

# Enhancement-led Institutional Review of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

## Technical Report

March 2013

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## About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method

A dedicated page of the QAA website explains the method for [Enhancement-led Institutional Review](#) of higher education institutions in Scotland and has links to the ELIR handbook and other informative documents.<sup>1</sup> You can also find more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>2</sup>

Further details about the enhancement-led approach can be found in an accompanying [ELIR information document](#),<sup>3</sup> including an overview of the review method, definitions of the judgement categories, and explanations of follow-up action. It also contains information on the Scottish Funding Council's response to ELIR judgements.

## About this review

This is the Technical Report of the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. The review took place as follows: Part 1 visit on 12-14 February and Part 2 visit on 18-21 March 2013. The review was conducted by a team of six reviewers:

- Ms Fyona Allan (student reviewer)
- Professor Howard Colley (academic reviewer)
- Mr Lars Ebert (international reviewer)
- Dr Crichton Lang (academic reviewer)
- Professor Ian Pirie (academic reviewer)
- Ms Gabrielle Weir (coordinating reviewer).

In advance of the review visits, the institution submitted a self-evaluative document (the Reflective Analysis) and an advance information set, comprising a range of materials about the institution's arrangements for managing quality and academic standards. In addition, the institution submitted a case study: 'the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Curriculum Reform project, 2009-2011'.

## About this report

In this report, the ELIR team:

- delivers an overarching judgement on the current and likely future effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for managing academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience

The overarching judgement can be found on page 3, followed by the detailed findings of the review given in numbered paragraphs.

ELIR Technical Reports are intended primarily for the institution which hosted the review, and to provide an information base for the production of thematic reports which identify findings across several institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Further information about the ELIR method: [www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/elir.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/elir.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> Further information about QAA: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus)

<sup>3</sup> ELIR information document: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/ELIR-information.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/ELIR-information.aspx)

## Enhancement-led Institutional Review of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Technical Reports set out the ELIR team's view under each of the report headings. Shorter Outcome Reports are provided which set out the main findings of the ELIR for a wider audience. The [Outcome Report](#) for this review is available on the QAA website.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Outcome Report: [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/Reports/Pages/ELIR-RCS-13.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/Reports/Pages/ELIR-RCS-13.aspx)

## Overarching judgement about the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland has **effective** arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience. These arrangements are likely to continue to be effective in the future.

This is a positive judgement, which means the Conservatoire has robust arrangements for securing academic standards and for enhancing the quality of the student experience.

### 1 Institutional context and strategic framework

#### 1.1 Key features of the institution's context and mission

1 The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (the Conservatoire) is a small specialist performing arts institution. It has its own taught degree awarding powers and offers research programmes with research degrees being awarded by the University of St Andrews through a collaborative agreement. In 2012-13, it had around 950 students including undergraduates and postgraduates. In the same year, it had 257 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff and 496 part-time hourly paid staff. The Conservatoire also has a substantial outreach programme with around 3,000 young people and adults engaged on short courses, study and training. The Conservatoire is structured around two schools: the School of Music, and the School of Drama, Dance, Production and Screen.

2 In 2011 the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama changed its name to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland to reflect that it was a Conservatoire of five discipline areas: music, drama, dance, screen and production. In delivering all five disciplines, the Conservatoire considers itself to be unique in the UK. Its mission is to be an international centre for developing artists, drawn from the full spectrum of society, who aspire to become leaders in the arts world. The Strategic Plan 2012-15 includes the ambition to have the Conservatoire recognised as a 'world-class artistic learning, teaching and research community'.

3 Since the previous ELIR (in 2009), the Conservatoire has implemented its Curriculum Reform project. This has been a significant strategic initiative involving: review of the academic portfolio; changes to the academic year and creation of a third trimester; streamlining of management and committee structures; and the creation of an academic framework and common assessment matrix to promote and support interdisciplinary study. The Conservatoire described Curriculum Reform as 'the most significant and far-reaching institutional enhancement project since the Conservatoire was the first in our sector to gain degree-awarding powers in the mid 1990s'.

4 In line with the ELIR method, the Conservatoire identified areas it wished the ELIR team to focus on during the review. These areas were: the implementation of the Curriculum Reform project including plans for the monitoring and evaluation of the new curriculum; the effectiveness of the new committee structure; and the use of ICT and e-learning.

#### 1.2 Strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching

5 The Conservatoire has an effective strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching through its Curriculum Reform (CR) project and three-year Strategic Plan 2012-15: Creating the Future for Performance. There has been extensive consultation with staff, students and external individuals in the formulation of the strategic approach.

6 The six aims of the Strategic Plan build upon the CR project and also embrace institutional policy relating to widening access and lifelong learning, equality and diversity, internationalisation, graduate attributes and the student as a global advocate and citizen. A set of institutional profile and sustainability Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), aligned to the Strategic Plan, had recently been approved by the Board of Governors and were due to be implemented shortly after the ELIR visit. The ELIR team would encourage the Conservatoire to progress the implementation of the KPIs to enable the institution to measure progress and impact against its Strategic Plan and the strategic ambitions arising from the CR project.

7 To support the Strategic Plan, the Conservatoire is currently finalising its international and IT strategies, and senior staff expressed the intention to revise the research strategy in the near future. The ELIR team considers completion of this suite of strategies to be important for the successful delivery of the Strategic Plan. In particular, the Conservatoire should prioritise the completion of its IT Strategy to support the intended developments in data management (see paragraphs 65 & 66).

8 The CR project demonstrates a carefully planned approach to strategic change with strong and responsive leadership from the CR steering group, regular and close monitoring of progress by the Curriculum Reform Project Group (CRPG) and the use of short-term task or thematic groups to deliver key elements of the project. A notable feature of the CR project was the inclusive nature of discussion on the scope and progress of reform. Staff and students were invited to contribute through 'HaveYour Say' sessions and in workshops on contentious topics. Staff also presented ideas through 'Open Space' meetings. In addition, there have been discussions at all levels of the institution through the formal committee structure. This inclusive approach to delivering strategic change was clearly demonstrated to the ELIR team during meetings with staff and students.

9 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.

### **1.3 Effectiveness of the approach to implementing strategies**

10 The Conservatoire has been successful in implementing the Curriculum Reform (CR) project. This is having a transformational effect on the culture of the institution, notably through the identification and realisation of the 'One Conservatoire' approach whereby similar policies and processes are adopted by staff and students across the institution. Through the CR project, the Conservatoire has developed an undergraduate curriculum that is distinctive and innovative amongst conservatoires in the UK and internationally (see paragraphs 29 & 30). The Conservatoire identified a number of challenges associated with the implementation of the new curriculum and these have, largely, been addressed.

11 In addition to careful self-reflection, the Conservatoire has used external individuals to guide, monitor and evaluate the development and progress of the CR project to date. External colleagues have prepared comprehensive reports on the revision of the undergraduate curriculum and reviewed the academic framework. This framework introduced the common ground between the Music and Drama schools to allow cross-Conservatoire curriculum development. It was also the principal medium for linking the curriculum to external reference points, such as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, subject benchmark statements, Scottish Enhancement Themes and Bologna principles.

An International Advisory Group, which included artists, educators and professionals, also met in 2010 and 2011 to advise the Conservatoire on its international ambitions and aspirations.

12 At the time of the current ELIR, the new undergraduate curriculum (developed through the CR project) was in its first year of implementation. A similar review of the postgraduate portfolio was in the planning stage. The ELIR team would encourage the Conservatoire to explicitly identify the lessons learned from implementing the undergraduate curriculum and use this to inform the scoping of the postgraduate project, including structuring a timeframe and identifying risks.

## **2 Enhancing the student learning experience**

### **2.1 Composition and key trends in the student population, including typical routes into and through the institution**

13 The student population has remained stable since 2009. The Conservatoire has 930 students studying on 10 undergraduate and four postgraduate taught programmes. In 2012-13, around 20 per cent of the students in the School of Music, and 15 per cent of the students in the School of Dance, Drama, Screen and Production were postgraduate. In addition, 16 students were studying on research degree programmes. The Conservatoire does not intend to grow its student population above 1,000 FTE.

14 The vast majority of students are full-time. They are recruited on the basis of both academic and performance ability, and processes are in place for admitting students who are outstanding performers but have not met the usual academic entry criteria. The vast majority of undergraduate students are school leavers. Entry with advanced standing, for example where students already have Higher National qualifications, is not currently a significant admissions route. The Conservatoire has an ambition to begin broadening its student profile through promoting entry from the range of short courses it intends to offer during Trimester 3 (see paragraph 9).

15 In 2012-13, international students formed around 10 per cent of the undergraduate student population and 33 per cent of the taught postgraduate population. In the same year, 22 per cent of the undergraduate students and 28 per cent of postgraduates were recruited from SIMD20 and SIMD40 (the most deprived parts of the population according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation).

16 Students typically leave the Conservatoire on completion of their undergraduate degree and move into employment as professional practitioners. On some programmes, most notably Modern Ballet, Drama, and Musical Theatre, where students in their third year of study have been offered employment in their chosen profession, the Conservatoire has taken active steps to enable the students to complete their academic award. A proportion of students, notably in Music, progress onto a postgraduate programme immediately after completing their undergraduate award.

17 As discussed later in this report (see paragraph 65), the further development of appropriate performance indicator sets would enable the Conservatoire to analyse more fully its student demographics and the differential levels of performance as part of its strategic planning. There were instances of data being used in a comparative manner, for example the SIMD20/40 admissions data were benchmarked against other conservatoires, and some programme-level Monitoring, Evaluation and Review (MER) reports gave detailed consideration to employment data. There was less evidence of data being used systematically to inform strategy or to monitor the impact of initiatives.

## **2.2 Supporting equality and diversity in the student population**

18 The Conservatoire has a positive approach to supporting equality and diversity in its student population. There is evidence that students from a wide variety of backgrounds and learning support needs are enabled to make the transition to study at the Conservatoire. In discussion with the ELIR team, students reported a strong sense of community within the institution, indicating that diversity was 'part of the norm' and that there were no barriers to access or inclusion.

19 The Conservatoire actively welcomes applications from mature students and from students with additional learning support needs. There are appropriate arrangements in place for identifying, assessing and providing support for students. Students have access to a range of specialist staff covering areas including international student support, disabilities counselling, effective learning support and academic writing support. There is a specified Counsellor and Disability Advisor, and an Equality and Diversity Officer. Once identified, additional support needs are set out in each student's Learning Agreement. Students also have a learning contract. The role of those documents and that of the transitions tutors (see paragraph 30) are identified in the Student Handbook. There is an Equality and Diversity Forum which is chaired by the Vice-Principal. All students who met the ELIR team were aware of the range of support opportunities available to them.

20 The ELIR team noted a range of very positive activities in support of Equality and Diversity including contributions to the It Gets Better global campaign, recognition by Stonewall of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) equality work within the Conservatoire, and the Conservatoire's work with Solar Bear Deaf Youth Theatre to develop training pathways for deaf actors.

## **2.3 Engaging and supporting students in their learning**

21 The Conservatoire has an effective approach to engaging and supporting students. There is a strong staff-student partnership and a clear practitioner community with students being treated as professional practitioners from the point of their admission to the institution. There is a holistic approach to providing support for individual students, including academic and pastoral support, which enables the students to achieve their potential. Student support services are managed centrally and student access to them is coordinated through a single enquiry desk. There are opportunities for students to undertake study outside the Conservatoire and internationally, and the institution should continue to develop its arrangements for facilitating and promoting staff and student mobility.

22 A powerful learning experience is delivered through the use of 'vertical' learning opportunities in which students are provided with regular opportunities to learn and perform alongside professional practitioners and students from different levels of study. The new undergraduate curriculum has been successfully developed. The core specialist curriculum includes opportunities for students to make choices which develop interdisciplinary working. This broadens the student experience and provides opportunities for students to become co-creators of their own learning.

### **Student engagement and representation**

23 The Conservatoire was careful to include students in every stage of the Curriculum Reform (CR) project, which students and staff consider has had a positive impact on the success of the project. In relation to regular student feedback mechanisms, the wide variety of ways in which students are able to provide their views is particularly positive. These mechanisms include: formal module surveys; informal weekly programme meetings with students; the annual staff student forum, which is facilitated by student representatives

and addresses operational matters; the formal committee structure, which incorporates a Student Forum; and informal opportunities during performance rehearsals.

24 Students confirmed to the ELIR team that the representative system works well and that all students would know who to approach with any issues relating to their programmes. Student representatives all receive training provided through the national body Student Participation in Quality Scotland, sparqs. Student Union office bearers receive additional training, which they indicated was useful in preparing them for their specific roles, particularly in supporting them to make an active contribution to the committees they sit on.

#### **Feedback to students on assessed work**

25 The small cohort sizes and high contact hours mean that students receive regular oral feedback on their performances. However, the results of an internal survey using the National Student Survey (NSS) questions indicated that a substantial proportion of students were not content with the feedback they receive on their assessed work. In discussion with the ELIR team, student representatives indicated that this was likely to have been a reaction to delays in students receiving written feedback on their formal assessed work. Staff confirmed that, in response to the student survey, a two-week turnaround time had been introduced for written feedback to be provided. However, it was indicated that it can be difficult to meet this deadline in practice, especially in view of the large numbers of part-time staff. The ELIR team noted that the Conservatoire was conscious of this challenge and that the institution would keep the matter under review. Through the introduction of the learning contracts in the undergraduate curriculum, the Conservatoire is developing a thorough approach to identifying the intended learning outcomes and sharing with students the extent to which these are being achieved. It is likely that, as this approach becomes embedded, students will become increasingly aware of, and engage with, the feedback they are receiving on all of their assessed work. The ELIR team recognised the Conservatoire's intention to keep monitoring this area.

#### **IT and virtual learning environment (VLE)**

26 A number of examples of good practice in the pedagogical use of IT were highlighted. A notable example from the Music discipline is the high-definition recording of student performances which enables the students to watch and reflect on their own performances. Uploading the recordings to the e-platform enables students to critique and evaluate each others' performances, and provides a digital space for each student to develop their own portfolio and reflect on their achievements.

27 Students commented positively on the IT facilities that are available, highlighting that they have good access to technical support. The Conservatoire currently uses two electronic platforms, a VLE and an e-portfolio, and is aware that some further work would be beneficial to ensure that all students are completely clear about the respective function of each.

#### **Student and staff mobility**

28 Although some students engage with outward mobility opportunities including formal student exchanges, a number of students and staff expressed reservations to the ELIR team about the value of such activity. There appeared to be barriers to greater student mobility arising from rigid approaches within the institution to credit-mapping. The Conservatoire is encouraged to adopt a more flexible approach where students are supported to achieve comparable learning outcomes through study exchanges, rather than requiring a direct match of outcomes against those in the module descriptors. In addition, the Conservatoire should consider the ways in which it can ensure that staff and students are made aware of the benefits of greater mobility.

### **Curriculum developments**

29 The new undergraduate curriculum has been explicitly designed to enable students to gain experience of disciplines outside their own named award. For example, in Bridge Week students were encouraged to bid for funding to undertake collaborative, cross-disciplinary projects. The ELIR team was given many excellent examples of highly creative and collaborative activity having taken place during the inaugural 2013 Bridge Week. Through the new Choice Modules element, students are required to select Choice Modules from within or outside their immediate discipline. Students have embraced the new developments with such enthusiasm that, in a number of cases, student demand has exceeded initial staff expectations. The Conservatoire is encouraged to consider ways of managing the likely increase in student demand for engaging with Bridge Week projects and with popular Choice Modules in future years (see paragraph 35).

30 The Conservatoire emphasised the importance of Transition Tutors and Learning Contracts to the success of the new curriculum. These elements are likely to further strengthen the arrangements for identifying and meeting the support needs of all students. In discussions with staff and students, it appeared to the ELIR team that there was some lack of clarity about the extent to which Transition Tutors were intended to provide advice to students on their choice of modules in the undergraduate curriculum. The Conservatoire has introduced a structure in which Transitions Tutors receive training and support from Transitions Coordinators. There would be benefit in the Conservatoire ensuring that the purpose and role of Transitions Tutors is made clear to all staff and students. Related to this, there would be value in the Conservatoire providing guidance to help students in their selection of co-curricular activities to ensure they are able to gain as much benefit as possible from the rich variety of opportunities that are available.

### **2.4 Approaches to promoting the development of graduate attributes, including employability**

31 The Conservatoire has an effective approach to the promotion of graduate attributes which is communicated clearly to students.

32 The majority of staff are actively engaged in relevant professions and significant numbers of visiting artists routinely work with the students. This, together with the highly vocational nature of the programmes, creates an environment in which students are treated as professional practitioners from their arrival at the Conservatoire. In addition, many programmes include work placements and the Conservatoire is highly supportive of students who gain relevant employment during their study. Students spoke positively to the ELIR team about this approach and the wider opportunities it gives them in terms of their outlook, learning experience and employability.

33 The Conservatoire has identified a set of graduate attributes which are embedded in the new undergraduate curriculum. Students take specific modules which are aimed at preparing them for their chosen profession, and spoke positively to the ELIR team about the practical benefits of this approach. The ELIR team recognised the clear positioning of research skills and practice-based research within the identified set of graduate attributes and in the learning outcomes which are set out in student handbooks. As the Conservatoire develops its research strategy, there would be benefit in considering how best to further develop research-teaching linkages.

34 Choice Modules in the new undergraduate curriculum provide a positive opportunity for students to develop their graduate attributes through collaboration with peers and professionals in other disciplines. As a further enhancement, the Conservatoire is

encouraged to consider ways of enabling students to become aware of the attributes they are gaining in this particular context.

35 Senior staff indicated that the institution is engaged with other conservatoires in tracking student cohorts over a 10-15 year period, which has the potential to provide rich data in relation to graduate destinations. There would be benefit in the Conservatoire introducing additional approaches to student tracking, for example analysing student journeys within programmes and student selection of Choice Modules (see paragraph 64).

## **2.5 Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience**

36 The Conservatoire has adopted an effective and imaginative approach to enhancing the student learning experience as exemplified by the creation and implementation of the Curriculum Reform project and the resulting new undergraduate curriculum.

# **3 Enhancement in learning and teaching**

## **3.1 Approaches to identifying and sharing good practice**

37 The Conservatoire has arrangements in place for identifying and sharing good practice and is developing a wider range of systematic opportunities as it benefits from the changes brought about by the Curriculum Reform (CR) project.

38 The sharing of good practice was facilitated carefully throughout the developmental stages of the CR project. Approaches included the use of formal thematic working groups on topics such as the student experience and externality, and informal open sessions for staff and students under the banners of 'Have Your Say' and 'Open Space Days'. During meetings with staff the ELIR team was given examples of the impact of these approaches, for instance, a student presentation on institutional culture had made a significant and positive impact on cross-institutional collaboration.

39 As the institution has progressed beyond the developmental stages of the CR project other mechanisms for sharing good practice have been introduced, such as the Vice-Principal's workshop on the NSS pilots (see paragraph 25). The annual Learning and Teaching Conference represents another structured approach to disseminating good practice. The Conservatoire has also established a Learning and Teaching Forum to provide another regular means of reviewing and disseminating good teaching practice through events. At the time of the ELIR visit, senior staff informed the ELIR team that the Learning and Teaching Forum would change its title to the Learning & Teaching Platform and would offer a spring event for staff and students and an autumn event for staff. Senior staff also outlined the process for identifying and disseminating good practice in quality assurance procedures with consideration of annual scrutiny panel reports being undertaken by the Quality and Standards Committee (see paragraphs 49 & 61).

40 The 'One Conservatoire' philosophy and culture is also leading to cross-disciplinary exchange of good practice, for example, with the continuing expansion of interdisciplinary Choice Modules. Traditionally, there has always been opportunity to share good practice across the Conservatoire during the production of major musical and theatrical events. Potentially, a very effective mechanism could be the student-led projects run during Bridge Week. It is clear that staff from across the disciplines are collaborating to support these student projects (see paragraph 29).

### **3.2 Impact of the national Enhancement Themes and related activity**

41 Strategy, policy and practice at the Conservatoire have been informed by significant engagement with the national Enhancement Themes. The Themes have had a significant impact on the Curriculum Reform (CR) project, notably the development of graduate attributes, and there is close alignment between the CR project and the current Theme, Developing and Supporting the Curriculum. There is evidence of other Themes influencing strategy and activity at the Conservatoire. For example the Research-Teaching Linkages Theme has supported the institution in its desire to thread research through the curriculum, and research skills have been introduced into the first year of the undergraduate curriculum. The Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Arts Education (see paragraph 43) has a research element designed to build a cohort of staff with the skills to link learning, teaching and research. In addition, the Conservatoire's thinking on a strategy for the third trimester (see paragraph 9) has been influenced by the national Theme on the First Year.

### **3.3 Engaging and supporting staff**

42 The Conservatoire has an effective approach to engaging and supporting staff including its large cohort of part-time hourly paid staff. The Conservatoire identified its Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Arts Education (PgCert) as a key vehicle for building staff capacity to enhance learning and teaching.

43 The PgCert is mapped to the UK Professional Standards Framework and accredited by the Higher Education Academy. It is open to academic and technical staff, with participants being given a 90-hour allowance for study. There are plans to make some modules available to administrative staff and to offer the programme outside the Conservatoire. The ELIR team heard that the PgCert is over-subscribed currently. Consequently, the Conservatoire is considering a number of options to increase its availability including offering two cohorts per year and expanding online delivery, which would also increase flexibility. Academic and technical staff who had participated on the PgCert spoke enthusiastically of the benefits and the opportunity to work with colleagues across a range of disciplines. It was clear from a sample of staff research projects that the PgCert has provided pedagogic support and underpinning for the new curriculum.

44 In discussion with the ELIR team, staff highlighted the value of informal mentoring as a way of developing new staff. 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.

45 In common with other similar institutions, the Conservatoire has the challenge of providing staff development to a large cohort of part-time hourly paid (PTHP) staff, particularly in the School of Music. Registration for the PgCert and attendance at the Annual Learning and Teaching Conference is open to PTHP staff and approximately 40 per cent of the participants at the 2012 conference were PTHP staff. In order to have closer engagement with part-time staff, the School of Music has appointed a PTHP link person who organises meetings to share information and gather opinion from the PTHP staff. In a meeting with the ELIR team, the link person described the various approaches

used by the School to engage with PTHP staff during the Curriculum Reform project development stages. In the same meeting other staff reported instances of both full-time and PTHP staff taking up research opportunities and attending HR courses, for example, on health and safety.

### **3.4 Effectiveness of the approach to promoting good practice in learning and teaching**

46 The Conservatoire has an effective approach to promoting good practice in learning and teaching. The Curriculum Reform (CR) project has led to considerable exchange of practice and ideas across the institution in a structured manner. Following on from the CR project, a number of systematic arrangements are being put in place for continuing to identify and share good practice, such as the Learning & Teaching Platform and, from 2013-14, the Committee for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Support (CELTS). In addition, there are a variety of opportunities to share good practice across disciplines in a less formal way through, for example, the significant music and theatre productions and the student-led Bridge Week. It was made clear to the ELIR team that the CR project has created a 'One Conservatoire' culture involving greater collaboration between staff in different disciplines. In addition, the PgCert has clearly been successful in supporting the curriculum developments and in providing a group of staff with the skills to promote interdisciplinary study and create research-teaching links.

## **4 Academic standards**

### **4.1 Approach to setting, maintaining and reviewing academic standards**

47 The Conservatoire has systematic processes in place for setting, maintaining and reviewing academic standards. The processes have been enhanced since the 2009 ELIR through a number of developments associated with the new curriculum including: the establishment of the common academic framework; the cross-institution assessment matrix and criteria; the mapping of learning outcomes to assessment criteria; enhancements to the programme monitoring arrangements; and greater clarity in the role of the specialist external assessors and examiners.

48 The processes for programme approval, validation, monitoring and review are described fully in the Quality Assurance Handbook. The Handbook pre-dates the identification of a revised committee structure which is due to be introduced in 2013-14. As the Conservatoire has recognised, the Handbook would benefit from being updated to reflect the revised structures. It is positive that programme handbooks clearly articulate the underpinning philosophies and expectations for students and map the expected learning outcomes to the criteria and modes of assessment.

49 Since the 2009 ELIR, a process for monitoring all minor modifications to programmes has been introduced with the Quality and Standards Committee maintaining oversight. The former Monitoring, Evaluation and Review (MER) report has been replaced by a Programme Committee Annual Report. The template for this annual programme review now requires a greater level of evaluation, self-critical reflection and response to key topics and performance indicators. The completed annual programme reports are subject to a scrutiny panel (which includes membership external to the discipline area) prior to the key issues and themes being forwarded to the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) and, from 2013-14, the new Committee for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Support (CELTS).

## **4.2 Management of assessment**

50 The Conservatoire is managing its assessment practices effectively. There is clear evidence through external examiner reports and supporting documentation of the effective management of assessment processes. There is a well-structured process in place for capturing and responding to external examiners' comments with individual staff being identified as responsible for carrying out follow-up action.

51 As part of the new curriculum, the Conservatoire has developed a common academic framework with a supporting common assessment scale and assessment matrix. The documentation is clearly student focused and intended to assist students to develop their understanding of the academic standards expected, including helping them to evaluate their own achievements through self-critical reflection.

52 Much of the assessment is based upon performance and often in public, adding an additional layer of complexity to managing the assessment process. In response to the 2009 ELIR, greater clarity has been introduced to the role of those external examiners who are directly involved in assessing student performance, including giving them the distinct title of external assessors. This level of externality is a critical component of assessing performance. The external assessor role is now fully defined and explained in the assessment handbooks.

## **4.3 Use of external reference points in managing academic standards**

53 The Conservatoire makes effective use of a range of reference points in managing its academic standards. As part of the Conservatoire's distinctive approach, all students are engaged with their respective professional organisations from an early stage. This contributes to setting high expectations and places the academic standards that students are expected to attain in a professional context from the outset.

54 In its RA the Conservatoire confirmed that all of the programmes are designed to meet the principles embodied in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). QAA subject benchmark statements were used as a point of reference during the Curriculum Reform (CR) project and in the review of master's programmes. International benchmarks are used where appropriate UK benchmarks do not exist, for example for the master's level programme in Music (MMus).

55 The Conservatoire makes reference to Bologna statements and, in particular, to the Tuning Document in Music and the Tuning Document in Theatre Education, both of which build on the Dublin Descriptors. More recently, work has been carried out in Europe to develop the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the Creative and Performing Disciplines, published in 2012. This Framework introduces seven dimensions that relate to the graduate attributes identified in the Conservatoire Strategic Plan 2012-15. The Conservatoire is encouraged to consider this additional reference point to inform future developments, such as the planned postgraduate curriculum reform.

## **4.4 Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards**

56 The Conservatoire has effective arrangements in place for securing academic standards. Through the Curriculum Reform (CR) project, the Conservatoire has reviewed and developed its processes providing consistency of experience within a common academic framework and overarching assessment scheme. A systematic review of the processes and documentation to support implementation of the CR project is ongoing, and is likely to ensure their currency and fitness for purpose.

57 The new undergraduate curriculum offers students a range of programme pathways, module patterns and option choices enabling them to expand their experience beyond their immediate discipline area. The common assessment scheme and assessment matrix have been developed to facilitate this greater curriculum flexibility and student choice while ensuring that key learning objectives are met. The development of the assessment matrix and the associated careful mapping of learning outcomes in module descriptors represents positive practice. It is likely to support students to develop self-critical reflection and encourage them to engage with feedback and discussion on their own and their peers' performance.

## **5 Self-evaluation and management of information**

### **5.1 Key features of the institution's approach**

58 Overall, the ELIR team considered 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. Many of the Conservatoire's arrangements represent planned, systematic and careful evaluation of key developments. The ELIR team considered that the majority of the evaluation was based on qualitative information and narrative views, which are important, but the team also considered that the processes would benefit from an increased use of data and target setting (see paragraphs 64 & 65). More systematic use of data and performance indicators would support the Conservatoire in its implementation of the new curriculum and in its ambition to achieve a 'One Conservatoire' approach.

#### **Curriculum Reform**

59 Evaluation processes were strong in the Curriculum Reform (CR) project through analysis and reporting on key changes, for example on Independent Learning Week and Bridge Week, to the Curriculum and ELIR Group, and on IT systems to the Implementation Task Group. The ELIR team learned that a clear monitoring and evaluation schedule for all key developments was in operation.

#### **Committee structure**

60 As part of the CR project, the Conservatoire has reviewed its committee structure. At the time of the current ELIR, the committee structure was still in transition and it was intended that the new structure would be fully implemented for the start of 2013-14. During the CR project, the Curriculum Reform Project Group and its successor, the Curriculum and ELIR Group (CEG), assumed responsibilities normally designated to a learning and teaching committee. In 2013-14, following the transition period, the Conservatoire intends that responsibility for progressing and evaluating learning and teaching enhancement will be assumed by the new Committee for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Support (CELTS).

61 Changes in the committee structure at the programme level had been introduced from 2012-13. Programme committees produce annual programme committee reports for the school management teams who, in turn, report to the institution-level Quality and Standards Committee and the Academic Board. In the future, good practice matters will be reported to the new CELTS. One of the Conservatoire's aims in introducing the new programme committees was to become more critically evaluative. There is evidence of this happening with the use of a scrutiny panel to consider all of the annual programme committee reports using a 'critical friend' model (see paragraph 49).

62 The ELIR team saw clear evidence of matters being considered and reported through the committee structures. There would be benefit in the Conservatoire clarifying the

ownership and accountability for performance indicators at the programme level, and linking this closely to monitoring and target or threshold setting at institutional level. There should also be better formal recording of closure on identified actions and recommendations. This would build on the strong evaluative culture already evident through the Curriculum and ELIR Group (CEG) and the Implementation Task Group (ITG), and on the strong links that are clearly developing between the Academic Administration and Support department and the programmes and schools.

### **Student engagement**

63 There is active and extensive student engagement in the committee structure. This is positive, providing a powerful mechanism for students to present their views on planned changes and contribute to strategic change. This aspect of student engagement is very likely to be strengthened by the new programme committee model which includes student-led, as well as staff-led, meetings. As noted elsewhere in this report (see paragraphs 8 & 23), students were also extensively involved in the Curriculum Reform project. There is less extensive use of formal, paper-based student feedback approaches, such as module-level questionnaires. However, staff and students reported to the ELIR team that student feedback through staff-student fora or through student dialogue with staff was extensive (see paragraph 23).

### **Use of data and performance indicators**

64 The ELIR team considered that the Conservatoire's procedures made limited use of data in the form of performance indicators and the robust application of targets, thresholds or impact assessment. For example, within the Monitoring, Evaluation and Review (MER) reports the use of available data was limited overall and varied between MERs. There were instances of data being used at institutional level, such as comparing SIMD20/40 admissions with other conservatoires, and some MER reports gave detailed consideration to employment data. However, the team did not see evidence of data being systematically reviewed to inform strategy, monitor the impact of initiatives or to inform enhancement. The planned move from the MER process to annual programme reporting provides an opportunity for the Conservatoire to strengthen aspects of its data and performance indicator use at the programme level.

65 At the time of the current ELIR, the Conservatoire was developing formal KPI sets, which is positive. The Conservatoire should give careful consideration to the performance indicators that are most meaningful to fit the institutional context and priorities. This should ensure the KPIs selected will be recognised as useful by staff and that they will be systematically adopted to inform and evaluate developments as well as informing the regular quality processes such as the new annual programme reports.

### **Management Information System**

66 The ELIR team had discussions with staff who are involved with the ongoing development of the Conservatoire's IT strategy (see paragraph 7) and related Management Information System (MIS). The team would encourage the Conservatoire to ensure that the necessary IT and MIS arrangements are put in place quickly to ensure key elements of the new curriculum and related quality processes can be adequately supported, for example the programme committee annual reports and the increased portfolio of Choice Modules. The implementation of Learning Contracts (see paragraph 30) and systems to support them have the potential to provide a good basis for further developing the open and positive use of MIS among staff and students.

## **5.2 Commentary on the advance information set**

67 The Conservatoire helpfully provided a range of additional material during the ELIR visits in addition to the advance information set. Overall, the ELIR team was able to confirm

that the Conservatoire has quality processes in place which meet sector expectations, including the SFC Guidance.

68 In view of a number of key changes in process and committee structure, senior staff indicated that the Quality Assurance Handbook would be updated and that a formal mapping would be undertaken of the Conservatoire's policies and practices against those identified in the UK Quality Code. There would be considerable benefit in the Conservatoire progressing these activities.

69 From its consideration of the advance information set and related documentation, the ELIR team identified a number of areas for development, many of which have been addressed elsewhere in this report including: the value of making greater, systematic use of data and KPIs to inform decision-making at institutional and programme level (see paragraphs 64 & 65); and the importance of tracking agreed actions through the committee structure to ensure their timely completion (see paragraph 62).

70 In addition, the ELIR team identified a number of areas of good practice including: the whole approach taken to the Curriculum Reform project; the extent and quality of staff-student interaction at all levels and, in particular, as part of the programme management processes; the robust use of external examiner reports including the tracking of responses through the committee structure; and the development of learning contracts as a tool for students and transition tutors.

### **5.3 Use of external reference points in self-evaluation**

71 The Conservatoire meets sector expectations in the range and manner in which it uses external reference points in its evaluative processes. Of particular note is the robust use of external examiner reports. There is clear evidence of these reports being considered at school and institutional level, and in the Monitoring Evaluation and Review (MER) processes.

72 The Curriculum Reform project involved extensive use of external reference points and external individuals in its development and evaluation (see paragraph 11). The Conservatoire also emphasised that it continually benchmarks itself against a group of conservatoires internationally. All of the Conservatoire's programmes are developed in line with the SCQF and use is made of the QAA subject benchmark statements. International benchmarks have also been used and the Conservatoire is encouraged to make use of updated European reference points (see paragraph 55).

73 As noted earlier (see paragraph 68) 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.

### **5.4 Management of public information**

74 The Conservatoire meets sector expectations in terms of the range of material it makes publicly available in a variety of formats. It should proceed with its planned review of the procedures for securing the currency and accuracy of public information.

75 In its Reflective Analysis, the Conservatoire indicated that responsibilities for managing public information are split between the Marketing Department and Academic Administration & Support. Key academic and support information, such as the Programme Portfolio, Applicant Guides and Information for Students with Disabilities, are reviewed and updated annually. Some materials, such as programme handbooks, are based on the

currently approved programme documents. The Conservatoire also indicated that a review of procedures for securing the currency of all website content was to be conducted by the Head of Marketing in early 2013. However, at the time of the current ELIR that post was vacant. The Conservatoire should proceed with its intended review and extend that to include all types of public information and the associated gateway processes for changing that information. There would be benefit in the Conservatoire considering the value of having a single accountable 'officer', even if operational responsibility for updating information continued to be split between departments.

## **5.5 Effectiveness of the approach to self-evaluation and management of information**

76 The evidence from the current ELIR demonstrates that the Conservatoire is highly reflective and evaluative in its strategic planning and management processes. In particular, the Conservatoire demonstrated a robust capacity for self-reflection through the development and evaluation of the Curriculum Reform project. The RA submitted for the current ELIR was strongly self-reflective. The careful use of external examiner reports is also positive practice. In the revised committee structure, the planned move from the Monitoring, Evaluation and Review processes to the new annual programme reporting arrangements is a positive development. This will particularly be the case if the reporting framework reinforces the need for evidence-based planning, development and evaluation at curriculum level.

77 The Conservatoire is encouraged to develop its arrangements in a number of ways as detailed elsewhere in this report, including: developing and using a full set of KPIs that fit the context of the institution; ensuring the wider availability and routine use of the MIS to programme teams; increasing the use of quantitative data within the monitoring and evaluation processes, together with the use of thresholds and targets to promote intended enhancements in the curriculum; and developing greater clarity around the roles, remits and accountabilities of academic committees and operational teams, including their relationships to each other.

## **6 Collaborative activity**

### **6.1 Key features of the institution's strategic approach**

78 The Conservatoire has partnerships with five institutions in relation to collaborative programmes:

- University of Glasgow - the BEd programme is delivered jointly with the University of Glasgow and awarded by the Conservatoire. Following a national review of teacher education, Teaching Scotland's Future 2010, the Conservatoire undertook a significant review of the programme which resulted in it being restructured. It has also been aligned with the principles and philosophies of the Curriculum Reform project.
- University of St Andrews - the University awards research degrees for postgraduate research students studying at the Conservatoire. The Memorandum of Agreement with the University was renewed in 2011.
- National Piping Centre - the BA Hons (Scottish Music - Piping) programme is delivered jointly with the National Piping Centre and awarded by the Conservatoire.
- Scottish Ballet - the Conservatoire works very closely with Scottish Ballet in the delivery of the BA Modern Ballet programme although, formally, the programme is delivered and awarded by the Conservatoire. In addition, there is close collaboration with Scottish Ballet over the MMus (Piano for Dance) programme

which is offered as a specialism within the Conservatoire's MMus provision to one student per year.

- Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI - this partnership was in development at the time of the current ELIR. The intention is to develop a master's programme aimed at experienced Gaelic-speaking theatre artists.

79 In addition, the Conservatoire has memoranda with a number of other institutions and organisations relating to a variety of collaborative work aimed at enriching the student experience and providing opportunities for links to the professions. As part of a strategic move to refine its collaborative partnerships, the Conservatoire indicated that it intends to edit and update these agreements during 2012-13, which is clearly an important and useful activity.

## **6.2 Securing academic standards of collaborative provision**

80 The Conservatoire has effective arrangements in place for securing the academic standards of its collaborative provision. This view is supported by reports from external examiners and professional body accreditations.

81 The Conservatoire is the lead institution for the BEd programme. It is managed jointly by two programme leaders, one in each institution, with the Conservatoire retaining responsibility for oversight. The programme is professionally accredited by the General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS). Where modules are developed and delivered by the University of Glasgow, they are approved jointly by both institutions. Entry requirements are now aligned with those of the University, and the module size adopted by the Conservatoire as part of its common academic framework also aligns with that of the University.

82 The partnership with the University of St Andrews is overseen by a Joint Board, which holds an annual validation review meeting to evaluate the effectiveness of the collaborative arrangements. The Pro-Dean (Arts) of the University is a member of the Conservatoire's Research Degrees Committee and is responsible for monitoring all decisions on awards on behalf of the University. Individual research student's work is subject to an annual review process, and the Conservatoire indicated that the effectiveness of its arrangements was reflected in the number of on-time completions.

## **6.3 Enhancing the student learning experience on collaborative programmes**

83 The Conservatoire has close relationships with its collaborative partners. This, and the student-centred approach promoted through the Curriculum Reform process, means the Conservatoire has arrangements which enable it to enhance the student experience on collaborative programmes.

84 In the case of the relationships with the University of Glasgow and the University of St Andrews, students are matriculated at both the Conservatoire and the relevant university, enabling the students to access the resources of both institutions. In discussions with the ELIR team, students were positive about their experiences, indicating that they benefitted from their joint matriculation status and the additional resources this provided. In particular, students were very positive about the level and quality of the support and guidance they received from the central support services in the Conservatoire.

85 Since the 2009 ELIR, the Conservatoire has appointed a Lecturer in Research post and this has facilitated a more systematic approach to staff and research student training. As the Conservatoire continues to evaluate its partnership with the University of St Andrews,

there would be value in considering whether students and staff could benefit from greater access to the research training opportunities available at the University.

86 The Conservatoire highlighted that its relationship with Scottish Ballet is strengthened by the fact that the two institutions employ two of the same staff on a fractional basis: the Artistic Director of the Modern Ballet programme is also the Depute Artistic Director of Scottish Ballet and another key member of the programme team is also the Head of the Associate Programme at Scottish Ballet. These links facilitate the close management of the collaborative relationship and provide students with access to a professional resource as an integral part of the academic programme.

#### **6.4 Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative activity**

87 The Conservatoire has an effective approach to managing its collaborative activity. This is evident from the documentation relating to the regular quality processes and is supported by the reports from external examiners and professional bodies.

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