

AEC Institutional and Programme Review Scheme



AEC Institutional Review Visit to the Birmingham Conservatoire

18th – 21st January 2010

BIRMINGHAM
CONSERVATOIRE



Evaluation Committee:

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Introduction

The visit to the Birmingham Conservatoire was undertaken in the framework of the *AEC Institutional and Programme Review Scheme*, a service offered by the AEC to its member institutions in order to assist them in their quality improvement activities. This scheme is financed by the ERASMUS programme through the *Polifonia* Network.

The international group of experts used the AEC Framework Document *Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Music Education: Characteristics, Criteria and Procedures*, a set of common European standards and procedures for the external review of institutions and programmes in higher music education. Based on the visit and the materials sent to the team beforehand, the present report was produced.

Birmingham, situated in the West Midlands, is the largest British city after London. Birmingham has enjoyed a true renaissance in the last few years, with the rise of artistic institutions, coupled with the renovation of historic areas and the creation of new developments, which has transformed the city from an industrial platform into a modern European hub.

Birmingham Conservatoire was founded as Birmingham School of Music in 1886 and integrated in 1971 in Birmingham Polytechnic, now Birmingham City University. In 2007, the Conservatoire became part of a larger faculty within the University, the Faculty of Performance, Media and English (PME Faculty), together with the Birmingham School of Acting, the School of English and the School of Media, with the objective to create synergies through cross-faculty courses and new areas of activities. The Conservatoire currently has 516 undergraduates, 95 postgraduates and 43 research students.

During the review visit, Birmingham Conservatoire was represented by the Principal, George Caird and the Vice-Principal, David Saint. The members of the Committee were chair Harald Jorgensen (former Director of the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo), Cecilia De Almeida Goncalves (Deputy Director of the Escola Superior de Música de Lisboa) and Claus Finderup (Programme Director at the Rhythmic Music Conservatory in Copenhagen). The Secretary was Linda Messas ('Polifonia' Project Manager).

The Committee would like to express its thanks to the Conservatoire for the organisation of the visit and for welcoming the Committee in such a friendly and hospitable way. Conservatoire staff members remained at the disposal of the Committee during the whole visit and contributed to the establishment of an atmosphere of sincere and fruitful cooperation in which many issues – current situation, problems, strengths and weaknesses - were discussed.

The Committee would like to express its appreciation for the hard work done by the Conservatoire in preparation of the AEC visit with the production of its self-evaluation report. This excellent and in-depth analysis of the institution has helped the Committee to get a comprehensive overview of the conservatoire and has been of great help to the reflections and discussions before, during and after the visit.

Birmingham Conservatoire
AEC Accreditation Visit 18-21 January 2010 - Review Visit Schedule



Day 1 – Monday 18th January

When?	What?	Where?	Who?
18:00 approx	Arrival at Hotel	Copthorne Hotel Paradise Circus Birmingham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Harald Jørgensen, Cecília de Almeida Gonçalves, Claus Finderup, Linda Messas, Eleonoor Tchernoff (observer)
18:30	George Caird to meet the Panel at hotel and escort to Conservatoire	Copthorne Hotel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ George Caird, Principal
18:30-20:00	Preliminary meeting of the Evaluation Panel	Conservatoire, Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel
20:00-20:30	Meeting	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ George Caird, Principal, David Saint, Vice-Principal
20:30	Dinner	Restaurant Malmaison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ George Caird, David Saint

Day 2 – Tuesday 19th January

When?	What?	Where?	Who?
08:45-09:00	Meeting	Copthorne Hotel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel
09:00-09:45	Introductory meeting (refreshments)	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ David Tidmarsh, BCU, Vice Chancellor ○ Ros Boyne, BCU, Academic Registrar ○ Dan Howard, BCU, Executive Dean, Performance Media and English ○ Richard Woolley, BCU, Associate Dean, Performance Media and English ○ George Caird, Principal, Birmingham Conservatoire ○ David Saint, Vice Principal, Birmingham Conservatoire
09:45-10:30	Meeting with Academic Course Directors	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ Steve Halfyard, Director Studies (Undergraduate) ○ Shirley Thompson, Director of Studies (Postgraduate) ○ Peter Johnson, Head of Research ○ Jeremy Price, Course Director, BMus Jazz ○ Simon Hall, Assistant Course Director, BSc Music Technology
10:30-11:15	Evaluation Panel Meeting (refreshments)	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel
11:15-12:15	Meeting with	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ Lamberto Coccioli, Head of Music Technology

	Heads of Department		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Joe Cutler, Head of Composition ○ Timothy English, Head of Junior Conservatoire ○ Michael Harris, Head of Woodwind ○ Chris Marshall, Head of Professional Development ○ Julian Pike, Head of Vocal & Operatic ○ Jeremy Price, Head of Jazz ○ David Purser, Head of Orchestral and Brass ○ John Todd, Head of Strings ○ Malcolm Wilson, Head of Keyboard
12:15-13:00	Evaluation Panel Meeting and Lunch	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel
	Recommended Class <i>Musical Philosophies and Aesthetics</i> by Peter Johnson	New Lecture Theatre	
13:05-14:00	Performance Platform By Tatiana Dardykina	Adrian Boulton Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel
14:15-15:15	Visiting classes	Various (Please see the end of page 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ Dan Verry (Steward) ○ Becky Woodcock (Steward) ○ Jonathan Wheeler (Steward)
15:15-16:00	Guided tour of facilities with Assistant Concert Managers, Building Services Manager, Instrument Curator, including visit to Library	Meeting in the Board Room for the Guided tour – review of facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ Paul Coleman, Building Manager ○ Kelly Williams & Libby Hall, Assistant Concert Managers ○ Martin Perkins, Early Music Co-ordinator and Instrument Curator ○ Francis Firth, Librarian
16:00-16:45	Meeting with Research Department (refreshments)	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ Peter Johnson, Head of Research ○ Ron Woodley, Professor of Music ○ Lamberto Coccioli, Centre for Composition and Performance Using Technology
16:45-17:15	Evaluation Panel Meeting	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel
17:15-18:00	Concert: Birmingham Conservatoire Wind Ensemble	Recital Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ George Caird, David Saint, Michael Harris
18:00-18:15	Visiting Postgraduate Performance Class 1	Adrian Boulton Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel
18:15-18:45	Visiting Postgraduate Performance Class 2	Recital Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel
	Evaluation Panel Meeting		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel

18:45-19:30	(refreshments) and return to Hotel	Board Room Cophorne Hotel	
20:00	Dinner	Restaurant Lasan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ Peter Johnson, Head of Research, George Caird, Shirley Thompson
Time	Venue	Class	Lecturer
14:30-15:00	Room 18	Voice	Margaret Field
14:00-17:00	Arena Foyer	FSA Vocal BMus1-4 Historical class/Vocal Workshop	Andrew King
14:10-15:10	Lecture Room 1	MMus Advanced Editorial Techniques	Shirley Thompson
14:00-15:00	Lecture Room 3	FSA BMus3/PG Orchestration	Richard Causton
14:00-15:00	Foyer Studio	BMus2 Composition Studies	Ed Bennett
14:00-15:00	Lecture Room 2	FSA BMus1 Recorded History of Piano	John Humphreys
14:00-15:00	Jazz Studio	Jazz 3/Grad Dip Composition	Hans Koller

Day 3– Wednesday 20th January

When?	What?	Where?	Who?
09:00-09:30	Evaluation Panel Meeting (refreshments)	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel
09:30-10:00	Meeting with Principal/Vice Principal/Financial Controller (refreshments)	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ George Caird ○ David Saint ○ Mark Williams, Finance Controller
10:00-10:45	Meeting with current students	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ Clare Trim, James Wilson, Kathryn Harris, Matt Gough, Sarah Langdon, Lucie Louvrier
10:45-11:30	Meeting with Senior Registry/Administrative Staff (refreshments)	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ Michael Hill, Registrar ○ Peter Jarvis, Course Administrator ○ Ruth Stanton, Assistant Registrar ○ Andrea Cox, PA to Principal
11:30-12:15	Visiting classes	Various (Please see the end of page 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ Becky Woodcock (Steward), Matthew Atkins (Steward), Emily Hearle (Steward)
12:15-13:00	Meeting with Visiting Teachers	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ Percy Pursglove (Trumpet - Jazz), Cathy Benson (Voice). Henry Fairs (Organ), Jennie Philips (Oboe), Robin Bowman (Vocal coaching), Simon Nicholls (Piano)
13:00-14:00	Evaluation Panel Meeting and Lunch	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel

14:00-14:45	Meeting with past students	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ Mary Wakelam, Daniele Rosina, Bridget Kerrison, Jeanette Wong, Ben Kennedy
14:45-15:30	Meeting members of the profession (refreshments)	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ Stephen Maddock, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra ○ Stephen Newbould, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group ○ Andrew Jowett, Town Hall Symphony Hall ○ Tony Dudley-Evans, Birmingham Jazz ○ Joy Krishnamoorthy, BCU Events Marketing Co-ordinator
15:30-17:30	Evaluation Panel Meeting	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel
17:30-18:15	Concert: The Boulton Quartet	Adrian Boulton Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ George Caird, David Saint, John Todd
18:15-18:30	Evaluation Panel Meeting (refreshments)	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel
18:30-19:15	Feedback meeting	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel, George Caird, David Saint
19:30	Dinner	Restaurant: Edmunds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ David Saint, Steve Halfyard

Time	Venue	Class	Lecturer
11:00-12:00	Adrian Boulton Hall	FSA BMus3-4/PG	Victor Sangiorgio
11:00-13:00	Arena Foyer	Elective Chamber Choir	Jeffrey Skidmore
12:00-13:00	Lecture Room 1	BMus2 Case St Grp 5	Chris Dingle
12:00-13:00	Lecture Room 3	BMus1 History Workshop 6	Duncan Fielden
10:45-11:45	Lecture Room 3	BMus1 History Workshop 5	Gareth Thomas
12:00-13:00	Foyer Seminar Room	FSA BMus3 Compositional Studies	Michael Wolters
11:30-12:00	G15	Oboe	Jennie Philips

Day 4– Thursday 21st January

When?	What?	Where?	Who?
09:00-09:30	Additional Meeting with Principal	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ George Caird
10:00-10:40	Open Day address	Adrian Boulton Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel ○ George Caird ○ David Saint
10:40-11:00	Evaluation Panel Meeting	Board Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel
11:00 -	Attend Open Day activities and departure	Around Conservatoire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluation Panel

1. Mission and vision

1-a. What is the institution's mission, aim or goal?

The Conservatoire management seized the opportunity offered by its integration into the PME Faculty to reflect together with the staff members on the position, mission and vision of the Conservatoire. Enshrined in the Corporate Plan of Birmingham City University as well as in the PME Faculty Plan, the Conservatoire's mission is "to educate and train the brightest and best professional musicians of tomorrow and to strengthen its position as a leading international conservatoire within a modern university" [self-evaluation report p7]. This mission is articulated in six aims and fourteen objectives, such as developing further a holistic approach to performance through the Conservatoire as a venue, a centre for professional development, a vehicle for outreach and creativity and as a research centre.

The Conservatoire's mission is clearly identified and specific aims and objectives have been set. The Committee supports the Conservatoire's practice of reviewing annually its Strategic Plan, as it enables a thorough follow-up of the implementation of objectives and brings a certain level of flexibility to the Plan through possible adaptations.

1-b. What are the goals of its educational programmes? 1-c. What is the correspondence between the institution's mission and its educational programmes?

The goals of the Conservatoire's educational programmes are thoroughly described for each cycle in the self-evaluation report on pages 9-13.

- The undergraduate programmes (BMus and BMus Jazz) aim at "equip[ping] students for a career in the music profession as performers and/or composers" with the particular objective of training them as "independent learner[s], critical interpreter[s] and reflective practitioner[s]" through the development of a broad range of skills and knowledge [self-evaluation report p9].
- The second cycle programmes (Master of Music, Postgraduate Diploma, Postgraduate Certificate - Specialist Performance and Postgraduate Certificate) allow students to develop further the knowledge and skills gained in the first cycle programmes and, with their emphasis on the first-study area, are designed to equip students to "enter the profession at a high artistic level", providing them with "advanced training in the specialist areas of performance, composition, jazz performance and composition, music technology and musicology" [Self-evaluation report p24].
- The third cycle offer encompasses an Advanced Postgraduate Diploma in Music - Professional Performance, designed to train "outstanding performers already on threshold of a professional career", as well as research degrees "leading to the awards of Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy" [self-evaluation report p12].
- In addition, the Junior Conservatoire offers specialist training on a part-time basis to young musicians between 8 and 18; children as from 3 can also receive tuition in the framework of the Young Strings Project [Appendix 5 – Junior Conservatoire Brochure].

The Committee welcomes the diversity of programmes offered at the Conservatoire. The prepared material provided the Committee with precise information on all programmes, including on expected learning outcomes at the completion of each module. Based on this information, the Committee was able to confirm the correspondence between the goals of the educational programmes and the general mission of the Conservatoire.

1-d. Does the institution have a long-term strategic vision?

Although the Conservatoire Strategic Plan covers a period ending in 2012, it reveals a long-term vision. This vision is:

- based on a thinking process undertaken within the Conservatoire and related to the nature, role, function and external interactions of a modern conservatoire, as well as its re-positioning within the PME faculty [Appendix 3 – Conservatoire Strategic Plan p1];
- fed by the image of “The University in 2017” as described in the University Corporate Plan [Appendix 1 – University Corporate plan 2007-2012 p4].

Recognising the rapid changes in the performing arts disciplines, the Conservatoire attempts in its Strategic Plan to “embrace the widest possible vision for the developments which will place the Conservatoire as an innovator in the education and training of young musicians” [Appendix 3 – Conservatoire Strategic Plan p2].

2. Educational processes

2.1 Curriculum

2.1-a. How does the curriculum address the institutional mission and the goals of its educational programmes?

The curriculum is structured in modules, with specific aims clearly enshrined in the general goals of the programme. Each module is described in terms of learning outcomes in line with these aims, and various assessment methods are used to check students' proficiency of these learning outcomes.

The institutional mission to “educate and train [...] professional musicians of tomorrow” [Conservatoire Strategic Plan p2] is also addressed in the curriculum through the professional development (PD) courses, which for example provide students in the 3rd year of the BMus with lectures and workshops on the portfolio career, career options and CV creation [Annex A1.3 Student Course Handbook BMus3]. Students voiced their satisfaction regarding these PD courses for the realistic picture it gives them of the professional life and for the support it brings them in concert organisation and understanding of the tax scheme [Meeting with students]. Former students indicated that the preparation to the professional life had improved in the last years, for example with the inclusion of items relevant for jazz students [Meeting with former students].

Although teaching is not separately addressed in the institutional mission or in the programmes' goals, students showed awareness of the high probability that their professional activities would include teaching [Meeting with students]. Teaching is indeed recognised as a typical career towards which second cycle graduates move [self-evaluation report p11]. There is no educational programme specifically dedicated to providing students with pedagogical skills, but students are introduced to “various matters concerning the teaching of [their] instrument” in the second semester of the 3rd BMus year, including technique, physical considerations, teaching material and examination syllabuses [Annex A1.3 Student Course Handbook BMus3 p12]. In addition, although a small proportion of students make this choice, students are offered since two years the opportunity to take their 4th BMus year as part-time (thus in two years) in combination with a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at the Faculty of Education [Meeting with Course Directors]. The Conservatoire's ambition to build up more the area of pedagogy was indicated [Meeting with Course Directors].

Thus, the Committee was able to confirm that the institutional mission and the goals of the educational programme are addressed by the curriculum. The Conservatoire gives consideration to the professional trends such as the increasing development of portfolio careers and explores ways to prepare its students for the profession and train versatile students through a diversity of programmes and courses, including courses and activities at cross-faculty level encouraging students to work together across disciplines.

2.1-b. Is the curriculum based on the 3-cycle structure promoted by the Bologna process? 2.1-c. Is there a connection/progression between the various cycles?

As indicated previously (see §1-b), the Conservatoire offers educational programmes for first, second and third cycle studies. Birmingham City University requires its faculties to use the standard UK credit structure to determine the workload related to each of their programmes (1 credit = 10 hours of study) [self-evaluation p16]. The conversion to the ECTS is possible, as 60

ECTS credits are equivalent to 120 UK credits. Thus, the BMus can be awarded at the end of year 3, when the student has gained 180 ECTS credits and the BMus (Hons) at the end of year 4 where the student has gained 240 ECTS credits. The first cycle programmes provide “a foundation for postgraduate study and for entry into the profession” [self-evaluation report p10] and the second cycle programmes form a “suite of taught postgraduate courses that provides a progression route between undergraduate degrees and professional and/or doctoral level work in a range of specialist areas of musical study” [self-evaluation report p11]. The entrance requirements to second and third cycle programmes illustrate how the progression works [self-evaluation report p39].

The Committee found in the material evidence of the 3-cycle structure of the curriculum, as well as elements indicating a progression between the three cycles.

Does the curriculum take into account the various aspects of the ‘Polifonia/Dublin Descriptors’ (PDDs) and/or the AEC learning outcomes?

The Conservatoire has used the UK Benchmarks for music in higher education to define its programmes’ learning outcomes. However, for the purpose of the AEC review, the Committee was provided with a precise mapping of the Conservatoire’s learning outcomes against AEC Learning Outcomes for all 3 cycles [Annexes A3, B3, C(ii)1]. A few AEC Learning Outcomes were pointed out by the Conservatoire as missing in the institution’s learning outcomes, such as the psychological understanding in the first cycle and the pedagogical skills at postgraduate level (even if they are in the first case addressed in practice). Students were well aware of the existence of learning outcomes for each module and knew where to find them [Meeting with students].

The Committee found the mapping very well done. The curriculum developed is certainly not firmly derived from the AEC Learning Outcomes but the Conservatoire has developed learning outcomes from its own perspective and philosophy, which match closely the AEC Learning Outcomes. As the AEC Learning Outcomes are based on the cycle-level ‘Polifonia/Dublin Descriptors’, the Conservatoire’s use of differentiated learning outcomes confirms that a progression is ensured from one cycle to another in terms of skills students are expected to have developed at the completion of each cycle.

2.2 Delivery

How is the institution utilizing different forms of teaching in the delivery of the curriculum?

The curriculum is delivered through a combination of different teaching methods:

- At first cycle level, students are encouraged to learn more actively through a combination of individual lessons, masterclasses, workshops, ensembles and tutorials, [self-evaluation report p27].
- At second cycle level, students also benefit from workshops specific to their postgraduate pathway, as well as from seminars and presentations given by the course team, specialist speakers and students themselves [self-evaluation p33].
- At third-cycle level, students are guided by their supervisors, receive research training and have the opportunity to attend Research Seminars and to take part in an annual Research Study Day [self-evaluation report p37].

Students highlighted the new perspectives/ideas brought by guests performing the masterclasses and expressed their satisfaction regarding the invited experts, especially in the jazz field [meeting with students].

The Committee welcomes the use of various teaching methods in the delivery of the curriculum. The Committee could observe work in small groups in composition and piano history, and it seems that teachers are given the freedom to organise group lessons (on the hours dedicated to individual lessons). The Committee would like to commend this flexibility and encourage the Conservatoire's teaching staff members to continue exploring various teaching methods.

Are the teaching and learning processes based on the competence-based approach promoted by the PDDs?

The use of learning outcomes for each module shows a willingness to centre the teaching and learning process on the skills and competences the students will have developed at the completion of the course. The material provided to the Committee also indicates that a progressive approach to the 'responsabilisation' of the students is implemented [self-evaluation report pp. 15, 25 and 32].

Thus, it seems to the Committee that the teaching and learning processes are centered on the students and aim to train them at developing skills, knowledge and competences. The Committee welcomes the Conservatoire's awareness of the need to train informed musicians by providing students with a broad range of skills, including generic skills.

Are the students offered opportunities to present their creative work?

The self-evaluation report enumerates numerous performance opportunities offered to students [p19], including concert series for soloists, several festivals, jazz concerts series as well as opera scenes and opera.

Other opportunities include:

- Students' recitals, presentations and other elements of assessment;
- Postgraduate Performance Classes (which the Committee could attend), which enable students to perform in front of their classmates and receive oral and written feedback from them;
- An External Engagements Office, which provides students and recent graduates with opportunities to perform for a wide range of venues and events throughout the West Midlands" [self-evaluation report p57].
- Support from the event marketing coordinator, who assists the production of all Conservatoire public events (approximately 250 per year) [Meeting with the profession].

Students confirmed the possibility given to each of them to play in ensembles and highlighted the funding made available by the Conservatoire to support students' participation in festivals [Meeting with current students].

Thus, the Committee would like to commend the many opportunities students are offered to present their creative work.

Are there formal arrangements for students to receive regular counselling?

Students in the first and second cycle are assigned one or two tutors they can contact regarding any personal difficulties, general concerns over their education at the conservatoire, as well as problems regarding specific courses and academic matters [self-evaluation report p20 and p33]. Third cycle students work independently on their own research projects under the guidance of supervisors [self-evaluation report p35], but can obtain support and advice on personal matters from other Conservatoire staff [self-evaluation report p37]. In addition, the Conservatoire students

benefit from the Student Services of the University, including careers and counselling services and of the Students' Union [self-evaluation report p20, 33 and p35]. The interviewed students confirmed the availability of teachers for discussing these matters and their important support, and were well informed about the possibilities offered by the University [Meeting with students]. The staff also mentioned the "open-door policy" of the Conservatoire regarding students' concerns [Meeting with Heads of School].

The Committee takes note of the students' very positive appreciation of the study counselling support offered by the Conservatoire staff members. In this area, the Conservatoire clearly benefits from being a part of the University, as all other support services are provided to students by the University.

Does research have a role within each cycle?

In line with the objective to develop a "first-class research department" [self-evaluation report p9], research is seen as essential to carry out to Conservatoire's mission to promote "the highest standards of artistry, technique and understanding in the practice of music of many cultural traditions" [self-evaluation report p12]. Thus, research activities are not only undertaken in the field of musicology, but also in performance-related research and composition, including technology supported composition¹ [Meeting with the Research Department].

Research is given an important role in all programmes through:

- The involvement of a number of teaching staff in research activities, which results are constantly used to feed, update and enrich the curricula (see section 4.1 regarding the involvement of staff in research activities). Several examples for each cycle are given in the self-evaluation report on pages 20, 28, 33 and 37 and students underlined the good research background of the lectures and mentioned the various fields of specialism offered [Meeting with students]. Current staff fields of specialism include performance studies, music technology and composers such as Tinctoris, Charpentier, Messiaen and Berio [self-evaluation report p34].
- The involvement of students in research activities:
 - At first cycle level, students are encouraged to develop and implement research skills in a number of modules. For example, *Historical Performance Practice (year 2)* aims at making students "develop their independent study and research skills, apply their findings to a piece of their choosing" [Annex A1.2 - BMus2 Modules p68].
 - Second cycle programmes also foster the development of students' research skills. The *Performance Practice module (MMus/PGDip)*, for example, requires students finishing this course to demonstrate "a critical awareness of a range of general performance practice issues, including familiarity with current research on various topics", "an ability to devise and conduct their own independent research projects" and "advanced research techniques and communication skills (both written and verbal)" [Annex B1 - Second-Cycle Module Descriptions Part 2 p13]. Students enrolled in the Musicology pathway of the MMus will be trained as researcher [self-evaluation report p28].
 - At third cycle level, students enrolled in the Advanced Postgraduate Diploma in Music are encouraged to become an "informed performer" with an "awareness and understanding of performance practice issues" through their own research [Annex C(i)1

¹ Research, in the definitions used in the UK, includes composition and certain kinds of broadcast or recorded performance [AEC Overview of UK professional music training system, (<http://www.bologna-and-music.org/>)].

AdvPgDip Module Descriptions - p6]. The MPhil and PhD programmes are by nature research programmes.

- The opportunity for students to work in the framework of some of the Conservatoire's research projects: the Integra project in the field of live electronics has commissioned 16 composers to work with the project and involves the Conservatoire's best students as performers (of the music developed in the context of Integra) [Meeting with the Research Department].

The Committee had a very good impression of the role of research in the programmes. Research activities of students, which start in the first years of the BMus with students developing written works based on research, increase progressively in the last year of the BMus and in the second and third cycles. Although the introduction of research results in the programmes does not seem to be regulated, it seems to the Committee that a number of programmes are research based. The Committee would like to commend the engagement and dynamism of the Research Department staff members, as well as the important reflection process they have started in the Conservatoire. The potential to develop the Conservatoire as a Research Centre is indeed present.

2.3 International perspectives

Does the institution have an international strategy?

The Conservatoire's objective in terms of international perspectives is the "develop[ment] [of] its ever-widening international profile" through four action strands:

- "student exchanges, principally with European partners but also some in the USA
- staff exchanges
- partnerships and progression agreements with overseas institutions
- major recruitment activity in South-East Asia and east Asia" [self-evaluation report p21].

Regarding student exchange, the Conservatoire sent 11 students to European Conservatoires in 2009/2010 and welcomed 8 European students [Additional documentation Misc 2]. The Committee did not see any data regarding teacher exchange but learned from the Visiting Tutors that some exchanges had taken place, for example between Weimar and Birmingham, although none of the interviewed teachers had been on such exchange [Meeting with Visiting teachers]. The management team explained the low numbers of student and teacher exchanges by stressing the importance of the quality of the exchange experience rather than of the quantity of student/teacher exchanges [Meeting 1 with management team]. Nevertheless, the management team expressed itself in favour of increased ERASMUS activities and pointed out the cautiousness of the University towards ERASMUS [Meeting 1 with Principal and Vice-Principal].

Regarding international recruitment, the Conservatoire puts important efforts in recruiting students at international level, and mostly in South-East Asia and East Asia. Thus, "of the 654 students, 54 come from 19 European countries (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland etc.), 67 from outside Europe (China, USA etc)" [Self-evaluation report p7] and the Conservatoire's target is set at around 17% (100 students) [Appendix 4 – 2009 Review of the Conservatoire's Strategic Plan p4]. Yearly visits to institutions in China and Malaysia aiming at recruiting students are performed by the Vice-Principal, assisted in some cases by former students active as local agents [Meeting 1] and new audition centres have been established in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong [Appendix 4 p4]. In addition, a joint recruitment is in place in Taiwan and the Conservatoire is looking into recruitment in Korea. A progression scheme involving Wuhan Conservatory of Music is under consideration [Meeting 1]. Staff members pointed out the advantages of recruiting Far

East students in terms of selecting the best students, improving the general level and enhancing the intercultural atmosphere of the Conservatoire [Meeting with Course Directors].

In order to help international students to face challenges such as language or distance from their home country, several support schemes (including University services) are in place such as tutoring, English language support provisions and assistance by all teachers at the end of the classes [Meeting with Course Directors]. Birmingham Conservatoire's growing reputation across the international community as an institution "caring for its students" was highlighted [Meeting 9 with Senior Administrative Staff].

The Committee welcomes the effort made by the Conservatoire to recruit at international level and support international students. The Conservatoire certainly has a strategy for recruitment as well as international practices in place. Nevertheless, the Committee feels it would be essential for the Conservatoire to develop a written international strategy with aims and objectives and to look at international issues in a broader perspective. Such a strategy could be presented to the University and would reflect the Conservatoire's international activities to (potential) students. The Committee would also like to encourage the Conservatoire to embed the international strategy in its quality assurance/enhancement perspective. Regarding the exchange policy in particular, the Conservatoire is advised to look carefully into student and teacher exchange possibilities. Indeed, the Committee found the rate of in-and outgoing students and teachers rather small in comparison with other institutions in Europe. Exchange activities have inspired and brought many ideas and could be considered as a cycle the Conservatoire could generate, in addition to representing a funding perspective.

Is the institution participating in partnerships that provide international perspectives?

In addition to partnerships/progression agreements aimed at recruiting students, several connections were mentioned during the discussions, such as links with McGill University, Quebec Conservatoire, institutions in South Korea, France and Denmark, and potential links with institutions in Sao Paulo and China [Meeting with Course Directors]. In addition, the list of in- and outgoing students indicates the existence of agreements with institutions in Vienna, Brussels, Prague, Odense, Lyon, Paris, Leipzig, Weimar, Ferrara, Oslo, Krakow, Bucharest, Malmo and Crane (USA). Regarding international projects, Birmingham Conservatoire leads the Integra project with the support of the EU Culture programme in cooperation with six research centres and five new music ensembles in Europe [Self-evaluation report pp42-43]. Finally, the Conservatoire is playing an active role in the AEC.

Several connections with institutions abroad seem to be in place (or under consideration). Nevertheless, the Committee would like to advise the Conservatoire to set priorities and target the institutions with which cooperation for specific instruments or programmes could be set up. The Conservatoire is encouraged to look for areas of cooperation relevant for its educational offer and to develop exchanges and programmes together with the targeted institutions. More consideration could be given to teacher exchange, as it is often a way to promote student exchange and provide students with contacts abroad.

To what extent do the curriculum and the educational processes offer international perspectives?

The Conservatoire regularly invites international conductors, composers and musicians to work with its orchestras or give masterclasses; thus, in March 2010 Louis Andriessen will visit for a festival centred on his music [self-evaluation report pp6-7]. In addition, the Conservatoire hosts

conferences such as the *International Double Reed Society* (2009), which promoted 100 events in five days with 1000 delegates from over 40 countries students, and promotes artistic projects involving students, such as annual organ studies visits to Paris, Germany and the Netherlands [self-evaluation report p7].

The Committee welcomes the various activities undertaken by the Conservatoire to include international perspectives in its educational offer and would like to encourage the Conservatoire to continue with its efforts in this field. In addition, the Committee would like to recommend the provision of language courses for students in order to promote and facilitate their international activities.

2.4 Learning assessment

What are the main methods for assessment and how do these methods support teaching and learning?

The methods for assessment are comprehensively described for each study cycle in the self-evaluation report on pages 22-23 (first cycle studies), 28-29 (second cycle studies), and 33 and 38 (third cycle studies). A Conservatoire policy ensures that the duplication of assessment methods is avoided in first cycle studies, with the clear aim that students develop a wide range of generic skills, [self-evaluation report p22]. The module description, available online for all students, indicates precisely for each module the learning outcome(s) students are expected to develop, the assessment strategy and the assessment criteria derived from the learning outcome(s), including detailed marking guidelines as well as the way the feedback will be made to students.

The Committee found the description of the assessment methods very elaborate and informative and welcomes the diversity of assessment methods employed. It seems to the Committee that the assessment methods support teaching and learning as they aim at checking if and how each student has developed the learning outcome(s) he is expected to develop at the completion of a module. In order to reflect further on its assessment methods, the Conservatoire could consider mapping them against the course learning outcomes or against the AEC learning outcomes for each cycle. Such a mapping could reveal the existence of over-assessment or could lead the Conservatoire to reflect on the combination of several assessments.

What kind of grading system is being used in examinations and assessments?

The standard UK grading system with percentage marks from 0-100% is used. Depending on the study cycle considered, this system distinguishes between four or five divisions for the assessment of student works, such as Distinction, Commendation, Pass, and Fail [self-evaluation report p23, p.29 and p34].

In addition, marking guidelines are used and a moderation policy is in place:

- For each module, detailed marking guidelines have been designed, which relate the levels of achievement in the assessed work to the module learning outcomes for each division mentioned above and even for additional subdivisions (above 70% and below 39%) [Annex A8 Sample marking Guidelines].
- Staff marking guidelines provide staff members with clarifications and guidance on, for example, rating less than 30% or more than 70%, rating under-and over-length work, giving feedback to students on their work, etc [Annex A10 Staff Marking Guide].

- The moderation policy ensures that the marking is fair, consistent and reliable [Annex A9 Moderation Policy]: a course team member serves as moderator to compare marks given by several assessors, to inspect all failures, to re-mark if necessary, etc. The composition of all assessment panels is also carefully thought of to ensure moderation and external examiners observe various practical assessments to witness the standards applied by panels and ensure that procedures are correctly observed” [Annex A9 Moderation Policy].

The Committee appreciated the precise description of the grading system and welcomes the existence and the publication of detailed marking guidelines and of a moderation policy, easily accessible to students. In order to facilitate (and therefore encourage) student exchange, the Conservatoire may wish to consider mapping its grading system against the ECTS grading system.

3. Student qualifications

3.1 Entrance qualifications

In what ways do the entrance requirements assess the artistic, technical, academic and mental capacities of the applicants to accomplish the various aspects of the study programme within the expected timeframes?

Since 2005, Birmingham Conservatoire uses an on-line application process shared by seven conservatoires (CUKAS – the Conservatoires UK Admissions Service) [CUKAS Annual Report 2008]. This service has led to a dramatic increase of applications [self-evaluation report p40]. In 2009, 131 out of 680 candidates were accepted in Birmingham Conservatoire at undergraduate level, and 37 out of 130 at postgraduate level. Information on the formal requirements to be eligible for first cycle studies at the Conservatory is available in the self-evaluation report p39. In addition, every candidate is required to demonstrate his/her performance, knowledge and understanding skills through an audition as well as to express his/her motivation [self-evaluation report p40].

Regarding the criteria used to assess students, the first year marking guidelines are supposed to be used but it has recently been decided to design audition criteria in order to facilitate acceptance decisions and feedback to the candidates when requested [Feedback meeting]. The Heads of School indicated the importance of quality and student potential to complete the programme over intake numbers, but also highlighted the need to ensure a balanced number of players for each instrument [meeting with Heads of School]. The Visiting Tutors expressed their high satisfaction regarding students' general level, motivation and work [Meeting with Visiting Tutors]. They also support the multi-age intake policy of the Conservatoire - there is no age limit - for the high level of maturity brought to the student cohort. Finally, rigorous requirements are in place for international recruitment in the Far East in addition to a good level of English [Meeting 1 with Principal and Vice-Principal].

Although the Committee did not see detailed entrance criteria, the situation described seems similar to other conservatoires in Europe. The satisfaction of the teaching staff regarding students' level and potential, as well as the relatively few drop-outs seem to indicate that entrance requirements assess the applicants' skills in a relevant way, allowing them to accomplish the various aspects of the study programme within the expected timeframes. The Committee would like to support the Conservatoire's decision to design evaluation/marketing guidelines for the auditions. In addition, the Conservatoire might wish to consider evaluating the admission procedures regularly, as part of the Conservatoire's quality enhancement scheme.

3.2 Employability

Are graduates successful in finding work in today's highly competitive music life?

A governmental survey on employability is led every year among graduates 6 months after graduation [self-evaluation report p41]. Such a timeline is generally too short to obtain a clear overview of career destinations for graduates in performing arts, who might need several years to build up their career. The Conservatoire has tried to conduct surveys addressed to former students who had graduated 5 years (or more) earlier, but was faced with too many problems such as the difficulty to find former students and the lack of responses [Meeting with Principal and Vice-Principal and meeting with Heads of School]. The Conservatoire alumni organisation (BCA)

regularly invites alumni to open days and other events and alumni often come back after they have built a career or a family [Meeting with Heads of School]. Thus, the data available through surveys, through the Conservatoire's alumni organisation and through personal networks of the Conservatoire's staff make the latter believe that "at least 90% of graduates work primarily as musicians" [self-evaluation report p41].

The Committee would like to encourage the Conservatoire to further study graduates career destinations some years after graduation. It is indeed essential that the Conservatoire obtains a more precise overview of graduates' employment. In order to facilitate the immense task of contacting all former students, the Conservatoire might wish to consider limiting the scope of the survey by each year tracking students in a different study fields, such as brass students, wind students, etc. Although an alumni organisation is already in place, some sections of the AEC Handbook *Cultivating Good Alumni Relationships in Conservatoires*² could be helpful for the Conservatoire.

How diverse is the spectrum of music-related arenas in which graduates find themselves immediately after graduation and later? How do graduates contribute to the enhancement of cultural life locally, nationally and internationally?

The career destinations are rather diverse, as graduates are active in orchestras, music services (nationwide), community music organisations, education outreach programmes, teaching/lecturing in Higher Education, public (i.e. private) and state schools, as well as cathedrals and major churches [self-evaluation report p41]. Conservatoire graduates tend to build portfolio careers and a number of them are self-employed [self-evaluation report p40]. These trends were confirmed by the group of former students met by the Committee. They underlined the flexibility of the Conservatoire to support each student's individual aspirations as well as the richness of the personal and professional contacts they had been able to make while studying at the Conservatoire, often through the Visiting Tutors [Meeting with former students].

Thus, discussions with former students and teachers indicated that graduates are active in many types of activities, mostly at local and national level. However, the Committee was not able to see the results of any systematic data collection and is therefore not able to address this point fully. The Committee would like to stress the importance of the External Engagements Office of the Conservatoire in assisting students and recent graduates in finding performance opportunities, which sometimes lead to long-term employment.

² The AEC/'Polifonia' Handbook *Today's Student: Tomorrow's alumnus - Cultivating Good Alumni Relationships in Conservatoires* (2007) can be found online at <http://www.bologna-and-music.org/employability>.

4. Teaching staff

4.1 Artistic and scholarly qualifications

Are members of teaching staff productive as artists and/or scholars at a high level?

The part-time teaching staff is mostly composed of artists active in the profession as freelance musicians, composers, orchestra musicians, chamber musicians, conductors, producers, etc and of some scholars delivering academic lectures [Appendix 7 – Visiting Tutors List]. The benefits for students of having a strong professional presence enabling them to build professional contacts during their studies was highlighted [Meeting with former students].

In addition, members of the full-time academic team are either research active or active practitioners, or involved in practice as research [self-evaluation report p20]. Course Directors confirmed being occupied with performing and researching, in addition to teaching [Meeting with Course Directors] and several of the Heads of School were active performers [Meeting with Heads of School]. As mentioned in section 2.2-e, members of the teaching staff have various areas of specialism in musicology, composition and performance using music technology, and use their research results to build or enrich educational programmes.

The Committee was provided with a list of teaching staff CVs and publications. Based on this list and the above-mentioned information, it seems to the Committee that teaching staff members are active and productive as artists and/or scholars.

Is there an institutional policy and practice to support and enhance the teaching staff's artistic and scholarly production?

Regarding the scholarly production, the Conservatoire is in a position to financially support its staff, including part-time staff. The openness of the Conservatoire towards all research ideas and the willingness to finance individual research projects was also positively commented on [Meetings with Research Department, Course Directors and Visiting Tutors]. The Conservatoire has now developed itself as a research centre able to win competitive bids launched by the university and to substantially increase its external funding over the last 10-15 years. The results of the Research Assessment Exercise obtained in 2008 identifying Birmingham Conservatoire as a creator of world-leading research [self-evaluation report p37] confirm this positive picture. Events such as the series of Research Seminars or other types of Symposia organised by the Conservatoire also enable staff members to present their research contribution and exchange ideas with other researchers.

Regarding artistic activities, Heads of Schools indicated the encouragement and the freedom they were given by the Conservatoire to organize these [Meeting with Heads of Schools].

The Committee was able to observe an impressive institutional practice supporting and enhancing the teaching staff's scholarly production, as well as a large flexibility supporting their artistic activities.

4.2 Qualifications as educators

How does the institution ensure that all members of the teaching staff have appropriate qualifications as educators?

Several procedures are in place to appoint teaching staff, in which teaching experience/ability is considered [self-evaluation report p43]:

- the instrumental and vocal tutors are appointed after an interview or by peer recommendation from the UK music profession on the basis of their professional track record, their teaching ability/experience and their teaching qualifications.
- academic and full time instrumental staff members are appointed from a national advertising process and competitive interview on the basis of their academic qualifications, their professional track record, their teaching ability/experience, their administrative capability and their research/scholarship activity and track record. The short listed candidates are asked to give a presentation and/or sample lesson at the interview [self-evaluation report p44]. In addition, new full-time staff will be asked to attend teaching courses at the University, although this is not required from the Visiting Tutors [Feedback Meeting]. The difficulty to check in practice the pedagogical skills of the teaching staff was mentioned in relation to the professional pride, and other techniques such as checking staff experience and references are preferred. In addition, the management also relies on students' feedback questionnaires to point out any problem relating to the teaching qualifications of the staff.

The Committee did not go into detailed information on institutional procedures ensuring that all members of the teaching staff have appropriate qualifications as educators. Nevertheless, procedures to appoint new staff members seem to systematically take into consideration teaching experience, and in some cases, require evidence of this experience during the interview.

Are policies and strategies in place for continuing professional development of teaching staff?

The following opportunities are offered to teaching staff members regarding continuing professional development (CPD):

- A series of workshops is provided by the University for the development of generic skills intended to support teaching staff [self-evaluation report p44]. Heads of schools confirmed that any teacher was able to attend these lectures [Meeting with Heads of School].
- A staff development budget is made available to staff members upon request by the Conservatoire [self-evaluation p44]. Each staff member is responsible to identify its needs and discuss it with the Principal [Meeting with the Heads of School]. The management staff indicated that a budget of 10000£ a year was reserved for CPD of all staff members and that a more active approach of the institution towards its staff had been envisioned but not implemented [Feedback meeting]. Visiting Tutors have the opportunity to obtain a small funding to attend conferences or short course [Meeting with Senior Administrative Staff].
- An annual development day is organised for the Visiting Tutors enabling them to discuss educational matters, teaching approaches or other specific topics such as performance health [Meeting with Visiting Tutors].

The Committee noticed that an institutional practice is in place regarding CPD of teaching staff, as funding is made available to teaching staff requesting it. However, no programme for CPD of

teaching staff was provided to the Committee and the Conservatoire's approach seem more reactive than proactive in this matter. Therefore, the Committee would like to encourage the Conservatoire to develop a proactive strategy CPD of teaching staff. Such a strategy could for example include the provision of elective courses for the teaching staff or an annual discussion between the management and the teaching staff to discuss CPD matters. Regarding the teaching staff, consideration could be given to teacher exchange, as it represents a unique opportunity for a teacher to gain inspiration and impulses to his/her professional development. The Conservatoire is also encouraged to reflect on the involvement of the Visiting Tutors in the CPD activities. Some consideration could then also be given to the promotion of CPD activities among the teaching staff members. In addition, such a strategy would also represent a useful tool in the communication with the faculty, the university, as well as external stakeholders.

4.3 Size and composition of the teaching staff body

Is the number of teaching staff adequate to cover the teaching volume within a frame of acceptable quality?

The Conservatoire has 27 permanent academic staff including the Senior Management Team (Principal, Vice-Principal, Registrar) [Appendix 6 - Permanent Academic Staff List]. In addition there are 211 Visiting Tutors delivering one-to-one tuition and academic lectures and seminars [self-evaluation report p44]. The weekly teaching time of Visiting Tutors varies from a few hours per week to 3 or 4 days a week [Meeting with the Visiting Tutors]. In 2009/2010, 6850 hours are taught by full-time staff against 32450 by part-time staff [Breakdown of Teaching Hours – 2009-2010]. Workload related to preparation and assessment of certain classes is taken into account in staff contracts and members of full time staff are granted remission from teaching where they take on additional administrative burdens [self-evaluation report p18-19]. Students did not express any discontentment regarding the quality of the courses or the way the teaching volume is covered in practice.

Thus, the Committee had the impression that the number of teaching staff is adequate to cover the teaching volume. Even though leadership, Visiting Tutors and students emphasized the many positive aspects of a high number of Visiting Tutors, the Committee would like to encourage the institution to address the ratio between full-time and part-time teachers. The potential strength of a larger full-time teaching staff for institutional debate and development could be considered by the Conservatoire, for instance in relation to quality assurance.

Does the teaching staff cover all areas and disciplines included in the study programme?

The self-evaluation report indicates: "The Conservatoire's teaching staff is constructed to cover all areas of the curriculum. Instrumental and vocal staff cover all the main instruments and voices associated with Western Classical Music from 1600 to the present day including baroque and classical instruments. In addition, the Conservatoire teaches jazz instruments, electric guitar and world music instruments" [Self-evaluation report p44]. Students did not mention any area not covered by teaching staff. On the contrary, they expressed their satisfaction of being taught by several teachers (permanent, visiting and guest professors), thus being introduced to different perspectives [Meeting with students].

Thus, the Committee had the impression that all areas and disciplines included in the study programme are covered by the teaching staff.

Does the composition of the teaching staff allow flexible adaptation to new professional requirements?

The high amount of part-time teaching staff mentioned above provides a great level of flexibility to adapt the Conservatoire's programme to new professional requirements [Feedback meeting]. Part time staff workloads are agreed at the start of each year and subject to individual contract [self-evaluation report p18].

Although the Committee did not go into details about the length and renewal conditions of the staff contracts, its members shared the impression that the composition of the teaching staff with a important number of Visiting Tutors ensures flexibility in the Conservatoire's educational offer: given their involvement in the profession, Visiting Tutors are able to keep their students up-to-date with the new professional requirements; in case a new module needs to be developed, the Conservatoire will be easily able to hire a new Visiting Tutor competent in the field to deliver this module.

5. Facilities, resources and support

5.1 Facilities

Are the building facilities (teaching and practice studios, classrooms, concert venues, etc.) adequate to support curriculum requirements?

The facilities are described in detail in the self-evaluation report on pages 44 and 45. The performance venues, two halls, a foyer and a lecture theatre also hired out to external organisations, seem to be adequate to support the Conservatoire's concert and teaching activities. Both students and teaching staff expressed their satisfaction regarding the performance facilities, as well as the situation of the Conservatoire in the city centre and surrounded by all professional organisations [Meetings with students and Meeting with Visiting Tutors].

However, several complaints were heard regarding the teaching and practice space. Students voiced the need for much more practicing space [Meeting with students]; Visiting Tutors mentioned "bursting facilities" having a negative impact on their working conditions, as tiny rooms without windows are often the only solution [Meeting with Visiting Tutors]; Heads of School acknowledged that, although the narrowness of the building helped creating a community, the building was increasingly crowded [Meeting with Heads of School]. The management team is well-aware of the situation, has launched a pilot system for students to book rooms electronically and undertaken some refurbishment. The option of reducing the number of students is also considered [Feedback meeting].

Thus, the practice facilities are not fully adequate to support teaching and learning requirements. The Committee found the rooms regularly small, some of them with a rather poor acoustic, and finds it problematic that such rooms (especially with no window) are used for teaching. The Committee welcomes the management team's initiatives to cope with the space situation and would like to urge the University and the City to support the Conservatoire in finding a long-term solution to this problem.

Are the instruments (pianos, organs, percussion, etc.) of a number and standard adequate to support curriculum requirements?

The instruments are adequate to support curriculum requirements. The Conservatoire owns around 300 musical instruments available for use by its students, including world music instruments, percussion instruments and early instruments, as well as a collection of historical musical instruments [self-evaluation report p46]. Students indicated a good quality of instruments and mentioned their appreciation of the possibility offered to students to borrow instruments from the Conservatoire [Meeting with current students]. Visiting Tutors indicated that the piano stock had very much improved [Meeting with Visiting Tutors].

Are the computing and other technological facilities adequate to support curriculum requirements?

The computing and technology facilities, described in detail in the self-evaluation report on pages 46 and 47, are adequate to support curriculum requirements. Computers are available for teaching and office use as well as for students in the library and the IT room and students mentioned the possibility for them to borrow computers [Meeting with students]. Recording and Music Technology resources have been expanded in the last years [Review of the facilities] and the Conservatoire now offers six studios for recording, mixing and editing; two labs with digital audio

workstations and two concert halls equipped with facilities for recording, live electronics performance and public address [self-evaluation report p46]. It seems that the Conservatoire is giving priority to this area.

Are the library, associated equipment (listening facilities, etc.) and the services adequate to support curriculum requirements?

The library and its associated equipment are adequate to support curriculum requirements. The collection encompasses “monographs, sheet music and scores, sound recordings and DVDs, periodicals and appropriate electronic databases” [self-evaluation report p46]. Several study spaces are available for students, as well as an audiovisual listening and viewing room [self-evaluation report p46]. Staff members interviewed highlighted the profitable cooperation with the librarians, providing them with all needed material upon request [meeting with Visiting Tutors]. Students expressed their satisfaction with the library and the opportunity for them to order scores and other material, which are then provided within a week [meeting with current students and tour of the facilities].

5.2 Financial resources

How is the educational programme tailored, so that it can provide high quality requirements within the financial resources available?

Most of the Conservatoire’s income comes from the following three sources [Meeting with the Financial Controller]:

- Core funding from the government channelled via the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Free-standing conservatoires receive a premium on this funding in recognition of the high costs of specialist training, especially the one-to-one lesson. In the case of Birmingham Conservatoire, the institutional premium to ensure that the Conservatoire meets the HEFCE criteria for music specialist institutions is provided by Birmingham City University.
- Tuition fees: tuition fees which UK institutions charge to undergraduate students from the UK or EU countries are limited by the Government (fee cap) whereas postgraduate tuition fees and fees charged to students from outside the EU are not subject to the same restrictions.
- Research funding for projects of various sizes, as UK conservatoires are entitled to bid for research funding alongside the UK universities.

In addition, the Conservatoire collects some additional income by hiring out its concert venues and encouraging the sponsorship of its events. Thus, the Conservatoire runs on an annual budget set by Birmingham City University which turned over at around 7 millions pounds in 2008/9 [self-evaluation report p48].

The Management Team expressed its gratefulness regarding the University support but also its concern regarding the increasing demand of evidence and demonstration of “extra” results justifying the high costs of running the Conservatoire. Students indicated a certain lack of flexibility from the University regarding the Conservatoire’s needs, different from other faculties’ needs [Meeting with students].

The Committee had the impression that the available resources are well allocated as the Conservatoire provides an educational offer and a learning environment which obviously meet

students' requirements. No complaints were raised by staff members regarding financial issues; on the contrary, they can benefit from continuing professional development funding and can easily request the purchase of additional library items. More generally, the Committee was impressed by the cost-effectiveness of the Conservatoire: the institution is well-run and the hard level of work and engagement of the Management team and staff members was noticeable. Most permanent staff members perform multiple jobs and interviews indicated that the actions and contacts developed by the Conservatoire are organised to be as inexpensive as possible. However, the Committee feels that this situation is not sustainable and sees a high risk that the quality of the educational offer and the learning environment decreases if external funding is cut.

Is there a long-term financial plan?

The Conservatoire status in the University changed in 2007 with the creation of the PME Faculty (see section 1.1) with some consequences on the long-term funding plan for the Conservatoire, which is now under discussion as part of a major Capital Plan [self-evaluation report p48]. As the Government fee cap should be lifted in 2013, a new strategy is being prepared, in which the University intends to continue funding the Conservatoire into the future [self-evaluation report P48]. In addition, plans are being made to raise the funding for a new Conservatoire building or a refurbishment of the current building [self-evaluation p48 and Meeting 1 with Principal and Vice-Principal].

Thus, a discussion is being held within the Conservatoire, with the Faculty and the University regarding the long-term funding of the Conservatoire. The Committee could observe during its various meetings that self-analysis is undertaken at all levels to feed this reflection and encourages this process.

5.3 Support staff

Is the technical and administrative staff adequate to support the teaching, learning and artistic activities?

The self-evaluation report provides an organisational chart as well as detailed information on this matter. The support staff, composed of 29 members [Appendix 9 – Non-Academic Staff List], covers the following areas:

- Faculty Office, dealing with admissions, enrolment, examinations, validation and review of courses, as well as management of international recruitment and day to day administration of courses;
- Personal Assistants and Administrative supporting the Principal, the Vice-Principal and all departments
- Concert Office, managing the concert venues and all Conservatoire's rooms
- Support Services for the Conservatoire building
- Technical Support including one IT technician supported by the University's CICT department, a Music Technology Manager, an Audio Technician/Studio Manager, and a Halls and Studio Technician.
- Marketing
- Library

The members of the support staff met by the Committee indicated a high level of workload and mentioned that additional recruitment of support staff could be beneficial, for example in the area of marketing [Meeting with Senior Administrative Staff].

The Committee had the impression that the number of students and activities has expanded in the last years without any extension of the administrative staff. Such a situation could cause a problem in the future and should therefore be given consideration.

Are policies and strategies in place for continuing professional development of technical and administrative staff?

The University offers courses for staff members in a variety of areas and some of them had attended these courses [Meeting with Senior Administrative Staff]. However, time constraints and the fact that courses are offered on another campus represent a hurdle for attending CPD courses [Meeting with Senior Administrative Staff].

Continuing professional development of technical and administrative staff is possible upon request but it is unclear if all support staff members have information about it and are encouraged to look into this course offer. In line with the Committee recommendation of developing a strategy for teaching staff professional development, the Conservatoire may wish to consider addressing also support staff professional development in order to express clearly that such development is possible and encouraged.

5.4 Organisation and decision-making processes

To what extent do the following support the curriculum, and the teaching and learning processes:

- *the organisational structure of the institution*
- *the organisational structure of the study programmes and decision-making on curricular affairs?*
- *decision-making processes on institutional management*

An organisational chart giving insight into the ‘Committees’ at Conservatoire, Faculty and University level and their place in the overall structure is provided in the self-evaluation report p53. Birmingham City University is managed by its Corporate Management Group and for academic matters by its Senate, both committees being chaired by the Vice-Chancellor [self-evaluation report p50].

Regarding the study programmes, the Conservatoire Course Boards composed of the course management team meet regularly to review the courses and report to the Faculty Board which in turn reports to the Senate. As the Conservatoire’s programmes lead to awards of the University, the authority to decide if these programmes can be delivered lies in the University Senate [Appendix 10 - *The Validation, Approval, Annual Monitoring and Review of Programmes of Study*]. The process relies however on a strong involvement of teaching staff members and students (see section 5.5).

The Conservatoire Management Committee, chaired by the Conservatoire’s Principal, discusses matters such as student recruitment, health and safety and building matters, staff development, students and staff attendance at concerts, equal opportunities, etc [Additional Meeting with Principal]. It then reports to the Faculty Executive Committee of the Faculty of Performance, Media and English, which in turn answers to the University Corporate Management Group.

Course Directors expressed their satisfaction of the organizational structure dividing tasks between Course Directors and Heads of School and underlined the good team-functioning [Meeting with Course Directors]. Heads of School shared their appreciation of the artistic freedom and independence they enjoy and highlighted the very good communication in place with the Conservatoire's administration [Meeting with Heads of School]. Finally, the Visiting Tutors mentioned the Conservatoire's open-door policy and the constant possibility for them to propose the introduction of new modules [Meeting with Visiting Tutors].

The Committee did not go into details about the organisational and decision-making processes, and on the involvement of student and staff in these processes. However, comments from the teaching staff were positive and the Management Team as well as the staff members seemed satisfied about their influence on the process, even if some adjustments had to be made following the new status of the Conservatoire as part of the PME Faculty. Thus, the Committee had the impression that the organisational and decision-making structures support the curriculum and the teaching and learning processes.

Is there a long-term strategy for the improvement of the organisational decision-making structures?
This issue was not addressed in the self-evaluation report of the Conservatoire and has not been discussed during the review.

5.5 Internal quality assurance system

To what extent are effective quality assurance and enhancement systems in place for the continuous improvement of the curriculum and the learning environment?

Given its position within Birmingham University as member of the PME faculty, the Conservatoire's quality assurance activities are regulated at University level. The Conservatoire therefore follows the University regulations on *The Validation, Approval, Annual Monitoring and Review of Programmes of Study* [Appendix 10], which require each Faculty to realise:

- programmes' reviews every five years by a panel of internal and external experts, including professional musicians and reviewers from similar institutions. These reviews aim at maintaining and enhancing the standards of the University's awards, at stimulating curriculum development and at ensuring that study programmes reflect the University's Mission Statement;
- a rigorous annual monitoring process in which all modules and programmes are considered in terms of recruitment, progression and achievement, staff and student feedback, and learning and teaching innovation. Comments made by external examiners are also taken into consideration.

Following the Conservatoire Course Boards meetings mentioned in section 5.4, an annual course monitoring statement is written by the Vice-Principal to report to the Faculty Board on all issues as well as on the actions to be undertaken regarding each of these issues. The Heads of schools mentioned their appreciation of external examiners' involvement in the review process for the new ideas they bring [Meeting with Heads of School]. The support of the University in terms of quality assurance structures in place was highlighted as an added-value compared to other UK Conservatoires but the administrative burden related to writing reports and following strict University procedures was also brought up [Meeting with Course Directors].

Based on this information and some examples of reports of the Conservatoire Management Committee and Course Boards, the (AEC) Committee was able to confirm that quality assurance

and enhancement systems are in place for the continuous improvement of both the curriculum and the learning environment. The support of the University system is certainly very helpful for the Conservatoire in this regard, but some concern could be raised regarding the time spent in reporting for the university structures. The Conservatoire could consider investigating this matter and raising this topic with the Faculty and the University representatives if the results are indeed worrying.

How are staff, students and former students involved in the quality assurance process?

As far as staff members are concerned, the Course Directors are directly involved in the course review process; they mentioned several topics looked at during Course Boards meetings, such as the need for readjusting the learning outcomes of courses/modules [Meeting with Course Directors]. The Heads of School also indicated being involved together with the Visiting Tutors in the review process, but underlined the difficulty to ensure the presence of all concerned Visiting Tutors for the meetings.

As far as students are concerned, different involvement schemes exist:

- an online feedback questionnaire available to students and analysed for the annual monitoring process of the programmes [Meeting with students];
- a system of elected student representation on Committees and Boards [self-evaluation report p 52];
- informal meetings with teachers and Heads of School [Meeting with students];
- a Student Experience Committee with Student Experience Coordinators collecting students wishes and complains and meeting with the Vice-Principal to take action [Meeting with students].

The Management Team expressed the Conservatoire's wish to satisfy all students' concerns in relation to the idea that the student is client, but also mentioned the behaviour of 'responsible students', which the Conservatoire tries to promote through students' contract specifying the duties/roles of both the Conservatoire and the student [Additional Meeting with Principal].

As far as former students are concerned, the latter are not involved in quality assurance procedures in a systematic way [Meeting with Heads of School]. Some former students are involved in the quinquennial programme reviews.

The Committee welcomes the strong involvement of staff and students in the quality assurance process and could observe their awareness of the process and its functioning. In parallel to the formal procedures, informal discussions are taking place between teachers, between the management and students, between teachers and students, etc, which contribute to a general feeling of being involved and being heard. However, as expressed in section 3.2, the Committee would like to highlight the importance of involving former students in the process and to encourage the Conservatoire to explore all possible ways of collecting their feedback. This would provide the Conservatoire with precious information on the relevance of its programmes for recent graduates and enable the institutions to react fast to suggestions for increasing this relevance.

To what extent:

- *are such reviews used to improve the educational programme?*
- *is this process continuously analysed and reviewed?*

Each report written in the framework of the Course Boards and the Management Committee meetings ends with a list of actions to be undertaken following all comments received and all

observations of the participants; a person is then made responsible for dealing with a particular action and has to report on the progress made in that field [Additional Meeting with Principal]. At module level, the “effectiveness of the previous year’s action plan” is taken into consideration; at programme level, the “Board of Studies is required to monitor achievement against th[e] action plan during the spring term or second semester” [Appendix 10]. Thus, students indicated for example that all their suggestions have been taken into account following a student consultation in groups regarding recent changes in the curriculum [Meeting with students].

It seems to the Committee that the quality assurance process is used for quality enhancement purposes and that changes to improve educational programmes are implemented immediately after they have been observed and reported upon.

The continuous improvement of the procedure was not discussed during the review visit.

6. Public interaction

6.1 Influence on development

Is the institution involved in the public discourse on cultural and musical policies or other relevant issues?

The Conservatoire sees itself as a model of a Conservatoire within a University and as an institution also answering regional needs with the provision of music education in the West-Midlands [Meeting 1 with Principal and Vice-Principal]. In addition to the numerous public events organised by the Conservatoire, e.g. performances, festival, debates, conferences (see section 2.2-d), the latter plays an active role in several local, national and European organisations, such as Conservatoires UK, the Music Education Council and the AEC [self-evaluation report p54]. The Conservatoire has also developed close relationships with music and arts professional organisations in Birmingham (see section 6.2.)

The committee could therefore confirm the substantial role played by the Conservatoire in the public discourse on music education and arts policies.

To what extent does the institution initiate and involve itself in projects challenging existing musical policies and practices?

The Committee found indications of the Conservatoire's involvement in such projects. In the research field, the Conservatoire has initiated innovative projects in the areas of Composition and Music Technology and Music for Media. The Conservatoire has also established a contemporary music group, the *Thallien Ensemble*.

6.2 Interaction with the profession

How does the institution communicate and interact with various sectors of the music profession in order to keep in touch with their needs?

The information given in the self-evaluation report on the Conservatoire's interaction with the profession is very comprehensive and informative. In addition to hiring Visiting Tutors who contribute to ensuring a professional presence in the institution, the Conservatoire has established various connections with several organisations:

- City Of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO), enabling students to play in rehearsals, receive mentoring from orchestra members and attend concerts, as well as to play in the CBSO Youth Orchestra or join the CBSO Chorus.
- Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, with BCMG players running workshops for composition students and, together with BCMG visiting conductors, composers, coaching the Conservatoire's contemporary music group, Thallein Ensemble.
- Birmingham Royal Ballet, enabling students to sit in on rehearsals and receive advice from orchestra members, but also to follow the piano repetiteur training scheme.
- Birmingham Jazz, giving students comprehensive performing opportunities in Birmingham and major jazz platforms and organising visits of jazz stars at the Conservatoire.
- London's Philharmonia Orchestra, giving students the opportunity to play with the orchestra in rehearsals in the East Midlands.
- The Choir Ex Cathedra, providing choral scholarships for students.

- Birmingham Opera Company, giving Conservatoire students and staff the opportunity to work for the company, e.g. in the orchestra.
- Symphony Hall and the Whitlock Organ Scholarship, providing an organ scholarship.
- The Musicians Union, which students are encouraged to join as it seeks to improve working conditions for musicians and to increase the cultural economy in the region [self-evaluation report p55-56].

Members of these organisations interviewed by the Committee confirmed their close association and constant dialogue with the Conservatoire [Meeting with the profession]. They expressed their great satisfaction regarding the openness and flexibility of the Conservatoire to all kinds of cooperation, its broad approach to profession as well as regarding the level of students. They also indicated that feedback on the Conservatoire's educational offer is usually given through members of the professional organisations teaching at the Conservatoire as well as through informal contacts.

The Committee was impressed by the very good interaction, the intense relationship and the numerous collaboration schemes in place between the Conservatoire and the local professional organisations, and welcomes the synergy created by this mutual process. Such links will certainly provide students with professional contacts at a high level. In addition, the Committee also noted the increasing appreciation of the educational offer provided at the Conservatoire. In order to formalise the interaction with professional organisations, ensure regular reviews of the cooperation schemes and a formalised feedback process on its programmes, the Conservatoire is encouraged to study all possible ways to involve the representatives of professional organisations in a formal body.

The Committee was not provided with written agreements on the cooperation between the Conservatoire and its Junior Department and local music services. In case no formal cooperation is in place, the Conservatoire may wish to consider developing formal partnerships with these institutions. These partnerships could cover for example placements for Conservatoire's students choosing a teaching career; the provision by the Conservatoire of continuing professional development courses for music services teachers; joint orchestras and artistic projects with Conservatoire students mentoring Junior Department students, etc.

How does the institution participate in the exploration of new professional possibilities for musicians?

As mentioned earlier, the Conservatoire's mission is to "educate and train the brightest and best professional musicians of tomorrow" [Self-evaluation report p7]. It is therefore part of its objectives to explore new professional possibilities for musicians, which results in the promotion of :

- The Centre for Composition and Performance using Technology as well as research projects in the field involving students
- Projects with hospitals, community centres, prisons, schools and colleges [self-evaluation report p57].
- Projects in cooperation with the other Schools of the PME, for example with Conservatoire students composing music for films produced by students from the School of Media
- New courses offered in cooperation with other faculties e.g. in Music Technology (with the Faculty of Technology, Engineering and the Environment), Digital Arts in Performance (with Birmingham Institute of Arts and Design) and Popular Music Studies (with South Birmingham College).

The members of professional organizations such as Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and Birmingham Jazz expressed their appreciation of the Conservatoire's proactive character in this area. They underlined the openness of the Conservatoire to students' ideas and mentioned the freedom granted to students in the definition of their projects undertaken within the curriculum, which encourage students to start building firms and be innovative.

The Committee welcomes the initiatives of the Conservatoire in the exploration of new professional possibilities for musicians. Particular emphasis is given to the projects in relation with composition and technology.

Is there a long-term strategy for the improvement of the links with the profession?

The Committee acknowledges the existence of a developed cooperation practice with the profession. Strong links are in place and seem to be so for a long time. Nevertheless, the Conservatoire might wish to consider developing a strategy to improve these links, which would build on the Conservatoire's mission and encompass concrete objectives. As mentioned earlier, this strategy could also cover the development of partnerships with music services.

6.3 Information to potential students

Is the actual course programme consistent with the information given to the public on what the institution offers in terms of educational programmes?

Information to potential students is essentially provided on-line via the website of the Birmingham Conservatoire (<http://www.conservatoire.bcu.ac.uk/>). An entire section of the website is dedicated to applicants and contains information regarding English language requirements, entry requirements, auditions (and tips to succeed), tuition fees, financial aid, student support, the students' union, as well as the cultural life in Birmingham. In addition to detailed information on the Conservatoire's staff and departments, research, junior department and alumni, a section dedicated to the courses gives precise information on each programme offered at the Conservatoire, with the possibility to download *Programme Specification Documents* listing the aims of the programme, the intended learning outcomes as well as the teaching methods used to help students developing these learning outcomes. In addition, the *Prospectus* section enables all visitors to download short brochures giving brief overviews on various aspects of the Conservatoire, such as the brochures *About the Conservatoire*, *Ensembles*, *Applying and Auditioning*, *For international applicants*, *Birmingham*, *Sponsors and Partners*, etc.

The Committee was given the opportunity to attend the opening of the Open Day organised by the Conservatoire for all potential students. All participants were welcomed by the Principal's and Vice-Principal's addresses and invited to take part in guided tours of the Conservatoire building, in open rehearsals as well as to attend performances and meet staff and students. The Committee appreciated this opportunity and would like to encourage the Conservatoire to continue organising such events, which enable students to get a concrete and realistic picture of the Conservatoire's educational offer. In addition, the Committee found the website very user-friendly in terms of design, quality and clarity of the content and felt that the information contained on the website was consistent with the actual course programme.

7. Standard summary

Strong points

- **Mission, aims and objectives:** the Conservatoire's mission is clearly identified and specific aims and objectives have been set. The goals of the educational programmes are enshrined in the Conservatoire's mission.
- **Cost-effectiveness of the Conservatoire:** the Conservatoire is cost-effectively run and the quality of work and engagement of the Management team and staff members, many of them performing multiple jobs, should be commended.
- **University support:** the Conservatoire benefits in several ways from being a part of the University, with assistance in students support services, quality assurance and financial matters.
- **Satisfaction of students and staff members:** students and staff members seem very satisfied with the convivial atmosphere existing in the Conservatoire at all levels. The open-door policy is used and appreciated and staff and students are involved in the quality assurance processes.
- **Preparation to the profession:** the Conservatoire reflects on the professional trends and strives to train flexible students through a diversity of programmes and courses for portfolio careers. The Conservatoire also explores new professional possibilities for musicians and particular emphasis is given to the projects in relation with composition and technology.
- **Student-centered approach:** the teaching and learning processes are student-centered. Learning outcomes have been developed for each module, which match closely the AEC Learning Outcomes and show a progression from the first to the third cycle. Various teaching methods aiming at encouraging students' active learning are used in the delivery of the curriculum.
- **Interaction with professional organisations:** the Conservatoire has established a very good interaction with local professional organizations including numerous collaboration schemes for students' training. The External Engagements Office provides students with performance and job opportunities.
- **Research activities:** the Conservatoire highly values research and aims at developing as a Research Centre. Students are progressively encouraged to undertake research activities and teaching staff members are given numerous opportunities to pursue research activities. The work and engagement of the Research Department in the Conservatoire's development in the field of research should be commended, with a high number of research projects undertaken and externally funded.

Potential for development

- **International strategy:** to reflect on and promote its high international ambitions, the Conservatoire is recommended to develop a written international strategy. In addition to the international recruitment activities, the Conservatoire is also recommended to look carefully into student and teacher exchange possibilities and to set priorities and target partner institutions according to specific instruments or programmes. More consideration could be given to teacher exchange, as it is often a way to promote student exchange and provide students with contacts abroad. Foreign language courses could be provided for students to promote their international activities.
- **Continuing professional development for teaching and support staff:** an institutional practice supporting and enhancing the teaching staff scholarly production is certainly in place, as well as a large flexibility supporting their artistic activities. However, the Conservatoire is advised to develop a proactive strategy for the continuing professional development of teaching and support staff in order to express clearly that such development is possible and encouraged and that some funding is available. Teacher exchange is certainly a way to provide teachers with professional development opportunities and this could be part of the international strategy of the Conservatoire.
- **Practice and teaching facilities:** the practice and teaching space are not sufficient to support teaching and learning requirements with the current student numbers. The Committee welcomes the management team's initiatives to cope with the space situation and would like to urge the University and the City to support the Conservatoire in finding a long-term solution to this problem
- **Tracking and involving alumni in quality assurance processes:** It is essential that the Conservatoire obtains a more precise overview of graduates' employment. A systematic data collection would need to be in place to ensure a proper knowledge of graduates' destination. To this end, more stable contacts with them could be progressively developed. The Conservatoire is also advised to involve alumni in quality assurance processes and use their feedback to constantly improve the content and relevance of the education provided.
- **Entrance examinations:** the Conservatoire might wish to consider evaluating the admission procedures regularly, as part of the Conservatoire's quality enhancement processes.
- **Interaction with professional organizations:** The Conservatoire might wish to consider developing a strategy to improve and formalise these links, which would build on the Conservatoire's mission and encompass concrete objectives. This strategy could also cover the development of partnerships with music services and the Junior Conservatoire.
- **Administrative duties:** The support of the University system in quality assurance is certainly very helpful for the Conservatoire, but some concern could be raised regarding the time spent in reporting for the University structures. The Conservatoire could consider investigating this matter and raising this topic with the Faculty and the University representatives if the results are indeed worrying.