

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Follow-up Report to the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)

July 2014

Preface

One year after publication of their ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports, institutions are asked to submit a Follow-up Report to QAA Scotland. These reports are also submitted to the Scottish Funding Council. Follow-up Reports are written in the institution's own words and require to be endorsed by the institution's Governing Body prior to publication on the QAA website. Guidance on the content and structure is provided by QAA Scotland.

Institutions are asked to focus on the action they have taken since the review and to include an indication of the effectiveness of that action. ELIR reports highlight positive practice as well as areas for development, and institutions are encouraged to comment on key areas of activity relating to good practice that they have prioritised since the ELIR.

Follow-up Reports are discussed with institutions as part of the ELIR annual discussion meetings. They also form the basis of a follow-up event which involves institutions that were reviewed around the same time coming together to explore the ways they have responded to their ELIR outcomes. This activity is intended to emphasise the enhancement-led nature of the review method.



Royal Conservatoire *of* Scotland

Enhancement-Led institutional review (ELIR) Follow-up Report – July 2014

A first draft of this report was compiled by the Deputy Principal, Academic Registrar, Acting Director of Academic Development, Head of Information Services, Head of Research, SU President, and the Deans of both Schools. Drawing on committee papers, internal reports and individual feedback components of the report were populated. This draft was then considered by the Quality and Standards Committee and the Academic Board with a final version endorsed by the Conservatoire's Board of Governors on 4 July 2014.

At the time of ELIR3 the Conservatoire was months into delivering our reformed curriculum. The ELIR Team supported our aspirations, offering a collaborative challenge at a key point in the process. Inevitably, given the timing, there were many unknowns and this Follow-up Report provides a useful opportunity to review progress having now completed two full academic sessions.

Two other major quality enhancement activities were undertaken by the Conservatoire in 2012-13, the Monitoring, Evaluation and Review (MER) Scrutiny event (now called the **Annual Programme Dialogue**) and the creation of a **Monitoring and Evaluation Dossier** which comprised detailed summaries of feedback from each element of the new curriculum. The Conservatoire created a **Quality Enhancement Strategy** to provide a strategic framework for monitoring progress across all actions from these three events. This strategy is overseen by the Committee for Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Support (CELTS) reporting to the Academic Board.

There has been continued development in the areas of positive practice identified by the report. The annual conference in learning and teaching ran in September 2013 with the theme 'Developing and Supporting the Curriculum' to align with the sector Enhancement Theme. (Similarly, in 2014, the conference theme will focus on 'Transitions'.) The three day event took the opportunity to explore different ways in which staff were developing and supporting the curriculum with the implementation of the new undergraduate curriculum. As well as exploring cross-cutting themes such as Curriculum for Excellence and flexible learning, the three day event used the Enhancement Theme to focus on the development and support of our new curriculum.

The remainder of this report focuses on the areas for development outlined with the Outcome and Technical Reports.

Use of data - *Develop the Management Information System further, and promote the active use of data to underpin quality assurance and enhancement-related decisions. This would also enable the Conservatoire to measure the impact of the new curriculum and to track progress in implementing the Strategic Plan 2012-15, Creating the Future for Performance, more readily.*

Response

The IT Strategy 2013-2016 (approved in November 2013) has identified this as a key area for development. An internal consultation process highlighted examples of both straightforward and complex issues which now need to be addressed in 2014-16. The implementation of the IT Strategy is overseen by the IT Planning Group (ITPG).

Evaluation

An institutional matrix of key information management reporting requirements will be established in order to map requirements to the systems and individuals responsible. This will ensure that as an institution we are gathering all required information, storing and sharing this information in the most efficient manner and identifying reporting requirements well in advance to ensure timely responses. This matrix will be established by the start of session 2014/15 and work to map that data to the institutional KPIs will be undertaken as a parallel workstream driven by the Head of Information Services and overseen by ITPG.

Performance indicators - *Evaluate the developing set of performance indicators to ensure meaningful indicators are identified to fit the institutional context and priorities. The Conservatoire should ensure the performance indicators it develops will be used systematically and proactively by programme teams.*

Response

The IT Strategy also identified improvements to data & information management which are linked to the development of our KPI suite, making the best use of our current MIS assets, and improving and automating business process where possible. In addition, a new post has been created which will be dedicated to the production and analysis of data as well as providing staff development to the programme teams in order to more fully engage with performance indicators. Reporting to the Academic Registrar, this post will have a cross-Conservatoire focus and it is hoped that someone will be appointed by December 2014.

In 2013-14, the Conservatoire's Senior Management Team (CSMT) reviewed and evolved the set of Institutional KPIs used to monitor the implementation and impact of the strategic plan. The Board of Governors confirmed its requirements in respect of KPIs. With the arrival of our new Principal in September 2014, work is planned by CSMT to further evolve institutional KPIs to align with a new Institutional Strategy and our Outcome Agreement which will be developed in 2014-15 and implemented from September 2015. From 2015-16 the institutional KPIs will be used by CSMT and the Board of Governors to monitor the implementation of our new strategy and report on impact and achievement. Following consideration of programme level KPI needs in 2013-14, a KPI pilot will be implemented in 2014-15 with a sub-set of undergraduate and postgraduate Programme Heads to develop skill in the use and analysis of programme level KPIs. This initiative is designed to support programme

teams in the use of KPIs in monitoring performance and to determining actions for programme development and enhancement.

Evaluation

Progress has been made, but further evolution of our KPIs is required both at Institutional and Programme levels as we develop new strategies in 2014-15 and implement them from 2015-16 onwards. The pilot will be commissioned through the Quality and Standards Committee who will evaluate it and determine mechanisms for conservatoire-wide rollout of the use of KPIs at programme level to all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes from 2015-16 to inform programme committee discussions and the production of Annual Programme Review Reports.

Committee roles - *Ensure the roles, remits and reporting relationships of the institutional and programme committees are clearly defined and understood across the institution. The Conservatoire should ensure that it achieves its objective of increasing institutional oversight and accountability through the revised committee structure and the operation of key processes, such as annual programme reporting. This should include the systematic use of data to inform decisions and the careful monitoring of the issues that are identified, along with the impact of actions taken.*

Response

The Committee Structure was re-launched at the learning and teaching conference in September 2013 (see below) and provided an opportunity to ensure a common understanding of the roles and remits of the structure. Within session 2013/14, the Board of Governors requested the establishment of a joint Governors/Academic Board short-life working group to make recommendations on the most effective and efficient arrangements for reporting to the Governors on the Conservatoire's management of quality and standards. This was convened by a member of the Governing Board with membership comprising the Deputy Principal, the Deans and the Academic Registrar. The working group took the opportunity to consider the totality of the new committee structure and reporting arrangements in order to identify the most effective way of capturing the right data for the right audience at the right time. The resulting new structure (approved by the Academic Board and Board of Governors in April 2014) has been designed to ensure effective accountability, communication and transparency both up and down the committee structure and hence to Academic Board and, ultimately, the Board of Governors. The intention is to ensure that the Academic Board is thus in a position to assure itself that standards are being maintained and the quality of the student experience continuously enhanced. The most important regular report received by the Academic Board in this context will be the Executive Reflective Summary of the Annual Dialogue Report prepared by the Convenor of the Quality and Standards Committee and CELTS on the basis of discussion at these committees. The creation of this report begins with Programme Committees who, on the basis of external examiner reports and responses, student feedback and performance indicators, produce an annual programme report that is discussed annually by a panel of internal and external colleagues. The resulting Annual Dialogue Report flows through the Academic Committee Structure for appropriate consideration and subsequent actions are incorporated into the hitherto mentioned Quality Enhancement Plan. The Executive Reflective Summary, and related data, will be debated by the Academic Board (and in turn at the Board of Governors) at its first meeting each calendar year.

Evaluation

The Academic Board , (convened by the Principal and comprising staff and students from across the Conservatoire in addition to an external member and an observer from the Board of Governors), will receive, both on a regular basis and on a summative annual cycle, the information it requires to ensure the effectiveness of the committee structure and maintain effective oversight of the management and enhancement of the quality of the student experience and the standards of awards throughout the Conservatoire.

Institutional strategies - *Progress the development of strategies to complement the Strategic Plan in the areas of IT, internationalisation and research. The Conservatoire should prioritise the finalisation of its IT Strategy to support the intended developments in data management.*

Response

The IT Strategy consultation was underway during the ELIR3 process and the final strategy was approved in November 2013. Improvements to data & information management are key considerations in the Strategy and are part of the implementation plan which is overseen by the ITPG and reported to CELTS and Academic Board. The International/Student Recruitment Strategy was completed and approved by the Academic Board on 16 October 2013. This Plan, including a SWOT analysis, 12-point action plan and indicators of success, has been produced to detail the context within which the Conservatoire operates and sets out the work required to achieve RUK and international recruitment targets. A completely refreshed Research Strategy has been discussed and approved by the Conservatoire's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee and by the Conservatoire Senior Management Team and, finally, Academic Board on 18 June 2014. The Head of Research and Knowledge Exchange will lead on the development of a separately articulated Knowledge Exchange Strategy that will be designed to integrate with the new Research Strategy.

Evaluation

The Research Strategy and Knowledge Exchange Strategy will be overseen operationally by the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee which includes staff representation from both schools. A Research and Knowledge Exchange session at the annual Learning and Teaching Conference will provide an opportunity to update staff on priorities and progress within Research and Knowledge Exchange. The Recruitment and Retention Group comprising the Deputy Principal, Academic Registrar, Deans and Head of Recruitment oversee the International/Student Recruitment Strategy on a monthly basis.

In addition, progress on all strategies will be reported annually to Academic Board.

Public information - *Review the processes for assuring the accuracy of public information, especially that published on the web, to ensure that appropriate controls are in place.*

Response

Over the past year, the Conservatoire has undertaken a review and consequent restructuring of its communication functions such that a more focussed approach is now being taken to the content and production of information – in particular where it

enters the public domain. The Conservatoire has commissioned an entirely new website which is currently in its test phase. As it is built on Wordpress there is intended to be an extensive programme of staff training. In turn this training will identify key personnel who will be authorised to enter and amend information.

Evaluation

The communications team ensure that staff at the appropriate level within the Conservatoire have checked and approved the content of information prior to printing and/or appearing on the website. The new website and authorial controls demonstrate significant progress.

Quality Code - *Progress with the planned mapping of institutional policies and practices against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, in parallel with producing the revised version of the Quality Assurance Handbook.*

Response

The ELIR Team confirmed that 'the Conservatoire's approaches to self-evaluation and the management of information do meet sector expectations including Scottish Funding Council guidance and the UK Quality Code' and we would reiterate our confidence that we meet the Expectations of the Code within our current practices. In general terms this can be evidenced through our Undergraduate and, newly developed, Postgraduate Framework, Quality Assurance Handbook, Rules and Regulations and a number of other policies, procedures and documentation. However, we agree with the Team that 'there would be considerable benefit in the Conservatoire progressing its planned mapping against the UK Quality Code which will assist with the evaluation of current practices as well as informing their further refinement.'

The mapping task is not an inconsiderable one, and it was agreed by Quality and Standards Committee that it would need to be completed over at least the next two to three years.

Progress throughout session 2013/14 includes:

- I. The new Committee for Enhancement in Learning, Teaching and Support began a two-year project to create a Learning and Teaching strategy for the institution which builds in mapping to the indicators of UK Quality Code Chapter B3 Learning and Teaching
- II. The Conservatoire Admissions department reviewed its Admissions Policy as outlined in QAH 8 to reflect the indicators of UK Quality Code Chapter B2 Admissions
- III. The Conservatoire Research department, when reviewing its Research strategy, took into account the indicators of UK Quality Code Chapter B11 Research Degrees
- IV. A mapping of QAH6 External examiners against UK Quality Code Chapter B7 External Examining began
- V. Using the new Model Complaints Handling Procedure, a new chapter is in development for QAH which reflects the indicators of UK Quality Code Chapter B9 Complaints and appeals on academic matters

Evaluation

Progress will be monitored bi-annually through Quality and Standards Committee. A mapping and mirroring of the UK Quality Code chapters with the QAH sections will be developed and be made available via the website during session 2014/15 with a view to being completed by the end of 2015/16.

New curriculum - *In the context of a range of positive developments relating to the new undergraduate curriculum, ensure the purpose and role of transitions tutors is clearly defined and understood by staff and students. In particular, the Conservatoire should clarify the role of transitions tutors in providing advice to support students in fulfilling their learning contracts. There would also be benefit in the Conservatoire considering the ways it can work to manage the likely increase in student demand for elements of the new curriculum including Bridge Week projects and popular 'Choice' modules.*

Response

Each element of the new curriculum was carefully monitored (and continues to be monitored) using a number of tools such as surveys, focus groups, and feedback forms. Transition Coordinators oversee the **Transition Tutorial** activity and regular briefing and feedback sessions with the Transition Tutors have taken place to refine their role. Coordinators develop briefing papers which are distributed at the start of each academic year and highlight, to staff and students, any changes to the system. Most importantly, based on staff and student feedback, was the change to incorporate Transition Tutors with year group leaders which means the Transition Tutor has greater knowledge of the student.

The **Bridge Week** initiative which 'bridges' the transition, in each Academic Session, from Trimester One to Trimester Two, provides students with the opportunity to use Conservatoire facilities to creatively apply the knowledge, skills and understanding gained in Trimester One in self-initiated experimental projects as a preparation for further development in Trimester Two. Based on feedback from the previous session, the Bridge Week Team was reconstituted for 2014 with a pool of facilitators who can allocate and ensure the best use of RCS resources. Promotional activities included a Mahara page that was available from week 0 as the central hub for information, a twitter feed, and information sessions for all first years and lunchtime drop-in information sessions from week 1 until the closing date for proposals. 39 proposals were received and reviewed in week 7, 34 of these were granted money and/or space. A promotional brochure was created and circulated via the Mahara page, SU and the Weekly News. It is expected that this week will continue to grow in popularity and the Conservatoire is looking at ways of creating a Festival event to support and recognise the transformative value of this event.

Choice has been closely monitored through the **Choice and Collaboration Committee** which was set up in 2013-14 to act as a Programme Committee to co-ordinate the delivery of choice modules, to monitor the process of allocation, and to tackle issues and challenges of delivery as well as initiating future developments. Since October 2013, the Committee reports on its work to the Academic Management Committee and Quality and Standards Committee quarterly. The Committee will produce a Choice and Collaboration Annual Report which will be scrutinised as part of the Annual Programme Dialogue starting in September 2014.

Evaluation

For 2014/15, 92% of students have been allocated their 1st priority module with a further 25 (5%) awaiting the outcome of auditions which could increase this to 98%. Of the remaining students a further 79% were allocated their 2nd priority module (with a further 4% awaiting the outcome of audition). Overall, 83% of students completed their credit requirements in order of their priorities. This figure is encouragingly high given the complexities of scheduling, and the need to meet pre-requisites as well as maximum and minimum numbers.

At the end of session 2012/13 students and staff were surveyed on their thoughts about all elements of the new curriculum, particularly Transition Tutors, Bridge Week and Learning Contracts. The amendments referenced above were based on this feedback. This survey was repeated at the end of session 2013/14 with results yet to be reviewed.

Staff and student mobility - *Continue to develop arrangements to facilitate and promote student and staff mobility, including ensuring the benefits of mobility are recognised and highlighted across the Conservatoire.*

Response

Student and staff mobility continues to be advertised widely throughout the Conservatoire by the **International & Student Experience (I&SE) team**. Mobility was promoted via regular presentations to students and staff between September and December as well as 1-2-1 sessions with students from January to June. The I&SE team have a presence at Open Days to promote Erasmus and International Exchange mobility to prospective applicants and at the Freshers Fayre to make new students aware of the opportunities available. All student participants were asked for feedback and were required to meet with their Programme Leader/Head of Department upon return. Participants were also asked to attend the promotional events organised by the I&SE team in order to give interested parties a first-hand account of their time abroad. Former Erasmus students are always encouraged to apply to become a British Council Erasmus Ambassador – a national scheme to promote Erasmus. A flexible and bespoke approach to credit-mapping is adopted and communicated to staff and students in order that full recognition can be given to exchange learning.

Evaluation

Students were encouraged to use their experiences on exchange in any relevant pieces of reflective writing they are required to complete. The benefits of staff mobility were highlighted at presentations given by returning members of staff to others in their department. All staff participants were asked to meet with their line manager upon return to discuss how the staff member and the Conservatoire can benefit from the mobility.

- One of our Vocal Studies students was selected to be a British Council Erasmus Ambassador and has been active in promoting the benefits of Erasmus to students within the Conservatoire and in schools.
- For the first time a member of support staff participated in Erasmus Staff Training (STT) mobility – the scheme which allows non-teaching staff to take advantage of job-shadowing and work experience in Europe.

Technical Report: Trimester 3 - *The strategic objectives for the introduction of the third trimester were explored in a number of meetings with staff. It was explained that Trimester 3 could be used to offer short courses for UK and international students. Senior staff also spoke of using the trimester to generate income, help deliver an international strategy and provide CPD opportunities for staff. The Conservatoire is encouraged to develop an explicit strategy for Trimester 3 activity that will maximise its benefits for the institution.*

Response

Progress on an explicit strategy for Trimester 3 has been delayed due to staff changes. However, A **cross-Conservatoire steering group** was established in 2013 to ensure that the summer school vision, objectives, performance and targets can be supported and achieved within the period of the current plan (2015) and beyond as the RCS secures a distinctive place in the local, national and global marketplace for performing and production arts summer schools. In addition, the steering group is the starting point for the evolving strategy from 2015 to 2018. 2014 will see the second year of a three year plan to grow summer school capacity at RCS. Over the period of the current plan the programme has now developed summer schools in all dance, drama, music, production and screen subjects and also teaching and arts business skills in line with the market research recommendations from summer 2012 and Board of Governors approval in January 2013. Further work has been done in 2014 to develop costing and pricing models and course viability tools to support the development of short courses

Evaluation

The performance of the summer school short courses offered is actively monitored by the Head of Short Courses and performance reported monthly to the CSMT.

Technical Report: Mentoring Scheme - *The Reflective Analysis (RA) referred to a new formal mentoring scheme being run by Human Resources. Currently, a small number of staff are involved with the scheme which is carefully structured and confidential to the mentor and mentee. Formal training is provided for mentors and the scheme is supported by a suite of guidance documents. Senior staff indicated that they regarded the scheme as providing support to staff with specific careers goals. As the formal mentoring scheme is established and the Conservatoire considers its evaluation, there would be benefit in senior staff reflecting on the balance between informal and formal approaches in delivering effective mentoring.*

Response

The scheme run by Human Resources is semi-formal, in that it is not specifically designed to support staff with specific careers goals. Instead, the focus is on the enhancement and development of skills and attributes that will potentially assist in an individual's general career progression. Its design ensures that both academic and support staff can actively participate. Formal training continues to be provided for mentors for the above scheme and it continues to be supported by a suite of guidance documents.

Evaluation

The scheme was evaluated in 2013-14 and the report considered by Academic Management Committee and the Committee for Enhancement, Learning and

Teaching and Support in April 2014. It was agreed the scheme was beneficial and would be continued in 2014-15 with further work being done in 2014-15, led by the new Director of Academic Innovation to formalise the scheme for teaching and learning support staff as part of a CPD Framework that will be developed, aligned to the Higher Education Academy and UK Professional Standards Framework and with the intention of offering routes to professional accreditation from 2015-16.

In addition to the above, the Conservatoire would take this opportunity to highlight progress within the **Postgraduate Reform Process**.

The postgraduate curriculum reform took place between August 2013 and June 2014 and the new/reformed programmes shall begin delivery in September 2014. The process built on much of the excellent work undertaken to reform the undergraduate curriculum and shared underpinning concepts and principles such as our approach to learning, teaching and assessment, curriculum principles, graduate attributes and ideas around choice, independent learning and collaboration.

Using the lessons learnt from the undergraduate reform, our approach ensured that:

- The Postgraduate Curriculum Reform/Development was an inclusive and democratic process. As with the UG reform we have involved our students, alumni, staff, senior managers, employers and external experts both in Scotland, rest of UK and from overseas to help us reform and re-shape our PG curriculum for a 21st century conservatoire. Throughout the reform process we have provided opportunities for staff, students, and other external stakeholders to input to our reform process.
- We asked fundamental and challenging questions. Although the PG curriculum we had was producing excellent graduates with very high levels of skills, the PG reform process like the UG process has made us examine, question and challenge assumptions about the curriculum.
- We provided opportunities for PG programme design teams to work collaboratively. Scheduling time when programme teams can work collaboratively has been core to our curriculum reform process. Further, providing facilitated workshops with programme teams has been an effective way of providing professional development and finding solutions to challenging issues that were preventing us from moving forward.
- We augmented our postgraduate reform project group managing the reform process to include programme design team convenors. This streamlined communication and ensured that there was a better connection between the group managing the reform and the teams re-designing new PG programmes.

The Postgraduate Certificate in learning and teaching in Higher Arts Education remains central to CPD in Learning and Teaching for conservatoire staff and from 2014/15 onwards will also be offered externally. As part of our postgraduate curriculum reform, the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Arts Education has been redesigned and renamed Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching, Support and Administration in Higher Arts Education and will lead to a number of exit qualifications aimed at an extended number of staff including academic staff, learning support professionals and administrators working in a HE arts context.

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183 St Vincent Street, Glasgow G2 5QD

Tel: 0141 572 3420
Email: enquiries@qaa.ac.uk
Website: www.qaa.ac.uk

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