



Scotland's Tertiary
Quality Enhancement
Framework

Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER)

Royal Conservatoire of
Scotland

March 2026

This review method
is ESG compliant

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About the Tertiary Quality Enhancement review method

The QAA website explains the method for Tertiary Quality Enhancement review (TQER) and has links to the TQER handbook and other informative documents.¹ You can also find more information about the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\)](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).²

About this review

This is a report of a TQER conducted by QAA at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland carried out by a team of four peer reviewers:

- Dr Steven Donnelly (Reviewer)
- Professor Shirley Thompson (Reviewer)
- Mrs Laura Witt (Reviewer)
- Mr Connel Greenhorn (Student reviewer)

TQER is an evidence-based process. Review judgements are based on the documents that TQER teams scrutinise and the meetings they hold and are informed by their experience.

In TQER, the TQER team makes a judgement on whether, currently, the institution meets sector expectations in managing academic standards, enhancing the quality of the learning experience it provides and enabling student success and, further, has the quality assurance and enhancements arrangements in place to enable this into the future.

In advance of the two review visits, the institution submitted a self-evaluative document, the Strategic Impact Analysis, (SIA) and an Advance Information Set, (AIS), the latter arranged around the Sector-Agreed Principles of the UK Quality Code (2024),³ and comprising a range of materials about the institution's arrangements for managing quality and academic standards. The SIA and AIS framed the TQER team's analysis and understanding of the operation of the institution's management of their quality and enhancement and enables them to consider the institution's practice in relation to the UK Quality Code, and Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).⁴

The TQER team has considered the institution's alignment to the UK Quality Code (2024). Having reviewed the evidence provided by the institution, the TQER team found there to be alignment.

The review comprised two visits: an Initial Review Visit which, for the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, took place on-campus on 10-11 February and a Main Review Visit which took place on-campus on 24-26 March.

The judgement for this review can be found on page 2, followed by features of good practice

1 About TQER: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/tertiary-quality-enhancement-review>

2 About QAA: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us>.

3 The UK Quality Code: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/2024>

4 ESG: <https://www.engq.eu/esg-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance-in-the-european-higher-education-area/>

identified by the TQER team and recommendations for action. This is followed by the detailed findings of the review.

TQER reports provide an information base to produce thematic reports that identify findings across tertiary institutions in Scotland.

Review judgement and findings

Based on the information presented, the TQER team judges that:

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is **effective** in managing academic standards, enhancing the quality of the learning experience and enabling student success.

Features of good practice

The TQER team identified the following **features of good practice**:

- The involvement of individual practitioners and industry partners/organisations in curriculum development, delivery and review, placements and/or work-related experiences in real-world settings that help ensure that its students are prepared to be work-ready graduates. (**Excellence in learning, teaching and assessment**, paragraph 30)
- The benefits to the doctoral student experience offered by the partnership with the University of St Andrews, that enables access to shared research events, additional staff expertise and additional resources and opportunities to support student progression. (**Excellence in learning, teaching and assessment**, paragraph 32)
- The encouragement for and facilitation of meaningful collaboration across artistic disciplines, broadening students' experience and skillsets. (**Excellence in learning, teaching and assessment**, paragraph 47)
- The approach to supporting EDI initiatives through sustained funding and training to promote a fair, inclusive, and accessible learning environment for staff and students. (**Supporting student success**, paragraph 57)
- The establishment and development of the Creative Enterprise Development Office (CEDO) that enables RCS to provide support for current students and graduates to develop their careers as self-employed entrepreneurial creative artists. (**Supporting student success**, paragraph 67)
- The comprehensive and impactful opportunities for student representation at discipline and programme level, that supports and embeds the student voice. (**Student partnership and engagement**, paragraph 88)
- The integration of a wide range of internal and external stakeholders into the institution's academic governance and quality processes to help inform the strategic approach to managing quality and standards. This enables the development of a strong quality culture based on continuous reflection and a shared sense of responsibility for delivering excellent learning opportunities and the student experience. (**Enhancement and quality culture**, paragraph 111)

Recommendations for action

The TQER team makes the following **recommendations for action**:

- RCS should clearly communicate the strategic approach to student partnership to all staff and students, improving awareness and visibility of the Student Partnership Agreement, Student Experience Project, the Student Experience Forum and programme open forums supporting their ongoing implementation. (**Student**

partnership and engagement, paragraph 86)

Contextual information about Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

1. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS/the Conservatoire) traces its origins to 1847, when it was founded as the Glasgow Athenaeum with a mission to provide cultural enrichment and education across society. Over time, its arts training has evolved into a dedicated specialist institution and, in 2011, became the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, encompassing the full range of performing arts. Today, RCS is Scotland's only conservatoire with a distinctive national role in developing artistic talent and contributing to the cultural life of Glasgow, Scotland and beyond.

2. RCS is an active member of Conservatoires UK, the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music and the Federation of Drama Schools. Its civic role is integral to its mission, with strong emphasis on community engagement, widening access, professional partnerships and contribution to the creative economy. The strategic direction is set out in *Strategic Plan 2030: People, Place, Promise*. This framework prioritises an outstanding student experience, inclusive and sustainable practices, curriculum transformation, environmental responsibility, and the nurturing of artistic promise through flexible and professionally focused learning.

3. RCS is organised around discipline-based academic structure with specialist schools. The academic schools and subject areas are Music, Drama, Dance, Production, Film and Screen and Education. RCS offers professional training across the performing and production arts through the delivery of undergraduate, taught postgraduate, research degrees and professional and short courses. Many of the programmes are accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). There is also a Junior Conservatoire which is made up of weekend and part-time provision.

4. RCS has a diverse student body, representing more than 60 national identities. Its learning environment is characterised by intensive study, high contact time and staff-to-student ratio. The student experience, retention and progression are monitored through programme-level governance structures, including programme committees and the Research Degrees Committee, all of which include student representation. RCS reports strong student outcomes and graduate success, with continuous enhancement driven by partnership with students at every level of academic governance.

5. RCS has held Taught Degree Awarding Powers since 1994 for awards up to and including Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 11. RCS has a validated partnership with the University of St Andrews for programmes at SCQF Level 12. Academic governance is overseen by Academic Board, with delegated responsibility for learning, teaching, assessment and quality enhancement held by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee. Programmes are developed and reviewed through shared academic frameworks for undergraduate, postgraduate taught and credit-rated provision, aligned to institutional graduate attributes.

6. There are around 1,320 students enrolled at RCS, including 872 full-time undergraduates, 230 full-time and 85 part-time postgraduate taught students and 49 postgraduate research students, of which 20 study full-time. There are also 84 students on credit rated short courses. In recent years there has been an increase in the proportion of Scotland domiciled students with just over half of students from Scotland while there has been a decrease in the proportion of international and from the rest of the UK. Online and blended programmes are offered at the master's level with 77 students currently active. RCS does not currently offer degree or collaborative programmes abroad. There are student exchange and study abroad opportunities for students.

7. Retention and progression rates for full-time Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants are above the Scottish sector average. Over the five-year period from 2019-20 to 2023-24, RCS achieved an average retention rate of 95.8%, compared to the sector average of 90.6%. for graduate outcomes RCS students enter employment or further study at rates that exceed the sector average, reaching 97.8% in 2022-23.

8. RCS has a high proportion of part-time and hourly paid staff (PTHP), including 688 lecturer or tutor roles. This compares with 102 permanent lecturers and tutors of which 26 are full-time and 76 are part-time.

9. Like many specialist arts institutions, RCS has faced financial challenges since the COVID-19 pandemic. This has necessitated savings across the portfolio, a reset of student fees, and decisions affecting staffing and resources. Sustaining staff morale, rewarding and developing a largely part-time specialist workforce, and maintaining an intensive educational model within constrained resources remain key challenges. Despite this, RCS continues to prioritise quality, student outcomes and long-term institutional resilience.

Excellence in learning, teaching and assessment

10. The TQER team found that the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is **effective** in achieving excellence in learning, teaching and assessment. The institution has appropriate and systematically applied practices in line with sector expectations for achieving excellence in learning, teaching and assessment, including assuring and maintaining academic standards. The institution's practices make effective and accurate use of data, evidence and externality to demonstrate impact. The TQER team's evaluation was informed by a range of evidence including strategy documents, committee minutes and review documentation. In addition, the TQER team met with a range of key stakeholders, including staff and students.

Academic standards and awarding

11. The TQER team found that RCS ensures that academic standards and awarding practices meet external expectations using a range of systems, structures and processes. This includes having in place a clearly defined academic governance structure: the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (LTQC), supported by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee Action Group (LTQAG), has oversight of and responsibility for a range of functions associated with the maintenance, enhancement and development of academic standards, and reports to RCS's Academic Board. RCS staff confirmed to the TQER team that the LTQAG was established to engage a broader group of staff in the assurance of academic quality. Minutes from LTQC evidence the attention given to the management of learning and teaching, demonstrating a thorough enhancement-led approach. For instance, in April 2025, the LTQAG received and reviewed programme validation reports, checking whether conditions and recommendations had been met ahead of recommending approval to Academic Board. The TQER team considered that this process helps ensure consistency and confidence in academic standards. Minutes from LTQC Action Group meetings support the statement made by RCS staff that the group contributes to LTQC by focusing on the operational aspects of learning and teaching. This includes, for example, reviewing proposals for new modules and module modifications, recommending amendments where necessary, or approving them for submission to LTQC. The TQER team considered the oversight provided by the academic governance structure ensures the maintenance and consistency of academic standards.

12. RCS further assures the quality and consistency of its academic standards through the alignment of its awards with the Scottish Qualifications and Credit Framework (SCQF and other relevant external frameworks (see paragraph 19). In parallel, RCS has developed distinct yet shared academic frameworks for its undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision (see paragraph 24). These frameworks ensure equivalence of standards and student experience across programmes at each level over time, while critically allowing individual courses the flexibility to meet the specific requirements of each specialism.

13. The Conservatoire offers a clear position to its students on academic integrity (AI), and has clear processes for dealing with academic misconduct, thus ensuring that standards are upheld. For instance, Bachelor of Music (BMus) students are supported to avoid academic misconduct through AI awareness and academic misconduct training, a practice described to the TQER team by RCS staff.

14. Assessment practices are underpinned by clearly articulated assessment rubrics and marking criteria, which are set out in module documentation and assessment materials. These support consistency of standards between markers and ensure transparency for students regarding assessment expectations and the basis on which academic judgements are made. When asked during meetings with the TQER team, students raised no concerns about assessment practices, attesting to its effectiveness. However, while the 2025 National

Student Survey (NSS) results indicate that students' experiences of assessment and feedback were positive on most courses, this was not consistently so across the Conservatoire. The BMus annual monitoring report provides evidence of that team's responsiveness to the need for ongoing improvement in this area and includes in its action plan for AY2025-26 a focus on enhancing assessment literacy for students and on refining guidance to assessors, demonstrating a proactive approach by the institution to enhance students' trust in assessment processes.

15. Clearly defined processes for the annual monitoring and evaluation of programmes, as well as for programme review and validation, also help ensure that academic standards and awarding practices are maintained, providing confidence in awards for students and employers. The approach to annual monitoring ensures a continuous cycle of reflection and review in which programmes are kept under regular scrutiny, with the opportunity to respond to issues and to put in place actions to facilitate enhancements. The BMus annual monitoring report covering 2024-25 provides detailed evaluation, thoroughly scrutinising a broad range of feedback and data, and identifying 18 actions across all areas of the report, each with a clearly defined action, those responsible for undertaking it, and a timescale for completion. This report, along with others reviewed by the TQER team, begins with a reflection on any actions remaining incomplete from the previous year, ensuring that the course team remain accountable. Programme validation and renewal processes are also thorough, involving eight carefully structured stages, not only ensuring alignment with the needs of the discipline, student demand, strategic priorities and resources, but also ensuring that academic standards are upheld. The first three stages focus on programme approval, and the remaining five on validation activity, beginning with a 'Preliminary Scrutiny Panel' leading to a 'Full Scrutiny Panel,' based on the decision made. The TQER team considered this to be a thorough process, as evidenced by the documents on the validation of BA Dance Artist programme. In particular, the TQER team noted the detail and attention taken at the Preliminary Scrutiny stage, from which the programme team get a helpful steer with next steps in the form of a formal report, and a need to respond to conditions and recommendations made at this early stage. The usefulness of this element of the process for supporting colleagues involved was confirmed to the TQER team by RCS staff.

16. Both annual monitoring and programme review processes draw on external expertise, with a view to ensuring that RCS is continually alert to, and in a position to be responsive to, external expectations. In the programme review process, the full scrutiny panel membership requires one professional representative and one employer. The annual monitoring process provides the opportunity to reflect on feedback from external sources, especially that from external examiner reports and, in Music, those from Specialist External Assessors. For instance, the 2025 Annual Monitoring report for postgraduate Learning and Teaching programmes neatly summarises and reflects upon the comments of its two external examiners and leads to two actions in the action plan. Comments from Specialist External Assessor reports are shared with the assessor's Head of Department. The Head collates these comments and prepares a response, which is shared with both the assessors and the Director of Music. The Director then produces an overview report identifying areas of good practice, as well as any issues requiring immediate or future consideration. The TQER team consider that this process again demonstrates a robust and thorough approach to maintaining academic standards. Reports from external examiners and Specialist External Assessors in Music for AY2025–26 confirm that standards at RCS are comparable with those at similar institutions and, in some cases - particularly in Music Principal Study achievement - are higher.

17. RCS readily invites external input to assist with benchmarking which provides additional confidence in academic standards (see also, paragraph 45). For example, an external expert reviews annual monitoring reports and action plans and attends the LTQC

discussion on them. In the examples from AY2023-25 reviewed by the TQER team the external experts all expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the reports, commenting on the detailed level of reflection, and observing common themes across them. Furthermore, some specific aspects of RCS's provision involve external accreditation by such Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies as the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), and the Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT). Because RCS staff serve as external examiners and Specialist External Assessors at comparable institutions and maintain both formal and informal links with organisations such as Conservatoires UK (CUK) and the Association of European Conservatoires (AEC), the Conservatoire has an additional mechanism for benchmarking its standards against those of peer institutions. The benefit of such connections was confirmed to the TQER team in meetings with RCS staff.

18. Embedded in both annual monitoring and programme review processes is reflective analysis of attainment and progression data. The Conservatoire draws both on data sets (achievement, retention, progression, award outcomes, withdrawals, students with disabilities, fair access progression data) and survey outcomes (for example, Graduate Outcomes, NSS) to monitor its performance across key areas of learning, teaching, student experience and student success over time. This ensures that academic standards and awarding practices are maintained and signals the potential for enhancement where possible. Analysis of this data and any allied action-planning takes place in annual monitoring reports and bespoke NSS action plans. Cohort monitoring data is also considered in reflective analysis documents prepared as part of the programme review process. RCS's Academic Board also receives and discusses the NSS Outcome Report, indicating engagement with this detail by RCS's leadership. The Conservatoire performs strongly across achievement, retention, and progression measures. SFC data report consistently high retention rates between 2019–20 and 2023–24, averaging 95.8%, which is well above the sector average of 90.6%. The proportion of first and upper second-class honours awarded has tended to track closely with sector averages throughout the reporting period. The TQER team considered that particularly close analysis of such data relating to retention, progression and degree outcomes is undertaken at programme level. This was evidenced by the most recent annual monitoring report for the BMus programme, which provided a detailed commentary of this and other data.

Use of frameworks

19. The TQER team confirm that RCS makes effective use of relevant frameworks to provide clarity about and confidence in the levels and types of qualifications it awards. Its own undergraduate and taught postgraduate academic frameworks (see also, paragraphs 5, 12, 24) are aligned with the SCQF, the UK Quality Code and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Evidence of mapping not only to SCQF but also other frameworks is clear in programme specifications. For instance, in the Programme Handbook for the Master of Arts (MA) and Master of Fine Arts (MFA) Production (Design/Management), February 2025, the Programme Learning Outcomes are mapped against the SCQF Level 11 descriptors. The TQER team observed more thorough mapping in the Programme Handbook for BA Acting 2024-25, where level and programme learning outcomes are mapped with equivalent levels in all the following frameworks: SCQF, FHEQ (Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland), NQF (The National Framework of Qualifications for Ireland), EQF, (The European Qualifications Framework) and FQ-EHEA (Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, also known as the Bologna Framework).

20. RCS also undertakes benchmarking with SCQF levels for credit-rated short courses. The TQER team considered a credit-rating review report from the SCQF Partnership which highlighted 'strong management and scrutiny within its documented process' and 'a defined

policy framework and committee structure for the review and monitoring' of its own credit-rated provision. The report raised three substantive matters: the completion of the governance cycle for recently credit-rated short courses, the status and periodic review of a small number of credit-rated short courses identified as due for review, and clarification that the Conservatoire does not offer third-party credit rating. In each case, the Conservatoire confirmed that the issues related to timing, withdrawn or superseded provision, or definitional interpretation, and provided evidence of appropriate governance, review processes and quality assurance arrangements. The TQER team can confirm, based on a thorough response from RCS and the provision of additional evidence, that these have been satisfactorily addressed.

21. RCS's higher degrees by research and its new Advanced Artist Diploma, benchmarked to SCQF Level 12, are covered by the academic regulations at The University of St Andrews. This arrangement provides an external source of assurance and clarity around the level and type of these qualifications. In addition, there is a joint Annual Progress Review Panel and reciprocal membership of Research Committees to support alignment of academic regulations.

Strategic leadership

22. RCS Leadership aim to enable and support a culture for excellence in learning, teaching and assessment that impacts positively across the Conservatoire is evident from the overarching Strategy 2030, 'People, Place & Promise' which puts 'Learning and Teaching' at the top of a list of five strategic supporting plans. This plan, articulated in the Learning and Teaching Strategy, is overseen by LTQC, convened by the Deputy Principal. This means that a member of the leadership team has direct responsibility for delivery in this area, providing further evidence of an institutional culture which accords it such importance. Another key post in RCS demonstrating leadership commitment to a culture of excellence in learning, teaching and assessment is that of Quality Enhancement Manager; this post, which is part of the academic management team, has significant responsibility for the effective operation of all quality documentation and review processes.

23. The TQER team observed how RCS's leadership clearly fosters a culture which enables and supports monitoring and evaluation which in turn positively impacts its provision and the learning experience of students. The Conservatoire's processes for the annual monitoring and evaluation of programmes, as well as for programme review and validation described above (see paragraphs 15-18), support learning and teaching by enabling regular opportunities for reflection, enhancement, adjustment and sharing of good practice. The TQER team considered the continuous, cyclical nature of annual monitoring, and the enthusiasm to grasp opportunities for curriculum review and development, the latter evidenced by the amount of such activity that has been undertaken in recent years supports RCS's own claim that it is 'committed to continuous improvement', a claim also supported by observations from external partners in a meeting with the TQER team.

24. By granting academic leaders' autonomy in programme development and recognising their disciplinary expertise, RCS leadership further supports effective learning, teaching and assessment. RCS's overarching academic frameworks for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes (see paragraphs, 5 and 12) are deliberately designed according to what is referred to as a 'tight-loose' approach, whereby specific curriculum principles underpin all programmes of study ('tight'), while schools and programme teams have the freedom to decide how best to apply the principles within their own programmes ('loose'). This institutional approach acknowledges and accommodates the differences between disciplines, and the expertise of its academic staff, but within a clear framework.

25. Other examples of activity by the RCS leadership team to support teaching and learning are evidenced through their support for, and active involvement in, a range of initiatives. For example, the Conservatoire demonstrates a strong commitment to student partnership, as reflected in the 2024–25 Student Experience Project (SEP), which directly informed the development of the 2025–26 Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) (see paragraph 80). The TQER team considered that RCS also engaged constructively with the Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR), addressing the recommendation about the consistency in design and delivery of assessment though assuring alignment with the Assessment Strategy and providing guidance in the undergraduate academic framework. Meanwhile, the other recommendation to include the Curriculum Review process in the Quality Assurance Handbook has been completed (see, paragraph 117). In addition, RCS’s active collaboration with other sector organisations supports the effective sharing of good practice. This includes representation at Forum meetings of Conservatoires UK, which provides an opportunity for the sharing of experience across UK conservatoire peers; and involvement in various projects led by the Association of European Conservatoires, including the ‘European Platform for Artistic Research in Music (EPARM) Preparatory Working Group’, ‘METRIC’ (Modernising European Higher Music Education through Improvisation) and ‘NXT Project – Making a living from the Arts’.

Curriculum planning, design and delivery

26. In preparing students for entry into the creative arts industries, and to enable them to make a meaningful contribution to those fields, RCS seeks to ensure that its programmes remain current and responsive to both student needs and the demands of the contemporary workforce. The Conservatoire adopts a ‘proto-professional’ working environment, one which simulates the working within the professions but nonetheless ensures a safe space in which learning can take place at the student’s own pace, and in which they are not afraid to take creative risks. That this is achieved was evident to the TQER team in numerous ways, including the centrality of practical work, the integration of industry links, and an emphasis on enterprise, innovation and entrepreneurship and readiness for the profession. The students who met the TQER team told the team they valued this approach, where they can learn from industry professionals.

27. RCS ensures that its programmes align to this proto-professional context by ensuring that, at every stage – planning, design, approval, delivery and monitoring – student and industry needs are central. This is explicit in the Curriculum Principles and Graduate Attributes stated in the Undergraduate Academic Framework (and reiterated in course handbooks) that underpin all programmes, and which provide a clear foundation from which planning and design follow. Principle 6 in the Undergraduate Academic Framework typifies the emphasis on creating provision that fulfils student and workforce needs: ‘The curriculum enables students and graduates to make a contribution in the world as artists, educators, advocates, and active citizens.’ A recently refreshed Postgraduate Academic Framework provides a similar foundation.

28. The TQER team found that the involvement of industry partners in programme approval and validation places relevance to professional practice at the centre of the provision. Students particularly valued the opportunity to gain experience from industry professionals, highlighting the contribution this made to the authenticity of their learning experience. The industry-based external representatives met by the TQER team confirmed their close involvement in programme design and delivery and recognised the value of this engagement for both students and industry partners. The Conservatoire’s Quality Assurance Handbook sets out a clear expectation that industry partners and employers engage in the planning and design of programmes, with evidence required that appropriate consultation has taken place regarding the need for and relevance of proposed provision. In addition, full

scrutiny panels are required to include both a professional representative and an employer. The effectiveness of these arrangements is evidenced in the revalidation of the BA Performance programme where, in response to panel feedback, the programme team were prompted to provide a strengthened and more detailed response to the question of how employer input had directly informed the evolution of curriculum content and structure.

29. Relevant external input is also incorporated in the annual monitoring process with a section on 'Employers and/or Professional Contacts' which summarises any key issues raised by employers, professional contacts and/or placement providers, if appropriate, and explains how they have been addressed.' Examples of this section of the annual monitoring report seen by the TQER team indicate both where things are going well, seen in the references to the ongoing strength of the Scottish Ballet connection in the BA Modern Ballet Annual Monitoring Report for 2023-24, and raise any areas where enhancement, and therefore an improved student experience, would be possible. This is illustrated, for example, in successive annual monitoring reports for the BMus programme and include actions to improve the reporting of placement-related issues and minor adjustments to better support student job applications for school-based music teaching.

30. The TQER team consider that the connection with industry to enhance students' learning is a central part of RCS's strategy. The TQER team found that RCS makes extensive use of industry partners in the organisation and delivery of specific curriculum areas, as well as in the provision of placement or work-based learning across all the courses in a variety of formats, providing all students opportunities for valuable industry experience. That the involvement of industry professionals is embedded into RCS's provision was evident in meetings between students, staff and the TQER team. The list of RCS's partners in this context is diverse and extensive, including not only leading Scottish national organisations but others across the UK and internationally. An example is the 'Big Noise' module offered on the BMus programme, developed in collaboration with Sistema Scotland, which offers final-year students the opportunity for firsthand experience as instrumental and vocal teachers, working directly with children and young people in community placements in some of Scotland's most disadvantaged areas of multiple deprivation. Other examples include a strong connection between the School of Dance and Scottish Ballet, including in performance medicine and similarly extensive connections between the School of Stage and Screen and a variety of theatres, productions and companies, including Shakespeare's Globe, the BBC, and a video pathway company. That this multiplicity of connections makes students ready for employment is evidenced by the success of alumni working in these and other arts organisations, who in turn have the potential to be able to shape the future of the profession (aligning with the Conservatoire's Strategy 2030). This success is reflected in outcomes data which records that undergraduate graduates from RCS enter employment or further study at rates that exceed the sector average, reaching 97.8% in 2022/23. Other industry connections take the form of school-based placements, which are a central pillar of RCS's Music Education programmes. Furthermore, RCS's large body of part-time hourly-paid tutors are generally professionals themselves who therefore bring students into direct contact daily with the real world of work for which they are being prepared. The TQER team identified the involvement of individual practitioners and industry partners/organisations in curriculum development, delivery and review, placements and/or work-related experiences in real-world settings to help ensure that its students are prepared to be work-ready graduates as a **feature of good practice**.

31. The impact and effectiveness of such industry-focused training is supported by the Conservatoire's graduate outcomes (see paragraph, 18). Across the umbrella organisation Conservatoires UK (CUK) which provides a key point of comparison, RCS had the second highest proportion of graduates from the 2022-23 cohort in employment and further study, which is three positions ahead of its 2021-22 results. Likewise, in comparison with the

Scottish sector, RCS graduates score above average in terms of entry into higher skilled roles with 78.5% of undergraduates in 2022-23 entering high-skilled roles. The same positive results are also reported for postgraduate outcomes with 98.0% progressing into high-skilled roles. Support for progression into the industry for all members of RCS community, including graduates, is offered by the Knowledge Exchange and Innovation ('Engagement') department in the form of the Creative Enterprise Development Office (CEDO) (see, paragraph, 67).

32. Another ongoing collaborative partnership is that between RCS and the University of St Andrews which, as noted above (see paragraph, 21), validates RCS's research degrees and new SCQF Level 12 Advanced Artist Diploma. The TQER team noted that RCS were given 16 commendations for this provision in the 2025 St Andrews-RCS Doctoral Review Outcome Report and Action Plan. Also, students, in two separate meetings, told the TQER team that the partnership significantly enhances the doctoral student experience and identified a range of benefits arising from the partnership with St Andrews. The relationship gains strength through a reciprocal arrangement in which the Associate Provost Education from St Andrews sits on RCS's Research Degrees Committee, and RCS staff attend the equivalent committee at St Andrews, ensuring that RCS's doctoral provision is well represented and well supported in formal discussion and decision-making. Students told the TQER team that they felt the partnership was authentic and provided examples of how it enhances their experience. They highlighted the added credibility the University partnership brings to their qualification and valued opportunities such as joint study days and symposia, which expand their professional networks and help build confidence. Students also appreciated access to supervisors at St Andrews with complementary expertise (e.g. in philosophy), as well as to library resources and a St Andrews email account, through which they receive useful notifications about funding and other relevant opportunities. Doctorate in Performance students welcome the opportunity to connect with the University's Music Department, and to collaborate on concerts. Students also noted that they can choose to follow St Andrews modules, whether formally or informally. In sum, the TQER team identified the benefits to the doctoral student experience offered by the partnership with the University of St Andrews, that enables access to shared research events, additional staff expertise and additional resources and opportunities to support student progression to be a **feature of good practice**.

33. RCS has also made strategic choices to develop courses which are non-traditional in the conservatoire context, but which are inextricably linked with the current creative arts industries. At undergraduate level, these are the BA Arts with Community, which offers a clear trajectory for the intending community-arts focused practitioner, and the BA Performance programme for deaf and hard of hearing actors, originally developed over a decade ago with the theatre company Solar Bear. In a meeting with the TQER team, two students from BA Performance made a strong case for why RCS course is needed and explained that their Department is always seeking external opportunities for them (for example, performing at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe), confirming the centrality within this provision of preparation for the profession.

34. At postgraduate level, such non-traditional courses take the form of a suite of online and blended programmes: PgCert/MEd Learning and Teaching in the Arts; MA Psychology in the Arts (Music - since 2022-23); MA/MFA Creative Arts Practice; MA/MFA Arts Leadership and Fundraising. These programmes, 'designed for established artists and educators seeking to deepen their practice,' allow a flexible approach to study and have professional practice at their heart. The TQER team heard from students located both in the UK and overseas, that satisfaction with this innovative provision is high. Student (and external examiner) satisfaction with the PgCert/MEd provision, the longest standing of these programmes, is also outlined in the 2024-25 Annual Monitoring Report. The close

connection between this course and the industry is evidenced by the 2023-24 Outcome Agreement to the Scottish Funding Council (2023-24) which reported the launch of a podcast series with MEd Graduates, as well as various other collaborative projects supporting arts education across Scotland. Also, the publication of work arising from the PgCert/MEd provision has enabled students to have a direct connection with the professional world, and moreover to make their own impact on it.

Work-based learning

35. RCS states in its Academic Framework that its definition of work-based learning aligns with QAA (2010) guidance 'where the focus is on situations in which students learn predominantly in a work context and in which work/professional practice informs the context for learning and where relevant, assessment'. As noted above (see paragraph 27), work-based learning is embedded into the Conservatoire's courses provision in several ways appropriate to the different specialisms. The TQER team observed that numerous mechanisms are in place to ensure its quality. The Quality Assurance Handbook provides comprehensive details of how placements are approved and monitored. RCS policy on placement learning is included in the Quality Assurance Handbook and draws on the UK Quality Code Principle 8, University Health and Safety Association (UHSA) guidance and the ASET (The Work Based Learning and Placement Learning Association) practical guide on Health and Safety of Placement for Higher Education Students.

36. In addition, RCS supply work-based learning providers with relevant information for supervisors. This is well evidenced by materials provided by RCS to schools delivering placements on its Music education programmes, with detailed placement handbooks comprising 'Information for Schools.' These include a clear setting-out of the role of the School Mentor, placement requirements and recommended quality measures. The TQER team also had access to Interim Progress Report feedback sheets for Year 2 BEd and the Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) provision, which are required to be completed by the School Mentor. These feedback sheets require the School Mentor to indicate at an interim stage where performance is satisfactory, as well as areas of strength, and/or areas requiring attention or giving cause for concern. The TQER team consider this monitoring mechanism to be effective in maintaining the quality of the work-based learning experience. It ensures that placement mentors clearly understand the priority areas identified by RCS, that students receive constructive and actionable feedback to support their ongoing placement, and that RCS is made aware of any students who may require additional support or placement settings that may need review. The students met by the team confirmed that overall, their placements experience was positive. There is also a process in place for providers to notify RCS about any placement problems as and when they occur. Where quality oversight is concerned, annual programme monitoring and periodic review processes are used to capture any issues associated with placement/work-based learning, enabling the Conservatoire to reflect and respond appropriately.

Learning environments

37. RCS recognises the need for continued investment (in technologies in particular) to ensure that the experience for students remains relevant and competitive. An example of one such recent investment is in a motion capture suit and software to build video games, interactive experiences, and real-time 3D visuals to support cross school experimentation and an Interdisciplinary and Extended Practice (IXP) module entitled 'Digital Storytelling & Dramaturgy' (see paragraph, 47). Its use in operation was observed by the TQER team in a session at RCS, where students from a variety of disciplines worked collaboratively on the module project, engaging enthusiastically with the innovative technologies and speaking positively to the TQER team about the opportunity to do so.

38. The Conservatoire's decisions in relation to resources are often informed by student feedback and/or consultation. For instance, the Student Experience Project (2024-25) identified opportunities for enhancement of access to facilities and resources, including digital platforms, rehearsal and study space, booking systems, equipment and storage, with resulting actions completed or in progress for completion in 2025-26. A further example is provided by actions arising from meetings of students on the undergraduate production programmes with the Director of the School, including the commitment to enhance the Wallace Street provision, through a 16-point action plan covering a wide-range of actions. The Wallace Studios support Dance and Ballet and set design. At the time of the review, six actions were complete, eight are underway or ongoing and two are currently constrained by budgets. A key response by RCS to low NSS feedback scores on Organisation and Management (in BMus and BEd in particular) has been the formation of a Central Timetabling Project to help maximise space and tackle associated issues. In meetings with the TQER team, staff reported positively on progress, and students confirmed that improvement have been made.

39. Feedback on Learning Resources in the NSS has been consistent over the last three years (2022-2025) with scores of 89%, 88%, and 88% with an overall score of 97% specifically for the library services in 2025. There is evidence of an ongoing reflective approach to library resources. This includes the systematic monitoring of library usage; a summary of activity relating to diversity and inclusivity within the library; annual library user surveys, with actions tracked and reported; and guidance for staff on library collections, informed by analysis of reading lists, regarding increasing the diversity of coverage.

40. RCS has developed a Digital Strategy with oversight of this work supported by a Digital Development Group that reports to the LTQC. A *Digital Experience Key Insights Survey* (2024) was conducted across RCS community, and many of the resulting action points have already been implemented. These include a range of developments that enhance the student experience, such as the hire of space for postgraduate research students about which the TQER team found students to be extremely positive and the promotion of Jisc *Building Digital Capabilities* tools. These tools provide IT skills audits for staff and students, assessing confidence and experience and offering access to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) materials. A monthly Digital and IT Newsletter is published for students and staff, providing information and guidance. In addition, RCS's *MyDay* app (a digital student engagement portal), introduced within the past 12 months and demonstrated by staff to the TQER team, further enhances the digital student experience by offering a single platform for managing timetables, communications, and bookings.

Staff development

41. The TQER team found that RCS supports the development of its staff and has several mechanisms through which this development is delivered. The staff development policy describes 'the operation of a culture of continuing development and training for all staff' to improve the effectiveness of their performance. Examples were shared with the TQER team in meetings with staff of where RCS has supported its academic (salaried or part-time hourly paid) and professional services staff alike to undertake development activity to enhance their contribution to learning and teaching. These included support for formal study, conference funding, equipment training, focused workshops and short courses. All staff, academic and professional services, take part in the annual 'Professional Update' process, in which priorities for the year ahead are agreed with the line manager. The TQER team heard of the effectiveness of the coaching approach taken to this activity in one area of RCS, where staff reflect on their own goals, their goals for the community, and their goals in relation to learning and teaching. There is an annual Staff Development Week to which all salaried and part-time hourly-paid staff are invited, and which covers relevant topics in keynotes and

workshops. The 2025 iteration included sessions led by a training provider on such themes as 'Having Difficult Conversations', 'Inclusive Practice' and 'Boundaries and Respect'. It was clear from comments made by RCS staff to the TQER team that these events also provide a shared experience and an opportunity for staff to meet other colleagues.

42. RCS staff, including those who are part-time and hourly paid, have access to various sources of funding to support their professional development. The Staff Development policy draws attention to funding for 'ad-hoc, short-term staff development' (for example, workshops, courses, and conferences). There are various additional funds to which staff can and do bid (alongside students) to undertake project work which can be impactful on learning and teaching, as well as on their own professional development, including Athenaeum Awards, the Innovation Studio Seed Fund and CEDO, RCS staff accounting for some 13% of engagements with this service in its first year (2024-25) (calculated to be some 5% of all staff – see paragraph 67). All staff have access to internal training opportunities, including Jisc upskilling tools (see paragraph, 40). Comments made to the TQER team indicated that the availability of all this development resource to part-time, hourly-paid tutors helps to reinforce these tutors' commitment to the Conservatoire and ensures that their students benefit.

43. RCS also supports its staff to undertake more formal study, including Advance HE Fellowship and RCS PgCert and MEd Learning & Teaching in the Arts. That RCS staff are committed to this development opportunity is evidenced by fact that, in December 2025, 39% of salaried RCS staff had HEA status, 51% of current staff had the PgCert, and 16% MEd. RCS staff, in meeting with the TQER team, acknowledged the impact of these and other staff development opportunities on their own development and in turn on those they teach. Specific RCS projects over recent years have foregrounded staff development, notably 'Understanding the staff development landscape required to support diverse learner journeys in the tertiary sector.' Furthermore, there was staff engagement with the coaching programme which grew out of the QAA enhancement theme 'Resilient Learning Communities' and where RCS chose to focus on the use of non-directive coaching to support resilience in learners, with RCS confirming the developmental benefits in its End of Year Report.

44. The TQER team consider that RCS values the input of the staff peer group as a mechanism for the enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment. An example is seen in the programme review and validation process where the Preliminary Scrutiny Panel, intended to offer support to an inexperienced team at an early stage in the process, normally comprises entirely RCS peers (the convenor and two academic staff unconnected with the programme). The panel offers critical feedback and identifies action points to assist the programme team in preparing for the full review. There is also evidence of RCS colleagues teaching collaboratively, broadening the student's experience; this is seen in team or shared teaching in Music, Ballet and Acting – activity described to the TQER team by RCS staff. The annual Staff Development week (see paragraph, 42) provides a further example of where the expanded peer group of RCS colleagues and fellow industry professionals come together for the benefit of their collective professional development, as evidenced by the 2025 programme.

45. There are many examples of external peer review of RCS activity involving individuals rather than formal external review mechanisms (see paragraph, 116). These include, as noted above (see paragraph, 17), the following: an external critical friend from another higher education institution who reviews annual monitoring reports and action plans, and attends the LTQC discussion on them; feedback from course external examiners, which is used as a basis for reflection, confirming good practice, and identifying areas for enhancement; feedback from Specialist External Assessors on Music Examination Panels,

which is standard for the sector and provides external benchmarking and objectivity in relation to the cohort of students being examined; and the involvement of RCS staff in peer review and evaluation in other institutions, with the ability to bring their learning back into RCS.

Innovation in learning and teaching

46. The TQER team observed that, by taking a reflective, responsive and creative approach to curriculum content, delivery and assessment, and by providing opportunities for its students and staff to engage in enhancement activity, RCS enables innovation within the learning environment. As noted above (see paragraphs, 41-43), support for the professional development of staff, including the ability to apply for funds to support innovation and impact in learning and teaching, enables and encourages ongoing innovation in learning, teaching and assessment.

47. Of note at module level is the recent development (from 2023-24) of the IXP portfolio of modules for undergraduate (all schools) and taught postgraduate programmes (School of Music). This is a suite of generic 'shell' modules whose content can vary on an annual basis. Delivered as week-long projects, these modules support project-based, interdisciplinary and collaborative activities. Aside from the innovative framework, the focus of the activity itself is intended to encourage innovation, allowing students 'to experiment, take risks within a supportive environment, and to try new forms, concepts, and ideas' but also offering flexibility and agility in terms of specific content. The approach also builds on RCS's concept of "smart design": provision that serves multiple student groups, maximises choice and flexibility, and creates opportunities for students from different specialisms, at varying levels and with differing experience, to collaborate and benefit from working together. The TQER team's Main Review Visit coincided with an 'IXP Week,' enabling team members to observe in practice a session on the cross-disciplinary 'Digital Storytelling & Dramaturgy' option (see paragraph, 37). Other notable cross-disciplinary projects have been 'Explore Phantom of the Opera' and 'Explore Wicked.' The TQER team heard from students that they welcome the opportunity such options present for collaborating across different specialisms, to undertake (and enjoy) activities outside their specialism, and the wide range of choice. The TQER team identified the encouragement for and facilitation of meaningful collaboration across artistic disciplines, broadening students' experience and skillsets as a **feature of good practice**.

48. RCS's Creative Citizenship module is an innovative element of the curriculum, first delivered as a core module for all first-year students in 2023–24 and benchmarked against comparable practice at a specialist drama institution. The module integrates, at an early stage of artistic training, themes that are often marginalised, including sustainability, social inclusion and progression, positionality, digital literacy, and wellbeing and self-care. The Conservatoire has closely monitored the effectiveness of this distinctive provision, with a postdelivery feedback exercise informing action points for subsequent iterations. The TQER team found that students were particularly positive about the opportunities the module provided for collaboration beyond their own disciplinary areas.

49. Other curricular and extra-curricular innovations which bring enhancements to students' experience have been inspired by RCS's commitment to the area of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) (see paragraphs, 53-57). Evidence is provided by two projects supported by the EDI Creative fund, *The Music of Mihail Jora* and *Bartók and Butterflies*, the latter leading to the establishment of RCS's EDI Symphony orchestra in 2024 as an ongoing body. The *Navigating Difference* project in the School of Stage and Screen culminated in a co-created document identifying principles for working together. The bi-annual *Play unseen but heard* initiative on the BA Acting course involves students reading plays that they would not otherwise encounter. The TQER team heard from students that email communications

regularly promote the EDI Creative Fund with examples of EDI activity cited including the creation of the EDI orchestra, a dignity project exploring student and staff experiences of racism, and EDI training delivered to postgraduate research students. In meetings with the TQER team students confirmed that the approach to EDI broadened their repertoire and alerted them to potential challenges and sensitivities they will meet in the industry. Similarly, academic staff met by the team confirmed the range of EDI initiatives and the value they bring to the student experience (see paragraph, 54).

50. Innovation at RCS extends to assessment through its approach to undifferentiated (pass/fail) outcomes, where emphasis is moved from grades to feedback. Only the institution's undergraduate honours awards (BMus, BEd) are differentiated, and then only modules in Years 3 and 4 of these programmes. RCS takes care to help students navigate the transition from pass/fail in BMus1 and 2 modules to differentiated outcomes in Years 3 and 4, where marking grids are explicit in relating assessment criteria to grades, a practice described in a meeting with RCS staff, as well as being evident from documentation. Students acknowledged that undifferentiated marks liberate them to take artistic risks, even if, in some cases, they say that a specific mark would encourage greater effort and/or provide a more useful guide. RCS does allow for some nuance: on the MMus programmes, recitals are given an indicative grade, to reflect that this can be particularly helpful to students at this stage, and to staff providing references for students who are approaching graduation. This approach to undifferentiated outcomes is complemented by an approach to feedback which integrates student reflection through 'mutually constructed feedback,' which begins with student sharing their own reflections on their learning, and then discussing these with their module tutor. The TQER team consider that this approach supports self-reflection and encourages the student to engage with feedback.

51. The TQER team considered that digital innovation is clearly seen as a priority for RCS given that it provides obvious employability benefits to students entering the modern arts profession. Digital innovation features within the Conservatoire's Strategy 2030; and an objective within the Learning and Teaching Strategy is that students will be able to 'navigate and apply emerging technologies (including AI) creatively and ethically'. Specific examples of digital innovation in the context of learning and teaching include the recently purchased motion capture suite and software build video games, interactive experiences, and real-time 3D visuals (see paragraph, 37), as well as the *On the Verge* digital festival, a showcase of new work by students on the MA/MFA Classical and Contemporary Text programme, and the installation of cameras into RCS's concert halls, enabling, among other things, students to review their own performances, which is an essential learning tool for intending performing artists.

Supporting student success

52. The review team found that The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland arrangements for supporting student success are **effective**. The institution has appropriate and systematically applied practices in line with sector expectations for supporting student success that uses data, evidence and externality, demonstrate impact and are effective in supporting student success. The TQER team's evaluation was informed by a range of evidence including policies and procedures to support student wellbeing, minutes from key oversight groups and committees, and reports evaluating key data. In addition, the TQER team met with a range of key stakeholders, including staff, students, and stakeholders. The TQER team was also provided with a demonstration of the virtual learning environment used by staff and students and an Interdisciplinary and Extended Practice (IXP) module.

Enabling student success

53. RCS strategy 2030 states an intention to address inequalities and this was clearly visible across the evidence provided as well as during staff and student discussion. For example, in the Quality Assurance Handbook the Admissions Policy starts with an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Statement. In addition, the student support website pages include accessible advice and signposting for students seeking support and guidance. RCS's Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP) 2024, indicates 29.3% of the student population require extra support for some form of disability, mental health difficulty, or other learning difference/support need. Support arrangements are designed and reviewed in response to multiple data sources, including disability disclosure trends, sector policy changes and findings from institution-led review. The approach to data collection and reporting across all levels of the Conservatoire indicated to the TQER team that student support needs are being met effectively. This is supported by data, with the Conservatoire achieving a 94.1% undergraduate retention rate (sector average – 89.5 %) and 93% overall achievement rate in AY2023-24. The TQER team also heard about recent enhancements to key student facing policies, including the Enhanced Support to Study Framework, updates to disciplinary and resolution procedures and improvements in learning agreements. The TQER team met with several groups of students, including students' representatives and learned that, in their view, the support is well designed and easy to access with specific services and signposting where required.

54. The TQER team learned from students and staff that RCS fosters an open and engaging EDI culture through both formal mechanisms such as the EDI Forum, course review processes, and formal and informal discussions (see paragraph, 79). The TQER team also heard that RCS provides training for students and staff in areas including consent, race equality, gender-based violence (GBV) awareness, and active bystander intervention. The EDI Forum is chaired by the Principal and includes student representation from the SU President, the Black Union, the LGBTQIA Society, and the Disability Network. Attendance is open to all Conservatoire students and staff and the TQER team identified the open and inclusive nature of the EDI Forum as a strength, as it enables a wider range of student voices to contribute, including those not holding formal representative roles. It was also noted that student representatives play a leading role as members of the EDI Forum bidding panel, which is responsible for considering and approving EDI projects aligned with the Forum's remit and responsibilities. The EDI Forum has high student engagement and is the most well attended committee for student reps. Additionally, information gathered as part of the Student Experience Project AY24-25 highlighted EDI specific enhancements, which have been either been achieved, actioned or progressing. The library's EDI initiatives, developed in partnership with students, have led to diversified collections, decolonised reading lists, and innovative resources such as global interactive maps highlighting underrepresented artists. The TQER team heard from staff and students that this work has improved inclusive

teaching as well as enhancing the learning experience. The diversified reading lists have allowed learners to explore a wider range of source material, representing artists from varied cultures, enhancing the learning experience as well as promoting EDI. Securing external funding for the “Spotlight on Diversity” project and participation in national working groups, along with specific EDI initiatives provides further evidence of the Conservatoire’s effective approach to delivering inclusive provision. Discussions with various student and staff groups demonstrated to the TQER team a positive culture of supporting EDI enhancements across the Conservatoire.

55. Academic and professional services staff work collaboratively, with small cohort sizes enabling the early identification of student concerns. Support begins at the point of application, where adjustments can already be considered and put in place for pre-course activity such as interviews or auditions. Students’ groups were keen to highlight the support available at an early stage of application through referral to Academic Administration and Support (AAS), enabling early engagement with learning and wellbeing support. The SU plays a significant role in signposting and supporting students navigating support pathways. While the TQER team heard that the pastoral demands on academic staff have increased, specialist wellbeing teams provide structured and informed first-line support for complex cases. This contributes to consistent, student-centred interventions and offers valuable support that is reflected in student retention and progression data. Increased staffing, including the expansion of disability support to a full-time advisor and extra counselling capacity, has reduced waiting times and broadened the therapeutic offer. Students have access to diverse counselling staff, including counsellors of colour, reflecting student feedback gathered through anti-racism planning and supporting culturally competent care. RCS consistently works towards enhancing the accessibility of its support offer.

56. Accessibility is fully embedded across RCS virtual learning environment (VLE). A demonstration of RCS VLE system showed a standardised set up (including resources, guidance and assessments) with embedded accessibility tools. Data presented at the demonstration showed that staff have access to student usage highlighting that students place high value on this resource and use it effectively. This was confirmed by students present at the demonstration. Additionally, staff noted that this data allows identification of students at risk of withdrawal early and interventions put in place. The structure, data usage and accessibility tools provided assurance to the TQER team that the VLE is an important support tool for learning at RCS.

57. RCS supports an effective EDI culture through sustained funding for student-led creative EDI initiatives, the diversification of library and learning-resource collections, and the expansion of accessible counselling and wellbeing services. This approach is underpinned by targeted staff and student development on EDI-related themes, strong awareness of emerging external developments, and tailored support for specific student groups. The TQER team identified the approach to supporting EDI initiatives through sustained funding and training to promote a fair, inclusive, and accessible learning environment for staff and students as a **feature of good practice**.

58. . The TQER team heard from professional support staff that RCS works to continually enhance its support to provide the best learning opportunities possible. Support is tailored to the intensive nature of the curriculum and specific discipline requirements. The Conservatoire is working to ensure that learning agreements are established across all learning environments, including those involving visiting staff and work placements, to meet both individual student needs and discipline-specific competencies. The TQER team learned that the implementation of learning agreements is monitored by the Special Circumstances Committees, which are sub-committees of each Examination Board at RCS. The Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (LTQC) having oversight of protected characteristics and

student support usage allowing tracking of awarding gaps, demonstrating oversight and evidence-based monitoring and enhancements.

59. RCS effectively engages with ongoing enhancement projects, both external and internal to improve student support for a diverse community. The Conservatoire is acting on data from the Student Experience Project (SEP) (see paragraph, 80) that highlights the importance of neuroinclusive pedagogy, improving representation from minority and working-class backgrounds, deaf students, and the provision of mental health support. As part of its Fair Access Initiative RCS offers Access courses designed to support people from under-represented backgrounds who intend to apply for undergraduate study at the Conservatoire, supporting widening access to RCS. The TQER team heard directly from students on the BA Performance for Deaf and Hard of Hearing programme, who described its accessible, "barrierless" learning environment and highlighted its importance to their community in providing fair, barrier-free access to skills development and employment opportunities. Implementation of action to student concerns raised through the SEP, acting on course specific feedback and informal feedback mechanisms shows that specific support actions across RCS learning disciplines have been implemented effectively demonstrating genuine collaboration and evidence-based developments to enhance student success.

60. As part of an EDI initiative there has been the development of a framework for navigating difference in the School of Stage and Screen. The framework is intended to establish a values-led approach to working together in a multidisciplinary, collaborative environment. It includes the use of trauma-informed practice for managing student conduct that reflects a context-specific approach to maintaining a safe, collaborative environment. While RCS identifies resource challenges in supporting students through highly intensive programmes, initiatives like the Creative Citizenship (see paragraph, 48) module and bespoke English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision for discipline-specific language demonstrate responsiveness to the unique needs of its diverse community.

61. The TQER team considered that RCS uses trauma informed and inclusive learning practices, to create safe educational environments, through mandatory training, targeted staff development and collaboration between the SU, disability officers and staff. Specific challenges are addressed using subject specialist external partners, including Scottish Ballet Performance Medicine team who provide daily care for dancers, including a walk-in clinic, injury management, and wellness services.

Transitions

62. RCS provides equitable and effective support throughout the student lifecycle, from pre-HE "Get Into" (a programme that engages with students aged 16+ to introduce them to RCS, provide them with careers information and inform them to help with their career choice for the future) and transitions bridging programmes (a fair access initiative supporting young people from underrepresented backgrounds) to an Alumni Development Manager who supports graduates entering professional life.

63. The TQER team met with several student groups, who reported that RCS provides a structured start through a comprehensive induction model, including Welcome Week and support from a dedicated Transitions Tutor. This structured induction ensures students are effectively oriented both academically and socially and help to underpin the Conservatoire's strong retention and progression rates (see paragraphs, 18 and 53). International students were keen to highlight to the TQER team that the specific support they received for their situation allowed them to transition into the Conservatoire, as well as living in Glasgow, effectively.

64. The TQER team learned through discussions with staff and students that the undifferentiated outcomes model allows for specific student development, preparing students well for the next steps in their learning and careers. This feedback models allows students and staff to openly discuss progress against rubrics that set out descriptors of expected performance levels. As the course progresses, these rubrics advance to include elements of the following years skills which introduces and builds skills before they are required (see paragraph, 50)

65. RCS has enabled teaching teams to consider their practice through engagement with Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP), and its Supporting Diverse Learner Journeys topic. The RCS project is about understanding the staff development landscape required to support diverse learner journeys in the tertiary sector. This work led to the development of an RCS coaching model and informed the establishment of an RCS Coaching Standards Framework to support staff in supporting students' transitions. The framework sets out clear skills, qualities and actions to guide student support. The model is well embedded in the BA Arts with Community programme, with staff reporting a positive impact on student resilience and outcomes. Further rollout is planned across the Conservatoire through learning and teaching development days and targeted support for interested areas. The TQER team considered this wider implementation of the framework to be a promising development in enhancing student support.

Employability, skills development and lifelong learning

66. Employability is a core strength of RCS, with 95% of graduates in work or study 15 months after graduation. Support is embedded through compulsory work-based learning, industry-standard placements such as school placements or placement with the Scottish Ballet, and the involvement of employers in program monitoring. The TQER team learner from staff, students, and employers that graduates are work ready, both technically and in their preparedness for working life. Employers and placement providers who met the team all stated that students at RCS develop the skills and softer skills required for work in their discipline. Employers also highlighted the importance of their involvement in course design, set up and feedback and valued the quality systems in place to capture their input as evidenced by the Quality Assurance Handbook.

67. The Creative Enterprise Development Office (CEDO) and the Innovation Studio provide vital entrepreneurial support for students, staff and alumni, offering seed funding and start-up workshops. Students spoke positively about this initiative and gave examples, including a pitch for a community activity, of projects they had undertaken or proposals they had submitted. The TQER team identified CEDO as a high value initiative that supports the development of a wide range of work readiness skills, including entrepreneurship, funding applications, independent working, and professional practice. This support is particularly significant given that 64% of RCS graduates enter self-employment. The value of CEDO is reflected in engagement data, with 12% of students, 5% of staff, and over 100 graduates operating as sole traders or running companies use the CEDO services. Additionally, student groups were aware of the initiative and its purpose demonstrating RCS' willingness to promote use. RCS resources the initiative effectively, providing a dedicated desk at reception staffed five mornings per week, alongside leaflets, newspapers, and other information sources. Students and staff across all disciplines are made aware of CEDO and its purpose through their courses, and graduates continue to be encouraged to use the service. The TQER team identified the establishment and development of the Creative Enterprise Development Office (CEDO) that enables RCS to provide support for current students and graduates to develop their careers as self-employed entrepreneurial creative artists to be a **feature of good practice**.

68. The TQER team learned that all students gain work experience on their course. Some courses have work experience as a mandatory aspect and where this is not the case support is provided to get students into workplaces to gain real life experience. Additionally, all courses provide a significant support in CV writing, portfolio development (specific to their discipline) and careers advice as part of their course. This was confirmed by all student groups that met with the TQER team. Additionally, the TQER team heard that postgraduate students that were in employment were offered support through online modules to further these skills providing students with significant skills development out with the discipline they are studying.

69. RCS Learning and Teaching Strategy outlines strategies to embed and enhance employability skills throughout the learner journey by aiming to develop the person rather than just teaching specific skills. Learning has therefore extended beyond discipline specific skills to include meta-skills/ employability skills, digital capabilities and entrepreneurial practice, which reflect the evolving needs of modern arts careers. The TQER team heard that all programmes integrate careers information and advice and guidance as part of the core curriculum rather than as an add-on activity. Engagement with external professionals including agents, casting directors, producers, and venue partners is routine and integral to learning and assessment. Students felt there was real value in collaborating with external professionals, especially in cross discipline working. Quality structures ensure a strategic implementation of employer input in courses. Employers play an active role in programme approval, monitoring and review, helping ensure curricula remain aligned with industry standards and expectations. This ongoing, structural collaboration with industry ensures that students' training remains current and directly relevant to employment environments.

70. The Conservatoire demonstrates a clear commitment to lifelong learning, supporting both students and staff to continually develop new skills. The TQER team spoke with multiple groups of staff and students regarding development of skills throughout learning and working at RCS, illustrating institution wide engagement with external agencies with the view to further enhances skills development and lifelong learning. Programmes include elements designed to build adaptability, preparing graduates for future professional contexts and known and unknown career pathways. The curriculum fosters entrepreneurial skills and encourages students to see themselves not only as performers but also as producers, educators, and innovators. The Innovation Studio and CEDO (see paragraph, 67) provides seed funding, workshops, and business support for start-ups and social enterprises. Additionally, staff are supported to maintain and develop new skills throughout their careers through a range of funding opportunities and in-house training. These arrangements, outlined in the Staff Development Policy and endorsed by staff during the TQER team's Main Review Visit, enable staff to incorporate new developments into the curriculum

71. Effective support for employability is enhanced through RCS alumni, who play a significant role in maintaining strong industry links. The Alumni Development Manager has established a network of employers and ambassadors who regularly contribute to programme design and guest lecturers (see paragraph, 28). The TQER team heard from students about how they gain substantial professional exposure through work at major venues and festivals. These opportunities, some of which are competitively allocated to simulate professional selection processes, helps ensure that every student engages with real-world practice as part of their studies.

Supporting diverse learners

72. The TQER team found that RCS is effective at providing an individual student experience across all curriculum disciplines. The Conservatoire's ethos prioritises the development of a unique artistic voice by combining formal education with personal,

emotional, and cultural development. The TQER team heard from learners from a range of courses discuss their learning experience and had an awareness that it was individual to them and endorsed the value of this approach. This learning experience is enabled by small cohort sizes and high contact hours, as well as allowing for a one-to-one and small-group tutoring model. Individual skills development is centred in mutually agreed feedback, which moves students through assessments while focusing on their skills development over the duration of their study. The "pedagogical restraint" approach, where staff intervention is minimal and enables students to take responsibility for their own artistic, technical, and professional development encouraging student autonomy and deep reflection, and confirmed in discussions with staff and student groups. Through discussions with staff and students, the TQER team viewed this approach as effectively supporting individual skill development while meeting curriculum requirements. The introduction of IXP modules also provides students with significant choice and the ability to tailor their pathways. The Main Review Visit took place during the IXP week enabling the TQER team to attend a workshop allowing it to witness this creative student experience (see paragraphs, 37 and 47). Investment in this recent technology is opening routes to modern employment opportunities not typically associated with certain disciplines. Student groups valued the IXP experience, as well as support from staff to engage in skills development out with their core studies and emphasised its importance in understanding other disciplines as well as developing their wider skill set.

Concerns and complaints

73. The TQER team considered that RCS has an effective response to concerns through systematic, institution wide governance. This is achieved through annual reporting on appeals, complaints, academic misconduct, and disciplinary cases to senior governance bodies (including to the Academic Board and Board of Governors) ensures institutional oversight and supports systematic enhancement. Working with the SU and Digital Development Planning Group, indicates responsiveness to emerging challenges, such as increasing misconduct issues regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

74. The TQER team learned from students that there is an embedded culture of seeking the student voice and learners feel comfortable raising concerns and confident that they will be listened to. Students in the postgraduate cohort were pleased to see that issues that had been raised while they were studying undergraduate courses had been listened to and had been actioned before they returned to start postgraduate studies.

75. The TQER team considered that RCS provides effective systems for students to raise concerns and responds appropriately when issues are identified. The Report and Support function enables students to raise course- or institution-level concerns, including anonymously, and has led to earlier and increased reporting of unacceptable behaviours. This has generated richer data and supported more targeted prevention measures, such as whole-cohort training in gender-based violence awareness and active bystander interventions. More serious non-academic misconduct, including gender-based violence, is addressed through the Student Alternative Resolution and Disciplinary (SARD) framework, which provides proportionate routes for resolution. While GDPR constraints limit feedback to affected cohorts, leading to some dissatisfaction, RCS is reviewing its communication during and after disciplinary processes. In addition, students can raise concerns through multiple feedback channels, including the Student Button, MyRCS, "You Said, We Did," staff-student committees, and Students' Union representation. Discussions with staff and students gave the TQER team confidence that these mechanisms together provide a systematic and effective approach to gathering and responding to student concerns.

76. Overall, the TQER team considered RCS response to concerns is systematic,

reflective, and increasingly preventative, supported by strong governance structures and evolving practice aligned with sector expectations. The adoption of enhanced reporting mechanisms, early-intervention strategies, and collaborative approaches to complex misconduct issues demonstrates effective and maturing institutional practice.

Student partnership and engagement

77. The TQER team found that the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is **effective** in student engagement and partnership. The institution's approach to student engagement and partnership is systematic and strategic. The institution ensures the quality of the student learning experience is continuously improved based on the voice of students in line with sector expectations. The institution works in partnership with students to use data, evidence and externality to develop, implement and evaluate the student learning experience. The TQER team's evaluation was informed by a range of evidence including the Student Partnership Agreement AY2025-2026, committee minutes and the Student Experience Project. In addition, the TQER team met with a range of key stakeholders, including staff and students. Of key importance were the meetings with the Senior Leadership Team, student representatives, and students.

A culture of student partnership

78. The TQER team found that the Conservatoire is effective in embedding a culture of student partnership in which students are actively invited to participate and contribute to the quality of the student learning experience. RCS Strategic Plan places the role of 'People' as one of its three strategic pillars, with a central focus on developing the student voice and experience, aligning this with the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2025. This strategic approach emphasises empowering learners as active and engaged stakeholders. By embedding this focus within the curriculum, it demonstrates how students can contribute to change, participate in review processes, and engage in wider institutional student voice activities. The TQER team found evidence in committee minutes of student representation at all levels of decision-making, including from the Board of Governors; Academic Board; Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee; Student Experience Forums; and programme committees. The TQER team considered RCS strategic approach to student partnership to be student-focused and committed to the role of inclusivity to ensure all students can contribute to their learning experience.

79. An update from the 'Report from the Student Union' is provided to Academic Board, detailing the activities of the Students' Union (SU) and their involvement in projects. The report is intended to help support year-on-year sabbatical officer transitions and open and transparent communication between Academic Board and the SU. The TQER team heard from senior staff and student representatives that this was a useful and consistent forum to address challenges and celebrate achievements in student engagement and partnership. While the SU President and Vice-President are the primary student representatives within the formal academic governance structure, the TQER team did not identify this as a barrier to a broader culture of student partnership, noting other opportunities that enable students' representatives to provide ongoing feedback across a range of forums. For example, Student Experience Forums are co-convened by the SU and Conservatoire to look at the student experience, including data from the NSS survey. The forums take place at a School and Department-level and feed directly into the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (LTQC). There was also evidence provided by student representatives that dialogue and informal feedback opportunities are rich at a course-level given the intensive timetable and curriculum, enabling timely solutions and explanations to student queries. The TQER team considered the SU update, the role of the SU officers and the Student Experience Forums as an effective means to support embedding the culture of student partnership.

80. The TQER team found that the Student Partnership Agreement AY2025–2026 (SPA), which sets out the principles, activities and objectives for student partnership and engagement between the SU and the Conservatoire, is overseen by the Students' Union Partnership Group. This group comprises members of the Academic Management Team

(including the Deputy Principal and Academic Directors) alongside SU sabbatical officers and is responsible for the agreement's implementation and ongoing evaluation. The SPA is also informed by external sources and includes reference to the use of resources developed by sparqs (student partnerships in quality Scotland) on the design, development and delivery of projects through student partnership agreements. The inclusion of the sparqs resources enables the SPA to become an actionable, strategic document that is shown to reflect the feedback and needs of the student body. In response to student voice feedback from the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Student Experience Forum, RCS and SU established a Student Experience Project (SEP) to build upon areas for improvement identified in the NSS. The key themes of the SEP were: communication and academic clarity; equitable access to facilities and resources; strengthening EDI; prioritising more holistic wellbeing support; and the management of expectations to ensure students are prepared for industry. To progress these priorities, the SEP action plan identifies areas of concern aligned to each theme and sets out corresponding actions, responsibilities, and timelines to support effective monitoring of progress and outcomes. Furthermore, to support the implementation of the SEP RCS Quality Assurance Handbook was shown to have been recently updated to embed the SEP as an area to report on within the annual monitoring process. In meetings with staff and students, it was found that the findings and outcomes of the SEP were challenging, but necessary, covering areas like managing excessive workloads and the use of learner agreements, with wider recognition of the value of proposed changes to the student learning experience. The TQER team consider that the SPA, the SEP and the resulting action plan demonstrates the commitment of the Conservatoire to provide a consistent approach to embedding a culture of student partnership, through reflection on practice and policy at a strategic level.

Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

81. The TQER team consider that there are a range of opportunities for effective student involvement in review and enhancement activity at the Conservatoire. The review team found evidence for this in the Quality Assurance Handbook, Undergraduate (UG) and Postgraduate (PG) academic frameworks, individual UG and PG programme annual monitoring reports, external examining reports. The external experts engaged by RCS recognised that strong student engagement in action planning within quality assurance and enhancement processes allows students to play an effective role in review and enhancement activities, supporting reflection on and improvement of the student learning experience.

82. Supported by Academic Administration and Support (AAS), the SU engage closely with sparqs who provide the appropriate training for student representatives through an interactive, e-module available in-house on the virtual learning environment. There are also class representative workshops delivered by sparqs to support student representatives in their role. The TQER team heard from student representatives who had completed the training that they found it useful in their role, although would like to see more practical examples, contextualised to the environment the Conservatoire operates within. There was recognition among senior staff that the sparqs training would benefit from a return to an in-person delivery format to tackle challenges linked to the attendance of student representatives. Although all student representatives are given access to the online sparqs training module, engagement and uptake across this group remain below 50%. In response, the TQER team has heard of proposals to use the new student calendar management system (ASIMUT) to better coordinate training dates and times, enabling student representatives to attend sessions together. The TQER team would encourage RCS to build on its ongoing development work with sparqs to better support the training needs of student representatives, with a view to improving attendance and tailoring course content to the specialist, that is, Conservatoire context.

83. Programme open forums provide opportunities for the student voice to be heard regardless of any formal representative role. These forums encourage students to feel more comfortable contributing and engaging, enabling programme leaders to capture a broader range of feedback on the student experience, course delivery, and student support. A group of students in BA Modern Ballet highlighted the opportunity for programme open forums to enhance engagement in wider student topics and issues. The feedback from programme open forums is considered at programme committees where heads of department in turn include this in their annual monitoring reports and action plans to LTQC. Programme committees are the equivalent of student-staff liaison committees, inviting elected student representatives through a formalised department-level infrastructure. The TQER team heard from student representatives about the effectiveness of programme committees. For example, BMus students highlighted the improvements in communications on how student feedback is used and actioned. Alongside this, there was recognition by staff delivering the BA Arts with Community programme that the contribution of student representatives at programme committees enabled a transparent and open relationship between staff and students. Overall, the TQER team considered that the combination of programme open forums and programme committees contribute towards providing accessible and effective mechanisms for engaging students at a programme-level in quality assurance and enhancement.

A strategic approach

84. The TQER team found that the Conservatoire is effective in strategically planning, resourcing, evaluating and enhancing student partnership at all levels and this is evidenced by a range of documentation, such as the SPA; SEP; programme committees and programme open forums across undergraduate and taught postgraduate provisions; programme handbooks issued to students outlining feedback mechanisms; Self-Evaluative Action Plan (SEAP) and the Student-Staff Charter that sets out the shared values, rights, and responsibilities that underpin the relationship between students and staff.

85. Following the collection of student feedback and data, RCS identified that students often struggle to find the time to attend wider institutional meetings, validations, and programme reviews. In response, RCS increased the annual block grant budget to support the creation of a second sabbatical officer role, who would serve as Vice-President (VP) of RCSSU. This has allowed for greater visibility among student-facing, day-to-day aspects of the SU, increasing participation in projects that amplify student voice at a localised level. In the meeting with student representatives the TQER team heard that this new position has enabled greater accessibility and in-person opportunities to raise issues or concerns directly with the SU who are then able to raise appropriately with the Senior Management Team, Directors of School and Head of Programme. Likewise, the TQER team heard from the staff that having both the President and VP at, for example, the Annual Board Strategy Day, has allowed for deeper discussions on the partnership and feedback culture and where having student representation present has influenced board-level decisions and priorities.

86. The TQER team found that the Conservatoire demonstrates a strategic commitment to partnership working by clearly articulating agreed principles through the SPA, setting project priorities through the SEP, and offering a wide range of opportunities across its provision to embed and encourage student engagement. These include Student Experience Forums, programme open forums, and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Forum. However, despite the diverse portfolio of in-person opportunities for feedback, staff and students met by the TQER team, appeared unclear about the formal role of the SPA, the SEP and differences between Student Experience Forums and programme open forums. The TQER team considered that this could undermine progress in student engagement and partnership activities, as both students and staff outside formal roles may struggle to attribute resulting

changes to the SPA or SEP. Consequently, the TQER team **recommends** that RCS clearly communicate the strategic approach to student partnership to all staff and students, improving awareness and visibility of the Student Partnership Agreement, Student Experience Project, the Student Experience Forum and programme open forums supporting their ongoing implementation.

Student representation

87. The Student Representative Structure Organogram outlines the variety of roles provided within the SU Council. The composition of the elected student representation structure includes the President and Vice-President, a team of four elected non-sabbatical officers (Student Health Officer, Events Officer, Societies Officer and EDI Officer), alongside nine Discipline Representatives, covering both undergraduate and postgraduate taught and research provision. Class representatives feed upwards to Discipline Representatives who then inform the Executive Officers, while the overall SU Council is directly supported by RCS staff in AAS, Finance and the Deputy Principal. In meetings with students, the TQER team heard how the role of student representative has produced change, with for example, the adoption of EDI training in BA Filmmaking following an isolated incident of student misconduct, and in BA Musical Theatre, where an EDI representative role was introduced to improve the diversity of the student voice. The positive role of student representatives is further evidenced by the recent NSS 2025 outcomes, where the satisfaction with the SU was at 80%, the highest since at least pre-pandemic records. The TQER team also heard from the elected postgraduate student representatives on the Research Degrees Committee and Academic Board, both of whom provided assurance that their voice within high-level, academic governance decision-making spaces was heard and that they are adequately supported to understand their role and responsibilities to represent the student voice and felt comfortable in seeking assistance when needed

88. The Conservatoire has about 100 programme representatives distributed across the School of Music, the School of Stage and Screen and the School of Dance, representing both undergraduate and postgraduate taught and research students. In meetings with students, the TQER team heard from students that the accessibility and value of programme representatives is strong and tangible across all disciplines, enabling the student voice to capture a range of experiences that are subsequently fed into programme open forums, annual monitoring reports and associated action plans. The TQER team also heard from staff that input and feedback from programme representatives helps to inform reflection on practice, pedagogy, assessment and student support, such as the BA Community with Arts programme where representatives were consulted on the assessment practice of undifferentiated outcomes. The TQER team considered that this demonstrates that the programme – and wider – student representation model supports a range of accessible and intentional opportunities for feedback that is valued by students and reported on by staff to enhance the student learning experience. The TQER team identified the comprehensive and impactful opportunities for student representation at discipline and programme-level that supports and embeds the student voice as a **feature of good practice**.

89. The Student Learning Experience (SLE) model and Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership Statement are introduced to student representatives in the training that they receive from sparqs. While students reported they were broadly aware of what the frameworks represent they were unclear about how they could be used in their role. Similarly, academic staff both full-time and part-time reported that they were not overtly aware of the frameworks and how they could be used in their practice and in working with student representatives. However, in the Quality Assurance Handbook, in Section 5: Student Engagement and Annual Monitoring, there is explicit reference to both frameworks and the expectations of their use for staff. This mismatch was clearly recognised by senior staff who

indicated that there are plans to recruit a new member of staff who can work directly with the SU and learning, teaching and quality teams to explore how staff can be better supported to consider the use of such models to enhance their discussions with student representatives.

Student voice and the feedback loop

90. In response to the SEP, programme teams are required to demonstrate within their annual monitoring reports how they have addressed its outcomes. From AY2025–2026, this requirement has also strengthened the overall annual monitoring process by introducing an explicit expectation that programme teams provide evidence of how students have been informed of actions taken in response to their feedback. For example, the Strategic Impact Analysis (SIA) for the BA Modern Ballet highlighted that a year-round performance medicine package was introduced in response to student feedback during curriculum design and planning. Discussions with ballet students during the TQER visit confirmed strong appreciation for this support, particularly the provision of physiotherapy and additional strength and conditioning, which enhanced their learning, fitness, and recovery.

91. Students on the BA Production Arts and Design (PAD) and BA Production Technology and Management (PTM) programmes fed back through the SU that they found it challenging to manage intensive timetables, meet industry expectations, and fulfil the requirement for production students to support performances across other programmes. In meetings with staff, it was confirmed that students on these programmes can experience a sense of isolation and that communication between lecturers and tutors within production programmes requires improvement. In response, the Director for Stage and Screen, in partnership with the SU, organised a series of meetings with production students to address these concerns and develop an action plan. During meetings with the TQER team, students confirmed that face-to-face discussions with staff had taken place, enabling feedback to be shared and providing greater clarity around responsibilities for taking actions forward. However, students were not always clear about how these actions related directly to the original concerns raised through the SU. Consequently, the TQER team encourages the Conservatoire to communicate more clearly with students about the actions taken in response to their feedback, to ensure that the connection between the student voice and actions taken to improve the student learning experience are made explicit.

92. The Academic Board minutes evidenced discussion between senior staff and student representatives on the potential introduction of an in-house postgraduate taught (PGT) survey, aligned to NSS themes, to better capture the PGT student experience. While participation in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) had been considered to enable year-on-year comparison across key themes of the student experience, this had not yet been implemented, partly due to low postgraduate student numbers. In meetings with PGT and postgraduate research (PGR) students, the TQER team heard that opportunities for the postgraduate voice to be heard currently exist through module-level evaluations and school-wide surveys. When seeking clarification on plans to introduce a survey that more fully captures the PGT and PGR student experience, senior staff acknowledged the value of developing a bespoke survey in partnership with students and external stakeholders. In addition, it was noted that the SU is planning to review its representative structures to enable the postgraduate student experience to be captured more comprehensively. The TQER team therefore encourages the Conservatoire to progress the planned bespoke and tailored survey mechanism, which would better capture postgraduate taught and research student experience and support more systematic, thematic analysis to inform year-on-year monitoring of actions taken in response to student feedback (see paragraph, 102).

93. The TQER team was provided with evidence of Staff-Student Liaison activities that

outlined how heads of department plan, promote, and communicate participation in the National Student Survey (NSS). The NSS remains a key, though debated, mechanism for the Conservatoire to capture the student experience within a specialist institutional context. NSS feedback and analysis are considered at both institutional- and school-level committees. In response to student feedback, programme-level action plans are developed collaboratively with student representatives and feed directly into the Self-Evaluative Action Plan (SEAP). During meetings with students, the TQER team found that, within the School of Music, there was recognition that some NSS results 2025, particularly in relation to Organisation and Management and Student Voice were less satisfactory. However, students highlighted several tangible actions taken by the Head of Department in response to this feedback. These included improvements to the quality of programme committee minutes, the provision of a booklet explaining how student feedback is used and acted upon, clearer communication of opportunities for student voice and how this informs decision-making, the issuance of updated Convenor guidance, and a more streamlined approach to course organisation. Overall, the TQER team concluded that these changes have had a positive impact on the student experience.

Enhancement and quality culture

94. The TQER team found that the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is **effective** in embedding an enhancement and quality culture across the institution. The Conservatoire has clearly identified strategic leadership and governance of the approach to quality assurance and enhancement with the capacity and commitment to identify and address situations that have the potential to pose risk to academic standards, the quality of the learning experience and enabling student success. The institution accurately manages data. The institution's strategic approach uses data, evidence and externality in line with sector expectations and promotes an embedded enhancement quality culture for developing, implementing and evaluating strategies. The Conservatoire has made timely and effective progress in formulating, implementing and reviewing actions in response to the findings of last external review. The TQER team's evaluation was informed by a range of evidence including the Conservatoire's strategy, minutes of institutional, school and departmental level meetings, records of student feedback and responses to previous external review. In addition, the TQER team met with a range of key stakeholders, including institutional leaders, academic and professional staff, students, and employers.

Embedded quality culture and leadership

95. RCS's Strategic Plan (People, Place, Promise) is supported by a set of five supporting plans focused on assuring, improving, and enhancing the student experiences⁵. The first stated success measure in the Strategic Plan is, "*Exceeding the UK benchmark for teaching quality across all programmes (National Student Survey)*," making explicit a commitment to academic quality at the institutional level. This commitment is further detailed within the Learning and Teaching Strategy, which sets out direction, values, and priorities linked to the Conservatoire's overarching objectives as set out in the Strategic Plan. The Learning and Teaching Strategy includes PI (Putting Into Practice) statements that list the types of measures that could be used to show progress (for example, employment rates, commissions for creative projects, adoption of AI literacy modules). The Strategic Plan describes several indicative projects, through which its objects will be delivered, some of which are currently underway, including the 'Decomplexifying the Curriculum' project, led by a Curriculum Review Working Group, and 'An Inclusive Academy' involving staff, students and partners. These examples help the Conservatoire to show how it plans to implement its strategic aims and objectives in practice.

96. The Conservatoire's Regulations, Codes of Procedure and General Rules begin with the Student-Staff Charter, setting out the respective responsibilities and expectations of RCS and its students. The TQER team considered the Charter clearly outlines the obligations related to the provision of high-quality learning, teaching and assessment and support provision (see paragraphs 30, 32, 39, 58, 67), in addition to commitments to provide clear student-facing information and student feedback channels (see paragraphs 38, 40, 56, 85, 90, 93). The prominence of the Charter within RCS regulations shows how the student experience is placed at the heart of the student-institution relationship. This view was borne out by the TQER team's meetings with students and staff, for example the meeting with student representatives, who reported that if there were not sufficient student representatives at formal meetings, they were routinely rearranged.

97. The Conservatoire has codified its quality assurance and enhancement processes

⁵ The Supporting Plans: Learning and Teaching; Research and Ethical Practice; Engagement and Creative Economy; Organisational Resilience; People and Culture

within a Quality Assurance Handbook. The Quality Assurance Handbook includes a policy outlining RCS' commitment to continuous quality enhancement, with a quality culture that runs throughout the Conservatoire's work and operations overseen by the Academic Board and includes both formal mechanisms (such as programme and institutional quality committees) and informal mechanisms (including student experience forums and regular programme meetings) and where students are actively involved and have a voice in quality assurance and enhancement processes. The Quality Assurance Handbook draws together written quality assurance processes with internal and external reference points, mapping sector-agreed principles from the UK Quality Code to each of its chapters. The TQER team consider that this approach helps explain why the various processes are in place supporting their effective understanding and application across the Conservatoire. The TQER team heard that staff, including part-time and hourly paid staff, were aware of where to access the Quality Assurance Handbook and reported that access to policies and procedures had improved with the implementation of a new intranet site.

98. In addition, RCS has developed academic frameworks for its undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, setting out common principles for curriculum design, graduate attributes, assessment design and work-based learning. Minutes from formal discussions about the frameworks show that the Conservatoire has taken a collaborative approach to developing these frameworks, and that the groups of academic and professional services leaders responsible for their development aimed to support clear links with the strategic plan and the Learning and Teaching Strategy. Curriculum principles as outlined in the frameworks can be seen in programme specifications, which form the core of programme handbooks. The TQER team considered that the documented alignment between frameworks, strategic plans and quality processes allows RCS leadership to support a consistent approach to quality that underpins all its programmes and provides assurance that curriculum design and approval are systematically governed at institutional level.

99. RCS runs a staff development week each year, incorporating activities focused on quality assurance and enhancement themes. The 2025 sessions were well attended by staff in a wide variety of roles and included sessions focused on key enhancement themes such as de-colonising the curriculum, ethical use of AI and workshops on boundaries and respect. These events provide an opportunity for academic staff to come together and build community through activities such as a Cultivating Connections Workshop, and to disseminate the Conservatoire's strategic priorities in relation to learning, teaching and student experience in an interactive way. The TQER team considered the reach and engagement levels of these activities to show that professional development is effectively supporting staff understanding of institutional expectations and contributing positively to enhancement culture. This view was supported by comments from academic staff at the Main Review Visit, who saw the staff development week as an opportunity for shared experience and dialogue.

100. In addition to being embedded in programme monitoring and review, critical reflection is also integral to Professional Services Review processes. A self-evaluation report from the Counselling, Disability and Welfare service draws up student and staff feedback and outlines several actions taken in response to stakeholder and institutional feedback from the Students' Union (SU) and the Learning and Teaching Quality Committee. The report also details how operations planning aligns with RCS Strategic Plan by asking how the service meets institutional needs in terms of the students' experience and the Strategic Plan. The TQER team considered this as positive evidence that shows evaluative practice is embedded beyond academic departments into an institution-wide quality culture that is functioning effectively.

101. The TQER team considered a range of evidence that demonstrated a strong working

relationship between RCS leaders and the leadership of the SU, which has been strengthened through introduction of a Vice-President role in AY2023-24. Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (LTQC) and Academic Board minutes show that SU sabbatical officers bring their perspectives to committees and contribute positively to quality culture. The SU President presents a report to each meeting of Academic Board, resulting in discussion of matters such as improved communication of student survey outcomes with the student body and ongoing actions from the Student Experience Project. In addition, the constructive contribution of student representatives provides evidence of an effective partnership model that is improving institutional decision making (see paragraph, 87).

102. During the Initial Review Visit, the TQER team heard that while there were no plans to repeat the Student Experience Project (SEP) survey for all students in AY2025-26, there was an intention to capture the experience of those who had not previously had the opportunity to engage (for example blended and distance learning students) in the current academic year. The SU President also indicated that the intention is that the SEP survey be repeated every few years to check progress. The TQER team agreed that this may eventually result in some longitudinal data that could provide a clear measure of enhancement to the student experience, however as there are no permanent SU staff in place and the elected team changes each year, it may mean the exercise is not repeated for some time. Consequently, the TQER team encourages the Conservatoire to build on the positive action emerging from the SEP and to identify ways to embed detailed exploration of the wider student experience into its quality frameworks as a basis for continued action planning that addresses the priorities identified in the SPA (see paragraph, 92).

103. Ownership of annual monitoring reports by programme committees ensures that students and teaching staff voices are embedded in quality assurance and enhancement processes (see paragraphs, 14-18). The student voice was clear in the sample annual monitoring reports provided to the TQER team, although the level of detail varied, with some annual monitoring reports quoting feedback from programme committees and surveys and others summarising key points made throughout the year. Despite this variation, the TQER team found in all the sample annual monitoring reports provided that critical feedback was demonstrably translated into clear action points. For example, comments made by BMus students in relation to teaching staff diversity, summer support for recital resits and staff safeguarding training are all addressed within the annual monitoring reports action plan for AY2025-26. Furthermore, checks on the progress of annual monitoring action plans at LTQC and reporting of institutional issues to Academic Board shows clear institutional academic oversight (see paragraph 14). Overall, the TQER team considered that the evidence confirms that institutional processes are effective in ensuring that student feedback informs enhancement activity and results in demonstrable improvements to learning, teaching and the student experience. However, (as noted in paragraph 91), in some cases more could be done to close feedback loops by clearly communicating the action taken back to the student body.'

104. RCS has increased leadership capacity for quality assurance arrangements in recent years with the introduction of an Assistant Principal (now Deputy Principal) role. The Deputy Principal has strategic leadership responsibility for quality and acts as Convenor for the LTQC) The role led to the preparation of the Strategic Impact Analysis for the TQER, regularly reporting on progress to Academic Board. The TQER team considered that the leadership structure therefore provides clear and effective strategic capacity for quality enhancement, reinforcing institutional assurance.

105. RCS has a structured academic governance framework in place, with clear reporting lines evidenced in the Terms of Reference and minutes of the Academic Board and LTQC. The remit of LTQC confirms its responsibility for oversight of the Learning and Teaching

Strategy, and learning and teaching and quality assurance processes in addition to alignment with sector standards and steering engagement with external enhancement processes such as Scottish Tertiary Enhancement Project (STEP) and Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER). Membership includes the Deputy Principal, academic directors and an SU representative. Externality is embedded within academic governance, with external critical friends from other higher education institutions reviewing annual monitoring reports and action plans and reporting their findings to LTQC. The feedback is provided to each programme team, informing action planning. The most recent critical friend report to LTQC on annual monitoring reports commended their interrogation and effective use of data to support the reflective narrative. The TQER team considered that this added externality provides RCS leadership with assurance that quality reporting mechanisms are robust, evidence based, and that academic standards are secure and benchmarked against sector expectations.

106. The minutes of the LTQC confirm that the committee monitors and updates the Learning and Teaching Strategy to reflect a range of major enhancement projects underway that are aligned with RCS's strategic approach. The Academic Board receives updates to the supporting plan and summary reports on progress from LTQC. Academic Board keeps responsibility for approving new course proposals and external examiner appointments based on recommendations from LTQC. Minutes show evidence of matters of institutional significance being escalated from LTQC to Academic Board, for example an item on acceptable use of AI. Academic Board also receives summary reports from the Research Committee, Ethics Committee and Engagement Committee, with the Academic Board minutes evidencing discussion of relevant issues and therefore direct links with the quality assurance of research degree provision. The TQER team considered that the evidence showed that the Conservatoire's academic governance arrangements are effective in supporting strategic decision-making and maintaining oversight of quality assurance and enhancement activities.

107. The LTQC is supported by sub-committees, including a Learning, Teaching and Quality Action Group (LTQAG). The LTQAG membership incorporates a broader range of representatives collaborating with academic leaders, including staff representatives from each school and from relevant central departments. The TQER team considered that the LTQAG increases capacity for detailed scrutiny of key matters such as programme and module modifications, enabling quicker response to student (and other stakeholder) feedback. For example, this is particularly pertinent in relation to credit-rated short courses, where RCS has a responsibility to undertake robust quality assurance processes while maintaining agility with respect to course development and modification. The key quality contacts at the Conservatoire confirmed that this approach had proven effective as it increased the volume of work that the LTQC could manage over an academic year.

108. The programme committees report to LTQC, through submission of annual monitoring reports. While the TQER team did not see evidence in the minutes of programme committees on matters being escalated throughout the year, the recently implemented Terms of Reference confirm that LTQC will be informed of any quality related matters arising from programme committees. The TQER team heard that the Sustainability Committee and Digital Planning Group also report to LTQC and shared membership of these committees enables each to take a joined-up approach to enhancement work in these areas.

109. Directors of schools present the outcomes of external examiner reports to LTQC, highlighting any significant issues and detailing the actions taken or planned to address them. The committee minutes include discussions about the quality of reports and the need to develop clear guidance for external examiners, including the creation of a model report. The committee found the level of contact between external examiners and students to be

variable and tasked the LTQAG to address this. As a result, the TQER team heard that guidelines have been put in place outlining minimum expectations while keeping a level of flexibility to suit different disciplines and types of programme. The TQER team considered this change will help ensure that the external examining process better supports the effective monitoring of academic standards within the conservatoire's academic governance framework.

110. The TQER team saw evidence that external input, including the use of three external experts on programme validation (Full Scrutiny) and review panels, has been discussed at LTQC and is confirmed to be working well. Use of an external academic member, an external professional member and an employer representative enable the external members of the panel to contribute a range of perspectives. The procedure allows for the external co-opted member of Academic Board to convene both preliminary scrutiny and fully scrutiny panels, and for the addition of further external members, for example, from Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) as needed. An external panel member from another institution was also used for Student-facing Professional Service Review. The TQER team considered that RCS approach ensures that external perspectives are at the heart of internal review processes and that academic standards stay aligned with sector expectations and employer needs.

111. The development of mechanisms such as the LTQAG and the use of external experts both within programme approval and review processes and as members of academic boards and committees, enable RCS to respond in an agile way to both student feedback and developments in the wider sector(see paragraphs, 16-17, 23, 28-29, 45). The TQER team's discussion with employers, partners and alumni confirmed that external stakeholders are carefully and regularly consulted on curriculum matters and that the RCS is responsive to their feedback. This integration of a wide range of internal and external stakeholders into the institution's academic governance and quality processes helps inform the strategic approach to managing quality and standards. This enables the development of a strong quality culture based on continuous reflection and a shared sense of responsibility for delivering excellent learning opportunities and the student experience and the TQER team consider this to be and is a **feature of good practice**.

112. Periodic programme review acts as a mechanism for the identification of areas for enhancement across the Conservatoire. The TQER team considered the process to be comprehensive, lasting around twelve months and including preliminary and full scrutiny phases with the possibility to set conditions at each stage. A Sample Reflective Analysis provided as evidence included some response to external developments, stakeholder consultation and external examiner feedback, indicating that the process prompts programme teams to consider the effectiveness of the learning experience and the extent to which academic standards are maintained. Themes emerging from periodic review are discussed at Board of Governors/Academic Board strategy days. In 2024-25 the focus was on decreasing complexity and de-siloing, including revisions to staff workload models and reducing assessment load. The TQER team heard from staff this had resulted in several changes to curriculum structure, including a reduction in the number of optional modules students must take, a renewed focus on constructive alignment and increased challenge of potential over-assessment within programme approval, review and modification processes.

113. RCS Self Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP) process has been effectively integrated with institution-led review activity and major themes can be tracked across external and internal review mechanisms. The 2024 SEAP suggests that many of the issues affecting the student learning experience are grounded in challenges with communication. Actions to address this are evident in the SPA AY2025-26 and the Student Experience Project Action Plan, which documents how key activities such as more regular student forums, rollout of

MyDay (a digital student engagement portal) and standing agenda items about closing feedback loops at School management team meetings, have been implemented with the aim of enhancing the student experience. The TQER team consider that the integration of SEAP with institution-led review confirms that data and feedback are being used effectively to drive institution-wide improvements.

114. An evaluation of institution-led review (ILR) processes is due to be conducted by LTQC in AY2025-26 and the Strategic Impact Analysis notes that improvement in the quality of reflective analysis coming to the Preliminary Scrutiny stage of the programme approval process is likely to be an action point (see paragraphs, 15 and 44). In its meeting with key quality contacts the TQER team was informed that the Preliminary Scrutiny stage had been introduced as an enhancement to the programme review process, and enabled the institutional quality team to identify those staff (for example those from an industry background) who needed more support with the process at an early stage, leading to a more effective review process overall. This targeted support model shows how ILR processes can be effective in developing staff capability and ensuring consistent application of quality expectations across programmes.

115. Student feedback is being gathered on developments such as a pilot of digital handbooks, which will feed into the ILR review. Enhancements already emerging from ILR include the introduction of a Digital Development Planning Group to drive forward enhancements related to digital learning and to develop an AI policy for RCS. This in turn feeds into curriculum development, for example the inclusion of the critical use of AI in assessment within the new BA Arts and Community programme.

External institutional review and engagement

116. RCS has a strong record of engagement with, and implementation of enhancements arising from external peer review (see paragraph, 45). In recent years, RCS staff and SU Presidents have engaged with the development of the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) and shared learning at the 2023-24 annual Curriculum Development Days (for academic and support staff). Prior to the implementation of TQEF, the Conservatoire used Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) process to progress key developments, including those associated with the rationalisation of its strategic approach to assessment, which have since been embedded within subject reviews and to drive development of RCS' digital strategy, which sets out aims for the development of technology-enhanced and digital learning. The TQER team considered that RCS's demonstrable record in implementing recommendations from external peer review (see paragraphs, 25 and 117) provides assurance that external peer review outcomes are used effectively to strengthen institutional quality arrangements.

117. Review of the Quality Assurance Handbook in preparation for TQER has prompted the Conservatoire to review alignment of its processes with the 2024 version of the UK Quality Code and to ensure that its mechanisms for the management of quality and standards and its approach to enhancement cohere with institutional strategy. Previous actions from Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) led the handbook to be updated with information about the curriculum review process. The TQER team considers that the institution's proactive alignment of its quality processes with external expectations provides evidence of an effective and forward-looking quality culture.

118. Opportunities for engagement with professional bodies are included in curriculum review and accreditation by external professional bodies including the General Teaching Council for Scotland, Advance HE and the Association of British Theatre Technicians demonstrate alignment with professional standards by embedding professional guidance

within programme design and review. Accreditations by these bodies confirm that programmes are effective in meeting recognised professional standards and provide additional assurance over the security of academic standards.

119. RCS took part in Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2021 with an increased submission size and successful articulation of world-leading aspects. The outcomes from REF fed into the Research Strategy, which aims to strengthen the connections between research and teaching and further into a Research and Ethical Practice Plan. Use of resultant Research Excellence Grant (REG) funding for Research and Knowledge Exchange promotes proto-research and knowledge exchange activities or development opportunities among all staff, supporting a wider culture of innovation and creativity.

Engagement in sector enhancement activities

120. The Conservatoire has contributed to several sector-wide enhancement projects in recent years. Most recently, it has engaged with the Scottish Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP) theme Supporting Diverse Learner Journeys (2024–2028). In 2025, RCS contributed to a STEP project proposal in partnership with colleges and universities to address the professional learning needs of staff teaching and supporting an increasingly diverse tertiary learner population. In addition to identifying and addressing gaps in staff development needs, the two year project also aims to provide a platform for institutions to share high impact practice. The STEP Year 1 Report (RCS 24–25) notes that RCS staff participating in a Glasgow-based academic developers group met with colleagues from the tertiary sector to explore opportunities for collaboration. Discussions focused on sharing provision, pooling resources for inter-institutional staff development, and developing a clearer understanding of sector-wide needs. While the impact has not yet been realised there is clear scope for the project to lead to significant enhancements in learning and teaching. The Conservatoire's role in multi-partner STEP projects demonstrates an effective commitment to sector enhancement and positions the institution as an active contributor to national learning and teaching development.

121. Earlier examples of RCS involvement in sector enhancement activity includes taking part in the Resilient Learning Communities Enhancement Theme project, through which it introduced group coaching and action learning sets to students on postgraduate programmes including BA Arts with Communities and MFA Production (see paragraphs, 43 and 65). Interviews with participants and an evaluative report highlighted the impact of transitions coaching for care leavers. The use of non-directive coaching methods and a facilitated action learning set model was found to be effective for individual creative development. Participants reported changes in their teaching and professional practice. A coaching standards framework was developed for use and rolled across the Conservatoire which the TQER team consider has the potential to positively impact the student experience (see paragraph, 65), however coaching was not mandatory and take up had been limited at the time of the review.

122. The Deputy Principal has been engaged, through the Conservatoires UK (CUK) Learning and Teaching Network, in sector projects to develop high-level principles for conservatoire education that have filtered into “curriculum planning, recruitment activity and peer networks at RCS.” RCS took a leading role in this initiative, building upon its work to develop safe working environments and healthy academic engagement as foregrounded within the new Creative Citizenship module (see paragraph, 48). Staff confirmed that involvement in this work had also prompted the Conservatoire to review its approach to the allocation of one-to-one teaching hours in music to allow this to flex to suit specific instrumental disciplines. The TQER team considered this example demonstrates the institution's effectiveness in using external networks to improve teaching models and

enhance the student experience.

123. The Conservatoire's engagement with the UK Knowledge Exchange (KE) Concordat in 2021 prompted the development of a Knowledge Exchange Action Plan aligned with RCS Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Strategy. This led to several initiatives, including the creation of an Innovation Studio that commissions new work by students, staff and alumni, alongside a bespoke evaluation framework to assess impact. These initiatives supported the development of new industry partnerships with Scottish Opera, Scottish Ballet, Citizens Theatre, Codebase, Techscaler, Creative Glasgow, and Anam Creative which in turn enabled the Split Screen project exploring AI and digital innovation in the performing arts. The KE Concordat Implementation Plan also resulted in the establishment of a Knowledge Exchange Enhancement Group (KEEG), operating from 2021 to 2023, with a remit to raise the profile of RCS's approach to knowledge exchange. The KEEG developed an Engagement and Creative Economy Action Plan aligned to RCS Strategy 2030, comprising five projects. As public and industry engagement is embedded across the Conservatoire's programmes, the TQER team considered these developments are well positioned to enhance curriculum development and student learning opportunities.

Collaborations and external outlook

124. RCS collaborates with a wide range of partners across learning and teaching, professional partnerships, and partnerships that support institutional mission and research. Key partnerships, as listed in the RCS Partnership Register, include BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Glasgow University and National Piping Centre. The TQER team heard from students how collaborations with international higher education institutions provide opportunities for student mobility and draw international perspectives into the curriculum, in addition to giving students the chance to perform alongside top international professionals. One example of this is a collaboration funded through the Scottish Education Exchange Partnership's (SEEP)⁶ Test and Learn initiative, whereby brass and percussion students spent a week in Finland collaborating with peers at the Sibelius Academy through learning and performance activities. The benefits of international exchange, including enhancing the learning experience and promoting cultural diversity, are outlined within student handbooks, through which students are informed about exchange opportunities and signposted to the RCS's International Student Portal. The TQER team heard how work on programme development with international partners, for example, the development of an immersive programme of activity for a Study Abroad module for The College of Charleston, also enables staff to bring a wider perspective back into the Conservatoire. The TQER team considered that these collaborations are effective in broadening the educational environment, enhancing cultural competency, and extending learning opportunities for students.

125. Both staff and students told the TQER team that multi-institution co-curricular initiatives have resulted in activities that enhance graduate employability. The 'Shift into your Future' partnership (SHIFT) with Glasgow School of Art and Queen Margaret University (QMU) is a creative entrepreneurship programme for students and graduates (one week online), delivered by staff from all three partners. The programme enhances entrepreneurship skills and is designed to address the needs of high numbers of self-employed graduates from RCS. The partnership has evolved into SHIFT PLUS and has added as an optional credit-bearing pathway, with credit awarded by QMU, enabling participants to gain formal

⁶ The Scottish Education Exchange Programme (SEEP) – Test and Learn is a Scottish Government-funded pilot initiative, to create national education exchange scheme.

recognition for their engagement. This initiative demonstrates how cross institutional collaborations are effectively supporting RCS graduate employability and lifelong learning. This impact is evidenced by an evaluation study from an external organisation (GradCore). The TQER team considered that the SHIFT programme occupies a critical niche in creative entrepreneurship, is widely valued by stakeholders, and has a sustained impact on participants' careers, businesses, and freelance practice.

126. Collaborations with national performing arts companies inform curricular development in relation to industry standards and employer need. Key strategic partnerships such as those with the BBC and the Scottish Ballet give professional engagement opportunities to students that enhance employability while providing a talent pipeline for the partner organisations. Corporate partnerships, such as those with a video pathway company and the Macintosh Foundation, enhance the student experience and support through the provision of scholarships and professional experience. In production disciplines such as lighting, open days enable students to speak to manufacturers and industry professionals, who also come in to lead projects that embed advanced technical practice and lead directly to work opportunities. For example, the TQER team heard how students had been involved in the operation of a remote follow spot system that allowed operators to safely control light fixtures from a distance at the Edinburgh Tattoo. The strong alignment between professional partnerships and curricular design provides assurance that programmes stay relevant and connected to industry expectations. This was confirmed by the external stakeholders met during the Main Review Visit, who spoke about their close collaboration with RCS during programme review and described the Conservatoire as an agile institution in the context of adapting its programmes to reflect professional standards.

127. The TQER team found that as Scotland's national conservatoire, RCS is well networked with sector bodies including Conservatoires UK (CUK), the Association of European Conservatoires (AEC, of which RCS Principal is Vice-President), the Federation of Drama Schools and the British Council. These relationships enable RCS to share practice, to learn from colleagues, and to attract renowned international performing arts institutions beyond Europe as partners, including YonSiew Toh, NYU Tisch, and Berklee Boko. The Conservatoire's involvement with the AEC ARTEMIS project, which was part of a working group on curriculum innovation, resulted in the development of shared creative citizenship principles with other institutions. The project has informed curriculum priorities and employer engagement at RCS, for example the delivery of a Creative Citizenship module for all undergraduate students from September 2023. The TQER team found that the institution's sustained engagement in international networks is effectively informing curriculum innovation and helping the Conservatoire anticipate sector trends.

128. The TQER team heard that academic staff are active in a range of external roles within the higher education sector; as teachers in other institutions, external examiners and assessors, quality reviewers and through sector enhancement projects (such as STEP), building institutional knowledge of sector best practice and building their network of external peers. Professional staff also felt encouraged to engage with relevant external networks such as Academic Registrars' Council (ARC) practitioner groups, Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE) and the Conservatoires UK (CUK) assessment group. External engagement by staff provides assurance that internal practice is informed by current professional and academic developments. The Conservatoire also sees these types of activity as a way of driving change rather than merely following developments. The TQER team heard from postgraduate students that they valued the extensive connections RCS has established with leading performing arts organisations and practitioners. Students highlighted how these links provided opportunities to collaborate with experienced professionals and to develop their own professional networks.

129. Engagement (or knowledge exchange) is a key strategic priority for the Conservatoire, as set out in RCS Strategy 2030. Initiatives that have had a positive impact on the student experience include the establishment of the Creative Enterprise Development Office (CEDO) and the provision of graduate seed funding through the Make It Happen Fund (see paragraph, 67). The Conservatoire also produces extensive public performance programmes and organises a range of conferences and events that bring external perspectives into the institution. Outreach activities (such as pre-HE programmes and Junior Conservatoire) focus on pipeline development and demonstrate a strategic approach to ensuring the sustainability of programmes and art forms. The TQER team agreed that the effectiveness of the institution's external outlook in driving innovation, supporting graduate trajectories, and strengthening student opportunity.

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