

Royal College of Music Quality Assurance & Enhancement Handbook



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Overview of quality assurance and enhancement at the RCM

Objectives of quality assurance and enhancement at the RCM

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.

2 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.

3 The processes and their outcomes aim to be transparent and open to audit. They take account of the College's learning and teaching strategy, access and widening participation strategy, equal opportunities (including race, age and disability equality), data protection and other legal requirements. The processes are intended align with the Quality Assurance Agency's codes of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education and take account of the national qualifications framework and undergraduate subject benchmarking.

4 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. The College is also concerned to ensure that its quality assurance practices are consistent with and promote its equal opportunities policy, including its duties to promote racial equality, and its disability statement.

5 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

6 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 external examiner appointments, of changes to programme regulations.
- Undergraduate Programmes Committee and Graduate School Committee (the programmes committee for postgraduate taught programmes): approval of minor and major modifications to programme content and of changes to regulations, approval of annual programme monitoring reports, response to reports of initial approval and review events, including acting on the conditions and recommendations of such reports.
- Artistic & Academic Management Group (AAMG): approval of operational procedures and policy relating to student assessment (eg composition of practical assessment panels and procedures for panels). The AAMG also operates as the College’s admissions committee – determining procedure related to admissions and taking admissions decisions. AAMG also has a role in taking oversight of the overall student experience – artistic as well as programme-related.
- Boards of examiners: approval of assessment decisions and award of qualifications, make recommendations to programmes committees and AAMG on revisions to regulations and assessment procedure.
- Learning Resources Committee: considers annual requirements for learning resources and teaching equipment identified in annual programme monitoring.
- Research Degrees Committee: quality assurance, standards and quality control for the research programmes, ie the DMus, including admission, progress monitoring and assessment of DMus students, review of DMus regulations (revisions are subject to approval by the Senate). Periodic review of the DMus follows the process for taught programmes, with the report subject to approval by the Senate.
- RCM Council: receives copies of reports of initial programme approval and review events and the annual report on performance standards, to keep it informed on quality and standards issues.

Review of quality assurance procedures

7 Periodically the College evaluates the effectiveness of its approach to quality assurance. Reviews are conducted at least every six years. The institutional review process will always involve some form of self-assessment, which is normally led by the Deputy Director, who has leadership responsibility for the College’s quality assurance processes, on behalf of the Senate. The self-assessment documentation and any proposed revisions to quality assurance processes are submitted to the Senate for approval. The review will include an evaluation of the alignment of the College’s processes with the UK Academic Infrastructure, the QAA Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, and the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ).

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

8 Initial programme approval and subsequent programme review both involve a development process leading to an extended, usually full day, meeting of a panel of external academics and music 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, representatives of the learning resources, and students. A report is produced by the panel and submitted to the Senate for approval. The relevant programmes committee considers and responds to any conditions and/or recommendations. Programme review is designed to be a key quality enhancement process.

9 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, external specialist examiner reports and sets an action list 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 the relevant programmes committee.

External examiners and external specialist examiners

10 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 the programmes committee, 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 and Research 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 by the relevant programmes committee.

11 External specialist examiners are included on all panels for graduation or final recital assessments. They are nominated by heads of faculty. Internal examiners for all practical examinations and 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 the AAMG 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.

Collaborative provision and flexible and distributive learning (FDL)

12 The College has a range of collaborative provision such as joint programmes, and has a growing involvement in flexible and distributive learning (FDL), such as 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

13 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. In particular, student engagement is core to ensuring a quality enhancement dimension to annual programme monitoring, review and initial approval.

Professional development and appraisal

14 The knowledge, experience and skills of members of staff is one of 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. Professional development is a core part of staff appraisal systems. Monitoring and evaluation reports on professional development are considered annually by the Senate. The College also supports peer observation through its Learning and Teaching Strategy. Details of the College's professional development and appraisal policies and procedures can be found in the web-based staff handbook and are covered by the College's HR Strategy.

Initial programme approval and programme review

Summary

- The purpose of initial programme approval and of programme review is to ensure that programmes will:
 - contribute towards fulfilling the College's mission statement and meeting its general quality assurance objectives;
 - offer a valuable and professionally relevant educational experience to students;
 - be of a standard appropriate to the awards to which they lead and are at least comparable with similar programmes offered internationally.
- Initial programme approval involves a development process leading to an initial approval event.
- Programme review is a process of reflective review conducted every five-six years. It draws on annual monitoring and provides an opportunity for making significant structural changes to a programme. In this regard the process is similar to initial approval and thus will involve a similar development process. It is designed to be a key quality enhancement process.
- Both processes usually involve an initial approval or review event for up to a full day, involving a meeting of a panel of external academics and music professionals and internal peers with the programme development team, administrators, and, where appropriate, students. The panel concludes with a judgement of whether to recommend initial approval or the date of the next review, with any attendant recommendations or conditions.
- A report is produced by the panel and submitted to the Senate for approval. The relevant programmes committee considers and responds to any conditions and/or recommendations.

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 Research and addresses the extent to which the proposal fits with the College's mission, strategic plan, and the range of other programmes on offer. Programmes given approval proceed to programme development. This process is not required for programme review.

Timing of programme reviews

2 Each programme will normally be reviewed every five-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.

Programme development and review

3 For each programme which receives Directorate approval to be developed and for those due for review, a planning meeting is arranged by the Deputy Director with the Director of Programmes and Research and the relevant head of programmes. At the meeting the following matters are discussed:

- the timetable for programme development and initial approval/review (including the consideration of resources);
- the composition of the programme development team;
- the 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;
- in the case of reviews, the plans for the use of and reflection on annual monitoring reports in reviewing the programme, especially student feedback and the views of external examiners as expressed in their annual reports;
- the composition of the initial approval or review panel and the nominees for membership;
- the outline schedule for the initial approval/review event (unless the process is by correspondence).

4 Prior to the initial approval/review event, the resource requirements of the programme will be assessed by the Directorate, using TRAC methodologies. Only programmes with approval from the Directorate may proceed to initial approval or review. A programme due for review which does not have such approval must seek a deferral of the review and may be discontinued either by the Directorate or by the Senate.

Initial approval and Review

5 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 are set out in the section 'Guidance for initial approval and review panels and for programme development teams'. Panels should aim to be constructive when making judgements, in a spirit of collaboration.

6 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 programme development team. Experience shows that this attendance does not inhibit panels from expressing criticisms, where these are felt to be necessary.

7 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:

- an external chair who will normally be a senior academic from a conservatoire or a university music department, with experience of programme design, approval and review procedures (in the case of collaborative provision the chair will be the Director, the Deputy Director or the Director of Programmes & Research to ensure the College's strategic interests are assured),
- one or two external panel members who are specialists in the area of the programme,

Between them the external panel members, including the Chair, will be expected to 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.

8 The initial approval/review event usually involves meetings with the programme development team, the Director of Programmes and Research or the Deputy Director on behalf of the Directorate (to speak to overall resource issues), representatives of the learning resources, and key programme administrators. If the proposed programme is a successor to an existing programme, the initial approval panel may meet students from that programme. For reviews, there will normally be a meeting with current students.

9 The Chair and the Secretary have particular roles during events. The role of the Chair is to chair the process on the day, guided by the Secretary. The Chair will normally be briefed by the Secretary before the event. The Secretary is a member of the panel and is responsible for ensuring that:

- the process is conducted in accordance with the College's procedures;
- the outcome, including conditions and recommendations, is consistent with the discussion during the meetings;
- the panel Chair is briefed on the College's procedures in advance of the event and that panel members are briefed in the opening session at the start of the day;
- that any proposed changes to the schedule of meetings for the event is discussed and agreed with the development team.

10 The Chair and Secretary are responsible, jointly, for steering the concluding sessions. Normally they will work together privately before the start of the concluding session to formulate a draft outcome and any recommendations and/or conditions for consideration by the panel as a whole. The Chair has responsibility for the academic coherence of the outcome and the Secretary for ensuring that the outcome is consistent with the discussions during the day, with the College's quality assurance procedures and with outcomes reached in similar circumstances at other initial approvals and reviews.

Structure of outcome decisions and conditions and recommendations

11 Panels must formulate an overall judgement of a new programme proposal by making a recommendation about its approval to the Senate. In the case of reviews, continuing approval is pre-supposed, although it is within a panel's discretion to recommend that approval be withdrawn.

12 The timing of future reviews can be recommended to the Senate, but the Board has responsibility for the overall schedule of reviews taking into account the desirability of phasing reviews over a reasonable timescale.

13 **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 or, in the case of review, take further new cohorts of students. A condition will be a specific design issue which the panel believes must be addressed by the programme development team 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.

14 Panels are advised that it is not part of their role to design programmes. Programme development teams must have the freedom to address conditions in the way which seems most appropriate to them. At the same time, the programme development team must recognise that their response to conditions must convince the panel if approval to run the programme is to be granted.

15 **Recommendations** are intended to indicate issues, specific or general, which the programme development team is asked to address either before a programme starts or during its operation, as appropriate. The programme development team 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 programme development team is free to determine the response to recommendations which seems most appropriate. Programme committees are responsible for considering the responses to recommendations.

16 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 programme development team'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 programme development team'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.

Guidance for initial approval and review panels and for programme development teams

Summary

- The programme documentation provided to the initial approval panel must contain all the information which the panel will require in order to understand the rationale for and nature of a programme proposal and how it will operate.
- Detailed below is the information which the College expects to see included in documentation for initial approval or review.
- Also set out are the issues for panels and programme development teams to consider when preparing for initial approval and review, which are used as the criteria for programme approval or successful review.

Documentation for initial approval and review

17 Documentation for initial approval and review should be provided as follows:

The programme rationale and review

An explanation of the proposal in terms of:

- its relationship to the rest of the College's provision;
- its relationship to similar programme provision offered elsewhere;
- the target student group/expected student profile and numbers (divided by home/EU, and overseas);
- intended or actual (for programme review) career destinations for students completing the programme (drawing on alumni data) and a statement on career guidance services relevant to the programme;
- a statement on professional development policy and practice specific to teaching staff on the programme, including sharing and developing best practice and enhancing the quality of provision;
- in the case of programme reviews, a review of the operation of the programme in the period since the last initial approval or review exercise (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;
- in the case of programme reviews, an analysis of issues raised in student consultation/feedback exercises undertaken as part of the review process.
- conformation 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 (equipment, access to

facilities, software) and music technology support resources and any specialist teaching accommodation requirements.

The draft programme handbook (see guidance below)

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, initial approval and review panels, external bodies and individuals requiring information about the programme. The categories of information listed below are the core content of the programme handbook:

- the diploma supplement (conforming to the national format);
- overall programme aims, objectives and learning outcomes;
- programme structure, showing relationships between years/levels and units (if possible, using a diagram);
- summary of progression and assessment arrangements (if possible, using a diagram);
- unit descriptions: comprising unit objectives, indicative content, data on level, credit rating, methods of delivery, prerequisites, and assessment methods. (In most cases unit descriptions will be supported by separate syllabus documents with more detailed week by week information and with assessment criteria. This is generally more detailed than would be required for initial approval or review);
- Programme management arrangements, to include terms of reference, structure and membership of the programmes committee and the Senate; a description of the programme management team arrangements; arrangements for obtaining and using student feedback;
- Programme regulations: including assessment, progression, reassessment, compensation and classification of awards.

Issues for panels and programme development teams: criteria for programme approval and review

18 The issues below should be addressed by programme developers when preparing for initial approval and review. Initial approval and review panels will wish to satisfy themselves that they have been adequately addressed either by the documentation or as part of their discussions with programme development teams. In effect, these are the criteria for initial or continuing programme approval.

How do the intended learning outcomes relate to external reference points and to the broad aims of the programme?

- What are the intended learning outcomes for the programme?
- How do they relate to external reference points including relevant subject benchmark statements, the qualifications framework?
- How do they relate to the overall aims of the programme described in the programme handbook?

How are the curriculum design principles used to permit achievement of the intended learning outcomes?

- 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 learning outcomes communicated to students, staff and external examiners?

- How are the intended outcomes of a programme communicated to staff, students and external examiners?
- Do the students know what is expected of them?

How does the College create the conditions for achievement of the intended learning outcomes?

- Do 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?

How does the assessment process work?

- 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?
- Can there be full confidence in the security and integrity of assessment procedures?
- 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 does the College review and improve the quality of the student learning experience?

- How does the College review and seek to enhance the quality of the student learning experience?
- Does it have strategies for building upon its quality assurance processes to enhance the quality of its programme?
- How effective is teaching in relation to curriculum content and programme aims?
- How effectively do staff draw upon their research, scholarship or professional activity to inform their teaching?
- How good are the materials provided to support learning?
- Is there effective engagement with and participation by students?
- Is the quality of teaching maintained and enhanced through effective staff development, effective team teaching and induction and mentoring of new professors?
- How effectively is learning facilitated in terms of student workloads?

How is students' learning supported?

- Is there an appropriate overall strategy for academic support, including written guidance, which is consistent with the student profile and the overall aims of the programme?

- Are there effective arrangements for admission and induction which are generally understood by staff and applicants?
- How effectively is learning facilitated by academic guidance, feedback and supervisory arrangements?
- Are the arrangements for support clear and generally understood by staff and students?
- How effective is the careers guidance provided for students?

How satisfactory are learning resources and how are they deployed?

- Is the collective expertise of the staff suitable and available for effective delivery of the curriculum, for the overall teaching, learning and assessment strategy and for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes?
- Are appropriate staff development opportunities available?
- Is appropriate technical and administrative support available?
- Is there an overall strategy for the deployment of learning resources?
- How effectively is learning facilitated in terms of the programme of resources?
- Is suitable teaching and learning accommodation available?
- Are the library stocks appropriate and accessible?
- Are suitable equipment and appropriate information technology facilities available to learners?
- 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 equal opportunities/diversity, including racial equality, disability and gender?

Programme monitoring and modifications

Summary

- The programme monitoring system is an annual process of quality control, which feeds into periodic programme review. It is intended to be a concise mechanism which reflects on the previous year's standards of achievement, addresses points in external examiner reports and student feedback, and sets an action list for the coming academic year.
- The relevant head of programmes compiles the report, which is submitted to the relevant programmes committee.
- Any significant change to a programme is subject to approval before it can be implemented.
- The purpose of such approval is to ensure that changes will maintain, and where possible improve, the standard of the education offered through the programme concerned.
- The relevant programmes committee has authority to approve minor and major 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 an annual programme monitoring report, in consultation with and drawing on contributions from area leaders and heads of faculty. The evidence base for the report will usually comprise:

- reports from external examiners,
- reports by external specialist examiners
- data on student achievement,
- student engagement (feedback obtained by questionnaire or consultation methods; these will include questions about the effectiveness of the programme in promoting equal opportunities, including racial equality and supporting students with disabilities),
- ideas and issues from an invitation to programmes committee and programme teaching team,
- members to offer comments on the year, including on learning resource and teaching equipment needs (to be referred to the Learning Resources Committee) and about the effectiveness of the programme in promoting equal opportunities, including racial equality, and supporting students with disabilities.

2 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, ie after the first year of operation;
 - 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 engagement;
 - a programme action plan for the coming year;
 - learning resources issues that have arisen during the year (to be referred to the Learning Resources Committee);
 - the effectiveness of the programme in promoting equal opportunities, including racial equality, and supporting students with disabilities;
 - appendices comprising the external examiner reports, external specialist 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).
- 3 The draft monitoring report will be considered and approved by the relevant programmes committee, subject to any revisions delegated to the Chair to finalise out of committee. The relevant head of programmes will then provide the finalised report to the external examiners, to committee members and to other professors and administrators involved in the running of the programme, the chair of the Senate.
- 4 The Senate will take an overview of the process via committee minutes.

Categorising and approving a modification

- 5 The method for considering changes to a programme will depend on the nature and extent of the proposed modification. Proposed modifications will be discussed with the Deputy Director, who will determine whether a modification is minor or major on the basis of the guidelines below.
- 6 Aside from modifications, it is expected that each programme or pathway handbook and each syllabus will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis by the head of programmes, area leaders and, in the case of principal study and related syllabuses, heads of faculty. This process involves reviewing the currency of the content of units and the clarity of the programme documentation. This normal up-dating constitutes a modification where it fits any of the definitions for a modification below.
- 7 Modifications will fall into one of three categories: a minor modification, a major modification or a change to the programme regulations.
- 8 **Minor modifications.** Minor modifications are most commonly new or modified units. In the case of an individual unit, a modification is any change to (as opposed simply to a clearer expression of) the:
- aims, objectives or learning outcomes,
 - assessment methods or assessment weightings between methods,
 - or to more than 50% of the indicative content.

Advice on whether any other change constitutes a minor modification or updating should be sought from the Deputy Director where there is any uncertainty.

- 9 Minor modifications are considered for approval by the relevant programmes committee. In the case of new units, consultation prior to the committee meeting with

those most likely to have an interest in the unit is encouraged. The unit leader, if not already a committee member, will be invited to attend the meeting for discussion of the unit. Where the committee proposes minor changes to a unit, the chair will normally be delegated responsibility to finalise the revised unit description outside a meeting. Where significant revisions are proposed or where the consideration of the unit raises issues of principle requiring more detailed discussion, a working group comprising interested committee members and the unit leader may be delegated responsibility to revise and approve the unit outside a meeting.

10 The programmes committee must monitor the cumulative effect of minor modifications to any one programme, via annual monitoring. The committee or its chair may bring forward a programme review where these become substantial.

11 **Major modifications** are significant changes to the structure or content of a programme and must be submitted for initial approval. The following proposed changes constitute major modifications:

- changes to the programme title or awards, or to its minimum and maximum duration,
- 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) units or subjects.

12 Major modifications will most commonly be considered by correspondence by the panel that last reviewed or approved the programme. If a modification is very significant it will also involve a meeting of a review panel, which may be newly constituted for this purpose or may involve the same members as were involved in the most recent initial approval or review. The Deputy Director will determine the most appropriate means of approving a major modification. Panels which consider major modifications, whether by correspondence or by a meeting, will report their recommendation on approval to the Senate, which has authority to approve them.

13 **Changes to the programme regulations** must be submitted to the programmes committee for approval. 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

14 Modifications will normally take effect from the next academic year and should be incorporated into the annual update of the programme handbook or syllabus.

15 Ideas for minor modifications and changes to programme regulations will often arise in the summer, following boards of examiners meetings and during the annual update of the programme handbook or while compiling the annual monitoring report. In these circumstances, taking advice from the Deputy Director, modifications may be made to the programme handbook, pending discussion by the relevant programmes committee. Whenever this occurs it is essential that such modifications are clearly marked as subject to the approval of the programmes committee.

16 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.

Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (FDL)

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 programmes, such as the Imperial College London/RCM BSc in Physics with Music, franchise or validated provision, such as the proposed undergraduate degree for Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), Singapore and articulated provision, such as the Princeton University/RCM BA/Masters Programme. It thus encompasses both UK-based and overseas provision.
2. Collaborative provision also encompasses provision of experience programmes to partner institutions: such as the Semester Experience Programme provided for Boston University. The Experience Programme (or successor programmes) provides the validated framework for delivery of credited provision, whether on an ad hoc or a regular basis, for partner institutions. While many of the principles below also apply to the Experience Programme, the arrangements for its quality assurance fall within the arrangements for the College's non-collaborative taught programmes. Any regular arrangements will, however, be expected to have a memorandum of agreement.
3. '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. 'Franchise' provision in this context is permission for another institution to deliver an RCM programme leading to an RCM award, with or without local elements (such as different principal studies or options). 'Validated' provision will involve provision that is completely or largely designed by the partner institution itself, leading to an RCM award. '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. The quality assurance and management arrangements for each of these types of provision are described below.

4. The College does not permit 'serial' arrangements in which the partner institution offers RCM collaborative and/or FDL provision via another third party institution.

5. The definitions above for collaborative provision (and for FDL, below) used in this section of the QA&E Handbook draw on the guidance in the *QAA Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: Collaborative provision, and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

Authorisation and responsibilities for and management of collaborative provision

6. 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 UK academic infrastructure, including the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

7. 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.

8. The lead quality assurance committee for collaborative programmes, as for other provision, is the Senate, with additional oversight by the relevant programmes committee.

9. Directorate members, usually at least one of the Deputy Director and/or Director of Programmes and Research, 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.

10. 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 & Estates 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 & Estates will also be involved in assessing any related documentation.

11. The financial management arrangements and the costing for a collaboration will be subject to scrutiny by the Director of Finance & Estates, working with the Directorate member(s) 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 and its predecessor bodies 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.

12. 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

13. 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 Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). Any divergences, for example to take account of local circumstances, will be explicitly acknowledged and explained.

14. A list of the College's current collaborative partners and the related provision will be published on the RCM website.

15. 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

16. 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.

17. 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.

18. 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 institutional audit. 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 the relevant RCM programmes committee and to the Senate.

19. 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 the relevant programmes committee and to the Senate.

20. 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 and Research and relevant programme head. Any significant deviation from normal RCM quality assurance arrangements will be subject to approval by the Senate.

21. There will usually be a site visit led by the Deputy Director or the Director of Programmes & Research, 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.

22. 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 & Research (to ensure the College's strategic interests are assured), including external members 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 other wise 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;
- Reports of all initial approval and periodic review processes to be subject to approval by the Senate, as well as being submitted to the relevant RCM programmes committee for discussion;
- 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 the relevant programmes committee 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 unit eligible for RCM credit.

23. The process and timetable for initial approval and periodic review activities will be agreed between the Deputy Director and the partner institution and will be set out in writing. These will include ensuring adequate time and processes for any necessary curriculum design and development by each and both institutions.

24. 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;
 - information about the legal standing of the institution (including relationship with government, powers and limits on powers, academic and otherwise);
 - details and any recent reports of national quality assurance agencies relevant to the programme;
 - evidence of financial standing;
- draft prospectus entry (where applicable) and draft publicity material.

25. 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. 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. The section of this handbook on *Guidance in for initial approval and review panels and for programme development teams*, should assist programme design and development

Quality assurance principles of flexible and distributed learning

26. '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 units, and the College's developing e-learning provision. The quality assurance principles for these types of provision are described below.

27. The educational aims and intended learning outcomes of a FDL programme or unit and associated study materials will be subject to the College's usual approval, monitoring and review processes.

28. Programme documentation for programmes or units 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.

29. Any FDL programme or unit offered for study will have the reliability of its delivery system tested, and, where applicable, contingency plans will come into operation in the event of the failure of the designed modes of delivery. The delivery system of an FDL programme or unit of study delivered through e-learning must be fit for its purpose, with appropriate availability and life expectancy. The delivery of any study materials direct to students remotely through, for example, e-learning methods or correspondence, must be secure and reliable, with appropriate means of confirming safe receipt.

30. Prospective students should receive a clear and realistic explanation of the expectations placed upon them for study of the FDL programme or units, and for the nature and extent of autonomous, collaborative and supported aspects of learning.

31. 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 locally and remotely for their FDL programme or units;
- 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 unit.

32. Students should have:

- from the outset of their study, an identified contact, either local or remote through email, telephone, or post, who can give them constructive feedback on academic performance and authoritative guidance on their academic progression. Staff involved in these delivery systems should have appropriate support and training in any technical and pedagogic aspects of delivery;
- 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 unit.

33. 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.

Student engagement in QA&E

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.

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 membership of programme initial approval and review panels
- sessions with students as part of initial approval and review events
- regular liaison with the Students' Association, via the Student Services Manager
- Director's open surgeries for staff and students.

2 In annual programme monitoring a questionnaire-based engagement and/or consultation sessions with students 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 or pathway level by the relevant head of programmes or pathway leader and through unit level questionnaires administered by unit lecturers. It is open to the relevant head of programmes, pathway leader or unit lecturer 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. Feedback should be collated on the following areas, as a minimum:

- arrangements for academic and tutorial guidance, support and supervision;
- Library services and IT support;
- suitability of accommodation, equipment and facilities for teaching and learning;
- perceptions of the quality of teaching and the range of teaching and learning methods;
- assessment arrangements;
- relevance of the course to further study and prospective employment;
- quality of pastoral support
- equal opportunities.

3 Periodically and at least every three years, learning resources providers will undertake user feedback exercises. These will always include feedback from student users, but will usually also cover professors and other users. The reports of such feedback will be submitted to the Learning Resources Committee.

4 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 programmes committee, on which there are student representatives. The sections of the finalised annual monitoring reports that responds to issues raised through student engagement are circulated to the students concerned either directly by pigeonhole or by email or through RCM internal newsletters.

5 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.

External examiners and external specialist examiners

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 made by the programmes 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.

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, diploma supplement 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 any of the 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 pathway 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 relevant programmes committee will identify a shortlist of suitable nominees for presentation to the Senate.
- 6 The relevant head of programmes will make an informal approach to nominees on the shortlist 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 extreme 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 nominations

- 11 The following criteria for the appointment of external examiners are used by the Senate when considering external examiner nominations. They also provide a check-list 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 musical 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 or, where there is only one external examiner, work initially alongside an experienced external examiner for a related programme.

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 women, those with disabilities and those from a range of racial groups.

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. For example a new programme should not have all its external examiners appointed to finish their terms of office in the same year.

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 relevant head of programmes will send a written report of the situation to the Deputy Director, who will discuss it 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 For those courses that have them, it is expected that external examiners will be asked to approve the form and content of proposed written examination papers for all years of the course. Normal policy will be for proposed examination papers to be prepared by the College during the spring term planning and review week for submission to the external examiner at the start of the week immediately following. The external examiner will be requested to respond with comments within two weeks, to enable the papers to be finalised by the end of the spring term. In the case of examinations which take place other than during the summer term, the equivalent lead times of this advanced planning timetable will be applied to the consideration of the relevant examination papers.

26 **Marking policies.** Internal first marking of examination scripts and course work will be subject to a process of moderation by a second internal marker or through group meetings. Unresolved inconsistencies in marking between first and second markers (where group meetings are not used) will result in moderation of all the papers by a third marker.

27 External examiners will be provided with a representative selection of the examination scripts and course work proposed for the highest, median and lowest available categories of the award, including failure. The selection of student work will normally relate to all years of the course, but must include samples of each year which contributes directly to the final award.

28 The role of the external examiner is to moderate the scripts and course work to establish that students are placed fairly in relation to the cohort and examining standards applied elsewhere.

29 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 course unit. Course work which has been returned to students will be requested from them in such circumstances, although its return by students cannot be guaranteed by the College.

30 **The Role of the external examiner in practical examinations.** External examiners are invited 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 and the marks awarded.

31 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. External examiners are specifically asked to comment on the standards of practical examinations in their written annual report.

32 **Meetings of Boards of Examiners.** 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.

33 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.

34 At least one external examiner should be present for a Board meeting to be quorate. In the unavoidable absence of all external examiners for a programme, the results will be considered by the Board, but must be sent to and discussed with at least one of the external examiners prior to formal ratification. The absence of the external examiners from the meeting will be noted in the minutes together with the mechanism adopted to ratify the results.

35 **Right of Veto.** External examiners are expected to moderate 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 course work, or at Board of Examiners meetings.

36 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.

37 **External examiner reports.** 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 report is in two parts: a pro-forma of questions and a qualitative report. The completed report, 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 pathway leader(s) before being presented to the relevant programmes committee 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.

38 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.

39 **RCM obligations towards external examiners.** 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 pathway 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, the College's Quality Assurance & Enhancement Handbook, the College's equal opportunities policies 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 pathway leader, to provide opportunities for meetings with representatives of students and representatives of course teams.
- via the relevant registry administrator, to arrange dates for Boards of Examiners meetings with external examiners a year in advance;
- via the Deputy Director, to provide guidance on the structure of annual reports.

40 **Contact with external examiners and remuneration.** 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 and Research).

41 Contact concerning remuneration and reimbursement of expenses should be through the Deputy Director.

42 External examiners will be remunerated in accordance with the annually-reviewed 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

43 Panels of examiners for final recitals and other major recital examinations which contribute marks to the final award will normally comprise three examiners (programme handbooks identify any divergence from this policy). The panel members will 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 and a list of these is presented to AAMG. External specialist examiners are asked to submit reports, following a simple template, which are then considered as part of annual programme monitoring.

Notes for the guidance of examiners

44 Detailed notes for the guidance of practical examiners and for those conducting auditions are reviewed each year. 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 fully aware of the methods by which they will be assessed.

Operation of the Chair of the Board of Examiners

45 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.

KAP

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