Provider name: ACM Guildford Ltd
UKPRN: 10067853

ACM TEF Submission 2023

1. Provider context

ACM was formed in 1995 as a specialist provider for music. Prior to 2014 ACM was one of a small number of 'HEFCE Connected Institutions' before being classified as an Alternative Provider between 2014-19. In 2019 ACM successfully applied to become an approved (fee cap) provider on the OfS register.

For the first 20 years ACM operated out of a single campus in Guildford but has been through a period of expansion since 2014. First, ACM began teaching degrees from Metropolis Studios, Europe's largest recording complex, starting a partnership that has resulted in ACM formally acquiring Metropolis Studios into group. In 2016 ACM opened a London campus and added a site in Birmingham in 2017. All three sites are teaching locations for the single registered entity -ACM Guildford Ltd- with centralised management and governance functions.

Having grown to three campuses and over 2,000 students in 2018, ACM took the decision to cap class sizes to create a robust, scalable model that enshrined the student experience at the centre. The curriculum model is covered in detail in the Education Gain section of this submission because the concept of the enhancement of education gain within our learners is central to our institutional identity. As a brief contextual introduction, ACM has a flexible, interdisciplinary programme framework that is highly accessible to a diverse range of learners. Care is taken to form a multi-campus student community through delivery mechanisms that include online sessions where students from all three campuses collaborate and study together.

At present the London and Birmingham campus footprints are being expanded through the acquisition of additional buildings to cater for the diversification of the subject areas covered. Having solely delivered music qualification for the first 22 years of its existence, ACM launched a degree in Games Development in 2018. This was followed by a new interdisciplinary creative industries degree, integrated masters and masters launching for the 2022-23 academic year. The new qualification framework has been designed to maximise the opportunities for credit-based delivery via micro-credentials, when the lifelong loan entitlement is launched in 2024. This innovative framework is based on flexible entry and exit points, where interdisciplinary student groups undertake subject-generic modules within the creative industries, with hyper-specific subject skills delivered through a series of short courses.

We cap class/group project sizes because of the intense, personalised and tailored support that students receive, and the small group working restrictions of real-world project development and delivery. Specialist, innovative, practice-based educational models are necessarily resource intensive, but is essential for students to get the real-world experience they need – to meet industry needs, stand out amongst peers and survive and thrive long-term in the industry.

The accelerated integrated masters qualification is the first of its kind in the world. On this programme students study levels 4-6 in an accelerated mode of delivery followed by a full 180 credit masters year to give them their final qualification aim. This model reduces the time it takes to achieve an integrated masters by a year whilst giving students a full 180 credit level 7 year as opposed to the standard 120 credits usually associated with this type of programme. This follows on from previous course structure innovation when ACM's accelerated delivery model was developed in 2000, pre-dating HEFCE's Flexible Learning Pathfinder pilots by five years. The

three-trimester, 45-week model was unique when first developed (differing from the University of Buckingham's eight-term model) and has now become the blueprint for accelerated degrees across the UK.

ACM's core curriculum ethos is to deliver an immersive, continuous, and intensively supported 1:1 and small group learning experience that nurtures the skills, self-awareness and agility required to access and succeed in a highly competitive global sector, fully embedded in industry. The degree provides a creative community that enables students to articulate their vision for an authentic and sustainable creative career, a commercial or social enterprise or niche area of interdisciplinary practice. Students practise skills ahead of graduation and employment, facilitating self-promotion and entry into the world of work. Crucially, it allows them to earn while learning. The opening 60-credits of the Masters includes an embedded professional framework so students can gain a professional qualification alongside their academic qualification.

Our students are treated as industry professionals throughout their education and at every level of learning. Our 'learn by doing', collaborative and embedded lifelong learning approach responds to global industry skills projections and ensures students are work-ready long before graduation.

To inform the ongoing evolution of its curriculum, ACM continues to lead discussions on workforce inclusion and development, employee recognition and future-proofing creative industries leaders. Critical knowledge exchange is taking place between ACM's senior academics, leaders and proven industry expert practitioners, who together possess a knowledge base of over 28 years of creative education and training, curriculum design and development, mentoring and coaching. We are at the forefront of a curriculum and learning model that is professionally oriented, opportunity-focused, and has problem-centred learning at its core. We believe this is essential for workforce inclusion and development, employee recognition and future-proofing creative businesses, organisations and professional associations such as ACM's own Metropolis Studios and other creative industries leaders.

ACM has a long-term validation partner in Middlesex University. This relationship has been in place since the late 1990s. During this time some course provision has also been validated by other Universities, including the University of Surrey and Falmouth University, however ACM consolidated all validated provision to a Middlesex University in 2020. Currently ACM is preparing its application for degree awarding powers with Middlesex University supporting and helping with this process. An on-going relationship with Middlesex University is planned when degree awarding powers is awarded. This is likely to consist of joint research and knowledge exchange projects and a collaborative doctorate programme that would enable ACM to apply for research degree awarding powers within the next 10 years.

In addition to higher education qualifications, ACM has delivered further education under subcontractual arrangements with partner colleges for much of its existence.

ACM has a high proportion of students classified as underrepresented in higher education. The TEF workbook data for continuation, completion and progression pre-dates ACM's status as an approved (fee cap) provider in all but year 4. The beneficial impact of the approved (fee cap) status was not fully realised until year 5 (outside of the data series) after the access and participation plan had been delivered for an academic year. The below table shows the characteristic data at ACM from the TEF data series, the current ACM data and the sector average for each characteristic.

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This table shows the large increase in underrepresented groups at ACM since moving onto the OfS register as an approved (fee cap) provider. ACM is now exceeding sector averages for 3 out of 4 of the underrepresented characteristics.

Characteristic	ACM TEF data series (2016-2020)	Current ACM data	Sector average (2016-2020)
Mature	19%	27%	24%
Known disability	19%	36%	16%
BAME	16%	30%	23%
IMD 1 +2	24%	26%	37%

An initiative launched in the 2022-23 was the development of community-based learners who study part of the degree foundation year within community settings to support a transition into higher education. This is currently in its first pilot year delivered in collaboration with community organisation Collage Arts, based in Wood Green, situated in one of the most deprived London boroughs.

ACM has been externally awarded several times, most recently winning two categories at the 2022 Independent HE awards.

As a specialist provider in the creative industries, ACM has significant international recognition for its staff and alumni. Of the 25,000 alumni there are several household names, including Ed Sheeran, Matt Healy from the 1975, and Ted Dwane from Mumford & Sons. On top of this there are thousands of alumni who have made a major impact in the creative industries since graduating.

2. Student experience

We are beginning this section with some information about ACM's recent journey to help contextualise ACM's available NSS metrics. We then follow this with information about our student voice mechanisms and then finally provide some commentary and analysis on our NSS scores, along with other available sources of data relating to student experience.

Contextual Information

There are several points worth noting in relation to ACM's NSS performance. These are explained below to provide context to statistics that we feel do not paint an accurate picture of student satisfaction.

ACM has been through a period of transformation and change since 2013 when specialist higher education providers entered the regulatory landscape. The NSS data starts in 2018-19, the second year that ACM entered the NSS. Almost all students surveyed in this year will have joined in 2017-18 (for accelerated degree students) or 2016-17 (for students who also took the foundation year). At this point in time ACM was classed as an 'alternative provider' with students able to access a maximum tuition fee loan of £6,000 with course fees topped up to £9,000 by way of a privately-funded component of £3,000. This does have an impact on the perception of 'value' compared to students who are not making upfront payments for their education via their own pockets at the point of studying. Nevertheless, the benchmark value is set with most students residing at traditional Universities making this an unfair comparison for former alternative providers.

Following the regulatory reformation ahead of the 2019-20 academic year, ACM entered the Approved (Fee Cap) category of the OfS register, giving students full tuition fee funding, however it is not until year 4 of the data series (2021-22) that all students were in receipt of full funding for the entire duration of their studies. The regulatory environment did mean a period of organisational change at ACM, not least because our position as a fee cap provider meant that internal restructuring was required to satisfy the enhanced levels of regulatory reporting. Although care was taken to not impact the student experience during this change, some elements will invariably have had a trickle-down effect. For example, ACM was not able to advertise the availability of student loans for the 2019-20 academic year until July once its register application had been accepted. For students joining in this year (who graduated in 2020-21 or 2021-22) the incoming perception of 'organisation and management' will have taken a negative hit before they even started their programme. These things were outside of ACM's control but are noteworthy when viewing NSS scores against the backdrop of a changing regulatory situation that will have impacted student's perception of stability.

The students graduating in year 4 (2021-22), and the prior year 3 (2020-21), most of whom will have felt the advantage of full tuition fee loan support, were the 'covid cohorts'. It is fair to say that the benchmarks consider the impact of the pandemic, however the impact was doubly compounded at ACM for two reasons. First, most students are studying on accelerated programmes so felt the impact of the two-year on/off lockdown for the entirety of their study period. Second, almost all students surveyed in years 3 and 4 were studying creative courses in popular music, where the pandemic had a profound impact on the student experience. The profound impact was a result of limited opportunities to use specialist equipment and resources not available

outside of the provider, and the limited opportunities to perform, rehearse and collaborate with peers.

We are proud of our covid response. Lockdowns started in March 2020. Traditional three-year degrees were entering the final few weeks of the academic year whilst ACM's accelerated delivery mode meant that there were a full 1.5 trimesters to deliver during those uncertain times. Our accelerated students were studying over the late-Spring and Summer in lockdown conditions whilst most other students were at home awaiting to hear whether their courses would recommence in September. Our response was swift and decisive. We transformed our session delivery modes to work for online-only delivery; we created online project groups to keep students connected and collaborating; we invested heavily in online learning resources for the library; we undertook detailed surveys of student's home studio set ups and undertook a £250,000 capital investment programme called 'campus in a box' to ensure all students had the equipment they needed to work remotely from campuses. All the above examples have a lasting legacy at ACM where the benefits have become standard practice and enhanced our delivery long term. Regardless, it is understandable that for students who applied for an on-campus experience studying a creative course, no level of mitigation will compensate them fully.

The final contextual point also relates to change experienced at ACM since 2018-19 when the NSS data series begins. In the 2017-18 academic year ACM opened a campus in Birmingham. This was achieved by taking over a failing provider and transferring students across from their existing programmes. Students from this cohort are apparent in the survey data from year 1 (2018-19), year 2 (2019-20) and to a lesser degree year 3 (2020-21). Great care was taken to support these students on their programme, with new facilities, studios and resources purchased to improve the campus they were studying on; new staff members (academic and non-academic) recruited to give them a good experience both on programme and outside their studies; integration into the student council and rep system. However, for students in year 1 of the survey data, the majority of their student experience was managed by a different provider. For students in year 2 and 3 of the data, part of their programme was delivered by a different provider and they also had to be part of the transitionary activity which will have impacted their time at ACM.

Linked to this, at the end of the 2019-20 academic year (year 2 in the survey data) ACM worked with its University partner to transfer students from its London campus into the OfS registered entity. Prior to this transfer the students were taught at ACM's London campus under a franchise arrangement with Falmouth University, meaning that students were registered to Falmouth University and apparent in their data. Although ACM operated the campus, the academic regulations, policies and frameworks were set by the franchiser. A decision was taken on student experience grounds to consolidate to a single validating partner where ACM had greater control over the policies and structures that underpin the student experience. Students from this cohort are apparent in the year 4 (2021-22) data. They experienced significant change through their programme, including the necessary change of degree programme, and there is residual impact of the first 1 to 2 years of their programme in their responses to surveys.

With the above considered, the first NSS where students will have experienced relative normality is the forthcoming NSS which would be year 5 in the data series.

This backdrop is provided to contextualise NSS scores that underperform against sector benchmarks. It is true that ACM were new to the NSS when the data started, and our own learning

curve in running the survey was impacted during the pandemic. Providers and Universities who were HEFCE-funded have had much longer to develop internal surveys and embed NSS into their institutional practice, and the benchmarks do not reflect the learning curve ACM and other specialist providers have been on during these covid impacted times.

Regardless, we do treat the NSS survey with upmost importance as one of the many ways we interact with our students and canvas their views. We are however aware that the NSS is a summative survey, taking place in the final stage of each student's journey. As such the feedback students provide in this survey does not directly benefit them individually so we take advantage of the agility our position as a small, specialist provider allows in order to have a more dynamic approach to engaging with the student voice and instigating positive change in response to their feedback. This also means we can take very regular, up-to-date readings of the student experience.

We do this in several ways:

Student Council and student rep system
ACM has a student council that meets on a monthly basis. The student council is constituted with reps voted in by their peers on an annual basis with all subject pathways and campuses represented. The Council is an essential part of the governance structure at ACM with a direct link to the academic board. Monthly reports are written for each subject pathway area which are then fed up to the academic board. ACM's Chief Operating Officer is responsible for observing Council and escalating reports and feedback to the academic board and vice-versa.

Chairman's question time
Twice a year ACM runs a campus-level question time session. This is student's opportunity to meet with members of the governing body and executive team in a roundtable setting to raise issues important to them. This is an open and safe space for students to discuss their experience and work with the executive team to find solutions that benefit them immediately.

Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQs)
Each term the entire student body comment on their on-programme experience through MEQs which have a direct impact on the curriculum. The results of the surveys feed into programme-level annual monitoring reports which, in-turn, inform the institutional action plan. This is a more immediate mechanism for reading the student experience compared to the NSS survey. Further examples are given in the NSS commentary section but an aggregate figure of 81% of respondents signalled satisfaction with their modules across the last academic year. This survey was sent to all 916 higher education students via their virtual learning environment with a 44% response rate.

Mid-module reviews
The NSS provides a summative experiential survey where students undertaking the survey will have all-but graduated by the time their feedback is seen meaning that they will not directly benefit from the enhancements ACM puts in place in response. In the same way, MEQs provide a summative opportunity for students to comment on a module they have just completed and therefore the feedback they give will not directly benefit them. In 2018, ACM decided to take

advantage of the agility its small and specialist nature allowed by introducing mid-module reviews. The idea behind this initiative was that students could meet with their programme team halfway through a module to give direct feedback to enhance the second half of the module after reading week. The upshot of this is that students could inform the development and enhancement of modules whilst still studying them.

Academic Wellness Temperature Check

In the 2021-22 academic year ACM introduced the academic wellness temperature check. The purpose of this exercise was to engage directly with the student body around academic-related issues that were affecting their wellbeing. Where an issue was identified, workshops were created to support students. This exercise took place at a particularly sensitive time for learners following almost two years of disruption as a result of the pandemic, which at that stage was still a very present issue despite on-campus tuition returning.

The whole student cohort of 916 was surveyed to ascertain their main issues of concern with a 30% response rate *(Academic Support Review 2021-22, Emily Bettison)*. Students could tick as many areas as they wished. The biggest issues for students were:

- Managing assessment stress (46.2% of respondents)
- Time management (48.9% of respondents)
- Academic writing (47% of respondents)
- Improving self-esteem and confidence (38.3% of respondents)
- Understanding my assignment (38.3% of respondents)

A total of 37 workshops covering the topics above were arranged . 62.5% of participants were new entrants to higher education whilst 37.5% were in their second and/or final year of study.

Prior to the workshops 70.8% of students felt unconfident or extremely unconfident about forthcoming assessments. After the sessions 79.2% of respondents felt confident or extremely confident. This demonstrates the impact this initiative had at a critical time for student wellbeing.

This yearlong exercise has had a lasting impact at ACM. Several new student support initiatives were created to embed the benefit long-term. This included:

1. Short courses being developed covering the main topics covered by workshops
2. The introduction of mentors
3. The introduction of personal tutors

Personal Tutors

For the 2022-23 academic year, ACM has introduced a personal tutor system. This was designed to give a personal voice to each student at ACM. Students meet with their personal tutor twice per 15-week term to discuss their academic progress, their experience on the course and their career objectives.

This section will provide some commentary on each of the NSS question areas. To precede the commentary there is some further analysis on the percentage splits of each question group.

The below table shows the aggregated scores for agree and disagree responses, together with the neutral response percentage. On average 20% of respondents choose the neutral category giving an overall negative impact to the NSS scores for each criterion. This has been a common feature of the NSS each year where 20-21% of responses are neutral across all questions. We are pleased that the next iteration of the NSS has removed the neutral response from the question banks as this will give ACM a clearer picture of student satisfaction levels.

Area	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE
Teaching on my course	63%	16%	20%
Learning opportunities	61%	20%	19%
Assessment and Feedback	56%	20%	23%
Academic Support	53%	20%	27%
Organisation and Management	44%	20%	36%
Learning Resources	52%	21%	25%
Learning Community	53%	17%	30%
Student Voice	46%	23%	30%
Student Union	25%	34%	30%
Overall Satisfaction	45%	17%	37%
OVERALL AGGREGATED SCORES	**53%**	**20%**	**26%**

The second table recreates the data using a collection model more akin to the new NSS methodology, with all neutral responses discounted from the aggregate scores. Whilst this does have a significant beneficial impact on ACM's scores, we recognise that some areas are still below benchmark. This analysis does allow us to explore areas of good practice, compared to areas to improve, in a clearer way.

Area	AGREE	DISAGREE	SECTOR BENCHMARK	ACM Performance against benchmark
Teaching on my course	76%	24%	80%	-4%
Learning opportunities	76%	24%	79%	-3%
Assessment and Feedback	71%	29%	69%	+2%
Academic Support	67%	33%	54%	+13%
Organisation and Management	55%	45%	70%	-15%
Learning Resources	67%	33%	81%	-14%
Learning Community	64%	36%	68%	-4%
Student Voice	60%	40%	67%	-7%
Student Union	45%	55%	53%	-9%
Overall Satisfaction	55%	45%	76%	-21%
OVERALL AGGREGATED SCORES	**67%**	**33%**	**n/a**	**n/a**

The above table shows that ACM is above or around benchmark for the first four question sets relating to the academic experience. This view aligns to the comments students submit as part of their NSS responses where academic staff are regularly praised. Internal survey data, undertaken on a termly basis by students, suggests positive results in this area with:

- 96% of students finding the module 'current'
- 86% receiving appropriate and timely feedback
- 81% being satisfied with the quality of their module

(MEQ data 2021-22 – 44% response rate)

The over the course of the last two partner annual monitoring reviews, undertaken by the validating partner Middlesex University, the external examiners have commented favourably on the enhancements to assessment feedback and standardisation of marks. (AMR 2019-20; AMR 2020-21). Significant work has been undertaken by ACM in relation to this with internal and external staff training taking place to continually improve standards in marking and assessment practice. Marking rubrics were also introduced in the 2019-20 academic year to help students understand the criteria used for marking their assessments.

With the neutral respondents removed from the NSS percentages:

- 73% of students felt that the marking criteria were clear
- 73% felt that marking was fair
- 78% commented that the feedback helped them to improve

External examiner feedback from the 2021-22 academic year highlighted some of the successful initiatives put in place by ACM to enhance this area of practice:

> *I would first of all like to commend ACM on its improvement on process over the period of time I have been involved as an external examiner. Feedback and marking processes have been normalised and the moderation process is effective. The use of the rubrics has also aided the marking process but it is good to see that it is not the only form of assessment and that the marks are also tempered by the experience and understanding of the subject by the markers. It is difficult with a large cohort and many markers to create an equitable marking environment of parity and fairness and within an acceptable tolerance, this has been achieved.*
> ***(EE report, 2021-22)***

Since the first year of NSS survey data available, ACM have changed the way academic staff are contracted. For most ACM's history, up until the mid-way point of the 2017-18 academic year, academic staff were contracted as sessional lecturers. Although this suited the working industry professionals supporting a portfolio career with teaching, it did not necessarily provide the best student experience with lecturers often changing term on term around their outside commitments. During the 2017-18 academic year ACM started employing permanently contracted lecturers to provide stability to students, and also support the levelling-up of academic standards and curriculum planning across its three campus locations. As of 2021-22, 72% of sessions were delivered by permanently contracted lecturers on 0.8 FTE or above contracts. The remainder of academic staff were recontacted on permanent, 'variable' hours contracts that allowed for an FTE

below 0.8 to be adjusted on a termly basis around professional commitments. This balance ensures that career academics, industry professionals and staff who balance both areas can all feed into ACM giving a rich mixture of skill sets. In addition to the internal survey data summarised above, and the NSS survey comments, the neutral-removed analysis of the NSS data shows that:

- 85% of students found staff were good at explaining things
- 81% of students found the course interesting

The emphasis on employing permanently contracted staff has had a huge beneficial impact on the curriculum planning activity with staff given time within their contracted hours to engage in pre-term planning -under a scheme we refer to as **tutor huddles**- together with weekly module meetings led by the module leader.

It is noteworthy that academic support is 13% above benchmark in the above analysis. This is an area where ACM has put significant support and intervention in place. We are a small provider and take a personalised approach to supporting students. There is a weekly cross-departmental 'risk intervention group' that meets to examine student engagement metrics to identify where students may need support. We also have put in place an 'early detection network' of academic staff who flag any causes for concern with students. The personal tutor system adds an extra layer to this early detection network by having one tutor assigned to a group of 20 students to ensure that every student is monitored and supported. Through initiatives such as the **Academic Wellness Temperature Check** outlined in the section above, and the introduction of **Academic Mentors** we feel that our academic support mechanisms enhance the learning opportunities for students and give them the best possible chance of avoiding barriers to learning.

ACM is marginally below benchmark for the learning community. Within the two questions within this area, ACM had a significantly lower score for question 21 relating to students feeling part of a community where 55% of students responded positively once the neutral scores were removed. Although we recognise this question will have been impacted by lockdowns, we believe there is an extra mitigating factor for ACM where the students are spread across three campus locations in three different cities. Regardless of these points, ACM has sought to address this point through curriculum delivery design in the newly validated programme, which all new students are enrolled onto. During the move to online learning during the pandemic we created the concept of **community sessions**. These online sessions replaced traditional 'large group lectures' and were a popular innovation within ACM's delivery. As a result, we have built the concept into the new programme design, enhancing the model further by making community sessions cross-campus delivery. This means that students from all three campuses will meet each other, and be taught by lecturers from other campuses, in order to create greater community cohesion amongst the whole student cohort.

The second question in this group scored much higher using this analysis with 72% of students agreeing that they had opportunities to collaborate with others as part of their course. In the newly validated programme, we have enhanced collaboration opportunities for students by creating a pillar of **collaborative project** modules running through the duration of the degree. In these modules, interdisciplinary groups of students are put together and given an industry brief to respond to. This is one of the major assessment models in the new programme and ensures that students on all subject pathways will collaborate and can develop their specialism within a wider context.

In the analysis in table 2, ACM is below benchmark for the student voice and student union question banks. For the student voice question bank ACM was at benchmark of 67% for questions 23 (I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback) and 24 (staff value students' views) however we performed poorly in question 25 (it is clear how my feedback has been acted on). In the student voice mechanisms section above we provide examples of the many ways students have a voice at ACM, but we accept that initiatives to 'close the loop' have not yet been successful. We have tried a 'you said, we did' campaign which our students commented "felt like an internal marketing exercise". We have also ensured that there is a student representative from each degree pathway at each campus location to try and avoid the physical distances creating barriers to communication. During the last academic year, we have strengthened the links between the student council meetings and ACM's other governance committees by improving two-way communication. We are hopeful that this will have an impact in the 2023 scores, alongside the creation of the **personal tutor** system which will provide one-to-one feedback opportunities for students, allowing the feedback loop to be closed at a personal level.

ACM does perform significantly below benchmark for the question bank relating to learning resources. Whilst we perform at benchmark levels for question 20 (I have been able to access course specific resources) we are significantly under benchmark for question 19 relating to library resources. We recognise that there is disparity in this provision across our three campus locations however we have taken large steps to improve this. First, we have introduced a digital library to ensure that all students have access to the reading materials they need for their course. This includes all publications available physically at our largest campus in Guildford and is easily accessible for students through a newly introduced single sign-on system. Whilst ACM operated with two University partners, there was disparity in the partner resources students could access. At the London campus ACM students could access the partner University's online library whilst students at Guildford and Birmingham were not able to access the same resources. Although attempts were made to level-up the access this was not possible due to complexities relating to library management system at the second partner which relied on students being in the University HESA population to grant access. The ACM digital library sought to address this by bringing all library functions in-house. ACM runs termly surveys on the student experience. Our aggregate data across the 2021-22 academic year shows that 85% of students are satisfied with the learning resources *(MEQ data 2021-22)*. In our survey we did word the question with specific reference to the types of resources within scope for consideration, such as the virtual learning environment and digital library. This suggests that an above benchmark number of students are satisfied when they understand what the question relates to.

Resources are only one part of the student experience issues raised in this question. The other is the access to quiet learning spaces. Again, we recognise that there was disparity between campuses in this regard. In Guildford, ACM's largest and oldest campus location, there is a dedicated library complex whilst the London and Birmingham campuses are single building campuses with a small room functioning as the physical library space. Whilst difficult decisions had to be taken regarding the usage of spaces for learning compared to library, it is something ACM has begun addressing thanks to a major capital funding grant distributed by the Office for Students. In Birmingham ACM has acquired two additional campus buildings with a dedicated library space in one. In London ACM is currently fitting out a second campus building that has a generous library including a ground-breaking **assisted learning technology library** which will enable neurodiverse and disabled students access to resources to support their learning.

Finally, within the organisation and management question bank, ACM performs below benchmark but significant work has been done in this area. A holistic institution-wide review of the management and administration functions was undertaken during the 2020-21 academic year. This resulted in new staffing structures across these functions. This was a complex review as ACM is essentially a single provider with disparate campus buildings spread across three cities.

- Each city now has a local **campus manager**, **student support team**, and **facilities team**. This provides support mechanisms for students on-site and ensures problems can be resolved quickly and at source.

- Each subject pathway has a **Pathway Leader** responsible for managing their programme area, embedding the student voice in curriculum developments and providing a centralised management function in relation to programme issues for students across all campuses. Care was taken to ensure that the Pathway Leader team contained representation across the campus locations. There is a bi-weekly meeting of all pathway leaders to share good practice, updates, issues and to support each other.

- Each subject pathway also has a team of **personal tutors**, discussed in detail above. Each personal tutor looks after students and is the first point of contact.

- A team of **Programme Administrators** has been created. This is a centralised function underpinned by a new helpdesk accessible to students via their virtual learning environment. Response time to queries is managed through a service level agreement to ensure that all student queries are responded to in a timely fashion.

- Particularly during the pandemic and move to online learning, we observed how the virtual learning environment was a critical element of the organisation of learning materials. Over the past two academic years we have grown our **digital learning team** by 50% and overhauled our VLE with a new organisation structure for module content to create uniformity across the board. This includes archived recordings of all community sessions and supporting resources, laid out in a format akin to an online course.

- We have created a new **education leadership team** consisting of three 'Heads of' positions to look after specific areas of the student experience. Care has been taken to represent all three campuses in this leadership team so there is a key member of staff located at each campus.

- We have refreshed our **institutional governance** structures to improve the operational management of ACM. The move to video conferencing during the pandemic transformed the way meetings and committees run at ACM. We were able to centralise functions in an effective way by including staff from all campus locations. *(ACM institutional governance document)*

These structures have evolved over the last two academic years, and we are hopeful and expectant of seeing a marked year-on-year improvement in the organisation and management question bank moving forwards. Our 2021-22 survey data shows significant upward movement

against this criterion with 77% of respondents finding the course well organised *(MEQ data 2021-22 – 44% response rate)*.

The positive change over the last 5 years was noted by one external examiner

> *Over the years I have seen the administration, structure, content, and delivery modes of modules on this course change, grow, and the submission of student work migrate from hard-copy submissions to Canvas, which was introduced as a new VLE/online portal not long ago. There have been cohorts of students from Birmingham to London added into the mix, and teaching spread across multiple sites.*
> *Through all the growth and added administrative complexity, the course team has managed to refine and streamline their processes, while always prioritising the upholding of academic standards and transparency. For this I congratulate them, and I am grateful as with every passing year, my job as external has gotten slightly easier and less overwhelming.*
> ***(EE report, 2021-22)***

3. Student Outcomes

This section begins by commenting on the standard progression, completion and continuation data at ACM, which is around or above benchmark for all areas. Following this a detailed section on educational gains concludes our TEF submission.

Progression

Overall indicator (our score): 67.5% | Benchmark: 66.1%

Progression statistics at ACM are above benchmark. It is noteworthy that there is no material difference between indicators across IMD quintiles - meaning our most deprived students are just as likely to enter professional employment as our most affluent students. The indicator for disabled students is materially above benchmark at 68.1% (benchmark is 62.4%).

Much of the information around how we prepare and progress students into industry or further study is covered in the educational gain section however there are some key points to make at this stage.

First, ACM operates two commercial entities, a theatre and a recording studio, which give students valuable work experience within a real-world professional environment. In addition, there are several student-run record labels and games companies, supported by ACM staff. Both are designed to help transition students into their next phase following graduation.

Second, ACM's innovative programme framework supports transition to further study. Although not covered directly by OfS oversight, ACM does have further education provision across levels 2 and 3 that provides an entry and transition point for 16–18-year-old learners. Within higher education there is a seamless transition from undergraduate study to postgraduate on our accelerated, integrated masters programme. Students also have a smooth transition to further study on our standalone masters programme launched in January 2022.

Third, ACM's ethos of 'small enough to care, big enough to make a difference' underlines our personalised commitment to students. We are not huge and faceless and therefore our students receive personal support and guidance that extends beyond their time studying at ACM. Our campus teams understand student needs and provide an additional layer of support and guidance for students as they transition from graduate to work or further study.

Completion

Overall indicator (our score): 85.8% | Benchmark: 87.2%

Completion rates are above or at benchmark for all but year 4. In year 2 ACM was 1.9% above benchmark. In Year 3 it was within 0.1% of the benchmark, however the year 4 score brought down the overall percentage as it was 4.3% below benchmark. Some contextual information about the time period in question. In year 3, ACM took over a failing provider based in Birmingham, creating a new campus location in the West Midlands. Student numbers on degree programmes almost doubled with the addition of a second campus. Higher Education students who were already enrolled on programmes run by the previous provider were transferred across to ACM programmes. The data in year 3 and year 4 shows the transition from a single campus provider to

a multi-campus provider, particularly with students who started on one degree and were transferred onto a different programme. The year 4 data highlights the most marked impact of this move. If this anomalous year was discounted our indicator would be 89.1%, one percentage point above benchmark.

It is noteworthy that completion rates for students ages 31+ are substantially above benchmark. ACM's indicator is 87.9% compared to a benchmark of 80.2%. ACM holds regular networking groups for different demographic groups and conversational feedback at the 'mature students' network' indicates that the flexibility of delivery via an enhanced virtual learning environment is extremely valuable for mature students who often have other commitments, such as work or childcare. Since the last year of available data in the TEF workbooks the virtual learning environment has gone through even more enhancement, in part thanks to the pandemic. This has further increased the flexibility. All large group lectures are now delivered online and are archived to allow students to watch back at their leisure. This has been very popular with all students but has had the single biggest impact with mature students due to their outside commitments.

There is no material difference between the indicators for students across IMD quintiles and ethnicities. This is with the exception of disabled students who are 6% below benchmark and Asian students who are 6.9% below benchmark. In response to this ACM has introduced an equality impact assessment for each proposal submitted to the academic board. The purpose of this is to ensure that specific groups are not being unfairly disadvantaged by initiatives or changes to assessment practices. Since the last year of available data, ACM has also increased its student support services for students with disabilities. There is now a dedicated team of disability support assistants who provide an enhanced layer of service for these students, supporting them with their individual needs. The final year of available data in the TEF workbook is also the first year ACM launched its access and participation plan -the first delivered by ACM in-line with its new position as an approved (fee cap) provider.

Continuation

Overall indicator (our score): 83.6% | Benchmark: 88.1%

There are two major contextual factors that need to be considered when looking at continuation data at ACM:

1. The accelerated mode of delivery
2. The subject matter taught

First, looking at the accelerated mode of delivery. ACM's model condenses a three-year programme into two-years by inserting an extra summer trimester. This means that student's study 1.5 levels each academic year compared to a single level on a traditional three-year programme. This renders ACM's data incompatible with traditional programmes in terms of benchmarking. Benchmarking on a traditional programme will look at whether a student has started a level, completed a level and stayed on programme for following year. On accelerated programmes students have to start a level, complete a level, start the next level and stay on programme for the following year. The upshot of this is that there are two natural exit points for accelerated students compared to a single natural exit point for students on traditional three-year degrees.

ACM overall indicator (TEF data)	ACM overall data at the end of level 4	Overall benchmark (TEF data)
83.6%	90%	88.1%

Second, the impact of the subject matter on offer at the time of the data series. Between 2016-2020 ACM solely delivered popular music programmes. The nature of a specialist institution like ACM is that students are eager to use their higher education study as a springboard into the industry. This is the ultimate aim for many students so if the opportunity comes early it will invariably be taken.

During the time period covered in this data, ACM undertook detailed analysis of the reasons students ended their study before completion and the single biggest reason students left programme was to start work in the industry.

Regardless of the above points ACM is only marginally under benchmark (<5%) with the two worst performing years occurring in years three (7.9%) and four (5.9%) which align with ACM's growth from a single to multi-campus institution. As outlined above ACM took over a failing provider just before the start of the 2017-18 academic year (year 2) so years 3 + 4 show the impact of the transition. Student numbers in the data also decreased by 57% between 2016 to 2020 meaning that a single withdrawal had a greater statistical impact in year 4 compared to year 1. It is noteworthy that this decrease in student number was a consequence of ACM opening a London campus operated by a different company entity under a franchise arrangement with Falmouth University. During the time period in question ACM saw the London campus grow in numbers from 70 in year 1 to 400 in year 4, however these students are not reflected in ACM's data due to the nature of franchised courses. These students were transferred onto ACM Guildford Ltd programmes in the 2020-21 academic year, counting in our student population the year after the data series in the TEF workbook ends.

ACM's data shows fairly consistent performance against the benchmark with the exception of Black students where ACM is above benchmark. Students over the age of 31 upon course entry are 7% below benchmark however numbers are small within this demographic group -averaging 20 per year- meaning that a single withdrawal has a large statistical impact. The completion data does show that students in this group are 8% above benchmark for completion, so when they do stay on programme they are likely to succeed. Cognisant of this, ACM's access and participation plan does have a specific target to reduce the non-continuation gap between mature and non-mature students.

As a result, ACM's access and participation plan target of reducing the gap between non-continuation rates for mature and non-mature students has been met, with the gap closed. Although we do not yet have the data to see if by closing the non-continuation gap there will be a positive impact on completion rates, we are able to predict this will be the case as more mature students are staying on programme for the duration of their programme.

Since the last year of available data (2019-20) ACM has launched several initiatives to increase continuation rates with internal data modelling showing continuation rates currently at 93% following year-on-year increases since the low point in the TEF workbook data in year 3.

The two major initiatives are:

- **Bootcamp reassessments.** Data analysis in 2019 showed that high percentages of students who did not pass a module on their first attempt were not using the second attempt resubmission point to submit work. Instead, students were opting to retake modules later in the year which led to a build-up of work and increased pressure on students. This was exacerbated due to the accelerated mode of delivery. To resolve this ACM developed bootcamp reassessments. These work by having an intensive week of 'refresher' activity with the assessment undertaken during the course of the week. We have found that resubmission engagement rates have increased significantly. In the 2021-22 academic year ACM undertook a 'partnership enhancement visit' by its validating partner, Middlesex University. This quality visit was designed to look at areas that could be classed as enhancements above and beyond the normal 'assurance' of quality. At this visit the Middlesex University quality assurance team commented that "provision of Bootcamps to support student progression on an accelerated programme is a great example of innovation" *(Middlesex University Partnership Enhancement Visit minutes)*.

- **Student risk framework**. The TEF workbook data series shows two years of decline in continuation rates in years 2 and 3. During year 3 (2018-19) ACM developed a new system of identifying students at-risk of non-continuation in order to reverse this decline. Year 4 of the TEF workbook data shows the success of this new framework with a 3% increase in retention rates, with this figure increasing year-on-year to the current academic year where continuation rates have risen to 93%. The risk framework took a metrics-based approach to identifying students showing signs of non-engagement. Session attendance, VLE engagement and assessment engagement data were compiled into dashboards to give a helicopter view of a student's profile. A new **risk intervention team** were formed to analyse the data and provide initial support to students. A cross-departmental **risk intervention group** was formed, where education management, academic and support staff meet with the risk intervention team to discuss individual students in order to put support mechanisms in place. This personalised approach to student support has been a critical method of helping students to stay engaged, creating an **early detection network** by monitoring data trends and re-engaging students at the earliest sign of problems.

Educational Gain

The concept and measurement of educational gain at ACM is something that has had huge internal focus over the last four years.

Historically, dating back to its formation in the late 1990s, ACM was a specialist vocational provider in the creative industries. We taught musicians how to succeed in an industry that can be brutal. Our student experience encompassed two major strands of development for students: exemplary creative skills and outstanding interpersonal skills. We taught students that in order to succeed you needed to be the type of artist that others would want to work due to your professionalism and attitude.

We taught students about building resilience for a career that would not always have an upward trajectory. This is an industry where today's chart-topping acts are getting voted off, I'm a Celebrity a few, short years later. We taught students about the importance of building a portfolio career with multiple income streams, using examples such as the fall in income from recorded music due to the rise of streaming in a world of digital music formats. We supplemented the core curriculum of creative skills with the hard and soft skills, from personal accountancy to public speaking.

The above skills have been hard-baked into the DNA of ACM. They were the foundational principles that ACM was established upon, well before the concept of learning gain was first mooted or resurrected as educational gain. To be clear, this is not a unique selling point of ACM and we are not laying claim to inventing the concept of 'transferable skills', 'learning gain', 'soft skills' or 'educational gain', we are highlighting that for us, and no doubt other former 'alternative providers' the concept of educational gain is where our institution started and it is therefore incredibly rewarding to see it on a pedestal as a central pillar of the teaching excellence framework.

Now, coming back to the last four years and our concerted focus on educational gain. Whilst the skills listed in the opening paragraph of this section are just as important now as when first conceived, one fundamental element of ACM has changed. We are no longer a vocational provider for the creative industries. We do teach skills that will enable students to be work-ready, on equipment they will find in industry environments they will graduate into, but to be a vocational provider means that you are training students' skills for a particular occupation, and in today's evolving world the vocation students train for may not exist by the time they graduate. Whilst that is a trite statement that may not stand up to scrutiny for an ancient art like music, there are shades of truth already emerging with AI technology such as ChatGPT able to write poetry and lyrics even in its current rudimentary form. Computers can compose and perform music or backing tracks in the style of any famous musician that has existed. The music of Bach, although beautiful, is no more than a series of rules (or algorithms) that can be reproduced on an app on an iPhone. Just like the ability to spell was rendered obsolete by spellcheckers or memorising historical dates and details is unnecessary in the world of search engines, we are at a time where the vocational, and creative, skills developed through practice and taught on music courses for centuries, are becoming irrelevant. And this is why educational gain is so important within all subjects, courses and institutions.

The conversation at ACM about educational gain is not about what 'extra' skills we think our graduates should come out with, it has been a conversation about the identity of our institution and what our role is in the development of learners across a diverse student body.

What we have done over this time is transformed an institution previously called The Academy of Contemporary Music into ACM. We have done this in stages.

- First, we took all the 'extra' stuff, that sat outside the curriculum in a co-curricular department called Industry Link, and we embedded it in our programmes. Industry Link was a 'finishing school for artists', a final step for the most capable students where additional coaching in the 'transferable skills' would help catapult them to stardom. It was successful, with ACM's glittering alumni spread far and deep across the music industry, however it was a selective element that betrayed our mission of 'levelling up education within our multicultural society". By embedding these elements it gave all student access to the 'finishing school' on a democratic playing field where they were able to gain credits through assessments that were accessible to all learners.

- Second, we started diversifying the subject availability at ACM. We developed degrees and curriculum materials in games development, digital skills, animation, rapping, movement. This put us on a course away from being a popular music provider into a more diverse creative industries space.

- Third, we acquired commercial businesses in the creative industries where interdisciplinary practice take place. We acquired a theatre in Guildford and a recording studio in London, Metropolis Studios, where 70% of UK Chart music is mixed, mastered or recorded *(Metropolis Studios website – www.thisismetropolis.com)*. These acquisitions were immediately important for the student opportunities for networking, work experience or future employment however the long-term importance was that it put ACM at the centre of an evolving industry to see how practices were changing and where 'vocations' were beginning to collide.

- Fourth, through our commercial entities and status as an approved (fee cap) provider, we began an exciting programme of research and development. One recent example being a collaborative, DCMS funded project to find creative uses for the 5G network. On this project we developed real-time audio-visual protocols, supported by an immersive, augmented reality platform, that allowed remote collaboration to take place between musicians spread across the UK. This project, that involved students as researchers and collaborators, demonstrated the convergence in technology and creatively to solve problems *(5G Festival Case Study – Digital Catapult).*

- Fifth, ACM began a partnership with Tulip Peer2Peer Learning to collaborate on the expansion of Tulip's Clock Your Skills programme *(CLOCK website)*. This programme identifies pre-existing skills (soft and hard) that people have in order to look at their transferability to other sectors, work environments or situations. It makes invisible skills, visible on an accreditation framework that puts skills and competencies in three work applicable areas: Advanced Trainee (level 4); Competent Professional (level 5); Sector Expert (level 7). Initially, the collaboration with Clock brought the peer reviewer delivery methodology into ACM's curriculum through 'retake bootcamps'. Since then, there has

been a more lasting impact with Clock's skills audits, bootcamps and framework becoming an essential element of the student experience and curriculum.

- Sixth, and bringing us to this academic year, we developed, validated and launched a new, innovative, flexible, interdisciplinary programme framework that has educational gain as the foundation. This programme framework spans foundation to level 7 and replaces individual subject degrees at ACM. The programme is based on the interdisciplinary practice that we believe is the future of the creative industries. This moves ACM away from its routes as a specialist vocational provider into a space where our graduates will be inventing the vocations of the future through the 'educational gains' they learn on programme. Importantly, this programme includes regular skills audits and a measurable way of calculating educational gain, through credited assessment, in the areas listed below.

ACM has identified the following educational gains for its students:

Group 1

1. Working collaboratively
2. Managing conflict

Group 2

3. Creative problem solving
4. Interdisciplinary thinking
5. Adaptive skillset

Group 3

6. Project management
7. Entrepreneurial mindset
8. Leadership

To explain how these are measured through the course, it is necessary to explain some of the mechanics of the programme (*Programme Handbook, Creative Industries Futures), (Creative Industries Futures and Short Courses operational document 2022)*.

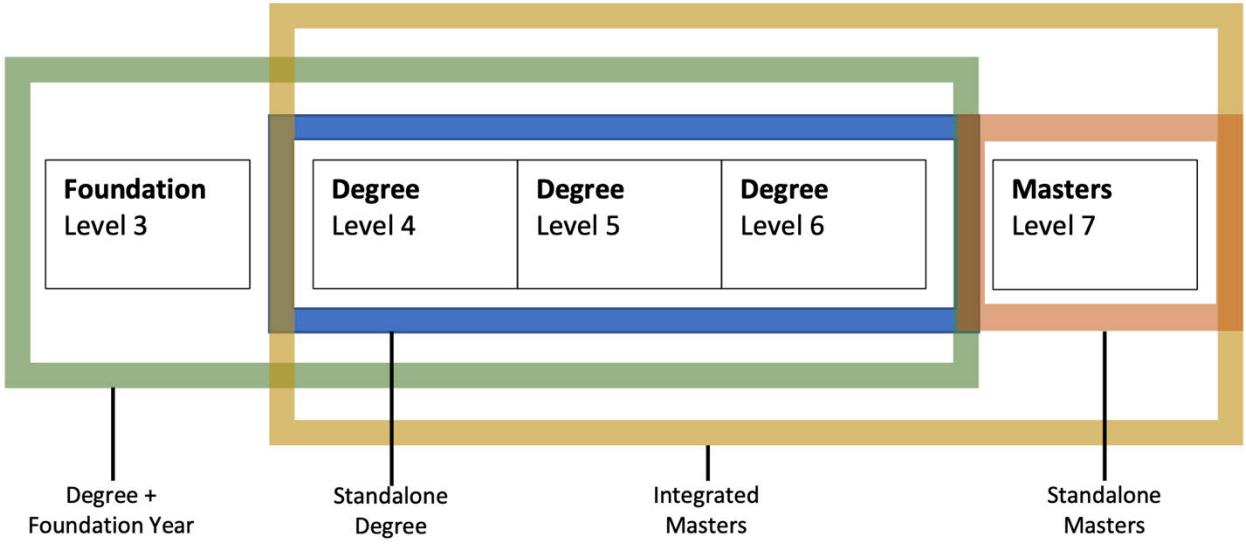
All applicants to ACM undertake a skills diagnostic before joining a programme. This 'Clock bootcamp' style diagnostic allows applicants to look at their pre-existing skills to uncover their programme entry point. Although the programme is interdisciplinary, it is possible to enter with a particular specialist pathway in mind. Students can continue developing this specialism on programme or broaden it during their time at ACM whilst collaborating within interdisciplinary groups. Other students will enter with a particular specialism and leave with interdisciplinarity through the acquisition of cross-subject skills applied within interdisciplinary groups. The validation panel noted two commendation areas in their report:

1. *The strong institutional commitment towards making this a successful educational offering*
2. *Demonstrating a strong community engagement*

(Validation Report, Creative Industries Futures – Middlesex University)

Students can start at Foundation level, undergraduate level or postgraduate level. Pre-existing qualifications/credits and the skills diagnostic will be used to negotiate the correct entry point for each student. It is also possible to undertake a CertHE or DipHE or enter the undergraduate programme at level 5 or 6.

Students undertaking the Foundation level usually do so as part of a three-year undergraduate programme where an accelerated degree follows the initial Foundation year. Students wishing to study the postgraduate component can do this as a standalone programme or as the final part of an accelerated, integrated masters programme that encompasses the accelerated degree components are followed by a full 180 credit masters. It is also possible to study level 5 in an 'industry sandwich year' where all projects are undertaken within a professional environment with regular supervision from an ACM mentor.



The way students acquire skills is through short course delivery, referred to as **skills units**. Across an undergraduate programme students will take a minimum of 15 skills units giving them a unique and personalised skills portfolio (using open badge recognition) when they graduate. Students who start at Foundation level or continue on the Masters have the opportunity study several more skills units. These are specific creative or technical skills that equip students for the workplace of today and give them a start point for the workplace of tomorrow. This element of the course is not where educational gain is predominantly taught, measured or delivered. Students are not summatively assessed on the skills units and they do not directly gain them credits towards their degree.

Students apply these acquired skills in collaborative, interdisciplinary project groups. This is where students are assessed, and educational gain takes place. Every term there is a collaborative project module. An industry brief is set and students from across all subject pathways and specialisms delivered through skills units are put into small groups of 7-10 students to respond to the brief. There is a structure to the competency framework learned through the collaborative project modules.

On the undergraduate programme:

- In term one (level 4), students **prepare** for collaborative work by learning to plan and develop for a response to a brief within their group.

- In term two (level 4), students **engage** in collaborative work
- In term three (level 5), students focus on **specialist** collaborative work, looking at how their own area of specialism can be applied within a broader, interdisciplinary context
- In term four (level 5), students focus on **professional** collaborative work, delivering industry-set projects to the professional standards expected in the workplace
- In term six (level 6), students **lead** a collaborative project. This follows on from a leadership module that students undertake in term 5

This structure allows students to develop the following educational gains skills:

1. **Group 1: Working collaboratively, Managing conflict:**
   Through participation in five interdisciplinary project groups where they must work successfully with others, developing their interpersonal skills in pragmatism, managing conflict, presenting concisely. The assessment learning outcomes allow for their collaborative mindset and growth to be measured on a termly basis by staff facilitators who support and observe the small groups throughout each term.

2. **Group 2: Creative problem solving, interdisciplinary thinking, adaptive skillset:**
   By placing students in interdisciplinary groups and setting a broad, industry brief, students will encounter problems which must be overcome during the project. In some instances, these will be problems that require an immediate, pragmatic solution, whilst at other times the solution may involve inventing a new software, technology or protocol in order to achieve the outcome the group want. The 5G creates project outlined in the steps ACM took to get here typifies this later approach, where new protocols, platforms and technologies had to be developed in order to achieve a solution to a longstanding problem of latency (delay) over digital networks. By developing an interdisciplinary mindset to creative problem-solving, and equipping students with an adaptive skillset that allows for their skills to be utilised in different contexts, we are developing graduates who are not just prepared for vocations but are ready to invent the future. The educational gain within this group is measured in two ways. Primarily by individual critical reflection following the conclusion of a project. Secondarily through one-to-one critical reflection sessions with a personal tutor and the staff project facilitator.

3. **Group 3: Project management, entrepreneurial mindset, leadership:**
   This group is predominantly measured sequentially and allows students to demonstrate their growth and development as a professional through their engagement in the collaborative projects. This mirrors a typical career trajectory where employees move from facilitating and managing projects, to having their own ideas to develop projects, and finally are the leaders of projects, companies or groups. Hard skills in project management are taught and assessed at level 4. The assessment of these skills predominantly takes place through the review of planning and project management documentation developed iteratively through the course of the projects at level 4. Development of these methodologies is reviewed through levels 5 and 6 as students become more refined with technology and techniques. Softer skills of entrepreneurism and leadership are assessed at level 5 and subsequently level 6. These are predominantly assessed through observation of performance in project meetings and discussions where the more intangible elements can be picked up by the trained staff acting as project facilitators. A simplistic example of this

occurring in popular culture is the observation (and feedback) that Claude and Karen undertake during tasks on the Apprentice. The results of the observations are reflected in assessment grades however they also feed into the personal tutor process where students have two one-to-one sessions each term to discuss their developmental needs across hard, soft, creative and technical skills.

The above focuses on the undergraduate element of the creative industries futures programme framework however it is not isolated to this part.

At **Foundation level** there is a greater focus on group 1 skills and the project management skill in group 3. The assessment model is different at this level with each student developing a single individual entry portfolio worth a nominal 120 credits at foundation level. The entry portfolio is made up of the following components:

- 25% of the portfolio must demonstrate basic **project management** skills. For example, demonstrated through an applied understanding of project phases and delivery, backed up with administrative evidence.
- 25% of the portfolio must demonstrate **effective communication**. This is often evidenced through critical reflection outlining effective communication within interdisciplinary project groups that are heavily supervised and curated by a project facilitator.
- 50% of the portfolio demonstrates **creative or technical skills** within a chosen broad subject pathway that demonstrates competency at, or above the threshold for level 4 entry.

There is a hard marker of entry-point tariff of these skills during the skills diagnostic. Students on the foundation year will have developmental needs in at least two of the above areas to be placed on the foundation year. The distance travelled by the end of the foundation year is assessed through the entry portfolio with students who have successfully developed skills to the threshold level progressing onto the undergraduate component.

At **postgraduate level** students spend the first term mapping their skills to an existing framework within a distinct area. Three Clock Your Skills accreditation frameworks are available, which allows students to obtain an additional professional qualification. Students with a particular vocation in mind, for example music therapy, can use an industry-recognised, professional competency framework for this element. It is also possible to use this term -worth 60 credits on the masters- to use the HEA framework for students wishing to work in academia post-graduation.

By mapping skills to external frameworks, students will work with their supervisor to plan their own developmental journey. This can involve upskilling in specific areas through participation in ACM skills units. This is particularly popular for students who join the masters with a narrow specialism that they wish to broaden. It can also involve external CPD as required. The purpose of using external frameworks is that students are critically reflecting on their own skills mix, identifying areas of deficiency and strength. By applying this skill of self-reflection, they are developing leadership skills in order to apply the same level of critical reflection on team members or employees they have in the future. This exercise is assessed through the supervision sessions and a critical reflection commentary. In order to pass this module students must have undertaken reflection on each competency area of the framework, with a developmental plan written for any area where they do not yet meet the criterion.

Students then lead on their own area of applied research. Group 3 skills are assessed through their leadership of their own specialist project. The implementation and delivery of this assesses their group 2 skills of problem-solving and interdisciplinary thinking. Group 1 skills are assessed through their external collaboration, networking and community building required to bring their area of applied research to a market-ready conclusion.

In conclusion, this is what ACM classifies and measures as educational gain and how it manifests throughout our institution. We have built our entire provision around the concept, with traditional subject skills almost being a by-product required to enable the demonstration of educational gain skills. There is an initial diagnostic reading that gives a personalised start point for the learning journey and there is continuous assessment through a variety of methods, including supervision, observation, critical reflection and project outcomes. Students graduate with measurable development of these skills from their initial diagnostic point. This is reflected in degree classification at undergraduate level and a masters classification, and mapping to an external professional framework at postgraduate level.

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