



**Trinity College Dublin**

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

## **Quality Review of the LIR Academy Programmes**

**7-8 June 2022**

### **Review Team:**

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Mr Sean Crowley - Director of Drama at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama

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### **Internal Facilitator:**

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# Reviewers' Report

## Quality review of the Trinity College Dublin Academy of Dramatic Art (The Lir) programmes

August 2022

### Context

The Lir – Trinity College Dublin Academy of Dramatic Art – aims to train actors, designers, directors, playwrights, stage managers and theatre technicians to the highest international standards for careers in the theatre and allied professions. A partnership between Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and the Cathal Ryan Trust, the Lir began operating in September 2011. The mission of the Lir states that it 'exists to provide the highest possible conservatoire training in Ireland. We are a centre of excellence, a hub for germinating talent and a training ground for brilliance. We aim to become one of the leading creative arts academies in the world.' It currently provides six programmes leading to awards from TCD: the Foundation Diploma in Acting and Theatre (one year); the Bachelor in Acting (three years); the Bachelor in Stage Management and Technical Theatre (three years); and, MFAs in Playwriting, Stage Design and Theatre Directing (one year full time/two years part time).

The overall strategic direction of the Lir is led by the Board of Directors, comprising representatives of TCD, the Cathal Ryan Trust and the theatre, film and television industries. The Lir is currently guided by a five-year strategic plan covering the period 2016-21. It is intended that this quality review, whilst limited in scope to academic standards and provision, will feed into the development of a renewed strategic plan covering the period 2022-25.

Alongside that wider frame, the core purpose of this review – deferred due to the global pandemic – is to provide a structured opportunity for TCD to:

- benefit from a constructive commentary on the Lir by external reviewers that are experts in their field;
- ensure that quality and standards in teaching and practice at the Lir are being maintained and enhanced, and that any areas of concern are identified and addressed; and,
- promote the enhancement of the Lir's programme provision as part of a strategy for continuous quality improvement and the future development of the Academy.

### Team

The review team consisted of Sean Crowley (Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama), Clarie Middleton (Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance) and Adrienne Scullion (Queen's University Belfast).\* Ciara O'Farrell was the internal facilitator from within TCD.

The review team was also supported by Roisin Smith, along with Quality Office colleagues, including Helen Tonra, and note-taker Alexandra Anderson.

The review team members thank all those colleagues – as well as all those members of the wider Quality Office and Lir admin and support teams with whom they engaged with as part of the review – for their professional support and enthusiastic engagement.

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\* The review team notes that the experiences of two of its members in UK conservatoires is reflected in some aspects of the review's benchmarking and exemplifications. Specifically, the report offers examples and comparisons drawn from Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance and, especially in respect of issues of governance, from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama which operates in formal association with the University of South Wales.

## Evidence

The review team was provided with the Lir's Self-Assessment Report (SAR), which linked to a range of resources and policy statements. Additional information – including sample timetables and schedules, course proposals, various financial schedules including an overall financial summary, FTE equivalents and materials relating to student demand for mental health support over the last four years – was also made available by members of the Lir team immediately prior to and during the review.

There was an online meeting with key TCD and Lir colleagues on 1 June 2022 and, on 7 and 8 June 2022, the review team met staff, students, internal and external stakeholders in person in Dublin and online.

The review team is grateful to all of those groups and individuals who contributed to the SAR and/or met with panel members during the institutional visit. It reflects positively on the whole Lir operation that so many students, graduates, members of staff, board members and professional stakeholders made themselves available to reflect on their experiences and contribute to the review.

## Review

The terms of reference for the review asked the review team to assess and make recommendations to the University on the quality of the Lir's undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and, specifically, to:

1. **benchmark** the suite of current education programmes against those offered by leading conservatoires in dramatic arts;
2. review the **curriculum** and comment on the quality of the programmes, **academic and practice standards**, and the **quality assurance of teaching and learning**;
3. review the **academic governance** and the financial model that support the design, delivery and quality assurance of academic programmes;
4. assess the quality of the **student experience**;
5. assess the Lir's success in establishing the requisite **network** of academic, industry and other third party relationships/collaborations to deliver an internationally visible activity of scale as compared to other such university associated conservatoires.

In addition to these broad areas flagged for consideration by the review team, the Lir team, via the SAR, posed a series of questions related to the governance, operations and strategic direction of the Lir: these are listed in the final section of this report – **Questions**, below – along with responses to them from the review team.

Engaging across these topics and questions the review team saw that the standard of professional training being delivered by the Lir is strong, that this training is valued by students and that it is respected by industry stakeholders, especially in Ireland. It found a professional and committed staff, and a passionate and engaged board. It met enthusiastic and reflexive students, and exciting and busy graduates. The work achieved by the Lir and its supporters over the last decade has been excellent and this report hopes to contribute positively and constructively towards its future development and its ambition to be amongst the world's very best creative arts academies.

## **Benchmarking**

The Lir's mission is to train actors, designers, directors, playwrights, stage managers and theatre technicians to the highest international standards for careers in the theatre and allied professions.

Prior to the opening of the Lir, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) was contracted as international advisor for the first five years of its [the Lir's] operation. The SAR indicates that RADA contributed in meaningful ways to all aspects of the foundation and early operation of the Lir. Whilst the formal relationship ended in 2019, positive relations between the two conservatoires continue – for example, staff from RADA have delivered some teaching and served on audition panels for the Lir.

The Academic Director is appointed from TCD to provide academic oversight and ensure that the Lir meets TCD's academic standards in all relevant areas. The TCD team noted that the current Academic Director – whom the review team found to be universally respected by stakeholders within and without the Lir – works in a voluntary capacity for the Lir while fulfilling a full-time role in TCD's Department of Drama.

The awarding of degrees (from TCD) is assured by the appointment of external examiners from peer institutions.

To its early benefit, the weight of the Lir's industry engagement has been within Ireland and with stakeholders – who may themselves be nationally and internationally active – from within the Irish industry. Looking forward to the next decade of its activity, and looking beyond the restrictions imposed by and experienced during the global pandemic, there is scope to animate further the Lir's international presence and to mobilise again connections and activities that may have been paused due to Covid.

The TCD team identified the sustained international reputation and globally-connected leadership of the Academic Director and also identified 'good connections' with Australia's National Institute of Dramatic Art (Sydney), collaboration with the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (London) as well as RADA leading to a joint showcase in New York. The TCD team also indicated some exploration of links with Lasalle College of the Arts in Singapore, the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing and with the Global Alliance of Theatre Schools. In engaging – or re-engaging – with these and other internationally active peer institutions and organisations, there is scope to draw evidence from their business experience, creative and academic profiles to develop appropriate benchmarking tools or other business comparators for the Lir.

### ***Strengths/Positives***

1. The Lir is uniquely placed in Ireland. It is currently the only provider of accredited conservatoire-type training in the nation. Whilst there are established, unaccredited courses in stage acting (Gaiety) and film acting (Bow Street), and many of the nation's universities deliver broader drama degrees, there are no other degrees in Ireland focused on stage management and technical skills, directing, designing or playwriting.
2. The standard of professional training delivered by the Lir is strong – it is valued by students and respected by industry stakeholders.
3. The Lir's original formative relationship with RADA, and its own endeavours over the last decade, have given it strong foundations on which to build.
4. The Lir team has achieved a lot in the decade of its operation and has been especially successful in bringing leading industry partners into the project: their respect for the training that is being

provided was articulated in the review team's meetings with industry representatives and with individual professional practitioners who work with Lir students.

5. The review team found that industry leaders and potential employers recognise the preparedness for employment within the creative industries of graduates from the full range of undergraduate programmes. Employability is a key marker of success in this sector and, although the review team was not shown any quantitative evidence to support this claim, discussions with industry professionals and graduates suggest high institutional attainment in this area.
6. Ambition is part of the culture of the organisation. The review team heard from Board members and from Lir staff a shared aspiration for the Academy to develop as a world-leading conservatoire.
7. The relationship with TCD (unique for TCD) is a huge asset to the Lir and is an excellent example of a conservatoire's formal association with a university, particularly in respect of quality assurance, degree awarding powers and some aspects of student and overall organisational support. This relationship is also fundamental to the Lir's business model which, based on the financial information provided to the review team, would be unsustainable without it. (Some UK-based conservatoires are now seeking their own taught degree awarding powers – some details of the formal association currently operating between the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and the University of South Wales are outlined below and may be seen as a fairly typical model for UK conservatoires.)
8. As part of its commitment to nurturing drama and contributing to excellence in the arts, the review team recognised that TCD supports the Lir's ambitions to become world-leading as part of its institutional and reputation plan.

#### ***Opportunities/Challenges***

1. There is an opportunity – within the executive organisation and on the board – to identify more clearly and to articulate more fully the Lir's planning strategies, including how success, ambition, quality and global reputation are measured.
2. The review team saw no evidence of how the performance – or ambition – of the organisation is being monitored, framed or measured by meaningful benchmarks or other useful KPIs. Developing such measures would be an important enabling tool for the Lir's future ambition, as well as quantifying its special contribution to TCD and Irish higher education more widely.
3. Beyond RADA, there is limited evidence of the Lir team using its reported good relations with international peers and networks actively to benchmark, measure or drive forward its quality and innovation. Whilst the global pandemic has not helped such networking it will, nonetheless, be hard to move towards a global level of achievement without staff and stakeholders re-engaging with international networks and measuring the Lir's success and progress against them.
4. The aspiration of Board and staff for the Lir to be one of the leading creative arts academies in the world will not be achieved in the current estate. There are significant benefits in the Lir's excellent city-centred location but the current site is marked by degrees of impermanence and limitations of physical space for rehearsal, technical and performance venues, as well as staff and student spaces. The current estate is not that of a world-leading drama academy. Key gaps include more and better-equipped spaces, including studio spaces and at least consideration of a proscenium space, resourcing for screen acting, office space for all categories of staff and appropriate social and quiet spaces for staff and students. Although never an ideal situation, the review team reflected that other city-centre institutions have responded to space pressures by developing split locations. It may be worth exploring the relocation of some activities – for example, workshop, costume and paint shop facilities – to different places.
  - To see one example of this solution in action, the Lir team is invited to review the experience of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff to explore an estates plan that has workshops in industrial units on the outskirts of the city. The Royal Welsh College has found that these facilities can provide the highest level of experience for students and provide the space and capacity to facilitate the expansion of programmes and pathways both at MA level and at Foundation Degree level.

- Two other examples are East 15, which has a split campus, and Rose Bruford College, which has established an international taught post-graduate centre away from its main Sidcup campus which has facilitated the development of a strongly engaged PGT community.

### ***Recommendations***

1. A commitment to data gathering, establishing benchmarks and setting and monitoring KPIs will support management decisions and planning strategies including, but by no means limited to, the setting of long-term goals around global reach and reputation.
2. The Lir team is encouraged to develop and articulate a clearer identity as Ireland's national conservatoire. Links with, and examples of pedagogic practice from, RADA have served the Lir well but it may now be time to articulate a clearer sense of its own identity, mission and values and to set and 'own' a Lir-specific agenda for the future.
3. The Lir might consider a medium- to long-term strategy around programme development to enhance its offer and to compete (internationally) with other trainers and conservatoires. For example, many institutions now offer a BA in some aspect or iteration of applied theatre and some others a BA in acting for screen and other media.
4. At present the MFA is the Lir's terminal degree: to maintain sectoral advantage there may be scope to collaborate with TCD's School of Creative Arts – and, indeed, with colleagues in TCD's other Schools where appropriate – to shape a compelling practice-led PGR offer.
5. Any developments in – and additions to – programmes offered by the Lir would impact on space needs and the estates strategy and would require appropriate resourcing and pump-priming investment.
6. The Lir must evolve its own view of what constitutes 'world-leading'. However, it could perhaps use, as a starting point for discussion, the parameters established by the UK's Office for Students (OfS) around its invitation to small specialist institutions to bid for extra funding. The parameters outlined by the OfS include:
  - a genuine and ongoing reputation, nationally and internationally, for teaching in its specialism that is world-leading and supported by evidence;
  - an environment that underpins teaching outcomes and experience for students;
  - the knowledge and skills of the provider's graduates, and the ongoing impact they have on the professions and industries for which they have been prepared, are recognised by other world-leading providers, leading employers, external funders and others nationally and internationally;
  - the economic, societal and cultural benefits that the provider brings, in particular through the activities of its students and graduates;
  - demand from (and dependency of) particular employers or employment sectors on graduates from certain courses;
  - graduate skills and experience -both in meeting the needs of leading employers and for boosting opportunities for those who are self-employed;
  - success in internationally competitive environments;
  - how the provider's students, graduates and teaching practitioners contribute to the development of their particular specialisms in a way that is recognised internationally or create new industry techniques or art forms of the future;
  - the professional roles, influence and recognition that the provider's graduates have had in the industries and disciplines for which they have been prepared;
  - the distinctive value that the provider has added to its students and the type of impact that it prepares its students to make in their professional lives;
  - the standing of the teaching practitioners (for instance the recruitment of staff who are currently leading practitioners in their field).

**Curriculum, academic and practice standards, quality assurance of teaching and learning**

The SAR describes the Lir's learning community as an 'ensemble' of individuals working, exploring and learning together. Whilst this is a compelling vision there is limited evidence of this driving the lived experience of staff or student engagement at this stage in the institution's development. In reflecting on – or refreshing – a contemporary identity for the Lir it may be worth considering how relevant this vision might be and/or how it might be mobilised more meaningfully for this stage in the institution's evolution.

Whilst the aspirations of the Foundation Diploma in Acting programme are clearly expressed in both the SAR and in other programme documentation, the review team found that for students these are collapsed into an engagement with the programme as a 'year-long audition' for entry to the Lir's Bachelor in Acting programme. Whilst documentation describes a 'focus on personal development and the students' emergent sense of themselves as young creative beings', this is not tangible in how students experience the programme or how they [both current and recent students] measure their 'success' or 'failure' on it. There may also be a question as to the diversity of that cohort – or at least a question as to the attractiveness of that programme for a wider range of emerging talents.

Across the Bachelors and MFA programmes the curricula are committed to engaging with industry stakeholders and this has benefitted student learning – including via formal placements for the Bachelor in Stage Management and Technical Theatre and MFA programmes – and enhanced employment opportunities.

The Bachelors degree programmes are focused on employability with a commitment to small cohorts to drive students' 'extensive individual tuition and support' (SAR). In discussion with current students and recent graduates, the review team found that is not clear to students how either of the Bachelor programmes allow students to respond to the expectation that they are 'proactive in their own development' (SAR).

The Lir team underlined the significance of Gradfest – an annual festival of four fully-staged productions designed and directed by the MFA students – as part of its commitment to training for employment. Representing a capstone project for MFA Theatre Directing and MFA Stage Design students the Lir team notes that these productions are built to a professional standard in the Lir's workshops by students on the Bachelor in Stage Management and Technical Theatre programme, supervised by Lir staff.

A commitment to mobilising the quality assurance processes of TCD is clear and is part of the remit of the Academic Director. Academic awards are assured by a process involving external examiners. Nonetheless, there may be scope for the Lir to widen its own staff's engagement with TCD's quality assurance processes to ensure that the distinctive challenges of practice-led teaching and studio-based learning are evaluated and enhanced with its key teaching stakeholders being held accountable. Suggesting more in-house quality assurance procedures should not be seen as a mechanism to by-pass or undermine TCD processes, or the role of the Academic Director, but as a potential prompt to grow expertise and accountability in creative-practice pedagogy within the Lir so that reports on current practice and plans for new initiatives are fully owned by the Lir's teachers before advancing through to TCD processes.



**Strengths/Positives**

1. The initial curriculum and quality assurance frameworks provided by RADA and adapted to the TCD context with input from the Academic Director have supplied a good foundation for the first 10 years of the Lir's learning and teaching activities.
2. Students on both Bachelors programmes reflected on their admission to these programmes as aspirational and prestigious.
3. Students on the Bachelor in Acting programme reflected positively on the theatre-centric focus of their learning – albeit framing that as a starting point for what they anticipated as being more multimedia careers and expressing a desire for more opportunities for more sustained experiences of acting for the screen.
4. The MFA offer has attracted an internationally diverse community of ambitious learners.
5. MFA students reflected positively on the work of the Lir's staff to flex successfully to online learning in the modules Contemporary Theatre Practice and Dramaturgy that was necessitated by the pandemic.
6. MFA students reflected positively on their experience of working with their peers from the various MFA pathways in both Contemporary Theatre Practice and Dramaturgy – and suggested that there could be further scope for the different pathways to work together in more sustained and managed ways in the contexts of both classroom learning and studio practice and making.
7. Work being achieved by MFA design students is of a high standard – at least in terms of evidence of conceptualisation, modelling and planning for production visible to the review team.

**Opportunities/Challenges**

1. Whilst an additional module in screen acting is in the course of being added to the third year curriculum, compared with employment opportunities available after graduation, and in comparison to the curricula of peer institutions, the Bachelor in Acting programme offers modest opportunities for students to engage with screen acting or learn techniques for alternative and emerging media.
2. Whilst having 'more' screen acting would be valued by students, including that further experience of screen-based media should not simply be in addition to the existing workload of staff and students. In recognising and responding to this pedagogic gap by including more training for the screen, there is an opportunity to re-assess the whole programme – and its resourcing – to ensure it offers staff and students a balanced and manageable curriculum, remains relevant to industry needs, is appropriately resourced and finds a place at the leading edge of provision available in a global marketplace.
3. The programmes and modules offered by the Lir tend to have a large number of specific learning outcomes – which, moving forward, might be better designated as competencies. This proliferation of declared outcomes can make teaching, learning and assessment more complicated and burdensome than it needs to be. Many peer institutions have moved to shorter lists of overarching learning outcomes or themes – often restricted to three or four – for their courses as a whole. The intended learning outcomes for each module are then mapped against these, thereby streamlining the teaching, learning and assessment processes. Examples of this can be seen in the BA Acting course details for the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and Rose Bruford College.
4. A high number of students met by the review team identified a high level of workload throughout the degree programmes leaving little or no time for them to reflect on their learning or for personal development.
5. Staff and students – especially staff and students on the Bachelor in Acting programme – articulated very different views on the reliability, trustedness, regularity and timeliness of feedback. The panel saw evidence of a deep mismatch between staff's perception of giving regular feedback and using clear criteria and the students not always seeing that same regularity, robustness or utility. Some students were positive about some of their experiences of receiving written feedback but found even that an infrequent tool and something that exposed their other experiences of feedback as wanting.

6. Students on the Foundation Acting diploma course described the pressure they felt to 'succeed', where success meant doing well enough to join the Bachelor in Acting course with, these students and recent graduates said, no other alternatives valued or adequately introduced/explored by the institution/programme. The students saw little evidence that value was placed on achievement within, or on completion of, the course in and of itself as a HE Diploma, as an entry point to a wider range of new learning opportunities or as a terminal qualification for some able to enter employment directly.
7. Staff and students identified challenges in the operations of programmes – including late notice of timetabling and late changes to scheduling that impacted on the quality of their experience.
8. Investment in a Head of Learning and Teaching – to provide operational rather than strategic or disciplinary leadership – and the introduction of Asimut to the academic administration operation have the potential to make significant improvements to the operation of programmes. However, like any system, IT tools will only be as good as the data that feed into them.
9. Another role that may be a useful addition to the team would be a Head of Student Experience, with a remit to support student learning. This is flagged again in section 4 – **Student experience** – below.

### **Recommendations**

1. As part of a process of international benchmarking, and with an eye to articulating a clear and distinctive offer as Ireland's national conservatoire, there is an opportunity to review existing programmes, their content and scheduling to meet more fully contemporary industry needs. For example, within the Bachelor in Acting, and whilst still building on strong foundations of acting for the stage, there is an opportunity to support more consistently students' engagement with and experience of acting for the screen and emerging media; and, for the MFA there could be further scope for the different pathways to learn together in the context of studio practice and theatre making. (At present MFA students working together in the Contemporary Theatre Practice and Dramaturgy modules and for Grad Fest (though that does not include the playwrights) and there may be potential to do more to create a community of emerging theatre makers as a distinctive and compelling feature of the Lir's PG offer.)
2. The Lir team might consider reviewing the efficacy of its messaging to students around the opportunities advanced via the Foundation Diploma Acting. There may be scope to consider the marketing of and recruitment to that programme with a view to widening the diversity of the cohort. Subject to market testing and sectoral overview it may be useful to explore routes to offer a conversion of the Diploma to a NQF8 qualification – for example, a Certificate in Higher Education.
3. The Lir and TCD should work together on appropriate module modifications to facilitate revision of learning outcomes (or competencies), assessment processes and opportunities in the curriculum for students to reflect on their learning. To support – as well as encourage – reflexive learning, and to support a potential reframing of learning outcomes as competencies, staff are encouraged to reconsider the types of assessment, including written assignments, used in programmes – in particular for Bachelor in Stage Management and Technical Theatre where some students perceive a more limited range of options for some aspects of their written assessments than staff may have anticipated. Where assessment is affirmed as being properly aligned to learning competencies this should be more clearly and consistently communicated to students, not least at the start of modules and in the language used in feedback.
4. Subject to robust market testing – and consideration of a curriculum that embeds the opportunity to work in production within the Lir and/or other professional contexts – there could be scope to develop a MFA in Costume Construction and Supervision and a MFA Theatre Producing.
5. TCD Library is a leading academic library and should respond to the changing needs of all of TCD's teaching and research staff and all its students, including those at the Lir.
6. Many of the Lir's staff have strong track records and profiles as practitioners. Overall learning and teaching at the Lir could be enhanced by making higher education teaching training, such as a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, available to them as being,

at the very least, desirable and, with an eye to its world-leading ambitions, a requirement of employment or a requirement for advancement/promotion/leadership.

7. To meet the demands of the post-pandemic world, there is scope for the Lir to map, review and, where appropriate and strategic, expand its networks to enhance student experience and staff and institutional ambition. Networking with its international conservatoire peers might also offer good- and best-practice examples of how a changing generation of creative and technical students learn and are supported.

### **Academic governance**

The Lir was established and operates with a distinctive governance model that engages Lir staff and board, Cathal Ryan Trustees and TCD colleagues. In reflecting on future governance structures, stakeholders must agree and be aligned around a clear vision for the overall Lir project and its ambitions. It is a key function of a board to reflect on its shape and structure and review governance – and where appropriate make changes – on a regular basis. Any changes made now must be subject to robust evaluation and be changed again if – and when – circumstances or plans require different structures of support and challenge.

The SAR proposes a new Artistic and Academic Oversight Committee. This proposition raises some questions – including the appropriateness of involving board members in academic governance, quality and standards. It may be beneficial to the academic ambition of the Lir to consider two separate committees reporting to the Board:

- Academic Development – focused on planning and benchmarking; and,
- Learning, Quality and Standards – adding a quality assurance step within the Lir and growing agency with the Lir team, albeit with TCD representatives being invited to be part of that work which would then flow through to relevant TCD structures and processes. The remit here would be to develop and oversee the implementation of strategies and procedures; to secure academic standards; to enhance the quality of students’ learning opportunities, including opportunities offered through collaborative partners.

Whatever solution is advanced the terms of reference of the committee(s) would need to be carefully developed.

Members of the review team reflected that the proposed new committee would have a similar functionality to the systems in place at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. As a conservatoire with a similar relationship with a university (the Royal Welsh College is a wholly owned subsidiary of the University of South Wales), it operates with senior members of the University – the Pro Vice Chancellor of University of South Wales and the Director of Finance and Resources – as a part of a Board of Directors. A similar partnership operates with its quality committees: the Royal Welsh College’s Quality Assurance Committee, Research Committee and Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee all offer an integration with the University whilst empowering staff within the College in the creation of its own strategy and policy and in the development of new programmes.

#### ***Strengths/Positives***

1. The Lir’s identity as part of TCD has facilitated a distinctive presence within Ireland and, despite its relative novelty, has reinforced a profile for the Lir as an ‘established’ part the Irish theatre industry and education system. The Lir and its graduates have, in their turn, contributed positively to the profile and reputation of TCD, especially within Ireland.
2. Along with the Academic Director, TCD’s Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and TCD’s Director of Finance serve on the board of the Lir providing a direct link between the governance of Lir and TCD.
3. Succession planning – especially for the key roles of CEO and Academic Director – is a current priority for the Lir and is flagged proactively in the framing of the current review and its SAR. The Board may want to consider establishing a search committee for the role of CEO. Succession

planning should not limit the capacity of the existing post holders to continue to lead ambitious growth.

#### ***Opportunities/Challenges***

1. The role of the Academic Director focuses on educational quality and on relations with TCD's structures and processes. With the anticipated retirement of the current post holder, the role, its purpose and its impact has the potential to change, not least in how it supports relationships between the Lir and TCD and how it might advance the Academy's ambitions to be world-leading.
2. Any future Academic Director must be able to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and credibility in the space of practice-led arts and creative practice Learning and Teaching and capacity to develop a deep understanding of TCD Learning and Teaching governance.
3. There is a question as to the visibility and understanding – by students and teaching staff – of the role and remit of existing course committees and the Lir's own internal exam boards as part of formal academic governance/ quality assurance mechanisms/ structures.
4. Whilst the Academic Director is the key role in the articulation between Lir and TCD quality assurance processes, it might be beneficial for Lir staff to be more accountable as to the Lir's own internal academic development and quality assurance mechanisms to interrogate its activity and aspirations before they are presented to the TCD through university structures. The current operations may limit the agency of Lir staff to innovate as appropriate to conservatoire benchmarks and may limit the specific expertise that is brought to bear on the ongoing quality enhancement of the Lir's programmes.

#### ***Recommendations***

1. To support future global ambitions, there is scope to augment what is a passionate and committed board with expertise from: (i) international conservatoire networks; and, (ii) digital/AR/VR sectors.
2. The Lir could also consider inviting additional representation from TCD senior staff – for example, in addition to the Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and the Director of Finance, the Head of School of Creative Arts (or another relevant colleague) may have useful disciplinary or sectoral knowledge – to join its board and further enhance the contact and understanding between the two institutions which could be further energised to the mutual benefit of institutional operations and reputation.
3. There should be consideration of Lir membership of TCD UG and PG Studies committees to ensure a joined up process.
4. The Lir's proposal to appoint a new senior staff member in charge of teaching and learning is to be commended. The review team recommends that this should be a 'Head of' role rather than as a Director. 'Director' might imply a strategic role when, in fact, that will remain within the established remit of the Academic Director. (The review team was positive about the plan that the Head of Learning and Teaching should have oversight of the academic operations of all taught courses MFA, Bachelors and Foundation but was less convinced that this role could or should be combined with the role of Course Director of the Bachelor in Acting. There is sufficient work for the roles to be separated and there seems no conceptual reason why the skills and experiences necessary to be a Head of Learning and Teaching would necessarily – or exclusively – come from a learning and teaching portfolio in the Acting programmes.)
5. Whilst the role of Academic Director is described by TCD as voluntary, it is embedded in a range of essential processes and structures in the Lir and wider TCD. Moving forward, a clear workload allocation (or equivalent) should be affirmed, ascribed and recognised within any future Academic Director's home School's workload allocation model and/or distribution of leadership roles.

### **Student experience**

Across the higher education sector the expectations and the needs of students are changing. At this time the Lir team is perhaps overly reliant on individuals ‘going the extra mile’ and being ‘a family’ to deliver to students when, in other educational contexts, professional standards and student expectations have moved on – and when systems failure can have catastrophic consequences. There is no space for complacency in this aspect of higher education practice, even where colleagues are confident in the ethical nature of their practice (as was the case with comments made to the review team by some staff).

It may be that it is in this area of student experience that the Lir’s limited use of KPIs and international benchmarking as a management tool, and lack of clear processes for professional development and training for staff, has seen its offer fail to keep up with sectoral innovation and best practice. This may also be an area where some aspects of the unique relationship between the Lir and TCD could work more seamlessly. Students are students of TCD and, as such, have full access to resources that include a personal tutor (who is not a member of the Lir team), Disability Services and the Student Counselling Service. It is not clear that students – or front-line teaching staff – really understand the scope and reach of this dual identity or make the most of the resources available as part of the support structures for all members of the Lir. As part of student induction it may be useful to affirm – and regularly reiterate – the resources available to students as members of the learning communities of both TCD and the Lir.

The Lir team seeks to be responsive to student feedback in respect of targeted well-being needs: the review team was told that student counsellors have been made available to students after classes finish two evenings per week and that there are plans to introduce resilience and self-empowerment programmes to Foundation and Bachelors curricula. It may be useful to evaluate such recent and existing initiatives to ensure that the anticipated expansions to the provision – and the visibility of such resources to staff and students – are optimised to the specific context of the Lir.

The Lir might reframe its mission or, more visibly and usefully, add to its mission a set of values that would set the expectations and tone of its community of learners, including staff.

#### ***Strengths/Positives***

1. Students are eager, passionate and generally enjoy their learning – although workload and inflexibility in workload was identified as sometimes presenting challenges to students on both the Foundation and Bachelors programmes.
2. The staff is passionate and committed to working hard with and for its students: as both staff and students expressed it, staff members ‘are willing to go extra mile’ and the SAR celebrates a ‘sense of community, family even’. That commitment is visible to and appreciated by students and industry stakeholders alike. However, there are risks in a culture that expects (and explicitly values) individuals ‘going the extra mile’ – with the risk of such work impacting on normal workloads and on the completion of other required tasks over systems and processes that are professionalised, robust, accountable and well supported.

#### ***Opportunities/Challenges***

1. The needs of students have changed, and continue to change, across the sector. The hard work, flex and willingness of staff to ‘go the extra mile’ is not meeting current sector norms, let alone setting the agenda, anticipating needs or leading this area of practice for TCD or in Ireland.
2. There is a clear opportunity for members of staff to reaffirm – and embed in their training and development reviews – a commitment to living the values of EDI, student care and well-being.

3. Students told the review team that mental health support was a concern. Staff reflected positively on initiatives taken in 2021-22 to schedule counsellors in the Lir after formal classes end. An evaluation of the use of this provision would be beneficial to the shape and resourcing of any future provision of support.
4. Students in minority groups – for example, students of colour and students identifying as neuro-diverse – expressed a particular feeling of lack of support, visibility and understanding. It may benefit engagement and trust – of students and staff – if there is increased visibility of the support that is already available and/or may be being co-created by students, Lir staff and TCD staff, including Disability Services: this could be part of induction processes, tutorial sessions and/or in written resources and documentation.
5. In 2020 the Lir community responded positively to the challenge of Black Lives Matter protests and convened an Academy-wide forum. That forum is currently working on an Anti-Racism Policy. Concluding work on that policy should be a priority. Implementation of any recommendations – and monitoring of their impacts – may benefit from assigning such responsibility to an experienced and possibly senior member of the Lir staff team.
6. Working with TCD’s Disability Support team the Lir team has initiated support for neuro-diverse students and is planning the introduction of additional support, including the development of sensory rooms. The Lir team may want to consider a targeted communications plan to ensure visibility – and trust – of these initiatives by both students and staff. And, of course, ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation of such initiatives is always valuable in informing future investments and priorities.
7. As part of its commitment to widening participation, and relevant to its ambitions to be a world-leader, there is scope for the Lir to develop and champion best practice in respect of a cultural of inclusion that responds meaningfully to the changing needs of socially and ethnically diverse student cohorts, promotes well-being and body positivity, respects and develops the potential of those with disabilities and supports, through living its values, all of its learners at all stages in their development.
8. Students are not aware of – or perhaps do not trust as meaningful to their learning environment – the policies around fitness to study and mitigating circumstances that apply to them as students of TCD.
9. Students and graduates reflected on the likely employment context of the contemporary industry and expressed desire for possible further changes or enhancements to the curriculum that would reflect current trends in the industry – for example, to include greater preparedness for the screen-based industries and for work in the context of devising and community-based practices.
10. PG students expressed some dissatisfaction with the spaces allocated for their teaching and learning.

***Recommendations***

1. As a matter of priority the team should evaluate how TCD’s resources – especially in the areas of pastoral support, well-being and mental health – are communicated to all members of the Academy, are being used by students and are trusted – and recommended – by staff.
2. Reflecting on the enhancement of resources directed towards student well-being in peer institutions, and based on any future evaluation of current initiatives, it may be that the Lir team considers advocating for or investing in bespoke (conservatoire-specific) and embedded (within the Lir), well qualified student support (counselling/coaching) staff.
3. The pastoral and personal care that presently operates in the Lir could benefit significantly by being professionalised by being embodied in accountable roles so that – without losing the personal touch – it is funded, formalised and made visible and consistently available to students to support their learning as students and to enhance their development as young professionals. As a first step, staff have to be consistent in affording students in need the time to attend the counselling and other support sessions that have been recommended and are institutionally available.
4. The review panel makes the strong recommendation that EDI and similar training should be mandatory for all Lir staff – and desirable for all Lir students – and that a communication strategy

should be evolved around this to reaffirm these messages as part of the distinctive culture of the Lir. There is, with work, an opportunity for the Lir to set a leading agenda for TCD in this area: for example, the roll out of the Lir's anticipated Anti-Racism Policy could be an agenda setting initiative, coming as it will from an Academy-wide forum.

5. There is a need and, with its established industry links and growing alumni, a distinctive opportunity to grow a wider network of more diverse role models for students. Diversity here should include role models across the range of protected characteristics and from a range of socio-economic backgrounds too.
6. The proposed new Lir organigram lists a Head of EDI. The review team would encourage consideration of whether a Head of Student Experience (with EDI integral to their brief) might be an effective new staff role at this stage in the development of the Lir and as being appropriate to its current scale of operation.
7. Given its size, scale and focus, there is scope for Lir to lead or set student-focused agendas for TCD – and the Lir team is encouraged to think imaginatively in this area with the aim of being on the front foot of innovation for creative practice education in the University and nation.
8. There is scope for the Lir to reframe its mission or, more visibly and usefully, add to its mission a set of values that would set the expectations and tone of its community of learners, including staff.



## **Networks**

The Lir, its board, staff and students all evidenced connectivity with the Irish theatre sector and, to some degree, the wider cultural industries that have, over the last decade, enhanced the learning experiences of students.

Despite some excellent specific examples of current significance and of emerging potential, the Lir – as an institution and as a staff team – is less internationally connected than might be expected given its ambitions to be a world leader. Whilst individual staff members have personal and professional networks – and the international connectivity of the current Academic Director is exceptional in this regard – these are not as effectively mobilised to the benefit of the Lir and its planning and ambitions as they might be. There is scope to develop – and embed as an explicit objective – a strategy for more meaningful international networking as part of an ongoing reputation plan and as part of a strategy for the Lir to grow as a potential world-leader.

Internationalisation and international networking is an area of activity where the skills and experiences of the current Academic Director and the wider resources of TCD's internationalisation agenda may be better harnessed: the Lir team could engage more actively with TCD's existing plan and strategy for internationalisation as a starting point. And it might also be the case that the Lir can represent and lead for TCD in specific markets and arenas – for example, nation-wide and international fund raising, development and alumni relations.

The upcoming retirement of the current Academic Director gives a degree of urgency to this issue – and it may be worth considering adding criteria relating to experiences of internationalisation and/or evidence of strong international networks (or capacity to develop these) to any job descriptions/person specifications for the roles of Academic Director and/or CEO.

The lack of direct engagement with quality assurance and other processes led by TCD may be a factor in the limited engagement that the Lir team has in other leadership roles and service both within TCD and the wider Irish higher education sector. There is scope to mobilise the expertise of the Lir team – and not just the influence of the Lir Board – in the development of national higher education policies and national cultural strategies. Such opportunities might be considered as part of a robust commitment to career planning and objective setting for Lir staff.

Reflecting on the holistic operation of the Lir, the review team sees benefit for the ambitions of the Academy to be world leading for the Lir to invest in the development of its staff as well as its students and encourages the Lir management team to develop a trusted and embedded programme of performance review/development and career planning linked to annual appraisals/reviews for its [the Lir's] staff. There may be scope to benefit from expertise and experience within TCD's Professional Services in meeting this challenge.

### ***Strengths/Positives***

1. The place and visibility of the Lir within Irish education and culture is clear and growing. The Lir's graduates are growing their profile and networks in national and international industries and there is evidence that, across the range of programmes, they are also supporting each other: there are, for example, some examples of graduates making work with and for each other as part of Ireland's professional theatre and performing arts culture. Professional colleagues within the industry are

regular contributors to the programme and are clear supporters of the Lir and willing employers of its graduates.

***Opportunities/Challenges***

1. There was no evidence available to the review team of professional development being supported within the organisation via robust career planning and performance management of staff. As a result there appears little scope for staff to advance within their careers as conservatoire practitioners and/or as practitioners without the conservatoire.
2. Staff and board have been focused on growing networks and credibility within Ireland – and they have done so with commitment and success. There are underexplored opportunities for the staff of the Lir to be more strategically active in their own professional networks – as directors, teachers of acting, leaders of conservatoires – and for the Lir to mobilise more strategically within international networks of conservatories.
3. Mobilising members of the staff team more effectively in international networks – of scenography, teachers of practice, staff in conservatoires – will support individual staff development, as well as institutional networking and benchmarking, and raise the profile of the Lir. (For example, the Organisation of International Scenographers Theatre Architects and Technicians provides a network and opportunities to liaise with international practitioners and educators. This can provide an opportunity to benchmark standards of training as well as provide a platform to showcase the quality of the Lir.)

***Recommendations***

1. In addition to its engagement with the Beijing-based Global Alliance of Theatre Schools – which has been necessarily curtailed as a result of the global pandemic – the Lir leadership team might also consider more engagement with European networks of peer institutions and trainers – for example, the Meeting of European Theatre Academies, the Theatre School Festival in Romania, the Alpach Forum in Austria and the European Union of Theatre Schools and Academies. Colleagues in the Lir may also consider whether an association (or affiliation) with Conservatoires UK, Federation of Drama Schools and/or the Performance Design Education Collective might be useful.
2. As part of a programme developing a clear identity for the Lir, attention could be paid to a communications plan. Specifically, there is scope to: (i) develop stronger and more regular communications within the Lir; (ii) raise the visibility of the Lir as part of the TCD community – and vice versa – with stronger and more regular communications within and across the TCD community; and, (iii) develop an externally-facing reputation plan for the Lir, in the context of TCD, as site of training excellence, cultural profile and funding-raising and development potential.

## Questions

<p><b>1</b></p>	<p>We are very interested in getting the Reviewers' input on the proposed structure, membership and remit of this new committee. We are also interested in hearing the Reviewers' views on the appropriateness of this structure in terms of providing fit-for- purpose academic oversight whilst also protecting the Lir's independence within the university structure.</p> <p>a) The indicative ToRs and the membership of the proposed Artistic and Academic Oversight Committee raise some questions – including the appropriateness of involving board members in academic governance, quality and standards.</p> <p>b) The review team reflected on a different, two-committee alternative consisting of committees for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Academic Development – focused on planning and benchmarking; and,</li> <li>- Learning, Quality and Standards – adding a quality assurance step within the Lir and growing agency with the Lir team, albeit with TCD representatives being invited to be part of that work which would flow through relevant TCD structures and processes.</li> </ul> <p>c) Whatever solution is advanced the terms of reference of the committee(s) would need to be developed with care.</p>
<p><b>2</b></p>	<p>We would welcome the Reviewers' comments and insights on the future role of the Academic Director as outlined in the report.</p> <p>a) Staff within the Lir identified the role for the Academic Director as an important and respected one, active in the induction and training of Lir staff, advising on curriculum development and leading advocacy within TCD. The role is clearly visible to and valued by the Lir team – with this making upcoming change in personnel an area of anxiety.</p> <p>b) Any future Academic Director must be able to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and credibility in the space of practice-led arts and in creative practice Learning and Teaching and be able to demonstrate (or have the capacity and opportunity to develop) a deep understanding of TCD Learning and Teaching governance.</p> <p>c) One risk of the role as currently framed is that the weight of relations with TCD – Learning and Teaching governance, internationalisation, academic, aspects of relations with the foundation and industry partnerships, and a potential research strategy – are owned or led by the Academic Director. There is scope for the role of Academic Director (to continue) to lead on these agendas for the Lir whilst also developing colleagues (in the Lir) in these aspects of programme delivery and professional development.</p> <p>d) The current Academic Director has a distinguished international profile and have been active in maintain the national and international reach of his professional networks. In planning for the retirement of the current Academic Director, it may be useful to include skills and experience in internationalisation – and/or the capacity to grow and mobilise such skills and experiences to the benefit of the Lir – as essential or desirable criteria in the job descriptions and person specifications for this role and/or for the role of CEO.</p> <p>e) The TCD team notes that, currently, the role of Academic Director is a voluntary undertaking made by a colleague with a full-time role within the School of Creative Arts. Moving forward to securing a new appointment to the role a clear workload allocation (or equivalent) should be ascribed to the role and recognised within any future Academic Director's home School's workload allocation model and/or distribution of recognised leadership roles.</p>

<p><b>3</b></p>	<p>We are interested in the Reviewers’ thoughts and comments on the structuring of this new [Head of Learning and Teaching] role which has been identified as a key appointment to facilitate the delivery of the Lir’s Strategic Plan 2022-26. The new role is due to commence in October 22 but, timing allowing, we plan to delay advertising this position until we are in receipt of the draft Quality Review Report.</p>
	<p>a) The review team anticipated significant advantage in investment in a new role of Head of Learning and Teaching with a remit to exercise operational (rather than strategic or disciplinary) leadership. There is a lack of dedicated accountability in some aspects of the organisational aspects of the programme leading to too many occasions when timetabling is delayed or changes made with late notice.</p> <p>b) However, as part of an institutional focus on the student experience, the review team would encourage the Lir staff to consider whether, alongside the new post of Head of Learning and Teaching, there is also a new Head of Student Experience, that is also part of the leadership team, and a Student Support Officer.</p> <p>c) The review team was positive about the plan that the Head of Learning and Teaching should have oversight of the academic operations of all taught courses (all MFAs, both Bachelors and Foundation) but was less convinced that this role could or should be combined with the role of Course Director of the Bachelor in Acting. There is sufficient work for the roles to be separated and there seems no conceptual reason why the skills and experiences necessary to be a Head of Learning and Teaching would necessarily come from a learning and teaching portfolio in the Acting programmes over any other disciplinary background.</p>
<p><b>4</b></p>	<p>We would be interested to hear from the Reviewers if they have any suggestions to make with regard to balancing the needs of students against the opportunity to work with leading film and theatre professionals with very busy schedules.</p> <p>a) The review team noted that, in programmes where the objective is so clearly graduate employability, these are familiar issues that are common across the sector. Members of the review team reflected that the experience of training students to a standard that allows them to develop sufficient skills to prepare them for a professional career is often balanced precariously between industry placement – or offers of pre-graduation employment – and the completion of in-course modules.</p> <p>b) It may be useful for the Lir team to note that, in equivalent UK schools, students may exchange up to 33% of credits allocated to production/performance modules for work in the profession. Further information is given in paragraph 8 below but, relevant here, principles arising from these placements in action include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- placements in technical theatre programmes are generally limited to up to six weeks of placement and are assessed on a pass/fail basis on the basis of a formative written assessment provided by the host company;</li> <li>- placements in design programmes are generally limited to three weeks, with any further time requiring the company to provide a traineeship contract and wages;</li> <li>- placements in acting programmes are assessed by academic staff if the performance either film or theatre can be seen. Otherwise the student can miss up to two of their six performance opportunities with a mark derived from an average across their production modules.</li> </ul>

5	<p>Although we are confident that the current application processes serve the needs of all courses well, we are interested to hear from the Reviewers if they feel there are alternative models that we might consider particularly workshop methods that could be included in the selection of MFA students. We would also be interested in any insights the Reviewers might have regarding recruitment to technical courses elsewhere.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Students raised questions as to the efficacy of the Lir’s widening participation processes – including for driving access to the Foundation Diploma programme – and there is certainly scope to learn from and with TCD’s activity in widening participation.</li> <li>b) Students reflected that the Academy could be more proactive in responding to the changing nature of the student body, especially in respect of working with students from under represented communities and minority groups. Staff were altogether more confident in their skills and experience and activity in this area.</li> <li>c) The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama uses <u>acceptd</u> as a recruitment/audition tool.</li> <li>d) The review team reflected that interview is critical for stage management and design programmes as, alongside an appropriate portfolio, an interview provides an opportunity to gauge a student’s interest/experience and attitude to learning.</li> <li>e) At the Royal Welsh College recruitment to Design and Technical Theatre, Acting and Musical Theatre is initially conducted via zoom. This has proved to be a much more inclusive system, opening the process up to more students. Acting and Musical Theatre applicants who are selected for a recall will come to the College to audition in person.</li> <li>f) The Head of Learning and Teaching at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama leads on the development and delivery of student induction, which has undergone significant review in the last two years.</li> <li>g) As part of the Royal Welsh College’s drama induction process, once students are offered they are invited visit the College and to take part in student-led tours. They are also introduced to current students to arrange independent zoom meetings.</li> <li>h) The Royal Welsh College delivers a week-long programme that is compulsory for all new students and works across courses in mixed groups (also divided into undergraduate or postgraduate) and concentrates on five themes – Wellbeing; Transition into Higher Education; College Ethos; Services and Support; and, Engaging with Differences. A further series of two hour sessions is embedded in students’ timetables every two weeks for the first semester. While this activity is front-loaded at the commencement of studies, consideration continues on how this work embeds further within the setting of individual programmes throughout the academic year.</li> </ul>
6	<p>We would be interested to hear of any other approaches to student feedback that might result in greater responses [in module and programme review] from the student body.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Student class reps are the building blocks of good course management and there should be regular meetings of Course Committees – twice a semester – to ensure student engagement in operational issues. In embedding a commitment to student engagement as part of the culture of the Lir – and making that commitment more visible to staff and students – it may be useful to rename those committees – as, for example, Staff-Student Liaison Committees.</li> <li>b) Anonymous end of module questionnaires add value – especially where a ‘you said, we did’ systems is in place to evidence engagement, institutional follow up and systems learning.</li> </ul>

	<p>c) Consideration might be given to establishing a Student Partnership Committee – convened by a new Student Experience Officer – to mobilise the student voice in key initiatives such as learning support and longer term programme and institutional development.</p> <p>d) Relevant to this point the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a Student Voice Officer who is a conduit for issues raised by students;</li> <li>- a Note of concern system that allows students to bring forth any issue that is monitored by the Director of Student Experience;</li> <li>- annual course boards chaired by a member of staff outside of the course and membership includes librarians and academic service staff. The aim is to allow the student to present issues without prejudice. The minutes of the course boards feed into the Royal Welsh College’s Quality Assurance Committee and also into annual course monitoring action plan that reports back to student reps. At the end of the year the lead of each course presents an annual course monitoring report to the academic board, senior management team and ultimately the Board of Directors;</li> <li>- an annual anonymous all-student survey – including a free-text section – the results of which are reported directly to the Senior Management Team and then to individual course leaders.</li> </ul> <p>e) As part of a review of pastoral support, the new post of Student Experience Officer might consider a managed open door policy – without that bleeding too much into an emphasis on informal support.</p> <p>f) An area of concern may be feedback to students – and it may be worth considering committing to formal tutorials with year tutors twice a term. The regularity of this would likely encourage high quality feedback from students too.</p> <p>g) In the UK HEIs participate in the National Student Survey (NSS) and institutions will have established mechanisms to create action plans in the response to the NSS. The review team did not know of an equivalent in Irish higher education.</p>
7	<p>We would appreciate the Reviewers’ input on our proposals to address current inadequacies in overall course management structures.</p> <p>a) The organisational aspects of timetabling and delivery is currently less than optimal. Students reported lots of occasions when timetabling was late, changed with minimal notice and/or was inflexible with no clear reason.</p> <p>b) Some admin staff with responsibilities in this area find themselves on the front line of student support (and in particular student pastoral support and well-being) – with seemingly urgent demands from students pulling them away from other operational tasks.</p> <p>c) Investment in <u>Asimut</u> and in a Head of Learning and Teaching may support improvements but only if the whole team commits to a culture of better planning and clearer and more consistent student communication.</p>
8	<p>We are interested in getting the reviewers opinion on the proposal to introduce a Professional Placement module on the acting degree, and any further thoughts on how we might manage the issue of releasing students for professional productions going forward.</p> <p>a) Peer institutions, including the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, have clear policies relating to students working professionally within industry. In their final year students at the Royal Welsh College can, if offered, take a role in a professional theatre production that staff can see and assess as an alternative to an in-house production experience. Where such professional engagement is a role for a film or television production that will not be available until the completion of the relevant module, then the</p>

	<p>student can receive an average grade across their other performance modules. (The regulations of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama allow professional practice to ‘replace’ no more than 33% of the graduating assessment.)</p> <p>b) A different model may be relevant for Stage Management and Technical Theatre students. Again at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, students can take an industry placement, normally for six weeks, in their second and third year (if undergraduates) and in their second or third term (if MA students). Both categories of student will receive feedback from their industry host and are required to present an evaluation of their experiences in a reflective presentation. Assessment is on a pass/fail basis and is logged on their transcript but does not contribute to a final degree classification.</p> <p>c) Design students at the Royal Welsh College will normally take a three-week placement in their final year (if undergraduate students) or third term (if postgraduate students). This is not assessed although formative feedback is requested from industry hosts. If the company/industry host wants to retain the student for a longer period, payment at appropriate rates is expected and the student also has the opportunity to present a reflective account of their experiences as a specialist study module that can be assessed and contribute to their overall degree classification.</p>
<p><b>9</b></p>	<p>We would welcome the Reviewers’ input on the complex issue of the interconnectedness of all our courses and how we reduce the workload for Stage Management and Technical Theatre students whilst minimising any detrimental impact on other students’ learning.</p> <p>a) Members of the review team recognised this challenge in their own experience of conservatoires and on programmes with full schedules of performances.</p> <p>b) Whilst the review team recognised that the Lir benefited from a good staff team, positive relationships with industry and a growing reputation it also saw that the spaces available are limited: indeed, perhaps the biggest restriction to the Lir’s ambition is space. If there was more high-quality space available there could be scope to expand enrolment on programmes and expand the number of programmes offered.</p> <p>c) Subject to robust market testing – and reflecting on the withdrawal from this market by the National College of Art and Design – there may be scope for a Bachelor in Design, as well as a foundation programme and degree in scenic construction and a MFA in Scenic Art and Construction.</p> <p>d) Subject to robust market testing and appropriate resourcing, there is scope for a strand in Costume (making and supervision for theatre and for screen) in the MFA design portfolio.</p>
<p><b>10</b></p>	<p>We would be interested in the Reviewers’ thoughts on how the CTP [Contemporary Theatre Practice] module will be taught to an enlarged MFA cohort</p> <p>a) The review team noted that MFA students were positive about the potential to learn together as a whole group.</p> <p>b) The growth of the MFA programme suggested by the Lir has the potential to be framed as a positive expansion of learning experiences for these students.</p> <p>c) The MFA programmes are not charged at a premium rate and the anticipated expansion of enrolment (as it is currently scoped) would not push numbers beyond other mid-scale PGT enrolments elsewhere in TCD or in the wider conservatoire sector.</p> <p>d) Nonetheless, supporting teachers to work with (what would be for them) larger groups should be part of any CPD and, where necessary, supported by appropriate training or mentoring.</p>

11	<p>We would be very interested to learn from the reviewers' experience of providing mental health supports to students and hearing thoughts on how we might continue to improve the supports we offer our students.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The Lir's current provision for providing mental health support for students falls below sector norms.</li> <li>b) The existing level of support does not reflect the quantum of demand that currently exists and nor does it reflect a culture that places the student first by responding to the particular learning experiences and scheduling demands of the Lir's student body.</li> <li>c) The demand for mental health support is growing across higher education as a whole – and is an area of need identified by the Lir's students and staff, who outlined some initial interventions already in operation. Conservatoire and creative practice disciplines have often been particularly alert to and responsive to such demands as part of their general commitment to a diverse student body, frequency of first generation higher education students and the self-reflexive aspects of some parts of creative practice training, which all contribute to a context where there is regular and sustained need for mental health and other well-being support. With appropriate investment and institutional integration, this is an area of practice wherein the Lir could take a lead on some specific aspects of TCD's commitment to innovation in student-centred learning and teaching cultures.</li> <li>d) There is an urgent need to professionalise the support mechanisms available to students – and an opportunity to make support for emotional intelligence, well-being and neuro diversity explicit and valued parts of the Lir offer.</li> <li>e) As an initial step the team might consider embedding a role of Head of Student Experience as part of the leadership team and appointing a Student Support Officer with specialist skills in, for example, neuro diversity. Current staff may be willing to support students in these areas but they may not be appropriately qualified (or be themselves supported for the challenge of such work) and it may not be a formal part of their workload which may lead to other business being compromised or not being completed with this leading to a knock on for a wider cohort of students and staff.</li> <li>f) As an example, the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama engages two independent councillors and a group of mentors who help students plan and adjust to the demands of their training. Staff members are formally trained to know and understand the support available and to recognise the point when they [the staff member] should seek help and not try to solve the student's problems when they veer into areas outside of the academic or vocational training.</li> <li>g) The review team found that students in the Lir are not aware of – or perhaps do not trust as meaningful to their learning environment – the policies around fitness to study and mitigating circumstances that apply to them as students of TCD. Such systems aim to set out trusted and reasonable adjustments on both sides to try and ensure that a student can continue when they are in danger of failing due to the impact of health issues, be they physical or mental. It may be useful to review the relevant TCD policies to ensure that they are inclusive of the Lir's distinctive learning cultures and accessible to its students. It may also be useful for the Lir team to explore further the operation of such schemes in peer institutions: as an example, the Royal Welsh College also has a Fitness to Study programme that may offer some useful case studies and other examples of using such schemes in the context of professional training.</li> </ul>



<p><b>12</b></p>	<p>We would welcome the Reviewers’ input on these issues, particularly the value of the <u>Asimut</u> timetabling software, in the context of the current review of IT access, support and provision.</p>
	<p>a) <u>Asimut</u> is an established and useful app for timetabling as long as data are entered correctly, consistently and in a timely fashion. Members of the review team with experience of <u>Asimut</u> in operation noted that students trust it reliable and as easy to use and access.</p> <p>b) Nonetheless, the review team noted that there may be an existing TCD solution that might be extended for use within the Lir that is already tested, debugged and more economic.</p>
<p><b>13</b></p>	<p>We would be interested in the Reviewers’ opinions regarding the management of similar resources in a drama school context and particularly where a potential partnership with a much larger University library is a possibility.</p>
	<p>a) TCD Library is a leading academic library for a broad-based and multidisciplinary learning and research community. It should continue to manage its resources to respond to the changing needs of all of TCD’s teaching and research staff and all its students, including those at the Lir.</p> <p>b) There should be a review – and where required update – of the digital subscriptions held by TCD Library to ensure appropriate levels of alignment with the needs of this part of TCD’s learning community.</p> <p>c) There is scope to have some on site (at the Lir) learning resources for Lir staff and students but it is unlikely that these could (or should) be more than an additional and informal resource given the infrastructure needs (including security and access) of an actual library resource.</p>
<p><b>14</b></p>	<p>We would be interested in the Reviewers’ comments on our current facilities in the context of our overarching ambition to become one of the leading drama academies in the world.</p>
	<p>a) The current estate and facilities are not that of a world leading drama academy. Gaps include more and better-equipped spaces, including studio spaces, and consideration of a proscenium space, resourcing for screen acting, office space for permanent (full time and part time) and visiting staff, and appropriate quiet and social spaces.</p> <p>b) Additionally, the precarious nature of some of the agreements around some of its spaces limits the potential of the Lir to invest in the future of even its current footprint.</p>



## Director of the Lir Academy Response to Quality Review Report

Dated: October 12th, 2022

The Lir Academy wishes to thank our three independent reviewers, Sean Crowley (Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama), Clarie Middleton (Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance) and Adrienne Scullion (Queen’s University Belfast) for their detailed and constructive report. The Lir is also grateful to the Quality Officer, Roisin Smith, and all the staff at the Quality Office including Helen Tondra, as well as Ciara O’Farrell, TCD’s internal facilitator and the note-taker Alexandra Anderson for all their assistance and support during the Quality Review process. Despite the Covid-related interruption, the Lir has embraced its first Quality Review as a timely opportunity to pause and reflect on its achievements to date, review the quality of all six programmes currently offered and reassess the academic oversight procedures agreed with Trinity at the outset. This report now provides a significant input for the further development of the Academy in its second decade.

It is important to note that this initial response draws on inputs from the Lir’s Director, Academic Director and Senior Management Team only. The Report is yet to be considered by The Lir’s Board of Directors to allow the report to be shared with Trinity’s Quality Committee in the first instance. As the Report’s recommendations are often strategic in nature, it is important to note that the Lir’s Board is ultimately responsible for the strategic direction of the Academy. As a result, this response will limit itself to general observations and the views of the Board will be incorporated as part of the detailed implementation process. The reviewers’ recommendations, however, will undoubtedly be useful to the Board in proposing means by which we measure how we are achieving the strategic ambitions outlined in our current Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026.

The Lir particularly welcomes the structure of the report – focusing on Strengths/Positives, Opportunities/Challenges and Recommendations - which provides real clarity on the Lir’s performance to date, areas that require additional focus or investment and many practical suggestions for how we can better deliver for both students and staff. We welcome the reviewers’ ascertain that “the standard of professional training being delivered by the Lir is strong, that this training is valued by students and that it is respected by industry stakeholders”. And that “the work achieved by the Lir and its supporters over the last decade has been excellent”. We also share the reviewers’ opinion that “the relationship with TCD is a huge asset to the Lir” and want to use this report to further strengthen that foundational relationship.

The report acknowledges that our “current estate” undermines the Lir’s ambition to become one of the leading creative arts academies in the world. It highlights the need to expand our current footprint to deliver additional teaching, production and administrative spaces. In doing so the report echoes our own ambitions, as outlined in our Strategic Plan, to work in partnership with Trinity College to raise the funding necessary for our expansion into Units 31 and 32 of the Trinity East Campus. And to researching and developing a Capital Development Programme designed to deliver a major new cultural facility as a centrepiece of the new Trinity East Campus.

We welcome the report’s call for the Lir to develop additional in-house quality assurance capacity and “widen [our] own staff’s engagement with TCD’s quality assurance processes” as part of an enhanced engagement with Trinity. This ambition was clearly outlined in our Self-Assessment Report (SAR) which proposed a new Academic Governance Framework and the appointment of a new Director of Teaching and Learning. The Lir is eager to use the opportunity that the report presents to make progress on these issues as soon as possible. We propose the establishment of a short-lived working group to agree the most appropriate structures that best serve both the Lir’s quality assurance needs and Trinity’s oversight requirements. Given the questions raised by the reviewers, we intend to delay the process of appointing a Director of Teaching and Learning until this process is concluded.

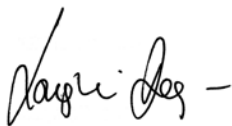
The report encourages the Lir to consider better utilising international networks to drive our international profile. The proposed level of international travel and engagement would provide resourcing and capacity challenges, but are, nonetheless, useful to consider. We are also aware that the considerable international success of our graduates will be the primary driver of our international reputation, including the work of our globally diverse student population, which the report rightly celebrates.

The report makes many useful course development recommendations across our six full-time programmes, including, for example, an increased emphasis on acting for screen and new media on our Bachelor in Acting (Hons) degree. As one of the key outcomes of the Quality Review process, we intend to schedule a series of reviews of our full-time programmes to ensure they continue to meet international standards. As part of this process, we will also address the issue raised about the proliferation of learning outcomes across our programmes.

The report raises significant concerns regarding the current student experience that must be addressed as a matter of priority. It is particularly of note that the report suggests the Lir has failed “to keep up with sectoral innovation and best practice”. These concerns echo feedback we have already received from students through various channels, especially coming out of the Covid 19 pandemic, and we have already been proactive in addressing them. As the report acknowledges we have invested in additional mental health supports for our students, including in-house counselling support in response to student requests. We are continuing to work with Trinity’s Student Counselling Service to increase supports available in-house and have introduced resilience training, delivered by the Student Counselling Service, in all undergraduate curricula as of the start of the 2202/23 academic year. We rolled out an enhanced Induction Week at the start of this academic,

with an increased focus on student supports. We are continuing to work with Trinity's Disability Service to improve supports to all students, including Neuro-Diverse students, and we will begin working on a new Disability Policy later this year. And our Anti-Racism Policy, which outlines a whole range of supports for our Black and Global Majority students and staff will be launched in January after a final round of student and staff input. We look forward to detailing many additional supports in our Quality Review Implementation Plan including the recently announced Student/Staff Council and an improved Student Communications Plan. We also plan to advertise for a new Director of Access and Equity who will assume many of the student engagement responsibilities suggested by the reviewers in their report.

In considering better student supports and a review of our academic programmes, it is important to acknowledge all the outputs the Quality Review has gifted us. These include the surveys and focus groups completed by students, staff, graduates and industry stakeholders, as well as our SAR. As we are once again operating closer to pre-pandemic norms, the surveys and focus groups allow us to consider the longer view as they were completed before the Covid 19 pandemic impacted both the delivery of our programmes and the supports we now offer our students post-pandemic.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Loughlin Deegan', followed by a horizontal line.

Loughlin Deegan  
Director



## Trinity College Dublin

### The University of Dublin

### MEABHRÁN | MEMORANDUM

**Chuig/ To:** Quality Committee  
**Ó/ From:** Gail McElroy, Dean of FAHSS  
**Tagairt/Reference:** Dean's Response to Quality Review of The Lir  
**Dáta/Date:** Wednesday 12 October 2022

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I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Review Team, on behalf of the Faculty, for this detailed and considered report. Their dedication and commitment to the process is to be commended and their recommendations will only serve to improve, the already high quality, education programmes offered by The Lir.

It is worth noting, from the outset, the unique relationship of The Lir with College. The Lir is a Company Limited by Guarantee, established as a partnership between Trinity College Dublin and the Cathal Ryan Trust, and the terms of reference of this review were, as a result, confined to an evaluation of the teaching programmes offered by the Academy.

In particular, the Review Team was tasked with the following:

- 1) Benchmarking the suite of current education programmes against those offered by leading conservatoires in Dramatic Arts;
- 2) Reviewing the curriculum and commenting on the quality of the programmes, academic and practice standards, and the quality assurance of Teaching and Learning;
- 3) Reviewing the academic governance and the financial model that support the design, delivery and quality assurance of academic programmes;
- 4) Assessing the quality of the student experience;
- 5) Assessing The Lir's success in establishing the requisite network of academic and industry and other third party relationships/collaborations to deliver an internationally visible activity of scale as compared to other such University associated conservatoires.

Overall, the report is positive and encouraging. The Review Team was clearly impressed by the success of The Lir in establishing itself as a leading Academy of Dramatic Arts so quickly after its foundation, with the first intake of students as recently as 2011. The professional training being offered is of a very high standard.

The report also underscores the value of the relationship with TCD for The Lir and cite it as an excellent international example of a "conservatoire's formal association with a university".

Among the many recommendations highlighted by the report, a number are worth highlighting, from the perspective of the Faculty and College.

- 1) **The Student Experience:** A number of concerns were raised about student welfare; issues which may have been exacerbated by the pandemic. The student body at The Lir does not appear to be fully aware of or availing of the suite of welfare and pastoral supports offered by College. Going forward, working with The Lir, we will make sure to highlight these supports and encourage their use, recognizing the off campus location of the Academy and the non-over-lapping term structure.
- 2) **Curriculum, academic and practice standards:** The report recommends that a review of module and programme learning outcomes and the associated assessment practices be undertaken. Working with Trinity Teaching and Learning such a review should, hopefully, address issues related to student workloads and expectations.
- 3) **Academic governance:** The report strongly encourages both The Lir and TCD to address issues of academic oversight and governance. At present the Academic Director (a TCD staff member) is the person responsible for ensuring educational quality in the Academy. However, this individual is not represented on either USC or GSC and has undertaken the role voluntarily for the past decade; this position would benefit from regularisation and succession planning. This post is the key link between The Lir and College for quality assurance in the delivery of educational programmes. Going forward, it may be challenging to fill this role and a secondment and/or buyout may be required.

This report is exceptionally detailed and rich and, again, I thank the Review Team for their thoughtfulness and generosity. We will, no doubt, return to the report for guidance and advice in the coming years,

With thanks,



Gail McElroy