The team found that students were achieving beyond threshold levels and in line with levels achieved within other higher education providers. Staff understand and apply NSCD's approach to setting and maintaining standards and articulated how they contribute to ensuring that standards are set and maintained to provide students with the opportunity to achieve beyond threshold levels and in line with standards achieved within other higher education providers. Students fully understand what they need to do to achieve standards beyond threshold levels. Students who met the team know the different grade and degree classifications that they can achieve.

NSCD's approach to setting and maintaining standards includes systematic ongoing review within its deliberative committee structures to ensure that students continue to have opportunities to achieve standards beyond threshold, and comparable to those achieved within other higher education providers. The team saw confirmation within external examiner reports that students are provided with the opportunities to achieve standards beyond threshold levels and that they do achieve these standards within all courses. The reports also confirmed that credit and qualifications are only awarded when these standards are met as evidenced within the Board of Studies' minutes. |
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				Therefore, the team concludes, based on the evidence described above, that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers and this Core practice is met.
S3	Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.	Met	High	NSCD has effective arrangements in place to ensure that the standards of awards are credible and secure, irrespective of where or how courses are delivered, or who delivers them. The Memorandum of Agreement is clear, and staff understand their responsibilities in maintaining academic standards. NSCD has established a quality infrastructure with effective governance arrangements to ensure that it fulfils its responsibilities under the Memorandum of Agreement. The Memorandum is comprehensive in detailing mutual expectations and responsibilities and is explicitly effective in addressing how the partnership ensures that academic standards are set and maintained and that a robust reporting protocol is in operation. Staff who met the team were able to articulate their responsibilities under the partnership agreements. They commented especially on the productive relationship they have with the University in ensuring that the University's academic regulations were adopted and applied within their practices.
				Staff who met the team were able to articulate their responsibilities under the partnership agreements. They commented especially on the productive relationship they have with the University in ensuring that the University's academic regulations were adopted and applied within their practices.
				NSCD works collaboratively with the University as members of the Board of Examiners to securely ensure that credible standards are maintained. The external examiners confirm that the partnership is effective in meeting mutual expectations and responsibilities and that it collaboratively ensures that the standards of awards are credibly and securely set, maintained and achieved in line with the

				University's academic regulations. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.
S4	The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.	Met	High	NSCD uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent. The Memorandum of Agreement between NSCD and the University is fundamental in establishing a strong platform for assuring partnership work between the two parties and this is augmented by detailed policies and procedures that ensure independent external expertise at key stages of curriculum development, delivery and review. The team's scrutiny of records of course approval documentation confirms that there is effective and extensive use of external expertise and external peers within both initial validations and periodic reviews. Contributions from external expertise which inform programme approval and review are also valued and actioned. The expertise of external examiners informs NSCD's assessment and classification processes and this, in conjunction with NSCD responses, lead the team to conclude that this external expertise is used and given due consideration. NSCD is effective in responding to all recommendations by the external examiners in a timely, targeted and transparent way. These responses are monitored consistently within the University's and NSCD's deliberative committees. Students confirmed that they found the assessment and classification processes to be reliable, fair and transparent. Staff who met the team demonstrated that they fully understand the requirements for the use of external expertise, and the assessment and classification processes. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.
Q1	The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.	Met	High	NSCD has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system. This is because NSCD has a clear, robust and credible policy for the

				recruitment, selection and admission of students which is based on a Contextual Admission Framework ensuring that students are not at a disadvantage for cultural, geographical, or financial reasons. The admissions records tested demonstrate that NSCD's policies are implemented in practice, and any deviations relate to minor omissions or oversights which do not harm the integrity of the procedures or interests of applicants. The admissions team understand their roles within the admissions process and academic staff have been suitably trained. Students met by the team attested to the fairness and equity of the admissions process. Feedback is demonstrably sought from applicants on all aspects of the system and used for monitoring and further improvement of the admissions arrangements. The admissions information provided by NSCD to prospective students, and the Admissions Appeals and Complaints Policy are accessible and fit for purpose. Admissions requirements are consistent with approved course documentation and are consistent with NSCD's admissions policy. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.
Q2	The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.	Met	High	The team concludes that NSCD designs and delivers high-quality courses. NSCD's approach to ensuring that the design and delivery of its courses are of high quality is informed by its strategic priority to enable students to become successful academics and practitioners. The University's academic regulations inform NSCD's approach to designing and delivering high-quality courses along with contextualised regulations of the CDD group. Approved course information provides information and clear guidance on what the learning outcomes are at programme and module level. It also includes details on the different assessment methods and the weighting attached to them. The information helps students to understand how the design and delivery of the programme as a whole and modules individually contribute to and align with the learning outcomes they are required to achieve.

| | | | | Through periodic review NSCD engages in productive partnership with CDD members to ensure that courses remain academically and vocationally current and aligned to intended learning outcomes. It credibly implements courses which are designed and delivered to further this strategic priority and are subject to robust review within NSCD's deliberative process and those of the University.

External examiners commend the support that staff give to students to engage in their study and their use of flexible and inclusive approaches to ensure that students are able to achieve their intended academic and professional outcomes. External examiners confirm that NSCD's courses are of high quality because the approach to design and delivery is effective to facilitating student priorities.

Students tend to regard their courses as being of high quality and value NSCD's approach to designing and delivering courses which enable them to develop as both academic and technical experts. Staff are able to articulate what 'high quality' means in the context of NSCD ensuring through course design and delivery that courses are of high quality through consistent and continued collaboration with external industry practitioners and relevant action research projects. Employers explained how they work with NSCD teams to ensure that the design and delivery of placements are of a high quality by providing students with productive placement opportunities to achieve intended learning outcomes.

The team's observations of teaching provided evidence that teaching sessions are organised and well planned with clear shared objectives. They allow inclusive opportunities for student engagement and targeted ongoing feedback. Teachers are experts in their profession and able to contextualise design and delivery of sessions to support preferred individual and collective learning styles. Teaching is also supported by good facilities aligned to meet the requirements of the diverse forms of delivery involving theory and |
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				practice within a dance curriculum context. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.
Q3	The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.	Met	High	The team concludes that NSCD has sufficient and appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience. NSCD operates within the University's codes of practice on quality assurance and relevant regulations and conventions. In line with these, NSCD submits staff CVs on an annual basis to the University for ongoing confirmation. This is further supported through NSCD's internal academic governance arrangements involving deliberative committees to oversee and confirm that staff are sufficiently qualified and skilled. Collectively this approach ensures the necessary oversight of policies for recruitment, appointment, induction and support to ensuring that NSCD's staff are appropriately qualified and skilled. NSCD's approach to recruitment and appointment is evidence-informed, with clear examples of academic, professional and managerial staff being appointed to meet emerging institutional priorities. There are robust application processes in place to capture key information to ensure that applicants are appropriate for the roles in question. Induction processes are focused upon ensuring that new staff are introduced to their roles and the institutional context, and further supported once appointed. NSCD also consistently monitors whether its approaches to recruiting and inducting supporting staff are effective. The sufficiency of appropriately qualified staff is also reviewed annually, both internally by NSCD and externally by CDD and the University and there is evidence of action being taken as necessary. NSCD's approach ensures that its staff are recruited and appointed appropriately, and that its arrangements to have sufficient academic professional and management staff in place are robust and credible. The team found that staff are appointed in line with both University requirements and NSCD policies on recruitment and appointment,

and NSCD's planned processes for induction of new staff. The team confirms from scrutiny of staff CVs that both academic and professional staff are appropriately qualified and continue to have professional engagement with the sector. Based on the team's scrutiny of the above, it concludes that NSCD recruits and appoints staff, supports them and makes sure that they continue to be appropriately qualified and skilled to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

Team observations of teaching and learning sessions confirm that staff are appropriately qualified and highly skilled with expertise in theory, research and practice. Observed teaching sessions were interactive with individual and collective student engagement, and inclusive in using different teaching and learning approaches to meet diverse learning preferences.

Students met by the team are very positive about the expertise of the teaching staff and tend to agree that there are sufficient appropriately skilled and qualified staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience. Students confirmed staff remained current in terms of their continuing professional engagement with the sector. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that this Core practice is met.

Q4	The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.	Met	High	NSCD has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience. Staff at NSCD have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities for facilities and resources. This is formalised by both job descriptions and person specifications for individual roles, and by terms of reference for relevant sections of the committee structure. The team's own observations led them to conclude that NSCD has highly specialised facilities and learning resources, and that developments, such as the investment in injury rehabilitation facilities, serve to ensure a high-quality academic experience. NSCD's strategic plans for facilities, learning resources and student

					support services are credible, realistic and demonstrably linked to the delivery of successful academic and professional outcomes for students. Students enthusiastically appreciate the high quality and accessibility of specialist facilities, learning resources and student support services, and acknowledge that they amount to a high-quality academic environment. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.
Q5	The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.	Met	High		NSCD actively engages students, individually and collectively in the quality of their educational experience and has a clear and effective approach to such engagement. Students interviewed by the team were able to cite examples of improvements made consequent upon their feedback, and how NSCD positively acted upon suggestions made. These discussions also encompassed larger scale changes to enhance student engagement, including the appointment of the Students' Union President, and the allocation of places to students on the Academic Board and LTQAC.

NSCD's approach to the collective engagement of students was supported by its governance structures, primarily the Student Voice Forum which provides student-led discourse between student representatives, academic staff, and the professional services in relation to the quality of students' educational experience. There is student representation on Academic Board and the Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee. The team found that the methods used to individually engage students were appropriate, including through the use of informal feedback, module evaluations and student surveys. NSCD's approach to the collective engagement of students was supported by its governance structures, primarily the Student Voice Forum which provides student-led discourse between student representatives, academic staff, and the professional services in relation to the quality of students' educational experience. Strategically, NSCD considers individual and collective feedback at its Academic Board, and Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee, and effectively communicates with students on the |

				outcomes of their feedback through a range of routes. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.
Q6	The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.	Met	High	NSCD has definitive, fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students, and which deliver or have the potential to deliver timely outcomes. Until such time as the relationship between NSCD and CDD comes to an end, the definitive procedure for complaints is that of CDD. NSCD's procedures for handling complaints in the form of its draft Students Complaints Policy and Procedure is fair, transparent and likely to deliver timely outcomes. The Memorandum of Agreement with the University confirms that academic appeals are the responsibility of the University. Relevant policies and procedures regarding complaints are accessible through the Student Handbook and NSCD's website, and additionally students are guided through the complaints procedure by the Head of Academic Registry and Quality Assurance. Students met by the team confirmed their understanding of the operation of both complaints and appeals, and raised no concerns about the fairness, transparency or accessibility of the procedures, or their application. The University's policies for handling appeals clearly explain situations that can or cannot be the subject of appeals, the process that should be followed, along with the deadline for each step. The University's policies and regulations are contextualised for NSCD's students in the Student Handbook. The formal complaint reviewed by the team was dealt with wholly in accordance with NSCD's procedures, and there were no deviations or omissions from the process. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.
Q8	Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or	Met	High	The team concludes that NSCD working in partnership with other organisations has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them. All NSCD staff understand their responsibilities as set out in the Memorandum of Agreement with the University and are aware that the University is responsible for setting and maintaining standards and has oversight

| how courses are delivered and who delivers them. | | | for quality. This extends to placements, where both NSCD staff and placement providers fully understand their respective responsibilities for quality. NSCD has an established academic governance framework through its deliberative committee structure to ensure oversight of its responsibilities under the Memorandum of Agreement, including the Academic Board and Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee. This approach enables it to ensure that a high-quality academic experience is delivered through partnerships. It is underpinned by clear and comprehensive policies for the management of partnerships, including an umbrella document covering working with others in partnership, handbooks and codes of practice. The application of these policies is monitored by the University as part of its annual monitoring review and periodic review processes, and collectively ensures that the academic experience is high quality, irrespective of where or how courses are delivered. The standard partnership agreement between NSCD and other organisations supports the maintenance of the quality of its placement opportunities as required by the University. These agreements are clear and comprehensive, and up to date. It reflects and is underpinned by a range of NSCD policies which implement its requirements

External examiners comment positively on both NSCD's partnership work with the University and with other organisations and include positive observations on the conduct of the Board of Examiners as both rigorous and extremely efficient. Third parties in the form of placement partners commend NSCD's partnership practices, curriculum and the quality of their students, while the University partnership manager identifies that there is a genuine relationship between NSCD and the University, which gives priority to students' learning experiences. Taking all of the foregoing into account, the team concludes that this Core practice is met. |
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| Q9 | The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes. | Met | High | The team concludes that NSCD supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes. NSCD has proactively developed policies and procedures for student support to create a planned and seamless transfer from the CDD arrangements going forward. These robust and embedded plans provide strong evidence of the processes in place to monitor students receiving support, so as to ensure that all students achieve successful academic and professional outcomes, and NSCD collects and uses targeted data to monitor these outcomes accordingly. The assessed student work reviewed by the team demonstrates that students are given comprehensive, helpful and timely feedback, which is both formative and summative.

All NSCD's staff met by the team fully understood their roles in supporting student achievement and were able to articulate clearly and enthusiastically how their role contributes to student outcomes, citing specific examples of bringing together academic and practice-based tasks, within an industry-focused context. The students met by the team agreed that NSCD has a strong and individualised approach which facilitates successful academic and professional outcomes, and were enthusiastic in their appreciation of teaching teams, and NSCD's facilities and support systems, which they felt were both accessible and effective. In particular, support for English language was praised by those for whom it is not a first language, together with the personalised financial and organisational support for students, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students also confirmed both the formative and summative feedback on their submitted work was helpful in developing them academically and professionally, and praised the different support with further progression to industry, including specifically the value of placement-based learning to their professional outcomes. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met. |
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About this report

This is a report detailing the outcomes of the Quality and Standards Review for providers applying to register with the Office for Students (OfS), conducted by QAA in January 2022, for the Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD).

A Quality and Standards Review (QSR) is a method of assessment QAA uses to provide the OfS with evidence about whether new providers applying to be on the OfS Register meet the Core practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), based on evidence reviewed by expert assessors. This report is structured to outline the assessment team's decisions about the provider's ability to meet the Core practices through detailing the key pieces of evidence scrutinised and linking that evidence to the judgements made.

The team for this assessment was:

Name: Jonny Barnes
Institution: Recent master's graduate, University of Bristol. Now Southampton Solent University
Role in assessment team: Student assessor

Name: Gary Hargreaves
Institution: Formerly University of Leeds
Role in assessment team: Institutional assessor

Name: Caitriona Price
Institution: Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance
Role in assessment team: Institutional Assessor and Subject Assessor CAH25-02 Performing Arts

The QAA officer for the assessment was: Dr Roshani Swift.

The size and composition of this assessment team is in line with published guidance and, as such, comprises experts with significant experience and expertise across the higher education sector. The team included members with experience of a similar provider to the institution, knowledge of the academic awards offered and academics with expertise in subject areas relevant to the provider's provision. Collectively the team had experience of the management and delivery of higher education programmes from academic and professional services perspectives, included members with regulatory and investigative experience, and had at least one member able to represent the interests of students. The team included at least one senior academic leader qualified to doctoral level. Details of team members were shared with the provider prior to the assessment to identify and resolve any possible conflicts of interest.

About Northern School of Contemporary Dance

Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD), based in Leeds, was founded in 1985 as the first conservatoire dance school within the public sector, and moved into its current premises in 1987. It is the only dedicated dance house in the north and operates as a charitable organisation whose mission is to provide an inspirational learning experience, from first contact through to the profession, enabling aspiring dance artists and dance professionals, regardless of background, to shape the future of dance. It offers specific provision in dance-related subjects, awarded under a validation agreement with the University of Kent (the University). The vision and ethos, articulated by the Principal and

Chief Executive to the team, is of an organisation which is predicated on remaining local, serving as a cultural 'anchor institution' in the city and supported by those in authority and in significant positions of cultural engagement while remaining diverse in both approach and engagement.

At present, and since 2003, NSCD has been part of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (CDD), a federal collaboration of specialist schools delivering education and training in the performing arts, which is registered with the Office for Students (OfS). The Conservatoire works through a formal collaborative arrangement among its six member schools, as set out in a Members' Agreement dated 2017. While each of the schools remains a legally autonomous organisation, all students on a higher education programme of study with a member school are registered students of the Conservatoire, which has the same institutional duty of care and obligations to its students as all higher education institutions that are registered with the OfS. While each of the schools within the CDD follows its own values and ethos, there is a common approach to learning, teaching and assessment which aims to enhance the quality of these areas, facilitating cross-school discussion.

CDD is registered with the Office for Students (OfS) and has developed an academic framework and produced guidance relating to this in a CDD Quality Handbook, to maintain academic standards and manage the quality of learning and teaching across its member schools. The framework is overseen by the CDD Academic Board and the Board's reporting committees and working groups which include representation from member schools. Ownership of academic standards and quality is shared through CDD's committees, policies and procedures, and its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy has been designed to develop a high-quality student learning and assessment experience across its member schools. CDD has also provided networking opportunities and other activities for its member schools to support staff development to deliver high-quality education, training and scholarship.

The CDD has a planned wind-down date of no later than July 2023, and plans are therefore in place for NSCD to leave the arrangement with effect from September 2022, (subject to registration with OfS) and to become an independent higher education provider once again. NSCD has commissioned Advance HE to undertake a review of the effectiveness of its governance arrangements, and as a result of this a governance structure is in place from the start of the 2021-22 academic year to facilitate NSCD taking over the quality assurance arrangements presently held by CDD. In the immediate future, NSCD will adopt all CDD policies (with minor changes to ensure that they relate to NSCD only), to ensure continuity and minimise disruption to staff and students.

The current listing of higher education courses on offer is as follows:

Course	Awarding Body	Location of Study	Student Numbers (FT)
Level 4 Cert HE in Cultural Dance Forms	University of Kent	Main Campus (Chapeltown, Leeds)	32
Level 4 Cert HE in Contemporary Dance	University of Kent	Main Campus (Chapeltown, Leeds)	26
Level 6 BA Honours in Dance (Contemporary)	University of Kent	Main Campus (Chapeltown, Leeds)	167
Level 7 MA in Dance Teaching and Facilitating	University of Kent	Main Campus (Chapeltown, Leeds)	10
Level 7 MA in Contemporary Dance Performance (Verve)	University of Kent	Main Campus (Chapeltown, Leeds)	34 (plus 2 PT)

Level 7 MA in Contemporary Dance Performance (PPS)			
Level 7 PG Diploma Arts Learning and Teaching in Higher Education	University of Kent	Main Campus (Chapeltown, Leeds)	6

NSCD is based in the Chapeltown area of Leeds and is currently in the initial stages of planning and scoping a vision for the Chapeltown Cultural Quarter which would mean operating on a split site local campus. The current campus had a formal condition survey in 2016, and since that time NSCD has spent in the order of £1.4m, partly on refurbishment, and partly on the creation of new facilities, such as the creation of a dedicated student support suite.

The academic governance of NSCD is headed by a Board of Governors, supported by relevant subcommittees including an Academic Board, Audit Committee, Finance Committee, Nominations and Governance Committee and Remuneration and Terms of Service Committee. All of these bodies include one or more governors as members to facilitate accountability.

Strategic governance is delegated by the governing body to a senior management team comprising a Chief Executive and Principal; a Vice Principal with oversight of the management of NSCD's curriculum, student support and academic resource provision; and a Director of Finance with responsibility for financial regulatory compliance.

How the assessment was conducted

The assessment was conducted according to the process set out in Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers (March 2019).

When undertaking a QSR all 13 of the Core practices are considered by the assessment team. However, for this assessment it was clear that the provider does not offer a research degree programme. Therefore, the assessment team did not consider Q7 (where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments).

To form its judgements about the provider's ability to meet the Core practices, the assessment team considered a range of evidence that was submitted prior to the assessment visit and evidence gathered at the assessment visit itself. [Annex 1] To ensure that the assessment team focused on the principles embedded in the Core practices, and that the evidence considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other assessments, the team utilised Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers to construct this report and detail the key pieces of evidence seen. Annex 4 expects that assessment teams will sample certain types of key evidence using a combination of representative sampling, risk-based sampling and randomised sampling. In this assessment, the team sampled the following areas for evidence for the reasons given below:

- The team considered a random/representative sample of 126 pieces of assessed student work from a total of 1,114, reflecting all pieces of assessed work from the 2020-21 academic year, covering all types of assignment and all courses operational in that period. This was to:

  - test that students' assessed work reflects relevant threshold standards

- test that marks and awards given to students are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers

- test that, where the NSCD works in partnership with other organisations, the standards of awards are credible and secure

- test whether students are given comprehensive, helpful and timely feedback.

- The team considered a random sample of 62 admissions records from a total of 89 students admitted to the BA (Honours) programme in the current (2021-22) academic year. This was to assess whether reliable, fair and inclusive decisions were made for those applicants sampled.

Further details of all the evidence the assessment team considered are provided in Annex 1 of this report.

Explanation of findings

S1 The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications' frameworks

1   To meet this Core practice a provider must ensure that threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications' frameworks. The threshold standards for its qualifications must be articulated clearly and must be met, or exceeded, through the delivery of the qualification and the assessment of students.

2   The sector-recognised standards that are used in relation to this Core practice are those that apply in England, as defined in paragraph 342 of the OfS' regulatory framework. That is, those set out in Table 1, in paragraphs 4.10, 4.12, 4.15, 4.17, 4.18, in paragraphs 6.13-6.18 and in the Table in Annex C, in the version of The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ) published in October 2014. These sector-recognised standards represent the threshold academic standards for each level of the FHEQ and the minimum volumes of credit typically associated with qualifications at each level.

3   The QAA assessment team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers (March 2019).

The evidence the team considered

4   The QAA team assessed the evidence presented, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The assessment team used that matrix to ensure that the evidence considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other assessments and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

a   Signed memorandum of agreement with the University and Taught Degree Regulations [002]
b   Annual Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Documents 2016-2021 University of Kent [003b]
c   External Examiner (EE) reports [004]
d   Undergraduate course and module specifications [010]
e   Postgraduate course and module specifications [011]
f   Periodic programme review and course validation resource [018]
g   Academic Board minutes for 2019/20 and 2020/21 [023c]
h   Board of Examiners minutes for 2019/20 and 2020/21 [023d]
i   Terms of Reference [030]
j   Annex 13 of the University's Credit Framework for Taught Courses [089]
k   University Academic Regulations [090]
l   Senior staff meeting [M01]
m   Academic staff meeting [M04]
n   Professional support staff meeting [M05]
o   Assessed student work sampling [T02].

5   Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the assessment team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this assessment are outlined below:

6   Although there are testimonials from practitioners for NSCD, no third-party endorsements relating to this Core practice from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies or Institute of Apprenticeships technical end-point assessments were available as NSCD does not run programmes requiring such endorsements.

How any samples of evidence were constructed

7   For assessed student work, the team considered a random sample of 126 pieces of assessed student work from a total of 1,114 for the year 2020-21 to test that students' assessed work reflects the relevant threshold standards.

Why and how the team considered this evidence

8   As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider [Annex 1] was considered by the assessment team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the assessment team to make its judgement regarding the provider's ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the assessment team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below:

9   To identify the institutional approach to course and assessment design, marking and moderation, requirements for awards and approaches to classification as the underlying basis for the standards of awards, the team reviewed the Signed Memorandum of Agreement and Taught Degree Regulations from the University [002] in conjunction with the University Academic Regulations [089; 090] to evaluate whether the threshold standards for the qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications' frameworks. Terms of Reference [030] and Academic Board minutes, [023c] Board of Examiners minutes, [023d] and Annual Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Documents 2016-2021, [003b] together with University Periodic programme review and course validation reports [018] were scrutinised to test for clear identification of NSCD's responsibilities and consistency of approach.

10   To test that specified threshold standards are consistent with relevant national frameworks, the team reviewed approved course documentation: Undergraduate Course and Module Specifications [010] and Postgraduate Course and Module Specifications. [011]

11   To check that external examiners confirm sector-recognised standards are consistent with national qualifications' frameworks, and that credit and qualifications are awarded only where those threshold standards have been met, the team considered external examiner reports and NSCD Responses 2016-2021. [004]

12   To test that students' assessed work reflects the relevant threshold standards, the team sampled coursework from across the range of NSCD's provision. [T02]

13   To test that staff involved in assessment understand and effectively apply NSCD's approach to maintaining threshold standards, the team met with senior, [M01] academic, [M04] and professional support staff. [M05]

What the evidence shows

14   The assessment team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

15   The team's scrutiny of the Memorandum of Agreement [002] confirms that NSCD adopts the University's quality assurance arrangements for ensuring achievement of relevant sector-recognised standards by applying the University's Academic Regulations, Codes of Practice for Quality Assurance and Credit Framework. [089; 090] For example, the team confirms that NSCD follows the University's Credit Framework for Taught Courses of Study, [089] which ensures that the qualification characteristics and level descriptors for setting and maintaining threshold standards fully address the requirements of the FHEQ.

16   The Memorandum of Agreement [002] notes that the University will ensure all proposals for validation and periodic review from NSCD will operate fairly and efficiently within the University's regulations. [090] In relation to assessment, the Memorandum of Agreement [002] also confirms the role of the Board of Examiners operating within the University's Code of Practice for Quality Assurance to assure that approaches to classifications, course design and assessment requirements ensure that qualifications are consistent with national qualifications' frameworks. The team can confirm that the University's Academic Regulations are effectively implemented within NSCD, because it found, for example, that the deliberations within the Board of Examiners minutes for both 2019-20 and 2020-21 [023d] provide evidence of the Board discharging its role in this regard. For example, the deliberations include discussions and decisions on whether students have achieved sector-recognised standards for all courses, in line with the University's academic regulations. [002] The team can also conclude that through use of the University documentation, NSCD has clear and comprehensive academic regulations to support the maintenance of academic standards at the relevant sector- recognised level.

17   NSCD also has internal mechanisms for assuring itself that threshold standards are maintained and achieved. For example, the terms of reference for NSCD's Academic Board [030] confirm that this Board has overall responsibility for monitoring, review and advice on academic standards, and in particular for the policies and procedures for validation and course reviews. This is evidenced explicitly within its minutes where course development, curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment are standing agenda items. There is evidence of reflective deliberations on new course development and revisions of existing courses. For example, the annual programme monitoring report for 2016 provides evidence of detailed discussions on the revision to the BA (Hons) Dance (Contemporary) course, in line with the University's academic framework and guidelines for standards and quality. Further, the terms of reference for NSCD's Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee (LTQAC), [030] confirm its responsibility for all aspects of curriculum development, course review, effectiveness of moderation and marking, and its overall responsibility for ensuring the effectiveness of NSCD's academic standards and quality assurance procedures. These arrangements are effective as minutes of LTQAC [023c] confirm how NSCD ensures through this committee's advice to Academic Board that sector-recognised standards of courses are maintained in line with the FHEQ requirements, and this is subsequently confirmed by the University's Validation and Periodic Review process. [018] Further, there is explicit evidence within NSCD's annual monitoring report [003b] of discussions on the revalidation of the BA (Hons) Dance (Contemporary) course of an express application of the University's guidelines on module credits and ensuring that specific learning outcomes meet FHEQ level descriptors. Hence the team can confirm that the University's academic regulations [002] along with NSCD's own approaches to these both enable the achievement of threshold standards for its courses and ensure that the courses offered meet sector-recognised standards.

18   The team's assessment of approved programme documentation shows that all

programmes fully align with the FHEQ levels and credit requirements. There is evidence of this in the programme specification for the BA (Hons) Dance (Contemporary) [010] where modules reflect the different FHEQ 4, 5 and 6 Levels and the requisite 360 credits for honours-level courses. In this respect, module learning outcomes (for example Creative Practice 1 module) are written to Level 4 of the FHEQ to reflect the acquisition of a core set of skills in contrast to the Creative Practice 3 Module at Level 6 which focuses on critical investigative skills and independent learning priorities. This can be further distinguished within the generic intended learning outcomes of postgraduate course specifications and module specifications, [011] which signify the need for students to be independent learners and achieve at the more advanced level aligned to Level 7 of the FHEQ. The team concludes that approved programme documentation demonstrates that standards are set at levels that are consistent with relevant national qualifications' frameworks.

19   The External Examiner Reports 2016-2021 [004] evidence that NSCD's approaches to assessment consistently prioritise the student achievement of sector-recognised standards at prescribed levels within the different qualifications, and the credits are awarded only on achievement of these standards. This is evidenced within comments by the external examiner for the master's course [004] which highlight how staff rigorously continue to maintain the academic standards by providing the necessary academic challenges required at postgraduate level study for students and carrying out the necessary moderation activity to confirm achievement of these standards despite the interruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of this, the team concludes that external examiners confirm that threshold standards are consistent with the relevant national qualifications' framework, and credit and qualifications are only awarded where those threshold standards have been met.

20   The sample of assessed student work [T02] confirms that assessments consistently include learning outcomes linked to relevant FHEQ levels, that students are able to achieve at those levels, and that credit and qualifications are awarded only where the relevant sector-recognised standards have been met.

21   In meetings with senior staff, [M01] academic staff [M04] and professional support staff [M05] it was clear that the teams had detailed knowledge of sector-recognised standards and were able to explain how NSCD's courses meet these standards. They explained how they operated within the University's academic regulations for maintaining and reviewing these academic standards, and linked activities such as marking and moderation. The team concluded that staff understand and apply the approach to setting and maintaining standards.

Conclusions

22   As described above, the assessment team considered all of the evidence submitted [Annex 1] to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing the assessment team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other assessments and remained outcomes focused. The team's conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

23   From the evidence seen, the team considers that the standards set for NSCD's courses are consistent with the sector-recognised standards defined in paragraph 342 of the OfS's regulatory framework. The team also considers that standards described in the approved programme documentation are set at levels that are consistent with these sector-recognised standards and NSCD's academic regulations and policies should ensure that standards are maintained appropriately.

24   The team considers that, based on the evidence scrutinised, the standards that will be achieved by NSCD's students are expected to be in line with the sector-recognised standards defined in paragraph 342 of the OfS's regulatory framework. The team also considers that NSCD's academic regulations and policies are clear and comprehensive, consistent with the national framework, and will ensure that these standards are maintained. The team considers that staff understand and apply NSCD's approach to setting and maintaining these standards and that the evidence seen demonstrates they are committed to implementing this approach. Assessed student work demonstrates that credit and qualifications are only awarded where the relevant threshold standards have been met. Therefore, based on its scrutiny of the evidence provided, the team concludes that this Core practice is met.

25   The evidence scrutinised by the assessment team was based upon examination of the full range of evidence described in Annex 4. Therefore, the assessment team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

S2 The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers

26   This Core practice expects that the provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.

27   The QAA assessment team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers (March 2019).

The evidence the team considered

28   The QAA team assessed the evidence presented, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The assessment team used that matrix to ensure that the evidence considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other assessments and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

a   Signed memorandum of agreement with the University and Taught Degree Regulations [002]
b   Annual Programme Monitoring – CDD [003]
c   Annual Programme Monitoring – University [003b]
d   EE reports 2016 to 2021 [004]
e   Assessment overview at NSCD [007]
f   Undergraduate Module Guides [008]
g   Post Graduate Module Guides [009]
h   Undergraduate course and module specifications [010]
i   Postgraduate course and module specifications [011]
j   Academic Board minutes 2019/20 and 2020/21 [023c]
k   Board of Examiners minutes 2019/20 and 2020/21 [023d]
l   NSCD External Quality Assurance [084]
m   Annex 13 of the University's Credit Framework for Taught Courses [089]
n   University Academic Regulations [090]
o   Senior staff meeting [M01]
p   Combined full and part-time students' meeting [M02]
q   Academic staff meeting [M04]
r   Professional support staff meeting [M05]
s   Assessed student work sampling [T02].

29   Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the assessment team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this assessment are outlined below:

30   Although there are testimonials from practitioners for NSCD, no third-party endorsements relating to this Core practice from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies or Institute of Apprenticeships technical end-point assessments were available as

NSCD does not run programmes requiring such endorsements.

How any samples of evidence were constructed

31 The team considered a random sample of 126 pieces of assessed student work from a total of 1,114, reflecting all pieces of assessed work from the 2020-21 academic year, covering all types of assignment and all courses operational in that period. This was to test that marks and awards given to students are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.

Why and how the team considered this evidence

32 As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider [Annex 1] was considered by the assessment team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the assessment team to make its judgement regarding the provider's ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the assessment team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below:

33 To identify the institutional approach to course and assessment design, marking and moderation, requirements for awards and approaches to classification as the underlying basis for the standards of awards, the team considered the academic regulations of the validating University, [002; 090] the Signed Memorandum of Agreement with the University and Taught Degree Regulations, [002] Annual Programme Monitoring - University, [003b] Academic Board minutes, [023c] Board of Examiners minutes, [023d] and the University's Code of Practice for Quality Assurance. [084]

34 To test that specified standards beyond the threshold for courses sampled are reasonably comparable with those in other UK providers, the team considered the approved course documentation in the form of the Undergraduate Course Specifications and Module Specifications, [008; 010] Postgraduate Course Specifications and Module Specifications, [009; 011] NSCD's document on Assessment Overview [007] and the University's Code of Practice and Credit Framework. [089]

35 To check that external examiners confirm that standards beyond the threshold for courses sampled are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers, and that credit and qualifications are awarded only where those standards have been met, the team reviewed external examiner reports and NSCD Responses 2016-2021. [004]

36 To test that marks and awards given to students are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers, assessed student work sampling [T02] was undertaken.

37 To assess whether students understand what is required of them to reach standards beyond the threshold the team met with students. [M02]

38 To test that staff involved in assessment understand and apply NSCD's approach to maintaining comparable standards, the team met with senior, [M01] academic [M04] and professional support staff. [M05]

What the evidence shows

39 The assessment team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

40   NSCD's approach to course and assessment design and marking conventions is fully situated within its responsibilities to adopt and apply its validating partner's Academic Regulations for Taught Courses of Study. [002; 090] This approach is in line with NSCD's responsibility under its Memorandum of Agreement [002] with the University requiring NSCD to ensure that the University's Code of Practice for Quality Assurance [084] and associated regulations and conventions are consistently applied to NSCD's validated courses. The Board of Examiners appointed under this agreement, [002] chaired by a University representative and including membership from NSCD, is responsible for ensuring comparability of assessment and standards across modules, and for implementation of the University's conventions and regulations for examinations and assignments. In carrying out this responsibility NSCD also has an established internal quality assurance infrastructure incorporating a committee structure, and policies and procedures to ensure that it is these University requirements that are fully implemented. The team's scrutiny of the Examination Board minutes [023d] confirms that deliberations of student progress and achievement consider the robust application of the University's academic standards, including through alignment with grade descriptors and credit requirements, with appropriate recommendations where students have not fully been able to meet the required standards or the necessary credits.

41   The team confirmed that the Academic Board minutes [023c] show that NSCD deliberates on student achievement of relevant academic standards, grade classifications and credit gained, noting any outstanding matters arising from the Board of Examiners on student achievement and actioning them as required. This is further triangulated within the evidence seen in NSCD's Conservatoire Annual Monitoring Report [003] and the University Annual Monitoring Report. [003b] The evidence within the annual monitoring reports also shows that the information on student awards, grades, classifications and credits awarded is also annually reported. Both the University's assessment regulations [090] and NSCD's own quality systems provide a clear and comprehensive mechanism to ensure that the approach to course assessment, design, marking and moderation, and grade classification are effective and robust.

42   The team's scrutiny of approved course documentation [008; 009; 010; 011] confirms that NSCD's courses provide opportunities for students to achieve standards beyond threshold which are comparable with those achieved in other higher education providers. NSCD's Assessment Overview [007] explains to students the different grades and award classifications that can be achieved above threshold level, and their key characteristics. For example, for BA awards the information shows the distinction between the prerequisites for first class, upper and lower second class, and third-class awards and signposts how these awards are classified in line with the University's Code of Practice and Credit Framework. [089] The programme and module specifications [010; 011] provide evidence of assessment methods which give students the opportunity to achieve beyond threshold levels. For example, the techniques for summative assessment for the CHEDT1 module [010] direct students on how to achieve performance at high levels taking into account, among other things, aspects such as structure, coordination, space and individuality. The team's review of approved programme definitive documentation found that NSCD's courses provide opportunities for students to achieve beyond threshold levels which are reasonably comparable with those achieved within other higher education providers.

43   The team found that external examiners confirm in their reports that students have opportunities to achieve beyond threshold and succeed in doing so. For example, the 2020-21 external examiner report for the CertHE in Contemporary Dance [004] confirmed the excellent grades and awards students achieved. Similarly, the external examiner for the MA Contemporary Dance course noted in the 2020-21 report [004] a correlation between the high marks that students received for their practical performance and technical standards and the level of skill at which they perform. The minutes of the Board of Examiners [023d]

evidenced that individual external examiner observations and recommendations and NSCD's responses to them are monitored by the Board. The July 2020 Board of Examiner minutes, for example, [023d] confirm that the external examiner for the BA (Hons) Dance (Contemporary) commented on the good use of the full range of marks, and noted that teachers were confident enough to fail students or award high marks as appropriate. Overall, the team found that the external examiner reports reviewed [004] confirmed the standards of student performance are comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions and that NSCD's responses to external examiner comments on these matters are monitored internally by NSCD and externally by the University.

44   The team's scrutiny of assessed student work [T02] confirmed that the assessment criteria, and the way they were interpreted, allowed internal and external assessors to differentiate between the different levels of achievement. The samples also confirm that assessments are marked and classified at the appropriates grade levels, with justifications for the grades explained in detail. There is clear evidence [T02; 004 - External Examiner reports] that proposed grades are systematically moderated internally and that students are achieving at levels beyond threshold, and these achievements are comparable with those within other higher education providers. Assessed student work demonstrates that credit and qualifications are only awarded where the relevant standards have been met.

45   Students [M02] were able to explain what was expected of them to gain higher grades and higher degree classifications. They explained how the different documentation and information within the virtual learning environment (VLE), and ongoing interaction with staff collectively and on a one-to one basis helps to continually confirm their understanding. They advised that they are given detailed assessment criteria which helps them to understand the differences between the different grades and award classifications. The team therefore concludes that students understand what is required of them to reach standards beyond the threshold.

46   Senior, [M01] academic, [M04] and professional support staff [M05] also discussed how they work with the University to ensure that standards above threshold are maintained and how validation processes ensure this. They fully understand and apply approaches for ensuring that students have opportunities to achieve and do so at levels above the threshold which are comparable to those achieved within other higher education providers. They explained how they use different approaches to support students to become high achievers and how new staff are mentored and supported in their understanding and application of academic standards in their teaching and assessment practices. The team therefore concludes that staff understand and apply NSCD's approach to maintaining comparable standards.

Conclusions

47   As described above, the assessment team considered all of the evidence submitted [Annex 1] to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing the assessment team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other assessments and remained outcomes focused. The team's conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

48   The team, based on the evidence presented, determined that the standards set for students to achieve beyond the threshold on the provider's courses are reasonably comparable with those set by other UK providers. The team considered that the standards described in the approved programme documentation and in the provider's academic regulations and policies should ensure that such standards are maintained appropriately.

49   NSCD operates within the University's Academic Regulations as confirmed within the Memorandum of Agreement between the two institutions. The University's Board of Studies and NSCD's internal governance arrangements for monitoring academic standards, which incorporates the structure of deliberative committees, consistently and systematically ensures that academic standards beyond the threshold which are comparable with those achieved in other UK providers are set and maintained.

50   Assessed student work confirms that assessment tasks and linked criteria provided students with the opportunity to achieve at levels beyond threshold. The team found that students were achieving beyond threshold levels and in line with levels achieved within other higher education providers. Staff understand and apply NSCD's approach to setting and maintaining standards and articulated how they contribute to ensuring that standards are set and maintained to provide students with the opportunity to achieve beyond threshold levels and in line with standards achieved within other higher education providers. Students fully understand what they need to do to achieve standards beyond threshold levels. Students who met the team know the different grade and degree classifications that they can achieve.

51   NSCD's approach to setting and maintaining standards includes systematic ongoing review within its deliberative committee structures to ensure that students continue to have opportunities to achieve standards beyond threshold, and comparable to those achieved within other higher education providers. The team saw confirmation within external examiner reports that students are provided with the opportunities to achieve standards beyond threshold levels and that they do achieve these standards within all courses. The reports also confirmed that credit and qualifications are only awarded when these standards are met as evidenced within the minutes of the Board of Studies.

52   Therefore, the team concludes, based on the evidence described above, that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers and this Core practice is met.

53   The evidence scrutinised by the assessment team was based upon examination of the full range of evidence described in Annex 4. Therefore, the assessment team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

S3 Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them

54   This Core practice expects that where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.

55   The QAA assessment team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers (March 2019).

The evidence the team considered

56   The QAA team assessed the evidence presented, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The assessment team used that matrix to ensure that the evidence considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other assessments and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

a   Signed memorandum of agreement with University and Taught Degree Regulations [002]
b   Annual Programme Monitoring – University [003b]
c   EE reports [004]
d   Assessment overview at NSCD [007]
e   Academic Board minutes 2019/20 and 2020/21 [023c]
f   Board of Examiners minutes 2019/20 and 2020/21 [023d]
g   Terms of Reference of Committees and Boards [030]
h   NSCD External Quality Assurance [084]
i   Senior staff meeting [M01]
j   Academic staff meeting [M04]
k   Professional support staff meeting [M05]
l   Assessed student work sampling [T02].

57   Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the assessment team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this assessment are outlined below:

58   Although there are testimonials from practitioners for NSCD, no third-party endorsements relating to this Core practice from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies or Institute of Apprenticeships technical end-point assessments were available as NSCD does not run programmes requiring such endorsements.

59   The team did not need to meet representatives from the University as it had sufficient primary evidence to inform the team's assessment.

How any samples of evidence were constructed

60   The team considered a random sample of 126 pieces of assessed student work from a total of 1,114, reflecting all pieces of assessed work from the 2020-21 academic year, covering all types of assignment and all courses operational in that period. This was to test that where NSCD works in partnership with other organisations, the standards of awards are credible and secure.

Why and how the team considered this evidence

61   As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider [Annex 1] was considered by the assessment team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the assessment team to make its judgement regarding the provider's ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the assessment team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below:

62   To test whether NSCD has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for maintaining standards in partnership work, the team considered the signed Memorandum of Agreement and Academic Regulations, [002] the Assessment Overview Document, [007] and the minutes of deliberative committees within NSCD [023c; 023d] together with their Terms of Reference. [030]

63   To test whether external examiners consider that standards are credible and secure, thus confirming the effectiveness of the underpinning arrangements, the team reviewed the external examiner reports from all programmes [004] and the follow up and internal monitoring by NSCD and the University. [084] These included meeting minutes from Board of Examiners [023d] and Annual Programme Monitoring - University. [003b]

64   To test that the standards of awards are credible and secure, thus confirming the effectiveness of the underpinning arrangements, assessed student work was reviewed to test for consistency, fairness and accuracy of assessment processes. [T02]

65   To test that staff understand and discharge effectively their responsibilities to the awarding body, the team met with senior management, [M01] academic [M04] and professional support staff [M05] and was able to discuss and differentiate the full range of higher education provision at NSCD.

What the evidence shows

66   The assessment team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

67   NSCD has been in partnership with the University of Kent since 2006 through a validation relationship and has been part of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (CDD), a federal collaboration of specialist schools delivering education and training in the performing arts since 2003. Although NSCD plans to leave the CDD in September 2022 it is committed to maintaining its existing collaboration with the group as peers. All curriculum and student-facing policies which are currently held by CDD and the ones which NSCD will be adopting are both verified and approved by the University and have been carefully designed to reflect existing content, albeit tailored to NSCD as a single institution rather than relevant to the multi-institution Conservatoire.

68   NSCD's relationship with the University, which has existed since 2006, is governed

through a Memorandum of Agreement. [002] The University validates NSCD courses and the University's academic regulations govern the delivery of these courses. The team found that this Memorandum [002] is comprehensive in identifying the terms under which the partnership operates to ensure that the standards of University-validated awards offered by NSCD are credible and secure. The Memorandum is comprehensive because it identifies the courses it governs, and the objectives and scope of the partnership. The responsibilities of both parties are sufficiently detailed to cover validations, periodic reviews and ongoing monitoring. [003b – Annual Programme Monitoring] Ongoing monitoring in particular is carried out at University level by an appointed Board of Examiners chaired by a University representative, but also including NSCD course director and markers. The Board of Examiners applies the University's examination conventions and regulations to ensure the comparability of assessment and standards within all modules and also that courses and assessments are comparable with sector-recognised standards. In this respect its role is to confirm marks and the credit awarded and the team saw effective implementation of this within the minutes of the Board of Examiners. [023d]

69   NSCD also has the responsibility to ensure that it operates within and applies the University's Code of Practice for Quality Assurance and associated regulations and conventions. [002] NSCD understands this responsibility and has worked collaboratively with the University and established an internal quality assurance infrastructure with committees including the Academic Board and the Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee. [030] The Academic Board, for example, monitors and reviews academic standards and determines and reviews validation and course review policies and processes in line with the University's academic regulatory requirements. The Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee [023b] is accountable for the monitoring and review of all NSCD's courses, and for recommending new, or revisions to existing, courses to the Academic Board. The team found evidence of the effective implementation of these responsibilities within the minutes of both the Academic Board [023c] and Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee. [023b]

70   The reporting of the ongoing effectiveness of the partnership is also addressed through the annual monitoring reporting system. The team found evidence of this within the annual monitoring reports [003b] where matters on academic standards relating to student achievement and currency of programme specifications are explicitly addressed and confirmed. Further, NSCD has developed a comprehensive assessment overview document [007] which includes useful guidance on, among other themes, modes of assessment, grading, classifications, feedback and moderation, while also acknowledging the oversight role of the Board of Examiners in confirming grades and degree outcomes. The team is thus satisfied that this partnership works effectively in ensuring that the standards of NSCD's courses continue to be securely and credibly delivered and maintained at a high level.

71   External examiners are appointed by the University and attend the meetings of the Board of Examiners as members, as noted in the Code of Practice for Quality Assurance. [084] They report [004] that the partnership works effectively and note, for example in the 2020 Cert HE Contemporary Dance course, that the proceedings of the Board of Examiners are highly effective. [004] They also report positively on NSCD's courses and commend the teaching teams for their approaches to ensuring that academic standards are credibly and securely maintained through rigorous marking and moderation practices and supporting high achievement. Where students undertake placements as part of their course NSCD retains the responsibility for the assessment and marking process in line with the University's academic regulations. External examiners conclude therefore that standards are credible and secure.

72   The sample of student work [T02] scrutinised by the team demonstrates that students achieved the validated course outcomes. The BA (Hons) Dance (Contemporary)

external for the 2019-20 academic year [004] commended the way in which experienced teaching teams challenged students to push the boundaries within contemporary arts practice and confidently take artistic and creative risks. The team therefore concludes that assessed student work demonstrates that the standards of awards are credible and secure.

73   The team's meeting with the different staff teams including senior staff, [M01] academic staff [M04] and professional support staff [M05] confirmed they are fully aware of their responsibility under the Memorandum of Agreement and commented on the positive relationship they have with the University. They know what their responses are under the Memorandum of Agreement, and are fully aware of the scope and content of them. The team therefore concludes that staff understand and discharge effectively their responsibilities to the awarding body.

Conclusions

74   As described above, the assessment team considered all of the evidence submitted [Annex 1] to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing the assessment team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other assessments and remained outcomes focused. The team's conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

75   NSCD has effective arrangements in place to ensure that the standards of awards are credible and secure, irrespective of where or how courses are delivered, or who delivers them. The Memorandum of Agreement is clear, and staff understand their responsibilities in maintaining academic standards. NSCD has established a quality infrastructure with effective governance arrangements to ensure that it fulfils its responsibilities under the Memorandum of Agreement. The Memorandum is comprehensive in detailing mutual expectations and responsibilities and is explicitly effective in addressing how the partnership ensures that academic standards are set and maintained and that a robust reporting protocol is in operation. Staff who met the team were able to articulate their responsibilities under the partnership agreements. They commented especially on the productive relationship they have with the University in ensuring that the University's academic regulations were adopted and applied within their practices.

76   NSCD works collaboratively with the University as members of the Board of Examiners to securely ensure that credible standards are maintained. The external examiners confirm that the partnership is effective in meeting mutual expectations and responsibilities and that it collaboratively ensures that the standards of awards are credibly and securely set, maintained and achieved in line with the University's academic regulations. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.

77   The evidence scrutinised by the assessment team was based upon examination of the full range of evidence described in Annex 4. Therefore, the assessment team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

S4 The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent

78   This Core practice expects that the provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.

79   The QAA assessment team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers (March 2019).

The evidence the team considered

80   The QAA team assessed the evidence presented, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The assessment team used that matrix to ensure that the evidence considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other assessments and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

a   Student Handbook 2021/22 [001]
b   Signed memorandum of agreement with University and Taught Degree Regulations [002]
c   Annual Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Documents 2016-2021 Conservatoire [003]
d   Annual Programme Monitoring – University [003b]
e   EE reports [004]
f   Assessment overview at NSCD [007]
g   Undergraduate module guides [008]
h   Postgraduate module guides [009]
i   Undergraduate course and module specifications [010]
j   Postgraduate course and module specifications [011]
k   Periodic programme review and course validation resource [018]
l   Student and industry consultation on new course proposals [018b]
m   Academic Board minutes 2019/20 and 2020/21 [023c]
n   Board of Examiners minutes 2019/20 and 2020/21 [023d]
o   Committee Terms of Reference - Academic Board [030]
p   CDD Moodle presentation [078]
q   NSCD External Quality Assurance [084]
r   University Academic Regulations [090]
s   Senior staff meeting [M01]
t   Combined full and part-time students meeting [M02]
u   Academic staff meeting [M04]
v   Professional support staff meeting [M05].

81   Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the assessment team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this assessment are outlined below:

82   Although there are testimonials from practitioners for NSCD, no third-party endorsements relating to this Core practice from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies or Institute of Apprenticeships technical end-point assessments were available as

NSCD does not run programmes requiring such endorsements.

83   The team did not require a meeting with representatives from the University as it had sufficient primary evidence to inform the team's assessment.

How any samples of evidence were constructed

84   No specific samples were reviewed for this Core practice.

Why and how the team considered this evidence

85   To assess the arrangements in place for the use of external experts in setting and maintaining academic standards, and the operation of NSCD's assessment and classification processes, the team examined the requirements of the University in the memorandum of agreement [002] and the academic regulations. [090] This was tested against the operation of the Academic Board, [030] Boards of Examiners, [023d] the Code of Practice for Quality Assurance [084] and the External Examiner reports. [004]

86   To test the reliability, fairness and transparency of assessment processes, the team examined approved course documentation, including programme guides [008; 009] and programme and module specifications, [010; 011] along with the Student Handbook, [001] the VLE [078] and the assessment overview document. [007]

87   To examine the use of external examiners and the evidence that NSCD considers and responds to externals' reports regarding standards, the team scrutinised External Examiner reports [004] and subsequent responses and actions including formal exam and progression boards and reporting processes internally and externally to the University. [023c; 023d] This was triangulated to evidence in the annual monitoring reports for CDD [003] and the University. [003b]

88   To test that external expertise is used according to NSCD's regulations, the team examined documentation relating to the periodic programme review and course validation process [018] and the records relating to student and industry consultation on new course proposals. [018b]

89   To test that staff understand the requirements for the use of external expertise, the team discussed their understanding in meetings with the senior, [M01] academic [M04] and professional support staff. [M05]

90   To identify how students regard the reliability, fairness and transparency of assessment and classification processes, the team met with full and part-time students. [M02]

What the evidence shows

91   The assessment team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

92   The Memorandum of Agreement [002] sets out clearly that the overall responsibility for the oversight of academic standards and the responsibility for conducting Assessment Boards rests with the University in line with its academic regulations, [090] including the University's Marking Conventions and its Classification of Awards Guidance for Examiners. [090] The established Board of Examiners is chaired by the University's representatives, with other members including course directors and markers from NSCD, together with external examiners. The Board of Examiners organises and conducts the Assessment Boards [002] and the minutes of the Board evidence this. [023d]

93   The Code of Practice for Quality Assurance [084] requires the use of external examiners, who are appointed by the University, to provide an independent external review of quality and to ensure that standards are set and maintained for the University's awards, and this includes NSCD's courses. External examiners are thus involved in externally confirming the assessment decisions made by NSCD's teaching team through the Board of Examiners. External examiners are invited to classes, performances and assessment panels and they produce independent reports on the effectiveness of the programme in meeting academic standards. [004]

94   External examiners are consulted when changes are made to courses, assessments, or moderation and attend the Board of Examiners meetings as members. [023d] Their main role is to comment and report annually on the effectiveness of the assessment process and the confirmation of academic standards as set out within the Memorandum of Agreement. [002] Minutes of the Board of Examiners [023d] provide evidence of the external confirmation that NSCD's courses meet the required academic standards. NSCD receives the external examiners' reports and responds to their observations and recommendations, and the team saw consistent evidence of detailed, targeted and timely responses by NSCD to aspects raised and recommendations made. [004] These included for the Cert HE 20/21 agreement to adopt a process to the use of a template document to support the standardisation and tracking of the moderation process. These responses are included within the Annual Programme Monitoring Reports [003; 003b] and monitored by the Academic Board. [023c]

95   Records of course approval and periodic reviews of NSCD's courses [018] provide evidence that NSCD engages industry experts to take part in programme validations and periodic reviews in line with the University's regulations and policies. The team saw evidence of the active engagement of external expertise, including University representatives and panelists from CDD member institutions, in the records of the validation of NSCD's courses including, for example, that of the MA in Contemporary Dance Performance. [018b] The team therefore concludes that NSCD has clear policies describing its requirements for using external expertise in maintaining academic standards, [002 Memorandum of Understanding; 030 Academic Board Terms of Reference] and there is evidence that these are fully enacted.

96   Approved programme documentation for NSCD includes the programme guides [008; 009] and the programme and module specifications [010, 011] which provide detailed information on assessment methods, mapping of learning outcomes to assessment methods, and weighting of the different assessment tasks. The Student Handbook [001] also provides students with an overview of the variety of assessments used within the course with further reference to assessment information on the VLE. [078] The above documentation is further supported by NSCD's Assessment Overview document [007] available to students on the VLE which provides comprehensive detail on the types of assessment, assessment processes, grading and classification rules, and procedures for assessment submission in line with the University academic regulations.

97   Moderation is undertaken on a continuous assessment basis [007 – Assessment Overview at NSCD] and is formalised by engagement between teaching teams and an internal moderator, thereby ensuring that marks awarded are fair and transparent, reflect the full student profile, and have been arrived at in line with due process. This entails team-working by NSCD tutors, and a multi-layered process to ensure that more than one tutor's contribution informs the formal assessment grades and outcomes. [007] The external examiner for the University (BA (Hons) Dance (Contemporary)) [003b Annual Monitoring Report 2016] stated the commitment of staff to rigorous and fair marking procedures was very apparent, and the marking conversations witnessed were described as exemplary. The team therefore felt the outcomes from the assessment process, including marking and moderation were effective in ensuring a reliable, fair and transparent process.

98   Staff confirmed in all meetings [M01; M04; M05] that they engage with external examiners at different levels. They talked about how externals play active roles in the independent observation of classes, reviewing student work and reporting on good practice and recommendations. They explained how external examiners' reports are reflected on at different stages within the committee structures, and how they contribute to these discussions. Students confirm that the assessment and classification processes are reliable, fair and effective. The team concludes that staff fully understand NSCD's approach to the use of assessment and classifications when marking student work and the external examiners confirm this. [004]

99   The students are also aware of the role of external examiners and confirm that external examiner reports are made available to them in the VLE. [078] They were fully aware of the different gradings and classifications and spoke of how approachable staff were in helping them to understand what was expected through collective and individual discussion on marking criteria and classifications. [M02]

Conclusions

100   As described above, the assessment team considered all of the evidence submitted [Annex 1] to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing the assessment team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other assessments and remained outcomes focused. The team's conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

101   NSCD uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent. The Memorandum of Agreement between NSCD and the University is fundamental in establishing a strong platform for assuring partnership work between the two parties and this is augmented by detailed policies and procedures that ensure independent external expertise at key stages of curriculum development, delivery and review.

102   The team's scrutiny of records of course approval documentation confirms that there is effective and extensive use of external expertise and external peers within both initial validations and periodic reviews. Contributions from external expertise which inform programme approval and review are also valued and actioned. The expertise of external examiners informs NSCD's assessment and classification processes and this, in conjunction with NSCD responses, lead the team to conclude that this external expertise is used and given due consideration. NSCD is effective in responding to all recommendations by the external examiners in a timely, targeted and transparent way. These responses are monitored consistently within the University's and NSCD's deliberative committees.

103   Students confirmed that they found the assessment and classification processes to be reliable, fair and transparent. Staff whom the team met demonstrated that they fully understand the requirements for the use of external expertise, and the assessment and classification processes. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.

104   The evidence scrutinised by the assessment team was based upon examination of the full range of evidence described in Annex 4. Therefore, the assessment team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

Q1   The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system

105   This Core practice expects that the provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.

106   The QAA assessment team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers (March 2019).

The evidence the team considered

107   The QAA assessment team assessed the evidence presented to them, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The assessment team utilised that matrix to ensure that the evidence they considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other assessments and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

a   Signed Memorandum of Agreement with the University & University Taught Degree Regulations [002]
b   Annual Programme Monitoring – University [003b]
c   Undergraduate course and module specifications [010]
d   Postgraduate course and module specifications [011]
e   Academic Board minutes [023c]
f   Example of RPEL Document agreed by the University [024]
g   NSCD Admissions Appeals and Complaints Policy (2022 entry) [031]
h   Measures in place to review and revise student recruitment processes [032]
i   Example BA Stage 2 Online Audition Results [032c]
j   Example MA Stage 1 Applications [032d]
k   NSCD Contextual Admissions Framework [043]
l   MA CDP Complete applications and offers 2021 Entry QSA [064]
m   Response to further evidence request post TPM [079]
n   NSCD Website [085]
o   Admissions Policy [086]
p   Senior staff meeting [M01]
q   Combined full and part-time students meeting [M02]
r   Academic staff meeting [M04]
s   Professional support staff meeting [M05]
t   Testing Samples – Admissions [T01].

108   Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the assessment team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this assessment are outlined below:

109   The team did not scrutinise arrangements with recruitment agents because NSCD does not employ agents and, senior management confirms, there are no plans to do so.

How any samples of evidence were constructed

110   The team considered a random sample of 62 admissions records from a total of 89

students admitted to the BA (Honours) programme in the current (2021-22) academic year to assess whether reliable, fair and inclusive decisions were made for those applicants sampled.

Why and how the team considered this evidence

111   As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider [Annex 1] was considered by the assessment team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the assessment team to make its judgement regarding the provider's ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the assessment team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below:

112   To identify institutional policy relating to: the recruitment, selection and admission of students; roles and responsibilities of staff involved in the admissions process; support for applicants; how NSCD verifies applicants' entry qualifications; how NSCD facilitates an inclusive admissions system; and how it handles complaints and appeals, the team considered the Admissions Policy, [086] Signed Memorandum of Agreement with the University and University Taught Degree Regulations, [002] the Contextual Admissions Framework, [043] and the Admissions Appeals and Complaints Policy. [031]

113   To assess whether NSCD has a credible, robust and evidence-based approach for ensuring that admissions systems are reliable, fair and inclusive, the team considered the Admissions Policy, [086] the measures in place to review and revise student recruitment processes, [032] the Contextual Admissions Framework, [043] Annual Programme Monitoring documents [003b] and Academic Board minutes. [023c]

114   To test whether the information given to applicants is transparent, inclusive and fit for purpose, the team considered the Admissions Policy, [086] NSCD's website, [085] the Contextual Admissions Framework, [043] and met with full and part-time students. [M02]

115   To test whether admissions requirements for courses sampled reflect NSCD's overall regulations and policies, the team considered the approved course documentation [010; 011] and the Admissions Policy. [086]

116   To assess whether reliable, fair and inclusive admissions decisions were made for the applicants sampled, the team considered a sample of the admissions records [T01] and panel notes from the BA (Hons) Dance (Contemporary), [032c] MA Contemporary Dance Performance (Verve) and MA Contemporary Dance Performance (PPS), [032d] example of RPEL Document, [024] Measures in place to review and revise student recruitment processes, [032] the Response to further evidence request post TPM, [079] and the MA CDP complete applications and offers 2021 Entry QSA document. [064]

117   To test whether staff understand their responsibilities, are appropriately skilled and supported and can articulate how NSCD's approach to inclusivity is manifested in the admissions process, the team considered responses provided in the senior staff, [M01] academic staff, [M04] and the professional support staff meetings. [M05] To assess students' views about the admissions process, the team considered the responses given in the full and part-time students meeting. [M02]

What the evidence shows

118   The assessment team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

119   The Memorandum of Agreement with the University [002] confirms that NSCD is responsible for the recruitment, selection and admission of students, and the implementation of this is reviewed as part of the University's annual programme monitoring process. [003b] NSCD ensures reliability and consistency within their admissions systems through its Admissions Policy [086] and by using standardised entry criteria for each course and pathway in addition to standard documentation.

120   The admissions process [086] has been most recently reviewed and reapproved by the Academic Board in October 2021 and will next be reviewed in September 2022. This is to accommodate the proposed move away from CDD, which is referenced in detail in the introduction to the policy, making explicit mention of the distinctions between the current policy and the proposed future state post-CDD. Applications are made direct to NSCD.

121   The admissions process is underpinned by the Contextual Admissions Framework. [043] The framework aims to promote access and remove barriers to higher education, notably where students have not had opportunities to engage with higher education due to cultural, geographical, or financial reasons. In practice this makes the admissions process inclusive because applicants are considered holistically. The audition process is designed to support this holistic assessment by using different audition methods, and by providing targeted financial support.

122   The team determined that admissions arrangements are explicitly designed to facilitate widening participation, and to celebrating and promoting equality and diversity. There is a commitment in the policy, mirroring that of the Conservatoire, to audition all applicants who meet the basic criteria, and to select applicants objectively based solely upon their talent and potential for training. The procedure [086] provides for all selection to be undertaken through auditions and/or interviews, and this is undertaken by a panel of NSCD staff, who assess each component of the process. The meeting with academic staff [M04] confirmed that staff are familiar with the assessment process and confirmed that the approach is consistently applied for all admissions cycles. The team concluded that NSCD has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for ensuring that admissions systems are reliable, fair and inclusive.

123   The team considers the selection process for performance courses fair and reliable because it involves two stages of auditions with both stages being assessed by three panel members to assist NSCD in addressing the potential for subjectivity during the selection process. [032c; 032d; 064; 079; T01] Prior to deciding whether an applicant receives an offer, the selection panel discusses the applicant's holistic performance throughout the audition stages. Unsuccessful applicants can request feedback from NSCD. The assessment team considered this system to be fair because NSCD uses this to assess which pathway, BA (Hons) or CertHE/Verve or Professional Placement Scheme, is suitable for the applicant to best support their intended academic and professional development. Consideration is given to student preference, aptitude and skills within the contextual framework of the course objectives. [032c; 032d; 064; T01] The assessment team therefore considered the procedure for the recruitment and admission of students to be reliable and fair.

124   Senior [M01] and professional support staff [M05] explained that they are suitably trained in NSCD's admissions criteria through observing selection panels and discussions prior to sitting on a selection panel. NSCD uses this approach to ensure that new selection panel members understand and are consistent with NSCD's admissions criteria before assessing applicants. In particular, staff could articulate their approach to inclusivity in assessment in terms of providing students with financial support to attend auditions, and making reasonable adjustments in terms of disability, injury or illness. The team concluded that staff understand their responsibilities and are skilled and supported in the

implementation of the admissions policy and understand its approach to inclusivity.

125   The team considers NSCD's admissions system to be accessible because the Admissions Policy [086] and website [085] provide clear information to applicants on what to expect from the audition/interview process which includes direct engagement between NSCD and applicants to ensure that applicants fully understand the application and audition process. This information is written in accessible language for applicants in the 'What is NSCD looking for in potential students?' document available on its website. [085] Additionally, the website makes clear the differences between parallel pathways by highlighting the key features of the pathway, the intended applicant profile, and the possible outcomes. Full and part-time students [M02] confirmed that they felt informed regarding the course they were applying for, the application process and application criteria, as they had received clear answers to questions when asked. Students informed the assessment team that they had received what they were expecting, and that the admissions system is reliable, fair and inclusive. The team concluded that the information given to applicants is transparent, inclusive, and fit for purpose.

126   The team also considers the application process to be inclusive because NSCD operates an application fee-waiver scheme to increase access for applicants: from low-income backgrounds; first in their family to go to university; currently live in an area of low progression to higher education; or who grew up in care. [043] The fee-waiver scheme is clearly advertised to applicants on NSCD's website and is used by applicants who meet the criteria. The application process is also accepting of applicants with non-traditional entry criteria set by the University. [010] The task is determined by the Vice-Principal, Head of Academic Registry and Quality Assurance, Admissions Manager, and Head of Undergraduate Studies considering the applicants' support needs if disclosed.

127   A further reason why NSCD's audition and admissions process is inclusive is that NSCD asks multiple times throughout the process whether applicants wish to disclose any specific learning difficulties. [T01 (Admissions Testing Sheets)] When a disclosure has been made, NSCD communicates with the applicant to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made during the audition process. These adjustments also cover short-term issues which could affect admission such as injuries. The outcome of this focus on inclusivity is that 70 per cent of applicants declare specific learning needs by the end of the application process. [032c; 032d; 064; T01]

128   After an admissions cycle, the selection and admissions process is discussed between admissions tutors [M05] to review and revise student recruitment processes. [032] NSCD uses this discussion to further improve selection panel members' consistency by analysing how each panellist has used/weighted each piece of evidence. Furthermore, NSCD seeks feedback from applicants after the auditions in order to improve the process for the following admissions cycle which is demonstrated through their measures to review and revise student recruitment processes. [032]

129   The Admissions Policy [086] also makes explicit reference to the opportunity for a prospective student to complain about the admissions process or to appeal a decision not to offer a place. The Admissions Appeals and Complaints Policy [031] includes the relevant procedures for handling admissions appeals and complaints.

130   The recognition of prior learning (RPL) process is administered and initially assessed by NSCD Curriculum Leads before individual case approval by the University, per Annex R (Student Engagement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement) of the Academic Regulations. [002] The RPL applications are managed through the submission of a template agreed by NSCD and the University. The team found that RPL has been used appropriately and consistently, for example, by applicants for the PGDip Arts Learning and Teaching in

Higher Education. [024]

131	NSCD monitors the outcome of its selection processes by household income and POLAR4. [Academic Board minutes 023c] This reflection confirms that admissions are fairly evenly divided when categorised by household income and that half of students came from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd POLAR4 quintiles. The assessment team therefore considered the application processes and outcomes to be inclusive. [043] Students [M02] met by the team also expressed the view that the admissions system was fair and inclusive.

132	Programme specifications for all programmes [010; 011] clearly set out the admissions requirements in line with the Contextual Admissions Framework [043] and the Admissions Policy, [029] including the entry requirements and criteria for the courses of study.

133	 The sampled admission records [T01] demonstrate that the admissions policy was implemented in practice and that the system used by NSCD was reliable because the records show that the processes were consistently applied to all applicants, and included specific checks on admissions qualification evidence. It was fair because NSCD demonstrably uses for all applicants a range of audition processes, including showreels; specific dance topics; interviews; personal statements and academic critiques, and it was inclusive as options were available for remote online applications and/or face-to-face auditions, and processes were in place to account for injuries and COVID-related cases during the admissions process. The team concludes that reliable, fair and inclusive admissions decisions were made for the applicants sampled.

Conclusions

134	As described above, the assessment team considered all of the evidence submitted [Annex 1] to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing the assessment team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other assessments and remained outcomes focused. The team's conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

135	NSCD has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system. This is because NSCD has a clear, robust and credible policy for the recruitment, selection and admission of students which is based on a Contextual Admission Framework ensuring that students are not at a disadvantage for cultural, geographical, or financial reasons. The admissions records tested demonstrate that NSCD's policies are implemented in practice, and any deviations relate to minor omissions or oversights which do not harm the integrity of the procedures or interests of applicants. The admissions team understands its role within the admissions process and academic staff have been suitably trained. Students met by the team attested to the fairness and equity of the admissions process. Feedback is demonstrably sought from applicants on all aspects of the system and used for monitoring and further improvement of the admissions arrangements. The admissions information provided by NSCD to prospective students and the Admissions Appeals and Complaints Policy are accessible and fit for purpose. Admissions requirements are consistent with approved course documentation and are consistent with NSCD's admissions policy. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.

136	The evidence scrutinised by the assessment team was based upon examination of the full range of evidence described in Annex 4. Therefore, the assessment team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

Q2 The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses

137 This Core practice expects that the provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.

138 The QAA assessment team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers (March 2019).

The evidence the team considered

139 The QAA team assessed the evidence presented, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The assessment team used that matrix to ensure that the evidence considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other assessments and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

a   NSCD Student Handbook [001]
b   Signed memorandum of agreement with University and Taught Degree Regulations [002]
c   Annual Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Documents 2016-2021 [003] Conservatoire
d   Annual Programme Monitoring – University [003b]
e   EE reports [004]
f   Undergraduate module guides [008]
g   Postgraduate module guides [009]
h   Undergraduate course and module specifications [010]
i   Postgraduate course and module specifications [011]
j   Periodic programme review and course validation resource [018]
k   Student survey results and analysis [019]
l   Student voice [019b]
m   LTA Strategy summary and action plan [023]
n   Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee minutes [023b]
o   Committee Terms of Reference [030]
p   Senior staff meeting [M01]
q   Combined full and part-time students meeting [M02]
r   Employers Meeting [M03]
s   Academic staff meeting [M04]
t   Observations of teaching and learning [OB01].

140 Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the assessment team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this assessment are outlined below:

141 Although there are testimonials from practitioners for NSCD, no third-party endorsements relating to this Core practice from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies or Institute of Apprenticeships technical end-point assessments were available as NSCD does not run programmes requiring such endorsements.

How any samples of evidence were constructed

142   The review team made an autonomous decision about which sessions to observe, selecting from the field of classes occurring during the review visit, and ensuring coverage of a broad range of courses and year groups. Statistical sampling was not applicable as the portfolio of courses was small.

Why and how the team considered this evidence

143   As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider [Annex 1] was considered by the assessment team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the assessment team to make its judgement regarding the provider's ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the assessment team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below:

144   To identify NSCD's approach to designing and delivering high-quality courses and to test the effectiveness of NSCD's approaches to designing and delivering high-quality courses, the team considered the Memorandum of Agreement, [002] the LTA Strategy summary and action plan [023] and the Periodic Review. [018]

145   To assess whether NSCD has credible, robust and evidence-based approaches to designing and delivering high-quality courses, the team reviewed the Student Handbook, [001] the Memorandum of Agreement, [002] the Annual Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Documents 2016-2021 [003; 003b] and the most recent University Periodic Programme Review and Course Validation. [018]

146   To test that all elements of the courses sampled are high quality (curriculum design, content and organisation; learning, teaching and assessment approaches) and that the teaching, learning and assessment design will enable students to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes, the team reviewed the undergraduate module guides; [008] postgraduate module guides in conjunction with NSCD Learning Teaching document; [009] the approved course documentation in the Undergraduate Course Specifications and Module Specifications; [010] Postgraduate Course Specifications and Module Specifications; [011] the Assessment Strategy Summary and Action Plan; [023] and the minutes [023b] and terms of reference [030] of the Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee.

147   To identify external examiners' views about the quality of the courses sampled, external examiner reports [004] were scrutinised.

148   To identify students' views about the quality of course design and delivery of the courses sampled, the team scrutinised internal and external surveys, module and course evaluations, [019] the institutional mirror survey for FHEQ Level 4 and 5 and samples of NSCD student evaluations for UG and PG provision. [019b Student Voice]

149   To assess how staff ensure courses are high quality, the team met with senior. [M01] academic and teaching staff. [M04]

150   To test current students' views about the quality of the courses, the team met with full and part-time students. [M02]

151   To identify employer and placement providers' views about the quality of the courses sampled, the team met with employers of graduates. [M03]

152   To assess whether delivery is high quality, live (remote and in-person) observations of teaching and learning were undertaken by team members in conjunction with assessment of the relevant lesson plan and appropriate module specifications. [OB01]The observations undertaken during the visit were of the Certificate in HE (CERTHE) Choreography; BA (Hons) Year 1 Dance (Contemporary); BA (Hons) Year 1 Ballet; BA (Hons) Year 2 Dance (Contemporary) as well as observation of a section of the MA Contemporary Dance Performance (Verve Pathway) undertaking a performance 'technical run' in the Riley Theatre. [OB01]

What the evidence shows

153   The assessment team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

154   NSCD applies the detailed frameworks detailed within the University's Codes of Practice for Quality Assurance of Taught Courses, specifically Annex 0 (Approval of the Quality Assurance Procedures for Collaborative Partnerships). [002] NSCD's teaching staff take responsibility for the design and delivery of its courses, and a University-appointed validation panel scrutinises and approves these courses in line with University regulations and the associated policies for approving courses for delivery. [002-Memorandum of Agreement]

155   NSCD's approach to course design and delivery is shaped by its strategic aims articulated within its current Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy (2022-2027). [023] These encompass an aim to lead dance training within the UK by offering an inclusive and innovative curriculum with content and delivery which provides a high-quality learning experiences for students. NSCD prioritises supporting these experiences through effective sectoral partnerships, civic engagement and promotion of best practice in the dance discipline. The strategy prioritises high-quality course design and delivery through supporting students' academic and vocational expertise, thereby creating opportunities for professional development through comprehensive sector engagement.

156   The Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy's focus is on achieving excellence by prioritising individual and personalised learning experiences, a student-centred and purposeful curriculum and using the expertise of professional staff and managers. To facilitate this, NSCD seeks to establish a research hub to facilitate knowledge exchange across staff and student groups to promote best practice, including conference papers, submissions to peer-reviewed journals, HEA membership and links with other industry bodies. [023]

157   NSCD's courses are designed through following the University's Academic Regulations and approved by the University in validation events as highlighted within the Memorandum of Agreement [002] and evidenced within validation reports. [018] For example, in the validation report for the Post Graduate Diploma in Arts Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (November 2018) the panel considered the programme in line with the University's Code of Practice for Quality Assurance. The panel, including an external adviser, considered outline documentation, the programme specification and structure, module specifications, staffing structure and CVs, physical resources and sample programme and module guides. The panel approved the programme subject to conditions and recommendations. [018] NSCD also has systems for internally scrutinising new course design and modifications to existing courses including through the Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee, as confirmed within the committee's terms of reference which provide for the oversight of all aspects of curriculum developments. [030] The team saw evidence of this oversight in the minutes of this committee, [023b] which included consideration of changes to an undergraduate course and the proposal for a new postgraduate course, with the committee identifying further actions to be followed by Heads

of Courses.

158   NSCD's annual monitoring reports including those provided to CDD [003] and those provided to the University [003b] capture reflections on course design and delivery. The team saw evidence of this in annual monitoring reports where changes to existing course content and delivery patterns and proposals for new courses are monitored on an annual basis. For example, NSCD's Annual Programme Monitoring School Report [003] provides evidence of such consideration where the course team modified the delivery pattern for the MA course to accommodate extra sessions for the research project to align with the creation of new work and practice-based applications. The report also notes plans for future courses and any further development of these. [003] Changes to programmes and follow-up changes to course specifications are also consistently reported by NSCD within the University 's annual programme monitoring reports.[003b]

159   NSCD is subject to periodic review every five years. [018] The periodic reviews of NSCD's courses are informed by the University's Code of Practice for Taught/Research Programmes Annex F. [002] The assessment team scrutinised the documentation on the periodic review of NSCD in May 2018 [018] and concluded that the review, carried out by a review panel, was robust and confirmed that the quality and standards of NSCD courses continue to be maintained. The panel was chaired by the University and included students and staff (not members of the course reviewed) and externals from outside NSCD (CDD members). The panel critically evaluated, among other things, the content, delivery and assessments of courses to ensure that they remain current and valid in developing teaching, learning and research. They also reflected student and employer priorities and used evidence from different sources such as NSCD's self-evaluation to identify good practice or areas for development where appropriate. For example, the panel recommended further consideration be given to the development of a professional placement model for NSCD's undergraduates, while also commending the currency of NSCD's courses, their inclusive culture, and the focus on research-informed, personalised, career priorities. The panel noted the merits of the staff-led research café for sharing best practice to inform, among other things, course development. The team also examined NSCD's action plan in response to the periodic review [018] which evidences timely actions taken to address advisable and desirable recommendations in its responses to the University.

160   Academic Board minutes 2016-2021 [003] provide evidence of internal scrutiny of course development, curricula, teaching, learning and assessment, and identify actions taken such as redevelopment and revision of its courses. The team saw minutes [018] of examples of NSCD's engagement with students and professionals for new programmes, which documented feedback from both groups to inform course design and development. The team is satisfied that NSCD's established opportunities and approaches for designing and delivering high-quality courses are robust, credible and evidence informed.

161   The team scrutinised NSCD'S programme specifications for its undergraduate [010] and postgraduate [011] programmes. Programme specifications set out the aims, intended learning outcomes, and the teaching, learning and assessment methods that will enable students to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes. For example, the undergraduate programme specification for the Certificate in Higher Education [010] includes information on programme aims, programme outcomes in terms of knowledge and skills (both generic and subject specific), and teaching, learning and assessment strategies. This information is further detailed within module guides [008; 009] to include module approaches to learning, teaching and assessment for undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The module information for the research project for the MA Contemporary Dance provides information covering module synopses, specific subject-related and generic learning outcomes, and the module specific approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. [008] This information is also contextualised for students within the student handbooks. [001] The approved course

documentation collectively supports high quality in the way that course content is designed and learning, teaching and assessment is approached, to support students in achieving the intended learning outcomes.

162   External examiner reports [004] comment on the high quality of NSCD's courses, for example noting in the Postgraduate Diploma Report (2016-17) how the design of the course offers talented students the opportunity to perform to their full potential. Further, the Contemporary Dance Performance report (2019-2020) highlights how staff responded to the challenges from the pandemic enabling students to access a high-quality experience and achieve programme outcomes. Similarly in the BA (Hons) Dance (Contemporary) 2019-2020 report the external examiner noted that the curriculum is designed and delivered to offer a high-quality and cohesive journey through the course for the student and commented specifically how the dance technique modules in particular used holistic approaches to further develop students. All external examiner reports [004] scrutinised by the team confirm that NSCD designs and delivers high-quality courses, because teaching, learning and assessment approaches fully focus on the achievement of programme and module outcomes and are supported by appropriate resources.

163   In both the senior staff [M01] and the academic staff [M04] meetings staff were able to articulate what 'high quality' is in the context of the design and delivery of NSCD's courses, and highlighted the highly specialised and rapidly evolving innovative and creative performing arts sector. In both meetings, staff talked about their extensive links with the sector which supports the ongoing development of course design and delivery. In both meetings, high-quality design was linked to creating and achieving professional outcomes for students, leading to progression to professional careers. Academic staff explained how the curriculum design and delivery also provide students with opportunities for reflective practice and to critique their own personal development. They explained how action research and the underpinning educational drive to embrace opportunities for students to be professionally trained and engage with conservatoires helped to ensure that the design and delivery of NSCD's courses are of high quality.

164   NSCD gathers feedback from students on their views through external surveys such as the National Student Survey, and the University-led student surveys, [019 – Student Survey results and analysis; 019b Student voice] and internally extends this to include surveys on the experiences of students studying at Levels 4 and 5 of its courses. The team saw evidence of this in the Student Survey Results and Analysis document [019] where students confirmed high satisfaction with the quality of NSCD courses and this is further triangulated within NSCD Student Union statement, [067] commenting on the high level of satisfaction and also emphasised within the student submission. [059] Student views are monitored and addressed as evidenced within the minutes of the Student Voice Forum. [019b] Student views are reported internally within annual monitoring reports [023] and externally within the University's monitoring reports, [003b] and addressed through action planning. [020 NSCD Action Plan 2021-22]

165   Students [M02] confirmed that the design and delivery of NSCD's courses are of high quality. They appreciate the breadth of high-quality opportunities within NSCD courses that promote a creative enterprise approach to self-employment to address the entrepreneurial needs of the sector and commented on the strengths of design and delivery of the courses in accommodating modules which are relevant within a dance practice context. They like the inclusion of professional placements within courses, and the opportunities to apply theory to practice. They also value NSCD's sectoral links and staff expertise which collectively help to support the design and delivery of high-quality learning experiences for them. The team concludes that students tend to regard their course as being of high quality.

166   In the meeting with employers, [M03] including placement providers, employers confirmed how the approach to work with NSCD was to adopt a student-centred approach. The employers, who provide placements, confirmed the collaborative approach that NSCD's leadership takes in engaging and supporting them. Employers noted the support of NSCD during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially the impacts of staff being furloughed. They explained how a mentor is always accessible at NSCD for placement support, and there was clear awareness of how different learning styles and preferences of a diverse student cohort needed to be taken into account within the placement context. Examples included guidance on inclusive language and access needs to minimise barriers to participation. [M03]

167   The team's observations of teaching sessions [OB01] on the different courses provided evidence of high-quality design and delivery of teaching and learning. For example, the team observed a Certificate in Higher Education Choreography session where all students were made aware of the intended learning outcomes and involved in experiential learning (a practical dance class) which was appropriately pitched with ongoing feedback undertaken through verbal exposition, visual demonstration and modelling by the tutor. The team's observation of the BA Year 2 Dance (Contemporary) session saw evidence of an approach to delivery which facilitated experiential learning and researching through practice. The teacher took an inclusive approach to address different learning styles and prior experiences. When observing the Verve Technical Performance Rehearsal for the master's programme, the team saw that the choreographer gave clear directions which encouraged students to perform in the rehearsal within a context that was structured to emulate a professional setting. This session took place in a well-equipped and professional theatre with appropriate lighting and sound, consistent with those facilities available in other dance and theatre venues. Overall, the team observed high-quality design and delivery of teaching and learning sessions which centred around consistent themes involving targeted resourcing of industry-standard facilities, careful planning and planned alignment with the learning outcomes, inclusive student interaction, and the development of technically competent reflective practitioners able to engage audiences.

Conclusions

168   As described above, the assessment team considered all of the evidence submitted [Annex 1] to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing the assessment team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other assessments and remained outcomes focused. The team's conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

169   The team concludes that NSCD designs and delivers high-quality courses. NSCD's approach to ensuring that the design and delivery of its courses are of high quality and are informed by its strategic priority to enable students to become successful academics and practitioners. The University's academic regulations inform NSCD's approach to designing and delivering high-quality courses along with contextualised regulations of the CDD group.

170   Approved course information provides information and clear guidance on what the learning outcomes are at programme and module level. It also includes details on the different assessment methods and the weighting attached to them. The information helps students to understand how the design and delivery of the programme as a whole and modules individually contribute to and align with the learning outcomes they are required to achieve. Through periodic review NSCD engages in productive partnership with CDD members to ensure that courses remain academically and vocationally current and aligned to intended learning outcomes. It credibly implements courses which are designed and delivered to further this strategic priority and are subject to robust review within NSCD's

deliberative process and those of the University.

171   External examiners commend the support that staff give to students to engage in their study and their use of flexible and inclusive approaches to ensure that students are able to achieve their intended academic and professional outcomes. External examiners confirm that NSCD's courses are of high quality because the approach to design and delivery is effective to facilitating student priorities.

172   Students tend to regard their courses as being of high quality and value NSCD's approach to designing and delivering courses which enable them to develop as both academic and technical experts. Staff are able to articulate what 'high quality' means in the context of NSCD ensuring through course design and delivery that courses are of high quality through consistent and continued collaboration with external industry practitioners and relevant action research projects. Employers explained how they work with NSCD teams to ensure that the design and delivery of placements are of a high quality by providing students with productive placement opportunities to achieve intended learning outcomes.

173   The team's observations of teaching provided evidence that teaching sessions are organised and well planned with clear shared objectives. They allow inclusive opportunities for student engagement and targeted ongoing feedback. Teachers are experts in their profession and able to contextualise design and delivery of sessions to support preferred individual and collective learning styles. Teaching is also supported by good facilities aligned to meet the requirements of the diverse forms of delivery involving theory and practice within a dance curriculum context. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.

174   The evidence scrutinised by the assessment team was based upon examination of the full range of evidence described in Annex 4. Therefore, the assessment team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

Q3 The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience

175   This Core practice expects that the provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

176   The QAA assessment team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the [Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers](#) (March 2019).

The evidence the team considered

177   The QAA team assessed the evidence presented, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The assessment team used that matrix to ensure that the evidence considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other assessments and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

a   Signed memorandum of agreement with University and Taught Degree Regulations [002]
b   Annual Programme Monitoring – Conservatoire [003]
c   Annual Programme Monitoring – University [003b]
d   Periodic Programme Review [018]
e   Student Survey Results and Analysis [019]
f   Student Voice [019b]
g   Staff handbook, related policies and procedures [021]
h   LTA Strategy summary and action plan [023]
i   Committee Terms of Reference [030]
j   NSCD Sample- recent appointments [041]
k   NSCD Student submission film [059]
l   Further Evidence Day 1 [068]
m   Further Evidence Day 2 [069]
n   Response to further evidence request post TPM [079]
o   NSCD Website (CVs of Staff) [085]
p   Senior staff meeting [M01]
q   Combined full and part-time students meeting [M02]
r   Academic staff meeting [M04]
s   Professional support staff meeting [M05]
t   Observations of teaching and learning [OB01].

178   Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the assessment team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this assessment are outlined below:

179   Although there are testimonials from practitioners for NSCD, no third-party endorsements relating to this Core practice from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies or Institute of Apprenticeships technical end-point assessments were available as NSCD does not run programmes requiring such endorsements.

How any samples of evidence were constructed

180   The team made an autonomous decision about which sessions to observe, selecting from the field of classes occurring during the review visit, and ensuring coverage of a broad range of courses and year groups. Statistical sampling was not applicable as the portfolio of courses was small.

Why and how the team considered this evidence

181   As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider [Annex 1] was considered by the assessment team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the assessment team to make its judgement regarding the provider's ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the assessment team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below:

182   To identify how NSCD recruits, appoints, inducts and supports staff the team reviewed relevant institutional policies including the Staff Handbook [021] and the Memorandum of Agreement and Academic Regulations. [002] These plans for recruitment were further triangulated with additional evidence supplied by NSCD during the visit [068; 069; 079] and with evidence of Annual Programme Monitoring [003; 003b] and Periodic Programme Review processes. [018] Responsibilities for oversight were identified in the terms of reference for key committees. [030]

183   To test that NSCD has sufficient qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality experience for all the courses offered, the LTA Strategy 2022-2027 Summary and Action Plan [023] was scrutinised in tandem with a sample of recent job descriptions, which included examples of professional support staff roles as well as academic and teaching roles. [041] To identify students' views about sufficiency, qualifications and skills of staff, the team met with full and part-time students [M02] and scrutinised the student submission, [059] internal and external student surveys and module and course evaluations. [019; 019b]

184   To assess whether staff are appropriately qualified and skilled to perform their roles effectively, the team reviewed NSCD job descriptions and person specifications for professional and academic staff [085] and cross-referenced this with outcomes from meetings with senior, [M01] academic [M04] and professional support staff. [M05]

185   To explore whether academic staff deliver a high-quality learning experience in practice, the team undertook lesson observations. [OB01]

186   To assess whether students consider that NSCD has sufficient staff and that those staff are appropriately qualified and skilled, the team met with full and part-time students. [M02]

What the evidence shows

187   The assessment team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

188   The Memorandum of Agreement [002] between NSCD and the University is explicit in confirming that NSCD is required to operate within the University's Code of Practice for Quality Assurance, and associated regulations and conventions. In this context, this requires NSCD to submit CVs of teaching staff to the University on an annual basis, for confirmation of their continued suitability. This is further strengthened within NSCD's deliberative

processes, whereby the Academic Board's terms of reference [030] confirm that it has institutional oversight of the development of academic activities and resources needed to support these. Academic Board is informed by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee (LTQAC) [030] which is responsible for operationally assuring the academic standards and quality assurance procedures are working effectively, including staffing and staff priorities. The team determined that the requirements for ongoing compliance with the University's requirements for ensuring necessary staff expertise and NSCD's own established deliberative committees provide an effective framework for ensuring that its staff recruitment and selection processes meet institutional priorities and provide for a sufficient number of appropriately qualified and skilled staff.

189   NSCD's approach to staff recruitment is published on its website, [085] which includes clear accessible information on the application and recruitment process for potential applicants. It specifies the information required from applicants relating to previous employment, together with academic and professional qualifications as appropriate. The team ascertained that the policy for the appointment of staff to roles at NSCD requires the completion of a standard application form, and a separate 'equal opportunities' monitoring form, linked through to the website. The policy confirms that no applications without these documents are considered, and that all applications are measured against the criteria in the person specification. [041]

190   Recruited staff have access to a comprehensive staff handbook [021] which provides details on key staff, the institutional mission, the courses offered, protocols on issues such as safeguarding and confidentiality and how to access support if necessary. This handbook [021] also includes information on staff induction and staff-related policies and procedures, including a formal teaching observation scheme and specific guidance for guest tutors. Inductions for new staff provide opportunities for confirming personal details, and sharing information on NSCD's staffing structure, institutional culture and facilities. Induction also ensures that terms and conditions are confirmed, and staff training priorities are identified. The team saw evidence of NSCD's approach in supporting staff to gain, for example, teaching qualifications. [Additional Evidence, 068]

191   There is evidence within NSCD's Annual Monitoring Reports [003; 003b] of consistent deliberations on the sufficiency of staffing resources as a regular agenda item leading to the identification of additional staffing needs and the appointment of new staff to support the curriculum. These include, for example, the appointment of a new lecturer in performance and contextual studies to lead the MA Dance and Creative Enterprise course; and a new appointment to provide library support within the 2016/17 Annual Programme Monitoring Report. [003] Further the 2018-19 Annual Programme Monitoring Report [003] also provides evidence of additional appointments to cover Marketing and Graphic Design developments.

192   The Staff Development Policy [021, p112] informs, and is informed by, NSCD strategic plans and covers all staff development activities including on-the-job training, mentoring, training courses and qualification-driven courses. Staff development is proactively organised and budgeted for by the leadership team and addresses the development needs of individuals and groups. This is delivered both in house and by external contributors and includes specific support for those who take on new roles. [068 Further Information] Examples include sessions on learning differences, mentoring, training courses and courses leading to qualifications.

193   As part of continuous professional development, staff are encouraged to seek external roles such as external examiners and members of validation panels, and presently serve as validation panel members, periodic review panel members and external examiners at five UK universities and two overseas bodies, in addition to equivalent work at other CDD

institutions. [NSCD's' Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) strategy 023, additional evidence requests 068; 069; 079] Guest artists and teaching staff new to NSCD without formal postgraduate teaching qualifications are supported to pursue such qualifications and/or pursue Advance HE recognition at descriptors 1-3. [021]

194   The effectiveness of staff development activities is evaluated externally by the University within periodic reviews, [018] which evaluate the extent to which programmes remain current regarding developments in disciplinary and teaching activities, learning and research. Deliberations on this are evidenced within the minutes of the 2018 Periodic Programme Review meeting [018] where the review panel found a clear ethos of supporting staff research and facilitating research-informed course development. This is also supported by the Conjoint PPR with the University of Kent [018] at course level. There is also routine review on an annual basis [Annual Programme Monitoring Reports 2016-2020 003b] where the introduction of the research café was seen as good practice. The impact of staff development and research, including the research café is evaluated within the 2018-2019 Annual Programme Monitoring Report. [003] Based on the above evidence, the team determined that NSCD's approaches for ensuing that it has sufficient and appropriately qualified staff to deliver a high-quality learning experience are credible, robust and evidence informed.

195   In addition to the permanent staff, there is a substantial level of engagement from expert guest lecturers who include alumni, representatives from other members of the Conservatoire and those from other higher education providers. [Annual Monitoring Reports 003; 003b] The University has recognised the variety and volume of the contributions these groups make to improving the student learning experiences as good practice within its Annual Monitoring Report. [003b] NSCD's staffing structure includes 20 permanent academic staff, three leadership team members, 10 managers with responsibility for facilities, two for library support, and six staff responsible for the other support facilities, one member of staff to monitor the VLE, and one employed across the CCD schools. The staffing profiles are reviewed externally by the University and also internally monitored by NSCD within annual reports. [003b] The team concluded that the current structure has been developed to address planned strategic priorities and provides for lines of accountability which are clear, including, for example, where both the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Heads are responsible for contracted lecturers, guest lecturers and accompanying staff such as musicians. Through the annual monitoring reports [003] there is evidence of consistent review of staffing structures and a proactive commitment to invest in new jobs such as curriculum leads, data management, support services, accompanist management, human resources and finance to ensure sufficiency of staff to support the high-quality learning experiences for students. The team found that NSCD's staffing roles and posts are sufficient and appropriate to support the delivery of a high-quality learning experience.

196   NSCD's staff are qualified and specialist in their field, and many of them also practice within the sector. [085 – Website – People] Staff CVs are included in detail on the NSCD website [085] and are publicly available to current and prospective students. They demonstrate a wide and multi-cultural range of professional experience and expertise among, for example, the staff with teaching responsibilities. The teaching team has two staff with relevant PhDs (and a third in progress), and a range of master's level and honours level qualifications in relevant subject areas, supported by evidence of teaching qualifications and, in some cases, HEA membership. [085] Staff CVs also reflect current practice with dance companies and other appropriate practice-based areas.

197   The team ascertained that the policy for appointment of staff to roles at NSCD requires the completion of a standard application form, and a separate 'equal opportunities' monitoring form, linked through to the website. It is confirmed in the policy that no applications without these documents are considered, and that all applications are measured

against the criteria in the person specification. [041] The team concluded that staff sampled or met have been recruited according to regulations and policies. Based on the evidence above, the team saw strong evidence of NSCD's credible and robust approaches to critically evaluating and ensuring that staff are suitably expert to maintain the high-quality learning experiences that students require.

198   The team saw evidence of a person specification for a lecturer post and confirmed a focus on academic responsibilities. The post for Head of Undergraduate Studies, on the other hand, focuses on core academic responsibilities, quality monitoring and enhancement roles, and operational management responsibilities and requires the post-holder to collaborate with teams on planning and curriculum development across courses. The professional support staff job descriptions, such as those for the Admissions Manager and the Student Support and Well-being Manager both highlighted responsibility for the effective management of support services in each area respectively. In line with the Staff Handbook, [Related Policies and Procedures section 021] the application processes for both academic and professional staff are standardised, and capture personal information and previous experience with emphasis on checking matters such as safeguarding. [Job descriptions and application narrative [041]]

199   Observations by the team of teaching and learning found evidence of effective interaction including examples of ongoing opportunities for supported independent learning. [OB01] The team found that directions given by the teachers to be clear and precise, and energised to motivate students in their performance. For example, during the observation of the BA (Hons) Dance (Contemporary) ballet classes, [OB01] the team saw evidence of experiential learning and an inclusive approach to address the diverse groups, along with active questioning to support ongoing active learning. The key themes that emerged from these observations included expert teachers, fully engaged and engaging students to become independent learners, and contributing to high-quality learning experiences for students. Based on the above evidence the team confirms that academic staff are appropriately qualified and skilled and deliver high-quality learning experiences for their students.

200   The team was able to further confirm in meetings with staff at all levels, that staff were highly-skilled and appropriately qualified. [M01; M04; M05] In meeting with academic staff, [M04] for example, the team learnt how knowledgeable staff were in their discipline, and how this knowledge was also grounded in evidence-informed professional practice. Staff talked about the importance of acknowledging diverse methods of teaching and assessment, accounting for any requirements within learning outcomes. The team determined that they were dedicated, and keen to understand student feedback, and to offer creative solutions for collective and individual student priorities. The team determined that teachers are fully committed reflective practitioners, focused on enabling students to succeed as artists and consistently maintaining the balance between academic and practice themes and that academic staff deliver a high-quality experience.

201   Senior management [M01] talked about, and academic staff confirmed, [M04] that teaching staff are encouraged to engage actively in the profession and contribute to shaping and informing the performing arts industry. The team heard from academic staff [M04] as to how teaching teams use action-research approaches as artist educators and exchange ideas and practices within the sector nationally and internationally. [M04]

202   Senior staff explained [M01] how new staff, both academic and professional support staff, were supported during induction and during their continued employment. Professional support staff [M04] spoke about how they focused on the safety and wellbeing of students, and how they had to be both reactive and proactive to address emerging priorities such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. Admissions staff talked about how they ensured that

consistency was maintained through ongoing benchmarking and development of criteria to support inclusivity. They confirmed that about 70% of NSCD students declare support needs and are supported to address their specific priorities. The team discussed with senior [M01] and professional support staff [M04] how resource determinations ensure that courses are adequately resourced and cited recent examples of the recruitment of extra human resources staff, English language support and admissions staff in line with NSCD policies and processes for staff recruitment. [M05] The team determined, based on the discussions within staff meetings, that staff are appropriately qualified and skilled, and are recruited and supported in line with NSCD policies and procedures.

203   The team's assessment of the student submission [059] found that students appreciate the staff expertise, and value the practice-based experience and currency which staff bring to their lessons. Scrutiny of internal and external surveys by the team found that students rate teaching highly, and this is confirmed with explanations of how the quality of training keeps them motivated and helps them to be creative and find their voice. [Student Survey Results and Analysis 019; 019b]

204   Students [M02] commented positively on the quality of teaching and explained how they appreciated the expertise of the teaching teams and the skilful way in which teachers ensure the necessary balance between the academic and physical elements of dance education and training. They confirmed that they are provided with the tools to be versatile artists and how access to choreographers has been further facilitated. They also explained how professional support staff were also skilled to help them, for example, within library services, admissions and learning support and facilities. The team confirmed that students tend to agree that there are sufficient staff with the appropriate qualifications, skills and current practice-based experience to deliver a high-quality learning experience and to support them with their studies.

Conclusions

205   As described above, the assessment team considered all of the evidence submitted [Annex 1] to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing the assessment team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other assessments and remained outcomes focused. The team's conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

206   The team concludes that NSCD has sufficient and appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience. NSCD operates within the University's codes of practice on quality assurance and relevant regulations and conventions. In line with these, NSCD submits staff CVs on an annual basis to the University for ongoing confirmation. This is further supported through NSCD's internal academic governance arrangements involving deliberative committees to oversee and confirm that staff are sufficiently qualified and skilled. Collectively this approach provides the necessary oversight of policies for recruitment, appointment, induction and support to ensure that NSCD's staff are appropriately qualified and skilled.

207   NSCD's approach to recruitment and appointment is evidence-informed, with clear examples of academic, professional and managerial staff being appointed to meet emerging institutional priorities. There are robust application processes in place to capture key information to ensure that applicants are appropriate for the roles in question. Induction processes are focused upon ensuring that new staff are introduced to their roles and the institutional context, and further supported once appointed. NSCD also consistently monitors whether its approaches to recruiting and inducting supporting staff are effective. The

sufficiency of appropriately qualified staff is also reviewed annually, both internally by NSCD and externally by CDD and the University and there is evidence of action being taken as necessary. NSCD 's approach ensures that its staff are recruited and appointed appropriately, and that its arrangements to have sufficient academic professional and management staff in place are robust and credible.

208   The team found that staff are appointed in line with both University requirements and NSCD policies on recruitment and appointment, and NSCD's planned processes for induction of new staff. The team confirms from scrutiny of staff CVs that both academic and professional staff are appropriately qualified and continue to have professional engagement with the sector. Based on the team's scrutiny of the above, it concludes that NSCD recruits and appoints staff, supports them and makes sure that they continue to be appropriately qualified and skilled to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

209   Team observations of teaching and learning sessions confirm that staff are appropriately qualified and highly skilled with expertise in theory, research and practice. Observed teaching sessions were interactive with individual and collective student engagement, and inclusive in using different teaching and learning approaches to meet diverse learning preferences.

210   Students met by the team are very positive about the expertise of the teaching staff and tend to agree that there are sufficient appropriately skilled and qualified staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience. Students confirmed staff remained current in terms of their continuing professional engagement with the sector. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that this Core practice is met.

211   The evidence scrutinised by the assessment team was based upon examination of the full range of evidence described in Annex 4. Therefore, the assessment team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

Q4 The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience

212   This Core practice expects that the provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

213   The QAA assessment team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the [Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers](#) (March 2019).

The evidence the team considered

214   The QAA team assessed the evidence presented, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The assessment team used that matrix to ensure that the evidence considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other assessments and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

a   Signed Memorandum of agreement with the University of Kent [002]
b   Annual Programme Monitoring and Review – Conservatoire [003]
c   Statement in relation to physical and learning resources [017]
d   NSCD Action Plan 2021/22 [020]
e   Staff Handbook, related HR policies and procedures [021]
f   Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee minutes [023b]
g   Academic Board minutes [023c]
h   NSCD Board and Committee Structure Diagram [026]
i   Terms of Reference of committees [030]
j   NSCD Sample recent appointment - Job Description [041]
k   Student submission endorsement letter [057]
l   NSCD Student submission SU statement [058]
m   NSCD Student submission film [059]
n   Further Evidence Day 1 [068]
o   Further Evidence Day 2 [069]
p   Tour of resources [077]
q   VLE Demonstration [078]
r   NSCD Strategic plan 2017-2022 [080]
s   NSCD Website [085]
t   Senior staff meeting [M01]
u   Combined full and part-time students meeting [M02]
v   Professional support staff meeting [M05].

215   Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the assessment team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this assessment are outlined below:

216   Although there are testimonials from practitioners for NSCD, no third-party endorsements relating to this Core practice from professional, statutory and regulatory

bodies or Institute of Apprenticeships technical end-point assessments were available as NSCD does not run programmes requiring such endorsements.

How any samples of evidence were constructed

217　　No specific samples were tested for this Core practice.

Why and how the team considered this evidence

218　　As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider [Annex 1] was considered by the assessment team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the assessment team to make its judgement regarding the provider's ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the assessment team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below:

219　　To identify how NSCD's strategies and plans for facilities, learning resources and student support services contribute to delivering a high-quality academic experience, the review team considered the Memorandum of Agreement with the University, [002] the annual monitoring reports, [003] the additional evidence provided during both days of the visit, [068; 069] and reviewed the physical resources. [077]

220　　To assess whether NSCD has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for ensuring that it has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience, the team reviewed and discussed the current resourcing strategy and future plans with senior staff, [M01] assessing also the further evidence provided during the visit, [069] and NSCD Strategic Plan. [080]

221　　To identify NSCD's facilities, learning resources and student support services the team examined the physical and learning resources statement, [017] the action plans [020] and the Staff Handbook, [021] as well as additional evidence provided during the visit. [068] This was triangulated against evidence of meeting minutes [023b; 023c] and associated committee structures [026] and terms of reference. [030]

222　　To determine whether the roles are consistent with the delivery of a high-quality learning experience, the team examined job descriptions and person specifications for relevant staff. [041]

223　　To assess staff and students' views about facilities, learning resources and support services, the team considered the student submission [059] and the supporting statements, [057; 058] met with staff [M01; M05] and students, [M02] and discussed and reviewed the Strategic Plans [080] and NSCD website. [085]

224　　To test that the facilities, resources or services under assessment deliver a high-quality academic experience, the team reviewed specialist facilities, learning resources, and support services covering health and wellbeing (on site nutrition, injury and physical progress). [077 Notes of Facilities Tour; 078 VLE demonstration]

What the evidence shows

225　　The assessment team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

226　　Under the Memorandum of Agreement with the University, [002] NSCD has

responsibility for ensuring that it operates within the University's Code of Practice for Quality Assurance and associated regulations and conventions, for example, ensuring that students on validated courses have a learning experience that provides them with the staff support and appropriate learning resources to experience high-quality learning. To this end, one of NSCD's current strategic priorities [Strategic Plan 080] is to ensure that all resources are developed and utilised to fully support students and their ambitions. These strategic priorities include a focus on maintaining and further developing estate, facilities, IT and staff training in line with plans to further strengthen NSCD's higher education profile. The plans for further development during the next five years [080] prioritise the review, improvement and modernisation of existing facilities to include additional social spaces for students and staff and further studio and performance space in the campus. NSCD also plans to increase academic and professional support staff to address the planned growth in its higher education curriculum.

227   NSCD has a defined Board and committee structure in place [Committee Structure 026] which provides oversight of the provision and maintenance of learning resources, facilities, and student support services. An Academic and Estates Resources Committee (AERC) has been established as a subcommittee of the Finance and Resources Committee, which reports directly to the Board of Governors. The AERC is also accountable to the Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee (LTQAC), which reports to the Academic Board, and again to the Governors. Responsibilities are underpinned by Terms of Reference [030] and provide for the Academic Board to 'address the academic activities…and the resources needed to support them', and this is operationalised at LTQAC [030] which has the responsibility of advising the Academic Board by providing a formal feedback mechanism for the development of student support services. Minutes of LTQAC [023b, Agenda item 5] for July 2021 evidence the receipt, discussion and actioning of student survey comments relating to resources, and at Agenda item 6 the discussion of NSCD action plan which includes resource issues. The equivalent minutes of the Academic Board [023c] clearly demonstrate receipt and discussion of LTQAC minutes (April 2021 - item 4), along with separate papers (for example April 2021 - item 7) covering items relating to learning facilities and resources. [023c]

228   Underpinning this deliberative committee structure, the staffing structure for NSCD [021 – Staff handbook, p10] provides a contextualised and hierarchical structure demonstrating clarity of responsibility and accountability in this key respect. Reporting directly to the CEO and Principal, the Director of Finance and Resources, who is a member of the Leadership Team, line manages all professional support staff. [021] Departmentally, there are six heads reporting directly to them, whose job roles cover the Events and Front of House team; Librarian; Financial Control; Student Finance; Information Systems and Facilities. In total, and including the Director of Finance and Resources, there are 15 staff involved with professional support services, along with external contractors in areas such as cleaning and security services.

229   Senior staff [M01] explained that NSCD has both a reactive and proactive approach to ensuring that it has the necessary resources to support the delivery, maintenance and development of a high-quality learning experience. For example, in response to the emerging challenges of COVID-19, it reacted by appointing a Student Support Manager to work collaboratively with the academic teams and integrate support services for students. It is strategically proactive in its approach in creating new roles to improve the learning experiences for students. Examples of this include the appointment of the Body Work Supervisor to integrate with the teaching teams and inform curriculum development and assessment plans. [069 QSR Evidence Day 2] Further examples include the appointment of two 0.5 full-time equivalent posts, one in learner support and the other to assist in English language support. [069] The team determined that NSCD has a reflective approach to improving student support services through effective management and insightful forward

thinking to address its emerging and planned priorities.

230   The team found that the student submissions [057; 058; 059] emphasise that students value the resources made available to them for their courses and explain how they benefit from the different specifically-equipped dance theatres and social facilities. They also talked about the strong and timely support they received including that for English language, career opportunities and specific personal needs.

231   Student views are captured externally through the NSS and internally through the University systems at course and module level and reported to both the University and NSCD deliberative committees. For example, NSCD in-house survey of students at Levels 4 and 5 shows consistently over the past three academic years that satisfaction with the library lies between 96% and 100%; for IT Services between 94% and 98% and for specialist facilities between 93% and 95%. These results are reported annually and discussed at Academic Board. [023c]

232   Annual reports reflect students' views on how well NSCD supported their online learning, and specifically commented on the value of the support in meeting individual priorities, describing it as 'amazing and really appreciated'. [003 – Annual Monitoring] The team determined from scrutiny of evidence within the student submission [059] and the other feedback mechanisms [Annual monitoring 003] that students are positive about the support they receive and that students agree that both physical resources and staff support are sufficient and appropriate and facilitate a high-quality academic experience.

233   The facilities occupied by NSCD are based in a former synagogue and mansion house in the Chapeltown area of Leeds, which was extensively redeveloped in the decade following its acquisition in 1997. In 2016, an external review was undertaken, and that has resulted in an extensive programme of redevelopment and refurbishment (at a cost of some £1.2m to date) [017 – Learning Resources] including a specific student support suite. [068 – QSR Further Evidence – Day 1] Facilities currently available to students include purpose-designed teaching spaces tailored specifically for the needs of the curriculum, including the Riley Theatre, which whilst an active teaching space, also serves as a professional theatre with a capacity of 250. These are augmented by lecture, seminar and tutorial provision, and a dedicated wellbeing suite containing both a counselling space and treatment facilities. A further wellbeing facility ('Bodywork') combines gym equipment for student use in both individual and small group settings with rehabilitation facilities including those provided by external physiotherapists. [017]

234   Learning resources to support students are provided by both computer-based systems and by the library, and there are deliberate synergies between the two. The library has a stock of over 16,000 items, and access to a range of reference and research material online. Opening hours are designed to be student-friendly, and include evenings and weekends, and the online facility is available 24/7, which proved to be a significant strength during the COVID-19 pandemic. The student IT support is primarily provided via the VLE, which incorporates individual and group working, but also through the provision of specific software for media and design work. Resources also extend to an on-site café run by an in-house chef, with a menu tailored to dance training needs. [017-Learning Resources Statement]

235   The facilities available to support students are kept under constant review, and the Action Plan for 2021/22 [020] provides for further consideration of physical support and packages to facilitate injured dancers' access to diagnostic facilities such as MRI scans and X-Rays. The team was made aware of further plans to improve students' changing facilities, and of a more strategic consideration, in conjunction with the Local Authority, around expansion into another building close to the current site. [068 (Further evidence - Day 1)].

The team is therefore of the view that NSCD strategies and approaches for facilities, learning resources and student support services are credible, realistic and demonstrably linked to the delivery of successful academic and professional outcomes for students.

236   The team examined two specific posts recently appointed to, appraising both the job descriptions and the associated person specifications: one for an admissions manager, and one for a student and well-being manager. [041] In respect of the latter, of direct relevance to student support, the job description provides for a line accountability to the Head of Academic Registry, and a series of working relationship requirements across the student support team. The main purpose is described as being to 'ensure the highest standard of support' is available to 'complement and support' students in their studies, and the individual duties and responsibilities are commensurate with that. [041] These include the identification and solution of student well-being needs, managing and coordinating student support work, including well-being and counselling services, and the provision of information and support to students. The postholder is to lead on safeguarding issues, and manage the personal support plans system. [041] To discharge these roles in the delivery of a high-quality learning experience, the person specification requires both a relevant first degree and an accredited counselling or psychotherapy qualification, demonstrable professional expertise in a similar role, and substantial experience of working in student support roles, including previous safeguarding knowledge, skills, experience and qualifications. [041] The team noted equivalent rigour and robustness in the other job descriptions and person specifications reviewed and that the roles are consistent with the delivery of a high-quality learning experience.

237   Senior staff [M01] spoke about how they discharge their responsibilities to ensure that resources are available before new courses start. Professional support staff [M05] also confirmed this and further explained how extra resources are made available when student numbers increase in the form of extra equipment or staff, and cited NSCD's new posts in English and admissions as examples.

238   Professional support staff [M05] also highlighted the ongoing programme of staff training - for example, learning how to run disciplinary panels, training in complaints and appeals, developments as members of the Leeds School of Health and Welfare Board and being part of general higher education staff development sessions. They confirmed that they had regular meetings as professional support teams and are collaborative in their approach. They discussed how they evaluate and report on student performance in terms of their retention and achievement, taking into account any protective characteristics as necessary. Senior staff [M01] also emphasised NSCD's vision to commit fully to widening participation and to invest financially to address student priorities. Based on the discussions in meetings with staff the team determined that staff fully understand their roles and are qualified and skilled to successfully carry out their responsibilities.

239   Students [M02] confirmed that during the COVID pandemic staff did their best to keep them engaged and supported. The students commented on how they benefited from the holistic support, the learning support and the targeted English language support in particular. In terms of physical resources, students found that the size of the studios and access to lighting in design studios and the availability of camera and recording equipment from the library was helpful. They talked positively about the support they receive from the library and the benefits of the inter-library loan facility. They said they found the support from student services useful in guiding them, and valued the body work support for injury prevention, development and maintenance. The team concluded that the students are positive about the physical resources and the collective and individual support which helps them to engage fully in their learning experience to facilitate a high-quality academic experience.

240   During the tour [077] the team saw that dance studios are fully equipped to include sprung flooring, pianos, video and audio playback, and high-quality online video facilities. The team visited the on-site library and found that it is well stocked with the relevant books and journals for NSCD courses. The team noted that the library facilitated an orientation exercise to support students with their studies and in accessing support materials for students and staff. The team visited the Body Injury clinic and facility for students to cool down and rest, and the canteen and gym. The team also visited the Riley Theatre which was fully equipped for professional training. [077]

241   The team also accessed the VLE [078] and found it to be comprehensive as it provided access to all students to the detailed information including student support, course administration, library facilities and course and module handbooks. The team determined from the tour of specialist and general accommodation facilities and services and the examination of the virtual learning environment available to students that the facilities and learning resources provide a high-quality academic experience.

Conclusions

242   As described above, the assessment team considered all of the evidence submitted [Annex 1] to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing the assessment team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other assessments and remained outcomes focused. The team's conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

243   NSCD has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience. Staff at NSCD have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities for facilities and resources. This is formalised by both job descriptions and person specifications for individual roles, and by terms of reference for relevant sections of the committee structure. The team's own observations led them to conclude that NSCD has highly specialised facilities and learning resources, and that developments, such as the investment in injury rehabilitation facilities, serve to ensure a high-quality academic experience. NSCD's strategic plans for facilities, learning resources and student support services are credible, realistic and demonstrably linked to the delivery of successful academic and professional outcomes for students. Students enthusiastically appreciate the high quality and accessibility of specialist facilities, learning resources and student support services, and acknowledge that they amount to a high-quality academic environment. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.

244   The evidence scrutinised by the assessment team was based upon examination of the full range of evidence described in Annex 4. Therefore, the assessment team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

Q5 The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience

245 This Core practice expects that the provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.

246 The QAA assessment team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers (March 2019).

The evidence the team considered

247 The QAA team assessed the evidence presented, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The assessment team used that matrix to ensure that the evidence considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other assessments and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

a   Annual Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Documents – University [003b]
b   Student survey results and analysis 2016-2020 [019]
c   Student Voice (Student Voice Forum Terms of Reference, Student Representative Handbook, Student Voice Forum minutes 2016-2020, Action Sheets 2017-2021) [019b]
d   Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee minutes [023b]
e   Academic Board minutes [023c]
f   Committee Terms of Reference (Academic Board and LTQAC) [030]
g   Student Submission Endorsement Letter [057]
h   Student Submission from NSCD Students' Union [058]
i   Student submission film [059]
j   VLE Tour [078]
k   Strategic Plan [080]
l   Attendance & Student Engagement policy [087]
m   Student Charter [091]
n   Senior staff meeting [M01]
o   Combined full and part-time students meeting [M02]
p   Academic staff meeting [M04]
q   Professional support staff meeting [M05]
r   Provider submission [PS].

How any samples of evidence were constructed

248 No samples of evidence were constructed in relation to student engagement.

Why and how the team considered this evidence

249 As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider [Annex 1] was considered by the assessment team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the assessment team to make its judgement regarding the provider's ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the

assessment team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below:

250   To identify how NSCD actively engages students in the quality of their educational experience, the team considered the Strategic Plan, [080] Student Charter [091] and information in the provider submission. [PS]

251   To assess whether NSCD has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for engaging students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience, NSCD's Attendance and Student Engagement Policy was considered. [087]

252   To illustrate the impact of NSCD's approach in changing or improving provision as a result of student engagement, the team scrutinised the Annual Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Documents, [003b] Student Survey Results and Analysis, [019] Student Voice, [019b] Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee minutes [023b] and Academic Board minutes [023c] and their associated terms of reference. [030] The team considered the VLE [078] and outcomes of meetings with senior, [M01] academic [M04] and professional support staff. [M05]

253   To identify students' views about their engagement in the quality of their educational experience, the team considered the student submissions, [057, 058, 059] Annual Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Documents, [003b] Student Survey Results and Analysis, [019] and met with full and part-time students. [M02]

What the evidence shows

254   The assessment team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

255   NSCD sets out in both the Strategic Plan [080] and Student Charter [091] that its commitment to student engagement is a key policy objective for the next five years. One tangible reflection of this is the strengthening of the partnership with the Students' Union, including the appointment of a dedicated Students' Union Manager in 2020, and the election of the first Students' Union president in 2021. [PS; M02] NSCD further plans to extend this strategic commitment [080] to working with the Students' Union to ensure that student representation is embedded at every level of the governance arrangements. [PS; M02]

256   NSCD actively engages students through a combination of complementary systems and processes, set out in the Student Engagement Policy. [087] This is primarily through the student representative system whereby two students from each course are elected to sit on the Student Voice Forum, [019b] which is the principal body of communication for collective student engagement. Student Voice Forum meetings are held termly and consider the on-going quality of the student learning experience, student engagement and student views, as well as the outcome of student surveys and evaluations. [019b] Representatives from Students' Union societies, including LGBTQ+ and the POGM (People of the Global Majority) Society also sit on the Student Voice Forum. The Student Voice Forum Terms of Reference [019b] show that the Forum is co-chaired by the Students' Union President and Students' Union Manager, and that its membership includes staff from all areas of NSCD including senior, academic, academic services, marketing, facilities and IT. NSCD actively considers and actions feedback from the Student Voice Forum, which feeds into decision-making at the Academic and Estates Resource Committee, and onwards to Academic Board. [023c]

257   Student representatives are informed of their role and responsibilities through the Student Representative Handbook [19b] which sets out what their position entails. The handbook provides guidance about closing the feedback loop with information being

disseminated through student representatives to students through year group meetings. This information is also accessible on NSCD's VLE, so all students are made aware of the impacts of the feedback they have provided, and the team confirmed this as part of their review of the VLE. [078] The information includes Student Voice Forum minutes and action plans, [019b] and the team's analysis of the actions confirmed some fifty instances for 2020-21 of NSCD changing and improving students' learning experience as a result of student engagement, ranging from class breaks and online class provision through to quality of learning resource videos, and environmental issues. Because of this breadth and depth of interaction, students confirmed that they felt informed of NSCD's responses to the feedback received, in a timely and clear fashion. [M02]

258   The team also noted that the Academic Board, NSCD's highest academic governance committee, included three student representatives (Student Member, Students' Union President, and Student Diversity Representative); this was confirmed by the Terms of Reference, [030] Academic Board minutes, [023c] and by full and part-time students. [M02]The same individuals also represent the student voice on the Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee (LTQAC) as full members, supplemented by student representatives as non-voting attendees. [030]

259   NSCD continually reviews its collective engagement of students, and this is evidenced within the Terms of Reference of the Student Voice Forum. [019b] The team confirmed that the recently appointed Students' Union President and Students' Union Manager have roles which encompass the student voice and contribute to the longer term academic representation strategy. [058– NSCD Student Submission, 059 SU Statement] In the meeting with students, [M02] attendees confirmed they were aware of these arrangements, and understood their operation. The Student Submission Endorsement Letter [057] confirms that student focus groups are convened prior to programme revalidation documents being submitted to NSCD's quality assurance committees, and this was confirmed by evidencing the provision of feedback on course design, module learning outcomes, and assessment in the Student Voice documentation. [019b]

260   NSCD engages with students individually through formal student surveys, such as the University run Student Survey [019] accompanying an NSCD internal student experience survey for students not eligible to complete the NSS. [019] The results of these surveys are analysed and used by NSCD to address areas for development; a summary of these results, and future actions arising is presented and discussed at the Academic Board. [023c] The resultant action plans have had a positive impact on NSCD's priority areas (teaching, assessment, management and student voice) as evidenced by subsequent surveys. [019] This was validated in the students' meeting [M02] where students shared with the team examples of where informal feedback had been actioned upon swiftly, including a move to 90-minute classes in light of student requests, and the exploration of easier access to diagnostic facilities and X-rays for injured dancers.

261   NSCD also engages students individually through regular module evaluations and informal feedback. Senior [M01] and professional services staff [M05] highlighted that NSCD values informal feedback, and actions it wherever possible. Students [M02] also noted that NSCD 'closed the feedback loop' for informal feedback, with many academic staff [M04] informing students of the steps they were taking and with whom they were communicating within NSCD to action the informally received feedback. Overall, students report that NSCD engages them in the quality of their learning experience.

262   The team noted that NSCD formally considered student feedback as this was regularly assessed, analysed, and actioned within NSCD's Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee. The minutes of the committee [023b] demonstrated that a snapshot of student feedback was presented in the July 2021 meeting, and the October 2021 meeting

received an in-depth analysis of Student Experience Surveys and Module Evaluations. [019] These evaluations feed into the Annual Programme Monitoring Reports to the University. [003b] The minutes of the committee [023b] record an aspiration to ensure that surveys/evaluations receive a high response rate so that as many students as possible can voice their opinions. The team therefore concludes that NSCD has a clear and effective approach which is robust and credible to engaging students individually and collectively in the quality of their educational experience.

Conclusions

263   As described above, the assessment team considered all the evidence submitted [Annex 1] to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing the assessment team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other assessments and remained outcomes focused. The team's conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

264   NSCD actively engages students, individually and collectively in the quality of their educational experience and has a clear and effective approach to such engagement. Students interviewed by the team were able to cite examples of improvements made consequent upon their feedback, and how NSCD positively acted on suggestions made. These discussions also encompassed larger scale changes to enhance student engagement, including the appointment of the Students' Union President, and the allocation of places to students on the Academic Board and LTQAC.

265   NSCD's approach to the collective engagement of students was supported by its governance structures, primarily the Student Voice Forum which provides student-led discourse between student representatives, academic staff, and the professional services in relation to the quality of students' educational experience. There is student representation on Academic Board and the Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee. The team found that the methods used to individually engage students were appropriate, including through the use of informal feedback, module evaluations and student surveys. NSCD's approach to the collective engagement of students was supported by its governance structures, primarily the Student Voice Forum, which provides student-led discourse between student representatives, academic staff, and the professional services in relation to the quality of students' educational experience. Strategically, NSCD considers individual and collective feedback at its Academic Board, and Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee, and effectively communicates with students on the outcomes of their feedback through a range of routes. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.

266   The evidence scrutinised by the assessment team was based upon examination of the full range of evidence described in Annex 4. Therefore, the assessment team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

Q6 The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students

267   This Core practice expects that the provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.

268   The QAA assessment team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers (March 2019).

The evidence the team considered

269   The QAA team assessed the evidence presented, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The assessment team used that matrix to ensure that the evidence considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other assessments and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

a   Student Handbook [001]
b   Signed Memorandum of Agreement with the University and University Taught Degree Regulations [002]
c   Consumer Law Self-Assessment and Consumer Law Handbook [006]
d   Student Survey Results and Analysis 2016-2020 [019]
e   Student Voice [019b]
f   NSCD Draft Student Complaints Policy and Procedure [033]
g   Log of Student Complaints [034]
h   Complaint audit trail [035]
i   Evidence of formal consideration of the outcomes of complaints and appeals at strategic level [036]
j   BA1 Student Complaint Closure Letter [056]
k   Website (Students complaints section) [085]
l   Guide to Student Complaints [088]
m   Annex 13 of the University's Credit Framework for Taught Courses[089]
n   Senior staff meeting [M01]
o   Combined full and part-time meeting with students [M02]
p   Professional support staff meeting [M05].

How any samples of evidence were constructed

270   Only one formal complaint had been received in the past three years, and this was tested by the team.

271   There have been no academic appeals over the past three years.

Why and how the team considered this evidence

272   As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider [Annex 1] was considered by the assessment team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the assessment team to make

its judgement regarding the provider's ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the assessment team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below:

273   To identify NSCD's processes for handling complaints and appeals, and to confirm that these processes are fair and transparent, the team considered the Guide to Student Complaints, [088] the Student Handbook, [001] Signed Memorandum of Agreement with the University Taught Degree Regulations, [002] exemplified by Annex 13 of the University's Credit Framework for Taught Courses [089] and NSCD Draft Student Complaints Policy and Procedure. [033]

274   To assess whether NSCD has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for developing and operating fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students, the team considered the Consumer Law Self-Assessment and Consumer Law Handbook, [006] NSCD Draft Student Complaints Policy and Procedure, [033] the meeting with senior staff [M01], meeting with full and part-time students, [M02] and professional support staff meeting. [M05]

275   To assess whether information for potential and actual complainants and appellants is clear and accessible, the team considered the NSCD website, [085], Guide to Student Complaints, [088] Student Handbook, [001] Student survey results and analysis 2016-2020, [019] Student Voice [019b] and a meeting with full and part-time students. [M02]

276   To identify levels of complaints and appeals overall and by course or type, which may identify issues for further investigation under other Core practices, the team considered Log of Student Complaints, [034] Complaint and appeal audit trail, [035] Evidence of formal consideration of the outcomes of complaints and appeals at strategic level, [036] and the BA1 Student Complaint Closure Letter. [056]

277   To identify students' views about the clarity and accessibility of NSCD's complaints and appeals procedures, the team considered the student survey results and analysis 2016-2020, [019] Student Voice, [019b] and met with full and part-time students. [M02]

278   To test that complaints and appeals sampled were dealt with in a fair, transparent and timely manner, the team considered the Log of Student Complaints, [034] Complaint and appeal audit trail, [035] and the BA1 Student Complaint Closure Letter. [056]

What the evidence shows

279   The assessment team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

280   The Signed Memorandum of Agreement with the University Taught Degree Regulations [002] confirms that complaints are the responsibility of NSCD, and that academic appeals are the responsibility of the University with academic appeals being submitted directly by students to the University.

281   The University handles academic appeals according to the procedures set out in Annex 13 of the University's Credit Framework for Taught Courses [089] (an annex of the University Taught Degree Regulations [002]) and these procedures are contextualised for NSCD students in the Student Handbook. [001] The Student Handbook [001] includes detailed information on the grounds for appeals, the appellant's rights, and the process to follow with the University. Students have a clear set of timelines to follow, both for making appeals (within 15 working days of examination boards), and for receiving responses (five

working days for a written response to an informal complaint; 10 days for a Stage 1 hearing to be arranged; and five days for a written response after a Stage 1 hearing). Additionally, Annex 13 of the University's Credit Framework for Taught Courses [089] provides examples of issues which could be raised directly with NSCD for informal resolution. NSCD reported that no appeals have been received to date. [M01; M05] Full and part-time students [M02] confirmed that students knew the distinction between an academic appeal and complaint, and that they knew how to access the appeals policies and procedures if needed. Students commented that thus far none of them had considered submitting an academic appeal due to the transparency of the assessment processes. As such, and because the students did not raise any concerns about the procedures, the team concludes that the approach to handling academic appeals is accessible, fair and transparent, and likely to deliver timely outcomes.

282   NSCD operates using the CDD complaints procedure and has undertaken a formal review of this procedure against relevant aspects of Consumer Law. [006] Subsequently, NSCD has developed its own draft Student Complaints Policy and Procedure [033] which it will adopt when its relationship with CDD comes to an end. NSCD's Draft Student Complaints Policy and Procedure [033] sets out NSCD's plans for handling complaints relating to non-academic issues and explains the purpose and scope of the policy. NSCD reported that its draft policy [033] is similar to the CDD policy with the exception that NSCD's policy also includes a section on collective complaints submitted by a group of students. The policy explains the three-stage process, the expected timeline for each stage and likely resolution. Stage 1 is an informal complaint with informal resolution which is dealt with by staff within the relevant academic/professional services area. The policy sets out that NSCD values early and informal resolution, and Stage 1 complaints are logged for reference, and those complaints requiring actions are monitored by the Head of Academic Registry and Quality Assurance. Stage 2 complaints are those which require a formal resolution or investigation and Stage 3 is an appeal. At Stage 3 the case is reviewed by NSCD's Principal and an external panel member which is the final stage within NSCD. Where students are dissatisfied with the decision and have exhausted the internal complaints procedure, the policy states that they have a right of appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). [033]

283   The team considers NSCD's Draft Student Complaints Policy and Procedure, which is yet to be fully implemented, [033] likely to be fair and transparent as the policy sets complainants' expectations regarding timescales, complaint resolution outcomes and which member of staff would be best to contact in relation to the complaint stage. Senior staff at NSCD [M01] and professional support staff [M05] confirmed they have received appropriate training to handle complaints and administer the procedure. This assists with the accessibility and transparency of the procedure as students who met the team [M02] voiced that they were well guided and supported through the group complaints procedure by the Head of Academic Registry and Quality Assurance. NSCD policy has an arrangement with another school within the Conservatoire which allows an external member to sit on an NSCD complaints appeals panel which would prevent conflicts of interest at the appeals stage. [033] This arrangement is planned to continue after NSCD leaves the Conservatoire in September 2022.The team considers this to contribute to the fairness of the complaints procedure and considered that the clarity of the guidance regarding which member of staff would be best for students to contact contributes to the transparency of the complaints procedure. The team considers that NSCD's approaches to developing a fair, transparent and accessible complaints procedure to replace that of CDD are robust and credible.

284   The CDD Guide to Student Complaints [088] explains the type of issues that would and would not be considered under the procedure. The CDD Guide to Student Complaints [088] is available on NSCD's website [085] and is written in simple language with flowcharts clearly setting out the complaints procedure. This guide also aids transparency of the

Student Complaints Policy and Procedure [033] as it instructs students on the process for notifying them of any changes to the document, and the source of the definitive version. Key terms are also defined within the Student Handbook [001 and the Guide to Student Complaints. [088] Full and part-time students [M02] confirmed that they know how to access the Guide to Student Complaints and the complaints policies and procedures, which they confirmed explains the procedures in simple language. Reference to the student survey outcomes in relation to complaints, [019; 019b] confirmed in the meeting with students [M02] satisfaction with the clarity and accessibility of the complaints process. As such, the team considered the complaints procedure to be accessible and concluded that students do not raise any serious concerns about the fairness, transparency and accessibility of the procedures, or their application, and that both the current CDD procedure and NSCD's aligned procedures for handling complaints are definitive, fair and transparent, and are likely to deliver timely outcomes.

285   The team reviewed NSCD's complaint log [034] for the past three years and noted that it had received its first formal complaint immediately before the visit. The assessment team reviewed the audit trail [035] and complaint closure letter [056] to test whether the procedure had been followed in this recent case. The team considered the complaints process to be fair as NSCD sought advice from the CDD to ensure that the procedure was followed correctly as it was a group complaint. Additionally, NSCD communicated with students to seek clarification to ensure that they fully understood the complaint. [035] The team considered the complaints process to be transparent as students were informed about their case during the investigation stages, including intermediary steps. The complaint closure letter [056] reiterated the steps that were taken to review the complaint and clearly articulated the outcome and closure of the complaint. Overall, the team was satisfied that the handling of the complaint followed procedures, and no deviations from this were noted.

286   The team found evidence that complaints are also considered at an operational and strategic level [036] to improve the provision for future students. Operationally, the leadership team convenes when a complaint is received to assess the immediate operational and strategic implications of a complaint. Once the complaint has been closed/resolved, a short report detailing the complaint is presented to NSCD's Academic Board for consideration. [036 – Evidence of formal outcome of complaints]

Conclusions

287   As described above, the assessment team considered all of the evidence submitted [Annex 1] to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing the assessment team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other assessments and remained outcomes focused. The team's conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

288   NSCD has definitive, fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students, and which deliver or have the potential to deliver timely outcomes. Until such time as the relationship between NSCD and CDD comes to an end the definitive procedure for complaints is that of CDD. NSCD's procedures for handling complaints in the form of its draft Students Complaints Policy and Procedure is fair, transparent and likely to deliver timely outcomes. The Memorandum of Agreement with the University confirms that academic appeals are the responsibility of the University. Relevant policies and procedures regarding complaints are accessible through the Student Handbook and NSCD's website, and additionally students are guided through the complaints procedure by the Head of Academic Registry and Quality Assurance. Students met by the team confirmed their understanding of the operation of both complaints and appeals, and raised

no concerns about the fairness, transparency or accessibility of the procedures, or their application. The University's policies for handling appeals clearly explain situations that can or cannot be the subject of appeals, the process that should be followed, along with the deadline for each step. The University's policies and regulations are contextualised for NSCD's students in the Student Handbook. The formal complaint reviewed by the team was dealt with wholly in accordance with NSCD's procedures, and there were no deviations or omissions from the process. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.

289   The evidence scrutinised by the assessment team was based upon examination of the full range of evidence described in Annex 4. Therefore, the assessment team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

Q8 Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them

290 This Core practice expects that where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.

291 The QAA assessment team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers (March 2019).

The evidence the team considered

292 The QAA team assessed the evidence presented, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The assessment team used that matrix to ensure that the evidence considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other assessments and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

a   Signed memorandum of agreement with University and Taught Degree Regulations [002]
b   Annual Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Documents 2016-2021 Conservatoire [003]
c   Annual Programme Monitoring – University [003b]
d   EE reports [004]
e   Working with others in partnership [005]
f   Third party endorsements [005b]
g   Periodic programme review and course validation resource [018]
h   Student survey results and analysis [019]
i   Staff handbook, related policies and procedures [021]
j   Board of Examiners minutes [023d]
k   NSCD Board and Committee Structure Diagram [026]
l   Terms of Reference [030]
m   Student submission endorsement letter [057]
n   NSCD Student submission SU statement [058]
o   NSCD Student submission film [059]
p   QSR Further Evidence Visit Day 1 [068]
q   Senior staff meeting [M01]
r   Combined full and part-time students meeting [M02]
s   Meeting with employers [M03]
t   Academic staff meeting [M04].

293 Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the assessment team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this assessment are outlined below:

294 Although there are testimonials from practitioners for NSCD, no third-party

endorsements relating to this Core practice from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies or Institute of Apprenticeships technical end-point assessments were available as NSCD does not run programmes requiring such endorsements.

How any samples of evidence were constructed

295   The team examined all available external examiner reports in its review of this Core Practice.

Why and how the team considered this evidence

296   As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider [Annex 1] was considered by the assessment team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the assessment team to make its judgement regarding the provider's ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the assessment team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below:

297   To assess how NSCD ensures courses are high quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them, the team assessed the requirements of the University in the form of the Memorandum of Agreement. [002]

298   To assess whether NSCD has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for ensuring a high-quality academic experience in partnership work, the team reviewed the regulatory requirements and policies of the University [002] and the underpinning NSCD documentation including the Staff Handbook, [021] the Committee Structure Diagram [026] and the Terms of Reference for Committees, [030] along with NSCD policy on working in partnership with others. [005] This was triangulated against evidence in the annual monitoring reports to the University [003b] and the CDD, [003] and the outcomes of the University's periodic review and course validation process. [018]

299   To assess students' views about the quality of courses delivered in partnership, the team considered the student surveys and their outcomes, [019] the student submission [059] and the supporting statements, [057; 058] and met with full and part-time students. [M02]

300   To test the basis for the maintenance of high quality within specific partnerships, and that those arrangements are in line with NSCD's regulations or policies, the team met with staff [M01] and placement providers, [M03] and examined documentation for alignment with partnership agreements. [002; 003b; 005]

301   To test that external examiners [004] consider courses delivered in partnership to be of high quality, thus confirming the effectiveness of the underpinning arrangements, the team reviewed the reports from external examiners and the minutes of the Examination Boards. [023d]

302   To assess how other organisations regard the quality of courses delivered in partnership the team considered additional documentation provided by NSCD including meetings with staff and placement providers. [003; 005b; 068; M03]

303   To test whether staff understand and discharge effectively their responsibilities to the awarding body, the team met with senior [M01] and academic staff. [M04]

304   To test that the awarding body is meeting its responsibilities the team reviewed the

memorandum of agreement, and received written confirmation from the University Partnership Manager who was unable to attend in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic. [002; 068]

What the evidence shows

305   The assessment team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

306   NSCD has three main types of partnerships which together ensure the high quality of the courses it provides. The first of these partnerships is established within the Memorandum of Agreement between NSCD and the University; the second covers the current arrangement with the CDD group which is planned to terminate at the end of the current academic year; whilst the third encompasses arrangements with placement providers.

307   The University's Academic Regulations for Taught Courses of Study applies to those courses which are credit-bearing leading to the award of a University of Kent qualification. In addition to these regulations, courses delivered by or on behalf of the University are subject to the requirements within the University's Code of Practice for the Quality Assurance for Taught Courses of Study. [002] This is explicitly acknowledged within the Memorandum of Agreement [002] and Annex P within the Code of Practice [002] explaining in detail the main principles of quality assurance and operational management that apply to collaborative partnerships such as that with NSCD. The University is responsible for advising NSCD on any changes to its academic regulations, policies or procedures, and monitors NSCD's engagement and adherence to these regulatory sources. [002] Currently NSCD also recognises its responsibilities as part of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama. However, in light of the impending closure of this group, it has actively developed an internal academic governance framework [026 (NSCD Board and committee structure diagram; 030 Terms of reference for committees]to ensure that its partnership responsibility for the quality of its courses continues to be addressed.

308   The Memorandum of Agreement [002] details the individual and shared responsibilities for the design, delivery, assessment, management and student-facing aspects such as recruitment, complaints and appeals. The Memorandum of Agreement is comprehensive as it includes the context within which the partnership should work and clear information on underpinning terms regarding each partner's responsibility. In terms of the responsibilities for the maintenance of high quality with the partnership provision, the University is responsible for ensuring that its regulations, policies and procedures operate fairly and for receiving and reviewing annual monitoring reports from NSCD as required within the University's Code of Practice for Quality Assurance. [002] The corollary to this is that NSCD is required to ensure that it operates within the University's Codes of Practice and associated quality frameworks referred to and to report annually to the University on the outcomes from its own monitoring and review of the University-awarded courses. There is demonstrable evidence of effective application of mutual responsibilities within annual monitoring reporting from both the University and NSCD. [003b] It is demonstrable because there are comprehensive responses to target themes which reflect the underpinning requirements within the University's Codes of Practice for Quality Assurance. [002] For example, within the University's periodic reviews the Panel noted that NSCD makes use of visiting practitioners who are industry experts to contribute to the delivery of its programmes and thereby ensuring that the courses are informed by current practice developments.

309   NSCD has an established academic governance framework to ensure oversight of its responsibilities under the Memorandum of Agreement. [002] This framework includes a committee structure with the Academic Board [030] having the responsibility of overseeing policy formulation and implementation of quality measures on matters such as assessment,

academic activities, and resources. The Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee [030] is responsible for the monitoring and review of all courses and making recommendations for modifications. The University's academic regulations [002] and the supporting NSCD governance framework [021] enables NSCD to ensure that this partnership delivers a high-quality learning experiences for the students.

310   The team saw evidence of NSCD's approach to partnership working documented in its 'Working with others in Partnership' document [005] developed to support all those involved to understand mutual responsibilities. It is comprehensive because it enables NSCD to fully meet its obligations for ensuring a high-quality learning experience for all its students. This is because it embeds important codes which apply to placement and work-based learning initiatives. The document [005] establishes and communicates broad principles and guidelines to enable partners to understand their respective responsibilities for quality. It focuses on working collaboratively with other organisations or individuals who are not contracted staff with the purpose of providing education services. There are clear definitions of relevant terms such as work-based learning, awarding organisation, partner and placement learning and focused information on roles and responsibilities of NSCD and the host partners. [005]

311   Standardised agreements with other organisations are shaped by the comprehensive approach described within its Working with Others in Partnership document. [005] The document details key approaches that inform partnership agreements such as a Working with Others Handbook, Codes of Practice for Placement and Work-Based Learning Policy. The document provides for the robust scrutiny of, and criteria and systems for, approval of potential partners, the range of placement opportunities, and focused contractual agreements including, for example, responsibilities for health and safety priorities. The handbook is applied in common with other Conservatoire partners, and NSCD plans to continue to adopt the underpinning principles after leaving the CDD group. [005] The Code of Practice for Placements and Work-Based learning [005] establishes the principles for maintaining the quality of placements and the Placement Opportunities document for NSCD courses lists the different placement options and the type of supervision. For example, at Level 5, placements are short and mentored and assessed by NSCD tutors. In contrast, for the Level 7, Post Graduate Diploma in Arts-Based Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, students are employed as higher education employees and undertake the course alongside employment. They are supported regularly by a workplace mentor and an NSCD dissertation tutor, again assessed by the latter. There is also targeted guidance for Professional Host Mentors for the Post Graduate Certificate and Diploma in Arts-Based Learning and Teaching in HE which covers aspects such as the criteria for appointing mentors and training and expectations from mentors. [005] Based on the above comprehensive, focused and credible approaches that NSCD takes when working with all partners, the team determined that it ensures a high-quality academic experience for the provision delivered in partnership.

312   NSCD's arrangements for partnership working are informed by the external reviews from the University during programme approval, [018] five-yearly periodic reviews [018] and annual monitoring. [003b] The team saw evidence of such oversight of the effectiveness of the mutual partnership working between NSCD and the University, and NSCD's other partnerships such as those with placement providers. [005] These agreements are clear, comprehensive and up to date. For example, course PGCD3 incorporates a full-time placement with a professional dance company. Annual monitoring by the University [003b] confirms the placement opportunities provided are 'good practice' and NSCD's own internal annual monitoring notes, for example, in relation to the experiences of its master's students, the effective way in which artistic directors support the professional development of students. [003]

313   External examiners consistently comment positively on both NSCD's partnership work with the University and with other organisations.[004] For example, the external examiner for the MA Creative Practice (2018) commended NSCD on the breadth of contribution that external professionals make to the courses, and the opportunities the curriculum offers students to access such experiences. [004] Further, comments within all reports also include positive observations on the conduct of the University Board of Examiners as being both rigorous and extremely efficient. In turn, the Board of Examiners minutes evidence consistent reporting by the external examiners on how NSCD courses are performing, including the effectiveness with which NSCD works with the University and other organisations. [023d] On the basis of the above observations the team determined that external examiners consider that NSCD's partnerships work effectively and are of high quality.

314   The team reviewed documented third-party endorsed evidence [005b] of the success of NSCD's holistic partnership work with other organisations, which demonstrably commends NSCD's practices, curriculum and the quality of their students. Observations from both the University's academic liaison officer for NSCD and University partnership manager are of a successful relationship which is 'genuinely productive and fruitful' linking representative and organisations and keeping students' learning experience firmly in sight as the first priority. [Further evidence 068]

315   All staff understand their responsibilities as set out in the Memorandum of Agreement [002] with the University. They are aware that the University is responsible for setting and maintaining standards and has the overall oversight for quality. All staff that the team met [M04] had relevant experience of engaging with and working within the University's requirements. Within the senior management meeting [M01] staff talked about the successful partnership with the University and also their historical engagement as part of the CDD group and the current transition to planned independence from this group. Both senior management [M01] and academic staff [M04] spoke about the underpinning philosophy of promoting research as practice, and total commitment to maintain an appropriate balance of academic and professional practice priorities within courses, and the importance of working with external professionals for this. The academic staff [M04] talked in particular about how they addressed the challenges of ensuring that experienced freelance musicians were available to support the students as live dance accompanists, by creating a pool of trained expertise to meet the particular priorities and expected outcomes of NSCD courses. Senior staff [M01] explained how placements were designed to meet bespoke course requirements and individual priorities and how they worked with the sector and placement providers to ensure this. They explained how placements provided are bespoke to specific programmes and individual student needs and aspirations, and operate within the University's requirements. [002] The team determined, based on these discussions, that staff both at NSCD and the University fully understand and effectively discharge their responsibilities under their partnership agreement with the University.

316   The team found evidence within the student submission and its supporting documents that students were aware of the role of the University in awarding their qualifications. [057; 058; 059] The analysis within the University's annual monitoring report [003b] on qualitative feedback from student surveys identifies that students have positive experiences from NSCD's sector-based partnership agreements. For example, such analysis of data on the student experience for the Postgraduate Diploma in Contemporary Dance [003] identifies the positive opportunities they had to engage with diverse dance contexts, and to work with choreographers to gain new professional insights. Within the Certificate of HE/BA year 1 & 2 survey, second-year students comment positively on the teaching module and cite the opportunity within this module to work with external choreographers as a 'wonderful experience'. [019] Based on evidence from student reports, reflecting positive experiences of engaging in opportunities created from NSCD's

collaboration with partners, the team determined that students view the courses delivered in partnership as being of high quality.

317   Students [M02] were also aware of NSCD and University partnership, and also talked positively about the work-based experiences within the different programmes in meetings with the team. They were able to describe their engagement with the external artists, and they appreciated their opportunities to access, for example, external choreographers. The team was able to confirm that students fully appreciate the opportunities for engaging with external organisations and the quality of their courses delivered with NSDC's partnership arrangements.

318   In the meeting with employers, [M03] the team heard how NSCD's leadership develop relationships with professionals to ensure the placement partnerships are carefully established and informed by relevant training. There is ongoing and timely support from NSCD to ensure an appropriate balance is achieved between meeting industry demands and student priorities. Employers said that communication and reflexivity is at the heart of such agreements to ensure a student-centred approach and feedback was seen as paramount to success. The placement employers [M03] confirmed that NSCD students have 'the tenacity of engaging' and as independent thinkers can produce great outcomes for themselves and the sector. Based on the above the team determined that placement providers appreciate the support they receive from NSCD and that the students are collaboratively supported to achieve positive outcomes from their placement modules.

Conclusions

319   As described above, the assessment team considered all of the evidence submitted [Annex 1] to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing the assessment team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other assessments and remained outcomes focused. The team's conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

320   The team concludes that NSCD working in partnership with other organisations has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them. All NSCD staff understand their responsibilities as set out in the Memorandum of Agreement with the University and are aware that the University is responsible for setting and maintaining standards and has oversight for quality. This extends to placements, where both NSCD staff and placement providers fully understand their respective responsibilities for quality. NSCD has an established academic governance framework through its deliberative committee structure to ensure oversight of its responsibilities under the Memorandum of Agreement, including the Academic Board and Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee. This approach enables it to ensure that a high-quality academic experience is delivered through partnerships. It is underpinned by clear and comprehensive policies for the management of partnerships, including an umbrella document covering working with others in partnership, handbooks and codes of practice. The application of these policies is monitored by the University as part of its annual monitoring review and periodic review processes, and collectively ensure that the academic experience is high quality, irrespective of where or how courses are delivered. The standard partnership agreement between NSCD and other organisations supports the maintenance of the quality of its placement opportunities as required by the University. These agreements are clear and comprehensive, and up to date. It reflects and is underpinned by a range of NSCD policies which implement its requirements.

321   External examiners comment positively on both NSCD's partnership work with the University and with other organisations [004] and include positive observations on the conduct of the Board of Examiners as both rigorous and extremely efficient. Third parties in the form of placement partners commend NSCD's partnership practices, curriculum and the quality of their students, whilst the University partnership manager identifies that there is a genuine relationship between NSCD and the University, which gives priority to students' learning experiences. Taking all of the foregoing into account, the team concludes that this Core practice is met.

322   The evidence scrutinised by the assessment team was based upon examination of the full range of evidence described in Annex 4. Therefore, the assessment team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

Q9 The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes

323   This Core practice expects that the provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.

324   The QAA assessment team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers (March 2019).

The evidence the team considered

325   The QAA team assessed the evidence presented, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The assessment team used that matrix to ensure that the evidence considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other assessments and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

a   Signed Memorandum of agreement with the University [002]
b   Annual Programme Monitoring – Conservatoire [003]
c   Annual Programme Monitoring – University [003b]
d   External Examiner Reports [004]
e   Third Party Endorsements [005b]
f   Assessment Overview at NSCD [007]
g   Student Population and Data Analysis 2016-2021 [012]
h   Personal and Academic Support Systems [016]
i   Statement of Physical and Learning Resources [017]
j   Student Survey results [019]
k   Student Voice [019b]
l   NSCD Action Plan 2021/22 [020]
m   Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee [023b]
n   Academic Board [023c]
o   Student Protection Plan [025]
p   Policies and Procedures - Reasonable adjustment and Equality and Diversity Statement [029]
q   Committee Terms of Reference - Academic Board and Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee [030]
r   English Language Support [038]
s   Personal Support Plans - Alternative Assessment [039]
t   Support for Students During Covid [042]
u   Student Submission Endorsement Letter [057]
v   Students' Union Statement [058]
w   Student submission film [059]
x   Student Voice Forum Notes [066]
y   Student Union Statement [067]
z   Student Review Board example students audit trail [076]
aa   Tour of NSCD facilities [077]
bb   Student Charter [091]
cc   Senior staff meeting [M01]

dd   Combined full and part-time students meeting [M02]
ee   Meeting with placement providers [M03]
ff   Professional support staff meeting [M05]
gg   Meeting with library staff [M07]
hh   Assessed student work sample [T02].

How any samples of evidence were constructed

326   For assessed student work, a sample of 126 scripts from a total of 1,114 was chosen, reflecting all pieces of assessed work from the 2020-21 academic year, covering all types of assignment and all courses operational in that period. This was to test whether students are given comprehensive, helpful and timely feedback.

Why and how the team considered this evidence

327   As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider [Annex 1] was considered by the assessment team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the assessment team to make its judgement regarding the provider's ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the assessment team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below:

328   To identify NSCD's approach to student support, including how it identifies and monitors the needs of individual students, the team considered a range of relevant agreements, regulations, policies and procedures, including the memorandum of agreement with the University, [002] Statement on the personal and academic support systems in NSCD, [016] and the Student Charter. [091] This was correlated against evidence from employers and work-based providers. [005b]

329   To assess whether NSCD's plans for ensuring that all students are supported to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes are credible, robust and evidence-based, the team considered the arrangements for annual programme monitoring both within the Conservatoire [003] and with the University, [003b] External Examiner reports [004] and the supporting information on outputs encompassed within the Data Analysis paper [012] subsequently considered at Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee, [023b; 030] Academic Board [023c; 030] and Student Review Board. [076] Specific plans reviewed by the team covered the statement on physical and learning resources, [017] Action Plan for 21/22, [020] Student Protection Plan, [025] Policies and Procedures, [029] English Language Support, [038] Personal Support Plans (alternative assessment), [039] and specific plans for student support during the COVID-19 pandemic. [042] The team also conducted a tour of the facilities available to support students which underpin these arrangements. [077]

330   To identify and assess students' views about student support mechanisms, and to assess whether students who have made particular use of student support services regarded these as accessible and effective, the team considered the student submission [059] and supporting statements, [057; 058; 067] as well as outcomes from the Student Survey [019; 019b] and the Student Voice Forum. [066] Outcomes from this analysis were then triangulated with students in the combined meeting with full and part-time students. [M02]

331   To test whether students are given comprehensive, helpful and timely feedback, the team considered a randomly selected sample of assessed student work covering the most recent complete academic year (2020-21), [T02] and considered this in the light of the

Assessment Overview document. [007]

332   To test whether staff understand their responsibilities and are appropriately skilled and supported, the team considered the outputs from the senior staff meeting, [M01] placement provider meeting, [M03] professional support staff meeting [M05] and library staff meeting. [M07]

What the evidence shows

333   The assessment team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

334   NSCD's Student Charter [091] sets out its aspiration of 'working in partnership with students as co-authors in a positive journey that will shape their Higher Education experience'. This Charter is situated within the academic regulations of the University [002] and the policies of NSCD [030] which mirror those of the CDD. NSCD recognises that it is in a period of transition from CDD and has proactively addressed the task of devising, developing and implementing policies and procedures to ensure a seamless change when the separation occurs. [030]

335   NSCD has a range of specific policies and procedures [016 -Summary of Personal and academic support systems; 017 – Statement in relation to physical and learning resources; 025 – Student Protection Plan; and 029 – Policies and procedures link document] which underpin the strategic aspirations, and which encompass the provision of support, advice and guidance, and other specialist support services for students with specific needs. [091 – NSCD Student Charter] NSCD supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes by providing holistic support which begins with a screening for dyslexia and dyspraxia during admission and is followed up during enrolment through the provision of academic and student support including student-facing policies such as the reasonable adjustment and equality and diversity statement. [029] English language support [038] is available to all students but targeted towards those with specific language needs and international students. [029] Students, including those for whom English is not their first language, confirmed that the English language support was targeted at the correct level to help guide them to develop their language skills independently. [038; M02] To ensure that all students are supported to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes, NSCD (as part of CDD) and the University have well established quality assurance procedures in place to monitor the effectiveness of these processes. [003] The programme delivered at NSCD is subject to the same periodic and annual reviews as all University courses, following both the University's procedures for the approval and monitoring of collaborative courses as outlined in the University's academic regulations. [002; 003b]

336   Students who have disclosed disabilities are contacted by NSCD at application so that a support plan can be put in place. A personal support plan is a written agreement between the student and NSCD describing the type of support and how it will be provided. With the student's permission, the plan is circulated to the student's teachers to make them aware. The plans are reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that they continue to meet the student's requirements. [029]

337   NSCD adopts a system of alternative assessment [039] to ensure that students who are unable to participate in practical sessions are still able to develop academically and meet module learning outcomes. [039] Students on support plans and those who are unable to fully participate in sessions are considered by the Student Review Board which is chaired by the Wellbeing Manager or Head of Academic Registry and Quality Assurance. [076]

338   Student Review Boards [076] are used by NSCD to monitor individual student progress, disseminate information where necessary, as well as note the supplementary

support that may benefit students and to which they are then signposted. The assessment team viewed three individual student lifecycles through the Student Review Board and considered it to demonstrate NSCD's early intervention and appropriate targeted support which enable students who may have 'dropped out' to achieve academically and professionally. [076]

339   Effectiveness of the implementation of these policies and procedures [030] is specifically monitored by NSCD through the medium of the annual monitoring action plan 2021/22 document, [020] whose implementation is a responsibility of both the Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee and the Academic Board. [030] Discharge of these functions was evident in their respective minutes. [023b and 023c] For example, the action to further improve training for work-based mentors to better support students for placements was signed off as complete by LTACQ in July 2021, [020; 023c, item 6] while the Academic Board [020; 023c April 2021, Item 13] is maintaining oversight of an ongoing action to further develop physical support for injured students to encompass access to MRI scans and X-rays.

340   NSCD also considers students' physical and mental wellbeing. There is a hardship fund which is supported by the Leverhulme Arts Scholarship Fund. [M01] The assessment team considered this to be sustainable as NSCD has recently been awarded a further three years of funding. The hardship fund supports free meals from NSCD which are designed to be suitably sustaining for a dancer's high levels of physical activity in addition to funding specialist equipment, and some external medical appointments for students. [M01; M02; M05] Students are also eligible to receive free tickets to attend events at the in-house theatre, which supports their academic, professional and cultural development as artists. [057; 058; 059; 067]

341   Students have the benefit of a fully equipped Dance Theatre, (the Riley Theatre) that is used not only for classes but also by visiting dance companies, to undertake regular programmed dance events. [077; M01; M05] Students benefit from engagement through paid, supervised and supported professional development roles related to lighting, stage-management, box-office, front-of-house and workshops for the wider community. An Arts Council England supported programme brings diverse artistic voices, particularly in relation to the ethnic diversity of the surrounding community of Chapeltown. [005b]

342   Evidence provided from employers and placement providers indicated that facilities, learning resources and student support services are appropriate [M03] in relation to supporting the achievement of successful academic and professional outcomes. Individual endorsements noted the 'student-centred ethos' and NSCD promotes 'intelligent dancers who engage with the world. They are vibrant, curious, passionate, engaged artists who want to make a difference' and that NSCD 'continues to produce world class practitioners' and 'It has also trained a distinguished list of alumni working around the world including the current Principal and Chief Executive, and leaders of companies working in the dance field'. [005b] The panel heard about students' opportunities to work as peers in other organisations, engage with different artists and be part of contemporary collaborative arts projects which enabled them to develop their transferable skills within industry and local communities. It was also recognised that students appreciated the positive experiences that such collaborative arts projects provided. Placement providers themselves evidenced the value of these placements, and the professional outcomes which students were able to achieve and demonstrate. [005b]

343   The external examiner noted that the VLE 'is used well by staff thus ensuring students have good quality information and learning resources. Feedback is detailed and thorough and indicates the outstanding investment of staff and the care and professionalism with which they engage with the assessment process'. [004] This was endorsed in other

external examiner reports [004] which noted that 'learning resources' provide 'many' industry links on the programme and commented positively about students' opportunities to network and consider their career and employment options.

344   To be assured that NSCD is achieving its aims in terms of the quality of student support, and the impact of the systems and processes in place, there is a range of mechanisms for collecting student views (student surveys; [019] Student Voice; [019b] and Student Voice Forum [066]). NSCD also collects, reviews and acts on data, [012] benchmarks against the Higher Education Performing Arts sector, and considers this information in the Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee [023b] and at the Academic Board. [023c] NSCD uses this data to inform action plans and have an internally devised metric that requires detailed consideration of any scores below 80%.

345   Data relating to student achievement is a key focus of both the LTQAC and the Academic Board and set out in a rolling student data analysis document. [012] The data shows that the vast majority (over 90%) of those leaving the school either undertake dance-related employment or move into further study or training. Some NSCD graduates set up as self-employed or limited companies. Contributing to the national data collection survey organised by Higher Education Business and Community Interaction (HE-BCI), NSCD monitors and reports on the number of these entities which remain in operation after three years of trading This level of focus on data was felt by the team to be strong evidence of NSCD having credible, robust and evidence-based plans for ensuring that all students are supported to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.

346   The sample of assessed student work [T02] demonstrates that students are given comprehensive, helpful and timely feedback. For example, in relation to the BA (Hons) Dance (Contemporary), the team noted that detailed and apt assessor feedback was evident, and bespoke to each student, and presented in a way to allow them to develop their individual skills. In respect of the sample for the MA in Contemporary Dance Performance pathway, the team noted that the detailed feedback provided via the VLE aligns with the relevant assessment criteria, and feeds forward. The feedback is highly personalised to enable all students individually to consolidate their achievement and develop further. NSCD has a policy of returning all feedback within 20 working days post-submission, [007] and the team's testing identified no examples of delayed feedback, which was confirmed in the meeting with students. This pattern of feedback was reflected in the full sample tested, and because of this the team was able to conclude that the assessed student work demonstrates that students are given comprehensive and helpful and timely feedback.

347   Students commented [M02] that following each assignment they have mandatory tutorials with their module tutors where individual feedback is provided to them. In this way, they felt able to more closely align theory with practice and improve their academic writing and reflection skills. Formative and summative feedback are individual and tailored specifically to each student and focused on achievement of learning outcomes. Before submission of assignments, students appreciated being able to approach lecturers for advice on study skills including essay writing and referencing. [M02] The sample of assessed work demonstrates a clear rationale for grade outcome and includes constructive feedback as to how the student could further develop. [T02] Students also appreciated specifically the responsiveness of NSCD to their particular needs during the COVID-19 pandemic including, for example, financial support for PCR testing, assistance with remote technology purchases, and flexibility in delivery patterns. [042; M02] Students referred to different ways in which NSCD prepares and supports them for working in the industries through, for example, choreography modules directly linked to creative practice.

348   The team found that NSCD's staff [M01; M04; M05; M07] understand their roles in supporting student achievement and were able to articulate clearly and enthusiastically how

their role contributes to student outcomes, in terms of employability and industry-focused outcomes. For example, staff and practitioners work together to design and deliver co-produced work involving professional choreographers, and entailing delivery in an industry-based setting, including panel feedback which replicates an audition.

Conclusions

349   As described above, the assessment team considered all of the evidence submitted [Annex 1] to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing the assessment team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other assessments and remained outcomes focused. The team's conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

350   The team concludes that NSCD supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes. NSCD has proactively developed policies and procedures for student support to create a planned and seamless transfer from the CDD arrangements going forward. These robust and embedded plans provide strong evidence of the processes in place to monitor students receiving support, so as to ensure that all students achieve successful academic and professional outcomes, and NSCD collects and uses targeted data to monitor these outcomes accordingly. The assessed student work reviewed by the team demonstrates that students are given comprehensive, helpful and timely feedback, which is both formative and summative.

351   All NSCD's staff met by the team fully understood their roles in supporting student achievement and were able to articulate clearly and enthusiastically how their role contributes to student outcomes, citing specific examples of bringing together academic and practice-based tasks within an industry-focused context. The students met by the team agreed that NSCD has a strong and individualised approach which facilitates successful academic and professional outcomes, and were enthusiastic in their appreciation of teaching teams and NSCD's facilities and support systems, which they felt were both accessible and effective. In particular, support for English language was praised by those for whom it is not a first language, together with the personalised financial and organisational support for students, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students also confirmed both the formative and summative feedback on their submitted work was helpful in developing them academically and professionally, and praised the different support with further progression to industry, including specifically the value of placement-based learning to their professional outcomes. The assessment team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.

352   The evidence scrutinised by the assessment team was based upon examination of the full range of evidence described in Annex 4. Therefore, the assessment team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

Annex 1 Evidence List

001 Student handbook 2021/22
002 Signed memorandum of agreement with University and Taught degree regulations
003 Annual Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Documents 2016-2021 Conservatoire
003b Annual Programme Monitoring – University
004 EE reports 2016-2021 inclusive
005 working with others in partnership
005b third party endorsements
006 Consumer Law self-assessment and consumer law handbook
007 Assessment overview at NSCD
008 Undergraduate module guides
009 Post graduate module guides
010 Undergraduate course and module specifications
011 Post graduate course and module specifications
012 Student population and data analysis 2016-2921
013 Not used
014 Not used
015 Not used
016 Personal and academic support systems for students at NSCD
017 Statement in relation to physical and learning resources
018 Periodic programme review and course validation resource
018b Student and industry consultation on new course proposals
019 Student Survey Results and Analysis
019b Student voice
020 NSCD Action Plan 2021-22
021 Staff handbook, related policies and procedures
022 Student induction timetable
023 LTA Strategy summary and action plan
023b Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee minutes
023c Academic Board Minutes for 2019/20 and 2020/21
023d Board of Examiners minutes for 2019/20 and 2020/21
024 Example of RPEL Document agreed by University
025 NSCD Student Protection Plan 2022-23
026 NSCD Board and Committee Structure diagram
027 UKVI compliance assessment
028 not used
029 Policies and procedures link document
030 Terms of Reference
031 Admissions Appeals and complaints policy 2022 entry
032 Measures in place to review and revise student recruitment
032b example BA Stage 1 Panel notes
032c Example BA Stage 2 Online Audition Results
032d Example MA CDP Stage 1 Applications 2021 entry
032e UG Complete Applications and Offers
032f Review of 2021 process and feedback from the panel and planning for 2022 entry
032g How to access English Language Support guidance for students
033 Draft student complaints policy and procedures
034 Log of student complaints
035 Example evidence audit trail of a student complaint
036 Evidence of formal consideration of the outcome of complaints at strategic level
037 Support for information – Withdrawal Process
038 English Language Support
039 Personal Support Plans – Alternative assessments

040 Evidence of Liaison with University
041 NSCD Sample – recent appointment Job Description
042 Support for students during Covid
043 Contextual admissions framework
044 Student Lists
045 NSCD Timetable January 2022
046 NSCD Validation Information
047 Not used
048 Not used
049 Audition Video 1
050 Audition Video 2
051 Audition Video 3
052 Audition Video 4
053 Audition Video 5
054 Audition Video 6
055 Audition Video 7
056 Student Complaint Closure Letter
057 Student Submission Endorsement Letter
058 NSCD Student Submission SU Statement
059 NSCD Student Submission Film
060 Response to further evidence request post DBA
061 to 063 not used
064 MA CDP Complete applications and offers 2021 Entry QSA
065 not used
066 Student Voice Forum 2021-22
067 A statement from NSCDs Student Union
068 QSR Further Evidence Day 1
069 QSR Further Evidence Day 2
070 Not used
071 Sample PA1 form for Cert HE in Contemporary Urban Dance
072 Teaching Objectives BA1
073 Class plan
074 BA2DT3 Class Objectives
075 Class Plan
076 SRB example Students' audit trail
077 Tour of NSCD facilities
078 CDD Moodle presentation
079 Response to further evidence request post TPM
080 NSCD Strategic plan 2017-2022, Available at:
http://www.nscd.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Strategic-Plan-2017-22-brochure-web.pdf
(last accessed 28 January 2022)
081 NSCD Mission and Vision, Available at:
http://www.nscd.ac.uk/about/vision-mission/ (last accessed 28 January 2022)
082 NSCD Governance, Available at: https://www.nscd.ac.uk/about/governance/
(last accessed 28 January 2022)
083 NSCD Policies and Procedures, Available at: Policies and Procedures - Northern NSCD
of Contemporary Dance (nscd.ac.uk) (last accessed 28 January 2022)
084 NSCD External Quality Assurance, Available at: https://www.nscd.ac.uk/higher-
education/external-quality-assurance/ (last accessed 28 January 2022)
085 NSCD Website, Available at: https://www.nscd.ac.uk/ (last accessed 28 January 2022)
086 Admissions Policy (2022 entry), Available at:
https://www.nscd.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/NSCD-Admissions-Policy-2022entry.pdf
Accessed 17 November 2021
087 Attendance & Student Engagement policy

https://www.nscd.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Attendance_Student-EngagementPolicy.pdf [Accessed 12 December 2020]
088 Guide to Student Complaints http://www.cdd.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Guide-to-Student-Complaints.pdf [Accessed 17 November 2021]
089 Annex 13 of the University's Credit Framework for Taught Courses
https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/documents/2021-credit-framework-annex-13-academic-appeals.docx [Accessed 20 November 2021]
090 University Academic Regulations
091 Student Charter https://www.nscd.ac.uk/higher-education/student-charter/
PS NSCD Provider Submission
M01 Senior staff meeting
M02 Combined FT and PT Students Meeting
M03 Employers Meeting
M04 Academic staff meeting
M05 Professional support staff meeting
M06 Final Meeting
M07 Meeting with Library Staff
OBS1 – Observations of taught sessions
T01 Testing sheets – Admissions Samples
T02 Testing Sheets – Student Work Samples