

RIAM LEVEL 9 PROGRAMME

Master in Music Performance

REVIEW REPORT

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Royal Irish Academy of Music



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1. Introduction

The Review Team wishes to express their gratitude to all of those who contributed to the Level 9 programme review (Master in Music Performance), 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 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 self-evaluation and which highlighted both current strengths and areas in need of further attention and development. The SAR and its supporting appendices provided a wealth of valuable information in preparation for review the site-visit. The review team were particularly impressed with the enthusiasm of all staff and students who participated in the site visit meetings. They were open and honest in sharing their feedback with the panel.

2. Context

About RIAM

Founded in 1848, the Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM) provides comprehensive practice-based musical education from pre-school to postgraduate level. It focuses on western art music and the Irish harp. Its current student numbers (during the academic year 2023/2024) are: Junior RIAM 1,600 pre-college students; Tertiary RIAM 215 full-time students. In addition, RIAM has run music assessments known as RIAM Exams since 1894, which set the curriculum for and assess about 30,000 amateur musicians annually across the island of Ireland.

RIAM is a Linked Provider of Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, which enables RIAM to offer and deliver undergraduate and postgraduate programmes validated by Trinity College as the Designated Awarding Body. RIAM also offers and delivers programmes certified by RIAM on its own authority (such as an Access Programme, Teacher training and a Recital Artist Diploma), which the numbers above also refer to.

Entry routes to RIAM

Students who apply for the Master programme must normally have an undergraduate degree, although RIAM has the right to make a case for students who may not meet those requirements but has recognised prior learning for instance through their professional career. RIAM's Recognition of Prior Learning Policy allows mature students to apply who may have work experience to mitigate against an absence of the undergraduate degree requirements. Applicants will also undertake an audition and interview. Application takes place directly to RIAM. International students from countries in which English is not an official language must also submit an English test score, for instance, an IELTS test report with an overall grade of 5.5. Up to the 2022, the IELTS benchmark was 6.5. In 2021, RIAM presented a case to Trinity on the appropriate level of IELTS for conservatoire degrees, arguing that UK conservatoires set the level at 5.5 or 6.0. On a pilot basis, RIAM have been allowed to reduce the IELTS requirement. This will be reviewed in two years.

Strategic targets for RIAM

Two significant overarching areas of focus for RIAM at present are the new RIAM 175 Strategy (2021-2025) and the major re-development of the campus (opened in the academic year 2022/2023). The Strategy takes the year 2023 as its central point of inspiration, RIAM's 175th anniversary. The Strategy aims to build on the core strengths that have brought RIAM success, examines deficits that hold it back and explore approaches that could be refreshed.

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The campus re-development is a transformational building project of €27 million that has doubled the footprint of the campus, providing twice the previous number of teaching studios, a recital hall of 300 seats, an opera studio, a sonic arts hub and a music discovery hub for students with additional needs. The building fully opened in September 2023, and students have experienced the full suite of facilities only since then, having had multiple temporary accommodations between 2020 and 2023.

The Strategy and campus re-development offer RIAM the historic opportunity to increase student and staff numbers, address infrastructure deficits and refresh its offer and approach.

This time of change brings challenges. It will require from RIAM a greater awareness of risk, a more strategic approach to the allocation of funds, new hires and the reconfiguration of roles within the organisation, and the ability to adjust the iterative process of curriculum reform as changes are implemented. Therefore, the current review comes at a time of considerable flux. This review allows for reflection about the status of the Master programme within a wider context of change.

3. Terms of Reference

The Review Team were asked to assess and make recommendations to the RIAM under the following categories:

- I) To provide assurance to the RIAM Governing Body, students, and other external stakeholders that the academic standards on the level 9 programme align with the relevant level on the National Framework of Qualifications;
- II) To assess the strategic direction of the programme in the context of RIAM's strategy, internal and external developments and, when necessary, to facilitate largescale changes or discontinuation;
- III) To review the effectiveness of the programme's governance, management, and administration structures in delivering and supporting the achievement of its strategy and mission;
- IV) To assess the quality of the programme's 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.

4. Overview of the Programme Review Process

This programme review followed a three-stage process:

- 1) RIAM presented a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) to the Review Team for analysis in advance of the site-visit. Once received and analysed, the Review Team met online to share their initial observations of the SAR, to identify any additional information that may be required and to formulate questions to ask of the various stakeholder group identified on the site visit schedule provided by RIAM.
- 2) The site-visit to the Royal Irish Academy of Music by the Review Team took place on 26th and 27th October 2023. The visit itself comprised six separate meetings:
 - Meeting 1: Director Deborah Kelleher and management of the institute;
 - Meeting 2: Students (including members of RIAM Students Union)
 - Meeting 3: Heads of Faculty;
 - Meeting 4: Professors and teachers from different departments;
 - Meeting 5: Administration staff;

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- Additional site-visit activities included observations of student rehearsals, as well as a comprehensive guided tour of the facilities. During a final meeting, the preliminary findings of the Review Team were shared with the management team.
- 3) This report has been produced by the Review Team, structured on the criteria provided by RIAM. For each criterion, we have included a short narrative which is followed by commendations and recommendations.

5. Review Findings

5.1. Category 1: “To provide assurance to the RIAM Governing Body, students, and other external stakeholders that the academic standards on the Level 9 programmes align with the relevant Level on the National Framework of Qualifications”.

Overview

As part of the self-evaluation exercises in preparation for this programme review, RIAM undertook comprehensive benchmarking of the programme with national and international counterparts. The desktop research was supplemented with site visits. The review team are satisfied that the programme compares favourably with its benchmarked counterparts. Indeed, the size of RIAM and the unrivalled level of one-to-one tuition offered to its students, can be seen as a distinct competitive advantage when it comes to the student experience. Further discussion on specific elements of the programme, including recommendations for improvement, are included in Section 3.3 and 3.4 below.

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 Examining. 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.

Overall, the review team are happy to provide assurance to the RIAM Governing Body, students and stakeholders that the academic standards on the level 9 programme (Master in Music Performance) aligns with the relevant level on the National Framework of Qualifications. The remainder of this report will provide further clarification and offer commendations and recommendations under each of the evaluation criterion.

5.2. Category 2: “To assess the strategic direction and planning of the programme, particularly reflecting on relevant strategic areas highlighted by the co-ordinating group”.

Overview

The SAR provided a clear and ambitious strategic vision for the future of RIAM, detailed in the context of the outstanding new facilities and the *RIAM 175 Strategy*. It is evident from the document and from meetings that all staff are committed to pursuing a teaching and learning environment that responds to changes in the profession whilst also recognising the pressures exerted by competition from other providers and the financial realities evident at institutional, national and international level.

Particular strategic goals highlighted to the review team included a desire to: increase MMus numbers; introduce greater flexibility and choice within the programme, particularly by considering a series of MMus streams; and take a more dynamic approach to research within the programme.

In terms of numbers, the preponderance of overseas students was noted (both in the SAR and in discussion with Senior Management) and a desire to increase home students was expressed. The strategies by which RIAM's strengths might be marketed were discussed, with an emphasis on how a smaller programme can be more flexible and allow a bespoke offering; it was noted that 'flexible and individual' might be more effective language at postgraduate level than 'small and intimate'. It was also noted that Dublin's European status (and associated fee status) was a clear tool for competing with UK-based competitors, as was the generous one-to-one provision (identified by students as important). The review team noted that, in order to increase home students, a marketing distinction between Dublin-based students and those who need to relocate might be considered. The newly acquired space for student accommodation was also discussed as a potential draw, particularly for overseas students who might have concerns about living in a foreign city. In terms of international recruitment, the implementation of a reduced IELTS requirement is a positive step, although the review team would recommend that this is monitored to ensure that students remain equal to the rigours of the programme.

The review team asked Senior Management what they saw as the particular identity of the MMus within the institution, as well as outside it. There was acknowledgement that there is currently no clear answer to this question, but that there needs to be. In relation to the strategic marketing of the programme this seems key and is something with which the new MMus streams might be able to help; in other words, they have the potential to promise more focused professional frameworks (i.e. market 'niches') to potential students than the current offering.

The detailed strategy for reforming the MMus curriculum is applauded by the review team and viewed positively by staff. The proposal for new streams and the desire to bring greater professional relevance to the MMus was highlighted as a key goal. However, it was noted by Heads of Faculty (with some frustration) that the necessary changes are challenging and that there is never enough time for comprehensive discussion of strategic goals and how they might successfully be implemented. The need for intensive strategy meetings, potentially offsite, was identified as important if plans are to be progressed.

Reduced Government funding resources were equally highlighted as a barrier to progress since new streams will require new staff and recruitment is not financially viable at the moment (although would be possible in principle as long as new expertise was being sought). Senior Management expressed a hope that an enriched offer would encourage an increase in student numbers, although it was acknowledged that there was a 'chicken and egg' issue inherent in the introduction of streams – the hiring of new staff and the potential for increasing student numbers were interdependent in a way that would require careful financial juggling. Senior Management were clearly aware of the benefits and risks of expansion and potential routes forward are being explored. The review team were assured that the current financial position of the MMus is secure

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and that the planned future developments will be undertaken with appropriate caution and attention to financial implications.

An increase in philanthropic income was highlighted as a strategic priority in order to allow RIAM bursaries and scholarships to remain competitive, a goal that the review team encourage; it seems a necessary part of any ambition to attract new students. In their meeting with the review team, students noted that scholarship and bursary support had been a critical factor in their choice to stay on at RIAM for their masters. The 1848 bursaries were mentioned as of particular value. The review team suggested that Senior Management could consider the introduction of a means tested bursary/scholarship which, in conjunction with a SUSI grant, could allow disadvantaged students to benefit from a 'free' or significantly cheaper masters.

The ambition to develop research within postgraduate programmes was acknowledged and discussed – the hiring of a Head of Programmes and Research is one very tangible move that will enable interaction between the two areas. Other positive steps include the connection with European hubs for artistic research (such as the Orpheus Institute), signing up to the Research Catalogue and involvement in EU funded projects and conferences. One current issue in relation to developing staff research profiles is the 750-hour contracts that leave no time for individual staff to engage in research – this was acknowledged as an area that would need tackling if the strategic aims around research-led teaching are to progress. The proposed Research Institute would offer a means for staff to take time away from teaching to undertake research, but this will require new resources. The review team applaud RIAM's plans to embed research more fully into the MMus but acknowledge that new funding will be required for the planned development of the wider research culture.

Commendations

The review team commends the following:

- The bold and relevant strategy for developing the MMus as outlined in the SAR and in meetings with the review team.
- The desire for and willingness to embrace change among all staff.
- The prudent financial management in the face of reduced government funding.
- The goal to increase philanthropic funding as a means to enhance the scholarships and bursaries available to students.
- The appetite for the development of new streams for the programme alongside a clear recognition of the pragmatic challenges associated with such a development.
- The exciting and ambitious plans for embedding research into the institutional culture.

Recommendations

The review team recommends the following:

- In future rebranding of the MMus programme, consider the unique identity of the programme within RIAM and wider educational circles and how this can be used for marketing purposes.
- Further promote the uniqueness of RIAM's MMus offering (its ability to provide personal attention to students, flexibility of provision, the benefits of its European status, 1-1 tuition at 2 hours/week).
- Set aside time and resources for offsite meetings to allow for strategic planning and sharing of ideas among Senior Management and Heads of Faculty.
- Consider the introduction of a means tested bursary/scholarship which, in conjunction with a SUSI grant, could allow disadvantaged students to benefit from a 'free' or significantly cheaper masters.
- Continue to pursue RIAMs agenda for research-led teaching even if the wider research culture will take time to mature.
- Monitor the impact of the change in IELTS on students' ability to engage with the programme.

5.3. Category 3: “To review the effectiveness of the programmes' governance, management, and administration structures in delivering and supporting the achievement of its strategy and mission”.

Overview

As a linked provider of Trinity College, RIAM has developed a comprehensive suite of policies and procedures in pursuit of the quality agenda, which follow a robust approach to ensure consistency and ease of access to relevant information. These policies are clearly outlined in the Quality Standards and Assurance Policy, which 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.

During the site visit, the review team were impressed with the genuine focus from Heads of Faculty and staff on ensuring that quality assurance and enhancement remained firmly on the agenda. During many of the site visit discussions, references were made to quality, and the impact of actions and decisions on the overall quality enhancement of the programme.

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 self-evaluation and which highlighted both current strengths and areas in need of further attention and development. The SAR and its supporting appendices provided ample documentation in advance of the site visit and were a valuable source of information to the review team in preparing for the site visit. This was further evidenced during the lively discussions held with various stakeholder groups during the site visit.

The student stakeholder group were very impressive. They offered candid feedback, but were quick to emphasise that as a student body, they genuinely felt their opinions were taken on board and their voice was heard. Of particular note were recent changes to the student handbook which were made on foot of student feedback, and were a very welcome improvement to the handbook. One small issue that arose in relation to QA was the panel formation of Final Recitals. Students seemed unclear what to expect and staff confirmed that the third panel member required for FRs could be either the Programme External Examiner or the Principal (whose institutional roles are not consistent with each other). Standard practice in the sector is to have a third 'generalist' member of internal staff who is a voting member of the panel, giving greater robustness to assessing the heavily weighted FR component and leaving the EE to remain fully an observer. The review team recommend that this issue be considered.

During our discussion with management, staff and students, the issue of student complaints was raised. There were mixed reactions to the current process in place and how effective it was in reality. The review team welcomed the proposed plans by management to engage an external facilitator to deal with both staff and student complaints. This is good practice within a small institution where educational and professional environments necessarily overlap, and the decision should make a positive impact on the overall complaints procedure.

The ongoing statutory and regulatory quality assurance and quality enhancement requirements can place onerous burdens on any organisation, and in particular a smaller institution like RIAM. The Review Team recommends prioritising the appointment of a dedicated role for Quality Assurance/Quality Enhancement. This would help RIAM to continue to meet its statutory and regulatory requirements as well as enhancing its activities in pursuit of its mission. All meeting participants engaged fully in the process and were forthcoming in their overall praise for RIAM and the Level 9 programme. They were also honest and open in offering suggestions for improvement.

During the meeting with Senior Management, the review team heard of plans to increase responsibility of Heads of Faculties, supported by the strategic goal to “integrate finance team functions across all platforms

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and allow greater autonomy to academic leadership in managing their budgets” which would allow for an effective impact of flexibility and autonomy onto the organisation as well as the curriculum. However, the review team would caution further discussion with Heads of Faculty on this proposed change, to ensure this is something the Heads of Faculty have the capacity and desire to undertake.

The SAR outlined opportunities for staff to pursue their own CPD courses, with a financial contribution made by RIAM. This was acknowledged by staff during the site visit. In particular there was a discussion with teaching staff on Erasmus staff and teacher exchanges to gain international insights into various programme formats and teaching modes. This was reported by staff as being a very engaging opportunity for continuing professional development. Of particular note was the AEC ICON (Innovative Conservatoire) seminars.

During our meeting with staff, it was acknowledged that much improvement has been made by HR in relation to training, and in particular to induction training. As part of the RIAM 175 Strategy, a more formal CPD strategy has also been organised. This is a welcome initiative by staff we met during the site visit. Training sessions at RIAM have been optional until recently and have been typically attended by approximately 40% of staff. In one session, part-time staff were paid to attend, and the session was repeated multiple times which increased attendance to 90%. Staff noted that this was effective but expensive. Heads of Faculty proposed that faculty meetings could be used more effectively for staff training. More focus now needs to be put on Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion (DEAI). The review team feel that this training should be mandatory for all staff.

Commendations

The review team commends the following:

- The comprehensive policies and procedures in place for quality assurance and quality enhancement of the programme.
- The genuine focus from Heads of Faculty and staff on ensuring effective quality assurance mechanisms are in place and adhered to.
- The comprehensive SAR and supporting appendices.
- The willingness of all stakeholder groups to engage fully in the review process and their honesty and openness in responding to our queries.
- The plans to hire an external ‘facilitator’ to deal with student and staff complaints.
- The involvement of students and external examiners in the quality assurance/quality enhancement of the programme.

Recommendations

The review team recommends the following:

- Prioritise the recruitment of a full-time staff member with responsibility for quality assurance and quality enhancement.
- Consider the impact of plans for devolved budgeting and whether this is something current Heads of Faculty have the capacity and desire to take on board.
- Review staff training in general, particularly the DEAI and mandatory training and continue to pursue avenues for maximising participation.
- Continue to promote Erasmus+ opportunities for staff as a means of continued professional development.
- Review the formation of Final Recital panels to ensure robustness and consistency.

5.4. Category 4: “To assess the quality of the programme 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”.

Overview

The review team acknowledged the expertise and commitment of all the staff they met during the site visit and were confident that programme delivery was of a high quality and was serving students well. The team observed two excellent rehearsals which revealed focused, creative and pragmatic models for teaching and learning. Teaching is clearly being shaped around the nature and needs of the student body whilst maximising what can be achieved within the resources of the institution. The team were also impressed by the connections that were being forged with Dublin's wider artistic environment. The ILOs for the programme are clear and focused as well as being realistic and achievable. Staff noted in the SAR report and site meetings, however, that there were elements of the programme that it was important to review in light of the considerable changes in the profession over the last few years and much of the discussion during the site visit focussed on these new proposals.

The central goal relevant to teaching and learning provision is the introduction of MMus streams which includes a rationalisation of the programme structure to improve coherence and clarity. Staff indicated that the MMus needs a stronger sense of professional focus and that streams could help to achieve this. There are a range of streams proposed, although it became evident during discussions with staff that some of these are more achievable than others; for example, the infrastructure and expertise required to introduce a Collaborative Piano stream are already mostly in place, whilst a stream in Musical Theatre would require new staff and facilities. Heads of Faculty and staff were clear that appropriate expertise and facilities must be in place for streams to be implemented. They also noted that the new streams would potentially require a more professionally proactive and savvy student body and that recruitment would need to be considered. The review team applaud the ambition to expand teaching and learning provision on the MMus but also admire the pragmatism with which staff are viewing the accompanying challenges. The review team felt that the goal to bring greater professional focus to the MMus was the right one, but suggest that the proposed streams be implemented incrementally, starting with the best-fit options before considering more ambitious proposals. This will give the chance to test the market before making extensive new commitments.

The proposal to rationalise the programme into four core modules seemed to be clear and practical. The Heads of Faculty noted, however, that they are trying to ‘map innovation onto old structures’ and that this brought challenges; nevertheless, as was noted in the SAR, this remains the most practical way forward within current resources. The implementation of aspects of the ‘Scholarship in Practice’ module were already emerging through a stronger ‘artistic research’ agenda for the current research module. This seems a positive step forward and the review team would encourage pushing this agenda to ensure that the research module feels as relevant to practice as possible. (The team note that bibliographies for this module are currently very out of date and not artistic-research-friendly). It was noted that RIAM has good library facilities available although one small suggestion for enhancing the learning environment was to implement the ALCID programme as a way for RIAM students to access other libraries. The question of student programming was also discussed, and it was noted that proposals included a freeing up of programme requirements for assessed recitals whilst also demanding the inclusion of underrepresented composers; the review team noted that these two proposals are potentially contradictory and that at PG level, whilst creative programming should be encouraged, free choice might be most appropriate.

There was discussion of the ‘professional development’ aspects of the programme. Some of this is embedded in Principal Study and in performance electives, such as through side-by-side schemes. Currently the dedicated ‘professional development’ provision within RIAM Holistic is optional and it was apparent in meetings that students were not signing up, even though in discussion they indicated that they wanted more

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practical preparation for professional life. The SAR has already raised the possibility of making elements of RIAM Holistic compulsory and the review team would encourage this, particularly because the ILOs state that students should “Demonstrate the ability to engage in the business-related aspects of the life of a professional musician”. Currently it seems that students might leave the MMus without giving due consideration to this area.

The review team discussed the current learning environment with staff and students about which both were positive, with students noting that their voices were heard and responded to through feedback mechanisms and committee membership. One piece of evidence for this was the restructuring of assessments in order to balance timetables better; these changes were welcomed by staff and students.

One area that emerged concerned the penalty mark system that looked on paper to the team to be overly complex and bureaucratic, particularly in relation to class attendance. It emerged in discussion that not all of these penalty marks are being enforced and that in some contexts attendance and deadlines were negotiable despite regulations being in place; this is acknowledged in the SAR. In general, current practice seemed to be working – students felt that the system was fair – but there is the risk of inequality across different staff/courses if regulations are being handled more or less leniently. The review team suggest that a review of current practice is undertaken so that regulations can be streamlined/simplified and then consistently observed. In terms of attendance, some students felt that they weren’t given enough flexibility to carry out professional work, but it was clear in talking to Heads of Faculty that the expectations of attendance were realistic and fair, and that sufficient warning was given.

The other area that emerged concerned the Student Code of Conduct. It was evident in discussion with students that they had not read the Code and were therefore unaware of their obligations. It had already been observed in the SAR that there are problems with the disciplinary process and that it is being reviewed, but the review team also recommend that staff look at creating a document for students to sign during enrolment that outlines expectations of behaviour; this could be separate from the full Code, drawing out key information (6.1 and 6.4-6.8). This is common practice within the sector and ensures that any disciplinary procedures can start in the knowledge that students understand what is and is not appropriate behaviour.

It was also evident from discussions with students that they were not always clear to whom they should go to seek clarification about issues or to activate non-standard educational and personal needs. It was evident that the Principal had become a default point of contact for problem solving. Although this speaks to the approachability and hard work of the Principal and should be commended, in procedural terms it could be problematic. The review team recommend that clear points of contact be established, particularly if students are seeking non-standard solutions to areas of their study; devolving responsibility to Heads of Faculty could be one solution.

Commendations

The review team commends the following:

- The positive and productive environment for teaching and learning evident at RIAM.
- Staff understanding of the nature of their student body and the development of appropriate educational provision.
- Efforts made to maximise educational opportunities within the student numbers available.
- Engagement in the musical ecosystem within Dublin, particularly in the context of new work.
- Student acknowledgement that their voices are being heard and actions are taken as a result of their feedback.
- The rebalancing of assessments, which has been well received by the students and seems closer to sector norms.

Recommendations

The review team recommends the following:

- Consider prioritising those new streams where appropriate staff/facilities/frameworks are already in place and consider an incremental increase in new streams.
- Continue to develop an artistic research agenda in MMus work to ensure that student research projects are as relevant to practice as possible.
- Pursue the idea of making the professional development elements of RIAM Holistic compulsory, in order to meet the ILO: “Demonstrate the ability to engage in the business-related aspects of the life of a professional musician with confidence through coursework and assignments”.
- Promote the Student Code of Conduct more prominently and consider requesting that students sign the Code during enrolment.
- Consider clearer and more systematic mechanisms for students to report/discuss issues about their studies to avoid too much problem-solving defaulting to the Principal.
- Consider a review of the penalty systems with particular attention to clarifying the process and ensuring fairness and consistency.
- Consider the ALCID programme as a way for RIAM students to access other libraries for research materials.

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

Overview

Through the comprehensive SAR and the site visit which included a guided tour of the new building and facilities, the management and staff have demonstrated that RIAM has sufficient resources to deliver on their academic mission.

The new, purpose-built campus will afford many opportunities to RIAM students such as performing in professional standard concert halls and recital venues over the duration of their studies. As well as developing performance venues, the new building has added to the already existing practice and academic workspaces for students which will allow RIAM to increase their student numbers in the coming years in line with their Strategic Direction. The new Whyte Recital Hall will also afford the possibility for artists and groups to visit RIAM and perform there, with the possibility for developing side-by-side partnerships and enhancing the teaching and learning environment more generally.

The review team were impressed with the proactive financial management in place and the work done on securing philanthropic donations. This included affording the opportunity to donors to have chairs within the Whyte Recital Hall and practice rooms named after them in return for their donation. The financial benefits secured when organising the projects in which RIAM students participate was another area which was very impressive. This includes partnering with venues for RIAM Opera to avoid extra costs such as renting a space. Senior Management were confident that the current financial model for the MMus was robust and noted that they had a potential financial cushion with the two-hour weekly tuition provision, which could be reduced if funds needed reallocating.

One area which the review team found that could be re-examined is the allocation of admin supports to Heads of Faculty. During the meeting with Heads of Faculty, members expressed that they felt that they could better support their department if their administrative load was reduced. This would free Heads of Faculty for strategic initiatives. This would also give Heads of Faculty more capacity to engage with student issues which was recommended in section 5.4.

Commendations

The review team commends the following:

- The magnificent new building which offers staff and students state of the art and purpose-built facilities, also the ability to attract high level professionals into the building and the possibility for side-by-side partnerships.

Recommendations

The review team recommends the following:

- Review allocation of admin support to Heads of Faculty in order to free them up for more strategic initiatives.

6. Conclusion

The Royal Irish Academy of Music is a vibrant institution with a solid national and international reputation. This is a time of significant change for RIAM and the move to the purpose-built, state-of-the-art building affords multiple opportunities for further growth and development. 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.

The review team were particularly impressed with the enthusiasm of senior management, heads of faculty, staff and students who participated in the site visit meetings. They were open and honest in sharing their feedback with the review team. We also had the pleasure of witnessing two outstanding rehearsals, which we really appreciated.

We have made a number of recommendations which are summarised below; many are simply encouragement to pursue directions already proposed in the SAR that we think are particularly valuable. We hope these recommendations will prove useful to RIAM in your journey of continued growth.

7. Summary of Recommendations – and management response

1. In future rebranding of the MMus programme, consider the unique identity of the programme within RIAM and wider educational circles and how this can be used for marketing purposes.
MANAGEMENT – this will be addressed in our ongoing review of the Masters programme. Timeline – immediate.
2. Further promote the uniqueness of RIAM's MMus offering (its ability to provide personal attention to students, flexibility of provision, the benefits of its European status, 1-1 tuition at 2 hours/week).
MANAGEMENT – this is a feature of our current marketing, but we will increase our reach and messaging. Timeline – immediate.
3. Set aside time and resources for offsite meetings to allow for strategic planning and sharing of ideas among the Senior Management and Heads of Faculty.
MANAGEMENT – this will be done in quarter 1 of 2024.
4. Consider the introduction of a means tested bursary/scholarship which, in conjunction with a SUSI grant, could allow disadvantaged students to benefit from a 'free' or significantly cheaper masters.
MANAGEMENT – we will formalise our means tested scholarship process during Quarter 1 of 2024.
5. Continue to pursue RIAMs agenda for research-led teaching even if the wider research culture will take time to mature.
MANAGEMENT – this will be noted in our current Master review. Timeline – immediate and ongoing.
6. Monitor the impact of the change in IELTS on students' ability to engage with the programme.
MANAGEMENT – this will be done for the ACDC meeting in May 2024.
7. Prioritise the recruitment of a full-time staff member with responsibility for quality assurance and quality enhancement.
MANAGEMENT – this is dependent on Government funding, but it is noted.
8. Consider the impact of plans for devolved budgeting and whether this is something current Heads of Faculty have the capacity and desire to take on board.
MANAGEMENT – this is noted and will be reviewed with Heads of Faculty
9. Review staff training in general, particularly the DEAI and mandatory training and continue to pursue avenues for maximising participation.
MANAGEMENT – faculty meetings featuring DEAI began in November 2023 and will continue as a standing item.
10. Continue to promote Erasmus+ opportunities for staff as a means of continued professional development.

RIAM Master in Music Performance Programme Review

MANAGEMENT – noted.

11. Review the formation of Final Recital panels to ensure robustness and consistency.

MANAGEMENT – we will review the composition of FR panel in time for academic year 2024/2025 with a view to adding a third party to the panel.

12. Consider prioritising those new streams where appropriate staff/facilities/frameworks are already in place and consider an incremental increase in new streams.

MANAGEMENT – noted and will be incorporated into current Masters review. Timeline – ongoing.

13. Continue to develop an artistic research agenda in MMus work to ensure that student research projects are as relevant to practice as possible.

MANAGEMENT – noted and will be incorporated into current Masters review. Timeline – ongoing.

14. Pursue the idea of making the professional development elements of RIAM Holistic compulsory, in order to meet the ILO: “Demonstrate the ability to engage in the business-related aspects of the life of a professional musician with confidence through coursework and assignments”.

MANAGEMENT – noted and will be incorporated into current Masters review. Timeline – ongoing.

15. Promote the Student Code of Conduct more prominently and consider requesting that students sign the Code during enrolment.

MANAGEMENT – this will be enacted for academic year 2024/2025.

16. Consider clearer and more systematic mechanisms for students to report/discuss issues about their studies to avoid too much problem-solving defaulting to the Principal.

MANAGEMENT – noted, and this will be discussed with Heads of Faculty and Principal, commitment to making immediate progress.

17. Consider a review of the penalty systems with particular attention to clarifying the process and ensuring fairness and consistency.

MANAGEMENT – this will be raised and discussed, with a commitment to streamline for academic year 2024/2025.

18. Consider the ALCID programme as a way for RIAM students to access other libraries for research materials.

MANAGEMENT – ALCID - years ago when the DMus degree began we looked into the possibility of RIAM becoming a member of ALCID – without any success. Subsequently Irish libraries with music collections came together with the Music Pal programme, which is not dissimilar (we were able to issue cards granting our students access to pretty much any HE institution library in Ireland). This effectively provided similar access that ALCID membership would have offered.

Unfortunately as the Music Pal programme has been since wound up, we will again reconsider ALCID as a route for access, and our Librarian has contacted CONUL (ALCID’s umbrella organisation) for more information. We will put this on the agenda of the Trinity ACDC Committee to see if our Associated College status will help in gaining membership. ALCID participating institutions are generally Irish universities or academic institutions with significant research collections.

In the interim we can issue letters on behalf of students requesting access to other HE libraries as required.

19. Review allocation of admin support to Heads of Faculty in order to free them up for more strategic initiatives.

MANAGEMENT – noted, this will be discussed with Head of Faculty with a view to finding a solution.

8. MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

On behalf of the RIAM, I would like to thank the panel of Sarah, Kim and Dylan for their enthusiasm and expertise. I also wish to acknowledge the work and input of our staff and students, which was tremendous.

RIAM Master in Music Performance Programme Review

The review itself shone a light on a MMus programme in transition. We wish to make it more industry focused, thereby equipping our students with the skills to achieve sustainable careers in music creation.

We have no disagreement with any of the recommendations, and the above timelines indicate the rate at which we believe changes can happen. A number of the recommendations will fold into our current MMus review, which will occur over the next 12-18 months. As such, our answers cannot give a definitive timeline. Others can be more accurately noted, which we have done above.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Deborah Kelleher". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Deborah" and last name "Kelleher" clearly distinguishable.

Deborah Kelleher, Director, Royal Irish Academy of Music