**Policy name: Academic Programme Development and Review Policy**

**Approved: 25th November 2016**
**Revision 1 approved 10th March 2017**
**Revision 2 approved 5th October 2018**
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### 1. Context

1.1     The Royal Irish Academy of Music, hereinafter referred to as RIAM or the Academy, has the status of a Linked Provider of Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, hereinafter referred to as Trinity, under the provisions of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 ('the Act'). Thus, all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered and delivered by RIAM are validated by the Designated Awarding Body, Trinity. RIAM programmes must comply with the principal legislation underpinning quality assurance in Irish higher education and training, which is the Act and internal quality assurance processes in RIAM and related policies of Trinity.

### 2. Purpose

2.1     The Academic Programme Development Policy ensures that RIAM's programmes are developed in a consistent and effective manner which feeds into the validation and periodic institutional review by Trinity, leading to high quality programmes which meet the academic quality standards set by Trinity, the awarding body. This policy forms part of a suite of policies which regulate the development, monitoring and suspension/cessation of programmes.

2.2     The purpose of a Programme review as outlined by the *Good Practice Guideline for the Approval, Monitoring and Periodic Reviews of Programmes and Award in Irish Universities* (Irish University Quality Board 2012) is to facilitate a critical self-assessment and overall evaluation of the programme, with a range of inputs and analyses.

### 3. Benefits

3.1     Programmes will be informed and led by RIAM's vision and mission statement, to underpin the assurance and continuous improvement of its academic quality standards.

3.2     Programme reviews fulfil Trinity's commitment to the cyclical quality assurance of RIAM and meet the academic and quality standards of Trinity as the validating body.

3.3     This policy demonstrates good practice on the part of RIAM and Trinity in alignment with guidelines set out under the Act, and the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).*

3.4     RIAM will assure the academic validity, quality and financial sustainability of its Programmes.

3.5     RIAM will ensure that the required standards of knowledge, skills and competences meet the awards standards of Trinity as the awarding body, which in turn are aligned appropriately to NFQ levels.

**4. Scope**

4.1     This policy applies to all programmes delivered by RIAM and validated by Trinity.

4.2     Out of scope are programmes delivered by RIAM and certified by RIAM.

**5. Principles**

5.1     RIAM is responsible for the internal quality assurance of the programmes it offers.

5.2     Programmes will be developed to contribute towards fulfilment of RIAM's vision, mission and strategic objectives.

5.3     RIAM ensures that its programmes meet national and international standards and satisfy the needs of prospective students, and provide for the professional and legal recognition of its graduates.

5.4     RIAM ensures that its programmes meet the academic ~~and~~ quality standards set by Trinity and the requirements under the Act.

5.5     Pursuant and subject to 3.4 above, programmes will be of a standard appropriate to the awards' level on the National Framework of Qualifications to which they lead and will meet, or exceed, those of similar programmes offered internationally.

5.6     Programmes will be monitored periodically by RIAM (see section 7.5 below). RIAM as a Linked Provider will be externally quality reviewed by Trinity periodically on a seven year review cycle as required under the Act.

**6. Policy**

6.1     *Trinity Approval Route*

     6.1.1     All new validated programmes leading to a new Trinity award must follow the Trinity 'New Programme Design and Approval Policy' detailed in sections 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4 below.

6.2     *Definitions*

     6.2.1     An *Award* is an academic qualification (degree, diploma or certificate), conferred in recognition of the successful completion of a higher education programme of study, either at undergraduate or postgraduate level, and issued by a designated awarding body.

     6.2.2     *Modules* are the building blocks of courses. They are self-contained units of teaching, learning and assessment on particular topics with defined academic credit values, learning outcomes, modes of delivery and assessment schemes. Students are required to pass a defined number of module credits in order to progress and to attain an award.

     6.2.3     A *Course* is a complete set of modules with an approved curriculum and assessment lasting one or more academic years. There may be modules and course options

within the main curriculum, so students on the same course may not all necessarily be following the exact same subject matter.

6.2.4  *Learning outcomes* are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate on completion of a process of learning.

6.2.5  A *Programme* is a set of modules, courses or course options that lead to an award (eg a degree).

6.2.6  A *Programme Strand* is a series of modules which creates a distinct thematic pathway within a programme.

6.2.7  The *National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)* is a system of ten levels used to describe the Irish qualification system. The NFQ describes in broad terms what learners should know, understand and be able to do on the basis of a given qualification.

6.2.8  A *Designated Awarding Body* is a higher education institution with the legal authority to make awards, and to whom the Qualifications and Quality (Education and Training) Act 2012 applies.

6.2.9  A *Validated Programme* is a programme of study that is developed, delivered and managed by a Linked Provider (see below), but is approved and leads to an award by a Designated Awarding Body.

6.2.10  A *Linked Provider* is a provider that is not a designated awarding body but enters into an arrangement with a designated awarding body under which arrangement the provider provides a programme of education and training that satisfies all or part of the prerequisites for an award of the designated awarding body.

6.2.11  The *Associated Colleges Degrees Committee* (**ACDC**), established in partnership between Trinity and RIAM, oversees all RIAM programmes validated by Trinity, in terms of academic quality.

6.2.12  *Annual Programme Monitoring* is a RIAM activity to evaluate and enhance programmes of study on an annual basis.

6.2.13  *Periodic Review* is the regular (normally at least every five years) assessment of validated programmes by the Linked Provider.

6.2.14  The *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)* is a system used across Europe for the transfer and accumulation of academic credit.

## 7. Procedures

7.1  *Procedure for Initial Internal Development Work on new Programmes*

7.1.1  For each programme which receives RIAM Board of Studies approval to be developed, an initial planning meeting is arranged by the relevant RIAM Programme Committee (Undergraduate or Postgraduate) with the appropriate members of staff.

The following matters will be considered:

(i)   relevant templates for documentation and guidelines set out by Trinity;

(ii)  the timetable for programme development and initial approval (including review of Trinity's approval route, see 7.2, 7.3, 7.4);

(iii) the composition of the programme development team, including any student members;

(iv)  the consultations planned as part of the process and the roles of those involved in developing the programme, including learning resource providers and academic support services;

(v)   plans to engage with and consult students.

7.1.2   Following from the initial meeting, the Chair of the relevant Programme Committee will oversee the agreed programme of work following the procedures set out in this document.

7.1.3   The finished report will be sent to the Programme Committee in the first instance, then to the Board of Studies and the Board of Governors in RIAM, and then to Trinity to follow the procedure outlined below (7.2.5 to 7.2.9).

7.2   *General Procedure for Design and Approval of New Programmes*

7.2.1   Trinity requires that new programme proposals submitted for approval and validation by Trinity align with any professional and statutory accreditation requirements that may apply.

7.2.2   Trinity requires that proposals for new validated undergraduate programmes adhere to the Template for Proposals for New Undergraduate Courses.

7.2.3   Trinity requires that proposals for new validated postgraduate programmes adhere to the Guidelines for a New Validated Postgraduate Course Proposal.

7.2.4   The lead-in time for the completion of the validation process will give due regard to the requirement for internal and external consultation and review, the schedules for academic committee meetings, deadlines set in accordance with the Academy's admissions timelines and its marketing and recruitment arrangements.

7.2.5   Programmes submitted for validation are considered by the related School, by the relevant Associated College Degrees Committee, and recommended to the Undergraduate Studies Committee or Graduate Studies Committee, as appropriate, prior to approval by Trinity's University Council.

7.2.6   Where a strand is being added to the existing programme/course and where more than 30 ECTS of the taught module is new the strand is normally sent for external review.

7.2.7   The Dean of Graduate Studies has discretion as to whether a new strand should be sent for external review.

7.2.8 Prior to submission for approval by the University Council all new undergraduate and postgraduate programme proposals are required to be sent for external review.

7.2.9 Programmes will not be advertised prior to the University Council approval.

7.3 *New Undergraduate Programmes*

7.3.1 For each new undergraduate programme which the RIAM Board of Studies has approved in principle, RIAM must have undertaken the following in accordance with processes agreed and approved through the RIAM ACDC:

(i) obtained approval in principle of the proposal idea by the Trinity Senior Lecturer and the Registrar;

(ii) submitted the first draft of the proposal to the RIAM ACDC at its May meeting in any year;

(iii) obtained discipline-specific input into the draft from the relevant Trinity School(s);

(iv) obtained feedback on the draft from the Trinity Teaching and Learning designated support staff;

(v) submitted the final proposal to the RIAM ACDC at its November or February meeting in the following year;

(vi) submitted the final proposal to the Trinity Undergraduate Studies Committee;

(vii) submitted the final proposal to an external reviewer approved by the Trinity Senior Lecturer;

(viii) submitted the final proposal for approval to the Trinity University Council in the same year) by the Trinity Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies (via the RIAM ACDC Secretary) for the course to commence in the September following.

7.4 *New Postgraduate Programmes*

7.4.1 For each new postgraduate programme which the RIAM Board of Studies has approved in principle, RIAM must have undertaken the following in accordance with processes agreed and approved through the RIAM ACDC:

(i) obtained approval in principle of the proposal idea by the Trinity Dean of Graduate Studies and the Registrar;

(ii) submitted the first draft of the proposal to the RIAM ACDC at its May meeting in any year;

(iii) obtained discipline-specific input into the draft from the relevant Trinity School(s);

(iv) obtained feedback on the draft from the Trinity Teaching and Learning designated support staff;

(v)     submitted the final proposal to the RIAM ACDC at its November or February meeting in the following year;

(vi)    submitted the final proposal to the Trinity Graduate Studies Committee;

(vii)   submitted the final proposal to an external reviewer approved by the Trinity Dean of Graduate Studies;

(viii)  submitted the final proposal for approval to the Trinity University Council in the same year) by the Trinity Dean of Graduate Studies (via the RIAM ACDC Secretary) for the course to commence in the September following.

7.5     *Structure of the Annual Programme Monitoring System – Programme Monitoring Report*

7.5.1   The annual programme monitoring system is managed by the Chair of the relevant Programme Committee compiling the report and is submitted to the RIAM Board of Studies.

7.5.2   The annual programme monitoring report is compiled by the Chair usually during the summer or autumn, in consultation with and, drawing upon, contributions from Heads of Faculty, students, teaching staff and administration.

7.5.3   The usual evidence base for the report is outlined in section 7.11 below.

7.5.4   The procedure for structuring the report is outlined in section 7.12 below.

7.5.5   The procedure for ratifying the report is outlined in section 7.13 below.

7.5.6   The Chair of the RIAM Board of Studies will report annually to the RIAM Board of Governors

7.5.7   Annual monitoring ensures that proposed changes maintain and, where possible, improve the high standard of the education offered through the programme concerned. The relevant Programme Committee has authority to propose modifications to programmes and revisions to its regulations, as referred to below, which must be considered for approval by the RIAM ACDC in Trinity.

7.6     *Modifications as part of the Annual Programme Review*

7.6.1   From time to time, programmes will need to be updated or modified and this is one part of the annual programme review process.

7.6.2   Modifications will fall into one or three categories: a minor modification, a major modification or a change to the programme regulations.

7.7     *Minor modifications*

7.7.1   Minor modifications most commonly result from the introduction of new or enhanced modules. Material changes to existing modules (as opposed simply to a clearer expression of) is limited to a maximum of cumulative changes of no more than 50% of the validated programme during its period of approval and may include one or more of the following amendments:

(i)     module aims, objectives or learning outcome;

(ii)    assessment methods or assessment weightings between methods;

(iii)   less than 50% of the indicative module content;

(iv)   new modules, which are not core to the programme.

7.7.2   The procedure for making minor modifications is set out in 7.14.

7.7.3   Either the Undergraduate Programmes Committee or the Graduate Programmes Committee, as appropriate, monitors the cumulative effect of minor modifications to any one programme, via the annual programme monitoring system.

7.8     *Major Modifications*

7.8.1   Major modifications are significant changes to the structure or content of a programme and must be submitted for the initial approval of the Board of Studies. Final approval must be sought by the RIAM ACDC, and subsequently by the Trinity University Council via the RIAM ACDC minutes.

7.8.2   All major modifications are subject to the new programme approval process outlined in 7.2 above.

7.8.3   The following proposed changes constitute major modifications:

(i)     changes to the programme title or awards, or to its minimum and maximum duration;

(ii)    restructuring the whole programme or any year of the programme;

(iii)   any significant change to the aims and objectives or learning outcomes of the programme;

(iv)   the introduction of new core (i.e. compulsory) modules or pathways;

(v)    material changes to more than 50% of the indicative content.

7.9     *Changes to the Programme Regulations*

7.9.1   Changes to the programme regulations must be submitted to the relevant Course Committee for approval and to the final meeting of the RIAM ACDC in any academic year in time for the following academic year.

7.9.2   Changes to regulations of any significance must be notified to all students affected.

7.10    *Programme Suspension or Cessation*

7.10.1  Proposals for the suspension or cessation of a programme following annual review must be approved by the RIAM Board of Studies.

7.10.2 Notification of the suspension or cessation of a programme of study must be formally submitted to the next available RIAM ACDC to be subsequently noted and approved by the Trinity Council. (See also *RIAM Programme Suspension or Cessation Policy.*)

7.11 *Evidence Base for Annual Programme Monitoring System*

7.11.1 Overall external examiners assist RIAM in ensuring that the academic standard for each award is set and maintained at the appropriate level and that student performance is properly judged. Reports from the overall external examiners for the all degrees should be reviewed as part of the annual monitoring process.

7.11.2 A number of specialist external examiners are contracted each year to assess RIAM's practical examinations in each instrument or instrument family. A summary of all practical examination reports from over 100 should be reviewed as part of the annual monitoring process. The Heads of Faculty should review all specialist examiner reports for their faculties.

7.11.3 Data and analysis of student achievement and progression.

7.11.4 Response to Student engagement (feedback obtained by questionnaire, module evaluation or consultation methods).

7.11.5 The minutes of the relevant Course Committee from the preceding year, including matters relating to learning resources and teaching equipment needs (to be referred to the Learning Resources Committee).

7.11.6 Proposals for modifications to each syllabus in the case of principal study to be made by the relevant Head of Faculty.

7.12 *Structure and content of the Annual Programme Monitoring Report*

7.12.1 A brief report on implementation of the preceding year's action plan, noting minor and major modifications made.

7.12.2 A commentary on key issues that have arisen during the year, explicitly addressing issues raised in external examiner reports and providing a response to issues raised through student engagement and analysis of supporting data.

7.12.3 A proposed programme action plan for the coming year.

7.12.4 Learning resource issues that have arisen during the preceding year (to be referred to the Learning Resources Committee).

7.12.5 The effectiveness of the programme in promoting equal opportunities in terms of gender, race and disability etc.

7.12.6 The effectiveness of the programme in supporting national and international students to achieve their goals.

7.12.7 Proposals for modifications (minor or major) to modules, as outlined in 7.7 and 7.8 above.

7.12.8   Proposals for staff support and development.

7.12.9   Appendices comprising the external examiner reports, selected external specialist examiner reports, data on student achievement (comparing current achievement with two previous years), an analysis of student feedback.

7.13   *Procedure for Ratifying/Approving Annual Programme Monitoring Report*

7.13.1   The draft monitoring report will be considered and approved either by the Undergraduate Programmes Committee or the Graduate Programmes Committee, as appropriate, subject to any proposed amendments delegated to the respective Chair for Chair's Action and report to a subsequent meeting of the Committee.

7.13.2   The relevant Chair of the Programme Committee will then provide the approved report to the external examiners, to his/her committee members and to other professors and administrators involved in the running of the programme, and to the Chair of the Board of Studies.

7.13.3   The report will be forwarded to the RIAM ACDC for consideration, discussion and final approval.

7.14   *Procedure for Minor Adjustments to Annual Programmes*

7.14.1   Minor modifications are considered for approval by the relevant Programmes Committee and must be submitted to the RIAM ACDC for approval in time for implementation in the following academic year.

7.14.2   The module lecturer, if not already a committee member, will be invited to attend the relevant Programmes Committee meeting for discussion of the module.

7.14.3   Where the Committee recommends minor changes to the proposal, the Chair will normally have delegated responsibility to take action to approve the revised module description.

7.14.4   Where significant revisions are proposed or where the consideration of the module raises issues of principle requiring more detailed discussion, a working group comprising interested Committee members and the module lecturer may have delegated responsibility to revise and approve the module, subject to the approval of the Chair of the Programme Committee.

7.15   *Procedure for Timing of Modifications and Updating the Programme Handbook*

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

7.15.2   The handbook is finalised in the summer of each academic year, prior to the beginning of the following academic year.

7.15.3   Major modifications are subject to the Academic Programme Development procedure and are considered for approval by the relevant Programmes Committee and must be

submitted to the RIAM ACDC for approval in time for implementation in the following academic year.

7.15.4 Exceptionally and usually only where students will be advantaged or may otherwise be seriously disadvantaged, minor modifications may occur mid-way through an academic year and have an immediate effect. When this occurs, such modifications must be approved by the RIAM ACDC and will be notified in full to students, staff and administration.

## 8. Responsibility

8.1 The Chair of the Board of Studies is responsible for overseeing this policy. The Head of the Administrative Office (Registry) is responsible for the operating procedures in relation to all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

## 9. Legislation and Regulation

9.1 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

9.2 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2005).

9.3 Code of Practice for Provision of Education and Training to International Learners (2015).

9.4 Good Practice for the approval, monitoring and periodic review of Programmes and Awards in Irish Universities.

9.5 National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

9.6 QQI Green Paper on the Recognition of Prior Learning.

9.7 QQI Access Transfer and Progression - QQI Policy Restatement 2015.

**9.8** QQI Policy for Protection of Enrolled Learners.

## 10. Related Documents

### *RIAM Policy*

10.1. Programme Suspension and Cessation Policy.

10.2. Quality Standards and Assurance Policy.

10.3. Overall External Examiners and Specialist External Examiners Policy and Procedure.

### *Trinity Policy*

10.4. Trinity New Programme Design and Approval Policy.

10.5. Trinity Procedure for Review of Programmes.

10.6. Academic Awards Policy.
10.7. External Examiners Policy.
10.8. Assessment and Academic Progression Policy.

## 11. Document Control

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