Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of The Prince's School of Traditional Arts, October 2017

Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1   From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that The Prince's School of Traditional Arts (the School) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the 2016 [Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers)](#).

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2   There are currently a total of 32 students at the School. Twenty-seven are on programmes validated by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD): 23 on an MA in Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts; one on an MPhil programme; and three taking PhDs. Four students are continuing their PhDs under earlier arrangements with the University of Wales. In addition, there is currently one student at the School on an exchange programme with an institution in Pakistan. No significant changes have taken place since the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) visit in 2016.

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3   The School is making acceptable progress in implementing its action plan. The good practice has been continued and the three affirmations have been progressed, with the identified actions addressed and implemented. The recommendation to provide adequate support to research supervisors has been addressed and the one new research student has been well supported. A new process of logging informal complaints has been introduced, with the Academic Board considering issues raised. Formal individual student feedback is now effectively collected at the end-of-teaching module sessions. A Visiting Tutor Representative has been appointed, who liaises with other visiting tutors and represents their views at the Academic Board.

4   The School has continued to extend the community of practice in ways that enhance the student experience, a point of good practice identified in the 2016 review. Initiatives for the 2016-17 academic year included a field study trip to Cairo, an open programme of short courses and lectures from April to June 2017, an exhibition on the Buddhist Cave Temples at Dunhuang, and visits to the British Library and museums. Students met by the team report that these activities and the guest lecture programme are of benefit to their studies and practices.

5   A series of research training sessions is provided by the School to support research students, which include information literacy and research skills training. Students are provided with a Research Student Handbook and other useful information. Students meet their supervisory team on a regular basis, with records of meetings being kept and reviewed through the annual progress review, and by the University of Wales or UWTSD. The research student who met the team reported a high degree of satisfaction with the supervisory arrangements and the support given by supervisors. New research students will receive research skills training sessions through a revised existing study module.

6   The School has addressed the recommendation to provide adequate support to research student supervisors and new research students. The School currently has a strong team of experienced supervisors, with a good track record of successful completions. One new research student started in autumn 2017 and is being supervised by the current supervisory team. This student has been provided with a range of appropriate support and is highly satisfied with the research training provided. The School plans to increase the number of research students and will be working with UWTSD to support this. Additional capacity for research supervision will be provided through new supervisors, who will be trained and mentored by existing experienced supervisors and will attend mandatory supervisor skills training sessions at UWTSD. The School has developed plans for supervisory training, which will be overseen by the Director of Educational Development, the Director of Research and the Research Degrees Committee, and further support and development needs will be identified through individual staff appraisal. The review team notes that it would be useful for the School to formalise these plans and to consider and finalise them through the School's deliberative structures.

7   An informal student complaints procedure has been developed to enable the monitoring and evaluation of issues raised by students; since March 2017, a log is maintained on the staff intranet. The School evaluated the informal complaints log at the June 2017 meeting of the Academic Board and will continue to do so annually. Just one informal complaint was logged between March and June 2017, which has been addressed by the School. The Student Handbook 2017-18 provides information about the recording of informal student complaints and offers useful guidance. Students met by the review team confirmed that there were no difficulties in raising concerns, and that issues were always dealt with promptly and appropriately.

8   Following the recommendation from the 2016 HER review, individual student feedback is now obtained by setting aside 10 minutes at the end of each module to distribute UWTSD module questionnaires to students. This has proved effective, with a very high student response rate for some modules. The School will continue with this recently introduced approach. Students reported satisfaction with this method for completing module evaluation questionnaires. The School summarises the findings from these questionnaires using UWTSD Module Tutor Report Forms and includes written responses on each point from the Director of Studies. This summary is then presented to the relevant Course Board and Academic Board. In addition, module teachers make use of the comments when completing the module review.

9   The School intends to review its Teaching and Learning Strategy over the 2017-18 academic year and in doing this will involve the wider community of teaching and support staff. The Academic Board provides a channel for the wider community to participate in programme monitoring and review. The School has identified a part-time member of teaching staff to represent visiting tutors and to attend Academic Board meetings; several items from visiting tutors were brought to the Board's attention in June 2017 and appropriate action identified. The School librarian attends meetings of the Course Board, Student Forum and Academic Board. The Trustees receive regular reports on a range of academic and professional activities from the Director of the School.

10   The School has continued to implement the actions affirmed in the 2016 review. These actions were designed primarily to strengthen the School's strategic management and administrative capacity, including the introduction of the Programme Strategy Group (PSG) to plan and oversee integrated enhancement activity and work patterns across all activities. The minutes of the meetings for 2016-17 demonstrate that the PSG is fulfilling its role effectively. In parallel, a Resources Group will work with the PSG to ensure that all strategic decisions and action plans are properly reflected and supported in the operational management of the School. Action has been taken to develop a social media policy,

which was adopted in June 2017 and included in the 2017-18 Student Handbook. A technical review of the School's website has been undertaken based on an external consultant's report, which will lead to a major reconstruction of the site by an external firm. The School has developed a staff appraisal policy, with appraisals conducted at the end of the 2016-17 academic year.

11   The admissions procedure and entry requirements are clearly laid out on the School's website and are conducted according to the School's admissions policy. Prospective students whose first language is not English and who do not have a higher education qualification from a recognised institution in a majority English-speaking country must have an IELTS score of 6.5 for admission to the MPhil/PhD programme or 6.0 for the MA degree. The admissions process is conducted in two stages: all candidates shortlisted by the School Admissions Committee are interviewed in person or by videoconference; those who are offered a place following interview are required to provide evidence of their academic and other qualifications. The UWTSD Admissions Committee makes the final decision on offers for the research degree programme. Students met by the review team reported that the admissions process was thorough and that they appreciated the individual guidance received both on the administrative and the academic front. Overall, the admissions process for the MA and research degree programmes is robust, fair and transparent, with clearly stated academic and other entry requirements.

12   Annual quality monitoring within the School operates effectively within the framework described in the 2016 report. Action by the School has strengthened its processes to facilitate contributions from the wider School community. The School participated in a Partnership Review by the UWTSD in June 2017, which was conducted in accordance with awarding body procedures. The review resulted in a commendation for the School's support to students, including the provision of additional resources and response to student feedback. A number of recommendations were made, including identifying ways of maximising the scope of the partnership, opportunities for research students to engage with the University, and for the University to raise the profile of the partnership.

13   The School has an effective approach to the engagement of students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. Student representatives sit on the Academic Board, the Course Board for MA student representatives, and the Research Degrees Committee for research student representatives. Students met by the team considered themselves fully engaged with the work of the School at all levels and noted that issues raised are addressed in a timely and adequate way. Student representative role descriptors are made available in the Student Handbook. Second-year MA student representatives help to train new student representatives for their role. There is a Student Forum, which meets termly and is open to all students to attend. This provides opportunities for information to be shared with students and allows any issues to be raised.

14   The data provided by the School indicate high levels of retention and success on the MA in Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts. The cohort admitted in September 2014 had 100 per cent completion and success rates. Two students discontinued from the September 2015 intake, while the eight remaining students completed successfully. To date, the cohort admitted in September 2016 has a 100 per cent retention rate. The picture in respect of the MPhil and PhD programmes is more mixed. In 2015-16, the School had a group of 10 part-time PhD students, three full-time PhD students and one full-time MPhil student enrolled at the University of Wales, some of whom had been on the programme for nine or 10 years, in addition to three part-time PhD students who were originally enrolled with the University of Wales but who transferred to UWTSD in May 2016. Three withdrew during 2015-16, and a fourth withdrew in 2016-17. Four students successfully completed their PhDs in 2015-16, and one PhD and one MPhil student successfully completed in 2016-17. One student was asked to resubmit in 2015-16 and one student was asked to resubmit in

2016-17. As indicated in the 2016 report, the School suspended recruitment of new research students at the end of 2015 to allow for consideration of how best to enhance its research supervision capacity. One new part-time student enrolled in September 2017. At the beginning of the 2017-18 academic year the School has four PhD students enrolled with the University of Wales, three continuing PhD students enrolled with UWTSD, and one newly enrolled MPhil/PhD student with UWTSD.

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

15   School staff are aware of the requirements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and those of UWTSD, which incorporate these requirements. Selected staff at the School attend a range of external events, for example those organised by UWTSD on assessment and research student management; the School thus makes good use of guidance from its validating body. The Registrar attended a workshop on enhancing student engagement organised by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. A key internal document that was described in detail to the team is the School's Teaching and Learning Strategy, which is closely informed by the relevant sections of the Quality Code.

Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit

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

17   The monitoring visit was carried out by Professor Donald Pennington, Reviewer, and Dr David Taylor, Coordinator, on 26 October 2017.