

LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

2019-2024



The **RCM Vision Statement for 2027 (refreshed 2021)** includes the following headline statements, which inform the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy:

RCM VISION STATEMENT FOR 2027 (REFRESHED 2021)

The Royal College of Music provides music education and professional training at the highest international level, through commitment to the transformative power of music and its own founding principles of excellence, advocacy and access. As a natural first choice for the most talented students from around the world, RCM is consistently recognised as an international leader in developing versatile, innovative and influential creators, communicators and curators within the world of music and beyond. It embraces the ideals of an inclusive, open and just society, supporting students from diverse social, economic and ethnic backgrounds. It fulfils its obligation as a relevant, persuasive and world-leading advocate for the future of music, as an agent for positive and meaningful cultural change.

The Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy should be read with reference to the College's Strategic Plan 2017-2027 and other College strategies, including the Artistic Strategy, EDI policy and Access and Participation Plan, available at <https://www.rcm.ac.uk/about/strategies-values>.

Learning and Teaching at the RCM is underpinned by five key values:

Artistry | Professionalism | Community | Innovation | Expertise

We develop creative, independent and critically engaged artists

We encourage and support students to take creative responsibility for their own learning, and to understand each student's development as a process of risk-taking, evidence-informed critical reflection, and self-directed approaches to discovering and articulating knowledge. The RCM's rich research environment supports and informs this spirit of enquiry at all levels of study.

We offer professionally-focussed learning experiences

We provide learning experiences through which students can continue to develop as innovative artists, researchers and practitioners equipped with relevant skills and values that enable them to thrive within the music profession and associated disciplines. Our graduates have the skills, versatility and confidence to shape the future of their profession.

Together we provide an inclusive curriculum and learning environment

We provide an inclusive curriculum and learning environment where all students, irrespective of background or circumstances, can achieve success at every stage of their studies. Our learning community is a respectful environment where diversity is valued by all, and our staff and students work in partnership to enhance the curriculum.

We provide resources and facilities for the musicians of the future

We ensure the provision of optimal physical and technological resources to support creative, reflective and interactive learning with peers, teachers and professional practitioners, within and outside the RCM. Alongside practical and in-person learning experiences, where appropriate our programmes utilise blended and online delivery approaches to offer students flexible study options.

Our students learn from outstanding teachers

We recruit the finest teachers and support them by providing formal and informal opportunities to share teaching insights, contextualise their practice in relation to contemporary pedagogical research, and develop as educators. We encourage staff to reflect on their teaching practice and explore innovative new teaching practices.

Fulfilling our learning and teaching goals

Developing creative, independent and critically engaged artists

1. Our programmes nurture understanding and respect for the multi-dimensional nature of music and musical knowledge, including the ways in which the disciplines of performance, composition, research, music education and performance science intersect and inform each other.
2. With our principal medium of sound at the core, we provide a holistic learning experience for students, developing their artistic, intellectual, technical, social and entrepreneurial skills appropriate to their individual needs.
3. 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 encouraged to take the initiative in discovering and developing their own distinctive voice, closely supported by their teachers. Throughout their development, students actively engage with the wide range of intellectual, practical and other experiential opportunities offered to them.
4. Our teaching at all HE levels is shaped by the College's rich research culture, which embraces both traditional and practice-led forms of research. Students learn from active researchers and are exposed to cutting-edge research ideas, processes and outcomes. Our doctoral community makes a vital contribution to our learning culture by contributing to UG programmes through the Graduate Teaching Assistant programme whilst promoting new research insights.
5. The spirit of enquiry is further supported by student and staff access to a rich collection of historical materials for study through the Museum and Collections. Our students learn from the past to shape their musical understanding and create the future of music.

6. The RCM will continue to offer a range of integrated programmes, from early years music workshops to pre-HE specialist music study at the Junior Department and all subsequent levels from FHEQ Level 4 to Level 8. All programmes are characterised by the integration of practical musical experience with reflective critical thinking, based on enquiry-led learning through doing.
7. In line with the mirroring of professional practice at all stages of each programme, students are encouraged to develop their skills in critical reflection, written and verbal articulation and to contribute informally to every aspect of collaborative creative working, including in one-to-one lessons, seminars, workshops, 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.
8. 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, cultural 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.
9. The RCM's Junior Programme provides advanced specialist training to young 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.
10. The RCM offers 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 or on a modular basis, and the MEd is taught in blocks, allowing for flexible learning. Two doctoral programmes, a DMus and PhD available full- or parttime, depending on UK visa restrictions.
11. 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. As part of this, peer discussion and feedback are vital learning tools. Assessment methods and styles are subject to regular review, in dialogue with students, staff, visiting artists and industry professionals and our external examiners.

Professionally-focussed learning experiences

12. Our student performers and composers commence their studies at the College with a very high level of technical proficiency, often developed over many years of training from an early age. For this reason, all undergraduate and postgraduate RCM students are regarded and treated as 'developing artists' from the moment they arrive.
13. The College looks to the wider cultural landscape, nationally and internationally, to inform the design of learning activities that mirror the variety, intensity and practices of the professional world. We consult with professors, visiting artists and industry professionals internationally to ensure that our programmes reflect the current cultural landscape and future directions of the profession.
14. From large-scale artistic projects to contextual modules and Faculty classes, RCM students experience a wide range of contexts, audiences, and technologies in and through performance, composition, and/or research.
15. We collaborate on curriculum design and delivery with our in-house professional departments and staff, including Sparks and the Museum, to support the development of professionally-aligned learning activities. Furthermore, we connect our programmes with RCM's Research and Knowledge Exchange expertise, enabling students at all levels to engage with and learn from cutting-edge research, active researchers, and professional insights.

16. We provide opportunities for students and staff to participate in creative collaborations across programmes and Faculties, and beyond the College with local and international partner institutions, in order to develop their collaborative skills, cultural awareness, and global citizenship.
17. Our HE programmes foster an entrepreneurial mindset by embedding career development training opportunities in the formal curriculum and informally through the RCM's Creative Careers Centre. The Creative Careers Centre provides 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, and business start-up funding for RCM graduates.

An inclusive curriculum and learning environment

18. The RCM is a nurturing and supportive learning environment which places individual students and their needs at the centre of their studies. We provide an inclusive curriculum where all students, irrespective of background or circumstances, can realise their potential and achieve success at every stage of their studies.
19. We recognise our role in developing each and every student's confidence and creativity as an emerging artist. Every member of the RCM contributes to a community that fosters creativity, respect, intellectual curiosity, collaboration and lifelong connections with others.
20. We recognise the intersectional nature of student support needs, which may be shaped by many aspects including race, gender, socio-economic background, health, disability, caring responsibilities, and language. Our contextual recruitment and admissions processes guide and support applicants from application through to enrolment. A robust personal advising system, in tandem with 1:1 principal study provision, ensures students have access to the resources they need to succeed, including specialist counselling, English language support, financial assistance, careers advice, and mentoring.
21. Students are provided with regular bespoke feedback on their individual musical development. Progress is monitored throughout their programme through either their one-to-one principal study teaching or supervision, complemented by regular meetings with their respective Head of Faculty/Programme Leader and Head of Programme.
22. Students 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.
23. The College has an inclusive approach to coursework assessment design. Where appropriate, student choice and continuous assessment are used, enabling students to work to their strengths.
24. 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, including Junior Department students, will be educated throughout their programmes in how to recognise and understand the stresses associated with professional musical life; trained in how to lead and sustain healthy lives; and, for our HE students, how to pass on this knowledge to their own students when they become teachers themselves.
25. 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. 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.
26. As recognised in the College's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, the College is committed to ensuring an inclusive approach to the delivery of learning, teaching, assessment and performance opportunities. We believe that diversity enhances our College culture academically, intellectually, socially and artistically. To that end, our curricula at all levels seek to reflect music in a wider societal context, underlining the vital role all students and staff can play in improving representation in classical music.

27. All teaching staff have a responsibility to ensure that RCM programmes recognise, respect and reflect the diversity of music and musicians today. At all levels of study, RCM students are encouraged to engage in critical debates concerning representation in classical music past and present. The College promotes the study and performance of music by underrepresented composers, and we are taking proactive steps to ensure that our roster of visiting artists and professors better reflects the diversity of our wider society.
28. Staff work in partnership with students to enhance our curricula and student support. At HE level, our 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), Programme Forums and Faculty Committees, which report through the Senate Executive Committee to Senate.

Resources and facilities for the future

29. 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 audio and video editing 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 c.750,000 historical concert programmes; a newly opened Museum housing a 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.
30. The opening during 2020 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.
31. The College regularly evaluates its resources and will continue to invest in cutting edge facilities and technological platforms to provide the optimal environment for all of our students to reach their potential as professional artists, researchers and educators. This includes ongoing investment by the Library in hard copy and electronic journals, books, scores, recordings, media, and access to online databases.
32. Blended learning (using a mixture of in-person and digital teaching methods) is a feature of all types of teaching in RCM programmes. The College's Virtual Learning Environment, Learn.rcm is central to all forms of learning and teaching at HE level. Around this, modules are carefully designed to use the most appropriate mode of delivery to achieve the learning outcomes, including in-person, synchronous online and asynchronous online teaching. Blended learning and teaching are supported by a Digital Learning team, who provide training and advice to students and staff.
33. We will mobilise appropriate technologies for performance, teaching and assessment, ensuring all RCM students develop the technological fluency to share their practice widely and communicate effectively with a wide range of audiences.
34. The RCM will work to extend the reach of its educational programmes by making select programmes and modules available online to distance learners, using a range of digital platforms and techniques. At present, the MEd and MSc are already designed with substantial elements of online delivery and part-time or modular study options. In the coming years, the RCM will expand its online provision to open up new, flexible study options to students from around the globe.
35. In performance-based courses, the College will develop selected online modules as a means of extending student choice and flexibility and connecting our students to a global learning community.
36. The development of online learning may extend to global and commercial educational initiatives, enabling the College to extend its reach to new international communities and markets.

Outstanding teachers

37. 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 continues to actively 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.
38. RCM professors are encouraged to exercise considerable autonomy in their musical and 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.
39. 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).
40. Professors are expected to continue the development of their 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 their line manager, enrol in selected modules on the MEd or MSc programmes, or 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.
41. 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.
42. Professors are encouraged to articulate their ideas for engaging in research and knowledge exchange projects relevant to their teaching, either as individuals, or in collaboration with colleagues. The RCM has an Internal Research Fund and a Knowledge Exchange Projects Fund that provide modest funding for approved research or KE activity, such as organising internal pedagogical seminars, presenting at conferences, developing community or industry partnerships or seed-funding applications for external research funding. Further advice and support is available from the staff of the RCM Research and Knowledge Exchange 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, Programmes Forum, Student Curriculum Forum, Senate Executive Committee), overseen by the Director of Programmes, who reports annually to Senate on progress.

Review: Summer 2024

Approved by Senate

May 2021