Royal College of Music
DRAFT

Introduction
The RCM’s Learning Teaching and Enhancement Strategy (LTES) has been developed through a series of discussions with programme team members, Heads of Faculty and the Directorate. The Director of Programmes & Research and the Head of Academic Development & Undergraduate Programmes have taken the ingredients of the proposed LTES to Senate, Artistic and Academic Management Group, and Programmes Committee in order to clarify the educational and artistic priorities underlying the targets set out below.

In order to track the effectiveness of the LTES in delivering its strategy and related targets (see the grids below) an annual report will be submitted for discussion at Senate. This will cross-refer to monitoring processes undertaken as part of Programme Review, Annual Monitoring and Faculty Review.

In essence the LTES is designed to help the RCM fulfil its mission to provide “specialist musical education and professional training at the highest international level for performers and composers, within an environment that stimulates innovation and research”. Students at the RCM need to be equipped to engage imaginatively with all aspects of music-making (the sonic, visual, technical and emotional) and to respond to music’s many contexts (past, present and future). The LTES is designed to support a new generation of entrepreneurial, resourceful, flexible and articulate musicians who can be advocates for their art. The College educational ethos is to encourage independence and autonomy from its students, and a critical awareness of their role within the wider community. In order to realise this ethos the educational curriculum and patterns of provision at the RCM need to draw on excellent resources from both within and outside the institution to maximum effect. This LTES seeks to set out a vision for how excellent resources can be matched by innovative programme design and by enhanced support for the student experience.

1. Maximising RCM resources
   1.1. The Artistic Programme
      1.1.1. Balancing and integrating the curricular and extra-curricular
      
      Extra-curricular activity is often as vital as the curriculum in defining and shaping students’ experience at the RCM. Thus the College needs to explore flexible ways of recognising and crediting such extra-curricular areas of students’ lives so that they can gain maximum benefit from them.

      1.1.2. Finding spaces for student artistic initiatives
      
      In a crowded schedule it is vital that students are encouraged to find creative spaces for their own initiatives. These spaces require the development of specific resources – whether human or technical – as well as the support of hooks to the curriculum.
1.1.3. Cementing thematic links between the artistic programme and other programmes, as well as Collections and research

A holistic approach to the student experience is vital for students’ full creative development; they need to be encouraged to make their own links between text and context, theory and practice throughout their time at the RCM. This holism requires growing connections to be made across the College’s artistic, educational, and research environments, as offered by themed concert series for example.

1.2. The Woodhouse Centre
1.2.1. Developing professional skills training throughout the curriculum

The resources and vision offered by the Woodhouse Centre need to be deployed as widely as possible for the benefit of all students. RCM students should be equipped to exert maximum leadership on the music profession, in entrepreneurial as well as artistic ways.

1.2.2. Enhancing outreach opportunities for students

The RCM’s leadership in outreach projects is a vital resource for training students in this growing area of professional activity. Such training needs to be integrated into the College’s developing portfolio of pedagogy options for students on UG and PG programmes.

1.2.3. Enhancing employment preparation for students

Through the Woodhouse Centre and other agencies (whether faculties, Performance & Programming, programmes) the College offers students much direct contact with potential employers. However, the aim is to embed further placement opportunities into the curriculum at all levels.

1.3. RCM Collections
1.3.1. Developing access to the Collections

The refurbishing of the museum and of its interpretive displays offers an opportunity for greater student and staff engagement with the artistic, educational and research potential of the RCM’s collection materials. A virtual museum, or ‘Discovery Zone’, would further enhance such imaginative involvement.

1.3.2. Developing links between the Collections and faculties/programmes

The developing research links between faculties and collection materials, whether around instruments or repertoire, need to filter into all aspects of the curriculum at both PG and UG levels to help give students a sense of context for their musical activity.
1.3.3. Enhancing artistic and research applications of Collection materials

The RCM’s Grove Forum series, curated concerts, and museum events suggest models of how to use collection materials to creative advantage. These models need to be developed and exploited educationally for the benefit of all students, whether doctoral, taught PG or UG.

1.4. New Technologies
1.4.1. Developing the use of the studio within teaching, research and the artistic programme

The RCM’s studios offer high-level resources for students to replicate professional conditions and explore collaborative models of musical production, whether as performers or composers. The matching of student need to specialist resource – whether human or technical - requires ongoing processes of review plus flexible patterns of curriculum development.

1.4.2. Integrating the use of new technologies into learning and teaching as both a tool of curriculum enhancement and a curriculum subject in its own right

Plans to introduce online student learning portfolios provide an important example of how new technology might transform the student experience, and staff approaches to student profiling and assessment. Such plans need to be subject to full critical scrutiny from both educational and technological perspectives.

1.4.3. Developing the opportunities for distance learning, synchronous learning and flexible learning offered by new technologies

The RCM’s approach to VLE has benefitted from developments in MUSE and website infrastructures, as well as video-conferencing facilities. The curriculum implications and creative potential of such resources are now to be developed by both programme and faculty leaders, and technology staff.

1.5. Centre for Performance Science
1.5.1. Developing access to CPS research for students and staff

The profile of CPS has increased within the RCM as well as externally, with growing student interest in specialist areas of Performance Science. The impact of CPS research could be enhanced further through effective communication, using online technologies to full advantage.

1.5.2. Enhancing links between CPS and faculties/programmes

The involvement of CPS in a series of curriculum enhancement projects should help to ensure its direct relevance to the student experience and core curriculum issues. The process of developing new PG awards (MSc and MEd) should also create more bridges between pure and applied research to the benefit of students at all levels.
1.5.3. Developing CPS-related research training skills across all programmes

The development of a series of interlinked options between MSc, MEd, MPerf, MMus and research degree programmes should allow the research skills and methods relating to Performance Science to be widely disseminated, with potential impact on UG programmes too.

1.6. Staff

1.6.1. Enhancing professional development and research support for all staff

The RCM’s staff remains the institution’s richest resource and thus high priority must be given to staff development, whether in the form of professional development or research support. The introduction of curriculum enhancement projects gives a particular opportunity for staff to share good practice and engage in research enquiry into matters relating to their own teaching.

1.6.2. Increasing engagement of the professoriate with the learning and teaching environment

With a high proportion of the professoriate employed on fractional contracts or hourly paid, full use needs to be made of the professors’ conference and faculty awaydays, and Faculty Review processes to enhance awareness of learning, teaching and assessment practices.

1.6.3. Enhancing staff training in assessment practices

The formation of an Assessment Working Group has increased awareness that in order to create meaningful and effective assessment criteria, time and effort has to be invested in continuing discussion between faculty and programme leaders. The curriculum enhancement project on recital assessment offers an opportunity to deepen this discussion and involve more staff and students in the important underlying issues.

2. Innovative Programme Design

2.1. Links with the profession

2.1.1. Developing more ‘real-life’ learning, teaching and assessment opportunities

Modes of educational delivery and assessment at the RCM need to be reviewed constantly in the light of the changing profession and thus the changing needs of students. The replication of external professional circumstances remains an important priority at the RCM.
2.1.2. Enhancing profession-led specialisms within the masters framework

Masters specialisms, such as Orchestral Performance and Contemporary Piano, have given students distinctive opportunities to create a bespoke programme reflecting their own career trajectories. Since the profession is itself changing, such specialisms need to be kept under review and room made for further curriculum innovation.

2.1.3. Expanding and enhancing practice-led elements within the research degree programme

Since it is accepted that many performers wish to undertake doctorates for a mixture of professional reasons, a mixture of the artistic and academic, the RCM needs to develop greater flexibility in the training of research degree students and the models of thesis submission offered to prospective candidates. The continuing development of staff expertise to encourage this synergy of theory and practice remains of vital importance, as is the recourse to external partnerships to supplement that expertise.

2.2. Cross-programme curriculum streams

2.2.1. Expanding pedagogical skills training for students

The prospect of developing an MEd qualification at the RCM adds momentum to the enhancement of pedagogy training within the BMus, MPerf and MMus programmes. The practical benefits of gaining experience in musical education need to be offered to all students with due regard for the changing landscape of musical education externally.

2.2.2. Encouraging higher-level presentational skills

Students’ level of presentational skills are a common cause for concern, thus the RCM needs to identify deliberate steps for raising students’ awareness of the issue and for expanding the technical resources available – whether through developing new options or new research initiatives.

2.2.3. Identifying and enhancing research skills training opportunities in all programmes

The College needs to use the new infrastructural links between UG and PG programmes to consolidate its guidance to students on good research practice and the key ingredients for conservatoire-specific research training.
2.3. Virtual Learning Environments

2.3.1. Developing MUSE as a tool for student-centred learning

In order to encourage student use of MUSE (programme and faculty pages), staff need to continue to share good practice and test the potential for more kinds of online delivery and assessment (including links to the ‘Discovery Zone’).

2.3.2. Developing on-line ‘cradle to grave’ learning portfolios for all students

The RCM is committed to extending processes of study planning (BMus) and research reports (doctoral programme) into the creation of student learning portfolios, where each student can log and reflect on all aspects of their RCM experience.

2.3.3. Exploiting the RCM’s web platform as a tool for life-long learning and knowledge exchange

The RCM sees the creation of a ‘Discovery Zone’ as a vital means of extending its curriculum into new areas of knowledge, new kinds of connection, that can also bring in new categories of student.

2.4. Faculty-based provision

2.4.1. Enhancing and exploring the role of the one-to-one relationship within Principal Study provision

The one-to-one relationship with a Principal Study teacher remains the core of their RCM experience for most students. The College is thus committed to enhancing this relationship in every possible way, whether through inviting reflection on it (through curriculum enhancement projects) or whether through encouraging effective staff appraisal and feedback processes.

2.4.2. Developing the effectiveness of assessment strategies for Principal Study and Faculty Activity areas

The reintroduction of professorial reports on Principal Study lessons, as well as the ongoing review of processes of assessing Faculty Studies, is designed to give students a more transparent understanding of expectations in these areas and their own levels of progress and attainment.

2.4.3. Enhancing the role of faculties in curriculum planning and review

The importance of faculties in the development and enhancement of the curriculum has been recognised through the introduction of an internal process of Faculty Review, where faculty members are invited to reflect on the effectiveness of faculty provision in meeting students’ needs.
3. Support for the Student Experience
   3.1. Responding to individual students’ needs
      3.1.1. Enhancing mentoring and personal advising systems for students

Given the growing flexibility of programmes structures and the variety of choices available to students, the effectiveness of personal advising systems becomes increasingly important and needs to be enhanced wherever possible. Induction processes will also need to be kept under continuing review.

3.1.2. Clarifying and refining options processes within taught programmes

Online timetabling systems and the provision of information via MUSE give crucial support to students in making the most of the options available to them, encouraging them to make effective choices. Such communication systems need to be kept under review to check that they are best fit for purpose.

3.1.3. Enhancing packages of special-needs provision for students (e.g. language support, learning agreements)

The RCM’s special needs provision is a vital part of its portfolio of student support and requires close coordination between Student Services, Registry, programmes and faculties. The Student Association has also a creative role to play in enhancing mentoring and language support to students who face particular challenges. With a shifting and varied student population there will need to be continuing review of the resources – human and technical – available for special needs.
3.2. Managing students’ expectations

3.2.1. Refining documentation and communication with students

The introduction of student learning portfolios will greatly enhance communication between programme and faculty teams and individual students. However, the processes of streamlining and refining the documentation given to students will need to continue to keep pace with students’ expectations.

3.2.2. Increasing awareness of internal and external benchmarks for standards

Specific initiatives designed to increase students’ awareness of how standards are negotiated in practical areas of the curriculum (as in the curriculum enhancement project to video recital assessment panel discussions) need to be followed through to help all aspects of communication about assessment with students. The College is committed to encouraging a transparent and meaningful language of assessment that allows a clear matching of internal and external benchmarks.

3.2.3. Enhancing processes for receiving feedback from staff

The reintroduction of professorial reports addresses a crucial gap in the feedback students receive from staff. The development of further flexible online systems for receiving comments from staff will be vital to meet student expectations and encourage the development of autonomous learning.

3.3. Increasing scope for student interaction

3.3.1. Encouraging critical reflection within all aspects of learning and teaching

The integration of educational and training perspectives is a distinctive aspect of student experience at the RCM. Thus a holistic approach should inform all areas of learning, teaching and assessment, including essential matters of curriculum design. Specific initiatives, like the introduction of student learning portfolios, are indicative of the aim to encourage students to reflect on all areas of their musical activity and to integrate aspects of theory and practice.

3.3.2. Developing peer assessment opportunities for all students

Student peer assessment has been highlighted as a key aspect of curriculum enhancement projects, given its encouragement of an ethos of autonomous learning. Embedding such practices within the curriculum is a continuing challenge and will need ongoing processes of testing and review.
3.3.3. Increasing effectiveness of feedback systems from students

The Staff Student Committee has raised the profile of student feedback and student representation within the College’s committee structures. The enhancement of online processes of communication with students (questionnaires, student learning portfolios) will be needed to keep responses flexible and timely.

3.4. Enhancing physical resources for students

3.4.1. Developing flexible spaces for concerts and rehearsal, research and workshopping

The online timetabling system is designed to allow more flexible use of space across the RCM. This flexibility will encourage a review of patterns of teaching delivery leading up to the preparation of plans for the Courtyard development.

3.4.2. Increasing access to collection materials for students

With the refurbishment of the museum and plans for re-siting loan/collection materials within the Courtyard development, the RCM will review its access policies for students to make sure they draw maximum benefit from the College’s resources.

3.4.3. Enhancing provision of financial support to students

Financial support for students’ time at the RCM remains a key concern and will require imaginative development of external resources (AHRC, individual sponsors, charities etc) and schemes for allocating bursaries/scholarships.