

# Executive summary

## Report

### Institutional quality enhancement review

# Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD)

## (Cardiff, United Kingdom)

**Site-visit: November 2021**

### Introduction

The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD) was originally founded in 1949 as the Cardiff College of Music. It is a well-established institution within the UK higher education conservatoire sector that provides higher, and pre-higher education in musical and dramatic arts. The College has a long-standing strategic alliance with the University of South Wales (USW) dating back to 2007. As such, it operates as a wholly owned subsidiary of the USW. The College shares academic infrastructure and procedures with the USW whilst maintaining a degree of autonomy and a distinct brand identity as the “*Royal Conservatoire*” in *Wales*. Professor Helena Gaunt was appointed as Principal in 2018 and is leading the strategic direction of the institution which is articulated within the College’s Strategic Plan.

The College operates seventeen courses at higher education level (excluding ERASMUS) along with a substantial raft of activity at pre- higher education level. Current higher education provision is at Bachelors and Masters levels and it is intended to extend this to Doctoral level as soon as it is feasible. The College is in a period of expansion with new higher education courses in Scenic Construction and Musical Theatre launched in 2021; there are plans for further course additions with an overall increase in student numbers. Alongside the expansion, the College intends to apply for Taught Degree Awarding Powers and to evaluate the dynamics of full institutional autonomy.

### Context of the Review

The institutional review of the RWCMD by MusiQuE is seen by the College as an important step towards achieving goals stated within the Strategic Plan, in particular, those relating to future autonomy, self-validation and doctoral provision. The MusiQuE procedure is a focused review of the College in the context of its place within the larger USW, Cardiff, and the broader regional, national and international contexts. In order to facilitate the review and to ensure that its effectiveness is maximized within the UK context, there has been a series of contacts between

MusiQuE and the QAA. It is hoped that the contents of this MusiQuE report will serve to provide the QAA and other interested parties with a fair and objective view of the RWCMD<sup>1</sup>. A separate review of the USW will be carried out by the QAA in 2022 and the RWCMD will be incorporated into this as one of the constituent bodies of the university.

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<sup>1</sup> SER, p.3-5

## Summary of the compliance with the Standards

<b>1. Institutional mission, vision and context</b>	
<b>Standard 1.</b> The institutional mission and vision are clearly stated.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Suggestion for enhancements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Strengthen some elements of sub-strategies to provide further support to the overall mission and values, with particular focus on learning and teaching and ensuring a good balance between equality, diversity and inclusion</li> </ul>	
<b>2. Educational processes</b>	
<b>Standard 2.1.</b> The goals of the institution are achieved through the content and structure of the study programmes and their methods of delivery	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<b>Recommendations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Develop a solid support structure (research culture &amp; organisational infrastructure) in preparation for introducing doctoral level study</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 2.2.</b> The institution offers a range of opportunities for students to gain an international perspective.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Suggestion for enhancements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Continue to engage with agencies to facilitate international activities such as staff and student exchanges, and strengthen the visibility of international elements of the curriculum within course documents and the student experience of the curriculum so as to further embed internationalisation.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 2.3.</b> The assessment methods are clearly defined and demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Suggestion for enhancements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Clarify some elements of assessment and feedback and ensure consistency of feedback across both departments. This includes enhancing consistency in relation to internal and external markers and real-world assessments.</li> </ul>	
<b>3. Student profiles</b>	
<b>Standard 3.1.</b> Clear admission criteria exist, which establish artistic/academic suitability of students.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Recommendations</b> /	
<b>Standard 3.2.</b> The institution has mechanisms to formally monitor and review the progression, achievement and subsequent employability of its students.	<b>Fully compliant</b>

<b>Suggestions for enhancement</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Continuing development of data capture and analysis in respect of employability to inform future curricular developments</li> <li>○ Strengthen data collection and analysis relating to EDI in all areas of this standard</li> </ul>	
<b>4. Teaching staff</b>	
<b>Standard 4.1.</b> Members of the teaching staff are qualified for their role and are active as artists/pedagogues/ researchers.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Suggestion for enhancement</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Prioritise the institutional ambition of systemising an equitable and effective mechanism for enabling staff development and research</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 4.2.</b> There are sufficient qualified teaching staff to effectively deliver the programmes.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Suggestion for enhancement</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ensure that plans for expansion numbers are supported by an appropriate teaching staff level (numbers/expertise)</li> </ul>	
<b>5. Facilities, resources and support</b>	
<b>Standard 5.1.</b> The institution has appropriate resources to support student learning and delivery of the programmes.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Suggestion for enhancement</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Continue the culture shift to shared departmental space wherever possible</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 5.2.</b> The institution's financial resources enable successful delivery of the study programmes.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Suggestion for enhancement</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The review team recommends that a risk management strategy (or equivalent) be regularly reviewed so that it can be used as circumstances require.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 5.3.</b> The institution has sufficient qualified support staff.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	
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<b>6. Communication, organisation and decision-making</b>	
<b>Standard 6.1.</b> Effective mechanisms are in place for internal communication within the institution.	<b>Fully compliant</b>

<b>Suggestion for enhancement</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ensure that the vehicles for communication are optimised to ensure that strategic priorities are shared and owned at all levels of the institution</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 6.2.</b> The institution has an appropriate organisational structure and clear decision-making processes.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	
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<b>7. Internal quality culture</b>	
<b>Standard 7.1.</b> The institution has a strong internal quality culture, supported by clear and effective quality assurance and enhancement procedures.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Suggestion for enhancement</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Further involvement of alumni to inform course development</li> <li>○ Ensure that feedback loops to students are closed</li> <li>○ Ensure that mechanisms for quality assurance and enhancement are future-proofed for plans such as expansion and autonomy</li> </ul>	
<b>8. Public interaction</b>	
<b>Standard 8.1.</b> The institution engages within wider cultural, artistic and educational contexts.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	
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<b>Standard 8.2.</b> The institution actively promotes links with various sectors of the music and other artistic professions.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	
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<b>Standard 8.3.</b> Information provided to the public about the institution is clear, consistent and accurate.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Suggestions for enhancement</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Prioritise further development of the website so as to fully represent the quality of work within the conservatoire</li> <li>○ To enhance the website in terms of accessibility and clarity in order to maximise its potential for priorities such as student recruitment</li> </ul>	

## Conclusion

This quality enhancement review has taken place during a very exceptional period in the world's history. The College should be congratulated for the comprehensive and thorough preparations that it has made to ensure that the review could take place in an effective, meaningful and useful manner under such exceptional circumstances. The College is at the early stages of an ambitious agenda for change and development and having carried out significant changes to the upper-levels of management, the focus is now on the roll-out of the Strategic Plan. The pandemic has been both a restraining force and a catalyst for change and the College has been adept in its adjustments necessitated by the adverse effects. It has learnt from the experience and has developed positive short-term outcomes along with longer-term strategies emerging from this learning. The Black Lives Matter movement has been a similar catalyst for positive change.

The review team considers the SER to be a frank, open and grounded analysis of the College's current position and its ambitions for the future. The review team has found many points which can be celebrated during this quality enhancement review. These positive elements were outlined to the College in the final presentation of the site-visit and they are listed below. Alongside these within the Summary of compliance with the MusiQuE standards is a series of recommendations. Some of these recommendations will be manageable through the on-going processes of the College. Others may require significant institutional impetus and placement within the order of priority.

The College's ambitions for its institutional profile are particularly notable. The review team considers that its commitment to collaboration - partnerships (regional, national and international) and optimising the multidisciplinary experience within the curriculum – as particularly impressive. These ambitions have the potential of creating a unique institutional quality which may have positive effects on the College's attractiveness to potential students and its ability to form strategic institutional relationships and partnerships. This in turn will have positive effects on its regional, national and global status. Equally, the review team considers that the College's commitment to the individual student experience, its commitment to serve under-represented groups and to promote equality diversity and inclusion is a highly valuable set of aims. This commitment was evident to the team in all its site visit meetings, institutional documents and dealings with the College.

Perhaps one of the most important recommendations relates to research. The College is aware that its current position is relatively nascent. It is committed to developing a research culture that will impact upon the College's programmes, give opportunities for its staff and enhance institutional reputation. Whilst this is an urgent priority, the review team believes this cannot be rushed and that firm foundations and a solid infrastructure are essential early stage priorities. This includes the formalisation of the mechanisms for staff development and research.

The review team was impressed by the approach towards quality assurance and enhancement. With its organisational links to the USW, the College benefits from the structures and procedures of the university. As the College rolls out the strategic plan and works towards autonomy it will be necessary to review these procedures so that it can develop the most appropriate structures for its own context and to ensure robust information in support of its decision making. There has been considerable discussion regarding data capture and analysis within this report and the review team considers this to be a high priority which, once achieved, will underpin the College's strategic priorities ranging from EDI to expansion and autonomy.

Communications are a key underpinning mechanism that can enhance or detract from an institution's success. The College places high value on its communications mechanisms and the review team noted the high degree of "buy in" from the stakeholders that it met during the site visit. This could not have been achieved without mutual communication and understanding. The College has a substantial body of students and staff and the review team was obviously only able to meet with a very small range of its stakeholders. The extent to which the institution's members have assimilated the strategic priorities is therefore difficult to assess. However, the importance of an optimal communications framework is beyond question and the review team strongly encourages the College to prioritise its efforts in this direction so as to ensure buy in for the College's strategic priorities.

The Royal Welsh College of Music has exciting and ambitious plans for its future. The review team hopes that the commentary within this report will be helpful as the roll out of its strategic objectives continues and it wishes the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama every success for the future.

***Summary of the strengths identified during the final feedback meeting between the review team and the SMT.***

- Clear statement on the mission and values of the institution with a strategy for dissemination to all levels of the institution
- A strong emergent and developing unique institutional profile
- The approach to institutional values is confident, reflective and informed by national and international contexts
- An agile approach to planning and seizing opportunities presented by the pandemic
- A flexible approach to facilitating individualised pathways of study
- A strong commitment to building on and enhancing the industry-led curriculum
- A strong institutional approach to shared educational values at all levels of study (pre-He to HE)
- A realistic approach to enhancing assessment procedures and responding to student feedback internally and within the NSS.
- An exceptionally welcoming and inclusive environment at the point of application through to acceptance
- There is strong evidence for a high quality of teaching
- The teaching staff is extremely supportive of its students
- The institution has a highly impressive site with excellent specialist facilities, accessible green space and a warm welcoming ambiance
- The speedy adoption post-pandemic of new and flexible working spaces and arrangements so as to enhance learning and teaching
- Bold financial planning exemplified by the recent lease of the Old Library in furtherance of the strategic plan
- Clear commitment to ensuring that working arrangements facilitate open communication and conversations
- The inclusion of a wider body of students and staff on institutional committees leads to enhanced communication, decision making and above all, ownership
- A strong commitment to quality assurance and enhancement as exemplified by the recent initiative involving the facilitation of course boards by the Quality Assurance Officer
- A well-articulated and thought through conception of quality assurance and enhancement
- Investment in a comprehensive complaints procedure management system
- A very public facing institution with a grounded understanding of its cultural, artistic and educational roles within Cardiff, Wales, and beyond

- A strong ambition to serve under-represented groups

Strong and sustainable working relationships with the sector