

Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama “the College”

Petitions Committee- additional information for meeting to be held on 24 June 2024

Option 1

1. Current challenges faced by the College and specifically the junior department.

This is a time of extreme challenge for the arts and for higher education (HE). Numerous financial pressures mean that all organisations in these sectors are facing some very tough choices. They, like us, are having to adapt quickly and to think differently about how they work, deliver on their core mission and coordinate and collaborate with others to achieve their aims. 3 years of high inflation have impacted the core costs of running Universities and Colleges in Wales. Undergraduate student fees have been capped at £9,000 for 12 years and, in Wales, public funding for HE will see a 6% reduction in the next academic year. More widely, the HE-sector in the UK is grappling with similar challenges; confidence is fragile principally driven by a particularly difficult student recruitment outlook with recent new barriers to entry for International Student Recruitment adding further pressure. More than 50 UK universities have already announced redundancies, with many now forecasting a deficit this year.

Conservatoires and Drama Schools, small and specialist institutions, which also operate in the context of additional financial pressures on the performing arts industries, are not exempt from these challenges. For RWCMD, the impact of (i) inflation, (ii) the student fee cap and (iii) a cap on HE funding for conservatoire teaching- means at least a £3m annual income shortfall.

The College is therefore taking urgent action to protect our core mission and to continue to deliver Higher Education Conservatoire level degrees for which we are funded. We are developing detailed proposals to adapt our ways of working by reshaping our academic delivery and professional services support models to ensure we have a robust sustainable business model for the future. Our proposals impact all the College’s operations as we plan to reduce our overall operating costs by 10% (£1.5m) in the 2024/25 academic year and further reductions in the following 2 years to bring the overall savings to 20% (£3m+).

Our weekly term time Young Acting and Young Music work needs a considerable subsidy from the College, and we receive no direct funding for this provision from either the Welsh Government or the Higher Education Funding Council Wales.¹ Continuing to subsidise these parts of Young RWCMD in this way isn’t sustainable given the serious financial pressures on us. The subsidy in 2023/24 for the direct costs of teaching and administering these courses was budgeted at £188k but the actual position at the end of May – indicates that the final outcome will be a deficit which will now be in excess of £200,000. There are also indirect costs associated with supporting these weekend activities – including safeguarding, safety and security, technical operations support and fundraising for scholarships and bursaries which are excluded from this total. Our proposals would mean this subsidy would cease from 2024/25 and the resulting saving would make a material contribution to the 10% overall cost reductions which the College has to make next year.

2. How could a different funding model impact on the junior departments in the future?

It’s important to note that these proposals do not amount to a full withdrawal from our work with under 18’s. Under these proposals, the College remains fully committed to providing opportunities in music, theatre and drama for young people and to creating pathways into professional training. In 2024/25 we would continue to deliver project work, including a series of weekend immersive music workshops, the National Open Youth Orchestra Ensemble Residency (in partnership with BBC NOW and Open up Music) and our holiday courses in Production Arts which are sponsored by Bad

¹ HEFCW’s responsibilities transfer to Medr, Commission for Tertiary Education and Research in 2024/25

Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama “the College”
Petitions Committee- additional information for meeting to be held on 24 June 2024

Wolf. Alongside these, we will consider how best to quickly develop new and sustainable models, collaborating with the National Music Service and building on ongoing partnership work with other organisations.

Beyond 2024/25, our ambition is to establish a long-term sustainable funding model for more work with under 18s that fully aligns with our role as the National Conservatoire for all of Wales – a programme of work that is accessible across all of Wales. Alongside a renewed focus on increasing the use of the Welsh Language in the College, we will look to nurture and develop a talent pipeline equipped to navigate and prosper from future careers in the fast-changing arts industry. And all of this will need to be underpinned by engagement and recruitment strategies that address the limitations in music and drama education provision where social inequality creates barriers for young people. These equity initiatives will strengthen the representation of young people from all backgrounds in the College.

3. Final decisions - timeline for the College.

The staff consultation process ends on 20 June 2024, and we currently estimate that it will take the senior management team at least 3-4 weeks to review and respond to the representation received before a final decision is taken. We are using very best endeavours to be able to communicate the final decisions to staff by 19 July 2024. A public announcement and communications with parents, learners and other stakeholders would follow very quickly after that. We will be able to share more information and detail with this committee and others at that stage.