TEF Year Four provider submission

Provider Context

1.1 The Academy of Live and Recorded Arts' (ALRA) mission is to equip actors and theatre technicians of all backgrounds and ages with the skills fundamental to a productive and creative life in the performance industries, through the provision of a specialist vocational drama education for students whose primary goal is to work within this industry. ALRA runs degree programmes accredited by Council for Dance and Education Training and is a member of the Federation of Drama Schools.

1.2 ALRA deliberately recruits students who may generally not access higher education due to their socio-economic background. ALRA has developed a robust approach to Widening Participation which is underpinned by a Nationwide outreach programme and our admission policies are specifically designed for students to enter Higher Education level provision with non-traditional and often non-academic routes. A strategic review of the non-academic admission process has been undertaken over the last two years, developing a new approach that allows the innovative use of digital environments to accelerate the critical and evaluative potential of our candidates.

1.3 ALRA's admission policy is centrered around the growing focus of the school towards recruiting those who not only face a social and/or economic barrier to conservatoire training but also to training in general. An example of this is our partnership with Leicester College which involved creating an accelerated BA Acting Creative Performance Practice that leads onto our MA programmes. We also have evolving partnership with pastoral care agencies that create access for those not normally able to access education.

1.4 The 2016/2017 academic year was the first year ALRA took part in the National Student Survey, achieving 95% student satisfaction, placing us in the top 3 Drama Schools in the country and the highest in London. The 2017/2018 year saw similarly high NSS scores, with ALRA obtaining 90% student satisfaction as well as significantly improved scored on Academic Support – an area of strategic priority for ALRA.

1.5 In autumn 2017 ALRA had a successful QAA Higher Education Review (Alternative Provider), receiving just one recommendation and, during the more recent Annual Monitoring Visit, ALRA was deemed to have achieved this recommendation and received a positive review outcome.

1.6 ALRA's investment in staff development is prioritised with the student experience. Our institutional engagement in the teaching and learning opportunities for staff have significantly increased as we seek to improve our work. All staff take part in pedagogic, governance focused and artistic training to widen their currency as practitioners and engage them with the most relevant thinking and 'doing' in the industries we precipitate. Recent examples of this include institutional training with Advance HE (90% of staff are now Advance HE fellows), Mental Health First Aid training, Actor Movement symposiums and the launch of the Northern Centre for Voice and Movement. We have a number of staff training on doctoral and masters level study as well as opportunities to develop their own practice through abundant CPD opportunities. Currently, staff are working on productions with Head Long, Sarah Esdaile, Arts Council England funded touring and projects mentored by the Artistic Director of the National Theatre. It is a strategic priority for ALRA to continue tackling diversity in British Theatre with conferences held across both campuses. ALRA has signed the MHFA Charter and provides equal numbers of mental health and physical health first aiders.

1.7 ALRA currently runs a BA Acting programme, MA Professional Acting programme and has recently started a new MA Directing, as well as a number of short courses.

1.8 Enhancement around employability is an also strategic theme within the academy seen in many features of programme delivery. Over the past two years we have organised Gala events driving in agents and casting directors from London and Manchester directly to student performances. The Gala consists of seeing level 6 and 7 productions and the impact of this has been a doubling in talent agent management for our students and a rise in the quality of the employment of all graduates. This has included two Hollywood castings in the last year, arguably the top tier of recorded media employment.

1.9 Studying at ALRA places learners at the heart of their practice. Rather than teach a certain methodology, students are asked to find their own, guiding their learning through intense reflection, evaluation and experience. From day one the actor engages in the skills of body, voice and imagination and their reflection on the value of these fields as intersecting and equivocal to prudent characterisation. As they systematically progress through more complex recorded media and live performance opportunities the students reflect on their value, their offer and their place in the industry and indeed the world around them. ALRAs graduates are empathetic, open and connected to a view that is wider than the academy, wider than their culture and authentically engaged with their craft.

1.10 ALRA considers Student Partnership an integral part of being a successful education provider and throughout this submission process our Lead Student Representatives (the equivalent of a Students' Union Sabbatical Officer) have been integral in the drafting of this document.

1.11 This report provides a narrative for ALRA's performance against the factors considered as part of the TEF.

Teaching Quality

2.1 In line with the review of strategic priorities, ALRA has undergone a whole school curriculum review as part of our ongoing pedagogic development. Throughout this period, we have formed focus groups with students exploring the pedagogic rationale behind existing assessments and module content to seek new and innovative ways of delivering their degrees. These meetings have centred around the reduction of assessment, engagement with digital assessment environments and more formal engagement with research as an authentic assessment activity.

2.2 Both student and staff groups agreed with idea that the academic literacies within the subject specialism of acting were more suited to blog, vlog and podcast assessments as ways of developing the sense of evaluation and reflexivity required of actors in the 21st Century. Adhering to tariffs informed by the guidelines of FHEQ level specific characteristics, the assessment of the critical and reflective skills required of ALRA graduates has been tailored entirely away from the traditional essay and exam-based assessments. The student response to this has been phenomenal, creating a sense of ownership of the assessment and a deeply engaged student body in an area that was previously described by the External Examiner as lacking in academic rigour.

2.3 Modelled on existing Practical Research Project at level 7, the replacement of the written submission Independent Project at Level 6 with an authentic assessment modality, including the use of peer feedback, has been received warmly by the students. Placing the summation of their practical skills into the real-world exploration of the creation of a film, theatre or audio performance has again, evolved into a culture of enthusiasm and curiosity.

2.4 The reduction of assessment has roughly averaged 70% across the curriculum which has reduced the stress placed on the Programme Teams and Student Cohorts. Our QAA report recently noted that this reduction was achieved without losing the assessments' 'clear alignment to the learning outcomes'.

2.5 ALRA, as a member of the Federation of Drama Schools, is required to deliver an intensive teaching load based on the hallmarks of a conservatoire training (as outlined in their 'core principles document). The Academy runs 36 hours of training per week for 24 weeks per year as well as 10 intense assessment weeks with no less than 12 hours contact time each.

2.6 One on one and/or small group tuition is received throughout level 4,5 and 7 by the Lead Movement and Voice Tutors. These tutorials focus on the physical and vocal skills required of an actor in an individual setting, often including the incorporation of imaginative techniques. At level 6 the Performance: Live module is supported with four hours of movement and voice specialist input complementing the practice of the theatre director. This targeted provision is overseen by the Lead Skills Tutor across both campuses ensuring excellence across the staff pool and breadth of experiences that exist in the different regional influences. The impact of this work is to create graduates that connect to our ideology of body, voice and mind in two facets, firstly to be able to separate the techniques and correct/self-direct manually, but secondly to synthesise these techniques later in their performance work.

Impact and effectiveness of external examining

2.7 ALRA makes extensive use of its external examiner to ensure academic oversight and currency within the higher education sector. Perhaps unusual within the conservatoire model, ALRA is committed to ensuring the quality of its pedagogic design is cutting edge and referenced widely within the latest frameworks. Our use of the External Examiner during the

full curriculum review demonstrates how External Examining is an integral part of ALRA's model of governance and creative practice.

2.8 The review of this pedagogical aspect of our curriculum was underscored by consultation with industry and focused the impact this could have on the employability of the students and the relevance of the curriculum alterations within these two years of validation cycles.

2.9 The impact of these consultations and nuanced work with external parties was an increasingly satisfied student body (as measured through ALRA's termly Student Survey), partially noting:

Feeling significantly better prepared for assessments
Feeling the programme is more coherent up in terms of modular coherency
Feeling the programme elements better reflect the requirements of the industry

Impact and effectiveness of teaching observation schemes

2.10 ALRA has a robust formal and peer observation of teaching system, which enables and emphasises the discussion of best practice. The staff appraisal system includes reflection on feedback on teaching from students and peer observations. Learning from the peer observations feeds into the staff development programme's good practice sessions as well as strategic CPD.

2.11 ALRA's observation schemes revealed a desire to consolidate our knowledge of movement for the performer and in 2016 led to the curation of an Actor Movement Research series. The schemes work with three world leading practitioners delivering experiential seminars over three days. Lead Movement Tutors on both sites captured feedback and reflection based on their embodied learning and this is leading to a school wide dissemination in our research days. The impact upon the delivery of the curriculum will be a developed ownership and advancement of the skill within the academy.

2.12 Our most recent QAA report identified that "the Academy works extensively with staff and students to articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices."

Impact and effectiveness of innovative approaches, new technology or educational research

2.13 ALRA makes use of blogs and vlogs assessment to support educational achievement which are an important part of the learning experience and which reflect the dynamic nature of a conservatoire training. Students are able to access either the Manchester Library or British Library depending on their location, while the Academy subscribes to a range of online electronic resources both on campus and those that can be used remotely.

2.14 The student portal provides direct online dialogue with tutors in response to their feedback allowing immediate online engagement with the process. This is a unique aspect of the feedback process that we have developed with consultants to positively impact on the student's access to the Lead Tutors who can deepen their experience of formative learning.

2.15 Research enriched pedagogic practice occurs through the deeper engagement in the Personal Research Projects across the level 6 and 7 studentship experiences. The final Personal Research Project module undertaken by level 6 and 7 students at the academy rationalizes the experience of the learner by creating a piece of work through practice as research. The pedagogic experience of the module requires individual work, peer assessment and supervision from a practitioner but working as a critical friend rather than as an enforcer of process - placing them on an equal footing to the academic lecturers they

have been/are working with at ALRA. Feedback also happens verbally at three formalised stages in terms 2 and 3 with the Lead tutors, Course Leaders, Vice Principals and Principal.

2.16 The student-faculty relationship focuses more on the partnership that they can build in developing the PRP, engaging in genuine creative activity to explore their concept.

2.17 The entire experience of the course negotiates the manner in which the student engages in articulating their practice in a way that empowers them to self-select the content of their learning. The academic frameworks created at ALRA allow for robust scrutiny of what, why and how they engage with these concepts, but essentially the build of the experiential learning environment is leading to a deep understanding of how they can work with tutors and professionals as an equal.

2.18 The co-creation of the content of the Personal Research Project offers the purest form of partnership between faculty and staff. Cook-Sather defines partnership as 'a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualisation, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis'. The student will work with the course leader to invent, lead on change, discover and discern artistic practice, synthesise complex ideas and champion the direction of the outcome of the project. We believe this leads to the graduateness of an ALRA student.

Quantitative information relating to the qualification, experience and contractual basis of staff who teach:

2.19 ALRA is committed to continuing staff development, underpinned by subject-specific and educational scholarship. This includes membership of the AdvanceHE of which all permanent teaching staff are required to have. Staff are financially supported to achieve qualifications such as masters and new acting techniques.

2.20 There are additional professional development opportunities through a Continuing Professional Development Scheme with funding for research projects by full- time, part-time and freelance tutors. All teaching staff are practitioners, and which brings currency the programme and to the vocational nature of the teaching, delivery and assessment.

2.21 A unique facet of our staff support mechanism is the use of Curriculum Evaluation Meetings which take place between all senior teaching roles and the Vice Principal (Curriculum). These serve as supervisory sessions for the staff to explore areas of practice in relation to organisational development, student experience and subject relevance.

2.22 The supervision is part of our scholarship and research department's ongoing exploration of the impact of using multi modal forms of reflection to improve teaching staff's engagement with their practice and satisfaction in the culture of the organisation. All members of staff receive this once per term and it is a separate scheme to the appraisal or management system, existing purely as an exercise in improving awareness and ability to engage in pedagogic design. During 2018, this scheme was shared at international research networks as part of ALRA's growing engagement in scholarship and embodied academic literacies.

2.23 Finally, ALRA has provided all teaching staff with Mental Health First Aid training as a result of staff and student feedback on this increasingly more prevalent issue. The intensity of the training in terms of hours and content require our staff to cope with exposure to mental health issues and signpost our students to the appropriate services effectively. This has now included the creation of a mindfulness and wellbeing department, which has initiatives imbedded into the curriculum and the timetable.

Impact and effectiveness of feedback initiatives aimed at supporting students' development, progression and achievement

2.24 Due to the high level of contact hours there is constant verbal formative and kinaesthetic feedback in the training schedules. Within induction schedules it is explained to the students that they are receiving feedback in class in these varying methodologies.

2.25 ALRA has worked resolutely to develop a Mindfulness and Wellbeing department that tackles the mental health of our students in a targeted manner. Led by two members of staff the department offers one drop in session per week that teaches skills in emotional resilience and cognitive behavioural skills. Secondly learners can sign up for pastoral support tutorials focusing on emotional behaviour. Staff are trained in professional, mindfulness, counselling and wellbeing courses to support their work in this role. Students also engage in peer to peer support with schemes such as the Sam-ALRA-tins offering a safe space that is supervised by the Lead Wellbeing Tutor, but student led and confidential. Alongside this service students from WP backgrounds also receive professional coaching from specialists outside of the organisation as well as psychotherapy should this be signposted within an aspect of the department's delivery.

2.26 Learning support is acquired through the regular DSA channels and we currently offer services for Autism, Asperger's and Dyslexia.

Learning Environment

3.1 ALRA is committed to ensuring the learning environment for the student body, our commitment is reflected in our high scores in the NSS for questions relating to teaching.

3.2 ALRA's admission process is designed to widen participation and access, but there is a strong focus on creating a learning environment that breeds success for all. The courses and all rules and regulations are designed to be accessible for students from a diverse background, with particular focus on learners who may not normally enter into postgraduate or even the Higher Education environment.

3.3 To speed up the embodiment of physical and vocal practice, one on one body and voice lessons are delivered throughout terms 2 and 3. These sessions target learner's physical and vocal needs with direct communication from Lead Tutors to the practitioners delivering this work. ALRA feels this is one of the hall marks of our Conservatoire Style of delivery, offering an hour of timetabled delivery per cohorts.

Impact and effectiveness of initiatives aimed at supporting the transition into and through a higher education course

3.4 ALRA provides tailored auditions for organisations such as Generation Arts and The Big House, who deliver high quality, free, accredited and non-accredited acting and theatre-making projects for young people in the margins in London. They specialise in working with young people NEET and who may be at risk or have experienced a range of social exclusion risk factors including long-term unemployment, leaving care, offending, gang-affiliation and homelessness.

3.5 Working with Generations Arts and The Big House, we provide access, bursaries and support for entry to training and develop young people in every way to prepare them for drama school, higher education and the world of work.

Quantitative information demonstrating proportional investment in teaching and learning infrastructure

3.6 We have made significant proportional investment into the following areas of teaching and learning with the following additional annual commitments, which when considered with the size of ALRA represent a significant investment from our annual budget. The CPD includes three Education doctorates, as well as a large number of Masters programmes and other HE centred qualifications (including mental health)

£4000 – Research and scholarship stream
£16000 – Staff higher education qualifications
£5000 – CPD institutionally

Extent and impact of student involvement in or exposure to the latest developments in research, scholarship or professional practice (one or more)

3.7 The academy regularly engages leading professionals in seminar, lecture, workshop and directing opportunities for our students. Recent visiting professionals include renowned actress Julie Hesmondhalgh, Simon Stephens, John Godber as well as countless other leading voices in the industry.

3.8 Our research and scholarship department has supported the development of a piece of new writing drawing on actors from intercultural backgrounds. These events have all been attended by students and therefore keep their knowledge and understanding of the industry current.

3.9 The Northern Centre for Voice and Movement (NCVM) aims to enhance the teaching of acting in the North of England and beyond through the investment in actor voice and movement practitioners. NCVM will be dedicated to supporting practitioners from all backgrounds and experiences, widening the exposure of young people to movement and voice activities as well as those with social or financial barriers. We will aim to build strong relationships with significant partners throughout the UK and internationally capitalising on ALRA's reputation for encouraging diversity in the participation of conservatoire training. The inaugural session was launched in partnership with International Network for Voice at Royals Central School of Speech and Drama and opened by Kristin Linklater, world leading vocal practitioner. The Centre already has over forty members and the impact of the network will be measured over the next 12 months through rigorous evaluation tracking the increased voice of underrepresented practitioners in this field and the overall effect this has on the teaching, learning and curriculum design that occurs at ALRA as the central nexus of this pedagogic cultural evolution.

Impact and effectiveness of initiatives aimed at understanding, assessing and improving retention and completion

3.10 ALRA's Equality and Diversity Policy takes account the incorporation of students with protected characteristics in different assessment modalities and learning environments. When developing this policy, ALRA researched with students, recent graduates to understand the complexities of why students were likely to leave or stay in education and developed a strategy to reflect the values that our teaching ethos should be driven by. This steering group uncovered facts around language used in rehearsal, casting dilemmas and the process of sharing information amongst cohorts in a fair and open nature.

3.11 Working in partnership with the student body, ALRA created a Mental Health Working Group, which looks specifically at the teaching and pastoral mechanisms by which ALRA can make strategic changes to its programme delivery to ensure that all students have the ability to succeed.

Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

Evidence and impact of initiatives aimed at graduate employability

4.1 The vocational nature of the programmes is designed to equip students for work. The Academy has strong links with industry and this includes network events for students with industry agents, professional workshops and presentations and performance work in professional venues.

4.2 ALRA's mission is to equip its graduates with skills to thrive in the sector, over 97% of students are employed within 6 months of graduation, well above the benchmark.

4.3 Our Highly skilled employment was previously below the benchmark, something which over the last three years we have worked extensively on (through Gala events, enrichment activities targeted at employability skills and an even greater involvement with industry throughout the final year). ALRA is pleased to see these initiatives have yielded a positive response in their DHLE scores. Unfortunately, the low number of students in the splits does mean that figures are not always reportable and comprehensive analysis of DHLE data is challenging, particularly as DHLE does not appropriately capture the nature of employment in the context of Actors. ALRA's own analysis of graduate data demonstrates that in 2018 over 90% of our graduates were represented by agents within 6 months of graduating from ALRA.

Evidence of longer-term employment outcomes and progression of graduates including into highly-skilled employment

4.4 ALRA's graduates can be found at the National Theatre, RSC, Hollywood films, English soaps, creating independent companies and within touring companies around the world. Recent graduate successes examples includes Bronwyn Jame's featured role in The ABC murders and Emmanuel Imani's featured role in Black Earth Risingm Gabby French in If We Were Older at the National Theatre, and Victor Ocean's title role of Othello in the English Touring Theatre's production and Dominic Burgess consistent featured parts in HBO series such as The Good Place, Bad Indians etc.

Impact of initiatives aimed at closing gaps in development, attainment and progression for students from different backgrounds, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those who are at greater risk of not achieving positive outcomes.

4.5 ALRA started work on outreach by referencing the Deprived Postcode information widely used by FE colleges pre-2000. This information provided a starting point since when we have annually reviewed and updated our outreach programme.

4.6 ALRa has also chosen to work with the British East Asian community through 'Yellow Earth' and 'Yellow Academy'. Through this work we have demonstrated significant commitment to teaching, learning, research, administration, management, cultural diversity and widening participation. The collaboration between Yellow Earth and ALRA has been maintained since 2009. As part of our commitment to East Asian actor development, we have offered summer courses free of charge during this period. Yellow Earth Theatre was formed in 1995 by five British East Asian (BEA) actors; Kwong Loke, Kumiko Mendl, Veronica Needa, David KS Tse and Tom Wu. The company sought to develop work that would widen the choice and type of roles being offered to BEA actors at that time and to create work that brought together our physical skills and western drama school training to present plays that explored our own cultural heritage. Over its 21-year history Yellow Earth has worked with

many of the best BEA actors, writers, directors and designers to create a wide range of award-winning work from new writing to bold adaptations of classics; from family friendly shows to participatory and site responsive work. Yellow Earth also provides professional development opportunities for BEA artists while inspiring the next generation to get involved in the arts.

Summary

5.1 We must acknowledge the student's readiness for learning and understand what encourages them to make an effort to learn. Our Mission Statement clearly refers to our commitment to the personal development of the learners alongside their skills development. ALRA is a collaborative and supportive environment and promotes and creates an environment within which students thrive.

5.2 From induction; where students are given information about healthy eating, safety, living as a student, money management and anything else they might need to survive life as a student, to Graduation; through our commitment to support them in the early years of their careers, ALRA demonstrates the highest levels of care and investment, not just in teaching them acting but developing students as people. We have a range of strategies in place to help if things get difficult and any ALRA staff member will be able to direct students to the right person due to the extensive CPD training offered to staff (200 courses in the last 3 years). Our 'open door' policy provides students with easy and simple ways of accessing support from staff who can help them to resolve issues swiftly rather than allowing a problem to build up in isolation. These high levels of care, support and commitment are available to both staff and students; our nurturing community ethos is repeatedly noted at inspection, validation and review where our students always acknowledge how 'safe' they feel. This is an environment we have built through formal and informal initiatives and is something we feel sets our actor training offering apart from that of other providers in the marketplace.

5.3 Our professional practice is firmly rooted in development. The Arts cannot survive within each of us without nourishment gained through expanding knowledge and reflection. The student care offered at ALRA is as a direct result of information from potential and on course students and has informed our entire approach to audition, outreach, induction and retention.

5.4 CPD at ALRA has included over 150 short courses, 5 MA programmes, Advance HE Fellowships and an Educational Doctorates. This is a form commitment for faculty and support staff at our levels. We believe that alone shows our level of commitment and engagement with the principle of student care, institutional development and educational excellence.