BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

RANDOM SPOT CHECK INSPECTION
(College)

INSTITUTION: School of Sound Recording

ADDRESS: 42-43 Gloucester Crescent
London
NW1 7DL

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Mr Ian Hu

DATE OF INSPECTION: 12 April 2017

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued Accreditation April 2017

PART A - INTRODUCTION

1.   Background to the institution

The School of Sound Recording (SSR/the College) began with the establishment of a commercial sound studio, which was called Spirit Studios. This studio was established in Manchester in 1980 by the College's founding Director. Spirit Studios no longer exists, although the name is still used, for example on promotional material. In 1984, recognising an increasing demand for professionally trained sound engineers within the music industry, Spirit Studios became the School of Sound Recording, providing courses in audio engineering and music production.

The main campus of SSR is still located in central Manchester, in premises, that have been converted for the purpose of teaching its programmes. There is also a second premises in north London, which is the subject of this inspection. The London campus opened in January 2011. It is located on the lower ground floor of a building known as the Rotunda. The complex houses a number of other businesses over five floors. The building is in the heart of Camden Town, which is a vibrant and lively area of north London.

SSR has links within the music and media industries, with over one hundred partners. It has strong links with Advanced Music Systems (AMS) Neve Ltd, which produces high quality music and sound equipment. It also has academic collaboration arrangements with a number of universities.

The College aims to provide its graduates with the skills, experience, contacts and opportunities to find their dream jobs in the music and related industries.

SSR is a private limited company. The founding Director is now the Managing Director. He delegates the overall management of the business to the Director, who is based in Manchester. The London operation is managed, day-to-day, by the Head of London Operations. Central support, for example with regard to human resources, is provided to the London campus from Manchester.

Graduates of SSR have gained employment with major artists and companies in the music and media industries. Many have set up their own businesses or become successful freelancers.

2.   Brief description of the current provision

SSR offers a range of courses in five main subject areas, which are music production and sound engineering, disk jockeying (DJ), film, games and animation and the music business. It also offers music, film and games non-residential summer schools, of five days' duration.

The courses include an eight weeks' course in DJ techniques, six-month courses in applied sound engineering, electronic music production and film production as well as two Bachelor of Arts (Hons) programmes in music production and electronic music and DJ practice. The latter two programmes can be studied either over three years full-time or five years part-time. They are offered in partnership with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN). A range of other courses, of varying lengths, are offered in games development. One-to-one tuition is also provided.

The College has a wide range of high-quality studio and computing facilities. It trains its students for careers in music production, sound engineering, audio post production, film, television and radio.

At the time of the inspection, there are 150 students enrolled on programmes. The majority of students are male. Students come from the United Kingdom (UK). Other countries, which are represented, include Lithuania, Latvia and Italy.

3.   Inspection process

The inspection was carried out by one inspector over half a day. Discussions were held with the Head of London Operations and the Admissions and Student Services Co-ordinator. Meetings also took place with students, including a group studying the Music Production and Sound Engineering programme and a tutor. The start of an evening teaching session was observed. A tour of the premises was also carried out and various documentation was scrutinised.

4.   Inspection history

Full Inspection:	25-26 May 2010
Interim Visit:	31 January 2012
Supplementary Inspection:	10 November 2012
Full Inspection:	11-12 November 2014
Interim Visit:	22 August 2016

PART B – JUDGMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgments and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution.

1.   Significant changes since the last inspection

No significant changes were reported

2.   Response to actions points in last report

3.2 A formal written process of verifying staff qualifications before employment at SSR must be put in place.

Evidence was seen that qualifications for staff are checked and recorded. However, there is still no formal written process. It is planned to put in place this in place before the next scheduled inspection.

3.   Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

It is recommended that the college uses the services of an organisation such as the CIPD to enable them to benchmark their policies and procedures against best practice.

SSR is a member of a Chamber of Commerce in Manchester, which provides SSR with the necessary advice and support on all aspects of business, including human resources issues.

4.   Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

4.1   Management, Staffing and Administration (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be		✔		
Comments				

Regular recorded formal meetings of the senior management team across both campuses, supplemented by staff meetings and informal contact on a daily basis, ensure effective communication takes place. Minutes of meetings are detailed and include clear action points, which are effectively followed up in subsequent meetings. The minutes show that issues are raised and appropriate action is planned to resolve any issues.

A staff handbook contains key clear and relevant policies and procedures.

Procedures for the induction of new staff are detailed and include appropriate checklists for all staff, with additional areas to cover for technical, teaching and management staff to ensure consistency and that nothing is missed.

There is a clear staff development policy in the staff handbook. Training undertaken by individual staff members is logged and includes a statement about the benefits of the training to the individual and the business. Training needs are identified through staff appraisals.

Clear entry requirements for the various courses are provided on the website. It is made clear to students that they have to do additional work, outside the class time, including studio time, in order to be successful in their studies.

Good student records are maintained and include notes about individual students' attendance rates.

4.2   Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✔			

Comments

Appropriate schemes of work and lesson plans are used well to plan the programmes and lessons. Tutors have access to lesson plans and teaching resources through the virtual learning environment (VLE), maintained by the College.

Information on timetabling and the allocation of rooms and tutors is maintained on a database, which is accessible to students so that they are aware of what is happening and can keep up-to-date with any changes. In the event that a course is cancelled, at late notice, contact is made with the affected students, including by telephone. The database and VLE are maintained by the Admissions and Student Services Co-ordinator to ensure they are aligned. Some issues, that have been experienced with the database and the VLE, have been resolved. Students confirm that they are aware of any changes to their course.

Procedures for recruiting and inducting teachers include an assessment of teaching skills, as well as industry knowledge and experience. A tutor handbook contains relevant information, including on the provision of support for the use of the information technology resources, to assist tutors with their work.

On-going teacher training, which is informed by the outcomes of lesson observations, is provided and logged, including the resulting benefits. A bespoke video is available to provide training on using new equipment for example the electronic whiteboards.

Procedures for carrying out and recording regular lesson observations, which are carried out by the Academic Director, follow best practice. They are detailed and provide excellent feedback on strengths and areas to improve and develop. A report is complied, which is based on all the observations carried out in a year. This provides an excellent overall view of the development areas and good practice and, as a result, aids the effective sharing of best practice and the planning of relevant additional training.

Tutors confirm that they receive appropriate training and that the effective sharing of best practice takes place.

Students are very positive about the quality of teaching, including the fact that teachers have relevant industry experience.

Students have access to learning materials through the VLE.

Assessment briefs are clear and include the learning outcomes covered, clear deadlines for submission and indicative reading resources. Where relevant, assessments are signed off by UCLAN and are not changed thereafter. Details of the assessments, with submission dates are also available to students on the database. Students confirm that the assessments are clear and fair and that they know by when they need to submit them. Assessments are marked and graded by the tutors. Detailed feedback is provided so that students know what they are doing well and what they need to improve. Additional support is provided through one to ones and tutorials.

Students confirm that they get very good support in finding employment and that they make very good progress with regard to their studies.

4.3   Student Welfare (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✔			

Comments

Tutors provide students with personal welfare support and are able to refer students, as appropriate, to specialist student support services, including external organisations.

Students confirm that they receive a suitable induction, so that they are aware of the expectations of them in connection with their course. They say that the staff are quick to respond to any queries they may have.

The student handbook contains useful information, including on appropriate behaviour, complaints and assessment appeals.

4.4   Premises and Facilities (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✔			

Comments

The premises are adequately maintained and decorated. Very good use is made of the space to provide good study and practice areas for the students.

Good information is provided to staff and students in their respective handbooks.

The equipment to support students' learning, for example furniture and lighting, is regularly reviewed and up-graded as required. Students say that the specialist equipment, which is provided is excellent and up-to-date. Staff have clear responsibilities for ensuring the specialist equipment is in good working order and to assist tutors to set up the equipment in student areas, if required. Such support is provided during the day and evening.

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS
Enthusiastic management and teaching staff
High quality equipment to support students effectively with their learning
Good policies and procedures to support the effective running of the organisation

ACTIONS REQUIRED	Priority H/M/L
3.2 A formal written process of verifying staff qualifications before employment at SSR must be put in place.	M

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT
None