

LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGY 2019–2024

The **RCM Strategic Plan 2017–2027** includes the following headline statements, which inform the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy:

Mission Statement

The Royal College of Music provides specialised musical education and professional training at the highest international level for performers and composers, within an environment that stimulates innovation and research. This enables talented students from all backgrounds to develop the musical skills, knowledge, understanding and resourcefulness which will equip them to contribute significantly to musical life in this country and internationally.

A Ten-Year Vision: in 2027, the RCM will be:

Learning and teaching

- Offering programmes of study which nurture artistic innovation through an enquiry-based approach to learning, commensurate with each student's needs and aspirations.
- Using appropriate technologies to support and enhance face-to-face teaching and learning.
- Equipping students with the relevant skills and resourcefulness to make successful careers as professional musicians and educators.
- Making relevant elements of the RCM learning environment available to distance learners.
- Recruiting outstanding teachers and supporting their continuing development.

Artistic programme

- Presenting an artistic programme with learning and excellence at its heart.
- Providing regular opportunities for all students to perform in a suitable environment for their current stage of learning.
- Working with international artists at the highest levels.
- Creating opportunities for student innovation and experimentation.
- Using performance as a learning environment and training for the demands of the musical profession.
- Ensuring all students experience teaching and performance in all suitable genres – solo, chamber and large ensemble.
- Creating performers who are confident, expressive, innovative and independent.
- Providing opportunities for student composers' works to be performed regularly.

Widening engagement (including Junior Programmes and Sparks)

- Advocacy to promulgate the importance of music education at all ages through leadership and example

- Integrated Junior and Learning and Participation programmes, within a strong and unified profile that is seamless with and supported by the College's HE work, developing a range of ways to bring the musically gifted and/or enthusiastic of all ages into involvement with the inspirational learning experience on offer
- Providing opportunities for student composers' works to be performed regularly.

Supporting our professors and administrative staff

- Pursuing strategies and opportunities to bring professors closer to the priorities of the College and new professorial appointments that enhance the RCM's reputation for quality teaching in a way that reflects all the markets in which the College needs to be competitive
- Providing a supportive professional environment that enables staff to realise their full potential
- Offering an innovative and comprehensive programme of professional development and training
- Promoting collaboration, understanding and equality of opportunity for academic and professional staff
- Valuing diversity among all our staff

Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2019–2024

AIMS

- 1. Learning and teaching philosophy:** Encourage and support students to take creative responsibility for their own learning, and to understand artistic development as a process of risk-taking, evidence-informed critical reflection, and self-directed approaches to discovering and articulating their musical feelings and contextual knowledge.
- 2. From student to artist:** Provide an environment in which students can develop as innovative artists equipped with relevant skills and values that enable them to take their places and thrive within the contemporary music profession and associated disciplines. Irrespective of background or circumstances, students are supported to achieve successful outcomes at every stage of their studies.
- 3. Environment and resources:** Ensure the provision of an optimal physical, technological, intellectually stimulating and safe environment that supports creative, reflective and interactive learning with peers, teachers and professional practitioners, within and outside the RCM.
- 4. Outstanding teachers:** Recruit the finest teachers and support them by providing formal and informal skills training and professional development opportunities that engender critical reflection and the sharing of best practice, based on contemporary pedagogical research.

SUPPORTING STRATEGIES

Aim 1: Learning and teaching philosophy

- 1.1 The teaching of music at the RCM is based on the principle of enquiry-led learning. From the beginning of their studies, all students, irrespective of the Level of their programme, are continuously stimulated to take the initiative in discovering and developing their own distinctive voice, closely supported by their teachers. In order to achieve success, students are expected to engage with the wide range of intellectual, performance and other experiential opportunities offered to them.
- 1.2 In line with the mirroring of professional practice at all stages of each programme, students are encouraged to develop their skills in critical reflection and verbal articulation and to contribute informally to every aspect of collaborative creative working, including in one-to-one lessons, seminars, small ensemble coaching, and rehearsals. Regular opportunities are provided for students to create, curate and execute individual and collective projects in the RCM's public performance spaces, supported by professional technical and organisational staff.
- 1.3 At HE level, practice-based learning is embedded within a suite of relevant contextual studies designed to: develop advanced analytical understanding and manipulation of musical sounds; cultivate intellectual curiosity, independent thinking, and the ability to express complex ideas both in writing and in speaking; foster entrepreneurialism and understanding of the social and institutional structures of the music profession; and promote awareness and knowledge of research-informed music educational practices and pedagogical theories as they apply from birth, through childhood, to life-long learning.
- 1.4 The RCM's Junior Programme provides advanced specialist training to selected musicians aged 8–18, delivered on Saturdays in term-time. Individual principal study lessons (and a second study, where relevant) are supplemented by a range of supporting studies, usually including chamber music, orchestra, choir, and musicianship, together with an extensive performance programme. Students are recruited on the basis of talent and potential, regardless of background; students who are successful at audition should not be unreasonably prevented by financial hardship and those needing support may apply for a means-tested RCM bursary.
- 1.5 The RCM will continue to offer a variety of research-based postgraduate programmes in specialist fields, including MSc in Performance Science and MEd in Music Education (the latter normally available only to students with at least five years of professional music-educational experience). These programmes can be studied full- or part-time, and the MEd is taught in blocks, allowing for flexible learning. Two doctoral programmes, a DMus in Creative Practice and PhD, are offered to early career researchers; they are likewise available as full- or part-time; all part-time options are subject to UK visa restrictions.
- 1.6 Modes of formative and summative assessment are designed to be appropriate to the skills and activities being evaluated such that they support students to make informed judgements of their progress and development and enable them to respond constructively to formal and informal critical feedback. Assessment methods and styles are subject to regular review, in dialogue with students, staff, and external examiners.
- 1.7 HE-level students are empowered to take a pro-active role in the design and content of their learning through formal consultative structures, including the Student Curriculum Forum (chaired by the Students' Union President) and Faculty Committees, which report through the Senate Executive Committee to Senate.

Aim 2: From student to artist

- 2.1 Most students entering the RCM have already chosen to pursue music professionally and have made a significant educational investment in acquiring advanced musical skills, often at an early age. The overwhelming majority of students are already highly proficient musicians, many of them already performing or composing at a professional or near-professional level. For this reason, all RCM students are regarded and treated as 'developing artists' from the moment they arrive.
- 2.2 The RCM will continue to offer a range of programmes at pre-secondary and all subsequent levels from Level 3 to Level 8, all of which are directed to the integration of practical musical experience with reflective critical thinking, based on enquiry-led learning through doing.
- 2.3 Students work in an environment that mirrors the variety, intensity and practices that characterise the professional world for which they are being prepared. At the same time, the RCM is also both nurturing and supportive, and cognisant of the many different kinds of starting points and educational pathways that have led each one to achieving the level that has gained them admission to the institution.
- 2.4 Students are provided with bespoke attention to their individual musical development, which is intensely monitored throughout their programme through the one-to-one teaching model that sits at the core of individual skills training, complemented by regular meetings with their respective Head of Faculty and Head of Programme. They also receive focussed responsive feedback from coaches, conductors, lecturers, seminar leaders and peers through the small-group learning activities that make up Faculty and instrument-specific classes, masterclasses, large-ensemble projects, and which is built into all contextual studies courses. Students on advanced specialist courses (e.g., MSc, MEd, PhD/DMus) receive regular individual supervision alongside seminars and workshops, within an active and world-leading research environment.
- 2.5 Recognising the diversity of the RCM's students who come from different learning cultures, countries where English is not a first language, or backgrounds currently under-represented in the College community, the College provides a network of support aimed at ensuring that all students have access to the resources needed to succeed. This is matched by a student recruitment and admissions process that guides and supports applicants with the necessary talent to secure a place to study at the RCM.
- 2.6 The particular needs of students from diverse backgrounds and differing circumstances are recognised and monitored, with additional support provided where necessary in order to help them fulfil their full potential. The RCM provides its HE students with English language support to those for whom it is a second language; a Student Support Service staffed by qualified counsellors; mentoring and tailored support for students with physical or recognised learning disabilities; the option of part-time or modular study integrated with on-line working to enable students with family or work commitments to benefit from certain postgraduate programmes such as doctoral studies, MSc, MEd, and the research training modules of the MMus.
- 2.7 As a founding partner in the 'Healthy Conservatoires Network', the RCM is committed to teaching and practising safe and healthy music-making. All RCM students will be educated throughout their programmes in how to recognise and understand the physical and mental stresses associated with professional musical life; trained in how to lead and sustain healthy lives; and how to pass on this knowledge to their own students when they become teachers themselves.

AIM 3: Environment and resources

- 3.1 The opening during 2019–21 of two major new performance venues equipped for live and recorded performance, an interactive Museum, and new teaching spaces in the Courtyard development, together with extensive new rehearsal facilities and research facilities in RCM Jay Mews, has supplemented the RCM's existing world-class spaces for music teaching, practising, performance and recording, providing students with optimal physical conditions for music-making.
- 3.2 Infrastructure that supports learning and teaching includes a fully-equipped and professionally staffed opera theatre; professionally staffed and equipped audio and video studios, together with recording equipment for staff and student loan; student composer workstations with state-of-the-art music technology software; a specialist library containing loan and study collections, and a world-famous historical collection that includes composers'

manuscripts, valuable printed music, letters, papers and c750,000 historical concert programmes; a Museum collection containing 25,000 treasures that are used to support learning and research whenever possible, among which are historical instruments that students can play, in optimal surroundings; a new concert-hall organ; professionally-maintained suites of concert-standard pianos, fortepianos and harpsichords; a loan collection of professional-standard modern orchestral, and copies of historical instruments; and the services of staff piano technicians and a professional luthier.

- 3.3 The use of both live and virtual methodologies ('blended learning') is a feature of all types of teaching in RCM programmes. Blended learning is regarded as a tool for innovation that adds value to, rather than substitutes for, face-to-face learning. The RCM already runs a range of on-line platforms, including learn.rcm (the College's customised VLE) and RCM Stream, a private streaming and learning platform containing recordings of RCM performances and masterclasses. On-line platforms are designed to enable real-time interactions between students and their individual teachers, and with their peers, wherever they are in the world, and to provide individual records of learning experiences that can be revisited throughout a students' programme. Blended learning and teaching are supported by a Digital Learning team, who provide training and advice to students and staff.
- 3.4 The RCM will work to extend the reach of its educational programmes by making selected elements of programmes available online to distance learners, using a range of digital platforms and techniques. Some programmes such as the MEd are already designed with substantial elements of online delivery, and a selection of masterclasses are livestreamed publicly. In the coming years, the RCM will develop its work in this field by identifying opportunities to incorporate distance-learning elements in all new HE or revised programmes, and to launch a variety of online-only open and paid short courses aimed at different constituencies of music learners, including mature students.
- 3.5 Students and staff have access to a variety of resources that support the specific needs of musicians, including the RCM's Performance Simulator, which can be used to practise controlling performance anxiety, and a dedicated performance fitness suite with a gym, fitness and yoga rooms. Music-specialist Alexander technique teachers offer practical classes to all HE students to help them deal with performance anxiety and other psychophysical challenges of being a musician.
- 3.6 The RCM's Creative Careers Centre will continue to provide a comprehensive service that helps current students and recent graduates pave the way to a successful lifelong career in music. Recognised internationally for its innovative approach to supporting young musicians, the Centre offers resources and guidance, bespoke career advice, workshops and presentations by industry specialists, plus a broad range of professional opportunities, including performance and teaching work.

AIM 4: Outstanding teachers

- 4.1 Professorial staff are recruited on the basis of their expertise, teaching experience, professional reputation, and commitment to the RCM's educational values and imperatives. The RCM seeks actively to appoint professors from communities currently under-represented both within conservatoires and the music profession at large, including women, black and other ethnic minorities, and those with disabilities.
- 4.2 RCM professors are encouraged to exercise considerable autonomy in their pedagogical methods, but are also required to keep themselves informed about, and in accord with the programme structures and wider ethos within which their students are studying. Professors are expected to work collaboratively and collegially, primarily as members of their own Faculty or programme team, and where appropriate, participating in team teaching, as well as through informal discussion with peers and sharing of their own best practice. They are also strongly encouraged to form connections with other colleagues and students across Faculties, for example through chamber coaching, or participation in annual Teaching Forums in which peer-learning and exchange of ideas is a feature.
- 4.3 RCM professors are encouraged to participate in the ongoing strategic development of the RCM's learning and teaching, for example by contributing to periodic programme reviews; standing for election to Senate or

Council; or acting as a recital assessment panel chair or examiner (following successful completion of in-house training).

- 4.4 Professors are expected to continue the development of their pedagogical knowledge and skills throughout their employment at the RCM. The professional development of professorial staff is supported through a range of services and opportunities, including that of working towards further formal qualifications. Staff may, by arrangement with the relevant tutors, enrol for up to 60 credits of Level 7 research training modules, successful completion of which provides the basis for an application either to complete one of the RCM's Masters' degrees (e.g., MSc in Performance Science or MEd in Music Education) or to apply for doctoral study. Enrolment on such courses may be subject to financial support through the RCM's Professional Development scheme. Additionally, fees for applying for accreditation to the Fellowship scheme of the Higher Education Academy will normally be met by the RCM, and applicants are supported with peer-mentoring.
- 4.5 Professors have full access to general teaching resources including the physical and on-line Library and Museum collections, blended learning platforms, and free attendance at almost all events in the public performance programme including concerts, masterclasses, specialist talks, seminars and conferences. Teaching support is provided by a variety of professional teams, including Registry, Faculty Administration, Digital Learning, RCM Digital (ICT), RCM Studios, and Performance and Programming.
- 4.6 Professors are encouraged to articulate their ideas for engaging in research projects relevant to their teaching, either as individuals, or in collaboration with colleagues. The RCM has an Internal Research Fund that provides modest funding for approved research activity, such as organising internal pedagogical seminars, presenting at conferences, or seed-funding applications for external research funding. Further advice and support is available from the staff of the RCM Research office.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation and progressive modification of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy over the course of its lifetime is a joint responsibility of all RCM professors and academic support staff, working through various forums (e.g., Faculty Committees, Teaching Forum, Programmes Forum, Student Curriculum Forum, Senate Executive Committee), overseen by the Director of Programmes, who reports annually to Senate on progress.

Approved by Senate on 7 May 2019

Review: Summer 2024