Quality Enhancement and Standards Review

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Review Report

December 2022

Contents

Introduction

This is a report of a review under the [Quality Enhancement and Standards Review](#) (QESR) method conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) as part of Phase 1 of the Scottish Quality Enhancement arrangements at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

The review took place on 9 December 2022 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Liam Brady (Student Reviewer)
- Pamela Calabrese (Co-ordinating Reviewer)
- Professor Hilary Grainger (Academic Reviewer)

QESR is Phase 1 of a two-phase approach that enables the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to fulfil its statutory obligation under Section 13 of the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005* to ensure that provision is made for assessing and enhancing the quality of fundable higher education provided by fundable bodies for academic quality and enhancement between 2022-24. The second phase of QAA's external quality review arrangements starts in 2024-25 to coincide with the implementation of new tertiary quality arrangements.

The main purpose of this review was to:

- provide assurance about the provider's management of its responsibilities for academic standards to inform an enhancement-led full institutional review in Phase 2
- provide assurance about the provider's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities for students to inform an enhancement-led full review in Phase 2
- report on any features of good practice
- make recommendations for action.

About the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS; the Conservatoire) was founded in 1847 as the Glasgow Athenaeum, initially offering music and subsequently extending its curriculum across the performing and production arts. The Conservatoire has continued to evolve, gaining degree-awarding powers in 1993-94 and adopting its current name in 2011.

In 2022-23, the Conservatoire has around 380 staff with 1,170 students enrolled on its degree programmes (both figures are full-time equivalent) and offers programmes across the disciplines of dance, drama, music, production, film and education; and at undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research levels.

Findings

From the evidence presented, the review team is confident that the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is making effective progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision to enable effective arrangements to be in place for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

Good practice

The QESR team found the following **feature of good practice**.

- **Student partnership:** The range of opportunities available for students to participate as partners in decision-making - for example, through the Student Experience Forum, annual staff-student Programme Committees and student input to annual monitoring action plans.

Recommendations for action

The QESR team makes the following **recommendations for action**.

- **Assessment:** RCS should use this cycle of Curriculum Review to ensure greater consistency in the design and delivery of assessment, building upon the progress made in some areas.

- **Curriculum Review process:** Curriculum Review should be included in the Quality Assurance Handbook, describing what this process is, ensuring information is reflective of the current approach, and clearly distinguishes Curriculum Review from other quality assurance and enhancement processes.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Strategic approach to enhancement

1   The QESR team is confident that the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland has effective arrangements to monitor, review and enhance its strategic approach to enhancement. The team considered a range of draft strategies, minutes of key institutional committees with responsibility for quality and standards, learning and teaching, and the wider student experience; and met with staff and students.

2   The development of the Strategic Plan (2021-26) was delayed owing to the COVID-19 pandemic but RCS has a clear approval timetable for completion, and it is due to be completed by spring 2023. The Strategic Plan Summary provides a mission statement, values and strategic objectives articulated as 'perspectives' - *People, Place and Promise.* Each strategic area has a supporting plan. At the time of the review visit, however, the strategic area plans were all described in the future tense, with the explanation that their timelines might vary but they would, collectively, lead to the fulfilment of the Strategic Plan by 2030. Given the nascent form of many of the projects which sit underneath the supporting plans, the QESR team was not in a position to judge how effective this approach would be to deliver the strategies. The QESR team noted, however, that there is a lot of work to be undertaken in terms of developing a very ambitious range of projects.

3   RCS is developing a range of strategies intended to align with and fulfil the objectives of the Conservatoire's Strategic Plan over an extended period (2021-30). The Learning and Teaching Strategy, which is also scheduled for completion by spring 2023, seeks to provide distinctiveness of provision, increased collaboration (both internally across disciplines and externally with other institutions and industry), more inclusive curricula, and increased impact and influence nationally. Other new strategies under development - including the Digital Strategy and Research Strategy - indicate a focus on developing digital literacies and on streamlining the curriculum. The aims and objectives set out in these strategies will inform the current Curriculum Review for Undergraduate provision, the Postgraduate Review (2024), and the next Undergraduate Review (2027).

4   The delivery of strategies is project-led, bringing together groups of staff and students, ensuring inclusivity of approach and practical value to take forward agendas with oversight by the Academic Board and Academic Management Team. The length of projects varies across the short, medium and long-term, with some projects anticipated to take place within a year, some lasting around three years, and others taking an extended period, potentially completing with the conclusion of the Strategic Plan in 2030. In view of the number and complexity of the projects planned, the QESR team welcomes the proposal by RCS to develop a project template and reporting template early in 2023 that should help to ensure consistency in approach, monitoring and evaluation across the range of developments.

5   Each Senior Management Team member has a strategy for their area to provide strong senior-level oversight. The QESR team heard that the first six months of the next calendar year will be a critical period in the development of these strategies as they are brought into alignment with each other for final sign off as a complementary and coherent suite by the summer of 2023.

6   The draft Learning and Teaching Strategy is ambitious and clearly articulated, with the student learning experience as a key element throughout. Learning and Teaching priorities link to the three perspectives of the Strategic Plan. Staff explained how reflections from learning during the pandemic have helped to inform its development. 10 indicative

projects, which include *Decomplexifying the Curriculum: An Inclusive Academy and Sustainable Art-making*, are listed and align with the overarching objectives of the RCS Strategic Plan. The Learning and Teaching Strategy aims to address societal issues and prepare students for life after the Conservatoire. The QESR team noted that the plan closely mirrors the Strategic Plan in principles and values relating to teachers and learners and references the Curriculum Review.

7   The Digital Strategy is led by a Digital Strategy Group and includes members of the Technology-Enhanced Learning Forum (TELF). This strategy aims to create a digitally-enhanced curriculum for all, by means of a digital environment (physically and virtually) which will support performing arts practice by creating an empowered digital community that embeds digital upskilling and active participation. While the pandemic had caused delay to some areas, the QESR team heard that technology-enhanced learning had been an area of considerable progress, and the valuable practices adopted during the pandemic had been carried through to inform strategy. This is discussed further in paragraphs 32-36.

8   The Research Strategy for 2022-30, which was in draft form at the time of the review visit, is informed by a review of the previous planning period (2013-20). This draft strategy sets out five strategic aims for research and knowledge exchange in the forthcoming period, each of which is mapped to the three perspectives articulated in the Strategic Plan. The Research Strategy is to be developed by means of seven projects between 2022 and 2024.

9   An International Strategy is also under development. This is intended to support a range of activity, including international recruitment, international practice and research, and collaboration including collaborative provision. At the time of the review visit, this strategy was at an earlier stage of development than some other draft strategies, although its priorities were listed, underpinned by some contextual detail and intentions.

10   An Equality and Diversity Strategy is also currently being explored. RCS seeks to embed principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) across all the RCS strategies and a range of policies. The QESR team found evidence of this throughout the documentation provided - for example, the Dignity at Work and Study Policy, the Anti-Racism action plan, and ongoing evaluation and planning around equality outcomes.

11   The Conservatoire's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Forum decided that the institutional Anti-Racism Action Plan should be updated on an annual rather than quarterly basis as the regular School-level, discipline-based updates were considered more useful in reflecting the specific needs and requirements. Furthermore, this approach was expected to encourage direct engagement by students and staff. Under the Anti-Racism Strategy, much of the responsibility for effecting curricular change has, similarly, been devolved to the schools and departments. Internal reflection, which included discussion at the institution's Quality and Standards Committee, confirmed that the approach was working effectively, and this was supported by external evaluation in the annual monitoring process.

12   There is alignment of the EDI work with the draft Learning and Teaching Strategy, one of the aims of which is to ensure inclusive activity. The Learning and Teaching Strategy cites 'An Inclusive Academy' which includes Curriculum Review and the EDI Forum and EDI working groups as well as designing inclusive assessment for learning and employability. The RCS commitment to EDI is further evidenced in Academic Board minutes.

13   The Curriculum Review, Postgraduate Taught Review (2024) and Undergraduate Review (2027) are intended as vehicles for the implementation of RCS's strategies as outlined by Academic Board. They provide the opportunity to evaluate the relevance and

sustainability of the curriculum, review principles and expected graduate outcomes to ensure relevant alignment with industry needs, particularly post-Covid, and to streamline the curriculum. The embedding of meaningful collaboration will be explored together with anti-racism and decolonisation, climate crisis, sustainability, conflict management, mental health and personal development.

14   The QESR team notes RCS's positive engagement with the current Enhancement Theme - 'Resilient Learning Communities'. RCS approached the Enhancement Theme by taking stock of their current activities that related to the Theme and then putting out a call for project proposals. Six were received from which one, entitled *Creative Conversations*, was selected for development. This was led by an institutional team. Nine sessions were held; two facilitated by students. There was no external engagement at that point. In Year 2, the theme of 'Coaching' was taken forward by a Steering Group comprising six individuals committed to coaching. Eight staff met eight times during the year and explored different coaching models. In this year, there was also collaboration with the College Development Network. The work was evaluated in an Evaluation Report authored by the Head of Postgraduate Learning and Teaching.

15   The QESR team considered the documentation that illustrated engagement with the Enhancement Theme to be thorough. It included slides from two recent events: a Coaching Conference held in June 2022 and the RCS Curriculum Day on 20 September 2022.

16   In addition to these specific projects, the QESR team saw evidence that RCS seeks to embed learning from the Enhancement Themes - for example, under guidance notes, the Undergraduate Academic Framework asks for a demonstration of the Enhancement Theme in the Specification document.

Student partnership

17   The QESR team is confident in the Conservatoire's approach to developing and maintaining its student engagement and partnership arrangements. The team considered the Student Partnership Agreement and evaluation of it, Outcome Agreement report, Students' Union reports to the Academic Board, and minutes from key institutional committees, and met with staff and students.

18   The QESR team considers RCS's approach to student engagement to be a particular strength, with evidence of student feedback and participation across all key processes related to the management of quality and standards. The student body is also represented on every academic committee and the Board of Governors. The Student Union reports to Academic Board include evidence of this positive working relationship with priority areas for students being heard and acted upon. There was also evidence of student feedback informing institution-led review, student involvement as members of review panels, and the student voice contributing to Curriculum Review. The review team learned that students contribute to the development of programme annual monitoring action plans and that student feedback gathered through annual monitoring is considered by the Quality and Standards Committee. The QESR team identified as **good practice** the range of opportunities available for students to participate as partners in decision-making at RCS - for example, through the Student Experience Forum, annual staff-student Programme Committees and student input to annual monitoring action plans.

19   The QESR team notes the positive steps which have been taken to enhance student engagement - for example, the regular meetings now held between senior leadership and the Students' Union President and Vice-Presidents, and the additional support available to them. Through its Learning and Teaching Strategy, RCS is committed

to developing the student voice. Similarly, in the Student Partnership Agreement, increasing student engagement is noted as a priority for two student groups in particular - those within the School of Drama, Dance, Production and Film and those enrolled on the Learning and Teaching postgraduate taught programme. While progress has been made in broadening the range of student voices - for example, in addressing student representation of those with disabilities - students have fed back to the institution that the impact of intensive courses can be a barrier to students getting involved in academic extra-curricular activities. The QESR team encourages RCS to continue in its efforts to explore how best to support students in representative roles and diversify the student voice.

20   The QESR team noted some inconsistencies in how students in representative, quality and committee roles are supported and trained. For example, the Students' Union appears to be responsible for organising some elements of training that are delivered by Student Partnership in Quality Scotland (sparqs). The QESR team heard in meetings, however, that RCS had no formal approach to training and it is delivered through a combination of the Students' Union and staff in academic support roles. While the QESR team welcomes the planned introduction of a new sabbatical officer, with the remit to be focused on student representation, training and supporting students in specialist roles is key to meaningful participation and there is an expectation that the institution will take ultimate responsibility for ensuring a consistent approach to training. RCS will need to be cognisant of its institutional responsibilities as it continues developments in this area.

21   The Students' Union President is line-managed by the Deputy Registrar. On exploring this in meetings, the QESR team heard that this was partly a response to constraints on resource resulting from the size of the institution and the arrangement was intended to ensure that there was dedicated support for the SU President from a member of staff who could also provide a channel to other specialist support or resource, such as Marketing. Thus, the QESR team was reassured that autonomy of the Students' Union is respected and line-management arrangements do not impact on the independence of the student body.

22   The QESR team is confident that RCS has a diverse and robust student support offering. A member of the Conservatoire Welfare team was appointed to support the Students' Union following ELIR 4. The Student Partnership Agreement notes that a priority for 2022-23 is to increase visibility and optimise the current offering to students. RCS has made good progress in enhancing student support, as evidenced by its commitment to increased resource, use of pastoral tutorials in Ballet, and establishment of the Student Disability Committee which has a communication line through to the EDI forum. However, there appeared to be some inconsistency in staff understanding of disability support and implementation of learning agreements, suggesting to the QESR team that there is still some work to be done in this area.

Action taken since ELIR 4

23   The QESR team is confident that the Conservatoire has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its actions taken in response to ELIR 4. The team considered the ELIR 4 action plan, Follow-up report, and minutes from key institutional committees, and followed up on key areas in meetings with staff and students.

24   The QESR team was satisfied that RCS has made good progress in addressing the five formal recommendations made by the ELIR 4 review team, as well as responding to further advice and reflections that were contained within the Technical Report. The institution's responses are tracked in an ELIR Spreadsheet which details 28 action points and progress against them. RCS states in its Annual Quality Report for academic year

2021-22 that 'ELIR 4 actions are completed, or in train, with clear end dates'.

25   As noted in paragraphs 2-3, there is evidence that plans to ensure the alignment of institutional strategies with the Strategic Plan are continuing, with the caveat that the development of the Strategic Plan has been interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. RCS has prioritised work to make processes, documentation and evaluation more efficient, ensuring alignment to strategies and clearer communications. An Assessment and Feedback Code of Practice has been developed and progress has been made in relation to its communication through student-facing documentation and the development of the portal.

26   The QESR team found evidence to show that the communication of key institutional policies has improved. Staff and students are made aware of key institutional policies and regulations by a variety of means including committee membership and weekly updates to staff and students from the Principal and Heads of Department. Heads of Programmes come together in School Management Team meetings for updates on policies and regulations. The new Academic Registrar/Secretary has begun a three-stage review of the student learner journey and policies and regulations are now outlined on the RCS portal and illustrated by flow charts. Programme communications are coordinated by School Directors and regular cohort meetings with staff and students. Communication and support for students had been effective during the pandemic, as evidenced through notes from the fortnightly Academic Management Team/Academic Continuity Group joint meetings, discussion at key committees - including the Students' Union President's reports to Academic Board - and student feedback. Staff and students also spoke positively about this in meetings during the review visit.

27   ELIR 4 recommended RCS establish an institutional strategy for assessment and bring greater clarity and consistency to the design and delivery of assessments including assessment weighting and marking practices. The QESR team notes that significant developments have taken place in relation to approaches to assessment and student feedback - for example, the Assessment and Feedback Code of Practice. RCS reported that a number of issues relating to assessment remain under review, including the award of pass/fail at master's level. RCS confirmed to the QESR team that the issue of the differences in the loading of assessments across modules is to be addressed through the Curriculum Review with further guidance in the Assessment and Feedback Code of Practice.

28   There have been operational changes, including the development of assessment rubrics introduced into a number of programmes. The students who met the team were clear about the ways in which they are being assessed. The QESR team recognises progress made in relation to assessment approaches in some areas, but notes that there is more work to be done, particularly to ensure consistency across the institution both in terms of articulation and implementation, and **recommends** that RCS should use this cycle of Curriculum Review to ensure greater consistency in the design and delivery of assessment, building upon the progress made in some areas.

29   In ELIR 4, RCS was asked to reflect on its approach to self-evaluation and review to ensure it is able to optimise the learning from its review activity while streamlining the burden of conducting multiple reviews. A revised Annual Monitoring process was introduced for the 2019-20 cycle which removed the requirement for a full report to be submitted in programme annual monitoring in addition to a summary report and action plan, and this has been received positively.

30   RCS was also asked to review the use of the virtual learning environment to ensure there is more consistent use of learning technologies across the curriculum and to consider how these could be used to promote engagement and to facilitate sharing key information between staff and students. This is being addressed through the Digital Strategy which is in

draft form and aligns with the RCS Strategic Plan objectives. The Digital Strategy also relates to the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and there will be linked projects that deliver in both strategy areas. The QESR team was informed that RCS has begun to restructure and centralise its IT function, in support of learning and systems. (The relationships of the developing strategies is considered above in paragraph 7.)

31   While the QESR team could be confident that progress is being made to address the ELIR 4 recommendations, this view was based on consideration of a range of documents - including draft policies and strategies; minutes and notes from key committees and groups; internal reflections; and meetings held during the review visit - rather than the Action Plan commentary, which is not clear about the current status of actions. A number remain recorded as both completed and ongoing and yet the Institution-Led Review of Quality suggests that the ELIR 4 actions have definite end dates. A clearer record of the status of actions would be beneficial.

Sector-wide enhancement topic

32   The QESR team is confident that the Conservatoire has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering. The QESR team considered RCS's paper - 'Enhancement Topic Reflection' - which clearly sets out the significant priorities in digital/blended learning. Other relevant evidence relating to the Topic in documents provided as part of this review included Development of a Digital Strategy and the report of the Fair Access Committee to Academic Board (March 2022) which referred to a short-life working group that would assess the viability and specification of a pre-higher education virtual learning environment as part of the institution's approach to technology-enhanced fair access. The draft Learning and Teaching Strategy also considers this topic - for example, through the inclusion of an explicit objective around the development of a technology-enhanced learning environment

33   RCS has built upon the work it has been undertaking in online and blended learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and has developed a set of strategic priorities. These include the creation of a centralised digital support, development and management unit. This will bring into a single team expertise that is currently dispersed across RCS, with the aim of improving visibility and availability of specialist skills, enabling a more effective institutional approach.

34   The Technology-Enhanced Learning Forum's (TELF) bi-annual report to Academic Board in May 2022 explains that discussions around digital strategy and planning will be conducted as part of the Undergraduate Curriculum Review process. The Academic Board noted that RCS was not in a position to make significant investment in digital equipment and that meaningful partnerships would be required to support the Conservatoire's ambitions and adaptability within a fast-moving environment. As the relevant processes and strategies are still in progress or under development, the QESR team understands that discussion around resourcing and implementation will take place during the completion of this work.

35   Digital surveys in 2020 and 2021 led to a review of the virtual learning environment (VLE), and student and staff engagement with the VLE. RCS collected a range of data to drive future planning and, in meetings, staff reported that the new dashboard and app under development for the portal - 'My Day' and showcased at TELF - will provide a new interface for staff and students. Staff explained to the review team how this was intended to allow for a more targeted and personalised interface for staff and students that could better support innovation and would enable a more equitable experience for students across subjects.

36   RCS reported it has reflected on and 'socialised' the topic, concluding that, while some staff engage well, others need more persuasion by those conversant with technologies in order to stimulate collaboration between staff from different areas. As a small institution, it is looking carefully at the desired balance between in-person provision and the use of technologies in order to deepen engagement. RCS is increasing its engagement with industry professionals as the use of technology advances in the cultural sector, in order to drive technology in the creative arts.

Academic standards and quality processes

Key features of the institution's approach to managing quality and setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards

37   The QESR team is confident that RCS has effective arrangements for the monitoring and review of its approach to managing quality, and to setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards. The team considered the Institution-Led Review reports and approaches to annual monitoring and Institution-Led Review, minutes from institutional committees, and met with staff and students.

38   The QESR team found that RCS's arrangements for managing quality and setting standards meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and align with the guidance issued by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Institutional policies relating to programme and module development and approval are aligned to sector expectations expressed in the Quality Code, take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF) and relevant qualification frameworks. Institutional guidance is detailed and comprehensive and promotes a consistent approach, which is understood and accessible to staff.

39   The institution has two main quality assurance and enhancement processes set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook: Annual Monitoring and Programme Review. In other documents, RCS also refers to a periodic Curriculum Review exercise. The current cycle of Curriculum Review aims to simplify the curriculum, building on achievements of the 2011 major curriculum review project and informed by the undergraduate Academic Framework which guides the review process and outlines overarching principles. The review team can confirm that the institution is currently on schedule with its review of all undergraduate provision and a review of taught postgraduate provision will follow in 2024. The annual monitoring process requires programme teams to detail significant changes made to programmes, enabling the Quality and Standards Committee to have oversight of all revisions and their associated impact. Recently, the annual monitoring process has been streamlined to minimise duplication of effort as programme teams prepare to participate in Curriculum Review.

40   The Quality Assurance Handbook describes the institutional approach to quality and is reviewed annually. In discussions with the QESR team, staff demonstrated an understanding of the key processes within the Handbook. The QESR team noted that the Handbook refers to Programme Review and not Curriculum Review, and defines the purpose of Programme Review as confirming that the proposed modified programme is maintained at an appropriate academic level and is of sufficient academic quality. This does not reflect the strategic intent of the current cycle of Curriculum Review, which is to review all undergraduate provision to 'decomplexify the curriculum'. As a consequence, the relationship between Curriculum Review and Programme Review is not clear. The QESR Team **recommends** that Curriculum Review should be included in the Quality Assurance Handbook, describing what this process is, ensuring information is reflective of the current approach, and clearly distinguishes Curriculum Review from other quality assurance and

enhancement processes.

41   The QESR team found that the institution seeks to improve the quality of its student support services in alignment with the guidance issued by the SFC. Professional Services staff contribute to the development of annual monitoring action plans and there is evidence of their contributions to the student experience and of an enhancement approach within these areas. The QESR team notes the institution's intent to use the current Curriculum Review and launch of the Strategic Plan in 2023 to expand Professional Services Review to enable benchmarking of progress against objectives in the Strategic Plan and to recognise the cooperation between academic and non-academic staff. As RCS continues to develop this area, it is encouraged to continue to reflect on the SFC guidance to ensure that the institutional approach to reviewing Professional Services meets expectations.

42   RCS's approach to quality is overseen by the Quality and Standards Committee, reporting to Academic Board. From the minutes available, it was evident that the Committee has appropriate oversight and carries out its obligations in accordance with its terms of reference. This includes consideration of student feedback, approaches to assessment as evidenced by the annual monitoring summary report, and consideration of modifications to modules and new module proposals. The QESR team notes the Conservatoire's approach provides opportunity for reflection, discussion and the contribution of a variety of stakeholders, including external members, to the enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment and that the sharing of effective practice is now embedded in annual Joint Management Team meetings.

43   The Conservatoire's draft International Strategy describes the institutional approach to collaboration, which includes Memoranda of Understanding and collaborations, but currently no joint awards or collaborative partnership provision. The Conservatoire is cognisant of the potential benefits of extending partnership relationships and has a comprehensive process for the approval and review of collaborative partnership within the Quality Assurance Handbook with appropriate governance in place to ensure oversight of collaborative provision. The QESR team notes that this section of the Handbook is currently under review.

Use of external reference points in quality processes

44   The QESR team is confident that the Conservatoire has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to the use of external reference points in quality processes. Evidence that the team considered included the mapping of the quality processes against the Quality Code, minutes from key institutional committees, and meetings with staff and students.

45   RCS has evidenced its mapping of different institutional policies and practice to the guiding principles of each theme in the UK Quality Code. As observed by the review team of ELIR 4, however, this could be more reflective by identifying strengths and weaknesses in the institution's approach. Thus, the QESR team also encourages RCS to adopt a more evaluative approach to engagement with the Quality Code. From meetings with the QESR team, it was apparent that RCS was aware of sector developments with regards to the Quality Code and its regulatory position, but there was no evidence of regular and ongoing engagement with mapping to the UK Quality Code, and the QESR team considered that further work by the institution might usefully be done in this area.

46   RCS has designed its Programme Review process to ensure that programmes take account of, and remain current with, key sector reference points, including QAA guidance, the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2015) and any professional, statutory and

regulatory body (PSRB) requirements. The use of a pro forma document provided in the Quality Assurance Handbook requires staff to detail the sector guidance which has been referenced in the development of the programme. This supports staff in programme development through making explicit the need to draw on key sector reference points and guides, and also ensures that there is transparency around the external reference points used to inform the development.

47   The Quality Assurance Handbook is currently under review, an exercise which is scheduled to be completed by the end of the 2022-23 academic session. The version shared with the QESR team, however, is built on and explicitly references key sector standards, including the UK Quality Code, *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF), and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. The Programme Handbook template ensures learning outcomes are mapped by level to the SCQF characteristics and the Dublin Descriptors. There are two Academic Frameworks: one for undergraduate provision and another for postgraduate taught provision. Both Academic Frameworks are consistent with the SCQF and integrate graduate attributes and appropriate QAA Subject Benchmark Statements (where available) at module, level and programme learning outcomes. The Curriculum Review process requires programme teams to ensure alignment of programmes to the appropriate Academic Framework.

48   The Assessment and Feedback Code of Practice, developed in response to an ELIR 4 recommendation, includes core principles and maps to the SCQF and Subject Benchmark Statements. The QESR team noted that assessment practices are considered as part of Curriculum Review/Programme Review and Annual Monitoring with key issues identified by the Quality and Standards Committee. RCS intends to use the current cycle of Curriculum Review to explore further the institution's approaches to assessment, as discussed in paragraphs 27-28.

49   RCS makes appropriate use of external expertise in verification of standards and monitoring quality. The Quality Assurance Handbook notes that, on appointment, external examiners are provided with links to the UK Quality Code, the SCQF and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. There is evidence of external examiner feedback informing annual monitoring, and of institutional oversight of external examiner reports by the Quality and Standards Committee. In addition, an annual monitoring summary feedback report is produced by the Quality and Standards Committee in collaboration with an external who provides critical comment and analysis.

Use of data and evidence to inform self-evaluation and decision-making

50   The QESR team is confident that the Conservatoire has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to the use of data and evidence to inform self-evaluation and decision-making. The team considered RCS's reports to SFC, and the Conservatoire's use of data on retention and progression, degree outcomes and complaints and appeals, and feedback from students and external examiners.

51   RCS has appointed a Statistical Analyst who plays a key role in data management, interpretation and dissemination. This appointment has had a positive impact through the development of more sophisticated use and interrogation of data at various levels across the institution - for example, by providing trend data on the annual recruitment and applications cycle report, five-year trend data on the performance indicators considered by the Quality and Standards Committee, and analysis of NSS results. As a consequence, staff in a range of positions were confident that they had a better understanding of the data available to them and could, therefore, make more informed decisions around prioritisation of actions.

This included, for example, identifying where communication had been the primary issue, rather than the situation to which that communication related.

52   The Academic Board considers a wide range of data including Fair Access, National Student Survey (NSS) Outcomes, Graduate Outcomes, student and applicant data, as well as student appeals. Detailed data sets relating to complaints were provided to the QESR team. A quarterly report is taken to senior management and the Board of Governors on key performance information from this data.

53   Data play a key role in the annual monitoring process at RCS. They are used in programme reapproval, the production of action plans for the year ahead, and reflective analyses of Student Recruitment, Progression, Achievement and Employment. Further, student feedback from Programme Committees also informs annual monitoring reports and action plans, and is shared at institutional level through discussion at the Quality and Standards Committee. With regard to course completion rates, relevant data indicate that those students with a declared disability are significantly less likely to complete successfully than their peers and have been identified as an 'at risk' group. The panel notes the positive development of the Disability Advisor role becoming full-time but remains unclear on what work is being done to improve student retention of those with a declared disability.

54   NSS responses from both the School of Drama, Dance, Production and Film and School of Music indicate that a high value is placed on student feedback and that actions are taken at the most senior level to respond to student concerns. In meetings with staff, it was reported that, within the School of Music, there is a focus on heads of department becoming more directly engaged with gathering and acting on student feedback to understand and combat problems that are arising.

55   The QESR team notes the positive action by Academic Board of proactively diversifying its membership, becoming more representative of the student body, and aspiring to diversify further both the staff and student population of the Conservatoire. Further, data for particular student groups have been documented in the Anti-Racism Action Plan as well as the annual disability and counselling report, indicating the effective intersectional approach to data from RCS as it works to become a more equitable institution.