

NFQ LEVEL 7 AND 8 PROGRAMMES REVIEW REPORT

APRIL 2022

Royal Irish Academy of Music



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1. Preamble

The Review Team wishes to express their gratitude to all of those who contributed to the Level 7 and 8 programme review, particularly to Director Deborah Kelleher and to the representatives of leadership, staff and students of the Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM) for their warm reception, their candour and openness in engaging with the intensive process of this programme review, and the support during and concerning the site-visit. The Review Team explicitly commends RIAM for the comprehensive Self-Assessment Report (SAR), written by the SAR co-ordinating group in support of this programme review, which presented an honest, pragmatic and critical self-evaluation and which highlighted both current strengths and areas in need of further attention and development. The SAR and its attachments provided ample documentation in advance, and further requested information was presented promptly on demand before and during the site-visit.

2. Terms of Reference

2.1. Composition of the Review Team and overview of the review process

The Review Team consisted of Martin Prchal (Vice-Principal, Royal Conservatoire The Hague (NL), Review Team member and chair), Lies Colman (Artistic Director Classical Music Department, Royal Conservatoire Antwerp (BE), Review Team member and secretary), Kim O'Mahony (Quality Officer, University of Limerick (IE), Review Team member) and Miranda Harmer (cello and composition student, Leeds College of Music (UK), Review Team member).

The review followed a three-stage process:

1) The institution presented a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) to the international Review Team for analysis in advance of the site-visit. Once received and analysed, the Review Team met in order to identify the focus of the site-visit in line with the information provided by RIAM and to agree the lines of enquiry of the review.

2) The site-visit to the Royal Irish Academy of Music by the Review Team took place on 8-10 March 2022. The visit itself comprised six separate meetings:

- Meeting 1: with Director Deborah Kelleher and Secretary/Finance Officer Kevin Kelleher (Meeting 1.a), immediately followed by a meeting with the full management team of the institution (Meeting 1.b);
- Meeting 2: with lecturers and teaching staff;

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- Meeting 3: with Heads of Faculties and Artistic Programming;
- Meeting 4: with members of RIAM Board of Governors;
- Meeting 5: with students (including representatives of RIAM Students Union) and recent alumni;
- Meeting 6: with alumni (graduated more than 5 years ago) and representatives from the profession.

Additional site-visit activities included observations of student performances during an orchestra rehearsal and a classical piano performance class, as well as a comprehensive guided tour of the facilities (new and old). During a final meeting, the preliminary findings of the Review Team were shared with the management team.

3) The present report has been produced by the Review Team, structured on the criteria provided by RIAM.

2.2. Context and Terms of Reference of the Programme Review

The Royal Irish Academy of Music was founded in 1848 and is at present a Linked Provider of Trinity College Dublin. As such, RIAM offers and delivers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the domains of western art music and Irish harp, validated by Trinity College as Designated Awarding Body, as well as a number of programmes certified on its own authority and a pre-college education programme, Junior RIAM.

This Programme Review, which took place in a time of major changes for the institution, was the first external review conducted at RIAM and must be considered within the framework of the RIAM's Quality Standards and Assurance Policy. This policy is designed to provide an overarching framework of the continual review and enhancement of the quality standards of RIAM's provision, which:

- (i) assures RIAM that threshold academic standards will be met and maintained, and that its QA framework remains 'fit for purpose';
- (ii) ensures high quality student learning opportunities across all programmes and supports students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes beyond the threshold Level;
- (iii) promotes continuous improvement in the student learning experience and enhancement of learning opportunities across RIAM's programmes;
- (iv) ensures the provision of high quality, accurate and accessible information to students and other stakeholders on the academic provision of RIAM;
- (v) supports teaching staff and identifies excellence from diverse forms of teaching and learning;
- (vi) ensures that RIAM's awards and validation arrangements are credible and secure.

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The Review Team were asked to review and make recommendations on the Quality assurance and enhancement processes around the delivery of RIAM's Level 7 and 8 Programmes, as registered on the National Framework of Qualifications, namely:

- Diploma in Music teaching and Performance (1-year course)
- Bachelor in Music Performance (4-year course)

In particular, the Review Team were asked to include the following areas of focus in their review¹:

- (i) The Diploma and Bachelor programmes' Strategic Direction and Planning, particularly reflecting on relevant strategic areas highlighted by the coordinating group;
- (ii) The effectiveness of the Organisational Structure and Management of the Level 7 and 8 programmes;
- (iii) An assessment of the Performance of the programmes;
- (iv) The fitness for purpose of the RIAM's Resources relating to these programmes;
- (v) A review of RIAM's Administration and Processes in relation to these programmes;
- (vi) Relevant RIAM relationships and external engagement.

As the provision of the Level 7 and 8 programmes are strongly connected to and dependent of RIAM's overarching organisation, structure and resources, the Review Team in accordance with the institutional leadership² has approached the reviewed programmes as organic components of RIAM and will refer to the institution instead of the specific programmes under review, should this be more relevant. However, all references and recommendations should be considered in light of the Level 7 and 8 programmes.

2.3. Outcomes of the programme review

The Review Team was invited to assess and make recommendations to the RIAM under the following categories, which also make up the structure of this report³:

- (i) to assess the strategic direction of the programmes in the context of RIAM's strategy, internal and external developments and, when necessary, to facilitate large-scale changes or discontinuation;

¹ Email by Director D. Kelleher, September 22, 2021.

² Meeting 1.a.

³ Idem.

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- (ii) to review the effectiveness of the programmes' governance, management, and administration structures in delivering and supporting the achievement of its strategy and mission;
- (iii) to provide assurance to the RIAM Governing Body, students, and other external stakeholders that the academic standards on the Level 7 and 8 programmes align with the relevant Level on the National Framework of Qualifications;
- (iv) to assess the quality of the programmes' teaching and learning provision, learning resources and learning environment, both internal and external to campus, that underpin the delivery of the curriculum and the attainment of the RIAM's graduate attributes;
- (v) to review the resources available to the programmes to deliver on their academic mission such as financial, facilities, human.

These outcomes should help RIAM in the pursuit of their objectives of quality and enhancement⁴, namely to:

- (i) provide the highest quality music conservatoire programmes possible, within available resources, by the training and support of RIAM staff and monitoring of feedback from staff and learners;
- (ii) enhance the quality of learning and teaching by providing an environment which supports progression and building policy in consultation with key stakeholders, that is teaching staff, administrative staff and students;
- (iii) listen and respond to feedback from key stakeholders both retrospectively, in terms of success and limitations and also to feedforward, in terms of enhancement and future planning.

⁴ RIAM's Quality Standards and Assurance Policy.

3. Responses and Recommendations

3.1. Category 1: “the assessment of the strategic direction of the programmes in the context of RIAM's strategy, internal and external developments, and, if applicable, recommendations regarding large-scale changes or discontinuation”.

Context and general observations:

The current period is marked by major upcoming changes that will have a far-reaching impact on the operation of the Royal Irish Academy of Music, in particular the major re-development of the campus – expected to be operational by September 2022 – and the new *RIAM 175 Strategy 2021-2025*. Both developments offer RIAM the historical opportunity to address strategic ambitions, namely to increase student and staff numbers, address existing infrastructure deficits and refresh its offer and approach.

To this end, RIAM has identified four strategic goals in the *RIAM 175 Strategy*, based on its mission to “lead music education, performance and participation in Ireland, through its core values of Excellence, Inspiration, Inclusion, Innovation and Support”⁵:

- Invest in Access and Inclusion for a modern RIAM;
- Embed reflective practice in RIAM's six learner groups;
- Leverage the benefits of the new campus;
- Design a new organisational body.

In light of the current programme review, the SAR coordinating group identified the following key areas of actions for the Review Team to address⁶:

- The rolling out of revised tertiary curricula connecting to the Trinity Education Project (TEP) and responding to changes in the music profession;
- The offering of more choice and autonomy (electives, specialised areas, non-classical genres, post-disciplinary studies, social responsibility);
- The participation in EU research to enhance wider and more flexible graduate skills including leadership, business skills, digital and entrepreneurship.

⁵ *RIAM 175 Strategy*; see also SAR, p. 10.

⁶ SAR, p. 11.

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Overall, the Review Team applauds RIAM for their ambition as developed in its *RIAM 175 Strategy*, and specifically commends the efforts on the topic of Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion (DEAI). RIAM shows an ambitious though realistic strategy, contemplating historic and current national and international strengths, risks and opportunities.⁷ Developed under the baton of strong and visionary leadership and supported by capable and dedicated management, teaching and administrative teams, the strategy expresses a common ambition: to grow and to reform in relation to societal and professional needs by “[the] creation of [a] new structure [that] will enable students to construct their own personal journey while ensuring they gain solid foundations”⁸, as being outlined in *A New Model for Music Education in Ireland*⁹. In general, the objectives show a strong international orientation, which is a necessary feature for the domain of Classical Music (Education), but are nevertheless strongly connected with the Irish context and respect the identity of RIAM. Therefore, RIAM expresses the ambition of being the national reference Academy, as it is located in the capital and holds strong ties with national institutions and organisations such as the Irish Baroque Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra and Irish National Opera.

In the development of its strategy, RIAM took into consideration that this ambition requires a modernisation and upgrading of facilities as well as curricula. The construction of the new building is an indispensable factor in the realisation of the *RIAM 175 Strategy*, while on a strategic level another important foundation has also been laid in terms of a comprehensive set of policies, publicly accessible on the website¹⁰, and by a plethora of ideas, visions and plans, as presented in among others the *RIAM 175 Strategy*, the SAR and as expressed and confirmed in the review meetings.

RIAM realises - and the Review Team agrees - that the operationalisation of the plans will be a challenging enterprise. To this end a number of roadmaps have already been developed¹¹, that build on a healthy understanding of the strengths and (dis)advantages¹². The Review Team will address some of these challenges and make recommendations, but wishes to express their confidence in the determination, resilience and eagerness of the RIAM team, as was only recently proven by their response to the challenges imposed by Covid-19.¹³

On the ambition for reinforcement of identity, prestige and position:

The Royal Irish Academy of Music offers pre-school, under- and postgraduate Level programmes in western classical music and Irish harp and wishes to maintain this focus. Some of the unique selling points of the

⁷ SAR, p. 15 – 21.

⁸ SAR, p. 27.

⁹ Appendix 22 of the SAR.

¹⁰ Policies are clearly outlined in the Quality Standards and Assurance Policy; See also Appendix 1 of the SAR.

¹¹ Exemplary in this regard is the Access and Inclusion audit and journey map, Appendix 13 of the SAR.

¹² Appendix 2 of the SAR: SWOT analysis.

¹³ This was acknowledged by the Chairperson of the Board in the 2021 Annual Report. Appendix 21 of the SAR, p. 11.

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programmes under review are the high number of one-to-one lessons (60 hours per student per year) and presentation opportunities, the high level of personal involvement of teaching staff with the artistic progress and career planning of their students, and the overall loyalty of both students and teaching staff in relation to RIAM. Nevertheless, RIAM wants to look beyond the strict scope of classical music and refers to the possibility of connections with Jazz and Musical Theatre for example, among others in order to give Junior students with these profiles the opportunity to advance to tertiary level education more easily. However, at present there is no intention to widen the scope of genres as new, stand-alone programmes, but rather to reach out from the classical core, in order to meet individual needs and respond to professional developments.

The Review Team subscribes to the fact that an exclusive focus on classical music becomes increasingly difficult to sustain for both professional musicians and higher music education institutions, since on an international scale, classical music in its traditional form and presentation increasingly occupies a niche position. The Review Team supports the ambitions of RIAM to widen the scope of professional generic and specific knowledge, competencies and attitudes (entrepreneurship, self-criticism and self-reliance), as well as to further embed music-related skills such as research into the curriculum and its respective artistic courses (see also further).

The Review Team encourages RIAM to expand its connections with less traditional professional partners, in terms of offering wider opportunities for learning experiences for both students and teachers. In terms of marketing as well, RIAM could strengthen its (inter)national position as a future-oriented, sustainable institution by emphasising these new perspectives in both its curricula and network. RIAM's Strategic Action point 3 ("the participation in EU research to enhance wider and more flexible graduate skills including leadership, business skills, digital and entrepreneurship") also supports this ambition. The Review Team encourages RIAM to further explore this pathway in accordance with the (present and aspired) potential within the teaching body, and points out that the exploration and/or further development of international collaborations (joint modules, exchanges, joint master programmes...) with esteemed colleague institutions will enhance its international profile and prestige. The Review Team believes that the appearance and possibilities connected with the new building will certainly contribute to further develop these strands, and to elevate RIAM's international prestige.

On the ambition for growth in student numbers:

RIAM's ambition to grow on tertiary level is relatively substantial: from 175 to 250¹⁴. According to the management team, this is in line with professional possibilities in Dublin (Irish National Opera and Orchestra, vibrant ensemble scene,...), and RIAM considers it to be its responsibility to deliver the required level of future professionals, both

¹⁴ SAR, p. 6.

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quantitatively and qualitatively. Although during the meetings with Management¹⁵ and with Heads of Faculties and Artistic Programming¹⁶ generally a message of optimism was expressed that the professional (Irish) market is not saturated (yet) and offers plenty of opportunities for young professionals with a classical education, this view was not equally shared by the representatives of the professional field¹⁷. Even though the Irish context seems to be more open to national profiles as opposed to international profiles, there is a realistic strain on the sustainability of the traditional profession, according to these respondents. More and more professionals develop portfolio careers instead of single-focus careers, and/or shift their focus entirely to other professional areas. Hence, as RIAM rightly points out in its ambition to develop more options for choice and a larger training in extra-musical skills (such as management skills, entrepreneurship, ...): these are no longer voluntary, but crucial skills to address during the programmes.

The Review Team identifies important initiatives by RIAM, such as the creation of the Capstone project, the possibilities derived from the TEP, and the development of the recently approved Trinity Elective (TE) *Music-making, the Arts, and Society*, designed by RIAM. The Review Team also recommends the RIAM management team taking into account the important feedback from professional stakeholders who support a larger academy, but mainly in terms of quality and not just quantity. Quantitative growth could be a valuable option, but should according to the stakeholders be targeted (e.g. specific instruments (winds) or specialisations (opera répétiteur, composition, chamber music))¹⁸.

Another perspective that should be addressed in terms of growth in student numbers is the intake of new students. RIAM already possesses several strong assets to attract larger student numbers nationally such as Junior RIAM and the RIAM exams, and although student recruitment was considered one of the risks in the SWOT analysis¹⁹, the management team is convinced that the available positions will be filled. The internationalisation strategy on the other hand is at this moment primarily focused on recruitment, which is a traditional approach to internationalisation. The Review Team advises to expand the internationalisation strategy more on collaboration, which will organically result into student recruitment as well. Possibilities for setting up joint modules and joint programmes with similar European institutions could for example be further explored, but also opportunities by Erasmus exchanges are interesting pathways. The Review Team believes that a more ambitious international marketing strategy might not only result in a more widespread international student recruitment, but also a more diverse one.

The impact that this ambition on growth has on composition of the staff team will be addressed further.²⁰

¹⁵ Meeting 1.

¹⁶ Meeting 3.

¹⁷ Meeting 6: representatives made mention that professionals regularly need to travel to e.g. the UK in order to expand their activities.

¹⁸ Idem.

¹⁹ Appendix 2 of the SAR; see also SAR, p. 15.

²⁰ 3.2 and 3.3 of this report.

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The Review Team has taken note of RIAM's successful lobby with Trinity College, to (temporarily) lower the required IELTS Level for students from 6.5 to 5.5²¹. A lower proficiency does however also include certain risks in terms of research related courses, for example, and also seems to go against RIAM's ambition to further develop the curriculum. The weekly English conversation moments for non-native speaking students, organised by RIAM, are a welcome initiative, but exploration of further training opportunities might be necessary.

On the ambition for an increase in individual choice, profiling and possibilities:

In line with changes in the music profession, RIAM wants to include other possibilities and facilitate more individual opportunities and different pathways²². This is a very topical ambition, confirmed by all stakeholders and also reflected in the reports of the Board of Studies and UG Committee.

The Trinity Elective Programme will be a major step, where students can take electives tailored to their own interest and ambitions. The Trinity Elective designed by RIAM, *Music-making, the Arts, and Society*, offers connections with 9 programmes – amongst which the BMusEd. Overall, the collaboration with Trinity is beneficial not only with regard to the curriculum but also on operational levels, where Trinity's resources and RIAM's specific expertise and enthusiasm constitute a fruitful cooperation²³.

The Review Team observes that this new focus on addressing a wider scope of professional opportunities should be consistently addressed in the curriculum of the programmes under review. At this moment there seems to be a strong focus on orchestral activity, to the extent that there is talk of a possible reduction in academic studies. Apart from issues related to 'expectation management' with regards to future professional opportunities for graduates, the Review Team wonders how RIAM will deal in the short term with other areas of professional activity, such as teaching and creative work²⁴. The Review Team is pleased to see that necessary steps in terms of specific courses have already been taken or are on the agenda for the immediate future, and applauds the possibility for 'dual pathways'. The Review Team recommends considering the curriculum in its entirety, and to explore which interventions will enhance the full integration of this vision, e.g. by offering alternatives for orchestra productions, further develop teacher training, and promote alternative professional pathways, also in individual career advice and instrument and performance classes. The Review Team acknowledges that initially there might be a certain

²¹ Meeting 1.b.

²² Strategic Action Point 2: "The offering of more choice and autonomy (electives, specialised areas, non-classical genres, post-disciplinary studies, social responsibility)" in this sense strongly connects to SAP 1: "The rolling out of revised tertiary curricula connecting to TEP and responding to changes in the music profession".

²³ Meeting 1.b.

²⁴ Addressed in Meeting 7.

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degree of hesitation among staff and student body, connected closely to the necessary focus on core skills development, but believes that both foci over time could become mutually reinforcing, instead of a restrictive factor.

The implementation and/or integration of artistic research into all aspects of the curriculum is also an important point of action in this regard, but at present this process still feels to be in quite an early stage with regards to the programmes under review. The Review Team confirms that a very capable and visionary Head of Programmes and Research is in place who needs to be fully supported to take further steps in this area. The Capstone Project is a good example of forward-oriented thinking and progressive curriculum development, but it will need to be sufficiently resourced in terms of support and supervision to be successful. At present, the students show interest, but express they are still in expectation of further information to be provided²⁵. In any case, this is an initiative that deserves the Review Team's support and underlines RIAM's advanced ambition and willingness compared to other institutions.

Recommendations on category 1:

The Review Team commends RIAM for the accomplishments under this category and recommends that the following challenges and opportunities are addressed:

- to widen the scope of the classical music programme to include non-traditional professional opportunities, for example by:
 - expanding collaborations with less traditional professional partners (socio-artistic, pedagogical, entrepreneurial, other music genres (e.g. Irish traditional music),...);
 - expanding the possibilities in terms of teacher training;
 - collecting relevant international good practices;
 - offering alternative performance projects in terms of e.g. creativity, interdisciplinarity, social engagement;
- to implement these possibilities as strands within the curriculum but also as an essential perspective in traditional performance classes;
- to rely on relevant input from external stakeholders with regards to the curriculum and professional requirements;
- to commit to international collaborations in terms of student mobility and knowledge generation.

²⁵ Meeting 5.

3.2. Category 2: “the effectiveness of the programmes' governance, management, and administration structures in delivering and supporting the achievement of its strategy and mission”.

Context and general observations:

The Review Team is positive in its assessment of the above mentioned criterium. The organisational structure of RIAM as the provider of the programmes under review is clear²⁶ and well communicated²⁷, and is in tandem with the requirements of Trinity College as Designated Awarding Body and the elaborate body of policies²⁸ in place within RIAM.

Specifically noteworthy is the positive account that was given to the Review Team on the strong regard in which the Board of Governors holds RIAM. Board members were very positive in their feedback during the site-visit²⁹ and confirmed their confidence in RIAM to meet the ambitious targets set out in the *RIAM 175 Strategic Plan*. The Review Team perceived a healthy and positive working relationship between the Board of Governors and the Director of RIAM, with clear delineation between governance and operational matters, guarded by a set of rigorous procedures in place by the Board of Governors to assess the performance of the Director and of RIAM on an annual basis.

Prudent financial planning allowed RIAM to achieve a modest surplus, even during Covid-19. However, the Review Team acknowledges the need for further-reaching financial government support in the execution of the strategic goals, most specifically with regard to the expansion and professionalisation of the teaching staff.

The implementation of the recently revised committee structures – a result of feedback from Trinity College – increases the opportunity for a more strategic approach to decision making. With regard to the Board of Studies and the strategic nature of the decision-making process involved in this committee, the Review Team would recommend however to consider election of staff for a longer period of time, e.g. two to three years, to allow for a better integration and a more consistent follow-up³⁰.

The Review Team endorses the decision to increase responsibility of Heads of Faculties, supported by the strategic goal to “integrate finance team functions across all platforms and allow greater autonomy to academic leadership

²⁶ See e.g. SAR, p. 31- 34 and Appendix 10 of the SAR.

²⁷ Accessible Information Policy (SAR, p. 76).

²⁸ See also Appendix 1 of the SAR.

²⁹ Meeting 4.

³⁰ This idea was supported during Meeting 3.

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in managing their budgets”³¹ which would allow for an effective impact of flexibility and autonomy onto the organisation as well as the curriculum. The fact that the shift in responsibilities between the Board of Studies and the Heads of Faculties and Senior Management Team is perceived by some members of staff as a shift in power dynamics and a loss of responsibilities for the Board of Studies, is indeed a challenge which needs to be further addressed and refuted. The Review Team has confidence that the continuous review of changes in structure will allow the further development and maintaining of a supported organisation structure, and invites RIAM to not only capture the evaluation in annual reports and informal feedback, but to also devise targeted communication actions hereupon.³²

On Policies and Procedures:

RIAM has developed a comprehensive suite of policies and procedures in pursuit of the quality agenda, which follow a robust templated approach to ensure consistency and ease of access to relevant information. These policies are clearly outlined in the Quality Standards and Assurance Policy³³, which categorises the policies under thematic area (Corporate, HR, Academic, Institutional, Financial and Student Related). The Quality Standards and Assurance Policy provides an overarching framework for the continual review and enhancement of the quality standards of RIAM. This policy clearly articulates the statutory and regulatory requirements from a quality assurance perspective, the Designated Awarding Body/Linked Provider relationship between Trinity College and RIAM, the governance and management of quality from RIAM’s perspective and individual and committee roles and responsibility for quality assurance/quality enhancement.

The comprehensive External Examiners Policy meets the requirements of Trinity as the Designated Awarding Body and aligns with the Quality and Qualifications Ireland in providing Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining³⁴. As a quality assurance tool, application of the policy ensures an independent element into the procedures for the assessment of learners, contributing to the quality assurance of RIAM’s taught and research programmes. The Review Team did note that the External Examiner reports were mostly positive but also somewhat brief.

Arising from conversations with staff, students and stakeholders during the site-visit meetings, it became apparent for the Review Team that Quality Assurance and Enhancement are placing onerous burdens on RIAM, for instance, the enhancement of the student feedback mechanism³⁵, the development and operationalisation of an action plan and roadmap arising from the DEAI audit, the development of a structured Alumni feedback mechanism...

³¹ SAR, p. 83.

³² SAR, p. 39.

³³ SAR, p. 5.

³⁴ Appendix 1 of the SAR.

³⁵ Notwithstanding past and current valuable efforts and initiatives, discussed during Meeting 3.

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The Review Team strongly advises consideration of the appointment of a dedicated role for Quality Assurance/Quality Enhancement, which would help RIAM to continue to meet its statutory and regulatory requirements as well as enhancing its activities in pursuit of its mission. This could be combined with the proposed role for disability support.

In addition, the Review Team was informed during discussions with staff and students that it is not always clear how policies are operationalised effectively on the ground. The Review Team learned that Moodle contains a lot of information for both staff and students, among which an extensive section on student feedback with information on student faculty representatives and the students' union, but also recognised that this information is either not found or not effectively searched for³⁶. The Review Team advises the design of a mechanism to ensure that all RIAM policies and procedures are communicated to staff and students to ensure consistent implementation, as part of a larger overarching communication plan and towards an institutional culture of self-reliance, where students instinctively turn to Moodle as a dynamic and interactive information platform. An example might be to make Moodle the sole carrier of essential information, such as course handbooks.

On Continuous Professional Development:

RIAM rolls out several initiatives to align the programme curricula with ongoing changes in the music profession: the Capstone project, the integration of artistic research into all artistic courses of the curriculum, RIAM Holistic. The substantive and pedagogical knowledge and skills these new perspectives require, however, are not commonly acquired yet by all teaching staff, which causes some uncertainty.³⁷ The need to review Continued Professional Development (CPD) delivery was a suggestion also echoed by the Board of Governors³⁸: development opportunities should be tailored to meet the needs of RIAMs emerging strategy and should include areas such as research, career planning, alternative career paths and professional studies.

In the SAR, RIAM confirms that at present, teaching staff matches the need of the curriculum, but that training will be needed with regard to the future³⁹. To this end, a CPD plan has been designed to assist all staff in "refreshing their skills and attitudes"⁴⁰. Notwithstanding these policies and enthusing initiatives such as financial remuneration for part-time teachers to engage in CPD modules, there is not sufficient evidence from staff that these are being rolled out systematically. Well-developed procedures will have to ensure consistent delivery of continued professional development. There are good examples to be found already, e.g. the rapid transition to digital

³⁶ See also SAR, p. 37.

³⁷ Meeting 2.

³⁸ Meeting 4.

³⁹ E.g. SAR, p. 25.

⁴⁰ SAR, p. 84-85, see also Appendix 14 of the SAR.

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education formats due to Covid-19 demanded swift training of staff, which resulted in an overall positive transition from live to online education.⁴¹

Also with regard to research, the Review Team could witness the existence of some expertise currently in the institution, and initiatives such as small research grants⁴² are in place to encourage staff to actively engage in research activities, but there is no overall existing 'research culture' yet. This topic will be addressed in this report under 3.3.

On staff, student and stakeholder involvement:

The Review Team witnessed clear evidence of passion and enthusiasm among all the staff during the site-visit, with an evident commitment to enhancing the student experience.⁴³ The same enthusiasm as well as praise of RIAM was also expressed by the alumni and stakeholder participants, as well as their support for the *RIAM 175 Strategy*.

The Review Team commends the commitment of management, staff and stakeholders, and encourages an elaboration of the communication channels even further, in order to embed diverse insights and expertise into the pedagogical structure on the one hand, and to communicate more efficiently the actions that have been taken as a consequence on the other. For example, many impressive initiatives were discussed in the Self-Assessment Report and during the site-visit, but not all staff were aware of these. In this context, the Review Team suggests further development of the regular staff appraisal system to ensure it is consistent with RIAM values and philosophy. A tailored approach to staff appraisal would yield benefits to both staff and RIAM.

Alumni and external stakeholders could also contribute meaningful input in the development and review of modules. To this end, RIAM could consider the development of a systematic approach to Alumni feedback, and/or to create advisory panels on a Faculty Level with members of the profession who are not actively teaching at RIAM, to help inform curriculum and competency developments relevant to current industry.

Throughout the visit and based on the SAR, the Review Team are confident that the student voice is actively surveyed thanks to consistent student representation on committees such as the Board of Studies and Faculty Meetings. Meaningful actions have been taken and adjustments have been made inspired by student's voices, for example with regard to curriculum review⁴⁴. However, there is an opportunity for student representation to be more

⁴¹ SAR, p. 42, which was also confirmed in meetings 2 and 5.

⁴² SAR, p. 89.

⁴³ Meeting 2, performance class and orchestra rehearsal, but also during informal conversations.

⁴⁴ SAR, p. 35.

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formalised and supported in committee structures throughout RIAM; an initiative that has already been taken by students themselves⁴⁵ and which would organically facilitate and enhance true student engagement. This could take care of concerns voiced by students about not always being very well informed on improvement actions as a result of their feedback⁴⁶.

Recommendations on category 2:

The Review Team commends RIAM for the accomplishments under this category and recommends addressing the following challenges and opportunities:

- to monitor and, if necessary adjust, the shifts in institutional structures and responsibilities;
- to set up mechanisms – for example via Moodle - to enhance communication on policies, opportunities, services, as well as good practices;
- to develop an ambitious marketing plan to highlight RIAMs unique selling points, good practices and national and international relevance;
- to continue to roll out CPD opportunities connected to new academic and artistic requirements;
- to design an effective mechanism for continuous feedback from staff and especially students , and to commit to staff appraisals as a tool for innovation as well as motivation
- to explore the establishment of an External Advisory body with alumni and professional stakeholders to inform curricular innovation and strategic development;
- to appoint a dedicated role for Quality Assurance/Quality Enhancement, possibly in combination with the proposed role for disability support;
- to continue seeking Quality Enhancement opportunities with an international background, e.g. international external examiners and international reviews with the aim to benchmark RIAM's artistic and educational quality at international level.

⁴⁵ During Meeting 5, students referred to self-launched “faculty rep meetings”.

⁴⁶ Meeting 5.

3.3. Category 3: “the assurance to the RIAM Governing Body, students, and other external stakeholders that the academic standards on the Level 7 and 8 programmes align with the relevant Level on the National Framework of Qualifications”.

Context and general observations:

Under the umbrella of the new *RIAM 175 Strategy 2021-2025* RIAM aims to align its programmes with contemporary relevant industry standards⁴⁷ as well as to relevantly implement Trinity College’s graduate attributes⁴⁸, while targeting both national requirements and international standards⁴⁹. Three specific actions have been defined, as also mentioned earlier⁵⁰:

- The rolling out of revised tertiary curricula connecting to TEP and responding to changes in the music profession;
- The offering of more choice and autonomy (electives, specialised areas, non-classical genres, post-disciplinary studies, social responsibility);
- The participation in EU research to enhance wider and more flexible graduate skills including leadership, business skills, digital and entrepreneurship.

Based on the comprehensive available documentation, personal experiences and international benchmarking, the Review Team expresses their confidence in the overall quality of the programme 7 and 8 delivery, as embedded in the RIAM structure as a whole:

- The SAR, which contains RIAM’s vision on learning and teaching, on international professional standards and on actualisation in relation to topical opportunities and realities, shows convincingly how these are translated into the programme’s Learning Outcomes of the programmes stated, into the graduate attributes of RIAM in connection to those of Trinity, and most specifically into the curricula, evidencing a thorough knowledge of professional-artistic as well as pedagogical requirements;
- The formal results of the final exams, assessed by representatives of the professional field that ensure the maintaining of the professionally required standards⁵¹;
- The profiles of the teaching staff, that are active in the professional field themselves, have an extensive network, ensuring the constant input of relevant pedagogical and artistic information and skills⁵²;

⁴⁷ *RIAM 175 Strategy*, Objective 2.3: SAR, p. 11.

⁴⁸ SAR, p. 13-14.

⁴⁹ See e.g. SAR, p. 48.

⁵⁰ SAR, p. 11.

⁵¹ SAR, p.6-7, see also Appendix 5 of the SAR.

⁵² Meeting 2.

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- The very generous amount of one-to-one principal study tuition time, by an enthusiastic and driven teaching team⁵³;
- Collaborations with local professional organisations and other highly classified institutions⁵⁴;
- Masterclasses by and other collaborations with internationally renowned artists⁵⁵;
- The compulsory spotlight weeks that offer concrete experience in pseudo-professional circumstances⁵⁶;
- The personalised approach to artistic development, from both teaching staff and students – teachers acting as mentors within their biweekly one-to-one sessions⁵⁷.

The meetings as well as the rehearsal and performance activities that the Review Team could witness were reassuring, not only with regards to student performance but also concerning teacher involvement and pedagogical quality, delivered in a nurturing and consciously critical way. The Review Teams is convinced that the governing body, the students, staff and alumni, and the external stakeholders will share this confidence, and recommends RIAM to remain committed to develop sustainable communication and feedback strategies, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The Review Team applauds RIAM for its current success and its continuing ambition and takes this opportunity to address some of the challenges RIAM faces in this context.

On the changes in academic and artistic requirements:

As mentioned earlier, the Objective 2.3 of *RIAM 175 Strategy* focuses on the alignment of the programmes with relevant professional requirements. Unavoidably, this causes an inherent challenge, possibly even tension: while it is generally acknowledged that there are necessary competencies for new profiles in accordance with changes in society and in the musical profession, quite naturally and even necessarily there also remains a protective attitude towards the focus on instrumental / vocal skills⁵⁸. The generous biweekly one-to-one instrument classes and numerous performance projects protect the latter, while new courses, foci and learning lines are designed to establish the former and to integrate other competencies into artistic and performance classes.

The Review Team was informed of a number of real actions that have been taken, e.g. in the vocal faculty⁵⁹ or on a general level, by allowing dual pathways⁶⁰. The Review Team is very positive about these initiatives but was

⁵³ SAR, p. 25.

⁵⁴ SAR, p. 59.

⁵⁵ SAR, p. 25, 30, 50...

⁵⁶ E.g. the orchestra rehearsal the Review Team attended during the site-visit.

⁵⁷ Meetings 2 and 5.

⁵⁸ Idem.

⁵⁹ Meeting 3: the interlinking between supporting and artistic studies, daily aural training, practicing performance repertoire in rhythmic studies....

⁶⁰ SAR, p. 5.

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informed that this is not yet the standard for all faculties, all courses, all curricula. Although students and teachers can give some real examples of intra-curricular connections, there is still a lack of clarity for students and staff what impact these changes will have for them, whether they are equipped for the new tasks, and even whether it is a necessity (this concerns for example the topic of counterpoint for singers, but also the use and impact of the reflective journal).

The Capstone project⁶¹ is an ambitious and future-oriented project to flexibly encourage and enable versatility and individual profiling. As mentioned earlier, students are aware of the project plans but can't explain yet what exactly it entails, or how it will be developed concretely. Especially given the fact that it's possibilities will be quite broad, they rely on clear communication by staff on outcomes, good practices, methodologies etc. The Review Team is very enthusiastic about the Capstone project and has confidence that this will be outlined more clearly as soon as it will be implemented, and more concretely as soon as some good practices have been developed.

The Review Team believes that this is indeed a challenge for the period to come but accentuates that this is a necessary stage in the development of a commonly carried policy of this magnitude and in the continuous progression of a culturally healthy institution. It would be recommended that staff and students are thoroughly informed on the plans, the goals and the concrete actions as well as good practices, but also that they will be involved in the shaping of the process itself as well.

There will most probably be a need for external expertise, and/or for staff training and support, a topic that was also addressed earlier under 3.2⁶². More formalised connections with professional stakeholders and international partner institutions could provide a continuous source of mutual inspiration as well as benchmarking opportunities. Another related possibility to be explored could be the structural involvement of alumni, as loyal partners of their alma mater with first-hand relevant information within the scope of their professional activities and their general estimation of their education thereupon. As the Review Team was informed during this Meeting 6, this group can offer direct suggestions based on their professional experiences, e.g. to have a greater focus on chamber music instead of orchestra projects in light of the availability of professional job opportunities, or the possibility to involve collaborative / opera repetitor skills in pianistic training.

On Work-life-balance:

Although the SAR slightly touches upon certain problems that some students encounter with some academic courses⁶³, it was mainly during the Meetings with Teachers and Students that the issue of workload was discussed.

⁶¹ Appendix 3 of the SAR.

⁶² See also SAR, p. 25.

⁶³ E.g. SAR, p. 27.

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Students as well as teachers mention the workload for academic courses, although both acknowledge the necessity to have a rudimentary basic of general musicianship – including harmony and counterpoint. One of the issues discussed during Meeting 3 was the policy on penalties by loss of marks in case of non-attendance and/or missed deadlines.⁶⁴ The Review Team was informed that this system is (was) mainly applied for academic courses, and that it will be revised in the near future. The Review Team supports this revision, as the results of this system do not accurately reflect reality. Attendance, for example, does not correspond to commitment, but the uneven application in the different faculties also gives a false picture. The Review Team recommends examining alternatives that are more focused on the individual student profile and on diversification in competences and levels, for example by differentiating degrees of difficulty in certain assignments, remedial lessons and exercises, modular courses, etc., and to develop and communicate a targeted and consistent policy .

Equally impacting (mental and physical) wellbeing and even study progress, is the large amount of performance activities. The Artistic Planning Group reviews student workload⁶⁵ but notwithstanding all efforts, students indicate they struggle finding a balance between study and private life on the one hand, and between all courses on the other. Not only the large amount of performance activities was mentioned, but also the fact that sometimes details are confirmed at the last minute.⁶⁶

The Review Team recognises the complexity of this issue and commends RIAM for their approach and concern for their students' wellbeing. Instead of simply reducing the number of activities and/or the aspired level in academic courses, the Review Team would like to share some suggestions for alternatives that were discussed during the meetings⁶⁷. For instance, does the same standard on all criteria need to be obtained by all profiles of student, or is flexibility in scope of the course a possibility (e.g. introductory level, rudimentary level, specialisation level, electives...)?

Are some classes too demanding compared with the officially assigned study time in terms of ECTS?

Do all orchestra instrument students need to participate in orchestra projects, even if they do not want to pursue an orchestra career?

Could the introduction of remedial courses could be considered, compulsory or optional, to help to lift the profile of weaker students and for example to catch up from a less elaborate preprofessional education level?

As part of the growth strategy, a less obvious course of action could also be explored, namely to expand the academic staff in order to involve them too in artistic performance classes, for example giving chamber music coaching from an theoretical perspective, going beyond just analysing the repertoire that is being played.

⁶⁴ SAR, p. 76-80.

⁶⁵ Meeting 3, see also SAR, p. 68.

⁶⁶ Meeting 5.

⁶⁷ Specifically during Meetings 2, 3, 5 and 6.

On the Implementation of Artistic Research:

Another challenge for institutions that embrace the new professional profile for classical musicians is the structural implementation of research-oriented courses into the artistic curriculum. Compared to the traditional focus on artistic performance, structural integration of research and investigative skills is a relatively new development in Higher Music Education. It is a common process that at first, this new perspective raises questions and doubts regarding the added value of this focus as well as the lack of concrete methodological skills and experience with existing staff. The Review Team recognises that RIAM has made important steps towards a long-term strategy, developed by the Head of Programmes and Research, but is aware that this strategy entails a change in culture which takes time to develop, and which cannot be forced upon staff.

The Review Team encourages RIAM to continue with their efforts and to roll out a clear and well-communicated research strategy in order to inspire and enthuse each staff member to their own interest, expertise and ability. Additionally the Review Team suggests making connections with other institutions and, for example via Erasmus, to tie external expertise to its existing team in order to gradually implement the research attitude, skills and competencies, but also to focus on existing interests and present expertise within the institution. Good practices, both external and internal, have an inspirational and aspirational power that constitute an almost necessary addition to formal strategies and plans. The Review Team advises the engagement of change agents in all levels and departments to induce and gradually reinforce a research culture, and to enhance methodological and epistemological knowledge by actively participating in the international artistic research scene and building a nurturing network.

On the Diploma Programme:

The Diploma Programme is delivered and certified by RIAM on its own authority, as opposed to the Level 7 and 8 Programmes⁶⁸. The Diploma Programme combines multiple facets and target groups ('gap year programme', orientation programme, CPD for professionals, preparation for master...), which renders its identity rather complex. Throughout the different meetings, the Review Team incrementally gained an understanding of the multiple possibilities this programme holds. Nevertheless, the Review Team shares RIAM's concern about the low number of students, which might interfere with the programme's sustainability in the near future.

In order to counteract this threat, the Review Team would suggest reconsidering the external presentation of the different Programmes' pathways and objectives, and to develop a specific marketing strategy, addressing each of the possible target groups. The Review Team is convinced on the added value of the different pathways and is

⁶⁸ SAR, p. 2.

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confident that an adaptation in external communication and marketing will reach and attract more suitable candidates.

Moreover, the Review Team has been informed that in the Irish national context, a teaching certificate is not compulsory in music education. However, in several meetings⁶⁹ the importance of a solid training in pedagogy and specific didactics was emphasised. During Meeting 3⁷⁰ the concern was expressed that the absence of national standards and qualifications in teaching reduces the appeal of the pedagogical strand of the diploma programme, especially considering their high tuition, notwithstanding their overall acknowledged added value for the profession. The Review Team was pleased to hear that this awareness induces ideas within RIAM for action from within the institution, by for example better spreading the narrative, and by more visibly celebrating the graduates and their teaching careers. The Review Team considers that expertise on these fields could also develop into a fruitful symbiosis with some concrete needs of teaching staff of the Level 7 and 8 programmes: some teachers indicated to work mainly intuitively and continue the pedagogical line of their own former teachers⁷¹. The substantive interlinking between both programmes could be a unique opportunity for RIAM in terms of pedagogical CPD.

Recommendations on category 3:

The Review Team commends RIAM for the accomplishments under this category and recommends addressing the following challenges and opportunities:

- to safeguard the emphasis on artistic mentoring and support during the generously allocated individual classes;
- to continue the professional training opportunities, keeping in mind a widened scope of professional possibilities;
- to support staff in the acquirement of 'new' artistic and academic requirements, by offering training opportunities as well as engaging new, external expertise;
- to rethink, where necessary, the work-life-balance with regards to academic courses, for example by providing alternatives and/or remedial courses, by involving students in the planning of projects and review the number of productions being implemented on an annual basis;
- to define the different possibilities and target groups of the Diploma programme and to design a targeted marketing strategy.

⁶⁹ Specifically Meeting 2, also Meeting 3.

⁷⁰ Heads of Faculties and Artistic Programming.

⁷¹ Meeting 2.

3.4. Category 4: “the quality of the programmes' teaching and learning provision, learning resources and learning environment, both internal and external to campus, that underpin the delivery of the curriculum and the attainment of the RIAM's graduate attributes”.

Context and general observations:

The RIAM Graduate Attributes are embedded in the overall learning outcomes and represent ‘the qualities, skills, behaviours and attitudes that RIAM students will have the opportunity to develop during their programme of study and are expected to demonstrate upon graduation’⁷². The RIAM Graduate Attribute are built upon the Trinity Graduate Attributes Framework⁷³ and reflect the relevant professional requirements:

- GA1: To Communicate Effectively *with an individual artistic voice*
- GA2: To Think Independently *through the synthesis of critical and creative scholarship*
- GA3: To Develop Continuously *through ongoing personal reflection and professional engagement*
- GA4: To Act Responsibly *through the cultivation and employment of a responsible and global artistic identity*.⁷⁴

Based on the information and the experiences that the Review Team had at their disposal, it can be confirmed that RIAM has made substantial efforts to assure that the teaching and learning provisions, resources and environment support the successful obtaining of the four categories:

- GA1: Students receive a very elaborate, personal and group-oriented education where they already can follow their individual pathways, an ambition which will be more elaborate by actions and initiatives in function of the second strategic action point,
- GA2: The critical and creative elements in the curriculum are still a challenge, as RIAM already made clear in the SAR⁷⁵ and was also felt during our meetings: the systematic integration of a research attitude in artistic activities and courses for example, but that does not prevent a substantial level in these fields that is already present.
- GA3: Personal reflection is stimulated in opportunities such as performance classes, with one-to-one lessons and mentoring on career development, in the reflective journal etc. A next step that could be

⁷² SAR, p. 13.

⁷³ Which were developed under the umbrella of the Trinity Educational Project, launched by Trinity College in 2020.

⁷⁴ Idem.

⁷⁵ See e.g. SAR, p. 55, Meetings 3 and 5.

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considered is to explore ways not just for (self-) reflection but also in self-evaluation, as this is a necessary professional attribute. If RIAM wants to prepare students for an effective self-evaluation of their own performance, this could also be reflected in the way they are assessed.

- GA4: (Societal) responsibility and the development of a global artistic identity is also increasingly being explored: the Trinity Elective Programme, RIAM Holistic, Capstone project,... The ambition of RIAM is to reach out from the core business of Classical music, but alternative careers, deeper towards education, outreach, socio-artistic work, entrepreneurship and management are less visible on the agenda. However, considering the course RIAM has set for itself in the Strategy document, the Review Team looks forward to seeing some examples on these types of identity in the near future as well.

On teaching and learning provisions:

Within the individual study programmes the Review Team discerns a personalised and tailored approach, designed to mentor and support all students to their individual needs and aspirations. The generous amount of time attributed to one-to-one lessons for principal study allows for the students to be profoundly educated in the development of their artistic skills, but at the same time is intended to offer the opportunity for professors to mentor their students regarding career planning, professional preparation and reflection. While the teaching staff are keen to give maximum attention to their students, they also mention relying on Trinity Electives and RIAM Holistic to give students more specialised guidance for the final task of career development, given the specificity and complexity of a changing professional environment.⁷⁶ The elaborate focus on performance practice, e.g. during the spotlight weeks and the performance classes, the intense collaborations with professional partners, e.g. in side-by-side projects, and explorations of team-teaching activities are other examples of this in-depth artistic teaching culture.

From a curriculum point of view, this tailoring is currently in full development, in line with the strategic actions of *RIAM 175 Strategy*. Promising initiatives have been developed and will be introduced shortly, if they haven't been already: the Trinity Elective programme, RIAM Holistic, Performing in Context, as well as a choice of electives. The Capstone Project is an ambitious and relevant development, the first results of which both the Review Team and RIAM staff and students are looking forward to. The consistent implementation of research is in line with RIAM's ambition to strengthen the graduate attributes. Given the ambition of RIAM to offer an innovative programme, the Review Team encourages the active involvement of professional stakeholders in the future development and finetuning of the curriculum, and the organisation of regular surveys with recent alumni on the fitness of their education in light of their professional progression.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Meeting 2.

⁷⁷ Supported by the stakeholders in Meeting 6.

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As already mentioned earlier in this report, the teaching body of RIAM consists of a loyal team with ample specialist expertise. However, the Review Team repeats the concern that the increasing substantial expectations from teachers, in terms of innovations within the programme, might increase the need for a more thorough application of CPD policy: on specific subjects (research, VR, socio-artistic skill sets, entrepreneurship and management were mentioned during Meeting 2), but also on pedagogical matters. The Review Team recognises that there are possibilities to connect to new movements and evolutions in learning and teaching, evaluation, methods and repertoire, but also on a more overarching level: in terms of including a mindset of diversity, inclusion, access, musical and other identities, broader skills, communication and so on. It is encouraging to witness the open-mindedness of the teaching staff towards CPD.

On learning resources and environment:

During the Covid-19-crisis, RIAM inevitably had to switch to an online learning environment, and did so successfully⁷⁸. Staff and students were supported in this transition, and thanks to successful practices, some new hybrid / blended opportunities have been developed. Moodle has been designed to be the main source for information and good foundations and infrastructure are already in place from the institution's side, e.g. String Performance Class encouraging students to sign up for sessions, to upload their scores in advance and to review marking criteria. However, full support and use of Moodle by faculty members as well as students are still in an organic development phase. The Review Team recognises the importance of the digital environment, parallel to the physical one, and supports RIAM in the further development thereof. Further substantive developments are possible, for example utilisation of digital pedagogical techniques, multiple types of learning resources, built in activities with opportunities for formative feedback, but equally important is the shift in institutional culture to fully embrace and use electronic platforms as an educational and communication tool.

Inside the institution's premises, the Review Team perceived a creative, loyal and enthusiastic environment, nurturing towards students, ambitious and driven. As in every institution or organisation, there are some grievances – for example on the work-life-balance - and possibilities for improvement that were mentioned, but this does not change the Review Team's impression that students as well as staff at all levels are happy to be there.

Initiatives such as the student lounge, the focus on wellbeing within artistic practice as well as in general are already in place, and the actions taken in function of DEAI are topical and well received by students⁷⁹. The Review Team was pleased to read and hear the commitment of management to make this a high priority.

⁷⁸ Chairperson of the Board in the 2021 Annual Report: "I wish to commend management and all staff for their proactive approach to keeping students learning, to congratulate the students for keeping their studies moving ahead, and to thank all the parents of the students for their understanding and continuing support" (Appendix 21 of the SAR, p. 11). This was confirmed during meetings 2 and 5.

⁷⁹ Meeting 5.

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The Review Team also commends RIAM for their initiatives on student counselling and mentoring services⁸⁰, the personal and extensive focus on a new student's induction process⁸¹ and learning support system⁸². The Review Team was informed by the students in Meeting 5 that not every student is fully aware of the possibilities, but this will most certainly become more common knowledge as soon as a more organic and self-reliant communication culture is established.

Recommendations on category 4:

The Review Team commends RIAM for the accomplishments under this category and recommends addressing the following challenges and opportunities:

- to continue the development and integration of opportunities derived from the Trinity Elective programme, the Capstone Project, artistic research RIAM Holistic etc. as an essential addition to the existing expertise in artistic training;
- to explore new methods of assessment that will increase student understanding and engagement in assessment processes in order to develop their ability to evaluate their own performance as reflective practitioners;
- to develop a mechanism for the integration of Moodle as the main source of information and feed back;
- to actively engage with the student voice and representation structures in the rolling out of (new) policies, mechanisms and pedagogical innovations.

⁸⁰ SAR, p. 67.

⁸¹ Idem, also worth mentioning again are the English conversation classes.

⁸² SAR, p. 68.

3.5: Criterium 5: “to review the resources available to the programmes to deliver on their academic mission such as financial, facilities, human”.

Context and general observations:

The period during which the programme review took place was dominated by the echoes of the Covid-19 crisis on the one hand, and the major campus re-development on the other. Apart from a thoroughly disruptive impact on learning and teaching conditions, Covid-19 restrictions had an important effect on revenue stream as well. RIAM, whose funding relies on Government grant (approximately 40% of the operating budget), tuition fees and bursary donations (30%) and RIAM Exams, short courses and publications (30%) shows financial stability for the past decade and could continue this trend even during the Covid-19 crisis.

The transformational building project of 24 million euros will according to planning be operational by the start of the new academic year 2022-23, doubling the footprint of the campus and thoroughly expanding teaching, performing and rehearsal facilities. At the time of the site-visit the building was in an advanced development phase, while for the time being all campus activities were accommodated in four campus spaces and extra rehearsal rooms⁸³. The *RIAM 175 Strategy* is strongly connected to the expansion of RIAM's facilities: to the aspired increase in student and staff numbers, to the reconfiguration of organisational roles and to the curriculum reform. The strategies on financial, facilities and human resources are inextricably linked and of the utmost importance for the future sustainability for the ambitions of RIAM.

On financial resources:

The main budget for the programmes under review is allocated to staff costs, student projects and establishment and operational costs⁸⁴. According to the new *RIAM 175 Strategy*, greater autonomy will be awarded to academic leadership in order to ensure that resources are deployed in the most targeted way. The Review Team endorses this decision and supports RIAM's dedication to train the respective academic leadership in financial management accordingly.⁸⁵

The investment of 24 million euros into the new building will offer RIAM the possibility to provide twice the current number of teaching studios, a recital hall, an opera studio, a sonic arts hub and a music discovery hub, hereby opening the opportunity to recruit more students and staff and to obtain a more competitive position internationally.

⁸³ For example, the orchestra rehearsal that was attended by two members of the Review Committee took place at the Lutheran Church in Adelaide Road, Dublin.

⁸⁴ SAR, p. 83.

⁸⁵ Objective 4.2 of the *RIAM 175 Strategy*, see also SAR, p. 83.

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The Review Team applauds RIAM's management team for the admirable efforts they have done clearing the path towards this major enterprise, both politically and financially, but is also aware that there is still a long way to go. The current financial balance currently showed a deficit of 2 million euros to fully complete the project, a necessary realisation in the relatively short term in reference to the qualitative provision of the programmes. The Review Team expresses their support to the management team in these final stages of fundraising and political mediation, and hopes that their efforts find resonance with the responsible authorities.

Additional financial power would evidently create additional advantages on marketing budgets, on scholarships, on recruitment actions etc., which also add to the competitive position of RIAM and the quality of educational provision. The Review Team commends RIAM's commitment to increase the scholarship fund and marketing resources⁸⁶, and expresses their appreciation on the allocation of funds to unique pedagogical added value initiatives and/or traditions, such as the generous time allocated to principal studies, the appointment of renowned professionals for masterclasses and performance projects and the extensive student support, counselling and mentoring services⁸⁷.

On human resources:

Currently, teaching staff matches the needs of the student numbers and of the curriculum. However, in order to maximise the capacity of the new campus in term of student numbers and revised curricula, a financial injection in staff recruitment will be necessary. Not only quantitative requirements will increase substantially, bearing in mind the strongly individualised didactic format that characterises music education, also the specific requirements in terms of e.g. artistic research, improvisation, non-classical genres, pedagogy and anti-racist music theorist⁸⁸. RIAM employs at present a gender-balanced body of 120 members of staff, corresponding with a total of 65 FTE, who educate 175 tertiary Level students and 1900 Junior RIAM pupils. Although the teachers are highly specialised in their respective domains, skills gaps are common among staff profiles mainly in field of recent developments (social engagement, research, creativity, entrepreneurship, management...) ⁸⁹. RIAM recognises this and developed several initiatives to address these challenges such as small research grants for example⁹⁰ and staff training workshops⁹¹ as part of the CPD policy⁹². Additionally, since in a national context pedagogic qualifications are not compulsory, the Review Team supports an idea proposed during Meetings 2, namely to include pedagogical initiatives into RIAM's CPD offers.

⁸⁶ SAR, p. 19.

⁸⁷ SAR, p. 67.

⁸⁸ SAR, p. 84.

⁸⁹ Meeting 2 and 3.

⁹⁰ SAR, p. 85.

⁹¹ SAR, p. 64.

⁹² Appendix 14 of the SAR.

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The Review Team wishes to repeat their appreciation for the enthusiasm and involvement of teaching staff and their loyalty towards their institutions, their students and leadership⁹³. The academic leadership members are all accomplished key figures in their field and can present valuable initiatives and development within the curricula and the programmes, while the management team and institutional leadership are known to act decisively, ambitiously and with insight, and enjoy overall mutual respect.

On Facilities:

The opportunities provided by the new building have already been discussed as the decisive factor to the realisation of the *RIAM 175 Strategy*. Important to mention is that the new building also enables daily practice and rehearsal facilities, organised via the Asimut online booking system⁹⁴, which would most probably solve some of the current issues on room availability. Students will be able to use two student areas: one for lockers and one for relaxation, successors of the current canteen area.

Equally important to mention is the large investment in Steinway grand pianos in every piano teaching room, next to a second (practice) piano (e.g. Boston or Kawai). A small collection of stringed, wind and brass instruments can be lent to students⁹⁵.

Another major expenditure in the near future will be the purchase of computers and AV equipment for the new campus. 35 Apple Mac computers will be available in the library and the sonic arts studio; iPads, projectors, screens, cameras, sound systems and microphones are another priority for the nearest possible future.⁹⁶

The Review Team shares RIAM's enthusiasm for the future facilities and creative and artistic outputs related to the new building and equipment, and regrets it was not yet possible to visit the library.

Recommendations on category 5:

The Review Team commends RIAM for the accomplishments under this category and recommends addressing the following challenges and opportunities:

- to keep advocating for financial support, in order to complete the ambitious building project, to make the aspired investments and to allow for the necessary staff recruitment. The Review Team would like to strongly encourage the Irish government to grant RIAM's request for additional support;

⁹³ Consistently confirmed during the site-visit meetings.

⁹⁴ SAR, p. 70.

⁹⁵ SAR, p. 71.

⁹⁶ Meeting 1.b, see also SAR, p. 70.

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- to guard and nurture the positive, loyal and devoted atmosphere among staff, students and alumni;
- to implement these resources as unique selling points in an inspirational and recruiting marketing plan.

4. Conclusion

The Royal Irish Academy of Music is a vibrant institution with a solid national and international reputation, led by strong and visionary leadership and supported by capable, ambitious and loyal management, staff and student bodies. As elaborated in the *RIAM 175 Strategy* and subscribed by a well-thought-out set of policies and procedures, RIAM has the ambition to position itself as a frontrunner in artistic education, connected profoundly with Dublin's and Ireland's professional environment and engaging internationally with prominent colleague institutions. To this end, RIAM has made applaudable endeavours in terms of expanding facilities, the most eye-catching of which is undoubtedly the new building. At the same time, RIAM aims to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the new facilities to increase its student and staff numbers, and to redesign its curricula in reference to changing professional requirements. At the time of this review, RIAM finds itself in a process of transition that presents both challenges and opportunities. Pending challenges concern growth in student numbers, staff composition, financial power and communication, while opportunities include gaining national and international power and prestige and causing meaningful impact on the (inter)national professional environment by delivering artistically strong, self-reliant and reflective musicians.

With these circumstances in mind, the Review Teams has suggested a number of recommendations under each of the proposed categories, and wishes to express their confidence that with suitable financial support, RIAM possesses the ambition, vision and competencies to meet these challenges and make the most of its opportunities.

Final Report April 29, 2022.

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