

**In the Board Room of the Royal  
Conservatoire of Scotland on Friday 31  
January 2025 at 10:00am being a  
meeting of the Board of Governors**

**PRESENT**

Jo Buckley (JB)  
Andrew Butcher (AB)  
Ruth Calder (RC)  
Morag Campbell (MC)  
Prof Stuart Cross (SC)  
Prof Lois Fitch (LF) (Dep Principal)  
Dr David Hare (DH)  
Elizabeth Jenkinson (EJ)  
Dr Robert Laidlow (RL)  
Alexander Lee (AL)

Sharon Mair (SM)  
Ed Monaghan (EM)  
Prof Nacim Pak-Shiraz (NPS)  
Philip Rodney (PR)  
Prof Matthew Rooke (MR)  
Caroline Roxburgh (CR)  
Jean Sangster (JS)  
Prof Jeffrey Sharkey (PJS) (Principal)  
John Taylor (JT)  
Dale Thrupp (DT) (SU VP)  
Ulysse Tonnele-Verjus (UTV)

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Keith Bartlett  
Prof Stephen Broad  
Lydia Demaison (LD)  
Prof Vicky Gunn  
Janette Harkess (JXH)  
Helen McVey (HM)  
Prof Aaron Shorr  
Dr Marc Silberschatz (MS)  
Alan Smith (AS) (DFE)

(Keith Bartlett & Associates Ltd)  
(Director of RKE)  
(Director of Human Resources)  
(Academic Registrar and Board Secretary)  
(Director of External Relations)  
(Director of Business Development)  
(Director of Music)  
(Director of Stage and Screen) Via Teams  
(Director of Finance and Estates) (Left  
after item 12.1)

**IN THE CHAIR**

Prof Dorothy Miell (DM) (Chair)

<b>1.</b>	<p><b>Welcome, Introductions, Apologies for absence and Declarations of Interest</b></p> <p>The Chair welcomed the attendees, including Keith Bartlett, AdvanceHE, the Reviewer for the External Governance Review, and opened the meeting.</p> <p>Apologies were recorded from William English (WE). The Chair also noted that this was the last meeting for two of our governors – Jean Sangster and Ed Monaghan - who have both served the maximum of three 3year terms of office. She complimented their fantastic contributions to meetings and discussions, bringing their different areas of expertise to the work of the Board and the benefit of RCS.</p> <p>No new declarations of interest were submitted.</p>
<b>2.</b>	<p><b>Confirmation of the minutes of the meeting of the Board of Governors held on 25 October 2024</b></p> <p>The minutes of the previous meeting were <b>APPROVED</b> as an accurate record subject to minor amendments.</p> <p>Under item 10 Research – DRKE assured the Board that appropriate edits had been undertaken subsequent to the last Board meeting.</p>
<b>3.</b>	<p><b>Actions Log and Matters Arising not elsewhere on the agenda</b></p> <p>The Board reviewed the rolling action plan. The Chair noted that Strategy Day preparations were underway and that the impact of curriculum review would be one of the items of discussion. The</p>

	<p>Chair also clarified why the January Board meeting remained in the Board Room rather than Wallace Studios which would be the venue for the Board meeting in June and Kerry Livingston, Head of the new School of Dance would be in attendance to present on her School.</p> <p>The SIG raised a query regarding an action which he had requested in June 2024, for clarity regarding how fundraising at the Conservatoire worked, particularly with regards to the transfer of fundraising income from and to the Conservatoire's Trusts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The convenor of the Fundraising Committee acknowledged that there was no report from the Fundraising Committee to the Board on this occasion as the Board's governance structure around fundraising was under review. The outcome of this review was focused on ensuring greater transparency. The aim after the review was completed was to present on RCS fundraising at the Strategic Away Day in April, clarifying how this will be governed and reported on in future, including how the transfer of funds to and from the Trusts is managed.</li> <li>• The convenor of F&amp;GP concurred with this, noting that the Trust Financials were now included in F&amp;GP meetings and agreed that formal examination of the Trust structure (est. 1980s) in the light of the changed circumstances since its foundation was forthcoming with this re-evaluation to produce options for discussion, agreement and communication of this with the Trusts' Boards. The outcomes from this re-evaluation would be discussed at the March committees with an aim of bringing proposals to the April Board.</li> </ul>
4.	<p><b>Chair's Update</b></p> <p>The Chair updated the Board on the recent notification by Creative Scotland regarding a £40m uplift in multiyear funding. She noted that this re-emphasized the need for the RCS to work closely with the cultural sector and SG to break the silo between HEI/ Culture funding. She acknowledged that there was some good news for some of those companies with which RCS partners. She highlighted donor events that were on-going, the excellent Autumn graduations, and a well-received ballet presentation at Gleneagles Hotel.</p>
5.	<p><b>Discussion Topic: Research and Knowledge Exchange</b></p> <p>The Chair welcomed the Conservatoire's Head of Engagement, Deborah Keogh to speak to the Board and lead the discussion on Research and Knowledge Exchange (now referred to under the sobriquet of 'Engagement'). The key points of the discussion included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognition that today was the submission day to SFC for the KEIF Strategy and noted that new website pages had been launched to better represent work already being done as well as further opportunities for engagement at RCS;</li> <li>- Acknowledgement of the positive acceleration of these aspirations subsequent to last year's funding uplift;</li> <li>- An emphasis on institutional transformation for RCS in its role as a creative enterprise nationally, with impactful activity, innovation and data demonstrating impact, all playing a role both specifically for RCS's reputation and, also, as the basis for a potential 'Performance Super Cluster' with other partners locally. It was noted that the entrepreneur, Mark Logan, would produce a provocation on the development of the Super Cluster, with the aim that this would lead to a summit with partner organisations later in 2025.</li> </ul> <p>Deborah also highlighted the work of RCS's Creative Enterprise Development Office – a direct response to SG entrepreneurial campus blueprint requirement – which was aimed at establishing a credible, meaningful network of support for staff, students, and alumni. Early feedback on the initial phase was good and that key lessons from over a decade of activity around Advice &amp; Guidance, Funding, and Enterprise were being synthesised.</p> <p>The Board expressed enthusiasm for the presentation and the work it represented. A question was raised regarding the name 'Engagement' and whether it would be understood as intended. It was explained that 'Engagement' was the umbrella term for three strands (innovation, public engagement, enterprise) of what was covered under the heading Knowledge Exchange, which had consistently failed to gain traction outside of research arenas. A further question was asked regarding the harnessing of internal talent within this framework with the Board being reassured that</p>

	<p>this was critical to the Engagement agenda at RCS. The Board acknowledged the potential of impact and evidence of impact, particularly in terms of a post-graduation outcome measurement, would be a valuable tool for demonstrating the Conservatoire's contribution (and, hopefully, ultimately securing additional investment as a result).</p>
6.	<p><b>Report from CSMT</b></p> <p>The CSMT report was received and noted. The Principal thanked CSMT colleagues for their contributions to the report and the Teams' hard work, drawing the Board's attention to the following headlines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The continued problematic siloing of higher education and cultural funding in the light of RCS's position as both HE provider and cultural producer</li> <li>- The need to engage more systematically and imaginatively with generative AI and its implications for performance disciplines (threats and opportunities)</li> </ul> <p>The Deputy principal highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engagement with on-going debates regarding student retention and cost of living that are occurring across the sector and given particular attention at the recent US LTC L&amp;T development day and sector meeting;</li> <li>- Period of transformation for both SFC and QAA whilst they were implementing a new Regulatory Framework which in turn was generating additional work for institutions.</li> <li>- RCS module on Creative Citizenship and what it aspired to achieve was of explicit interest to others in the Scottish HE sector.</li> </ul> <p>The Board raised a concern regarding the resourcing model for overseeing the incoming external regulatory quality review (TQER) and were reassured that contingencies were in place. The Board also asked about efficiencies emerging from the Central Timetabling project and heard that the initial phase of the project was to identify custom and practice prior to resetting approaches to room 'ownership' to release time in Conservatoire spaces.</p> <p>Further aspects of the CSMT report highlighted were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A short update regarding the in-year Accounts (noting the gift of the Gaspero cello, student numbers ahead of budget, and the expectation of fee recovery (clawback) from the SFC).</li> <li>- The introduction of a new name for the School of DDPF to the School of Stage and Screen with an emphasis on School identity as a core part of the student experience.</li> <li>- The importance of maintaining a culture of agency and accountability with regards to staff and student behaviour to ensure the best outcomes from this period of programme review and transformation of space use and, where possible, training to facilitate this. The convenor of PCC requested that Director of Stage and Screen be invited to attend PCC to discuss his ideas more fully with an outline of the potential resolutions.</li> <li>- The successes and challenges in the recruitment and admissions space for the School of Music and moves to resolve some of the challenges, particularly those relating to capacity in the Admissions team as well as challenges with international recruitment, particularly applicants' anxiety around continuing studies with economic downturns across the Globe and the importance of scholarships in this context.</li> <li>- Notification of a pause in recruiting to the opera programme, allowing for appropriate remodelling in light of personnel changes.</li> <li>- The introduction of the Blended Masters programmes which effectively introduced a formalised cross-Conservatoire academic structure, noting that progress was being made in the marketing space and that the new programme designs were on target to meet required statutory processes.</li> <li>- The need to progress with a new commercial platform for short courses whilst recognising that measuring the impact of the current one on conversions from interest to participation was complicated because of the annualised nature of some of the provision (repeating activity which was low risk mixed with more opportunistic offerings).</li> <li>- The successes relative to other HEIs in the KEIF funding space were likely to reduce as other institutions improved their engagement with the agenda.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The potential impacts of governors leveraging fundraising opportunities through their contacts</li> <li>- Effective closure of the Conservatoire in the light of the red weather warning relating to Storm Eowyn</li> <li>- Successes and continuing challenges relating to the implementation of CI Anywhere.</li> </ul>
7.	<p><b>Report from the Students' Union</b></p> <p>The Board received and noted the report from Students' Union. The SUVP highlighted in particular the on-going student engagement project, expressly noting the support they were receiving from the Deputy Registrar in collaborating with the process as it focused on student welfare. The possibility of highlighting student welfare as part of the recruitment activity was raised as was a question regarding staff who had been resistant to engaging. A further question was raised in respect to whose responsibility it was to undertake this engagement work. The SUVP explained that this work was additional to the normal programme committee representative structure (which was not able to achieve the depth of the process achieved by the SU), but that there needed to be a degree of pragmatism about how the work undertaken by this year's sabb officers could be embedded as sustained practice. Board looked forward to hearing about any future embedding</p>
8.	<p><b>Student Recruitment</b></p> <p><b>8.1 Student Recruitment Strategy Part A</b></p> <p>The Board received and considered the paper which had been presented for approval. It was noted that the paper provided was a final version of the drafts previously scrutinized by Academic Board and the Board of Governors and that, if approved, the KPIs would be used annually to review student recruitment successes and challenges.</p> <p>Key points of the discussion covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Areas of predictability and unpredictability in target student numbers.</li> <li>- Role of the Student Recruitment Committee in planning more targeted international recruitment activity, with new talent pools being explored.</li> <li>- Conversion rates (pre-HE juniors to seniors; offers to acceptances in HE provision).</li> <li>- The importance of retention but noting RCS already outperforms many HEIs in Scotland with respect to retention.</li> <li>- Pressures on both the academics and the professional services staff (Recruitment &amp; Admissions, Registry) to ensure targets are being achieved and the long-term sustainability of what was being asked if the RCS continues to grow student numbers.</li> <li>- Changeable picture of ecology within different cohorts each year adds additional complexity to recruitment cycles</li> </ul> <p>A question was raised regarding the balance of Scots students projected forward within the Schools suggesting a decline in Scots in both Music and Stage and Screen. It was clarified that this reflected the capped nature of Scots numbers into the Conservatoire and the transference of some of those numbers into new programmes.</p> <p>A further question was raised regarding financial sustainability, particularly the balance of sufficient income against additional expenditure in the growth targets. The DFE noted the impact of rebasing the fees. Board discussed whether it would be prudent to rebase again, at higher a level than inflation (ie a premium uplift) perhaps fixing the fees for the duration of a degree so that students could budget for the entire period of their studies. The Chair expressed concern that RCS should not be cheaper than comparator/competitor institutions with regards to fees.</p> <p>The Board <b>APPROVED</b> part A of the Student Recruitment Strategy and also <b>APPROVED</b> the additional changes to the original Strategic Plan (June 2023) objectives requested within the cover sheet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>FROM</u> SP point 2: "Diversifying the higher education academic portfolio into low residency models of delivery to achieve a projected contribution of £650k in 2025-26 and then 10% growth in contribution in 2026-27 and 2027-28" <u>TO</u>: <i>Diversifying the higher education academic</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>portfolio including the introduction of new MA blended provision to achieve a projected income of £580k by year 3 of their inception.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>FROM</u> SP point 5: “Developing international partnerships with a steady state £500k pa minimum annual contribution by 2029-30” <u>TO</u> <i>Developing international partnerships strategically and identifying benchmarks for levels of financial contribution and educational impact to enable annual effectiveness reviews at a School level</i></li> </ul> <p>Board also asked to see the following at a future meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information regarding financial sustainability mapped against the projections in the Student Recruitment Strategy (SRS) – with forward student numbers to income forecasting moving beyond an individual year to 3-5 years</li> <li>- Clarity regarding the financial forecasting for the blended Masters as in the original strategic plan, the 2024-25 forward projections, and the student numbers shown in the SRS</li> </ul> <p><b>8.2 Recruitment Targets for AY2024-25</b></p> <p>The Board received and noted the paper provided which illustrated recruitment targets up to 2029/30 by school and funding category and highlighted the impact of under recruitment in academic years 2023-24 and 2024-25.</p>
<b>9.</b>	<p><b>Strategic Plan</b></p> <p><b>9.1 Annual KPI Review for AY2023-24</b></p> <p>The Board received and considered the the strategic plan annual KPI review paper presented by the Academic Registrar and Secretary for approval. This paper should have been presented at the October 2024 Board and would, in future, be presented in the autumn alongside the annual plan review of the previous academic year. Key points of the discussion which followed covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The need to look at cash absorption/flow surplus (deficit/surplus) as a KPI</li> <li>• What exactly the EDGE measures for Engagement actually mean</li> <li>• Clarifying whether the colours reflected full achievement of a strategic plan objective or just in year success (reporting of annual plan actions). The Board suggested that it should be full completion of an SP objective rather than annual plan success, with the emphasis on scoring progress towards an end goal rather than scoring as progress committed to in the annual plan.</li> <li>• The need to map the KPIs against the risk register. Board suggested that the risk register should come more regularly to the Board. A request was made that the schedule of business be changed to reflect this need and ensure that the risk register accompanies the annual KPI review.</li> </ul> <p>The Board was content to <b>APPROVE</b> the review parameters for implementation as proposed with the following amendments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inclusion of cash absorption/flow surplus as a specific KPI in 1a (financial sustainability)</li> <li>- Use of colours to show progress towards completion of SP objective</li> <li>- Map the KPIs against the risk register</li> </ul> <p><b>ACTION:</b> DFE &amp; Secretary to implement the agreed amendments.</p>
<b>10.</b>	<p><b>Approval requests:</b></p> <p>There were no additional approvals referred from Board Committees.</p>
<b>11.</b>	<p><b>Report from the Academic Board</b></p> <p><b>11.1 Shortlist of Honorary Doctorate nominations</b></p> <p><b>Secretary’s note:</b> To facilitate completion of the substantive items during the January Board meeting, this agenda item was held over until the April Board meeting</p>

	<p><b>11.2 Summary report of the meeting held on 8 January 2025</b></p> <p>The Board received and noted the summary report of the Academic Board meeting held on 8 January 2025.</p>
<b>12.</b>	<p><b>Report from the Finance and General Purposes Committee</b></p> <p><b>12.1 Management Accounts</b></p> <p>A status update on the management accounts to end November 2024 were received and noted. The Convenor of F&amp;GP noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The criticality of financial sustainability and of presenting the Management Accounts in a form to make the data underpinning this transparent and easy for the Board to digest</li> <li>- The current Management Accounts were not, exceptionally, scrutinised by F&amp;GP prior to coming to the Board (this was a consequence of delays extracting and translating appropriate data from CI Anywhere). The Management Accounts tabled to the Board for their scrutiny were welcomed for the improvements in both analysis and data set available. Board also welcomed the additional information, particularly clarity around operating leverage (whether revenue was moving ahead of expenditure).</li> </ul> <p>The DFE highlighted that this information allows for clearer data-driven decision-making to be made during the coming budget setting for 2025-26, recognising that this might be experienced internally as 'top down'. Board noted the importance of balancing bottom-up with top-down data-driven approaches to ensure budgetary decisions were appropriate to the institution's financial position. The benefits of CI Anywhere with regards to the type and level of data that could be extracted both for forward planning but also evaluation and tracking of performance was emphasised.</p> <p>The SUP raised a question about whether additional unexpected costs such as the insurance for the donation of the Gaspero cello should be highlighted in the Accounts, given that the cello's valuation was not cash but an in-kind accounting value that obscured the bottom line. The DFE considered the insurance costs to be acceptable and agreed to outline these, if it was possible to disaggregate them from the overall insurance costs for the institution.</p> <p><b>12.2 Ci Anywhere Status Report</b></p> <p>The Board received and noted the updated status report on progress to date.</p> <p><b>12.3 Summary report of the meeting held on 17 January 2025</b></p> <p>The summary report of the meeting held on 17 January 2025 was received and noted.</p> <p><b>12.4 Fundraising Income Report</b></p> <p>The Board received and noted the report provided information on donations and fundraising income for period 4 (up to November 2024).</p>
<b>13.</b>	<p><b>Report from the Infrastructure Committee</b></p> <p>The summary report of the meeting held on 17 January 2025 was received and noted.</p> <p>Members were reminded that this would be Ed Monaghan's last meeting and he was warmly thanked by the Chair for his valuable contribution over the past nine years to the work of the Board of Governors and to this committee, in particular.</p> <p>The SUP asked whether the RCS would consider using the CCA for teaching space purposes. The DP noted that this discussion was already in train with regards to the BA Arts in the Community.</p>
<b>14.</b>	<p><b>Report from the People and Culture Committee</b></p> <p>The summary report of the meeting held on 4 December 2024 was received and noted. The committee's convenor noted that the staff survey would go out in April/May 2025 this year but then move to a biannual cycle. The outcome of the recent ACAS conciliation was highlighted as was progress regarding the decision by PCC for RCS to join UCEA.</p>

15.	<p><b>Governance Updates</b></p> <p><b>15.1 Quinquennial Governance Review update</b> The Senior Independent Governor provided an oral update on the progression of the review process. He expressed his thanks to all those who have met with the review team and to the steering group that is the conduit for the work. It was noted that the 1:1 interviews had concluded with a meeting with the Principal on 21 January and the second Steering Group meeting was scheduled to take place on 11 February 2025.</p> <p><b>15.2 New Governor recruitment update</b> The Board was updated by the Chair on the arrangements for new governor interviews which had been scheduled to take place on 3 February 2025.</p> <p><b>15.3 Report from the Nominations Committee</b> The summary report confirmed that there had been no formal approval requests progressing directly from Nominations Committee since the October 2024 meeting. It was noted that the Committee would finalise the recommendations made following the interviews held on 3 February as soon as possible.</p> <p><b>15.4 Report from the Convenors' Group</b> It was noted that no updates and no formal approval requests had been progressed from Convenors' Group since the October 2024 Board, but members were reminded that Dr Stuart Cross was now the Convenor of the Fundraising Committee and would this join the Convenors' Group and that, with Ed Monaghan demitting office, the Infrastructure Committee would require a new Convenor.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Convenors group date to meet to discuss Away Day was being organised but a date that all convenors could make was proving difficult to achieve. A short online early evening meeting date would be added to the options.</p>
16.	<p><b>Any other business:</b></p> <p><b>Prevent Training for Governors</b> The Academic Registrar and Secretary to the Board agreed to produce a short audio-visual presentation on PREVENT as part of the mandatory training for governors rather than present at the Board.</p> <p>There being no other business, the Chair brought the meeting to a close.</p>
17	<p><b>Dates of future meetings/events:</b></p> <p><b>17.1 Academic Year 2024-25:</b></p> <p>Next event: 24 April 2025 (Strategy Planning Day) Next meeting: 25 April 2025</p> <p><b>Board:</b> 27 June 2025</p> <p><b>Graduations:</b> Thursday 3 July 2025 Thursday 30 October 2025</p> <p><b>AGM:</b> Wednesday 10 December 2025 (9.30am)</p> <p><b>17.2 Schedule of Board and Committee meetings for AY2025-26</b> The full schedule of Board and Committee meeting dates for AY2025-26 were noted.</p>

<b>18.</b>	<b>Papers for Information</b>
<b>18.1</b>	<b>Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP)</b> The Board received and noted the Conservatoire's SFC Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP) which had been submitted to SFC in December 2024.
<b>18.2</b>	<b>Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Fund (KEIF)</b> The Board received and noted the draft strategy narrative, 5-year forecast template with metrics and targets and graphic map of the strategy provided for information.