

Doctoral Studies

Preparing a research proposal and supporting materials

Updated July 2026

Before you submit a doctoral proposal, you are strongly encouraged to:

- **look at existing doctoral theses** from the RCM (<https://researchonline.rcm.ac.uk/>) and other institutions
- **check that RCM is the best place for you** by looking through RCM staff members currently offering doctoral supervision listed here: <https://www.rcm.ac.uk/courses/researchdegrees/findasupervisor/>.
- **discuss your research proposal informally** with a potential supervisor or named contact before making an application

Your application must include

Research proposal

Your research proposal should be a maximum of 1500 words. Please structure your proposal under the following headings:

- **Research Question:** What are the fundamental issues that your project will address?
- **Rationale:** What is the significance of your proposed work? What gaps exist in current scholarship that your research might fill? Is your project substantial enough to sustain at least three years of study?
- **Methodology:** What approaches will you use, based on what theoretical background? Do these differ from those of others working in the same field? If so, how and why? Do you have the relevant experience for the project, and can you anticipate future developments from it? If relevant, do you have the appropriate language skills to pursue your chosen topic? If relevant, do you have access to the required research materials?
- **Suitability:** Why does your project fits with your proposed/chosen supervisor(s) research, and the strengths of the RCM? It is essential that you identify potential supervisors and demonstrate the relevance of their expertise to your project.
- **For practice-related projects only:** The PhD program offers flexibility in the format of submissions, allowing for a range of options that integrate creative work with written analysis. Depending on your research in performance, composition, or other creative practices, you may submit anything from brief commentaries accompanying a creative portfolio to a more extensive written thesis. If applicable, please outline your current thoughts on how you envision balancing the creative and written components in your final submission. How will practice help you answer your research questions?

Bibliography

Include a bibliography of what you feel are the most relevant publications and/or creative contributions (15-20 items) framing your field of research, including academic publications, scores, recordings and web resources as appropriate.

Sample of written work

All applicants must submit an example of previously completed written work in English of approximately 2000 words. This might be an extract from a recent Master's degree dissertation, or an extended essay involving a critical or scholarly evaluation of an aspect of music. It should demonstrate the standard of your scholarly writing, including critical thinking and using other academic and/or practitioners work, demonstrating referencing skills.

Applications for doctoral research in composition and performance

In addition to the requirements listed above, applicants specialising in performance and composition must submit the following:

Applications for doctoral research in composition

You should submit a portfolio of three recent substantial works together with a recording of a performance of at least one of the submitted works.

Applications for doctoral research in performance

You should include a video recording of approximately 20 minutes' total duration of performances relevant to your research area.

For other practice-based research, please contact researchdegrees@rcm.ac.uk to discuss what would be suitable.

References

Applicants are required to provide two references testifying to their suitability for doctoral studies. Referees should be asked to email their references direct to the RCM Research inbox at researchdegrees@rcm.ac.uk to arrive no later than 11:59pm (23:59 GMT) on 13 January 2027.

Conditions of entry

Applicants for the research degrees programme should have appropriate prior educational experience. Normally, this means that you should hold, or be about to gain, a good Master's degree. In exceptional circumstances, equivalent independent research and/or professional experience may be accepted. You **do not** need to provide evidence of your educational achievements as part of your application. If you are offered a place on the Doctoral programme, you may be asked to provide evidence as part of the Conditions of Offer of a Place.

English Language requirement

Applicants for the Doctoral programme are also expected to meet the RCM's English language requirements, which can be found on our website: <https://www.rcm.ac.uk/apply/englishlanguagerequirements/>. If your first language is not English, you may be asked to provide evidence of your ability to speak and write English. You **do not** need to provide evidence of your English language proficiency as part of your application. If you are offered a place on the Doctoral programme, you may be asked to provide evidence as part of the Conditions of Offer of a Place.

Closing date for applications

Instructions on how to submit an application may be found on the RCM website. You must submit a complete application by **11.59pm on 13 January 2027** in order for your application to be considered by the RCM Research Degrees Committee. The RCM reserves the right not to consider incomplete applications.

More information

For further advice, visit <https://www.rcm.ac.uk/research/researchdegrees/>.