

Enhancement-led Institutional Review of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Outcome Report

March 2013

Contents

About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method.....	1
About this review.....	1
About the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.....	2
Overarching judgement about the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.....	3
Areas of positive practice	3
Areas for development.....	4
What happens next?	5
Further information.....	5

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.¹ You can also find more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.²

Further details about the enhancement-led approach can be found in an accompanying [ELIR information document](#),³ 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 Outcome 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, as follows:

- 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).

This report sets out the overarching judgement formed by the ELIR team 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.

It is possible for the overarching judgement to be expressed in three levels which indicate that the institution's arrangements are: effective; have limited effectiveness; or are not effective. More detail on these categories is provided in the ELIR information document.

The overarching judgement for this report can be found on page 3, followed by the areas of positive practice and the areas for development.

A more detailed [Technical Report](#) is also available for this review.⁴ The Technical Report sets out the ELIR team's findings under each of the headings in the ELIR 3 report structure.

¹ Further information about the ELIR method: www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/elir.aspx

² Further information about QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus

³ ELIR information document: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/ELIR-information.aspx

⁴ Technical Report: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/Reports/Pages/ELIR-RCS-13.aspx

About the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

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 930 students studying on 10 undergraduate and four postgraduate taught programmes. In addition, 16 students were engaged on research degree programmes. 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.

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'.

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.

Areas of positive practice

- 1 The ELIR has identified a number of areas of positive practice at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and these are summarised below.
- 2 **Undergraduate curriculum** - The Conservatoire has successfully developed a new undergraduate curriculum which is having a transformational effect on the culture of the institution and which is distinctive and innovative among conservatoires in the UK and internationally. 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. In addition, the careful mapping of learning outcomes onto the assessment matrix will support students to become self-critical in reflecting on their own and their peers' achievements.
- 3 **Curriculum Reform project** - The design of the curriculum was informed by engaging external peers, including those from outside the performing arts disciplines, and there was significant use of national and international reference points throughout the Curriculum Reform project. Implementation of Curriculum Reform was inclusive of staff and student opinion through extensive internal consultation.
- 4 **Staff-student partnership** - There is a strong staff-student partnership and a clear practitioner community, into which students are fully integrated. A powerful learning experience is delivered through the use of 'vertical' opportunities in which students from different years perform alongside professional practitioners.
- 5 **Graduate attributes and employability** - Students are encouraged in the development of graduate attributes through the range of opportunities for them to engage in professional settings within and outside the formal programmes, and by being treated as professionals from their arrival at the institution. The Conservatoire is highly supportive of students who gain relevant employment during their study, adopting a variety of flexible approaches to ensure students can complete their intended awards.
- 6 **Student support** - There is a holistic approach to providing support for individual students, including academic and pastoral support. This enables students to achieve their potential. Student support services are managed centrally and student access to them is coordinated through a single enquiry desk.
- 7 **Staff development** - The Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Arts Education (PgCert) continues to be successful in supporting staff to deliver the curriculum and by creating a group of influential staff with the skills to promote interdisciplinary developments and create research-teaching links.

8 **Engagement with the national Enhancement Themes** - Strategy, policy and practice are informed by significant engagement with the national Enhancement Themes, in particular Graduates for the 21st Century and the current Theme, Developing and Supporting the Curriculum.

Areas for development

9 The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is asked to consider the areas summarised below.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What happens next?

18 QAA Scotland will continue to engage with the institution through the annual discussion visits which, among other matters, consider the ways in which the institution is responding to the ELIR outcomes.

19 One year after publication of the ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports, institutions are asked to provide a follow-up report to indicate how they are responding to the outcomes of ELIR. Institutions also engage in a follow-up event with colleagues from other institutions to explore the ways in which the ELIR outcomes are being implemented. The final version of the institution's follow-up report is published on the QAA website.

Further information

20 A more detailed [Technical Report](#) is also available for this review. The Technical Report sets out the ELIR team's findings under each of the headings in the ELIR 3 method.

21 This review and its findings relate to the institution as a whole and do not provide information about individual programmes of study or subjects. For further information about those, visit the [Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's website](#).⁵

22 University sector institutions in Scotland also engage in systematic Enhancement Theme activity. Further information about that work, which has a sector-wide and institutional focus, can be found on the [Enhancement Themes website](#).⁶

23 Further information about QAA Scotland and the enhancement-led approach, including the ELIR method, can be found on the [QAA website](#).

24 Information about the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) response to ELIR judgements can be found in the [ELIR information document](#). For further information about SFC more generally, visit the [SFC website](#).⁷

⁵ Royal Conservatoire of Scotland website: www.rcs.ac.uk

⁶ Enhancement Themes website: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk

⁷ Scottish Funding Council website: www.sfc.ac.uk

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