

QUALITY ASSURANCE & ENHANCEMENT HANDBOOK

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1. The objectives of quality assurance and enhancement at the Royal College of Music are: to assure the provision of the highest quality music conservatoire programmes possible, within available resources, of an international standard relevant to the music profession and to enhance the quality of learning and teaching by providing an environment which supports their development. The promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion will be at the heart of the processes that support these objectives.
2. The Royal College of Music supports the principle of freedom of speech and expression within the law, consistent with its Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech. It has regard to the need to ensure that students and staff have freedom to question, test and to put forward new ideas and controversial opinions without placing themselves at risk.
3. The quality assurance and enhancement processes encompass: programmes, including teaching and performance activities and admissions processes; learning and teaching support services and resources; assessment and standards of outcomes, including performance standards.
4. The processes and their outcomes aim to be transparent and open to audit. They take account of the College's learning, teaching and assessment strategy, access and participation plan, equality, diversity and inclusion policy, data protection and other legal requirements. The processes are intended to align with the Quality Assurance Agency's Quality Code, advice and guidance and subject benchmarking.
5. The RCM is cognisant of the particular responsibilities that flow from its status as a degree awarding body and the self-validating powers that go with this.
6. In delivering these objectives the RCM's quality assurance and enhancement systems have three arms:
 - programme development, approval, review and monitoring;
 - external examiners, external specialist examiners, internal examiners (including auditions for entry);
 - student engagement

The College's arrangements for professional development and appraisal are also an important part of the wider context.

Roles of committees in quality assurance and enhancement

7. Academic committees have a key role in these processes: as approving bodies, in monitoring the discharge of quality assurance responsibilities and in reviewing and reflecting on the outcomes and processes of quality assurance. Almost all academic committees have some role in quality assurance, but those with specific responsibilities are as follows:
 - Senate – the College's central quality and standards committee: approval of revisions to the quality assurance procedures, approval and review of overall initial approval and review timetable, approval of reports of initial programme approval and review events, approval of annual programme monitoring reports, approval of external examiner appointments.
 - Senate Executive Committee: approval of operational procedures and policy relating to student assessment (eg composition of practical assessment panels and procedures for panels). Senate Exec also operates as the College's admissions committee – determining procedure related to admissions and taking admissions decisions. Senate Exec also has a role in taking oversight of the overall student experience – artistic as well as programme-related. Senate Exec also has approval of minor and major modifications to programme content and of changes to regulations and is supported by two forums: a Student Curriculum Forum (chaired by the SU President) and the Programmes Forum.
 - Boards of examiners: approval of assessment decisions and award of qualifications, make recommendations to programmes committees and Senate Exec on revisions to regulations and assessment procedure.
 - Research Degrees Committee: quality assurance, standards and quality control for doctoral programmes, including admission, progress monitoring and assessment of doctoral students, review of regulations.
 - RCM Council: overall responsibility for quality assurance, to protect and promote the collective student interest and the importance of a high-quality student experience, to promote excellence in learning, teaching and research, monitoring institutional and governing body performance, to receive copies of reports of initial programme approval and review events, to keep it informed on quality and standards issues.

Review of quality assurance procedures

8. Periodically as well as on an ongoing basis the College evaluates the effectiveness of its approach to quality assurance. This will include revisions to ensure alignment with national arrangements for quality and standards, such as in response to the expectations of the QAA or the Office for Students. Such reviews will normally be led by the Deputy Director, who has leadership responsibility for the College's quality assurance processes, on behalf of and for approval by Senate and Council.

Programme development, initial approval, review, monitoring and programme modification

9. Initial programme approval involves a research and development process, led by the relevant head of programme, via a steering group which is the Senate Exec. It will normally lead to a final event involving an extended meeting of a panel that includes external academics and music industry professionals and internal peers and a student which recommends either the approval or otherwise of the programme and any recommendations or conditions, following discussions with professorial staff, administrators, and students. A report is produced by the panel and submitted to the Senate for approval.
10. Programme review is designed to be a key quality enhancement process. Programmes will be reviewed at least every six years. The programme review process is led by the relevant head of programmes, via a steering group which is the Senate Exec. The review process will involve workshop sessions to evaluate and propose any revisions to the programme, seek the views of the Student Curriculum Forum (chaired by the SU President) and the Programmes Forum, take into account recent annual programme monitoring, will seek input from music industry professionals and/or external academics, and the views of students and alumni. A report of this process will be submitted to Senate for approval.
11. The College's annual programme monitoring system is a process of quality control, which feeds into periodic programme reviews. It is intended to be a concise mechanism which reflects on the previous year's standards of achievement, addresses points in external examiner reports, reflects on data on student outcomes/achievement and sets an action plan for continuous improvement for the coming academic year. Like programme review, annual monitoring is designed to be a key quality enhancement process. The relevant head of programmes compiles the report, which is submitted to and is approved by Senate.
12. Module coordinators are responsible for the annual review and enhancement of their modules, in collaboration with the head of programme. The College encourages all staff to review and update their syllabus content, teaching methods and assessment annually in response to formal and informal student feedback, student performance, peer observation, external examiner feedback and sector developments.

External examiners and external specialist examiners

13. The College has procedures for the appointment of external examiners and a published policy statement about their duties and responsibilities. External examiner nominations originate from Senate Exec and are subject to the approval of the Senate. External examiners are required to submit annual reports to the Deputy Director, who circulates them to the Director, the Director of Programmes, the relevant head of programmes, and the relevant registry administrator. The relevant head of programmes is responsible for responding to reports, usually in the context of the annual programme monitoring report, a copy of which is provided to the external examiner once it has been finalised and submitted to Senate.
14. External specialist examiners are included on all panels for graduation or final recital assessments. They are nominated by heads of faculty. Internal examiners for entrance auditions are nominated by heads of faculty. Detailed notes for the guidance of examiners and for those conducting auditions are reviewed each year by Senate Exec and provided for all examiners. Copies of the criteria to be applied are made available for students to ensure that they are fully aware of the parameters against which they will be assessed.

In line with its commitment to EDI, the College is mindful of diversity when appointing external examiners and arranging panels for examinations or auditions.

Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (FDL)

15. The College has a range of collaborative provision such as joint programmes, and has a growing involvement in flexible and distributed learning (FDL), such as modular study or distance learning. The College's overarching principle is that such provision will, as far as possible, be subject to the same quality assurance arrangements that apply to conventional and RCM-based provision, adapted where necessary.

Student engagement

16. Engagement with students is a core element of many of the College's quality assurance processes and, indeed, of many of its academic decision-making processes. Working in partnership with current students is an essential component of annual programme monitoring, review and initial approval. Alongside this, the Student Curriculum Forum (chaired by the SU President) is a termly committee that consults students at regular intervals on programme delivery and content.

Professional development and appraisal

17. The knowledge, experience and skills of members of staff are among the College's most valuable assets. To fulfil its responsibilities to students, the College must ensure that the quality of this resource is continually enhanced. The College professional development policy includes provision for the support of individual and group project-based staff professional development activities, as well as research and knowledge exchange. Professional development is a core part of staff appraisal systems.

SUMMARY

- The purpose of initial programme approval is to ensure that programmes will:
 - o contribute towards fulfilling the College's mission statement and meeting its general quality assurance objectives;
 - o offer a valuable and professionally relevant educational experience to students;
 - o be of a standard appropriate to the awarded qualifications and are at least comparable with similar programmes offered internationally
 - o promote equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Initial programme approval involves a research and development process, led by the relevant head of programmes, via a steering group which is the Senate Exec. It will normally lead to a final event involving an extended meeting of a panel that includes external academics and music industry professionals and internal peers and a student which recommends either the approval or otherwise of the programme and any recommendations or conditions, following discussions with professorial staff, administrators, students. A report is produced by the panel and submitted to the Senate for approval.

New programme development

1. All programmes leading to a qualification require Directorate approval before they can proceed to initial approval. A proposal for outline approval is prepared by the Director of Programmes and addresses the extent to which the proposal fits with the College's mission, strategic plan, the range of other programmes on offer, the additional resources needed by the programme and income that the programme will generate. Programmes given Directorate approval may proceed to programme development. This process is not required for programme review.
2. For each programme which receives Directorate approval, a planning meeting is arranged by the Deputy Director with the Director of Programmes and the relevant head of programme. At the meeting the following matters are discussed:
 - the timetable for programme development and initial approval (including the consideration of resources);
 - the internal consultations planned as part of the process and the roles of those involved in developing/reviewing the programme, including learning resource providers and academic support services,
 - plans to engage with and consult students;
 - plans for external consultations with graduates, professionals and/or industry organisations;
 - the composition of the initial approval panel and the nominees for membership;
 - the outline schedule for the initial approval/review event (unless the process is by correspondence).
3. Prior to the initial approval event, the detailed resource requirements of the programme will be assessed by the Directorate. Only programmes with budgetary approval from the Directorate may proceed to initial approval.

Initial approval process

4. The College's quality assurance procedures are intended to ensure that the programmes offered are of the highest quality. This includes making judgements about the quality of programme design. The criteria against which new or reviewed programmes are judged is set out in the criteria for programme approval, at the end of this section.

5. The intention that the process should feel constructive lies behind the principle of encouraging the development team leader to observe all briefing and concluding meetings of the panel. This helps to ensure that decisions and the reasons for them are understood by all in the Senate Exec.
6. The composition of the panel, which may be drawn internationally as well as nationally and will aim to include gender and ethnic diversity, will normally be:
 - Chair: Deputy Director or another member of Directorate
 - one or two external panel members who are specialists in the area of the programme. Between them the external panel members will ideally have experience that ranges across both higher education (conservatoire and/or university music departments) and the music profession or specialist area. External panel members should not have had recent significant involvement with the College's programmes, for example as an external examiner.
 - up to two internal panel members who will be academics/professors who will not have been involved in the programme development/review process
 - a student or recent graduate
 - the Secretary, who will be an administrator experienced in QA processes.
7. The initial approval event usually involves meetings with the head of programmes, the Director of Programmes, Senate Exec members, and key programme administrators, teaching staff, students and/or alumni.

Structure of outcome decisions and conditions and recommendations

8. Panels must formulate an overall judgement of a new programme proposal by making a recommendation about its approval to the Senate.
9. **Conditions** are issues identified by the panel as being of sufficient importance to require a direct response back to the panel. They require approval either by correspondence or a further meeting. Where subsequent approval is not forthcoming, the programme may not commence. A condition will be a specific design issue which the panel believes must be addressed by the Senate Exec and where a rethinking of the proposal is needed before the programme can start or, where this is unavoidable but acceptable, early in the life of the new or reviewed programme.
10. Panels are advised that it is not part of their role to design programmes. The programme design team must have the freedom to address conditions in the way which seems most appropriate to them. At the same time, the programme design team must recognise that their response to conditions must convince the panel if approval to run the programme is to be granted.
11. **Recommendations** are intended to indicate issues, specific or general, which the Senate Exec is asked to address either before a programme starts or during its operation, as appropriate. The Senate Exec is expected to produce a response to recommendations which will form part of the next annual monitoring report, in the case of reviewed programmes, or during the first year of operation for new programmes. The response to a recommendation may be produced earlier than this if desirable. The Senate Exec will determine the response to recommendations which seems most appropriate.
12. If a panel feels sufficiently concerned about an issue about which it has made a recommendation, it can determine that it should see a response to it either before the programme starts or early in the life of the new or reviewed programme. The panel should only do this if it wishes the opportunity to advise on the content of the Senate Exec's response to the recommendation. The panel needs to be aware, however, that it cannot, at this later stage, change a recommendation to a condition. As a result, the panel cannot under these circumstances prevent a programme from running, whatever its view of the Senate Exec's response. Responsibility for the running of the programme has then passed to the programme committee. Similarly once a panel has indicated that it regards any conditions which may have been set as being satisfactorily fulfilled, responsibility passes to the programmes committee.

Documentation for initial approval

13. Documentation for initial approval should be provided as follows:

The programme rationale

14. An explanation of the proposal in terms of:

- its relationship to the rest of the College's provision, with reference to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy;
- its relationship to similar programme provision offered elsewhere;
- the target student group/expected student profile and numbers (divided by home and international);
- intended career destinations for students completing the programme
- in the case of programme reviews, (which should include previous annual monitoring reports or a summary of them), data on student achievement, external examiner reports (or a summary of issues raised by them) and a summary of the response to external examiner reports;
- confirmation that the resources needed to support the programme have Directorate approval and information that also covers the following resource areas: library and other learning resources, including IT resources and other digital resources and any specialist teaching accommodation requirements.

The draft programme handbook

15. The programme handbook provides a user-friendly, comprehensive description of the programme and is the authoritative source of information about the programme. The handbook is principally for use by students and professors teaching the programme, but it will also be used by a number of other people including the external examiners, administrative staff. The categories of information listed below are the core content of the programme handbook:

- overall programme aims, objectives and learning outcomes;
- programme structure, showing relationships between years/levels and modules (if possible, using a diagram);
- summary of progression and assessment arrangements (if possible, using a diagram);
- module descriptions;
- Programme management arrangements
- Student support provision
- Programme regulations: including assessment, progression, reassessment, compensation and classification of awards.
- the diploma supplement (conforming to the national format).

Issues for panels and Senate Exec: criteria for programme approval

Learning outcomes

What are the intended learning outcomes for the programme?

How does the curriculum content enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes?

How effective is the design and organisation of the curriculum in promoting student learning and achievement of the intended learning outcomes?

How are the intended outcomes of a programme communicated to staff, students and external examiners?

Do the students know what is expected of them?

Does the design and content of the curriculum encourage achievement of the intended learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and understanding, cognitive skills, subject-specific skills (including practical/professional skills), transferable skills, progression to employment and/or further study, and personal development?

Is there evidence that curriculum content and design is informed by recent developments in techniques of teaching and learning, and by current research and scholarship?

Equality, diversity and inclusion

How are equal opportunities assured for all applicants and students?

What arrangements are in place to support students with disabilities?

How does the programme take account of the duty to promote EDI?

Are there adequate opportunities for students to feed back on their studies?

Assessment

Does the assessment process enable learners to demonstrate achievement of all the intended learning outcomes?

Are there criteria that enable internal and external examiners to distinguish between different categories of achievement?

Does the assessment strategy have an adequate formative function in developing student abilities?

What evidence is there that the standards achieved by learners meet the minimum expectations for the award, as measured against relevant subject benchmark statements and the qualifications framework?

How effectively do staff draw upon their research, scholarship or professional activity to inform their teaching?

Admissions

Are there effective arrangements for admission and induction which will be generally understood by staff and applicants?

Learning resources

Is there appropriate staff expertise to deliver the programme?

Is suitable specialist teaching and learning accommodation available?

Are library stocks and online resources appropriate and accessible?

Are suitable equipment and appropriate ICT facilities available to learners?

SUMMARY

- The purpose of programme review is to ensure that programmes continue to:
 - o contribute towards fulfilling the College's mission statement and meeting its general quality assurance objectives;
 - o offer a valuable and professionally relevant educational experience to students;
 - o be of a standard appropriate to the awards to which they lead and are at least comparable with similar programmes offered internationally
 - o promote equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Programme review is designed to be a key quality enhancement process. Programmes will be reviewed at least every six years.
- The programme review process is led by the relevant head of programmes, via a steering group which is the Senate Exec.
- The review process will involve workshop sessions to evaluate and propose any revisions to the programme, seek the views of the Student Curriculum Forum (chaired by the SU President) and the Programmes Forum, take into account recent annual programme monitoring, will seek input from music industry professionals and/or external academics, and the views of students and alumni.
- A report of this process will be submitted to Senate for approval.

Timing of programme reviews

1. Each programme will normally be reviewed at least every six years. The Deputy Director maintains a schedule of initial approval and review activities which shows the academic year in which a programme is due to be reviewed and when it was first or last reviewed. The Senate may revise the scheduling of specific reviews, as circumstances suggest, for example to spread the initial approval and review load or to group reviews of closely related programmes, or to take account of key developments/appointments in an area. Outside this annual review, if circumstances suggest that the rescheduling of a review of a programme would be appropriate, permission for such a deferral or an early review must be sought from the Senate by the relevant head of programmes. Any request for a deferral or early review in these circumstances must include the reasons for it.

Review Process

2. The programme review process is led by the relevant head of programmes, via a steering group which is the Senate Exec.
3. The review process will involve workshop sessions to evaluate and propose any revisions to the programme. These will be led by the head of programmes and involve the Programmes Forum, Senate Exec and the Student Curriculum Forum
4. The head of programmes will also seek the views and advice of music industry professionals and/or external academics and the views of students and alumni. Views might be sought through meetings, surveys or by correspondence.
5. The final report of the review will be submitted to Senate Exec and will comprise:
 - An overall summary of any changes proposed to the programme, with a supporting rationale

- a review of the operation of the programme in the period since the last initial approval or review exercise (which might reflect on the criteria for programme approval, set out in the section of this handbook on initial approval)
 - an outline of the process that has been followed (including the dates of relevant meetings)
 - the draft revised programme handbook
 - recent annual programme monitoring reports and data
6. The report comprising the overall summary of any changes proposed to the programme with a supporting rationale, review of the operation of the programme in the period since the last review and outline of the process that has been followed (including the dates of relevant meetings) will be submitted to Senate for approval.

SUMMARY

- The College's annual programme monitoring system is a process of quality control, which feeds into periodic programme reviews. It is intended to be a concise mechanism which reflects on the previous year's standards of achievement, addresses points in external examiner reports, responds to student feedback, reflects on data on student outcomes/achievement and sets an action plan for continuous improvement for the coming academic year. Like programme review, annual monitoring is designed to be a key quality enhancement process. The head of programmes compiles the report, which is submitted to and is approved by Senate
- Any significant modification to a programme is subject to approval before it can be implemented. Senate Executive Committee has authority to approve modifications to programmes and revisions to their regulations.

Annual programme monitoring procedure and guidance on compiling reports

1. Each summer vacation or autumn the relevant head of programmes compiles a concise annual programme monitoring report.
2. The evidence base for the report will usually comprise:
 - reports from external examiners,
 - data on student outcomes/achievement,
 - student feedback (obtained by questionnaire or consultation methods; these will normally include questions about the effectiveness of the programme in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion).
3. The programme monitoring report will usually comprise the following sections:
 - a description of the evidence base for the report;
 - brief report on implementation of the preceding year's action plan;
 - a summary of modifications to the programme during the preceding year and a commentary on the success of those from the year before;
 - a commentary on key issues that have arisen during the year, as exemplified by the evidence base and explicitly addressing issues raised in external examiner reports and providing a response to issues raised through student feedback;
 - a programme action plan for the coming year;
 - evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme in promoting equal diversity and inclusion;
 - appendices comprising the external examiner reports, data on student achievement (comparing achievement in earlier years), an analysis of student feedback (referring also where appropriate to National Student Survey [NSS] results).
4. 4 The monitoring report will be considered and approved by Senate.

Programme modifications

5. Each year, programmes are subject to routine updating and minor modification, including through the proposal of new modules, updating of modules, and the closure of others. This process is overseen by the Programmes Forum and reported to Senate Exec on a termly basis.

6. **Major modifications** are significant changes to the structure or content of a programme and must be submitted for approval by Senate Exec. The following proposed changes constitute major modifications:
- changes to the programme title or awards, or to its minimum and maximum duration, or to its mode of study, including distance learning
 - restructuring the whole programme or any year of the programme,
 - any significant change to the aims and objectives or learning outcomes of the programme,
 - the introduction of new core (ie compulsory) modules
 - changes to the programme regulations. Changes to regulations will not normally be made mid-year; in any case, changes to regulations of any significance must be notified to all students affected.

Timing of modifications and updating the programme handbook

7. Modifications will normally take effect from the next academic year and should be incorporated into the annual update of the programme handbook or syllabus.
8. Exceptionally and usually only where students will be advantaged or may otherwise be seriously disadvantaged, modifications may occur mid-way through an academic year and have an immediate effect. When this occurs such modifications need to be notified in full to all interested persons, including all affected students.

SUMMARY

- This section of the handbook sets out the quality assurance principles and arrangements for collaborative provision, such as joint programmes, and for 'flexible and distributed learning' (FDL), such as distance learning
- The overarching principle is that such provision will, as far as possible, be subject to the same quality assurance arrangements that apply to conventional provision, adapted where necessary

Definitions of 'collaborative' provision

1. For the purposes of this section of the QA&E Handbook, 'collaborative provision' denotes educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit towards an award, of the College delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation. This encompasses joint and collaborative programmes, such as the RCM/Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), Singapore programmes. It encompasses both UK-based and overseas provision.
2. 'Joint programmes' in this context are programmes leading to awards made by two degree-awarding higher education institutions for which the provision is taught jointly and the qualification is a joint award of both institutions.
3. 'Franchise' provision in this context is permission for another institution to deliver an RCM programme leading to and RCM award, with or without local elements (such as different principal studies or options).
4. 'Validated' provision will involve provision that is completely or largely designed by the partner institution itself, leading to and RCM award.
5. 'Articulated' provision, in this context, is provision which links two programmes between two or more institutions for progression purposes, eg an undergraduate degree delivered by one institution, successful completion of which, leads directly to admission to a postgraduate programme of the other institution. This may include some joint provision or FDL provision (see below) or a credited term/semester in one or other institution as part of the programme.
6. The College does not permit 'serial' arrangements in which the partner institution offers RCM collaborative and/or FDL provision via another third party institution

Authorisation and responsibilities for and management of collaborative provision

7. The overarching principle of the College's approach to collaborative provision is that the College takes responsibility to ensure that the academic standards of all its awards and qualifications are consciously and carefully secured. This includes ensuring that it meets the expectations of the QAA and Office for Students.
8. The College's strategy for collaborative provision is set by the Council as part of the College's strategic planning processes. The Senate is consulted as part of the process of reviewing and agreeing the College's Strategic Plan. New collaborative programmes and all significant decisions affecting ongoing programmes, such as decisions to terminate or continue provision, are taken by the Director, taking advice from the Directorate and the Senate. Decisions are reported to the Council. Before entering into a new collaboration, the College will wish to assure itself that the educational objectives of the partner are compatible with those of the College.
9. The lead quality assurance committee for collaborative programmes, as for other provision, is the Senate.
10. Directorate members, usually at least one of the Deputy Director and/or Director of Programmes, will lead negotiations with any partner and will always be in membership of any joint committees established to manage a partnership. One of the two will usually chair any initial approval or review panel.

11. Before entering into a new collaborative partnership, the College will undertake a due diligence process. The extent of this process will depend on the legal standing of the institution. For example, in the case of a publicly funded UK HEI the process might be minimal, in the case of an overseas for profit institution which is just being established, it will be relatively extensive. This process will include, where appropriate, scrutiny of any information about restrictions on institution's use of funds or other statutory financial regulations imposed by relevant public funding bodies. The Director of Finance and the Deputy Director will determine the extent of the process that will be needed and whether to involve Council members. The Director of Finance will also be involved in assessing any related documentation.
12. The financial management arrangements and the costing for a collaboration will be subject to scrutiny by the Director of Finance, working with the Directorate members leading negotiations. The aim will be to ensure that collaborations are fully costed and that financial management arrangements are strong enough to manage risks effectively, and that the financial arrangements themselves do not jeopardise the integrity of the academic standards and quality of the provision or the interests of students. A due diligence process will normally include scrutiny of:
- the public and legal standing of a prospective partner in their own country;
 - the standing of a prospective partner in the UK determined in the light of experience of other UK institutions and from public documents such as reports of the QAA on collaborative arrangements with UK institutions;
 - the financial stability of a prospective partner;
 - the ability of the prospective partner to provide the human and material resources to operate the programme successfully;
 - the ability of the prospective partner to provide an appropriate and safe working environment for students on the programme;
 - in the case of overseas collaborative or FDL arrangements, the ability of the College to operate within the legislative and cultural requirements of that overseas country and, at the same time, address the points of reference offered by the UK's Academic Infrastructure.
 - in the case of a dual or joint award the College will satisfy itself that the partner has the legal capacity to do so.
13. Each collaborative programme will have a memorandum of agreement setting out the rights and obligations of the parties and signed by the Director, in the case of the RCM, and by the head of the partner institution. The Deputy Director leads the drafting of memoranda of agreement for the College. Draft memoranda of agreement for franchise/validated or joint programmes will be submitted to the Senate, and all signed memoranda of agreement for collaborative programmes will be submitted to the Senate and to the Council. The College will take legal or other professional advice where necessary, although most agreements will not require this. The areas that an agreement would usually cover include arrangements for the following:
- Recruitment and Selection of Students
 - Operation of the Programme
 - Data Returns
 - Handling of Information
 - Learning resources, special arrangements and equal opportunities
 - Induction arrangements and collection fees
 - Management of the Programme
 - Quality Assurance Arrangements
 - Assessment and Conferment of Awards
 - Appeals and Complaints and Student behaviour
 - Financial Arrangements
 - Publicity
 - Intellectual Property Rights
 - Revisions to the agreement
 - Dispute Resolution and legal jurisdiction

- Force Majeure
 - Termination Provisions
14. The aims, learning outcomes, teaching, learning and assessment methods of a collaborative programme will normally be described in a 'diploma supplement', that will be included in programme documentation for students and other stakeholders. It will, where applicable, show how the programme content relates to relevant subject benchmark statements, and that the award is appropriately located within the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). Any divergences, for example to take account of local circumstances, will be explicitly acknowledged and explained.
 15. A list of the College's current collaborative partners and the related provision will be published on the RCM website.
 16. The College will retain sole authority for awarding certificates and transcripts for franchised provision and memoranda of agreement will assign responsibilities for certificates and transcripts for joint provision. Certificates and transcripts will record the name and location of the partner institution(s).

Quality assurance of collaborative provision

17. In general, the College's approach to the assurance of the quality of collaborative provision is to use its usual programme initial approval, monitoring and review processes, adapted only where necessary.
18. In the case of **franchise or validated provision** or any other provision where the College is the sole awarding body, the College will consult the partner institution about the quality assurance arrangements for the programme, including taking account of local circumstances, but the aim will be only to enhance normal quality assurance arrangements, never to dilute them.
19. In the case of **joint programmes** leading to a joint award, the College will discuss quality assurance arrangements with the partner institution, adapting them where necessary to accommodate the quality assurance arrangements of the partner institution and to take account of local circumstances, but, again, the aim will be only to enhance normal quality assurance arrangements, never to dilute them. The only exception to this will be any UK-based joint provision by an institution subject to QAA and OfS oversight. In these circumstances, the lead institution for quality assurance matters will be set out in the memorandum of agreement. In these circumstances, joint annual monitoring will be overseen by a joint programme management committee, the evidence base for which will include reports from external examiners and the responses to any recommendations; data on student achievement; and evidence of student engagement/feedback. Initial approval, periodic review, and annual monitoring reports will be submitted for discussion to Senate.
20. In the case of **articulated programmes** leading to the separate awards of each institution for discrete periods of study, the constituent programmes/awards will be subject to the quality assurance arrangements of the relevant institution. A management committee with responsibility for quality assurance will receive reports of the normal quality assurance exercises in each institution. Where modifications are proposed to the constituent programmes/awards which may impact upon the content or delivery of the overall articulated programme, these implications will be discussed by the management committee in advance, aside from any approval required through the existing quality assurance arrangements of each institution. There will be an annual monitoring process undertaken by the management committee, the evidence base of which will include reports from external examiners and the responses to any recommendations; data on student achievement; and evidence of student engagement/feedback. Such reports will be submitted for discussion to Senate.
21. In each case, the determination of appropriate quality assurance arrangements will be led by the Deputy Director, in conjunction with the partner institution and senior RCM academic staff, who will normally include the Director of Programmes. Any significant deviation from normal RCM quality assurance arrangements will be subject to approval by the Senate.
22. There will usually be a site visit led by the Deputy Director or the Director of Programmes, ahead of an initial approval process with a new partner. The purpose of this site visit will be to make an initial assessment (including a risk assessment) of the readiness of the partner institution to offer/contribute to the programme, an initial assessment of the resources available to support the programme and students on it at each institution, and to discuss the range of issues

that will be covered by a memorandum of agreement, including sustainability issues and arrangements for quality assurance and management.

23. The minimum elements for the quality assurance of any franchise or joint programme involving an RCM award will normally be:
- an initial approval process involving a panel chaired by the Director, the Deputy Director or the Director of Programmes (to ensure the College's strategic interests are assured), including an external member and at least one further internal RCM member. The precise composition of the panel may vary from the format for non-collaborative provision, in order to accommodate the quality assurance requirements of a partner or otherwise accommodate local circumstances. The membership of the panel must be agreed by the College and the quality assurance process will usually include a meeting held at the partner institution;
 - Periodic review processes at intervals of not more than six years, involving a panel constituted as above, involving a visit to the partner institution and supported by the documentation set out in the section of this handbook on programme review;
 - Reports of all initial approval and periodic review processes to be subject to approval by the Senate;
 - An annual monitoring process that includes, as a minimum:
 - reports from external examiners and the responses to any recommendations,
 - data on student achievement,
 - evidence of student engagement/feedback;Reports of annual monitoring will be submitted to Senate for approval;
 - Appointment of an external examiner or examiners using the process set out in this Handbook and with duties and responsibilities consistent with those set out in this handbook and subject to approval by the Senate. In addition to any briefing provided by a partner institution, the College will brief external examiners itself;
 - Admission and assessment processes consistent with the RCM's usual processes and including the normal level of external input for the assessment of any module eligible for RCM credit.
24. The process and timetable for initial approval and periodic review activities will be agreed between the Deputy Director and the partner institution. These will include ensuring adequate time and processes for any necessary curriculum design, development and review by each and both institutions.
25. Documentation for an initial approval process for a franchise or joint programme will normally comprise:
- the draft memorandum of agreement;
 - draft programme handbook;
 - rationale document covering areas set out in the RCM QA&E Handbook:
 - the relationship of the programme to the institution(s)' other academic provision and to similar provision offered elsewhere and its compatibility with institutional goals and mission;
 - external reference points, including the UK Academic Infrastructure, any relevant subject benchmark statements, national frameworks for higher education qualifications
 - the target student group/expected student profile;
 - intended career destinations for students completing the programme and recent career destinations of any graduates (drawing on alumni data) and a statement on career guidance services that will be provided;
 - a statement on appraisal, professional development policy and practice specific to teaching staff on the programme, including sharing and developing best practice and enhancing the quality of provision;
 - an analysis of issues raised in student consultation/feedback.
 - resource statement, including:
 - cvs of staff proposed to teach on the programme;
 - details of learning resources and plans to develop these to support the programme;
 - proposed student numbers;

- o information about the legal standing of the institution (including relationship with government, powers and limits on powers, academic and otherwise);
 - o details and any recent reports of national quality assurance agencies relevant to the programme;
 - o evidence of financial standing;
 - draft prospectus entry (where applicable) and draft publicity material.
26. In preparing for an initial approval or review process it is expected that there will be significant contact between the two institutions, which will often include visits or video conferencing, as well as email and other communication. This will be most important for initial approval, where the process may involve growing familiarisation with institutional culture and practices, developing relationships and understanding between staff, as well as curriculum design and development.
27. As stated above, the process and timetable for initial approval and periodic review activities, agreed by the Deputy Director, will include adequate time and processes for curriculum design and development by each and both institutions.

Quality assurance principles of flexible and distributed learning

28. 'Flexible and distributed learning' ('FDL') denotes educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit toward an award, of the College delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through means which generally do not require the student to attend particular classes or events at particular times or at the College. This will include distance learning (DL) provision, such as top-up modules, and the College's developing digital learning provision. The quality assurance principles for these types of provision are described below.
29. The educational aims and intended learning outcomes of a FDL programme or module and associated study materials will be subject to the College's usual approval, monitoring and review processes.
30. Programme documentation for programmes or modules offered by FDL will have the same documentation as those delivered conventionally, including on assessment. This will include a clear schedule for the delivery of study materials, where appropriate, and for assessment of their work.
31. The delivery system of an FDL programme or module of study delivered through digital learning must be fit for purpose. The delivery of any study materials direct to students remotely through digital learning, must be secure and reliable.
32. Prospective students should receive a clear and realistic explanation of the expectations placed upon them for study of the FDL programme or modules, and for the nature and extent of autonomous, collaborative and supported aspects of learning.
33. Where applicable, students should have access to:
- a schedule for any learner support available to them through timetabled activities, for example tutorial sessions or web-based conferences;
 - clear and up to date information about the learning support available to them;
 - documents that set out their own responsibilities as learners, and the commitments of the College and any collaborative partner for the support of an FDL programme or module.
34. Students should have:
- from the outset of their study, an identified contact who can give them constructive feedback on academic performance and authoritative guidance on their academic progression;
 - where appropriate, regular opportunities for student-student discussions about the programme, both to facilitate collaborative learning and to provide a basis for facilitating their participation in the quality assurance of the programme;
 - appropriate opportunities to give formal feedback on their experience of the programme or module.

35. The relevant head of programmes and other academic staff, should ensure that students can be confident that:

- their assessed work is properly attributed to them, particularly in cases where the assessment is conducted through remote methods that might be vulnerable to interception or other interference;
- examiners are capable of confirming that a student's assessed work is the original work of that student only, particularly in cases where the assessment is conducted through remote methods;
- any mechanisms, such as web-based methods or correspondence, for the transfer of their work directly to examiners, are secure and reliable, and that there is a means of proving or confirming the safe receipt of their work.

SUMMARY

- Engagement with students is a core element of many of the College's quality assurance and enhancement processes and of many of its academic decision making processes. In particular, engagement with students is central to annual programme monitoring, review and initial approval.
- The key aims of student engagement are:
 - to improve the quality of educational provision (including but not limited to programmes);
 - enhancing the sense of a common academic purpose and community between professors and students;
 - To encourage students to take ownership of their studies

1. A variety of student engagement and consultation methods are used:
 - questionnaire-based feedback
 - consultation sessions with students (year groups or representatives, for example by external examiners)
 - student representation on academic committees
 - staff student committee, Student Curriculum Forum (chaired by the SU President)
 - student membership of programme initial approval panels
 - sessions with students as part of initial approval events
 - regular liaison with the Students' Union, including with Directorate members and the Student Services Manager
 - Director's open surgeries for staff and students.
2. An annual programme monitoring questionnaire-based engagement and/or consultation sessions with students (which might be via the Student Curriculum Forum) will be undertaken at least annually, usually during the summer term. The analysis of the feedback gained and a response to it form a core part of reports. Feedback is obtained at programme level by the relevant head of programmes. It is open to the relevant head of programmes to invite someone independent to the area for which feedback is being sought to undertake the feedback exercise. Analysis of student feedback is undertaken by the person conducting it.
3. It is important to provide students with some direct response to issues they have raised as part of engagement processes, where this is not provided naturally through the process by an immediate response. It will sometimes be the case that a positive response is not possible, for example where resources are unavailable to effect a change; nevertheless an acknowledgement of the situation with an explanation of the difficulties it raises shows that the issue is recognised. In the case of annual programme monitoring, responses are provided for students in the context of discussion of annual monitoring reports at the relevant Student Curriculum Forum. The sections of the finalised annual monitoring reports that respond to issues raised through student engagement are circulated to the students concerned either directly or through RCM newsletters. Throughout the year, the Students' Union President works closely with members of Directorate and heads of faculties and programmes to review feedback reporting mechanisms and communication with students.
4. The Senate will annually scrutinise the College's National Student Survey (NSS) results, including in comparison with those of other conservatoires. This report will also be submitted to Council.

SUMMARY

- This procedure describes the stages and criteria involved in the appointment of external examiners to programmes of the College. It will be administered by the Deputy Director.
- The purpose of the procedure is to ensure that all external examiner appointments made by the College meet the criteria for approval, which seek to ensure that external examiners are seen to be objective and appropriately qualified for the task.
- External examiner nominations are discussed by Senate Executive Committee and are approved by the Senate.
- An external examiner's normal term of office is four calendar years, which may be extended for a maximum one further year.
- This procedure also sets out policy on the involvement of external specialist examiners in practical examinations, the details of which are set out in published guidance, reviewed annually by Senate Exec.

The Role of the External Examiner

1. External examining assists the College in ensuring that:
 - the academic standard for each award and award element is set and maintained at the appropriate level and that student performance is properly judged against this;
 - the assessment process measures student achievement against the intended outcomes of the programme appropriately, and is fair and fairly operated;
 - that the College is able to compare the standards of its awards with those of other higher education institutions.
2. The College asks external examiners, in their expert judgement, to report on:
 - whether the standards set are appropriate for the awards by reference to the music subject benchmarking statement (in the case of the BMus(Hons)), the national qualifications framework, and other relevant information;
 - the standards of student performance in the programme and on the comparability of the standards achieved with those of similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions;
 - the extent to which the College's processes for assessment, examination, and the determination of awards are sound and have been fairly conducted.
3. In order to carry out these responsibilities, the external examiner must:
 - be able to judge each student impartially on the basis of practical and written work submitted for assessment without being influenced by previous association with the programme or its students;
 - be able to compare the performance of students with that of their peers on comparable programmes elsewhere;
 - be entitled to request access to all assessed work;
 - ensure that assessments are conducted in accordance with the approved programme regulations;
 - be properly briefed by the relevant head of programmes (including if appropriate programme leaders) on their role, the programme and the College's expectations of students on the programme;
 - produce an annual report.

Procedure for the appointment of external examiners

4. The Deputy Director will notify the relevant head of programmes that a nomination is required nine months in advance of the date when a vacancy will arise.
5. The head of programmes will identify a shortlist of suitable nominees for presentation to Senate Exec, which identifies a single nominee to be presented to Senate.
6. The relevant head of programmes will make an informal approach to the selected nominee to ascertain their willingness to be appointed and to obtain a cv or biography and complete the external examiner nomination checklist.
7. When the nomination is ready to progress, the head of programmes will submit it to the Senate for consideration, in the light of the criteria for appointment.
8. Once the nomination has been approved by the Senate, the Deputy Director will send an appointment letter to the external examiner.
9. The Chair of the Senate is empowered to approve nominations by chair's action, in the light of advice from the Deputy Director, but only in cases of urgency.
10. Requests for an extension of appointment for one further year must be made in writing by the relevant head of programmes to the Senate.

Criteria for the approval of external examiner nomination

11. The following criteria for the appointment of external examiners are used by the Senate when considering external examiner nominations. They also provide a checklist of issues to be considered when making nominations. The Senate may exceptionally waive a criterion, on the basis of an individual case. A number of the criteria relate to contact an examiner might have had in the past with the programme, the professors teaching on the programme, and the College. They exist to ensure that the impartiality of the external examiner can never be called into question.
12. The external examiner's normal term of office will be four calendar years, which may be extended for a maximum one further year.
13. An external examiner's academic/professional qualifications should be appropriate to the programme to be examined. Both the level and the subject of the examiner's qualification and experience should generally match what is to be examined in the programme.
14. An external examiner should have appropriate standing, expertise and experience to maintain comparability of standards. Standing, expertise and breadth of experience may be indicated by:
 - the present (or last, if retired) post and place of work;
 - the range and scope of experience across higher education or the music profession;
 - current and recent active involvement in research, scholarly, or professional activities.
15. An external examiner should have enough recent external examining or comparable related experience to indicate competence in assessing students. If the proposed examiner has no previous external examiner experience at the appropriate level, the application should be supported by:
 - extensive internal examining experience;
 - other relevant and recent experience likely to support the external examiner role.
16. Proposed examiners without previous external examining experience should, where possible, join an experienced team of external examiners.
17. External examiners should be drawn from a wide variety of institutional/professional contexts and traditions in order that the programme benefits from wide-ranging external scrutiny. There should not be:

- more than one examiner from the same institution in the team of external examiners;
 - reciprocal external examining between programmes;
 - an external examiner from an institution which has been the source of external examiners to the College in the recent past (normally five years), unless the association of the individual concerned is modest (for example a part-time teaching post).
18. Consideration should be given to identifying among the nominees for appointment those from under-represented groups, so as to promote equality, diversity and inclusion.
 19. Examiners should not be over-extended by their external examining duties. The external examiner should not normally currently hold more than the equivalent of two substantial undergraduate external examiner appointments.
 20. There should be an appropriate balance and expertise in the team of external examiners. When an appointment is to be made to a team of external examiners the following considerations need to be taken into account:
 - one member of the external examining team should always have recent or current experience of examining a similar programme, where a similar programme exists;
 - the proposed examiner should complement the existing external examining team in terms of expertise and examining experience;
 - the range of musical and/or academic perspectives necessary to the programme should be represented in the external examining team.
 21. The phasing of appointments to the team should be structured to ensure continuity within the external examining team.
 22. External examiners should be impartial in judgement and should not have previous close involvement with the institution which might compromise objectivity. Over the last five years, the proposed examiner should not have been:
 - a member of staff, a Council member, a student, or a near relative of a member of staff on the programme;
 - an external examiner on another programme in the institution;
 - a former or current close working colleague of a key member of staff teaching on the programme to be examined.
 23. The proposed examiner should not be personally associated with the financial sponsorship of students on the programme or required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme.
 24. In the rare circumstance that the College is unhappy with the performance of an external examiner, for example because of the non-submission of an external examiner's report or because he or she is not abiding by the moderation role of an RCM external examiner, the situation will be discussed with the Chair of the Senate. If the Chair of the Senate believes that the situation cannot be resolved satisfactorily, the Chair will terminate the external examiner's appointment and a fresh appointment will be sought.

Rights and Responsibilities of external examiners

25. External examiners will be provided with a representative selection of examination materials and coursework. The selection of student work should include samples of each year which contributes directly to the final award. The role of the external examiner is to review an appropriate range of examinations and coursework to establish that students are placed fairly in relation to the cohort and examining standards applied elsewhere, that the assessment criteria are applied consistently, and the feedback is constructive.
26. In addition to the selection of material provided for them, external examiners have a right of access, on request, to all assessed work for a student or module.

The Role of the external examiner in practical examinations

27. External examiners are asked to attend the main practical examinations for the award. They are expected to attend a reasonable proportion of final recitals or their equivalent. The precise proportion will be determined in any one year in discussion with the relevant head of programmes. External examiners do not participate personally in examining practical examinations. The role of the external examiner in a practical examination will be to observe the process, the marks awarded, and the quality of feedback.
28. If the external examiner has an immediate concern about the conduct of any practical examination which cannot be resolved with the chair of the panel, he or she is asked to contact the head of programmes directly and immediately.
29. External examiners are specifically asked to comment on the standards of practical examinations in their written annual report.

Meetings of Boards of Examiners

30. External examiners are expected to attend all meetings of the Board of Examiners at which final awards are decided. They participate as full members and are responsible for ensuring that the Board's judgements have been reached by appropriate means according to normal practice in higher education.
31. At every Board meeting that considers final awards, there will be consideration of every student and their result, although only those cases requiring fuller discussion will receive it. At the conclusion of the consideration of results they will be deemed to be formally ratified by all members of the Board, including the external examiners, present at the meeting. A formal statement to this effect will be included in minutes of the meeting.

Right of Veto

32. External examiners are expected to review the marks awarded by internal examiners; they do not, however, have a right of veto when commenting on the setting of examination papers, when moderating examination scripts or coursework, or at Board of Examiners meetings.
33. External examiners have a right to expect that views which they express in meetings will be taken seriously and will receive a specific response. If an external examiner is not satisfied with a response or does not receive one, he or she has a right of direct access to the Director, who will attempt to resolve the issue (calling on the chair of the Board of Examiners as necessary). If a resolution cannot be achieved, the issue will be considered directly by the Senate, as the body to which Boards of Examiners report.

External examiner reports

34. External examiners are required to provide a formal written report to the Deputy Director on the effectiveness of the assessments and related issues at the end of each annual cycle of examinations. The completed report, which follows a pro forma structure, when received by the Deputy Director, will be acknowledged formally, and will then be copied to the Director, the Chair of the Board of Examiners, appropriate head of programmes and programme leader before being presented to the Senate as part of the annual course monitoring report. The relevant head of programmes will write annually to the external examiner to inform him or her of action taken to address the issues raised in the report.
35. If an external examiner wishes to raise a matter of particular importance or sensitivity he or she may submit a written report to the Deputy Director or to the Director, on an exceptional basis.

RCM obligations towards external examiners

36. Many of the Royal College of Music's obligations are specified in the foregoing. Other responsibilities include:
 - via the relevant head of programmes, to brief and provide induction for newly-appointed external examiners. This will include ensuring that external examiners know the names, contact details and specific roles of the relevant head of programmes, any programme leaders, and the relevant registry administrator, as appropriate. It also includes the provision of up-to-date course and pathway handbooks, syllabuses, notes for examiners, the College's general academic regulations, this Quality Assurance & Enhancement Handbook, the College's EDI policy and related information;
 - via the relevant head of programmes to consult in advance with external examiners in drawing up an appropriate sampling timetable for practical examinations, combining cases which are expected to be at the

extremes and midpoint of the ability range, whilst preserving freedom for external examiners to access other cases on a random basis so as to ensure adequate sampling of the entire cohort;

- via the relevant head of programmes or programme leader, to provide opportunities for meetings with representatives of students;
- via the relevant registry administrator, to arrange dates for Boards of Examiners meetings with external examiners a year in advance.

Contact with external examiners and remuneration

37. The chief points of contact with external examiners after formal appointment will be the relevant head of programmes, the relevant registry administrator, and the Chair of the Board of Examiners (who is the Director of Programmes).
38. Contact concerning remuneration and reimbursement of expenses should be through the Deputy Director.
39. External examiners will be remunerated in accordance with the rates set by the College. Local overnight hotel accommodation will be booked by the College, on request, where necessary. The College will pay reasonable travel and subsistence costs, including standard class rail travel (supported by receipts).

Composition of practical examination panels and the role of external specialist examiners

40. Panels of examiners for final recitals and other major recital examinations which contribute marks to the final award will normally include an external specialist examiner. 'External specialist' examiners should not be confused with programme level 'external examiners'. External specialist examiners are nominated each year by heads of faculty.

Guidance for practical examiners and audition panels

41. Detailed notes for the guidance of practical examiners and for those conducting auditions are reviewed each year by Senate Exec. They include the composition of examination panels and marking criteria. Copies of the criteria are published and made available to all examiners and to students to ensure that they are aware of the methods by which they will be assessed.

Operation of the Chair of the Board of Examiners

42. There are occasions when it is not practical to call a meeting of the Board of Examiners, but where rapid decisions are necessary in the interest of individual students. Taking advice from the Deputy Director and the relevant head of programmes, the Chair of the Board is empowered, to take decisions affecting individual students on the Board's behalf, subject to advance consultation with members wherever possible and operating within programme regulations and guidelines. In these circumstances, particular effort is made to consult external examiners. All Chair's decisions are reported to members.

Signatories and document history

Full version

Deputy Director

Kevin Porter

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