

ROYAL COLLEGE OF MUSIC

ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN

2025-26 to 2028-29

Introduction and strategic aims

The Royal College of Music (RCM) is one of the world's leading conservatoires, ranked global number 1 in the QS world rankings for music in 2024 and performing arts in 2024, 2023 and 2022. Its mission is to provide specialised musical education and professional training at the highest international level for performers and composers within an environment that stimulates innovation and research. Since its foundation the RCM has been committed to enabling 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.

As stated in the RCM's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy,¹ the RCM's overarching strategic aim is to create and sustain a community where diversity is recognised, valued and celebrated. The institution pro-actively aims to advance equality and inclusive practice in its staff and student recruitment and admissions processes, in its research activity, in its teaching and artistic programme, and the College's working environment. The RCM endeavours through effective and collaborative action to create a culture which values diversity.

As a leading British conservatoire, the RCM aims to provide musical education and professional training at the highest international level to meet the aspirations of as many as possible of those whom it deems to have the ability and motivation to benefit. Described at its foundation as an institution whose doors were to be 'thrown open to the whole world', the Royal College of Music acknowledges and welcomes influences from diverse social and artistic traditions.

Institutional context

The RCM is a small, specialist institution offering a single undergraduate course, the Bachelor of Music (Hons). The total student population is around 950 students, smaller than many secondary schools, with a typical UK-domiciled undergraduate intake of around 60 students per year. The BMus degree is only offered as a full-time programme,

¹ RCM Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, 2021, <https://www.rcm.ac.uk/about/strategies-values/people-equality-diversity/>

although, as part of its student-centred retention strategy, the College sometimes permits students who would not otherwise be able to progress to transfer to a year of part-time study, usually for health or personal reasons.

The access trajectory for music conservatoire students begins at a very young age, typically starting between the ages of four and nine. Credible applicants for the BMus will have had access to, and been engaged with, music making throughout their school lives and will usually have reached a high level of attainment by the time they are in their mid-teens. One or more distinctions at ABRSM Grade 8 level is usual. Entrance to the RCM's performance and composition programmes is by audition and/or interview. Entrance assessment panels are made up of experienced professional musicians, whose task is to recognise potential and to offer places to applicants who are likely to develop and succeed on the programmes, leading to successful professional careers. The overriding factor which determines the offer of a place is performance at audition or interview. Whilst many students are highly academically gifted, A-level requirements for entrance are purposefully low (currently two E grades at A level), reflecting the performance focus of our programmes and reducing unnecessary barriers to entry.

The RCM supports children of primary and secondary school age through its ambitious outreach programme, RCM Sparks, and its Junior Department (Saturday school), which are described in further detail in this Plan.

Risks to equality of opportunity

The RCM undertook a detailed assessment of its performance in Spring 2024, which can be read in full in Annex A. As a small, specialist provider, the RCM does not have the capacity to analyse or address all the potential risks and intersections of risk to equality of opportunity currently seen in UK higher education. The approach to identifying groups to explore in more detail is outlined in the annex.

The small size of the data samples available within the RCM's student body means that there are many areas where there are high levels of statistical uncertainty, and it has often not been possible to disaggregate sub-groups of students. The RCM must also avoid the risk of identifying individuals (in line with its duties under the Data Protection Act 2018). Due to small data samples, it is also not always possible to identify trends or conclusively demonstrate cause and effect in situations where one or two students may cause a dramatic swing in results. Therefore, along with internal applicant and student data, the RCM has considered data and research from the wider sector and music industry, with reference to the OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register.²

The most significant risk identified is inequality of access to high-quality music education from a young age. As discussed in further detail in Annex A, music provision in schools has been significantly cut, due to a combination of budgetary challenges, the impact of Covid-19, and the prioritisation of STEM subjects.³ As a result, numbers of learners taking GCSE and A Level music are collapsing,⁴ with schools in the most disadvantaged areas the worst affected. Due to fewer young musicians progressing to degree-level education, there is also a major pipeline challenge. This situation is exacerbated by reduced specialist music teaching in schools, with the subject often covered by non-musicians, especially in primary schools.⁵

Similarly, regional music services have been forced to reduce their extra-curricular provision significantly due to budget cuts, meaning the range of provision previously available to young people of all backgrounds a generation

² <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register/>

³ ISM, 2022, *Music: A subject in peril*, <https://www.ism.org/music-in-peril/>

⁴ Whittaker, A. and Fautley, M, 2021. *A-level music decline and disadvantage attainment gaps*. Available at: <https://bcuassets.blob.core.windows.net/docs/a-level-report-290621-pdf-132695100641559063.pdf>

⁵ Ofsted, 2023. *Striking the right note: the music subject report*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/subject-report-series-music/striking-the-right-note-the-music-subject-report#main-findings>

ago has been slashed. As a result, regrettably, access to high-quality music tuition and performance experiences is increasingly becoming the preserve of those who can afford to pay for it.⁶

All this means that the pool of potential candidates for entry to the RCM is being eroded, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the challenge of ensuring equality of opportunity for access is only increasing. This is not something the RCM can solve on its own: the scale of the issue will need investment at a national level from primary level upwards over a generation to improve. In this context, it is likely to prove extremely stretching for conservatoires to maintain numbers of students admitted from lower income backgrounds, still less to increase them. However, as internationally recognised centres of excellence,⁷ there is a clear responsibility for conservatoires like the RCM to try to ensure students who succeed against the odds have every opportunity to progress in their musical education.

The assessment of performance has identified the following risks to equality of opportunity as the highest priority for the RCM at the time of writing (Spring 2024):

Risk 1: There are lower proportions of applicants from low-income households at the RCM compared to other UK HE providers

Evidence suggests that this may be due to several factors:

- Inequality of access to instruments and high-quality music education at school and music hubs resulting in a lack of the knowledge and skills necessary to apply; this may also result in a lack of access to high-quality information and guidance on preparing a successful audition.
- Inequality of access to extra-curricular music activities.
- Concerns about cost pressures can act as a deterrent to application or result in a lack of family support for pursuing a professional career in music.

Groups of students who are more likely to be from low-income households include but are not limited to: those who are the first in their family to participate in HE, disabled students, mature students, carers, and those who are care-experienced or estranged from their family.

Risk 2: There are lower proportions of applicants from black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds at the RCM compared to other UK HE providers, and also in the wider classical music industry

Despite significant progress in this area made during the RCM's previous APP, there is still a gap compared to other HEIs. Evidence suggests that this may be due to several factors:

- A 'leaky' pipeline, where the membership of elite training opportunities for school-aged young people in the UK is significantly more diverse than at undergraduate conservatoire level.⁸ This indicates that diverse young musicians are choosing not to pursue music at conservatoires, possibly due to a lack of family support and/or personal concerns about career prospects as a professional musician.

⁶ Social Mobility Commission, 2019. *An Unequal Playing Field: Extra-Curricular Activities, Soft Skills and Social Mobility*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818679/An_Unequal_Playing_Field_report.pdf

⁷ OfS, World Leading Specialist Provider Funding, <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/7bd645bb-079e-42a8-b061-5710b96ecc11/world-leading-specialist-provider-funding-outcome.pdf>

⁸ Cox., T and Kilshaw, H., 2021. *Creating a More Inclusive Classical Music A study of the English orchestral workforce and the current routes to joining it*. Available at: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Executive_Summary.pdf

- A lack of diverse role models in the classical music profession.⁹
- Perceptions of classical music and conservatoire study, reinforced by historically very low proportions of black British students at conservatoires compared to other types of HEIs.¹⁰

It should be acknowledged that students from different ethnic groups may experience disadvantage in different ways. Black students in particular have an increased chance of experiencing a large number of the risks to disadvantage highlighted in the EORR.¹¹ In this institution's context, perceptions of conservatoire education along with a potential lack of access to the training and support to prepare a strong audition are likely to be the greatest contributing risks.

Risk 3: There has been a significant increase in numbers of students who are reporting financial difficulties during their studies and contacting RCM Student Services for hardship support

Evidence suggests this may be due to:

- increasing cost pressures due to the current increase in the cost of living in the UK, especially in London
- the shortfall in the rate of maintenance loan available, which has not kept pace with inflation

Financial difficulties may result in:

- students needing to undertake more part-time work, resulting in less time for study and practice, which may impact attendance, engagement, and attainment
- higher risk of non-completion
- increased risk of poorer mental health
- lower rates of satisfaction with the student experience

Groups of students most likely to struggle with cost pressures include but are not limited to: those from low-income households, those who are the first in their family to participate in HE, disabled students, mature students, carers, and those who are care-experienced or estranged from their family.¹²

Risk 4: There has been a significant increase in numbers of students who are accessing RCM wellbeing and counselling services in relation to mental health issues (with or without a formal diagnosis)

Evidence suggests this may be due to:

- increasing cost pressures and anxiety about debt
- ongoing impact of the pandemic on students' wellbeing and preparedness for higher education
- delays accessing NHS support services

Poor mental health may result in:

- difficulties transitioning to higher education
- increased requests for consideration of mitigating circumstances

⁹ Stevens, A., 25 May 2021. 'Classical Music's Diversity Problem' In *Classical Music*. Available at: <https://www.classical-music.uk/features/article/classical-music-s-diversity-problem>

¹⁰ Bull, A., Bhachu, D., Blier-Carruthers, A., Bradley, A. and James, S., 2022. *Slow Train Coming? Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in UK Music Higher Education*. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Music Studies network.

¹¹ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register/student-characteristics/ethnicity/>

¹² <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register/risk-10-cost-pressures/>

- poorer attainment rates
- higher risk of non-completion

Groups of students who are more likely to experience mental health issues include but are not limited to: students from low-income households, disabled students, mature students, LGBTQ+ students, and students who are care-experienced. In addition, research indicates that musicians, particularly music students, are disproportionately likely to be affected by mental health issues.¹³

Objectives

Based on this analysis of the greatest risks currently faced by RCM students and prospective applicants, the RCM has identified the following objectives as priorities for its widening participation work during the lifetime of this plan:

Objective 1

To reduce the gap in equality of access to conservatoire education for students from low-income backgrounds by addressing the cost pressures of studying in London and inequality of access to the prior skills and knowledge necessary to apply to a music conservatoire.

Target PTA_1: to achieve a 25% increase in the number of new UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants eligible for free school meals (FSM) by 2028-29 (benchmark to be set based on 2024/25 enrolment data)*

Target PTA_2: to achieve a 5% increase in the number of new entrants to the RCM Junior Department either in receipt of Free School Meals or with household income lower than £35,000** per annum by 2028-29 (benchmark to be set based on 2023/24 enrolment data)

**Note the RCM is only able to report on senior College FSM data from the 2024-25 recruitment cycle onwards.*

***This threshold may be revised during the lifetime of the plan depending on inflation and average household income data*

Objective 1 is expected to prove the most challenging, as all the evidence suggests the pool of potential applicants from lower-income backgrounds is shrinking and the situation is only likely to worsen due to the endangered state of music education provision in schools. Given the lead time of many years for young musicians to reach the standard necessary for conservatoire entry, even if there were a dramatic change for the better in youth music provision, it would take many years for the impact to filter through to higher education level. In this context, simply maintaining current levels of applicants from these backgrounds poses a significant challenge. However, the RCM wishes to be ambitious in its work and has aimed for an increase in performance, even though this will likely prove very difficult to achieve.

Objective 2

To continue to reduce the gap in participation in conservatoire education for students from black, Asian, and ethnic minority backgrounds.

Target PTA_3: to increase the percentage of students from black, Asian, and ethnic minority backgrounds from a baseline of 19.9% (three-year rolling average) in 2023/24 to 22% by 2028/29.

¹³ Kegelaers, J, Schuijjer, M. and Oudejans, R.R.D., 2020. *Resilience and mental health issues in classical musicians: A preliminary study*; <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0305735620927789>

Objective 2 builds on the work undertaken in the previous Access and Participation Plan, during the course of which the RCM made better progress than projected. We believe there is still more work to be done and, whilst a similar leap forward would be unrealistic, there is scope to continue the steady progress in this area, recognising the RCM's responsibility to continue to diversify the pipeline of graduates joining the classical music industry.

Objective 3

To mitigate the increased risk of non-continuation and poorer student academic and well-being outcomes due to cost of living pressures, by supporting students with the costs of studying in London

Target PTS_1: to ensure there is no statistically significant difference in continuation rates between students from lower-income households (defined as £35,000 or lower**) and other students, by supporting students with the cost pressures caused by the current increase in the cost of living.

Whilst the RCM's continuation rates have historically been very high, the assessment of performance showed a downward turn in performance in 2022/23 and clear indicators of a risk that the situation will likely worsen without intervention. If the current context of the UK economy and the rising cost of living continues, this target will be very stretching.

Objective 4

To mitigate the risk of non-completion for students declaring a mental health condition (with or without a formal diagnosis) by addressing the increased demand for pastoral and specialist support.

As discussed above poor mental health of students is a growing concern and this objective provides a strategic commitment to enhance work in this area. The RCM has not set a related numerical target for this objective, as we do not believe it is appropriate given the small size of the cohort and the need to provide every student experiencing mental health difficulties with the individualised support they need. For example, in some cases taking a period of interruption or leaving a course can be the best decision for the wellbeing of a student. However, work on this objective will be underpinned by a robust evaluation plan to ensure that the related intervention strategy is achieving the desired outcomes, as outlined in Annex B.

Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

The objectives outlined in the previous section have been translated into the following intervention strategies, which each address one or more risk areas. These strategies are underpinned by theories of change supported by evaluation of work undertaken during previous plans and sharing of good practice within the conservatoire and wider HE sector, as explained in further detail in Annex B.

Each intervention is multi-faceted but will primarily target the following risks:

- Intervention strategy 1: knowledge and skills
- Intervention strategy 2: perceptions of conservatoire education
- Intervention strategy 3: cost pressures
- Intervention strategy 4: mental health

Intervention strategy 1: Objectives and targets

Risks to equality of opportunity

Intervention strategy 1 focuses on widening access to the high-quality training needed to develop the knowledge and practical skills required entry to a conservatoire. The range of activities addresses multiple stages in the musical development of young learners, including pre-16 attainment, and identification and support of talented young musicians with the application process and transition to higher music education.

Objectives and targets:

This intervention primarily supports the following objective and targets:

Objective 1: To reduce the gap in equality of access to conservatoire education for students from low-income backgrounds by addressing the cost pressures of studying in London and inequality of access to the prior skills and knowledge necessary to apply to a music conservatoire.

Target PTA-1: to achieve a 25% increase in the number of new UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants eligible for free school meals (FSM) by 2028-29 (benchmark to be set based on 2024/25 enrolment data)

Target PTA_2: to achieve a 5% increase in the number of new entrants to the RCM Junior Department either in receipt of Free School Meals or with household income lower than £35,000 per annum by 2028-29 (benchmark to be set based on 2023/24 enrolment data)

Related risks to equality of opportunity:

- a lack of access to appropriate information and guidance to prepare a successful conservatoire audition

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Developing the applicant pipeline	Creation of new role within RCM Sparks team of 'Learning and Participation Officer: Pipeline and Transitions'. New activity.	1 FTE plus on-costs	Increased staff resources to focus on identifying talented musicians from under-represented groups; greater focus on evaluation and identifying "what works"	PTA_3
RCM Sparks Juniors	Weekly, fully funded learning pathway for 4 to 8-year-olds from underrepresented groups identified as having significant musical potential. Developing existing activity. Up to 5 children per year on the programme (up to five years)	Programme lead; specialist teachers; student mentors; instruments	Improved musical skills among students from underrepresented groups.	PTA_3

RCM Pipeline programmes	Funded places (including travel bursaries) for students from FSM/low-income backgrounds and other under-represented groups for RCM pipeline courses, including those targeting “shortage” instruments. New Activity.	Programme leads; specialist teachers; student mentors; space for events.	Strengthened connections between the RCM, young musicians, and their music education providers and families. Positive perceptions about who conservatoire study is for. Improved awareness among young people of pathways and opportunities in music	PTA_3
-------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------

RCM Springboard and Launchpad	A minimum year-long programme for learners in years 9 to 11 from underrepresented groups, to support skills in composition and music creation. Developing existing activity. Up to 12 young people per year.	Programme lead; specialist teachers; student mentors	Improved musical skills among students from underrepresented groups.	PTA_3
-------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------	-------

IntoUniversity Partnership	Partnering with IntoUniversity to deliver a termly series of workshops within five local centres: Brent, North Kensington, Hammersmith, Haringey and North Islington Existing activity. Collaborative.	Administrative costs; student mentors; specialist workshop leaders.	Raising aspirations, knowledge and skills, information and guidance	PTA_3
----------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------	-------

FutureTalent Partnership	Financial support from FutureTalent provides a small group of six talented young musicians with potential with a supportive ‘bridging programme’ into the RCMJD. Developing existing activity. Collaborative.	Bursaries; administrative costs	Increase in the number of under-represented students from local grass roots music organisations progressing to the RCMJD.	PTA_3
--------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------

Partnership with London Music Fund	Facilitating visits and masterclasses at the RCM for young people support by London Music Fund scholarships. New activity. Collaborative.	Administrative costs; space for events; bespoke projects that support widening access to the RCM.	Increase in the number of under-represented students from local grass roots music organisations progressing to the RCMJD and senior college.	PTA_3
------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------

Links with national music education organisations	Develop and embed strategic partnership links with national organisations such as Music Mark and Awards for Young Musicians to share knowledge, best practice and signpost pathways for young people across the UK to the RCM, in particular those from underrepresented backgrounds. New activity. Collaborative.	Administrative costs; training events for staff and students	Increasing knowledge and skills, information and guidance.	PTA_3
Strategic Partnership with Tri-Borough Music Hub	Continue to co-create a programme of inclusive musical activities, promoting access to high-quality musical activities for young people across the Tri-Borough area. Developing existing activity. Collaborative.	Administrative costs; space for events; student mentors; bespoke projects and events that support widening access to the RCM.	Development of improved musical skills among underrepresented groups at pre-16 and sixth form level	PTA_3
Role in new London West Music Hub	<p>Support the Tri-Borough Music Hub with their transition to become Hub Lead Organisation for the new London West Music Hub (from September 2025).</p> <p>Work towards becoming a strategic partner of LWMH, with a view to amplifying both organisations' geographic and demographic reach and impact.</p> <p>Strengthen our knowledge sharing with LWMH, through student placement and training opportunities, underpinned by inclusive teaching practices.</p> <p>New activity. Collaborative.</p>	Administrative costs; space for events; student mentors; bespoke projects and events that support widening access to the RCM.	Development of improved musical skills among underrepresented groups at pre-16 and sixth form level	PTA_3

Partnership with Nucleo	Promotes progression from the local Nucleo 'music for social change' project into the RCMJD by sharing information and opportunities for promising young musicians from underrepresented groups. 3 - 6 new students from Nucleo join the RCMJD every year/ Existing activity. Collaborative.	Administrative costs plus £1k - 1.5k of support from RCMJD bursary fund per student for tuition costs	Increase in the number of under-represented students from local grass roots music organisations progressing to the RCMJD.	PTA_3
-------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------

Contextual admissions	Use of contextual admissions indicators (e.g. FSM) to inform admissions decisions to senior College and junior programmes. Developing existing activity	Administrative costs	Ensuring talent and potential is not overlooked where students may not have had access to the highest standards of teaching, support and guidance to prepare their audition	PTA_3
-----------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £887,000 (over four years)

It should be noted that most of the RCM's widening participation and pipeline activities work across multiple school year groups, so in most cases, it is complex to disaggregate spending on pre-16 and post-16 activities. In the attached Fees, Investment and Targets document activities have been attributed to the budget category that represents the greatest proportion of expected participants.

Summary of evidence base and rationale:

Due to the long lead time for the development of skills needed for conservatoire admission, and current challenges within youth music education, the RCM's work must support students right from the start of their musical journey through to the point of application and beyond. The range of planned activities addresses multiple stages in the musical development of young learners, including pre-16 attainment, as well as identifying and supporting talented young musicians with the application process and transition to higher music education. Given the RCM's small-scale and highly specialised course offering, traditional partnerships with schools to raise general academic attainment would not support the stated objectives. However, the RCM has been working to develop partnerships with a range of specialist organisations working in target communities to identify and support talented young musicians, as well as harnessing the expertise of its own Junior Department and flagship outreach programme, RCM Sparks. Full details of the rationale for each activity are available in Annex B.

Evaluation

All RCM learning and participation projects embed an evaluation strategy at the design and planning stage. For repeated projects, the evaluation strategy is reviewed annually to reflect updated skills and methodologies. Data gathering is embedded to gather quantitative participant EDI data at the outset and qualitative participant experience data by the end of the project. Following specialist evaluation training, the RCM Sparks team is now applying more imaginative approaches to evaluation, ensuring that data collection is engaging and purposeful for all participants.

The strategic priorities for learning and participation projects are reviewed on an annual basis in response to a needs analysis that identifies where there are recruitment shortages and a lack of representation. This needs analysis subsequently informs future project aims and outcomes.

In line with the focus on progression in this intervention strategy, the College will explore not only project-based outcomes, but also the next steps and destinations of project participants. Participant progression is a key success indicator, whether this is to another RCM project, the RCMJD, an RCM partner, or another provider. Our individualised approach to supporting local young musicians means we are usually able to track participant destinations and longer-term outcomes.

Evaluation of this intervention strategy will include collaborative evaluation with our partners, built upon ethical and GDPR-compliant data sharing and co-designed evaluation strategies. In addition to ongoing training for RCM staff to upskill in evaluation methods, we also plan to commission specialist external evaluation at least once during the APP.

In addition to internal annual reporting, each year we will produce an accessible external-facing impact report for this intervention that summarises our cumulative progress, using HESA data thresholds to guide the inclusion of data on small cohorts.

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation Include type of evidence you intend to generate e.g. empirical (Type 2).	Summary of publication plan When evaluation findings will be shared and the format that they will take.
Developing the applicant pipeline	Increased staff resource to focus on identifying talented musicians from under-represented groups; greater focus on evaluation and identifying "what works"	Annual consolidation and analysis of individual project evaluations (see below). Specialist, external evaluation at an interim point during the APP. (Type 2)	Annual Sparks Report to Senate Annual external-facing impact report. Commissioned report
RCM Pipeline programmes/ RCM Sparks Juniors/RCM Springboard	Strengthened connections between the RCM and young musicians; positive perceptions about conservatoire study; Improved awareness among young people of pathways in music	Bespoke project evaluation, typically based on a combination of Type 1 and 2: participant demographic data; participant outcomes and progression tracking; qualitative participant and stakeholder feedback.	Regular reporting to APP Working Group; Annual APP report for Senate Annual Sparks Report to Senate Annual external-facing impact report.
Strategic Partnership with Tri-Borough Music Hub / Role in new London West Music Hub	Development of improved musical skills among underrepresented groups at pre-16 and sixth form level	Co-evaluation based on TBMH focussed priority areas Co-evaluation based on LWMH Impact Framework	Annual Sparks Report to Senate TBMH Annual Report (public) LWMH Annual Report (public)
Partnerships: FutureTalent, Nucleo, London Music Fund	Increase in the number of under-represented students from local grass roots music organisations	Evaluation will be based on a combination of Type 1 and 2: participant demographic data; participant outcomes and progression tracking; qualitative data from	Annual RCMJD Report to Senate Annual external-facing impact report.

	progressing to the RCMJD.	participant and partner feedback.	
IntoUniversity Partnership	Raising aspirations, knowledge and skills, information and guidance	Qualitative data: participant feedback	Annual Sparks Report to Senate Annual external-facing impact report.
Links with national music education organisations	Increasing knowledge and skills, information and guidance.	This activity will be monitored and reported on, but not evaluated	Annual Sparks Report to Senate Annual RCMJD Report to Senate
Contextual admissions	Ensuring talent and potential is not overlooked.	Annual collection and analysis of admissions data	Annual APP report for Senate

More detailed information on evaluation for this intervention strategy can be found in Annex B

Intervention strategy 2: Objectives and targets

Risks to equality of opportunity

This intervention strategy targets the ‘leaky pipeline’ of students from black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds progressing from engagement with youth music activities to higher music education, primarily by addressing perceptions of who classical music education and conservatoires are for.

Objectives and targets:

Objective 2: To continue to reduce the gap in participation in conservatoire education for students from black, Asian, and ethnic minority backgrounds.

Target PTA_3: to increase the percentage of students from black, Asian, and ethnic minority backgrounds from a baseline of 19.9% (three year rolling average) in 2023/24 to 22% by 2028/29.

Related risks to equality of opportunity:

- A lack of access to the knowledge and skills needed to make a successful conservatoire application (see Intervention Strategy 1)
- a lack of access to appropriate information and guidance to prepare a successful conservatoire audition

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Strategic partnerships to develop applicant pipeline	Continue to develop our strategic links with partners that have a track record of working with young black, Asian, and ethnically diverse musicians (e.g. LMF, AYM Scholars, Music Masters, Nucleo)	Staff time	Reaching students in more diverse communities; deeper cultural understanding	PTA_1, PTA_3
External advice on fostering culture of belonging	Dialogue and collaboration with HE and industry organisations (such as Black Lives in Music and Sphinx Organisation) to inform enhancements in RCM institutional culture and improved sense of belonging for current students from black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds. New activity. Collaborative.	£1000 p.a.	Improved sense of belonging among black, Asian and ethnically diverse students; recognition of the importance of diverse repertoire and role models in all areas of the artistic programme and curriculum, in turn promoting an institutional culture of inclusion among all students and staff.	PTS_1
Developing inclusive messaging for applicants	Develop a series of digital resources that 'demystify' the RCMJD experience, application process, and bursary scheme. New activity	Staff time, videography costs £1000 p.a.	Presenting information in an easily accessible format to increase engagement	PTA_1, PTA_2
Diversifying the curriculum	Continue to build on work to diversify the curriculum and artistic programme (see Whole Institution Approach). Developing existing activity	Staff time, investment in library resources	Fostering cultural awareness among students and staff; developing a sense of belonging among students	PTA_1, PTA_2
Diversifying visiting artists and professors	Continue to build on work to diversify programme of visiting artists and professors to engage students with diverse musical perspectives. Developing existing activity.	Staff time	Providing role models from diverse communities	PTA_1, PTA_2, PTS_1

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £8,000 (over four years)

In addition to the intervention activity listed above, the RCM' scholarship programme for black, Asian and ethnically diverse students, an ongoing initiative from the previous APP 2020-24, represents a commitment of over £250,000 over 4 years for students commencing study from 2025 onwards. For further details see the Whole Provider Approach section below and Annex B.

Summary of evidence base and rationale:

This intervention strategy aims to address the 'leaky pipeline' of students progressing to higher music education, primarily by addressing perceptions of who conservatoires and classical music education are for. In addition, there is a focus on nurturing a culture of belonging when students commence their undergraduate studies at the College, to ensure that students can thrive, supported by an inclusive curriculum and learning environment. The continuing work to develop a diverse and inclusive curriculum and culture at the RCM does not just address race but also many other groups that have been historically underrepresented in classical music, including women (especially female composers and conductors), LGBTQ+, disabled, and neurodiverse musicians. The activities also complement the work in Intervention Strategy 1, providing greater opportunity for younger learners to encounter role models they identify with and creating greater confidence in pursuing music professionally. Further details can be found in Annex B.

Evaluation

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation Include type of evidence you intend to generate e.g. empirical (Type 2).	Summary of publication plan When evaluation findings will be shared and the format that they will take.
External advice on fostering culture of belonging	Improved sense of belonging among black, Asian and ethnically diverse students; promoting diverse repertoire and role models in the curriculum, in turn promoting an institutional culture of inclusion.	Data from the annual BMus student survey, especially the section on 'Community and Belonging' Data on staff EDI training and engagement. Feedback from the staff-student EDI Committee Informal and formal (consultancy) feedback from external organisations.	EDI Annual Report and Action Plan
Strategic partnerships to develop applicant pipeline	Reaching students in more diverse communities; deeper cultural understanding	Qualitative evaluation of partnership and pipeline projects; quantitative data on participant demographics and engagement; external evaluation (Type 1 and 2)	RCMJD and Sparks Annual Reports Annual external-facing impact report.
Developing inclusive messaging for applicants	Presenting information in an easily accessible format to increase engagement	Quantitative data on the reach of video/social media (Type 1)	RCMJD and Sparks Annual Reports
Diversifying the curriculum	Fostering cultural awareness among students and staff; developing a sense of belonging among students	BMus External Examiner reports (section on EDI) Data from the annual BMus student survey (section on 'Community and Belonging') Feedback from the staff-student EDI Committee	EDI Annual Report and Action Plan Annual Programme Monitoring
Diversifying visiting artists and professors	Providing role models from diverse communities	Data from the annual BMus student survey (section on 'Community and Belonging')	EDI Annual Report and Action Plan

More detailed information on evaluation plans for this intervention strategy can be found in Annex B

Intervention strategy 3: Objectives and targets

Intervention strategy 3 focuses on addressing the challenges experienced by students from low-income households (and intersecting groups) caused by cost pressures. Providing greater financial security from the start of the course should increase confidence in accepting a place. It should also reduce numbers of students reaching the stage of needing crisis intervention from the RCM Hardship Fund, contribute to a reduction in anxiety and poor mental health, and improve the student experience by allowing students to spend more time focusing on their studies rather than working to support themselves. The intervention targets two groups of students:

- Applicants who may be deterred from applying to the RCM or accepting a place due to concerns about cost pressures, especially the cost of living in London
- Current students, whose student experience may be impacted or who may be at risk of dropping out due to cost pressures.

Risks to equality of opportunity

Cost pressures

Objectives and targets:

This intervention primarily supports the following objectives and targets:

Objective 1: To reduce the gap in equality of access to conservatoire education for students from low-income backgrounds by addressing the cost pressures of studying in London and inequality of access to the prior skills and knowledge necessary to apply to a music conservatoire.

Target PTA-1: to achieve a 25% increase in the number of new UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants eligible for free school meals (FSM) by 2028-29 (benchmark to be set based on 2024/25 enrolment data)

Objective 3: To mitigate the increased risk of non-continuation and poorer student academic and well-being outcomes due to cost-of-living pressures, by supporting students with the costs of studying in London

Target PTS_1: to ensure there is no statistically significant difference in continuation rates between students from lower-income households (defined as £35,000 or lower) and other students, by supporting students with the cost pressures caused by the current increase in the cost of living.

Related risks to equality of opportunity:

Access to the specialist high-quality training needed to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to make a successful conservatoire application; mental health.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
New RCM Undergraduate Bursary scheme	<p>Means tested bursary (assessed by the SLC as part of the student loan application) for new UK-domiciled entrants and continuing students from low-income households.</p> <p>New Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - £3,000 per year available for new starters and current students with a household income of £25,000 or lower - £1,500 per year available to new starters and current students with a household income between £25,001 and £35,000 - starting from 2025/26, until at least 2028/29 - supporting an estimated 40-50 students per year 	Budget for bursaries; cost of subscription to SLC's Bursary Administration Scheme; staff administration costs	Increased confidence in accepting a place; decreased financial concerns; improved student experience and increased sense of security and belonging; reduced risk of dropping out due to financial worries; reduced risk of negative impact on student attainment from the need to take on excessive part-time work	Objective 4
Care Leavers' Top-Up Bursary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - £1000 Care Leavers Summer Accommodation Top-up Bursary (available in addition to main bursary) to support additional housing costs for the summer vacations for students who don't have a family home to return to. <p>Enhanced information provision on support available to care leavers.</p> <p>New Activity.</p>	Budget for bursaries; cost of subscription to SLC's Bursary Administration Scheme; staff administration costs	Increased confidence in accepting a place; decreased financial concerns; improved student experience and increased sense of security and belonging; reduced risk of dropping out due to financial worries; reduced risk of negative impact on student attainment from the need to take on excessive part-time work	Objective 4

Enhanced audition fee waiver scheme	Automatic audition fee waiver for students flagged in UCAS as eligible for free schools meals, without the need to submit an audition fee waiver. From 2025/26 application cycle. Estimated 50 applicants per year. Developing existing activity	Budget for audition fee waivers approx. £6,000 per year; staff administration cost	Reduced administrative burden for applicants who are less likely to have support navigating the application process; reduced financial barriers to auditioning for a conservatoire	n/a
	Expanding existing audition fee waiver application scheme (eligible applicants include care leavers, estranged students, refugees) by increasing eligibility threshold for low-income households from £25,000 to £35,000			

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £466,000 (over four years)

Summary of evidence base and rationale:

Whilst research on the effectiveness of financial support in the UK context remains rather limited, there is a body of evidence from several countries, most notably the USA, which indicates a positive influence on enrolment rates, where information on availability of support is communicated clearly to prospective applicants and offer holders.¹⁴ The RCM's own evaluation of the measures in its previous Access and Participation Plan supports the theory that provision of financial support can be effective in attracting applicants and increasing the likelihood of them accepting the offer of a place.¹⁵ There is more robust evidence that means-based financial support improves continuation and completion rates in students from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹⁶ Expansion of the current audition fee waiver scheme should ensure that cost is not a barrier to conservatoire application for financially disadvantaged applicants. For further details see Annex B.

Evaluation

Evaluation for this intervention strategy will focus on the primary activity, the new bursary scheme, as this represents the biggest financial investment.

¹⁴ Robinson, D. and Silvestrini, V., 2020. *The impact of interventions for widening access to higher education: a review of the evidence* (Education Policy Institute / TASO) https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Widening_participation-review_EPI-TASO_2020.pdf

¹⁵ Royal College of Music, 2021. *Evaluation of financial support: Access and Participation Plan 2020-25* (internal)

¹⁶ Goldrick-Rab, S., Kelchen, R., Harris, D. N., & Benson, J. (2016). *Reducing income inequality in educational attainment: Experimental evidence on the impact of financial aid on college completion*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 121(6), 1762-1817. doi:10.1086/685442

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation Include type of evidence you intend to generate e.g. empirical (Type 2).	Summary of publication plan When evaluation findings will be shared and the format that they will take.
Bursary scheme	Increased confidence in accepting a place; decreased financial concerns; improved student experience and increased sense of security and belonging; reduced risk of dropping out due to financial worries; reduced risk of negative impact on student attainment from the need to take on excessive part-time work	Data analysis: analysis of annual admissions and continuation data (Type 1) Student survey. Using OfS Financial Support Evaluation Toolkit ¹⁷ , adapted to the RCM's context and programme scale. Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data (Type 1 and 2)	Regular reporting and analysis to the APP Working Group, Senate Executive Committee, and Senate. Recommendations to feed into the EDI Annual Report. Annual external-facing impact report.

More detailed information on evaluation plans for this intervention strategy can be found in Annex B

Intervention strategy 4: Objectives and targets

Risks to equality of opportunity

Intervention strategy 4 focuses on addressing the increasing risk of students experiencing poor mental health and the potential impact on both their studies and their overall health and well-being. It will address all stages of the student lifecycle, with activities to support students during the challenging transition to higher education and throughout their course.

Objectives and targets:

Objective 4: To mitigate the risk of non-completion for students declaring a mental health condition (with or without a formal diagnosis) by addressing the increased demand for pastoral and specialist support.

Related risks to equality of opportunity:

Poor mental health can lead to an increased likelihood of non-completion (Target PTS_1)

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Making healthy practice and wellbeing a core element of the curriculum	Continue to deliver the L4 Healthy Musician module to all BMus 1 students: a comprehensive introduction to musicians' health and wellbeing, with a focus on	Teaching staff, staff training	Improved student awareness of wellbeing; increased resilience at the point of transitioning to HE; increased engagement with support on offer; early	PTS_1

¹⁷ Office for Students, Financial Support Evaluation Toolkit, <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation/financial-support-evaluation-toolkit/>

mental health and self-care. Strengthen process for early signposting and referrals to support for students who may benefit. Update curriculum annually in response to emerging research in the field. Developing existing activity.

identification of students in need of support; increase in Year 1 progression.

Enhancements to case management process	Develop an enhanced system for casework recording, with greater capacity for cross-referencing with students' academic records and enhanced data monitoring capacity (whilst ensuring compliance with best practice around confidentiality)	Staff resource to implement	More robust casework record keeping; improved continuity of support for students; enhanced capacity for monitoring /reporting and connection to other strands of support work for earlier and more effective intervention	PTS_1
Signposting support	Provide up-to-date and relevant online resources and training to support the professional development of teaching staff and personal advisors around student mental health. Developing existing activity.	Staff time Training costs (HR)	Greater confidence among teaching staff to recognise and act upon initial signs of poor mental health; more rapid referral of students to support;	PTS_1
Enhanced mental health awareness raising	Regular programme of mental health awareness-raising activities to reduce stigma around seeking support. Developing existing activity	Administrative costs Staff time	Reduced stigma around mental health conversations and disclosures; improved visibility of mental health support	n/a
Improved analysis of early warning indicators	Use of student data points (attendance, VLE logins, non-submissions) to develop a set of early-warning indicators that trigger interventions. Developing existing activity.	Administrative costs Staff time	More rapid identification of students of concern and appropriate referral.	PTS_1
Reviewing staff resource to support interventions	Review resourcing of Student Services team to support additional activities and improve consistency of service levels	Analysis of capacity and requirements to be completed in 2024	Improved service level; reduced risk of interruption to services	n/a
Connecting Mitigating Circumstances data	Automatic referral of students submitting mitigating circumstances requests to the Student Services Manager for follow up and signposting (where appropriate and if not already engaging with support). New activity.	Staff time	More rapid identification of students of concern and appropriate referral	PTS_1

Implementing HE sector best practice	Although the cost of subscription to the Student Mental Health Charter is prohibitive for a small institution, work towards meeting the same standards of best practice in line with the Charter Framework. New activity. Embed a 'students as partners' approach in our decision-making through student representation on committees and regular surveys. Developing existing activity.	Staff time	Ensuring highest standards of support provision for students; enhanced partnership working with students	n/a
Enhanced support with transition to HE	Provision of enhanced information on orientation webpages shared with new starters pre-enrolment about expectations and sources of support. Integrate transition and well-being support into current engagement with offer holders. New activity.	Administrative costs Staff time	Reduced anxiety during transition period; reduced stigma around seeking support; more rapid identification of students of concern and appropriate referral.	n/a
Report + Support	New Report + Support platform launching April 2024 includes functionality for students to report concerns about their own and others' mental health (along with incidences of harassment etc that may require support). New activity.	£13,200 per annum	More rapid identification of students of concern and appropriate referral.	PTS_1

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £144,000 (over four years)

Summary of evidence base and rationale:

Our intervention strategy for targeting mental health is based on three pillars that reflect current¹⁸ sector research, specialised research on mental health for musicians, and our internal understanding of the RCM's student needs:

1. Preventative work and early interventions are vital
2. Activities should be designed to meet the specific needs of conservatoire music students
3. Activities should be integrated as part of the curriculum and overall culture of the College

Research shows that up to 40% of students may have a diagnosable mental health condition¹⁸ and yet over half of students with an existing diagnosis chose not to declare on application citing reasons relating to stigma.¹⁹ With the

¹⁸ Student Minds, Student Mental Health Manifesto. Available at: <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/studentmentalhealthmanifesto.html>

¹⁹ UCAS, 2021. *Starting the Conversation: UCAS Report on Student Mental Health*. Available at: <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-reports>

implementation of the Higher Education Mental Health Taskforce (HEMHIT)²⁰ comes an expectation that all HEIs will embed best practices and common standards, make improvements to identifying students in need of mental health support, and commit to more compassionate communication and processes.²¹ A focus on preventative work in HEIs has been recommended and so our plans for intervention prioritise raising awareness, early identification of need, improved signposting to support and reducing stigma (including at the pre-enrolment stage to aid transition).²² HEIs should consider themselves to be 'health settings' with health outcomes carrying equal weight to learning outcomes.²³ As such, we will continue to ensure that mental health and well-being are embedded into our curriculum and culture.

For further details of the rationale underpinning our intervention strategy, please see Annex B.

Evaluation

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation Include type of evidence you intend to generate e.g. empirical (Type 2).	Summary of publication plan When evaluation findings will be shared and the format that they will take.
Making healthy practice and wellbeing a core element of the curriculum	Improved student awareness of wellbeing, increased resilience, increased engagement with support.	Healthy Musician module student feedback annual survey; work closely with the Centre for Performance Science (CPS) to inform integration of mental health and wellbeing into the curriculum (Type 1 and 2)	Programme Annual Monitoring Report to Senate and Council; Potential research publications by CPS.
Enhancements to case management process	Improved casework record keeping, continuity of support for students, monitoring and reporting.	More detailed recording of students accessing support to facilitate cross-referencing with Registry data on student lifecycle stages and outcomes	Annual Student Services report to Senate and Council
Signposting support	Greater confidence among teaching staff to recognise and act upon initial signs of poor mental health; more rapid referral of students to support;	Monitor professor engagement with accessing available resources and mental health training	Annual Student Services report to Senate and Council; Annual HR report (re: learning and development) to Senate and Council; Annual external-facing impact report.
Enhanced mental health awareness raising	Reduced stigma around mental health conversations and disclosures; improved visibility of mental health support	Record engagement in activities; seek feedback from students through the annual Student Services survey; monitor mental health disclosures/Learning Agreements; monitor usage of TogetherALL platform; review performance in NSS mental health support question;	Annual Student Services report to Senate and Council; EDI Annual Report to Senate and Council; Annual external-facing impact report.

²⁰ Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/higher-education-mental-health-implementation-taskforce>

²¹ HEMHIT, 2024. HE Mental Health Implementation Taskforce – first stage report. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65ba1fb7ee7d490013984a12/HE_Mental_Health_Implementation_Taskforce_first_stage_report_Jan_2023.pdf

²² Student Academic Experience Survey 2023, <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2023.pdf>

²³ Universities UK, 2020. *Stepchange: Mentally Healthy Universities*. Available at: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2020/uuk-stepchange-mhu.pdf>

		monitor numbers of referrals to Counselling (Type 1 and 2)	
Improved analysis of early warning indicators	More rapid identification of students of concern and appropriate referral.	Review performance in NSS mental health support question; feedback from frontline staff; conduct annual Student Services survey; monitor progression rates with specific regard to interruptions and withdrawals due to mental health reasons.(Type 1 and 2)	Annual Student Services report to Senate and Council
Reviewing staff resource to support interventions	Improved service level; reduced risk of interruption to services	Analysis of capacity and requirements to be completed in 2024/25; monitor waiting times for counselling support	Analysis report to Directorate
Implementing HE sector best practice	Ensuring highest standards of support provision for students; enhanced partnership working with students	Review performance in NSS mental health support question; conduct a review of our processes to ensure we are following the guiding principles of the Mental Health Charter Framework; conduct annual Student Services survey; work closely with the Centre for Performance Science to develop evaluation strategies and inform interventions (Type 1 and 2)	Annual Student Services report to Senate and Council; EDI Annual Report to Senate and Council; Annual external-facing impact report; Potential research publications by CPS.
Connecting Mitigating Circumstances data	More rapid identification of students of concern and appropriate referral	Conduct annual Student Services survey; review performance in NSS survey question on mental health support; monitor disclosures of mental health issues; monitor progression rates with a specific eye on interruptions and withdrawals due to mental health reasons. (Type 1 and 2)	Annual Student Services report to Senate and Council; Annual Programme Monitoring Report to Senate and Council
Enhanced support with transition to HE	Reduced anxiety during transition period; reduced stigma around seeking support; more rapid identification of students of concern and appropriate referral.	Monitor mental health disclosures/Learning Agreements; conduct annual Student Services survey; feedback from frontline staff including personal advisors	Annual Student Services report to Senate and Council
Report and Support	More rapid identification of students of concern and appropriate referral.	Monitor numbers of reports relating to mental health concerns and track any trends (Type 1)	Annual Registry report (Appeals and Complaints) to Senate and Council

More detailed information on evaluation for this intervention can be found in Annex B.

Whole provider approach

Since the start of the previous Access and Participation Plan in 2020 the RCM has made significant progress in its commitment to equality of opportunity. The duty of fostering an inclusive and respectful institutional culture lies with everyone from undergraduate students to the Chairman of Council. The RCM's Strategic Plan²⁴ and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy²⁵ set out its strategic aims and vision with regards to EDI, always underpinned by a commitment to ensure that no member of the RCM community should be discriminated against unfairly on the grounds of race, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, marriage or civil partnership, in line with the Equality Act 2010.

In recent years heightened awareness of inequality resulting from the Black Lives Matter movement has provided the impetus for greater staff and student engagement across all aspects of equality and diversity. A period of critical reflection was required that was sometimes challenging, and advice on best practice was sought from arts sector experts, utilising resources such as the Music Masters "I'm in" evaluation tool to map what stage the RCM was at in its diversity and inclusion journey.²⁶ Progress is driven by an EDI Action Plan, which is updated annually and of which the Access and Participation Plan represents just one strand. We are proud of how far we have travelled to date, whilst recognising there remains much work to do.

Strategic responsibility for EDI sits with the Director of Programmes, who is also responsible for the RCM's junior programmes, whilst the institutional lead for the Access and Participation Plan is the Deputy Academic Registrar, who heads up the RCM's Admissions Team. The positioning of these roles ensures that access and participation is embedded at every stage of the student lifecycle. As outlined in our evaluation section below, in addition to the main Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, the Access and Participation Plan and wider EDI work are regular standing items on the agendas of a suite of committees across the College, including the governing body, the RCM Council. Examples of recent key areas of work include are outlined below:

Artistic Programme and Curriculum

The RCM has set a priority to deliver an artistic programme that celebrates and promotes diversity amongst performers, working closely with professional organisations (including orchestras, the Association of British Orchestras, Musicians Union, and Black Lives in Music) to learn from industry and promote change. Most concerts now include at least one work by an underrepresented composer and an EDI Visiting Artists Fund has been created to support even more visits by diverse visiting artists. Data on performances is now collated to monitor representation.

An example of diverse programming is the annual FestivALL celebrating diverse and underrepresented composers, including female and neurodiverse composers. In 2023 students presented 50 works across ten concerts, including a variety of 'pop-up' performances. The Performance and Programming team received over 40 student proposals for FestivALL, a record number of submissions that demonstrates increased student engagement with diverse repertoire.

Similarly, work is being undertaken to diversify the curriculum. Updates to undergraduate syllabuses from 2023-24 include a requirement for all students to perform repertoire by under-represented composers during their studies. This has been mirrored by a similar requirement for Junior Department students to perform one piece by an under-represented composer in their assessments, ensuring that students explore a wide range of musical voices

²⁴ RCM Strategic Plan 2017-2027, <https://www.rcm.ac.uk/about/strategies-values/governance/>

²⁵ RCM Quality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, 2021. Available at: <https://www.rcm.ac.uk/about/strategies-values/people-equality-diversity/>

²⁶ Music Masters, I'm In Self-Analysis Diversity and Inclusion Tool: <https://musicmasters.org.uk/im-in/>

throughout their education. To support this a “Play Something New” database has been created on the student VLE, with over 2400 works listed for students and staff to discover. Elective modules in the broad area of socially-engaged music practice include Women in Music, Musical Care Throughout the Life Course, Workshop Leadership, Classical Music and its Others, and Music and Power. In 2023/24 through the Global Conservatoire Consortium RCM students could study elective modules in The Harlem Renaissance, Music and Disability, Music and Racism, and Engaging with Audiences and Communities.²⁷

From 2024 the RCM is launching a new MMusEd Teaching Musician course at postgraduate level. The College is committed to ‘advocate for the importance of music education at all ages through leadership and example’ (Strategic Plan 2017-2027). The MMusEd is expected to be an important vehicle for strengthening this advocacy for several reasons: its central position in the RCM Masters portfolio through alignment with faculties; placements with strategic music education partners thereby strengthening the sector’s collective voice; and a critical mass of students specialising in teaching at the RCM. The aim of this new programme is to develop outstanding teaching musicians who can apply their high-level artistic skills in a range of educational environments today. The foundational pillars of the programme are: artistry, imagination, communication, and inclusion.

The Library continues to support both artistic and academic aspects of the curriculum through its acquisition and promotion of new resources. Over the last five years (as at Spring 2024), the Library team has reviewed the works of 186 diverse composers. Of those, the Library has acquired all published songs, solo instrumental, and chamber works for 149 composers, adding over 4800 works to the collection. In June 2023, the RCM Librarian shared his team’s work with colleagues from across the conservatoire sector in a presentation, ‘Diverse Musical Voices at RCM: Supporting growth and change’ at the Diversifying the Performing Arts Curriculum online event.

More widely within the RCM the criteria for internal Knowledge Exchange funding now require project proposals to demonstrate consideration of inclusion and diversity in project design, participant engagement, and evaluation. New doctoral training topics during 2022-23 have included sessions on Disability Theory and Anti-racist inclusive practice. RCM doctoral research students recently curated two ‘Artistic Insights’ concerts exploring underrepresented identities and voices in music, past and present.

Staff training and recruitment

The RCM has been working hard to fill gaps in its data on staff ethnicity. This is a particular challenge in the context of the institution’s predominantly part-time and hourly teaching workforce (most instrumental professors are also working musicians). New initiatives are being explored to attract a more diverse pool of applicants for vacancies, especially in areas where there are known issues of representation, and to diversify the roster of visiting artists and professors.

EDI training initiatives continue to grow and are reaching a wider range of staff. In addition to compulsory EDI training for all new staff, during 2022-23 all staff were offered access to training in Unconscious Bias, Being an Active Bystander, Mental Health Awareness, Menopause Awareness, and Men’s Mental Health. A new online ‘Supporting our Students’ Staff Hub on Learn now provides comprehensive information for staff on inclusive teaching practices and support for disabled students. In June 2023, Programmes teaching staff participated in a training session on ‘Creating Inclusive Environments’ delivered by Tonic, a training provider specialising in EDI in the performing arts.²⁸

²⁷ <https://www.rcm.ac.uk/study/globalconservatoire/>

²⁸ <https://www.tonictheatre.co.uk/training/>

Student Services and pastoral support

The Student Services team provides a wide range of support to students in addition to the activities planned in Strategic Intervention 4. This includes support with accommodation issues, financial planning and administration of the RCM's Hardship Fund. To improve the student welfare the team runs regular yoga and meditation sessions, provides reduced cost massage therapy and organises a termly Wellbeing pop-up event in conjunction with the Students' Union. Despite its small size the RCM has its own in-house counselling team and collaborates with neighbouring Imperial College Medical Centre to provide access to more specialised counselling services and CBT. A 24-hour support service, Togetherall, ensures ease of access to out-of-hours and on-demand mental health support. RCM students can also access pastoral support and wellbeing activities via the Imperial College Multi-Faith Chaplaincy.

All undergraduate students are allocated a dedicated, trained, personal advisor from the academic team, who can provide advice and signposting to support services, ensuring rapid identification of students of concern and referral to appropriate support.

A Mental Health First Aiders scheme has been launched and in 2022/23 the number of trained MHFAs increased from 19 to 27, facilitating raised awareness and better signposting to support.

Awareness Raising

Recent priorities include improving collaboration between RCM management and the Students' Union (SU) to encourage whole College engagement with EDI matters and curation of activities/events that resonate with RCM students. This is accompanied by promoting EDI awareness among SU Committee members and Student representatives through enhanced training. In 2022/23 the SU participated in bespoke training provided by Tonic that was well-received and will be integrated into the SU induction programme in future years.

From September 2022 the College introduced consent training for all students. The online 'Consent Matters: Boundaries, Respect, and Positive Intervention' course has been developed specifically for students in higher education. The training was introduced to all new students during Induction Week through a presentation on 'Respect at the RCM', which was co-delivered by staff and the Students' Union.

We continue to enhance the representation of diverse participants and voices across physical and virtual areas of the RCM, from a new photo display in the café to the many hundreds of social media posts that demonstrate the importance of representation across our concerts, visiting artists, student projects, and research. Our new 'Meet our Alumni' section of the website presents a wide range of alumni and their varied, global careers.

Financial support

In addition to the financial support targeted at UK-domiciled undergraduates listed within the intervention strategies for this plan, a significant amount of further financial support is available:

RCM Scholarships: Around 50% of RCM students (including international and postgraduate students) receive support from the main RCM Scholarship programme. In 2023/24 this was worth a total of over £3.9 million and is made possible by the generous support of the RCM's charitable donors. All applicants for the BMus course are considered for scholarships, with awards made based on performance at audition. There is no separate application process.

Scholarships for black, Asian and ethnically diverse students: A minimum of three scholarships are awarded annually, worth up to full tuition fees (currently £9,250) for the duration of the course. Applicants self-declare that they come from an eligible ethnic background in an application form sent to all on-time UK domiciled applicants before audition, as ethnicity data is not provided by UCAS Conservatoires at the point of application. Since there

are normally more applicants from minority ethnic backgrounds than available scholarships, awards are subject to the same competitive allocation process as the main RCM Scholarship programme, based on performance in entrance auditions. Awards are made to the three students who meet the basic eligibility criteria and demonstrate the greatest potential at audition. Sometimes additional awards may be made where budget permits. These scholarships are intended to promote the RCM as a welcoming destination for study that recognises excellence and potential in a diverse body of students. See RCM website for further details²⁹.

Hardship Fund: The RCM has a Hardship Fund to assist students who encounter unexpected financial difficulties during their studies. In addition to the ringfenced funding for UK-domiciled undergraduates included in the APP, there is further hardship funding available to all students, made possible by philanthropic giving. Details on how to apply are available to current students via the RCM's VLE, Learn.RCM.

RCMJJD Bursaries: Like the senior college, the RCM Junior Department has an extensive [means-tested bursary programme](#), combining support from the Government Music and Dance Scheme (£135,000 in 2023/24) with funding from the RCM each year (£120,000 in 2023/24, again generously supported by RCM donors). RCMJD bursaries aim to ensure that cost is no barrier to participation in high quality music education.

Outreach and community engagement

The RCM offers a wider programme of activities to schools through its Learning and Participation Team, RCM Sparks. Events are tailored to specific age groups, allowing the most constructive, enjoyable and engaging learning experience for participants. Events are available for children aged from 4–18 and actively recruit participants facing barriers to accessing music education. The programme provides a consistent and nurturing learning journey for those who return year after year, offering an excellent opportunity for access to high quality music experience.

The newly refurbished RCM Museum is not only an invaluable resource for students, but also plays a key role in bringing music to a wider audience. The Museum seeks to combat physical, intellectual, social and economic barriers to welcome a diverse range of visitors, especially school groups, through numerous measures, including:

- Making interpretation content easy to understand and providing opportunities to learn through touch and other senses.
- Representing inclusive communities (such as minority groups) within the collections and displays where possible, promoting tolerance, inter-community respect and challenging stereotypes
- To ensure accessibility for all, the museum's collection is available online, with resources for families and schools.

Governance

The RCM Council continues to demonstrate its full commitment to the area of EDI through Council representation on the EDI Committee and a termly review of progress on the College's EDI action plan at all Council meetings. In recent years the RCM has increased the diversity of Council members, all of whom are actively encouraged to participate in the College's programme of EDI training.

²⁹ <https://www.rcm.ac.uk/apply/feesandfunding/scholarships/>

Centre for Performance Science

The Centre for Performance Science (CPS) is a collaboration with Imperial College London and is at the forefront of research into topics such as the impact of music on wellbeing and coping with performance anxiety. Their research provides the basis for the musicians' health and wellbeing modules embedded in the curriculum and ensures that the RCM's teaching reflects the latest in best practice. Encouraging healthy practice helps students to avoid or manage challenges with their mental health, supporting the work in this plan.

Sharing best practice

The RCM is a member of the Healthy Conservatoires Network, a forum for members to share news and updates on health needs of performing artists; access peer support, resources and expertise in creating and maintaining a healthy conservatoire; and engage with the latest research and evidence-informed practice.

Through membership of the APP Special Interest Group of FACE (the Forum for Access and Continuing Education), RCM staff engage with good practice in APP development and delivery.

Future priorities

Across the College, EDI is now a key consideration for planning, decision-making and evaluation at all levels. However, there are areas where progress has been slow. The challenge of recruiting students from underrepresented groups, including students from low socio-economic backgrounds, is one which requires collective action across the music and education sectors. We are aware that the RCM lacks full data about the ethnicity of its staff and there is work required to develop a more diverse workforce across salaried, hourly and visiting staff and examiners. The RCM is exploring seeking expert guidance on the further evolution of our EDI goals, especially in more challenging areas like staff training and recruitment. There is scope to adopt a more robust approach to data collection and analysis to measure our progress and provide stronger evidence of meeting our goals, such as including a dedicated section on EDI and belonging in the annual BMus student experience survey to understand better the impact of EDI initiatives.

Student consultation

The RCMSU comprises an elected executive consisting of the President (a sabbatical officer) and volunteer representatives from the student body. As a small institution, the SU President and Executive members know a high proportion of their fellow students personally and therefore can provide a representative sample of student opinion. Student consultation is an established part of the RCM's governance structure, with students represented on the majority of the RCM's committees, including Council, Senate, and Staff-Student Committees among others. Student feedback plays an important role in the regular review cycle of the academic curriculum. In addition, the RCM collaborates closely with the SU to support its events such as Mental Health Awareness Week.

Student collaboration and feedback constitute important elements of the RCM's ongoing work and strategic thinking regarding access and participation. Responsibility for monitoring the RCM's Access and Participation Plan sits with a variety of committees, most notably as a standing item for the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, which includes the Students' Union (SU) President and members of the SU committee with responsibility for welfare, diversity and inclusion.

Feedback from students via their SU representatives was a vital starting point for the RCM in undertaking the assessment of performance that underpins this plan. Students have regularly raised concerns about cost pressures and mental health issues, and their feedback contributed to these areas being given particular focus in the plan. Notably, the SU has lobbied for an element of means testing to be introduced as part of the RCM's financial support work. The main RCM Scholarships are awarded based on performance at audition, but acknowledgement of the

SU's views contributed to the development of the means tested bursary scheme planned as part of Intervention Strategy 3.

Students were consulted during the development of this plan, through specific consultation meetings and ongoing dialogue with the SU Executive. Students were provided with the RCM's assessment of its performance and invited to comment on the proposed targets and strategic interventions. The students were satisfied that the assessment of performance was robust and that the planned interventions reflected their concerns. It was requested that clearer guidance on the criteria for eligibility for the Hardship Fund should be provided on the RCM VLE, which has been actioned. Students also expressed the hope that, whilst the APP targets UK undergraduate students, many of the interventions would also benefit the wider student body. The RCMSU is making a student submission to the OfS to accompany this plan.

The SU will continue to be consulted on recommendations following evaluation throughout the lifecycle of this Plan. Students also play a highly active role in the delivery of the RCM's outreach work through the Sparks programme, with music leadership and outreach work being an embedded part of the undergraduate curriculum. Many students are passionate about this work and go on to develop careers in youth music and widening participation. Student feedback formed a significant part of the RCM Sparks evaluation undertaken during the previous APP and is framing how the RCM moves forward with its outreach work: the Sparks team meets with their student teams to hold reflection sessions at the mid-point and/or end of projects, which shape small in-year changes and larger changes when recruiting to these roles for subsequent years.

Evaluation of the plan

The RCM will ensure that progress towards each of the stated objectives will be assessed through an evaluation strategy that is robust, but proportional to the scale of the institution and the cohorts of participants in the planned activities. As a small institution specialising in music the RCM does not have the social science research or data analysis capacity of a larger multi-disciplinary institution. During the course of the previous Access and Participation Plan 2020-25 the RCM made progress on evaluating its widening participation work: for example external consultants who were specialists in music programme evaluation were commissioned to develop evaluation tools for outreach activity with primary age learners. This has informed the design of several of the activities in this plan. However, the RCM acknowledges that evaluation remains a relatively under-developed area and undertakes to develop its evaluation capacity during the lifetime of this plan.

The RCM plans to use the 2024/25 academic year to refine its evaluation design so that a clear plan is embedded from the start of the Plan for each Intervention Strategy, with a commitment to have full plans in place by September 2025. This includes, for example, exploring how the expertise within the RCM's Centre for Performance Science might be harnessed to assist with evaluation of mental health and wellbeing work as, at the time of writing (Spring 2024), data analysis, monitoring and evaluation capacity is particularly under-developed in this area. The evaluation plan will target the most resource-intensive activities within each intervention strategy, after consideration of their "evaluability".³⁰ Evaluation of specific activities as well as monitoring of progress towards overall targets will provide a clearer indication of which are proving the most effective towards achieving the relevant objective.

Given the RCM's size and emerging level of evaluation capacity, evaluation will be primarily Type 1 (narrative) or Type 2 (empirical), but with consideration given to whether it is feasible to develop Type 3 (causal) evaluation capacity in the future.³¹ Guidance from sources such as TASO will be used to inform evaluation design for small

³⁰ <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/themes/evaluability-assessment>

³¹ OfS, Access and Participation Standards of Evidence, <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation/financial-support-evaluation-toolkit/>

cohorts.³² Small cohorts can require more burdensome evaluation methods to obtain useful data samples, which can be disproportional to the scale of the intervention being assessed. One challenge with a small student population and even smaller pool of students from under-represented backgrounds is that they may suffer from survey fatigue from being over-surveyed,³³ leading to low rates of engagement with evaluative research. It is also important to find balance between ensuring the views of students and staff from under-represented backgrounds inform the development of the RCM's Access and Participation work - providing opportunities for them to get involved if they wish - without repeatedly asking the same cohort to contribute, placing unfair additional burdens on those who may already face additional challenges or demands on their time (sometimes referred to as the "minority tax" or "diversity tax").³⁴

For our partnerships with local organisations, including the Tri-Borough Music Hub, the new London West Music Hub (LWMH), Nucleo, London Music Fund, FutureTalent and Into University, we are committed to collaborative evaluation with partners. Our evaluation methods in partnership projects are built on mutually agreed aims and outcomes, ongoing dialogue, informal peer feedback, and sharing of evaluation data and outcomes in an ethical and responsible way. For instance, we expect to work closely with the LWMH to align co-delivered projects with their new Impact Framework.³⁵ Our approach to collaborative evaluation also extends to participant-centred evaluation methods that involve participants in decision-making processes, an approach that helps to 'de-territorialise' partnership, putting a clear focus on learning.³⁶

Further details on the evaluation plan for each intervention strategy can be found in Annex B.

Disseminating findings

The scale of activities and data samples mean that it is often not appropriate to share evaluation results in the public domain due to the risk of identifying individuals. Furthermore, the limited data available from small cohort sizes may not conclusively indicate cause and effect. That said, we are confident that triangulation of robust Type 1 and Type 2 evidence will allow us to develop strong evidence of impact, even if the findings may be specific to a conservatoire institutional ecology.

Working closely with established music education partners facilitates amplification of our impact and pooling of resources and expertise to evaluate outcomes. Each of our partners has their own impact framework which we will contribute to and learn from. This 'learning and sharing' model enables us to contribute meaningfully to partners' public-facing reports, a model which we have developed through our strategic partnership with the Tri-Borough Music Hub.

The College has a robust approach to annual monitoring and enhancement which will ensure outcomes are disseminated internally, including to student-facing fora. In addition, each year we will produce a series of accessible external-facing impact reports that summarise our cumulative progress in the intervention strategies, using HESA data thresholds to guide the inclusion of data on small cohorts.

³² TASO, 22. *Impact Evaluation with Small Cohorts: Methodology Guidance*.

<https://taso.org.uk/evidence/evaluation-guidance-resources/impact-evaluation-with-small-cohorts/>

³³ <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/blog/top-tips-to-avoid-survey-response-fatigue>

³⁴ Chauhan, C., Lange, S. and Chen, T., 2022. *Reducing the burden of diversity tax: The tax no-one talks about*, <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2022/08/08/guest-post-reducing-the-burden-of-diversity-tax-the-tax-no-one-talks-about/>

³⁵ Arts Council England, *Strategic Functions for Hub Lead Organisations*, 2023. Available at:

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/21512/download?attachment>

³⁶ Kinsella, V., Fautley, M., & Whittaker, A. (2022). Re-thinking music education partnerships through intra-actions. *Music Education Research*, 24(3), 299–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2022.2053510>

During the lifetime of the plan, we will explore further opportunities for sharing evaluation findings, for instance through our networks such as the QAA Specialist and Independent Provider Network, Conservatoires UK, The Association of European Conservatoires (AEC) and the Healthy Conservatoires Network.

Monitoring progress

As part of its previous Access and Participation Plan 2020-25 the RCM implemented a robust monitoring process to ensure its commitments are met, which will be continued. The RCM has an Access and Participation Plan Working Group, which meets on a termly basis to ensure delivery of the plan and to review its effectiveness. Progress against targets is monitored at institutional level by the RCM's Council, Senate, Audit & Risk Assurance Committee (which includes both the RCM's internal and external auditors), Staff Student Committee and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. Other than Audit & Risk Assurance Committee, each of these committees includes student representation. The Access and Participation Plan is a standing item on the termly Staff Student Committee, to ensure that students are updated on the evaluation of our work and can monitor progress. Where a measure proves ineffective in achieving its aim, a review will be undertaken by relevant team members and a step-by-step plan to remedy the situation developed at the earliest possible stage. It should be noted that the RCM's Senate Executive Committee meets fortnightly in term-time and therefore is able to respond swiftly should an intervention proves ineffective.

Provision of information to students

Clear, accessible and timely information will be available for applicants and students on the fees that we charge and the financial support that we will offer. This information will make it clear exactly what financial support is available to students in each year of their studies. The information will be provided on our website and in our prospectus. We will provide timely information to UCAS for the UCAS Conservatoires admissions service and to the SLC to enable them to populate their applicant-facing web services. Further information can also be found on Discover Uni.³⁷

Prospective applicants receive information regarding the application process and fees and funding primarily via the RCM website, along with e-mail communications and the RCM's annual open day. For further information see:

<https://www.rcm.ac.uk/apply/>

<https://www.rcm.ac.uk/apply/feesandfunding/>

The RCM's current and recent Access and Participation Plans, accompanied by its policies relating to fair admissions and equality, diversity and inclusion and annual fee summaries are available at

<https://www.rcm.ac.uk/about/strategies-values/people-equality-diversity/> A summary version of this plan will also be published at the same link following approval by the OfS.

Once enrolled, students receive a comprehensive range of orientation events during Induction Week to help them understand where and how to access information and support. A Study Skills module is embedded in the curriculum for the first term to help them adjust to higher education. The main information resource is the RCM's Virtual Learning Environment, Learn.RCM, which hosts a range of resources and signposts the routes to access support services. Individual meetings are held at regular intervals with an allocated personal advisor and other teaching and support staff.

³⁷ <https://discoveruni.gov.uk/>

ANNEX A – ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE

Further information and analysis relating to the identification and prioritisation of key risks to equality of opportunity

1. Institutional context

The RCM is a small, specialist institution with a total population of around 950 students, devoted to the study of classical music. It offers a single undergraduate course, the Bachelor of Music (Hons) Programme, with an average UK-domiciled undergraduate intake of around 60 students per year.

As a small institution the RCM does not have the data analysis capacity of a large multi-disciplinary institution, so it is not feasible to assess all potential risks against all groups known to be under-represented in UK Higher Education, or against each stage of the student lifecycle.

Resources such as the OfS' Access and Participation Data Dashboard are of very limited benefit, as most data are suppressed due to small numbers. Therefore, HESA and other internal data sources have been used as the basis for this assessment of performance. These also have limitations, since it is challenging to identify trends reliably when data sets are too small to produce statistically significant results, even when data are aggregated. Analysis of intersectionality of characteristics is in most cases not practical as the sample sizes are so small. Care must also be taken to ensure the presentation of data does not identify individuals, in line with the RCM's data protection duties. Percentages have been used wherever possible to avoid this, however this can have the effect of making differences appear more significant than they are, with a difference of a single student causing a swing of 20% of more in some cases. Figures have been rounded/suppressed where appropriate.

2. Approach to assessment of performance

In light of this context the RCM has used the following to prioritise areas of performance to investigate in more detail, in order to provide an evidence-based approach to identifying the greatest risks to equality of opportunity at this institution:

- Review of performance against targets in the RCM's Access and Participation Plan 2020/21 – 2024/25
- Recent national data and research regarding the HE and music education sectors
- Analysis of HESA and internal data on the different stages of the student lifecycle: access, continuation, completion, attainment, progression
- Student and staff feedback regarding the current greatest areas of concern for students

These will be considered in the context of the [OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register \(EORR\)](#), with particular focus on the priorities highlighted by the OfS in its Access and Participation Plan guidance, notably the expectation that institutions will consider student mental health and pre-16 attainment.

This assessment of performance will enable the RCM to identify which of these risks are most significant for RCM applicants and students at the current time.

3. Review of performance against targets in current Access and Participation Plan (2020/21 – 2024/25)

At the point of developing the RCM's previous Access and Participation Plan, the assessment of performance indicated that the RCM's greatest challenges lay in Access, and three key objectives were set to reflect this:

3.1 To reduce the gap in participation in HE for students from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR4 quintiles 5 and 1)

The RCM aimed to increase the percentage of UK domiciled undergraduate entrants from quintile 1 from a baseline of 4.68% (2017/18) to 9% (three year rolling average).

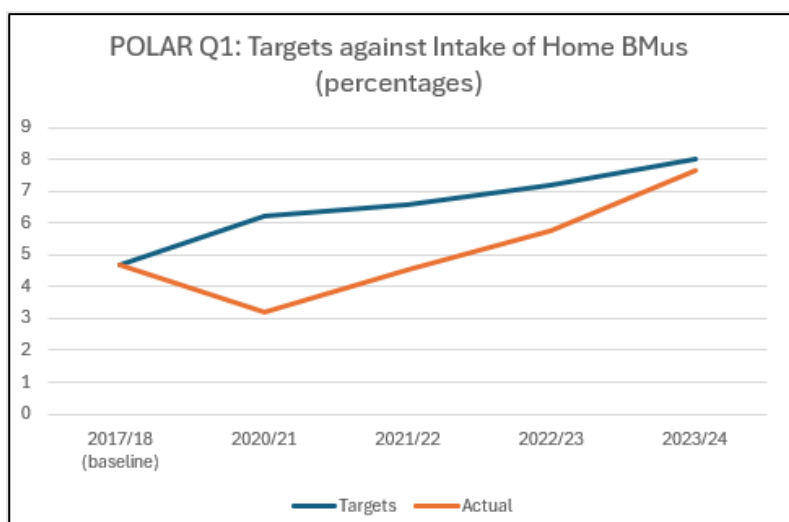


Fig. 3.1a Percentage of students from POLAR4 quintile 1 (three year rolling average)

At the time of writing (Spring 2024) the RCM is part-way through the final recruitment cycle of the current plan. Whilst performance against this target has been below benchmark, there has nonetheless been definite progress and results are now close to benchmark. This is encouraging given the unforeseen challenges during the lifetime of the plan, notably the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-21 and the increased cost of living which disproportionately affects those from disadvantaged backgrounds, along with the increasing challenge of accessing high quality music teaching provision in state schools (see below).

It remains clear that there is more work to do to ensure equality of access to a conservatoire education for those from disadvantaged areas who are less likely to participate in HE. However, with the discontinuation of POLAR as a key national dataset, it will be necessary to consider different measures to continue this work.

3.2 To reduce the gap in participation in HE for students from black and ethnic minority backgrounds

The RCM aimed to increase the percentage of UK domiciled undergraduate entrants who identify as coming from a BAME³⁸ background from a baseline of 10% (2017-18) to 14% (in line with the most recent national census data at the time of writing).

³⁸ Following consultation with staff and students as part of its wider Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work, the RCM avoids use of the acronym "BAME" internally, however it is used here for consistency with the terminology used in national KPIs at the time of drafting the 2020-25 APP.

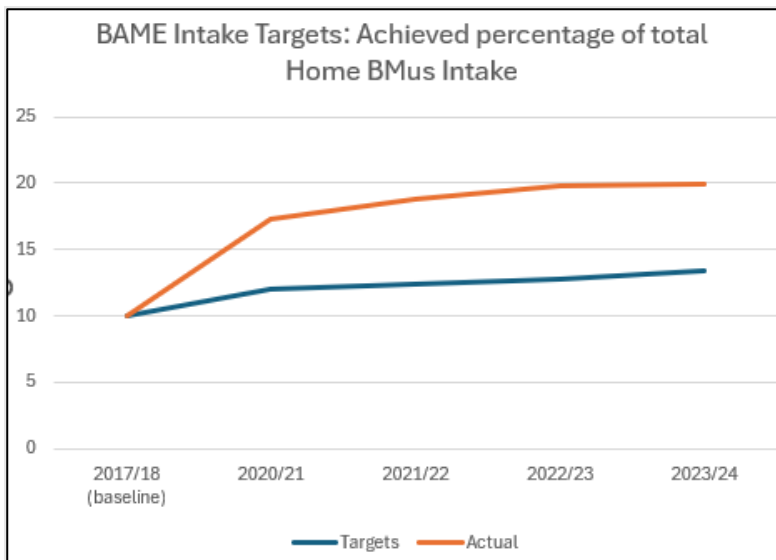


Fig. 3.2a Percentage of students from black and ethnic minority backgrounds (three year rolling average)

As shown in figure 3.2a substantial progress has been made in this area, with the RCM comfortably exceeding its targets. Recruitment is now slightly above the proportion of the population of England and Wales from non-white backgrounds (18.2%) in the 2021 census.³⁹ The main drivers of this have been the offer of scholarships for students from black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds, along with a considerable institution-wide push for cultural change which has included diversifying the curriculum (especially performance repertoire) and improving visibility and representation of those from more diverse backgrounds in all areas of the RCM's work. There has also been significant work by the RCM's Junior Department in diversifying the student body in our under-18 programme, which serves as a pipeline to HE (see section 6).

There is undoubtedly more work to be done in this area, as some ethnic minority groups remain better represented than others (see section 5), and as identified in research such as a 2021 study commissioned by Arts Council England there is still a need for greater diversity in the classical music industry and music teaching.⁴⁰ The RCM considers it has a vital role to play here as a pipeline to the profession and will continue its work, including collaboration with external organisations to promote an inclusive environment.

3.3 To contribute to reducing the national inequality of access to high quality music education by offering a pathway of learning, allowing those from under-represented groups to access and develop the skills needed to progress to higher music education

The RCM aimed to ensure 90% of RCM Sparks Juniors participants were on track to achieve the required standard for audition to any junior conservatoires by the end of the 4-year programme. The programme is aimed at 5 - 9 year olds from Access backgrounds:

39

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021>

⁴⁰ Cox, T. and Kilshaw, H. (2021), *Creating a more inclusive classical music: A study of the English orchestral workforce and the current routes to joining it*, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Executive_Summary.pdf

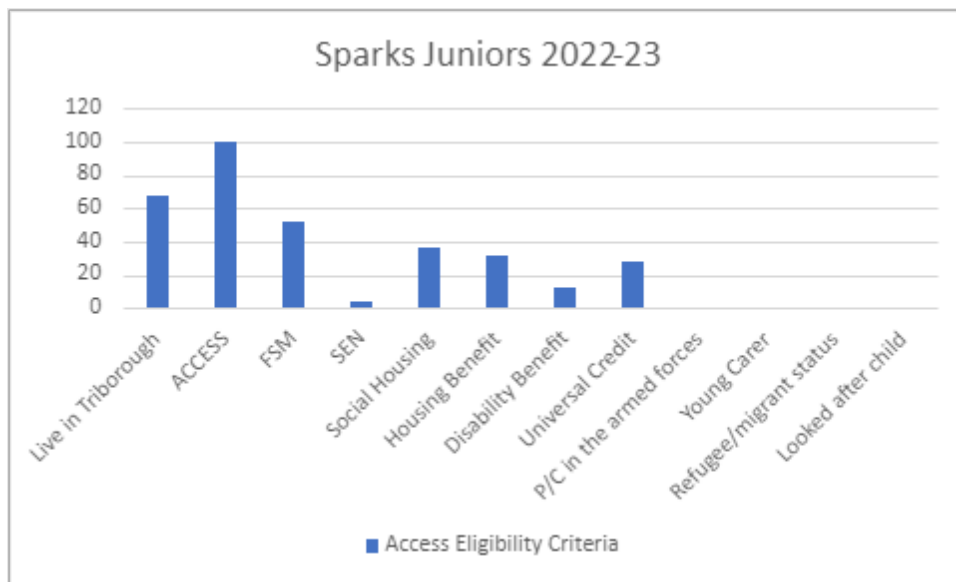


Fig. 3.3a Background of 25 Sparks Juniors participants in 2022-23 (%)

The first graduating cohort for the Sparks Junior programme was due to complete in 2021/22. Unfortunately Covid-19 created progression barriers to the students' development during 2020-21, particularly with all Sparks Juniors instrumental lessons taking place fully online over the year. There were challenges for all providers in pivoting to online tuition, but these were particularly pronounced for the delivery of practical subjects such as music, especially to maintain engagement with such young learners.⁴¹ On the return to face-to-face learning in September 2021, it was apparent that some children struggled with note reading. Post-pandemic it was agreed to pause recruitment to the Sparks Juniors pathway for a year. This enabled the RCM to redirect resources to provide an extra year for children in year 3, allowing them to catch up on their learning that had been hindered by Covid-19.

The freeze on recruitment in the 2022-23 academic year therefore saw the continuation of three year groups in years 2, 3, and 4. A recovery curriculum of theoretical knowledge support during the three musicianship lessons accelerated learning for many of the children and the results have shown the children are on the most part playing at a level in line with their projected development. Progress against targets is therefore as follows to date:

RCM Sparks graduating cohort	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Benchmark	60%	70%	80%	90%
Percentage achieving required standard to audition to any junior conservatoires	N/a – additional year offered post-Covid	64%	90%	-

After auditioning for the RCM Junior Department in Easter 2023, two Sparks Juniors (a violinist and clarinetist) entered the RCMJD main programme from September 2023 and one additional clarinetist joined on an associate place, ahead of re-auditioning to the main programme in Spring 2024. Further graduates from the programme also progressed to other conservatoire junior departments or alternative high quality music programmes, including partner programmes, such as; two students going to Centre of Young Musicians on scholarships, four children joining the Nucleo Project and two joining Guildhall Young Artists.

Over the 2021-23 academic years support with programme evaluation was provided by [Sound Connections](#). Sound Connections provided the team with a framework and templates to collect parent/pupil feedback, individual case studies, teacher and staff feedback and from wider stakeholders. This template will be used over the coming

⁴¹ Daubney A. and Fautly, M., 202. *U-turns in the fog: the unfolding story of the impact of Covid-19 on music education in England and the UK*, available at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051721000048>

years to collect vital impact data to evidence the efficacy of the programme, improve and adapt its offer when necessary to ensure robust student outcomes.

The data were extremely positive, with 86% of parents and carers observing that their child's personal skills and capacities had developed as follows:

- 86% observed increased wellbeing (with 59% stating significantly)
- 86% observed increase in verbal communication (with 55% stating significantly)
- 86% observed increased problem-solving skills (with 41% stating significantly)

The Sparks Juniors programme is a long-term project that forms just one part of the Sparks Team's wider access and participation work that will be considered as part of the new Plan.

4. The national music education context

"The school you go to, the area where you grow up, and your socioeconomic background largely determine what types of activities are available outside the classroom. There was a direct link between household income and participation for almost all extra-curricular activities which were included in the survey. Children from the poorest households were much less likely to take part in any extra-curricular activity, but particularly music and sport."

Social Mobility Commission: *A unequal playing field* (2019)⁴²

Numbers of A level entries are a useful proxy for understanding the number of young people in the UK studying music at a suitably high standard for entry to higher education. At the time of writing the RCM's Access and Participation Plan 2020-25 (spring 2019) research jointly commissioned by the RCM and Royal Academy of Music found that:⁴³

- Areas with lower levels of A-level music entry tended to correlate with lower POLAR ratings and greater levels of deprivation.
- The proportional distribution of A-level entries by POLAR rating had remained relatively stable across a five-year period, indicating that the decline in entries was across all POLAR quintiles.
- Independent schools account for a disproportionately high number of A-level music entries when compared against national entry statistics.

A range of research including a report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education⁴⁴ supported these findings, highlighting that music was no longer being taught across key stage 3 in 50% of state schools, or being offered as little as one day a year, despite it officially being a statutory requirement until the end of year 9. A British Phonographic Industry (BPI) survey in 2019 found that only 12% of the most deprived schools have an orchestra, compared to 85% of independent schools.⁴⁵

Since then the situation has deteriorated further, with a recent report by the Independent Society of Musicians (ISM) making for concerning reading.⁴⁶ Music provision in many schools has been significantly reduced due to budget

⁴² Social Mobility Commission, 2019. *An Unequal Playing Field: Extra-Curricular Activities, Soft Skills and Social Mobility*. Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818679/An_Unequal_Playing_Field_report.pdf

⁴³ Whittaker, A. et al, 2019. *Geographical and social demographic trends of A-level music students*. Available at: <http://researchonline.rcm.ac.uk/502/>

⁴⁴ Daubney, A., Spruce, G., Annetts, D., 2019. *Music Education: State of the Nation*. London, UK: All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education, <https://www.ism.org/images/images/State-of-the-Nation-Music-Education-WEB.pdf>

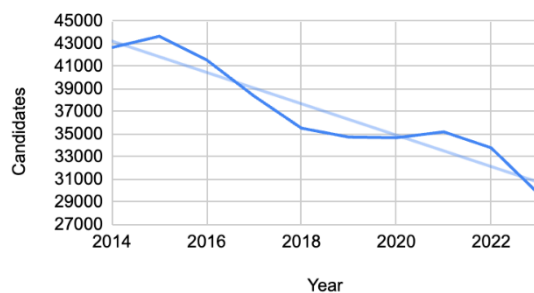
⁴⁵ BPI, 2019. BPI calls on Government to tackle growing inequality in access to music in state schools, <https://www.bpi.co.uk/news-analysis/bpi-calls-on-government-to-tackle-growing-inequality-in-access-to-music-in-state-schools>

⁴⁶ Independent Society of Musicians, 2022. *Music: A subject in peril*, <https://www.ism.org/music-in-peril/>

cuts, falling teacher numbers and measures such as the introduction of the EBacc which encourage schools to focus on core subjects such as English and Maths to the detriment of provision for creative subjects. The Covid-19 pandemic also had a significant impact: an ISM survey in 2020 found that 68% of primary music teachers and 39% of secondary teachers stated that music provision was being reduced as a direct result of the pandemic⁴⁷ and in many schools this provision has not recovered. As shown in the charts below, more recent research indicates that the situation looks only likely to worsen:

GCSE Music (entrants from England only)

2014-2023 from JCQ data



A Level Music (entrants from England only)

2014-2015 from JCQ data

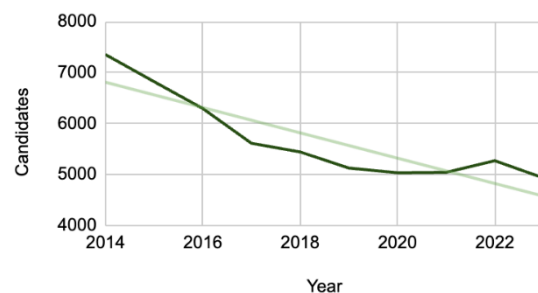


Fig. 4a Decline in Music GCSE and A Level entries, based on JCQ data

In a report by Birmingham City University in 2021, the authors extrapolated that the pattern of decline in A Level Music entries could theoretically lead to no entries whatsoever by the year 2033.⁴⁸

With reduced provision for music teaching in school time, children in the UK are increasingly reliant on access to private extra-curricular music making opportunities. However, as shown in a report by the Child Poverty Action Group: "The cost of participating fully in musical opportunities at school is preventing pupils in low-income families from flourishing. Limited and stretched household incomes are directly having an impact on engagement and achievement in music for young people in England."⁴⁹

This means that the pool of potential candidates for entry to the RCM, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, is being eroded, and the challenge of ensuring equality of opportunity for access is only increasing. This is not something the RCM can solve on its own: the scale of the issue will need investment at national level from primary level upwards over a generation to improve. In this context it is likely to prove stretching for conservatoires even to maintain numbers of students admitted from lower socio-economic backgrounds, still less increase them. However, the RCM has an important role to play as an advocate for the importance of music education, and to play its part in contributing to raising skills and ensuring that those who do reach the required standard have the opportunity to pursue higher music education.

5. Review of student lifecycle

Based on previous performance, internal staff and student feedback and the priorities of the OfS, the RCM has identified a number of specific groups to focus on for further analysis of current performance:

- Disabled students (including those declaring a mental health condition)

⁴⁷ Underhill, J., 2020). The Heart of the school is missing: Music education in the COVID-19 crisis https://www.ism.org/images/files/ISM_UK-Music-Teachers-survey-report_Dec-2020_A4_ONLINE-2.pdf

⁴⁸ Whittaker, A. and Fautley, M., 2021. *A-level music decline and disadvantage attainment gaps*. Available at: <https://bcuassets.blob.core.windows.net/docs/a-level-report-290621-pdf-132695100641559063.pdf>

⁴⁹ Child Poverty Action Group, 2022. *The Cost of the School Day in England: Pupils Perspectives*, <https://cpag.org.uk/news/cost-school-day-england-pupils-perspectives>

- Black, Asian and ethnically diverse students
- Students from disadvantaged / lower income households (Free School Meals, IMD quintiles 1 and 2)

The RCM acknowledges that there are other groups of students who are currently under-represented in higher education, including but not limited to: mature students and those with parental/caring responsibility; care experienced students; estranged students; service children; commuter students and those who are first in their family to apply for higher education. For these students the RCM either does not hold data, or their numbers are so low that it is not feasible to carry out any statistically significant analysis or present data without identifying individuals. In the case of commuter students, there is not yet a sector-wide definition for this group.⁵⁰ The RCM attempts to identify students with additional support needs through a support declaration form, which enables the Student Services team to enter into dialogue with them and provide bespoke support prior to commencement and during study.

In carrying out the analysis below, it should be noted that the time period covers the academic years most impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic (2020/21 and 2021/22). These are anomalous years and any conclusions drawn from the data must consider that context.

5.1 Access

As discussed in section 3, equality of access has been a focus of the RCM's work in recent years. Whilst for some groups there are no significant differences in equality of access, in others there are continuing challenges, notably students' financial circumstances.

5.1.1 Disabled students

The number of registered students declaring a disability is slightly higher than the average for all OfS-registered HE providers (17.4% in 2021-22)⁵¹, indicating that, for most students, disability is not a barrier to entry to the RCM:

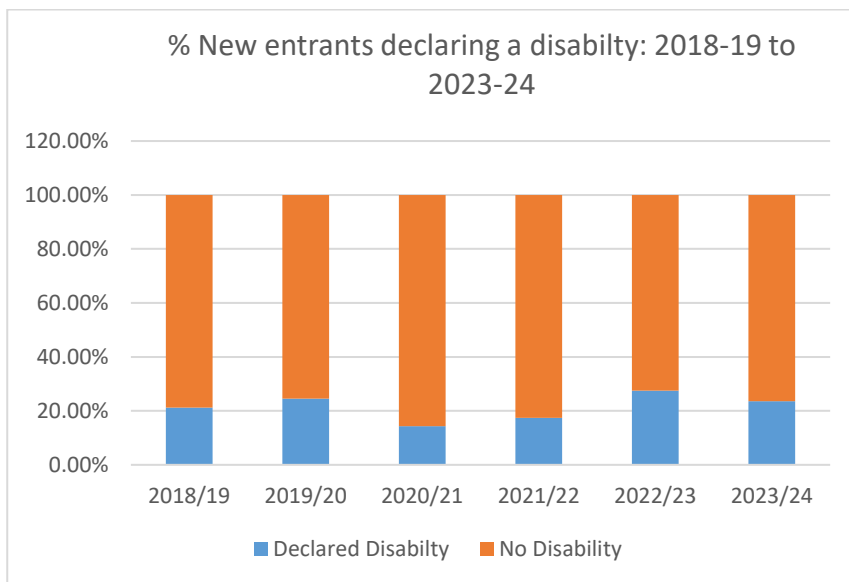


Fig 5.1.1a UK domiciled undergraduate new entrants declaring a disability⁵²

As part of this analysis the RCM reviewed this data at a more granular level, considering students with Specific Learning Difficulties, students with a declared mental health condition, those with physical disabilities and those with

⁵⁰ Maslin, E. 2024. *The sector is still often talking at cross purposes over commuter students*. Wonkhe: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/the-sector-is-still-often-talking-at-cross-purposes-over-commuter-students/>

⁵¹ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/>

⁵² RCM internal data

another form of disability. The numbers within each group were so small that it was impossible to present them here without identifying individuals, or to draw any firm conclusions about trends. No statistically significant differences were noted between these groups.

5.1.2 Black, Asian and ethnically diverse students

As demonstrated in section 3, significant progress has been made in this area and the number of RCM students from ethnic minority backgrounds is now broadly representative of the UK population. RCM internal data indicates that students who identify as coming from minority ethnic backgrounds have an application success rate at least as high as their counterparts who are white or did not declare their ethnicity, so it is not considered that there is a risk of applicants not being accepted despite being qualified. Nonetheless, as shown in the chart below there is still a smaller percentage of non-white students compared to the national average for UK HE providers:⁵³

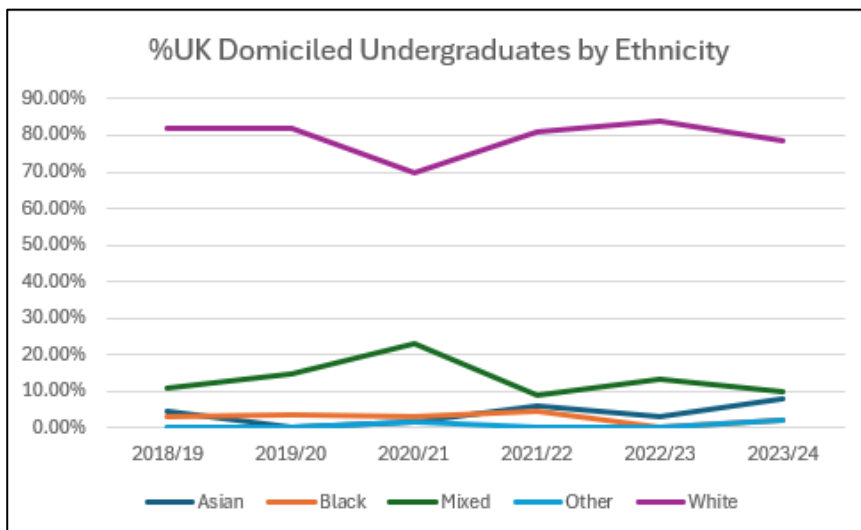


Fig. 5.1.2a ethnicity of RCM UK domiciled undergraduate new entrants⁵⁴

It is notable that for students from mixed backgrounds, the RCM exceeds the performance nationally, whilst students from black and Asian backgrounds remain slightly less represented than the national average. It would be impractical to set meaningful objectives targeting individual ethnic groups due to the very small numbers involved, and it would be impossible to report on any such target as it would unavoidably identify individuals. However, there is further work to be done to contribute towards a more diverse classical music sector and the RCM intends to continue the access work currently taking place in this area, most notably the scholarships for black, Asian and ethnically diverse students, which have been shown to influence students' decision to accept a place at the RCM (see Annex B).

5.1.3 Lower income households

There are challenges in selecting suitable measures to use to identify students from disadvantaged socio-economic areas, especially for a small institution with more limited data processing capacity.

In its last Access and Participation Plan the RCM focused on POLAR4 data. However, this is no longer going to be updated by the OfS, making it unsuitable to use as a measure for this new Plan. In any case, there are issues with using postcode-based measures, especially when recruiting from urban areas such as London where the richest and poorest districts can sit side by side. The RCM has also experienced challenges tracking students through the student lifecycle based on postcode, as this changes if students move house. This would not be so significant for a larger student body but creates issues in a small institution where one student can significantly alter the percentage of students from a particular group. There is also a particular problem for conservatoires, as many applicants attend residential specialist music schools (often supported by government bursaries) and will in many cases give the school address in their UCAS form rather than their home address, leading to inaccurate data. Datasets such as TUNDRA

⁵³ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/>

⁵⁴ RCM internal data

and ABCS are similarly postcode-based and not currently available directly in our student records system from UCAS; data must be looked up manually which makes their use administratively impractical for a small admissions team.

5.1.3.1 English Index of Multiple Deprivation

As a postcode-based measure (that furthermore only covers England) IMD data is subject to all the issues identified above. It is also not available directly in UCAS weblink records, so the RCM has found it less practical to use when assessing applications or targeting support packages. However, it is still useful to review performance for the purposes of this assessment. In most registered UK HE providers numbers of students from quintiles 1 and 2 (the most deprived areas) has increased in recent years⁵⁵, but they remain low at the RCM. Likely causes are the music education pipeline discussed in section 3, and the increased cost of living (see section 6).

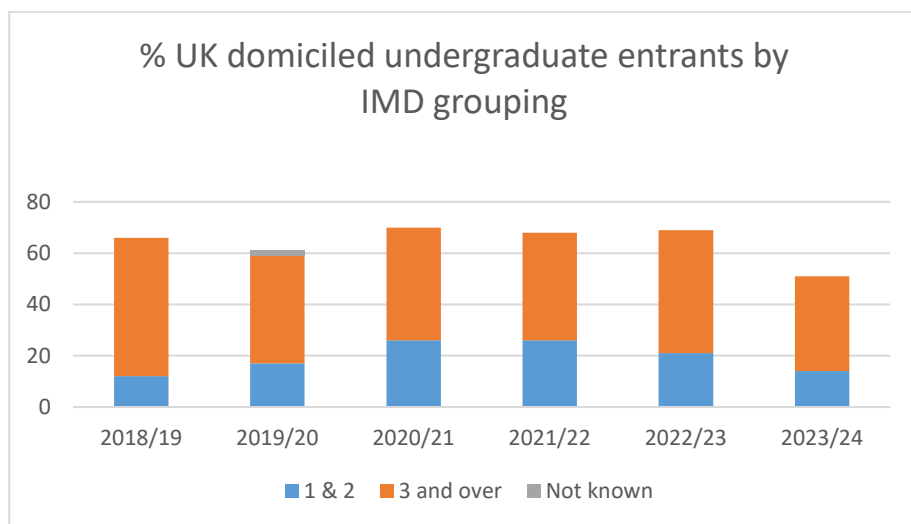


Fig 5.1.3a Percentage of UK domiciled UG entrants grouped by lower and upper IMD quintile⁵⁶

5.1.3.2 Free School Meals

Free School Meals (FSM) data has been made available to the RCM in a reportable format for the first time for the 2024-25 recruitment cycle since the transition to receiving applicant data from UCAS via xml-link. We do not yet have a complete cycle of data, so this cannot yet be used as a formal benchmark. However at the time of writing (March 2024) 8.2% of UK-domiciled undergraduate applicants and 7.3% of offer holders for September 2024 entry are flagged as being eligible for free school meals. This compares to 18.4% of new entrants to all registered UK HE providers in the most recent year for which data is available (2021-22).⁵⁷ This supports the research above indicating that the most financially disadvantaged school students struggle to access high quality music tuition to enable them to progress to conservatoire education.

Again, within these lower income groups the RCM does not believe that there is an issue with application success: the acceptance rate for the 2024 cycle for those eligible for FSM (as at March 2024) stands at 23.3% compared to 24.3% for those not receiving FSM, so there is no significant difference. Rather the pipeline issue described above leads to a shortage of potential applicants with the necessary skills to audition. There is also a risk that applicants may lack advice and guidance from individuals with experience of conservatoires to support them through the audition process or perceive that a conservatoire education is “not for them”.

⁵⁵ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/>

⁵⁶ RCM internal data

⁵⁷ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/>

5.2 Continuation

The RCM has consistently had very high continuation rates for many years, but a small increase in the number of mid-course leavers was seen in 2022/23. The numbers involved are too small to draw any firm conclusions as to whether that represents a trend, but data for the academic year to date and feedback from academic support staff for 2023/24 also indicate that there are greater numbers of students known to be at risk of dropping out in 2023/24. The reasons why a student may consider leaving are often complex and take into account multiple reasons, but financial pressures are a significant factor for many of those at risk of leaving. This evidence tallies with the increase in applications to the RCM Hardship Fund noted in section 6.2. The number of leavers each year is too small to carry out any further analysis by demographic group.

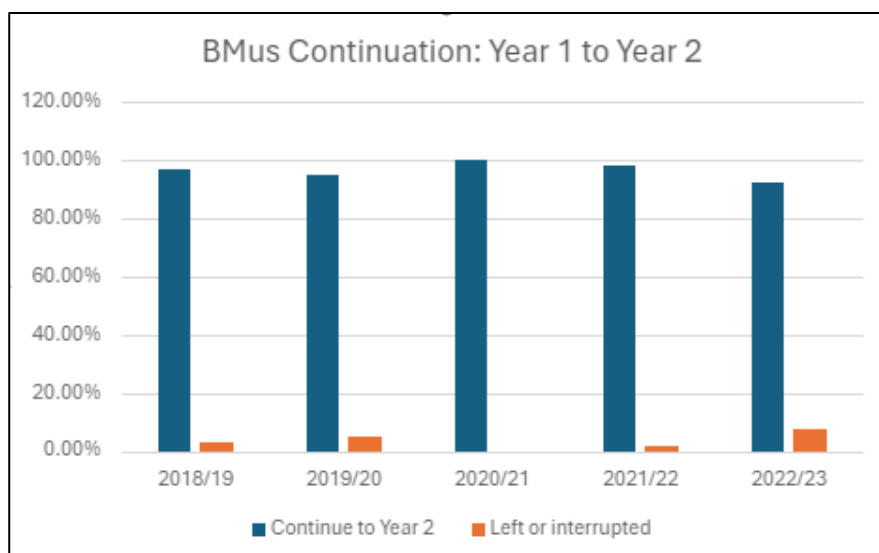


Fig.5.2a Analysis of percentage of UK-domiciled RCM BMus students who left or interrupted at the end of their first year

The RCM does not currently hold reportable data on reasons for early leaving or interruption at a sufficiently granular level to analyse trends in the reasons behind these decisions on more detail, or to cross-reference against specific demographic groups. Furthermore, there will often be a complex mix of contributing factors, meaning that for the majority of RCM students the reason for their decision to leave is recorded as “personal reasons”. Even if more detailed data were available in a reportable format, the size of the available sample would likely be too small to be statistically significant, although the RCM could possibly explore whether it is possible to collect this data in more granular detail and cross reference against student records and welfare data.

It should also be noted that not all decisions to leave are negative; sometimes a student will change their mind about their career path and successfully transfer to a different course at a different institution, and this flexibility is to be encouraged where it supports their best interests.

5.3 Completion

The RCM has only tiny numbers of final year UK-domiciled undergraduate students who fail to successfully complete their final year of their degree in any given year, and most years none at all, meaning that any comparative analysis is very difficult. Therefore we have focused analysis in more detail on student success rates.

5.4 Success

To compare student success rates the RCM analysed the percentage of students awarded degree classifications of 2:i or 1st across different groups. It should be noted that the sample period includes the pandemic years 2020-21 and 2021-22 when a “no detriment” policy was in place, so like most of the sector the RCM saw fluctuations in the

classifications awarded. Figure 5 (below) shows the UK domiciled students gaining a BMus degree in each of the years shown. Data were aggregated across four years to provide a useable data sample.

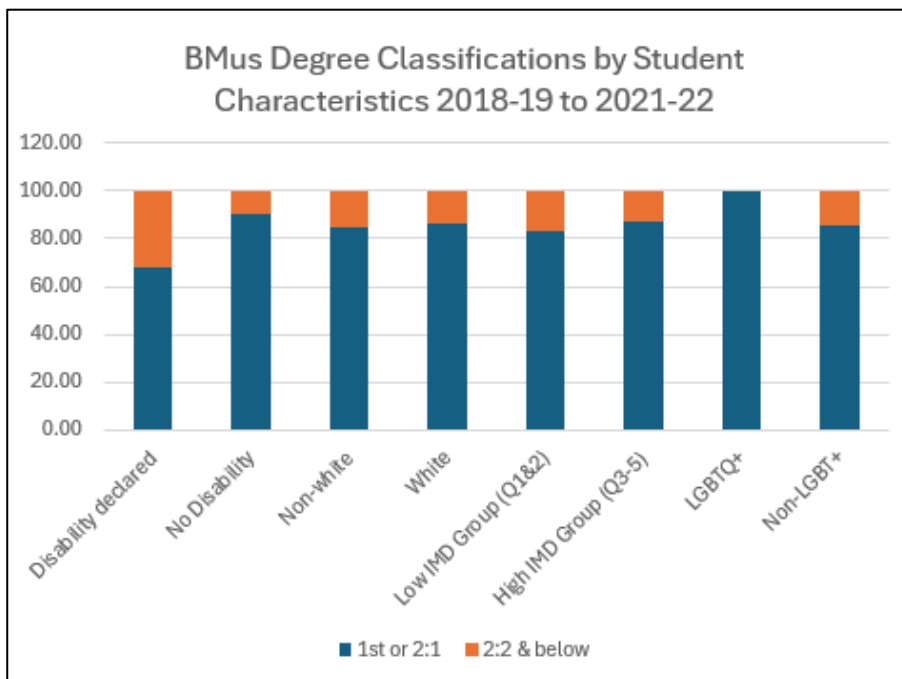


Fig 5.4a Analysis of RCM BMus degree classifications by student group⁵⁸

The data indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in outcomes for white and non-white students, or those from higher or lower IMD quintiles. In this category the analysis also considered the attainment of LGBTQ+ students, who national evidence suggests may be at greater risk of mental health issues (for which lower academic performance can be an indicator). However, again there was not statistically significant difference from their peers.

This chart does at first sight suggest that there may be a difference in outcomes for those declaring a disability, although due to the very small numbers of students even using aggregated data this should be treated with caution. These numbers make further analysis challenging, however the RCM reviewed performance by groups of types of disability. The analysis showed no statistically significant difference in performance for most groups (indeed for some their outcomes were better than average for their cohort).

The only area where there was some evidence of lower outcomes was for students with a specific learning disability or communication disability. However, this was only present in the data for 2018/19 and 2019/20 and appeared to have returned to a typical spread of degree outcomes for these students in 2020/21 and 2021/22. This is notable as 2020/21 was the year the RCM implemented a revised BMus programme following its regular review cycle, that made the programme significantly more flexible and accessible. The new programme introduced an inclusive assessment approach that gave students greater choice and agency, whilst reducing reliance on extended academic writing to demonstrate learning outcomes. In addition, a move to more practice-led approaches in musicianship and historical studies enabled RCM students to work to their strengths as performers and composers.

Whilst the RCM has only one undergraduate course, and, due to its size, does not have the scope to introduce more, the BMus course incorporates [numerous pathways and options](#), enabling students to tailor their learning to their principal study (instrument) and strengths, focusing to a greater or lesser extent on practical elements depending on their academic aptitude and interests. From 2020/21 the RCM also introduced additional support elements such as a personal academic tutor for every undergraduate student. The RCM will ensure this positive trajectory is maintained, but it is not considered that this currently presents a high risk for further intervention.

⁵⁸ RCM internal data

5.5 Progression to employment or further study

The most recent year of data available for analysis of progression to employment or further study is the Graduate Outcomes survey 2020-21.⁵⁹ It is difficult to compare this data to previous years due to the change in the way the data were collected nationally. Due to small numbers and a relatively low response rate (37%) these data should be treated with some caution. It should also be noted that the survey does not account well for the typical “portfolio career”, which is the norm for most musicians, combining part-time performance work with teaching, outreach or arts administration work, generally on a self-employed basis. Nonetheless the survey shows a very high number of students in work or further study, with only 4% of graduates reporting being unemployed, compared to 5% within the HE sector (notably this is the cohort who graduated at the peak of the pandemic when much of the arts sector was shut down):

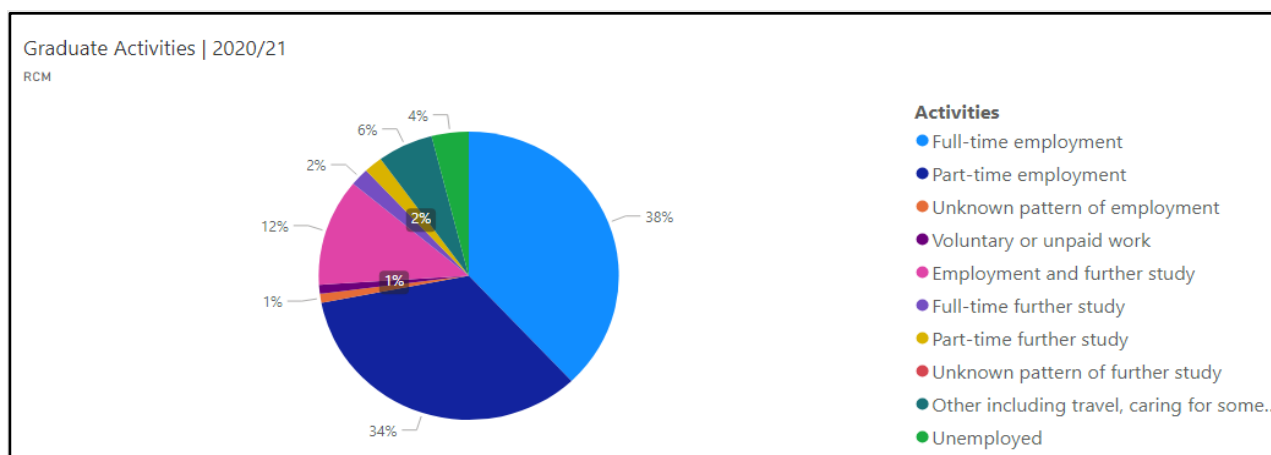


Fig 5.5a Progression to work or further study 15 months after course completion, RCM graduating cohort 2020-21

Respondents with a declared disability were more likely than the overall cohort to be in work or further study:

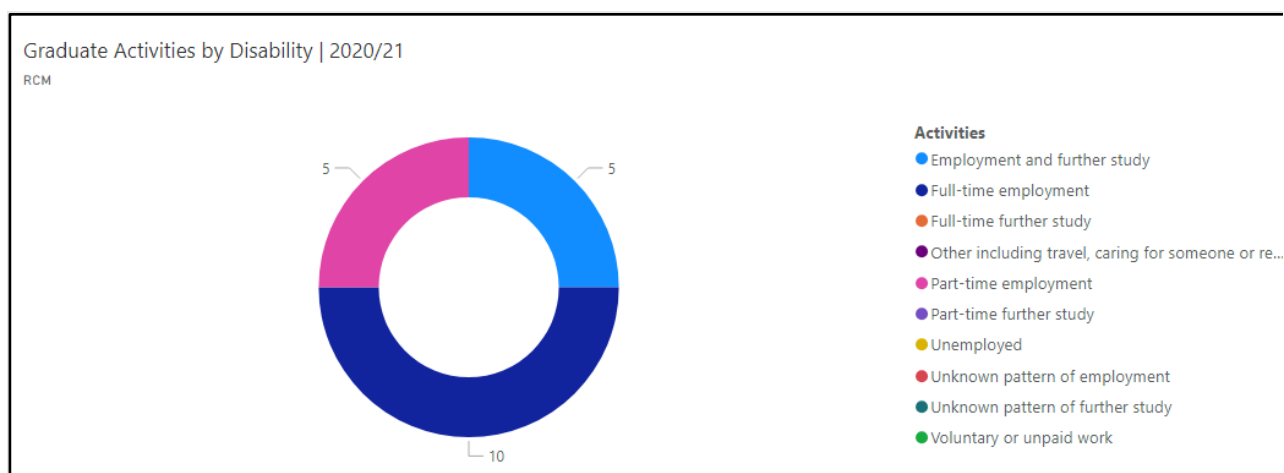


Fig 5.5b Progression to work or further study 15 months after course completion, respondents with declared disabilities, RCM graduating cohort 2020-21

The data by ethnic group are mostly suppressed due to low numbers of responses, but similarly indicate that no respondents from minority ethnic backgrounds were unemployed. Data is not available for other groups.

The job market in the performing arts sector remains challenging, with funding cuts to many organisations such as the recent well-publicised case of English National Opera. The RCM’s [Creative Careers Centre](#) plays an essential

⁵⁹ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/graduates/releases>

role in preparing students for the industry, with professional and entrepreneurial skills embedded in the curriculum from the first year of undergraduate study. The Centre also provides an extensive range of extra-curricular support and professional opportunities, which continue for five years after graduation, and this will continue to be an important pillar of the RCM's work. However, as there are no significant differences in performance from underrepresented groups, this is assessed as a lower priority area of the student lifecycle for Access and Participation work.

6. Further consideration of key risk areas

6.1 Knowledge and skills: Raising pre-16 attainment

Whilst many conservatoire entrants are very academically gifted, academic attainment is not the primary measure used to assess suitability for entry. Admission is based on performance at audition: either a practical performance for instrumentalists and singers or a portfolio of work and interview for composers. To be a viable applicant for conservatoire study, most young musicians will need to have commenced learning an instrument between the ages of 5 and 9, making the challenges of access to music education at a young age discussed in section 3 all the more significant. The RCM's learning and participation team, RCM Sparks, and the RCM Junior Department (RCMJD) work together to provide a comprehensive range of activities to engage young people at all stages of their musical journey, and a coherent pathway to Higher Education.

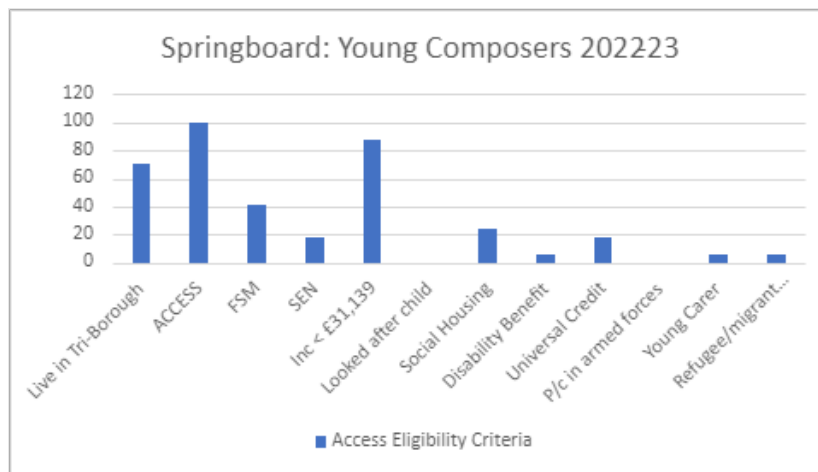
6.1a Widening Participation: RCM Sparks

RCM Sparks run a series of public events and activities for schools both at the Royal College of Music and online, as well as a special programme in our local area, partnering with other organisations to provide the benefits of music education where they are most needed in the community. The RCM Sparks team works with young musicians of all ages from pre-school up to 18. This includes the Sparks Juniors programme (see section 3.3). All work is based around clear learning pathways, which cater for children's changing needs as they develop, so we can continue to foster musicianship and learning skills year-on-year throughout their educational journey. Most of the Sparks programme is on offer free of charge, funded through active fundraising and supported by RCM core funds. In the most recent complete academic year (2022-23):

- i. RCM Sparks offered a varied and high-quality music education programme across the academic year providing over 100 practical workshops for children, young people and families.
- ii. RCM Sparks delivered bespoke school activity offering live music experiences to over 2700 children from all educational phases.
- iii. 83% of those engaged in the Sparks programme were from hard to reach or under-represented groups.
- iv. RCM Sparks trained and provided extended, practical workshop experiences to over 155 RCM students and graduates, 49% of which took part in at least two or more Sparks practical projects and 24 of whom were involved in a term or year-long mentoring projects
- v. RCM Sparks curated Music education curriculum placements for over 195 RCM students.

In recent years RCM Sparks has prioritised embedding more robust evaluation of its programmes, and as a result has been adapting its offering to increase the focus on activity that supports the pipeline to HE for secondary school aged learners. Examples include:

- Springboard: a year-long programme for young people from Year 9 up, to support skills in composition and music creation. 17 different young people took part in 2022/23, all from under-represented groups. One student from the first cohort successfully gained a place at RCMJD starting in September 2023 supported by a full bursary.



- Partnership with IntoUniversity (IU), to reach local young people who would not normally engage with HE pathways. Sparks delivers a termly series of workshops within five local centres: Brent, North Kensington, Hammersmith, Haringey and North Islington. In 2022-23, RCM Sparks delivered 12 practical music making workshops in both IntoUniversity Centre and the Royal College of Music with 226 participants. IU Data from 2022-23 showed that 61% of IntoUniversity 2023 alumni progressed to Higher Education, compared to 28% of students from similar backgrounds nationally.

6.1 b Pipeline to HE: RCM Junior Department

The RCMJD is a Saturday school offering advanced training at the highest level to young musicians aged 7-18. It provides an individually tailored timetable for each student comprising one-to-one instrument/voice/composition lessons, supported by chamber music, orchestra, choir and musicianship classes. The RCMJD team has been working hard to diversify the pipeline of students to higher music education. Figures for the 2022/23 cohort showed that:

- There was a small decrease in the number of JD students who attend state schools (40%) in 22/23. However, many of these students started their RCMJD musical journey whilst attending state schools. Students who join the programme make excellent musical progress, and often go on to gain major music scholarships at independent schools. For example, one of the first cohort from the RCM's partnership with Nucleo (see below) won a 110% scholarship to Eton after three years on our programme.
- 56% of RCMJD students attend independent schools as music scholars, and of those students 18% receive significant financial assistance to pay their school fees.
- 11.1% of JD students who attend state school qualify for free school meals. Notably, many of these students live in POLAR4 regions 4-5, illustrating how POLAR is not always a good indicator of need.
- 27% of JD students are supported by a partial or full bursary to meet their RCMJD fees
- 11.3% have Specific Learning Needs or a Disability

53% of RCMJD students in 22/23 were from a non-white or mixed background, compared with 47% in 21/22. This is representative of the fact that around half of JD participants come from the highly diverse London area, whereas the senior College recruits nationally to a greater extent and is more representative of the UK-wide population.

The annual auditions continue to reveal huge disparities in the quality and quantity of musical opportunities that young people have enjoyed and the extent to which their musical potential has been nurtured prior to audition. Some have enjoyed private tuition for many years, whilst others have had limited access to musical lessons and have little or no

experience of ensemble music making. Local education authorities no longer provide free peripatetic music teaching in schools and this severely limits access to music provision for groups under-represented in HE generally (as well as at the RCM specifically). As a result, only small numbers of students from under-represented groups have an opportunity during their formative years to study a musical instrument to a level sufficient to be likely to be offered a place to study at the RCM, or RCMJD.

The number of applications received from students in POLAR4 regions 1-3 in 2023 rose in 2022/23 (55 applications, compared with 36 in 2021). The number of students offered places from POLAR 1-3 areas also rose slightly, with 13 students offered places in 2022, compared with 8 offers in 2021. 10 of the 13 students (77%) accepted their offer of a place.

These figures reveal a significant and widening imbalance in the number of UK applications from POLAR4 regions 1-3 (14.4%) compared with POLAR4 regions 4-5 (85.6%). There was also a further reduction in the number of applicants from students in Years 10/11 (GCSE) and those playing brass instruments (particularly horn, trombone and tuba). Increasing academic demands placed on students in schools and the reduction (or in some cases, demise) of musical activity in schools continues to have a significant impact. To attempt to counteract the impact of this on recruitment, students from partner access programmes, were offered free live auditions and were not required to provide recordings.

Over the lifetime of the previous Plan, the RCMJD has developed important partnerships with organisations working in under-represented communities, such as [Nucleo](#) (part of the Sistema movement) and [London Music Masters](#), which have laid valuable foundations for this new APP. By working together, we can ensure young musicians from diverse backgrounds receive the appropriate support at each stage of their musical development.

The RCMJD is committed to ensuring that successful applicants are not prevented from attending the RCMJD through financial hardship. In the 22/23 academic year over £200,000 of bursary support was accessed by families in the most need. The RCM was able to provide bursary funding for all eligible JD families in 22/23 and filled all of its allocated [Music and Dance Scheme \(MDS\)](#) places. Parental income is rigorously assessed according to the criteria set by the government for the MDS scheme.

There has been an increase in the number of RCMJD graduates going on to study music at either conservatoire or university. 64.7% of RCMJD students went on to study music in 2023, compared with 59% in 2022. However, students continue to report that they are being advised by schools to study STEM subjects at university, rather than continuing their musical studies at university or conservatoire. Schools, parents and students are concerned about the financial viability of a career in music.

6.2 Cost pressures

The increased cost-of-living in recent years has seen the price of essentials such as rent, energy bills, travel costs and food soar. A survey by Save the Student in 2023 found the average student's monthly living costs had risen by 17% since 2022.⁶⁰ Recent national research has found that nearly half of students have been forced to cut back on food shopping⁶¹, and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to report skipping meals to save on food costs (33% of those from working class backgrounds).⁶²

In recent years the SLC maintenance loan has not kept pace with inflation: maintenance loans are due to increase by just 2.4% for 2024/25. According to analysis by the Russell Group⁶³ this leaves students with a shortfall of approximately £2000 per year compared to if loans had increased in line with inflation since 2020. Students from the poorest households are most affected by this shortfall.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the threshold for eligibility for the full

⁶⁰ Save the Student!, 2023. Student Money Survey 2023. Available at: <https://www.savethestudent.org/money/surveys/student-money-survey-2023-results.html>

⁶¹ Office for Students, 2023. *Studying during rises in the cost of living*, <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/studying-during-rises-in-the-cost-of-living/>

⁶² Sutton Trust, 2023. *Cost of living and university students*, <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/cost-of-living-and-university-students-2023/>

⁶³ <https://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/policy/policydocuments//briefing-cost-of-living-support-for-students>

⁶⁴ Bolton, P., 2024, *Research briefing: The value of student maintenance support*. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn00916/>

maintenance loan has been set at an annual household income of £25,000 since 2008. If it had risen in line with average earnings, it would now sit at close to £35,000⁶⁵, meaning more and more students from below average economic backgrounds are ineligible for the maximum amount of financial support.

Among applicants, the cost of studying is one of the most regularly cited reasons for not taking up the offer of a place, and a particular concern for those considering moving to London from more affordable regions of the UK. Furthermore, studying music can be expensive in itself: in addition to the usual student equipment (books, laptop), students need high quality instruments and accessories such as strings and reeds.

The ongoing impact of the rise in cost of living has been observed in the RCM's student body: academic staff report that almost every week they are dealing with a student at risk of dropping out due to financial pressures (mirroring findings in the literature⁶⁶) and the Students' Union has raised concerns on several occasions about the number of students struggling financially. Student Services data indicate that the number of applications to the RCM's Hardship Fund has increased exponentially: there has been a 375% increase in applications from 2017/18 to 2022/23 (from 2% of the student body to almost 10% requesting support for in-year financial difficulties). It is not possible to disaggregate UK undergraduate students from the total student population in this data, and due to the way it is collected it is not currently possible to cross-reference against student lifecycle data or other characteristics. However, this provides a strong indicator of the increasing level of need for financial support.

Nationally cost pressures have been found to affect student performance, with students undertaking more paid work than is feasible alongside full-time study and experiencing poor mental health due to financial anxiety.⁶⁷ This is known to disproportionately affect underrepresented groups, including (but not limited to) those from low-income backgrounds, estranged or care experienced students, commuter students and disabled students.⁶⁸

Due to the high level of personal contact associated with conservatoire tuition (with 1:1 tuition, a personal advisor system and small group sizes allowing engagement issues to be identified swiftly) and the level of lifelong dedication required to achieve the required standard to join the RCM, students tend to have very high completion rates. In 2022-23 the undergraduate continuation rate was 93.7%, higher than the sector average of 91.1%, however historically we have seen rates as high as 97%, and as noted above there has been a small decrease in continuation from year 1 to year 2.⁶⁹ Whilst most students currently "make it over the line" and complete their degree, the figures mask the impact on the student experience: many students report they are unable to spend as much time as they ideally should on practicing their instruments, and are experiencing high levels of stress balancing part-time work and study, contributing to poor mental health.

6.3 Mental Health

Students are experiencing increasing challenges in managing their mental health. Recent research by TASO and Kings College London found that between the 2016/17 and 2022/23 academic years, the share of undergraduate students at universities across the UK who said they had experienced mental health difficulties rose from 6% to 16%.⁷⁰ This is supported by multiple studies, including recent research by HEPI showing that levels of student wellbeing are some way below that of the general population.⁷¹ Whilst some of this increase may be due

⁶⁵ Godin, M., 2024. *The increase in student maintenance hides a critical shortfall in financial support for students*, <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2024/01/26/the-increase-in-student-maintenance-hides-a-critical-shortfall-in-support-for-students>

⁶⁶ Nieuwoudt, J., & Pedler, M., 2021. *Student Retention in Higher Education: Why Students Choose to Remain at University*. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 0(0), 1-24.

⁶⁷ ONS, 2023. *Student voices: experiences of the rising cost of living*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/studentvoicesexperiencesoftherisingcostofliving/2023-09-06>

⁶⁸ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register/risk-10-cost-pressures/>

⁶⁹ RCM Annual Programme Monitoring Report 2022-23 (internal)

⁷⁰ Sanders, M., 2023. *Student Mental Health in 2023*, <https://taso.org.uk/news-item/student-mental-health-problems-have-almost-tripled-study-finds/>

⁷¹ HEPI, 2023. *Student Academic Experience Survey*. Available at: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2023.pdf>

to the lessening of the stigma previously associated with declaring mental health problems, this is still a significant change.

The Covid-19 pandemic had a major impact, with 74% of respondents to a 2022 survey by Student Minds indicating that the pandemic had negatively affected their mental health.⁷² Those who were in the final years of school and had to transition to higher education without the usual structures in place found the period particularly challenging, and the effects remain ongoing.⁷³

Musicians have been found to experience greater incidence of mental health issues than the general population⁷⁴, and research suggests that prevalence is even higher in music students.⁷⁵ Reasons identified for this include: lifestyle (keeping unusual hours for practice and performance); isolation when practicing; comparison and competition between students; pressure and stress; challenges with performance feedback; and anxiety about future career prospects⁷⁶. The RCM's [Centre for Performance Science](#), a collaboration with Imperial College London, is at the forefront of research into musicians' health, and modules in healthy practice and musicians' wellbeing are embedded in the undergraduate curriculum.

Nonetheless, the RCM's Student Services team has seen a 50% increase in students accessing counselling services since 2017, with around half presenting with issues relating to anxiety and depression⁷⁷, providing a strong indicator of risk. At present Student Services data is anonymised and it is not possible to cross-reference with institutional data on access and academic performance. This may be an area to develop as part of this Access and Participation Plan, to gain a better understanding of how poor mental health is impacting students.

Students with poor mental health are at risk of lower continuation rates and lower course attainment, and this may affect their progression into work and further study. The RCM does not hold data on which demographic groups are most likely to present with mental health issues, but nationally this is known to be more likely to affect those from low-income households, disabled, mature and LGBTQ+ students and those who are care experienced.⁷⁸

⁷² Student Minds, 2021. *University Mental Health: Life in a Pandemic*. Available at: <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/lifeinapandemic.html>

⁷³ As recognised in the AdvanceHE and HEPI *Student Academic Experience Survey 2023*, available at: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2023.pdf>

⁷⁴ Musicians Union. *Mental Health Support for Musicians*. <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/career-development/career-guides/musicians-wellbeing-guidance-pack/musicians-and-mental-illness-what-is-being-done-to-help>

⁷⁵ Kegelaers, J, Schuijjer, M. and Oudejans, R.R.D., 2020. *Resilience and mental health issues in classical musicians: A preliminary study*; <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0305735620927789>

⁷⁶ Perkins, R. and Reid, H. and Araújo, L. and Clark, T. and Williamon, A., 2017. Perceived enablers and barriers to optimal health among music students: a qualitative study in the music conservatoire setting. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8 (968), available at <http://dx.doi/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00968>

⁷⁷ RCM internal data

⁷⁸ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register/risk-8-mental-health/>

7. Conclusions

Based on the evidence above, the RCM has prioritised the risks to equality of opportunity identified in the EORR as follows:

Risk to equality of opportunity	Risk level
Knowledge and skills necessary for access to conservatoire education	High
Information and guidance to prepare for conservatoire admission	Medium
Perception of higher education, specifically conservatoire education	High
Application success rates	Low
Limited choice of course type and delivery mode	Low
Insufficient academic support	Low
Insufficient personal support	Medium
Mental Health	High
Ongoing impacts of coronavirus	Medium
Cost pressures	High
Capacity issues	Low
Progression from higher education	Low

7.1 Indicators of risk to be used to set targets

It is considered that the greatest priority risks are:

Risk 1: There are lower proportions of applicants from low-income households at the RCM compared to other UK HE providers. Evidence suggests that this may be due to a number of factors:

- Inequality of access to instruments and high quality music education at school resulting in a lack of the knowledge and skills necessary to apply; this may also result in a lack of access to good information and guidance on preparing a successful audition
- Inequality of access to extra-curricular music activities
- Concerns about cost pressures acting as a deterrent to application, or resulting in a lack of family support for pursuing a professional career in music

Risk 2: Despite significant progress there remains a lower percentage of students from black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds at the RCM compared to other UK HEs. Evidence suggests this may be due to:

- A 'leaky' pipeline, where the membership of elite training opportunities for school-aged young people in the UK is significantly more diverse than at undergraduate conservatoire level.⁷⁹ This indicates that diverse young musicians are choosing not to pursue music at conservatoires, possibly due to a lack of family support and/or personal concerns about career prospects as a professional musician.
- A lack of diverse role models in the classical music profession.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Cox, T. and Kilshaw, H. 2021. *Creating a More Inclusive Classical Music A study of the English orchestral workforce and the current routes to joining it*. Available at:

https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Executive_Summary.pdf

⁸⁰ Stevens, A. 25 May 2021. 'Classical Music's Diversity Problem' In *Classical Music*. Available at:

<https://www.classical-music.uk/features/article/classical-music-s-diversity-problem>

- Perceptions of who conservatoire study is for, reinforced by historically very low proportions of black British students at conservatoires compared to other types of HEIs.⁸¹
- Concerns about career prospects acting as a deterrent to application, or resulting in a lack of family support for pursuing a professional career in music

Risk 3: There has been a significant increase in numbers of students who are reporting financial difficulties during their studies and contacting RCM Student Services for hardship support. Evidence suggests this may be due to:

- increasing cost pressures due to the current increase in the cost of living in the UK
- the shortfall in the rate of maintenance loan available, which has not kept pace with inflation

Risk 4: There has been a significant increase in numbers of students who are accessing RCM wellbeing and counselling services in relation to mental health issues (with or without a formal diagnosis). Evidence suggests this may be due to:

- increasing cost pressures
- ongoing impact of the pandemic on students' wellbeing and preparedness for higher education

It should be noted that many of the risks identified above are interrelated. For example, applicants without access to high level music training not only do not have equality of opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge needed to apply; they are also less likely to receive the best information and guidance to help them prepare for audition. Working with students to address the skills gap also brings young musicians into contact with those who can provide appropriate advice and influence their perception of whether a conservatoire education may be "for people like them". Similarly, the coronavirus pandemic has been shown to have had a negative impact on mental health and the cost of living. The increase in students seeking support for financial and mental health difficulties has caused an increase in demand for personal support, leaving the Student Services team under more pressure than previously. So while interventions will focus on the highest priority risk areas, these should also indirectly address several of the other risks to equality of opportunity highlighted in the EORR.

The analysis of performance did not find any indication of a risk that specific groups had lower application success rates where equally qualified for entry. Due to its size the RCM has not experienced the same issues with teaching and accommodation capacity seen in other areas of the sector in recent years (indeed the size of the UK-domiciled undergraduate intake has slightly reduced) and the data did not indicate any difference in equality of outcome for those progressing into work and further study. However, the RCM will continue to monitor these areas, to ensure this does not change in future years.

7.2 Student groups to be targeted

The above priority risks are identified in the EORR as being at greater risk of affecting students from a range of backgrounds, including care leavers, estranged students, disabled students and mature students. The RCM will, however, focus its interventions on those for whom it is likely to have access to a sufficiently sized dataset to facilitate the setting of meaningful and measurable objectives:

- applicants and current students from low-income backgrounds
- applicants from black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds
- students experiencing mental health difficulties (with or without a formal diagnosis)

It should be noted that intersection between population groups means that work targeting these priority groups will also reach those from other under-represented backgrounds.

7.2.1 Defining low-income backgrounds

To identify students from low-income backgrounds the RCM proposes to use two primary measures:

⁸¹ Bull, A., Bhachu, D., Blier-Carruthers, A., Bradley, A. and James, S., 2022. *Slow Train Coming? Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in UK Music Higher Education*. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Music Studies network.

- Free School Meals data, as supplied by UCAS at the point of application (noting the challenges setting targets as a full year of baseline data is not available at the time of writing (March 2024))
- Household income assessment data provided by the Student Loans Company post-enrolment. Taking into account the impact of inflation on the threshold for eligibility for full student loan support noted above, and the need for clear messaging to students, the RCM will define students from a low income household as those with a household income equal to or below £35,000, i.e. below the national average (ONS statistics indicate that in the financial year ending 2022, median household income in the UK before taxes and benefits was £35,000, increasing to £38,100 after taxes and benefits).⁸²

⁸² Office for National Statistics (2023), *Effects of taxes and benefits on UK household income: financial year ending 2022*,

[https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/bulletins/theeffectsoftaxesandbenefitsonhouseholdincome/financialyearending2022#:~:text=In%20the%20financial%20year%20ending%20\(FYE\)%202022%2C%20median%20household,poorest%20fifth%20\(%C2%A38%2C200\).](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/bulletins/theeffectsoftaxesandbenefitsonhouseholdincome/financialyearending2022#:~:text=In%20the%20financial%20year%20ending%20(FYE)%202022%2C%20median%20household,poorest%20fifth%20(%C2%A38%2C200).)

ANNEX B – RATIONALE FOR INTERVENTIONS

Further information that sets out the rationale, assumptions and evidence base for each intervention strategy that is included in the access and participation plan.

This annex explains in further detail the theory of change and evidence base underpinning the main activities in each of the four overarching intervention strategies. It provides further details on the planned activities where applicable, especially where these involve strategic partnerships with external organisations, and also expands on the evaluation plans for each strategic intervention.

8. Intervention strategy 1

Intervention strategy 1 focuses on widening access to the high-quality training needed to develop the knowledge and practical skills required entry to a conservatoire. The range of activities addresses multiple stages in the musical development of young learners, including pre-16 attainment, and identifying and supporting talented young musicians with the application process and transition to higher music education. These interventions are set against a backdrop of substantial decline in music education in UK schools and a period of significant change for Music Hubs in England, meaning it is a particularly challenging and volatile environment in which to demonstrate impact.

8.1 Partnership Models

The intervention strategy is designed to amplify the RCM's impact in this area through **partnership working**. This is an approach endorsed in the National Plan for Music Education⁸³ which recognises the importance of HEIs' commitment to improving music education at pre-tertiary levels by sharing best practice and engaging directly with schools and Music Hubs, as well as through junior conservatoires'.⁸⁴ Kinsella et al. recognise the potential of these types of musical partnerships to 'have beneficial impacts on young people and leave a lasting legacy in the schools where it takes place. Teaching and learning practices can be developed, content updated, and new musician role models encountered'.⁸⁵

Our intervention strategy seeks to build on existing partnership activity in this area, for instance our longstanding strategic partnership with the Tri-Borough Music Hub (TBMH) as it transitions to become the HLO (Hub Lead Organisation) for the new London West Music Hub (LWWMH). Having worked closely with the TBMH on their successful application to become a Hub Lead Organisation, the College is committed to continuing this strategic partnership which enables knowledge-sharing, student and staff development, collaborative project delivery, and positions RCM at the heart of young people's music-making in the local community.

The RCM also works closely with a range of **local music education providers** with a track record of delivering high-quality music tuition to young people from under-represented groups. Nucleo is one such organisation. Based in North Kensington, this community-based project uses the El Sistema 'music for social change' model of education to offer free and high-quality music lessons to local children. Around half of Nucleo participants are living in areas that are in the lowest 20% nationally on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index and 84% are members of Global Majority populations. In 2023-24 the programme reached 452 children, far more than the RCM alone could reach on a regular basis. Through a close partnership with the RCM Junior Department, children on the Nucleo programme have opportunities to become either Associate Members of the RCMJD (joining a variety of chamber and orchestral ensemble opportunities that complement those offered by Nucleo) or full members of the RCMJD programme, accessing support from the RCM Bursary Fund/MDS. Regular communication and dialogue

⁸³ *The Power of Music to Change Lives: A National Plan for Music Education, 2022*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-power-of-music-to-change-lives-a-national-plan-for-music-education>

⁸⁴ *The Power of Music to Change Lives: A National Plan for Music Education, 2022*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62bc1242d3bf7f292040d364/The_Power_of_Music_to_Change_Lives.pdf

⁸⁵ Kinsella, V., Fautley, M., & Whittaker, A., 2022. *Re-thinking music education partnerships through intra-actions*. *Music Education Research*, 24(3), 299–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2022.2053510>

between programme leaders at RCMJD and Nucleo inform tailored support for young musicians who show promise, ensuring they can access 'next step' opportunities at the right time for their needs. This connected approach to partnership working is essential to support seamless progression for young musicians, especially those from underrepresented groups. We apply the same principles when working with other partners including the London Music Fund and Music Masters.

8.2 RCM Pipeline Programmes

In recent years the RCM and many other music conservatoires have observed shortfalls of applicants in specific instrumental areas. The decline in students learning certain instruments, such as bassoon, double bass and lower brass, impacts the orchestral balance of the student body and consequently the College's ability to support high-quality orchestral training for the profession. More recently, broader concerns about the UK applicant pipeline are emerging due to reduced music education provision in schools, poorer take-up of music GCSE and A-Level qualifications, and fewer access points to low-cost and high-quality instrumental tuition. Annex A sets out more details about this context.

In response, the College has committed to dedicated staffing and ring-fenced annual funding to support the development of targeted activities to develop the UK pipeline of applicants. This pipeline activity involves targeted interventions that are based on evidence (internal and external data) and are aligned to specific project aims. A focus on data gathering is allowing the College to understand better the UK landscape for instrumental music education, including the location of 'cold spots' where there is minimal instrumental provision, learner demographics, knowledge gaps, and the evolving needs of young musicians, especially those from underrepresented groups. Close collaboration between Heads of Faculties and the Sparks Learning and Participation team facilitates project design that is highly tailored to learners and their instrumental disciplines, producing highly stimulating and engaging activities. Free places will be made available for students from low-income families and other under-represented groups, to ensure these activities reach the broadest possible range of young learners.

To date this work has involved thirteen events including a pilot Young Bassoon Programme working with 50 students from across the UK, a Youth Brass Course, a partnership with GALSI (Gender and the Large and Shiny Instruments) and workshops as part of the RCM's annual Percussion Festival. During 2023-24 different models of recruitment were piloted – open sign up (Bassoon/GALSI), application (Brass) and partner approach (Percussion). The application process allowed for detailed consideration of how places were offered, in turn ensuring the young people were at the required level of musical ability for a possible pathway to Conservatoire study and met one or more access criteria. Evaluation of these pilot events is informing the design of the events planned for the lifetime of this Access and Participation Plan.

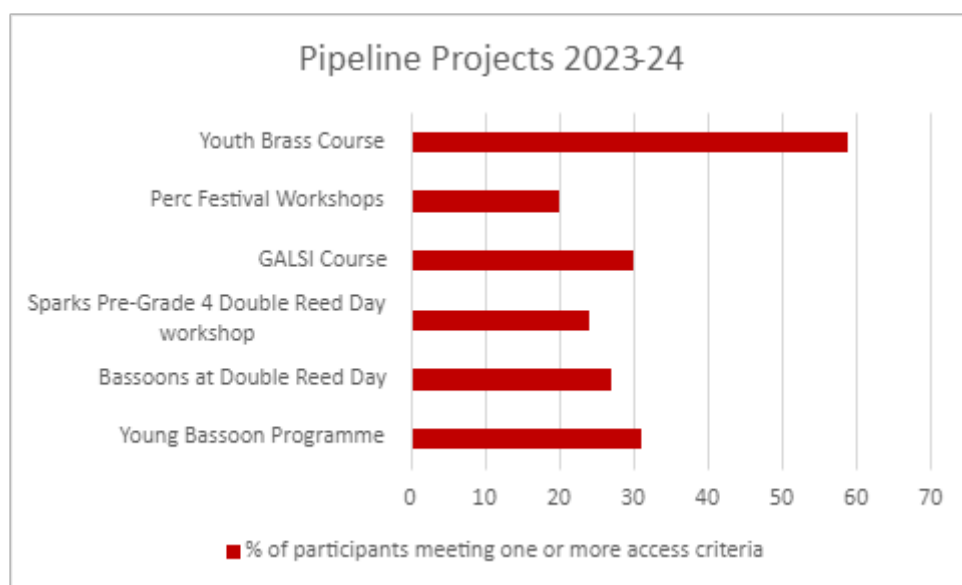


Fig. 1.2a Percentage of participants in RCM Sparks pilot pipeline projects in 2023/24 who met one or more access criteria.

8.3 Signposting for Progression

The National Plan for Music Education also emphasises the importance of clearly **signposted progression opportunities** for young musicians, a recommendation that is echoed in the landmark 2019 report ‘Music Education: The State of the Nation’.⁸⁶ We know from our own admissions records that applicants from CATS (Centres for Advanced Training), of which the RCM Junior Department is one, are more likely to receive an offer of a place at a conservatoire. CATS are ideal environments for promising young musicians to develop their potential in preparation for conservatoire study, with financial support for students from low-income households available through the Government’s Music and Dance Scheme.

It is therefore important for institutions like the RCM to work effectively with first-access providers to ensure there are clear and accessible progression opportunities for students with musical potential. As part of the access pathway children from age 5 are recruited from under-represented backgrounds to join the Sparks Juniors programme, learning at the RCMJD on Saturdays on a fully funded programme. An audition point offers learners the opportunity to continue the main RCMJD programme or move to another partner programme (Nucleo, Tri-Borough Music Hub or other local music providers). Importantly any child moving on to another programme can remain part of the RCM Connect programme, which provides touch points throughout the year offering workshops, concert visits and ensemble sessions. This continues to provide the learners with the important access to high quality tuition and a community of support and encouragement at Conservatoire level. As noted by Griffiths (2020), there are high-quality training opportunities and strong financial support at an elite level, but the issue is how children reach these opportunities which this initiative aims to address.⁸⁷

8.4 Contextual Admissions

Contextual admissions policies are widely used within the HE sector to understand more about applicants’ backgrounds and ensure that they do not experience inequality of opportunity of access to HE due to structural disadvantage.⁸⁸ This is recommended good practice by organisations that promote fair access, such as the Sutton Trust.⁸⁹ Evaluation of progress against the objectives in the RCM’s previous Access and Participation Plan indicated that the contextual admissions policy, when combined with additional support measures, was likely to have played a contributory role in increasing the proportion of students from under-represented groups. Contextual admissions recognises the difference between equality and equity. Equality of treatment does not necessarily amount to fairness when not everyone has the same starting point. Equity aims to “level the playing field” by taking into account that everyone has different circumstances and that not every applicant will have had access to the same support and resources to prepare for an audition.⁹⁰

Traditionally **contextual admissions policies** involve setting lower academic entry requirements for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, but this is not applicable in a conservatoire where the primary basis for admission is performance at audition. When assessing an applicant’s potential as a performer or composer, contextual admissions is a natural extension of the holistic approach that is already applied by the RCM’s audition panels. A contextual flag can help to identify students who may have received less support and guidance in preparing an audition, but who demonstrate strong potential. Suggested good practice indicates that these markers should be administratively verified, individualised metrics such as FSM, rather than area level markers such as POLAR.⁹¹ As a world leader in its field the RCM maintains the highest standards, and admissions panels will only admit students

⁸⁶ All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education, Incorporated Society of Musicians and University of Sussex, 2019. *Music Education: State of the Nation*. Available at: <https://www.musiceducationappg.org/publications.html>

⁸⁷ Griffiths A., 2020. Playing the white man’s tune: inclusion in elite classical music education. *British Journal of Music Education*. 2020;37(1):55-70. doi:10.1017/S0265051719000391.

⁸⁸ OfS, 2019. *Contextual admissions: Promoting fairness and re-thinking merit*. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/contextual-admissions-promoting-fairness-and-rethinking-merit/>

⁸⁹ The Sutton Trust, 2017. *Admissions in context: The use of contextual information by leading universities*. https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Admissions-in-Context-Final_V2.pdf

⁹⁰ Solomon-Pryce, C., 2015. *Is equity the same as equality?* <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/equityDiversityInclusion/2015/12/is-equity-the-same-as-equality/>

⁹¹ Boliver, V., Gorard, S. and Siddiqui, N., 2021. *Using contextual data to widen access to higher education*. *Perspectives: policy and practice in higher education*, 25(1), pp.7-13.

they are confident have the ability and potential to succeed on the course. A recent sector-wide study of EDI in UK higher music education identified that there was scope for greater use of a contextual admissions approach in music and for the sharing of best practice between institutions.⁹² However the report also recognised that contextual admissions alone is not sufficient to improve the diversity of a student body, hence its position as one of a range of RCM interventions.

8.5 Contribution to other objectives

By working with diverse groups of young learners and partners working in under-represented communities, these activities should also make a substantial contribution to Intervention Strategy 2, most notably by providing diverse role models and fostering the perception that Western Classical music is for everyone.

8.6 Theory of Change

THEORY OF CHANGE				
	Inputs	Change Factor	Impact	
Key Institutional Enablers	Financial Support	Ringfenced financial support for RCM pipeline and transitions activities, including Sparks Juniors; enhanced bursary support for RCMJD and UG study	Improved learner confidence and ability to commit to programme of study	Increased participation in pre-HE activities and UG study by participants from low income backgrounds; lower attrition; improved progression at all levels
	Capacity Building	Investment in dedicated staffing to support pipeline and transitions activity	Provides improved capacity to develop targeted pipeline projects in collaboration with RCM faculties	Pipeline projects are well-supported and fully evaluated in relation to aims and outcomes
	Contextual Admissions	Continuation and enhancement of contextual admissions approach during RCMJD and UG auditions process	Risks to opportunity are recognised at the point of audition	RCM UG applicants with excellent potential are recognised and provided with tailored transition support to allow them to excel
Access Strategies	RCM Pipeline Activities	Providing high-quality, accessible and inclusive musical activities in targeted areas	Stimulate young people's excitement for music and nurture their musical potential	More young people locally and nationally can access musical opportunities and develop their skills
	Partnerships & Collaboration	Sustained partnerships with local music organisations are underpinned by staff dialogue and strategic collaboration	Partnership working increases information sharing, knowledge of inclusive practices and RCM's understanding of young people's needs	Partners trust RCM as a 'next-step' provider for young musicians, promoting RCM progression opportunities including into the RCMJD
	Signposting for Progression	Working with partners and RCM MarComms, provide clear signposting of opportunities for young musicians to progress to the next stage of learning	Enabling young musicians to continue to progress in their musical development without interruption, supported by RCM and/or partner organisations	Increase in proportion of RCMJD students from low-income backgrounds; increase in applications for UG study by applicants from low income backgrounds
Outcomes Strategies	Enhancing Data Capability	Enhanced data collection, monitoring and analysis at pre-HE level, including staff training and co-evaluation with partners	Deeper understanding of pre-HE participant demographics; timely identification of trends; tracking of pre-HE student engagement, outcomes and progression; enhanced skills in evaluation.	Robust evaluation outcomes inform targeted enhancement of pre-HE programmes and an understanding of 'what works' for musical progression.
	Promoting Conservatoire Study	Promote the conservatoire as a welcoming and inclusive place of musical learning for learners from all backgrounds, through inclusive communications, student role models, and positive relationships	Challenging negative perceptions of the conservatoire; promoting strong values of inclusion and belonging through student and staff role models and positive family engagement	Greater sense of belonging among participants, including family; stronger sense of community during activities; greater participant trust in the conservatoire as a supportive space for everyone.

8.7 Evaluation

Following a bespoke training course in 2024 delivered by an external evaluation consultant, the RCM's approach to evaluation of our learning and participation programmes has matured considerably.

The Sparks team are reviewing evaluation procedures across the learning and participation programme – considering how best to measure impact and success through a team 'Away Day' in summer 2024. The team will explore standardised approaches to evaluative work looking into both qualitative and quantitative measures that best suit the various projects and maximise the opportunity to demonstrate change.

⁹² Bull, A., Bhachu, D., Blier-Carruthers, A., Bradley, A. and James, S., 2022. *Slow Train Coming? Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in UK Music Higher Education*. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Music Studies network. Available at: <https://edims.network/report/slowtraincoming/>

From 2024, all Sparks pipeline projects will build in an **evaluation strategy at the proposal stage**. Faculty staff collaborate with the Sparks delivery team to design an evaluation approach that meets the specific aims and objectives of each project. Data gathering is embedded to gather quantitative participant EDI data at the outset and qualitative participant experience data by the end of the project. We are now applying more imaginative approaches to evaluation, ensuring that data collection is engaging and purposeful for all participants, whatever their age or background.

The strategic priorities for pipeline projects are reviewed on an annual basis in response to a **needs analysis** that identifies where there are recruitment shortages and a lack of representation. This needs analysis then informs future project aims and outcomes.

In line with our focus on progression, the RCM explores not just project-based outcomes, but also the next steps and destinations of project participants. **Participant progression is a key success indicator**, whether this is to another RCM project, the RCMJD, an RCM partner, or another provider. There are challenges collecting this data, but our individualised approach to supporting local young musicians means that in most cases we are able to maintain communication with participants.

This progression-led approach to evaluation applies to our Sparks Juniors, Pipeline, Springboard, and Tri-borough activities and fully aligns with the National Plan for Music Education and London West Music Hub's Progression Strategy. Historically we have also commissioned **independent external evaluations** (such as those undertaken by Sound Connections in 2021 and 2023) and we plan to continue to do so periodically to ensure that we are following best practice.

For our partnerships with local organisations, including the TBMH (LWMH), Nucleo, London Music Fund, FutureTalent and IntoUniversity, we are committed to **collaborative evaluation with partners**. Our evaluation methods in partnership projects are built on mutually agreed aims and outcomes, ongoing dialogue, informal peer feedback, and sharing of evaluation data and outcomes in an ethical and responsible (i.e. GDPR-compliant) way. For instance, we expect to work closely with the LWMH to align co-delivered projects with their new Impact Framework.⁹³ Our approach to collaborative evaluation also extends to participant-centred evaluation methods that involve participants in decision-making processes, an approach that helps to 'de-territorialise partnership, putting a clear focus on learning.'⁹⁴

In addition to internal annual reporting (Sparks Annual Report, RCMJD Annual Report, APP Annual Report), each year we will produce an **accessible external-facing impact report** that summarises our cumulative progress for this intervention strategy, using HESA data thresholds to guide the inclusion of data on small cohorts.

9. Intervention strategy 2

As discussed in Annex A, whilst the RCM has made significant progress in diversifying its student body, it remains less ethnically diverse than many other UK HEIs, as do music conservatoires more generally. A recent Arts Council England report noted that in particular 'Black or Black British musicians are underrepresented at each stage within elite training opportunities. As the training stages progress, the overall intake becomes less ethnically diverse.'⁹⁵ There is also notable under-representation of British Asian students among UK music undergraduates.⁹⁶

This intervention strategy aims to address this drop off in students progressing to higher music education, primarily by challenging perceptions of who conservatoires and classical music education are for. In addition, there is a focus on

⁹³ Arts Council England, *Strategic Functions for Hub Lead Organisations*, 2023. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/21512/download?attachment>

⁹⁴ Kinsella, V., Fautley, M., & Whittaker, A., 2022. Rethinking music education partnerships through intra-actions. *Music Education Research*, 24(3), 299–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2022.2053510>

⁹⁵ Cox, T. and Kilshaw, H., 2021. *Creating a More Inclusive Classical Music A study of the English orchestral workforce and the current routes to joining it*. Arts Council England, available at: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Executive_Summary.pdf

⁹⁶ Bull, A., Bhachu, D., Blier-Carruthers, A., Bradley, A. and James, S., 2022. *Slow Train Coming? Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in UK Music Higher Education*. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Music Studies network. Available at: <https://edims.network/report/slowtraincoming/>

developing a culture of belonging throughout the College, from outreach and junior programmes through to undergraduate study, to ensure that students can thrive, supported by an inclusive curriculum and learning environment.

9.1 Enhancing representation and fostering a sense of belonging

Recent studies have highlighted the importance of student belonging in higher education and how a strong sense of community can support course completion and academic outcomes.⁹⁷ Links have been demonstrated in the literature between students' sense of belonging and their motivation and self-efficacy and their more general sense of social acceptance.⁹⁸ Cureton and Gravestock (2019) observe that students of different ethnic backgrounds may experience differing "belongingness" depending on the quality of their relationships with their teachers and other students, and that a sense of belonging should be based on "respect, perception of potential and evidence that students matter".⁹⁹

A recent report commissioned by Pearson and Wonkhe (2022) noted that representation among staff is also key and recommended that HEIs diversify guest speakers to expedite change in this area.¹⁰⁰ The RCM's Artistic Strategy includes the commitment that artistic programming at the RCM will "take a pro-active approach to celebrate and promote diversity amongst performers and performances."¹⁰¹ The exploration and promotion of music by under-represented composers will be a priority. This will be achieved through a number of initiatives:

- Reworked and updated core repertoire lists for RCM Ensembles
- Dedicated programme opportunities, including festivals and series
- Continuing development and publication of resources: scores, recordings etc
- Commitment to representative balance for leaders of performance projects
- Active inclusion of music by under-represented composers in all projects"

Work to improve representation among visiting artists, lecturers and examiners is already underway at the RCM. Thanks to the generous financial support of a donor, the College has established the Robey Visiting Artists Fund which has supported visits by internationally leading artists such as Ryan Bancroft, Samantha Ege, Jonathan Lemalu, Wayne Marshall, Anthony McGill, Weston Sprott, Winston Rollins and Sasha Romero. This work is helping to promote 'positive perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity', which is especially important for ethnically diverse students and staff working in institutions which have traditionally been seen as lacking in diversity.¹⁰² This is coupled with a MarComms strategy to ensure that the RCM's external media better represent the experience of modern conservatoire study to prospective applicants and the wider community.

The College embeds dialogue and stakeholder consultation at all levels, including junior programmes, in the shaping of our EDI Policy and culture. This includes ongoing dialogue with our students. Nash et al. have noted that 'there is a clear need for organisations and others to consider how to involve those who are poorly represented or supported in their workforce to have a voice in determining how best to construct these interventions and what change is required.'¹⁰³ There is strong student representation on the RCM EDI Committee and the Student Curriculum Forum.

⁹⁷ Robertson, A., Cleaver, E., & Smart, F., 2019. *Beyond the Metrics: Identifying, Evidence and Enhancing the Less Tangible Assets of Higher Education*. QAA Scotland

⁹⁸ Freeman, T. M., Anderman, L. H., & Jensen, J. M., 2007. *Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels*. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 75(3), 203– 220.
<https://doi.org/10.3200/JEXE.75.3.203-220>

⁹⁹ Cureton, D. and Gravestock, P., 2019. *We Belong': differential sense of belonging and its meaning for different ethnic groups in higher education* University of Wolverhampton. Available:
<https://journals.gre.ac.uk/index.php/compass/article/view/942/pdf>

¹⁰⁰ <https://wonkhe.com/wp-content/wonkhe-uploads/2022/10/Building-Belonging-October-2022.pdf>

¹⁰¹ RCM, 2021. Artistic Strategy. Available at: <https://www.rcm.ac.uk/about/strategies-values/quality-learning-research/>

¹⁰² Hussain, M., & Jones, J. M., 2021. Discrimination, diversity, and sense of belonging: Experiences of students of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 14(1), 63–71. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000117>

¹⁰³ Nash, R., et al. (2020). 'Belonging as a multidimensional construct and its relationship to mental wellbeing in UK university students'. *Journal of Mental Health*, 29(3), 299-306.

To support it in this work the RCM will work with its partners such as Nucleo (see Intervention Strategy 1) who are already working in very diverse communities at grassroots level, to share best practice and raise awareness of conservatoire study as a viable pathway to a career in music.

9.2 Diversifying the curriculum

One fundamental aspect of this intervention strategy is inclusive pedagogy, emphasising the incorporation of diverse perspectives within the curriculum (Archer et al., 2020).¹⁰⁴ By integrating inclusivity into teaching practices, educators can validate students' identities and empower them in the learning process.

Music conservatoires, and the classical music industry more broadly, have historically been spaces lacking in diversity. In the UK the music curriculum has historically been Eurocentric and "overwhelmingly white", which may impact the sense of belonging and future career choices of students from Global Majority backgrounds. Griffiths notes that 'structures in the field maintain a repertoire that continues to be white and male and does not recognise the contributions of female and BME composers.'¹⁰⁵ This narrow lens risks alienating those students who are unable to see themselves in the curriculum, generating the perception that classical music is 'not for them'.

Over the last ten years, there has been significant work across the industry to address the lack of representation in the field of classical music. Organisations including Black Lives in Music, EDIMS (EDI in Music Studies Network), the Musicians' Union, and the Arts Council England have all contributed to raising awareness of and addressing systemic issues. In music education specifically, there has been call to action to diversify music curricula at all levels, including the music that is performed, to better reflect society today.¹⁰⁶ At the RCM, this work is being taken forward through ongoing curriculum review and more diverse artistic programming, to ensure that all students can see themselves in the music that they study and perform. Furthermore, there are frequent opportunities for students to celebrate and share their own culture and individual voice, for instance through faculty listening groups, student-curated concerts and events, including Faculty Showcases, the Great Exhibitionists Festival, and FestivALL. These platforms empower students from all backgrounds to co-create learning activities with their peers, aspects recognised in the AdvanceHE programme standard for Embedding EDI in the Curriculum.¹⁰⁷

9.3 Scholarships for black, Asian and ethnically diverse students

In its previous Access and Participation Plan 2020-25, the RCM introduced a scholarship programme for black, Asian and ethnically diverse students. During the lifetime of the Plan, the RCM undertook an evaluation¹⁰⁸ of its financial support commitments, including these scholarships. Firstly, a review of offer and enrolment rates was carried out using RCM internal data. As recommended by the OfS, the RCM then used the Survey Tool from the OfS Financial Support Evaluation Toolkit¹⁰⁹ as the basis for the evaluation exercise, adapting the questions to reflect the context of the RCM as a small, specialist provider. The OfS Statistical Tool was not used, as this is only recommended for institutions with a data sample of 300 or more students.

Due to the very small numbers involved the study cannot be made publicly available to avoid identifying individuals, and some caution should be observed when drawing conclusions from the data. However, the results gave a strong

¹⁰⁴ Archer, L., Moote, J., & MacLeod, E., 2020. Learning that physics is 'not for me': Pedagogic work and the cultivation of habitus among advanced level physics students. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 29(3), 347–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508406.2019.1707679>

¹⁰⁵ Griffiths A. 2020. Playing the white man's tune: inclusion in elite classical music education. *British Journal of Music Education*. 2020;37(1):55-70. doi:10.1017/S0265051719000391

¹⁰⁶ See Griffiths A. Playing the white man's tune: inclusion in elite classical music education. *British Journal of Music Education*. 2020;37(1):55-70. doi:10.1017/S0265051719000391 and <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/07/20/levelling-the-playing-field-in-uk-music-conservatoires-diversifying-through-decolonising/>

¹⁰⁷ Advance HE, 2019. *Embedding equality, diversity and inclusion in the curriculum: a programme standard*. <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-09/Assessing%20EDI%20in%20the%20Curriculum%20-%20Programme%20Standard.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ Royal College of Music, 2021. *Evaluation of financial support: Access and Participation Plan 2020-25* (internal)

¹⁰⁹ Office for Students. Financial Support Evaluation Toolkit. Available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation/financial-support-evaluation-toolkit/>

indication of the value of these awards to students, both in being able to take up their places and in their ability to continue their studies as their course progresses. The purpose of these awards was to increase enrolments from target groups, so the fact that two thirds of respondents replied that their availability influenced their decision to apply was significant, especially as we know the importance of other factors to conservatoire applicants, such as professor choice and the influence of their current instrumental teacher.

This conclusion was supported by the enrolment data, which showed an increase in the proportion of students recruited from these target groups, and corroborates feedback from applicants reported by Heads of Faculty and the Admissions team that, once an offer is made, the availability of a scholarship is a significant factor in students in accepting or declining a place. For this reason it is intended to maintain this scholarship programme under the new Access and Participation Plan as an important part of the RCM's work in improving diversity. However, as an ongoing commitment it is considered under the Whole Provider Approach rather than Intervention Strategy 2.

The literature suggests that, from a perspective of retention and attainment, means-based bursaries are likely more effective.¹¹⁰ However, the primary goal here is to encourage students to enrol at an institution where they feel represented, respected and valued. Analysis of qualitative data from the RCM's evaluation highlighted the value to applicants of receiving recognition of their talent and potential. Respondents commented (unprompted) that the awards gave them a "boost in terms of self-worth and a sense of belonging". It is for this reason that these scholarships will continue to be offered as merit-based scholarships on a competitive basis and carry the prestige of the "Scholar" title, as part of the RCM's main audition scholarships programme.

9.4 Contribution to other objectives

The continuing work to develop a diverse and inclusive curriculum and culture at the RCM does not just address race but also many other groups that have been historically underrepresented in classical music, including women (especially female composers and conductors), LGBT+, disabled and neurodiverse musicians. The planned activity supports the work in Strategic Intervention 1, providing greater opportunity for younger learners to encounter role models they identify with and creating greater confidence in pursuing music professionally. Poor mental health can create a barrier to a sense of belonging and inclusion¹¹¹, whereas students with a greater sense of belonging are likely to report higher levels of motivation and enjoyment of their studies.¹¹² Therefore fostering a culture of belonging should increase levels of wellbeing, contributing to Intervention Strategy 4.

¹¹⁰ Moores, E. and Burgess, A. P., 2023. *Financial support differentially aids retention of students from households with lower incomes: A UK case study*. *Studies in Higher Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2022.2125950>

¹¹¹ Blake, S., Capper, G., Jackson, A., 2023. *Building Belonging in Higher Education Recommendations for developing an integrated institutional approach*. Pearson & WonkHE. <https://wonkhe.com/wp-content/wonkhe-uploads/2022/10/Building-Belonging-October2022.pdf>

¹¹² Pedler, M. L., R. Willis & J. E. Nieuwoudt, 2022. A sense of belonging at university: student retention, motivation and enjoyment, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 46:3, 397-408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1955844>

9.4 Theory of Change

THEORY OF CHANGE				
		Inputs	Change Factor	Impact
Key Institutional Enablers	Whole-Institution EDI Strategy	Directorate-level support for EDI Policy and implementation; RCM Council engagement; engagement with students to inform EDI activity	Demonstrates full commitment to EDI from RCM leadership team. Promotes an inclusive and respectful culture across the Institution.	Clear understanding across the College of RCM values and a commitment to EDI; improved sense of belonging among students and staff
	External Consultation and Insights	Continued dialogue and collaboration with HE and industry organisations.	External input promotes reflection and change across the College and extends the RCM's network of collaborators, including artists and teachers.	RCM approach to EDI is aligned to best practice in HE and the profession
Access Strategies	Scholarships	Minimum of 3 scholarships per year to support UK-domiciled Black, Asian and ethnically diverse students at UG level. Administration of scholarship process. Publicising of awards on RCM website and through partners.	Promotes confidence in offer-holders to pursue conservatoire study; reduces financial anxiety and financial barriers to study; boosts confidence in offer-holders' own abilities and deservedness of place at a conservatoire.	RCM attracts higher number of Black, Asian and ethnically diverse applicants; Black, Asian and ethnically diverse applicants more likely to accept offers; improved confidence among new Black, Asian and ethnically diverse students and ability to progress and excel on the programme without financial barriers.
	Inclusive Messaging	Production of materials (e.g. videos, learning resources, text-based information) providing information about the RCM experience for pre-16 learners.	Communicates the lived experience of current students at RCM; addresses concerns about financial support, bursaries, and career prospects in music; demystifies negative perceptions and stereotypes of conservatoire study; provides welcoming and inclusive messages	RCM attracts a higher number of applications for Sparks activities and RCMJD from underrepresented groups; changed perception of conservatoires and careers in music among learners and their families
	Strategic Education Partnerships	RCM collaborates with local education partners working with learners from underrepresented groups. Activity may include co-created projects, student visits to RCM, side-by-side activities with RCMJD, and staff visits/exchanges.	Dialogue leads to deeper cultural understanding of barriers to access and progression. Sharing of insights enables RCM to shape our activities to the needs to young people locally and signpost opportunities to/from external partners.	Expanded reach of RCM Learning and Participation activities to more diverse communities. Increase in engagement and progression by learners from underrepresented groups, including progression to/from RCM and partners. Positive perceptions of the RCM as a welcoming and inclusive institution
Outcomes Strategies	Diversifying the Curriculum	Annual review of the curriculum and artistic programme to promote underrepresented artists, scholars, and repertoire; staff training to raise awareness of inclusive music curricula; investment in library resources	Greater visibility of diverse musicians and scholars in the RCM curriculum and artistic programme; more opportunities for students to share and celebrate their own culture and identity through learning activities and projects	Black, Asian and ethnically diverse students feel a greater sense of belonging and the confidence to celebrate their own identity as musicians
	Staff Representation	Investment in visiting artists, including conductors, masterclasses, speakers, and examiners.	Greater visibility of diverse artists provides role models for Black, Asian and ethnically diverse students	Black, Asian and ethnically diverse students feel a greater sense of belonging in the conservatoire, with increased positivity and confidence about their career aspirations in the classical music industry

9.5 Evaluation plan

As for intervention strategy 1, there are considerable challenges when working with small-cohort evaluation, in this case typically 11 to 14 students in each undergraduate year. Small-cohort evaluation is especially time-consuming and resource-intensive for small institutions. In addition, the experience of each conservatoire student in this small cohort will be individual and complex, shaped by myriad of lived experiences across family, culture, and education. This and small cohort sizes limit the potential to extrapolate 'causality' or Type 3 evidence. With this in mind, we plan to apply evaluation techniques that triangulate Type 1 evidence (narrative, based on the ToC model above) and Type 2 (cross-referencing and analysis of data). This approach aligns with Arts Council England's recommendation to 'ensure that qualitative data sits alongside quantitative material, so that the subtleties of experience can be explored, particularly amongst groups who are significantly underrepresented in any quantitative dataset.'¹¹³

We will continue the approach already established in this target area during the previous iteration of our Access and Participation Plan. This has centred on reviewing key metrics (applications, offers, acceptances, student progression, and student outcomes) in combination with qualitative responses to student surveys about the impact of their financial support. As discussed above, to date we have found analysis of these measures to be an effective way of evaluating our financial interventions, producing compelling evidence of positive impact.

¹¹³ Cox, T. and Kilshaw, H., 2021. *Creating a More Inclusive Classical Music A study of the English orchestral workforce and the current routes to joining it*. Arts Council England, available at: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Executive_Summary.pdf

There are however many other factors that impact on a student's sense of belonging, both at HE and pre-16 levels. As set out above, EDI culture, curriculum and staff representation are three critical, intersecting areas where evaluation can shine a light on the effectiveness of the College's whole-institution approach to EDI. We will apply a Contribution Analysis approach, based on the above Theory of Change model, to test, challenge and refine our intervention approaches over the next five years.¹¹⁴ In doing so we will enrich our understanding of impact through close and sustained dialogue with students, staff, and key industry and music education partners. The EDI Committee, which meets termly, will be an important vehicle for this work, as this committee brings together members from all levels of the organisation, from students (all members of the SU Committee) to the Director and a member of Council.

Additional data points to enrich our evaluation of impact will include:

- Responses to the 'Community and Belonging' section of the annual online BMus student survey
- Annual BMus External Examiner reports, where examiners are invited to comment on EDI in the curriculum
- The Annual Programme Monitoring report to Senate, which includes reflection on the effectiveness of EDI initiatives in the curriculum
- Data collection for the EDI Annual Report, which includes data on the diversity of concert programming, visiting conductors, and visiting artists
- Identifying any trends that emerge from student reports or complaints (e.g. the Report + Support platform).
- We also expect to commission external evaluation at an interim point during the APP

Actions for the annual EDI Action Plan are developed based on analysis of the above data sources and in consultation with the EDI Committee. This will form a platform for evaluating student belonging across the RCM and therefore closely align with evaluation of Intervention Strategy 2.

10. Intervention strategy 3

Intervention Strategy 3 addresses the impact of cost pressures on students. As explained with reference to relevant literature in Annex A, there is extensive evidence that the rising cost of living is having a significant impact on students, both in deterring students from undertaking higher education and impacting their ongoing studies, leaving them at risk of dropping out.¹¹⁵ Students from the least well-off households are the most affected, as their family members are less able to assist with the shortfall in funding. Students who are struggling financially tend to devote a greater proportion of their time to part-time work, leading to poorer student wellbeing and academic outcomes. Ideally there would be a national review of the student maintenance loan thresholds and rates, but in the absence of this the RCM has considered how it can ensure the current situation does not reduce equality of opportunity for financially disadvantaged students.

10.1 Means-tested bursaries

The most significant new activity within this intervention strategy is a new means-tested bursary scheme for UK-domiciled undergraduate students which aims both to increase confidence in making an application/accepting an offer, and to provide greater financial stability for current students, to reduce the risk of them dropping out mid-course.

Whilst research in the UK context on the effectiveness of financial support on applicant behaviour remains rather limited, there is a body of literature from several countries, most notably the USA, which indicates a positive

¹¹⁴ TASO, 2022. *Impact evaluation with small cohorts: methodology guidance*. Available at: https://cdn.taso.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/TASO_Report_Learning-about-evaluation-with-small-cohorts_DEC2023.pdf

¹¹⁵ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register/risk-10-costpressures/>

influence on enrolment rates, provided information on availability of support is communicated clearly.¹¹⁶ As explained above in the rationale for Intervention Strategy 2, the RCM's own evaluation of the measures in its Access and Participation Plan 2020-25 provides evidence of the effectiveness of financial support in attracting applicants and increasing the likelihood of them accepting the offer of a place.¹¹⁷ Studies suggest bursaries directly contributing to living costs may be more effective than fee waivers in increasing enrolment rates¹¹⁸, and this is supported by the RCM's own data on how UK undergraduates find it most beneficial to receive awards from its main scholarships scheme, which allows them to choose whether to use their funds for tuition fees or living costs.

There is much wider and more conclusive evidence to support the theory that means-based financial support improves continuation and completion rates of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹¹⁹¹²⁰¹²¹ Studies show that economically disadvantaged students are more likely than their peers to drop out¹²², and the evidence suggests that by having their basic financial needs met, students can focus more on their studies, enabling them to flourish.¹²³

The threshold for eligibility for bursary support will be set at a household income of £35,000 or lower, reflecting the evidence discussed in Annex A that the threshold for full student finance would have risen to approximately this figure had it been increased in line with inflation. This may be reviewed in future years of the plan depending on inflation rates and any uplifts to the eligibility criteria for full student loan support.

Among students from disadvantaged economic backgrounds, care leavers are particularly under-represented in higher education. Recent studies recommend that care experienced students should be supported through a range of means including accommodation, mentoring and financial interventions.¹²⁴ Current best practice recommends that HEI's acknowledge care leavers' lack of family support and the likelihood of incurring additional housing costs over the summer vacation period where they do not have a family home to return to.¹²⁵ The new bursary scheme will address this, with a supplementary grant available for the summer vacation period to assist with additional accommodation costs. To increase awareness of this the RCM will enhance the signposting of support for care leavers on the website, including pastoral and other practical support. The RCM's residence, Prince Consort Village, is available to any students who need to remain during the summer months.

In addition to the senior College bursary scheme, the RCM will continue its existing commitment to provide bursaries for its Junior Department¹²⁶, ensuring that younger musicians can gain access to high level training to support them in their journey to conservatoire education.

¹¹⁶ Robinson, D. and Silvestrini, V., 2020. *The impact of interventions for widening access to higher education: a review of the evidence* (Education Policy Institute / TASO) https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Widening_participation-review_EPI-TASO_2020.pdf

¹¹⁷ Royal College of Music, 2021. *Evaluation of financial support: Access and Participation Plan 2020-25* (internal)

¹¹⁸ Fack, G., & Grenet, J., 2015. *Improving College Access and Success for Low-Income Students: Evidence from a Large Need-Based Grant Program*. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 7(2), 1–34.

¹¹⁹ Goldrick-Rab, S., Kelchen, R., Harris, D. N., & Benson, J., 2016. *Reducing income inequality in educational attainment: Experimental evidence on the impact of financial aid on college completion*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 121(6), 1762-1817. doi:10.1086/685442

¹²⁰ Bettinger, E., 2015. *Need-based aid and college persistence: The effects of the Ohio college opportunity grant*. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 37, 1025-119S.

¹²¹ Castleman, B. L., & Long, B. T., 2016. *Looking beyond enrollment: The causal effect of need-based grants on college access, persistence, and graduation*. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 34(4), 1023-1073. doi:10.1086/686643

¹²² Vignoles, A. & Powdthavee, N. 2009, *The Socioeconomic Gap in University Dropouts*. *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, 9, issue 1, p. 1-36. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1935-1682.2051>

¹²³ Harrison, N., S. Davies, R. Harris & R. Waller. 2018. *Access, participation and capabilities: theorising the contribution of university bursaries to students' wellbeing, flourishing and success*. *Cambridge Journal of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2017.1401586>

¹²⁴ HEPI, 2023. *Student Academic Experience Survey 2023*, <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2023.pdf>

¹²⁵ Hauari, H. Hollingworth, K., Cameron, C., 2019. *Getting it right for care experienced students in higher education*. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/widening-participation/sites/widening_participation/files/getting_it_right_for_care_experienced_students_in_higher_education.pdf

¹²⁶ RCMJD Fees and Funding, <https://www.rcm.ac.uk/junior/rcmjddapply/rcmjdfeesandfunding/>

10.2 Audition fee waivers

Conservatoires typically charge an audition fee to applicants, to help offset a proportion of the significant cost of auditioning students with specialist panellists, without needing to use tuition fee income. However, it is important that audition fees do not act as a deterrent to application. The RCM plans to expand its audition fee waiver scheme from the 2025 entry cycle, allowing more applicants to benefit. The eligibility threshold will be raised from a household income of £25,000 to £35,000, to align with the criteria for our bursary scheme. In addition, where students are flagged in UCAS Conservatoires as being eligible for FSM, the RCM will automatically apply an audition fee waiver without the need to apply, reducing the additional administrative burden for applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds. The RCM has been working with the other member conservatoires of the UCAS Conservatoires User Group to try to simplify messaging around accessing an audition fee waiver.

10.3 Contribution to other objectives

The impact of the rising cost of living has been shown to impact students' wellbeing, with 57% of students in a recent study reporting a negative impact on their mental health.¹²⁷ Addressing this issue before students reach the point of crisis should therefore lead to improved student wellbeing, contributing to Intervention Strategy 4. Reducing the financial shortfall has been shown to reduce the need for excessive hours of paid work¹²⁸, which evidence suggests can in turn improve students' learning outcomes.¹²⁹ Reducing pressure on students' time also provides increased scope for engagement with extra-curricular activities, helping to foster a sense of belonging, which is important for overall student wellbeing, and well as continuation and attainment.¹³⁰

10.4 Theory of Change

THEORY OF CHANGE				
		Inputs	Change Factor	Impact
Access Strategy	Enhanced Audition Fee Waiver Scheme	Automatic audition fee waiver for students flagged as eligible for FSM. Increased eligibility threshold up to a household income for £35,000	Reduces the stigma associated with requesting an audition fee waiver; reduces a financial barrier to applying to RCM; communicates that applicants from low-income households are welcome	Increase in applications from applicants from low income households; reduced anxiety among these applicants
Outcomes Strategy	Bursary Scheme	Means tested bursaries for new UK-domiciled entrants and continuing students from low income households.	Offer-holders: increased confidence in accepting a place and preparing for the transition to HE and studying in London Continuing students: reduced financial anxiety, reduced pressure to take on part-time employment; improved student experience and increased sense of security and belonging RCM: Improved understanding of the financial situations of incoming students, informing enhancement of institutional support structures and individualised interventions.	Improved attendance, attainment, progression and outcomes seen in students from low income backgrounds. Improved mental wellbeing of this student cohort.

¹²⁷ Frampton, N. 2022. *How the cost of living crisis is affecting students' money and mental health*. Money and Mental Health Policy Institute. Available at: <https://www.moneyandmentalhealth.org/cost-of-living-students/>

¹²⁸ Broton, K. M., Goldrick-Rab, S., & Benson, J., 2016. *Working for college: The causal impacts of financial grants on undergraduate employment*. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 38(3), 477-494. doi:10.3102/0162373716638440

¹²⁹ Blackman, T., 2018, *What affects how much students learn?* <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/01/08/5266/>

¹³⁰ Thomas, L., 2016. *Developing inclusive learning to improve the engagement, belonging, retention and success of students from diverse groups*, DOI:10.1016/B978-0-08-100213-1.00009-3

10.5 Evaluation plan

The targets related to this intervention will monitor students in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM). Evidence including guidance from the OfS¹³¹, suggests that FSM is one of the best available individualised indicators of disadvantage readily available via UCAS admissions data^{132, 133}, and it is one of the most robust for comparison of performance with other institutions as the information is provided by UCAS Conservatoires and the SLC. The RCM will track application data for applicants with FSM flags from the point of first contact through to enrolment. To assess the impact on continuation the RCM will focus on monitoring rates of students progressing from year 1 to year 2 of the BMus course (generally the point of greatest risk for attrition).

For more in-depth evaluation, RCM will build on the evaluation method for financial support developed during the previous plan, which uses as its basis the OfS' Financial Support Evaluation Toolkit, which allows for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The survey questions will be updated to reflect the change in design of the financial support offered under the new plan. It is intended to carry out a study at the mid-point of the plan to assess interim results, and in the final year. Due to the small numbers involved and GDPR considerations, the results will not be suitable for external publication, but will be shared internally.

We will also explore possibilities to collaborate with other members of Conservatoires UK to examine this area of risk to opportunity, which is of particular concern to music conservatoires. A collaborative research project could pool research capacity and expertise, whilst increasing the participant cohort size to produce stronger data and more valid findings suitable for publication.

11. Intervention strategy 4

Our intervention strategy for targeting mental health is based on three pillars that reflect current sector research, specialised research on mental health for musicians, and our internal understanding of the College's student needs:

- Preventative work and early interventions are vital
- Activities should be designed to meet the specific needs of conservatoire music students
- Activities should be integrated as part of the curriculum and overall culture of the College

A recent study by HEPI¹³⁴ recommended that institutions focus on preventative work, as well as supporting students who already experience mental health challenges. For this reason, several of the planned activities focus on awareness raising, early identification of need, improved signposting to support and reducing the stigma around declaring a mental health issue. Recent studies have shown that the prevalence of mental health issues in musicians tend to be higher compared to the general population¹³⁵, including student musicians¹³⁶, and this is an area of major concern in the UK music industry.¹³⁷ We recognise that the intensity of conservatoire study, as well as the

¹³¹ OfS, 2019. *Contextual admissions: promoting fairness and rethinking merit Insight brief 3*, <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/contextual-admissions-promoting-fairness-and-rethinking-merit/>

¹³² Boliver, V., Gorard, S and Siddiqui, N., 2015. *Will the use of contextual indicators make UK higher education admissions fairer?* <https://www.mdpi.com/2227-7102/5/4/306>

¹³³ *Contextual Admissions in London's Higher Education Institutions: A report for the Greater London Authority by CFE Research*, 2021, https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/contextual_admissions_in_londons_higher_education_institutions_se_11nov2021.pdf

¹³⁴ Student Academic Experience Survey 2023, <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2023.pdf>

¹³⁵ Vaag, J., Bjørngaard, J. H., & Bjerkeset, O., 2016. *Symptoms of anxiety and depression among Norwegian musicians compared to the general workforce*. *Psychology of Music*, 44(2), 234–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735614564910>

¹³⁶ van Fenema E.M. and van Geel C.C., 2014. *Mental problems among first-year conservatory students compared with medical students*. *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, 29(2):113-4. doi: 10.21091/mppa.2014.2023. PMID: 24925180

¹³⁷ Musicians Union, 2023. *Mental Health Support for Musicians*. Available at: <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/career-development/career-guides/musicians-wellbeing-guidance-pack/musicians-and-mental-illness-what-is-being-done-to-help>

emotional investment of music students in their chosen career, can exacerbate mental health challenges.¹³⁸ Our internal historic figures for demand for counselling and mental health support indicates this is a priority area for intervention, and recent research in the field of performance science has underlined the importance of health and wellbeing for musicians-in-training not just being supported, but being integrated fully into the curriculum.¹³⁹ and our approach will be informed by the principles for good practice across the 18 themes in the Mental Health Charter Framework.¹⁴⁰

11.1 Awareness raising

Student Minds have identified that up to 40% of students may now be experiencing a mental health problem that could meet diagnostic criteria.¹⁴¹ Disclosures of mental health conditions on application to Higher Education, however, remain low. In their 2020 survey, UCAS found that 56% of 1st year undergraduate students who said they had an existing mental health condition prior to starting University chose not to declare this on application.¹⁴² UCAS found that many students still fear stigma and discrimination associated with mental health problems, with 90% of respondents saying they thought disclosing would affect their application and 53% reporting that they didn't want other people to know due to stigma and embarrassment.¹⁴³

Increasing knowledge about mental health conditions through information sharing has been found to lead to a change in attitudes and a decrease in stigma around mental health.¹⁴⁴ The RCM will therefore work to improve mental health literacy and resilience¹⁴⁵ amongst our students via the continued delivery of the Healthy Musician module, by enhancing the preparatory information provided during the orientation and transition period for incoming students and through the delivery of a regular programme of awareness raising activities. Initiating open conversations about mental health early and often (at the pre-enrolment stage, orientation and regular intervals beyond) may encourage more students, whether formally diagnosed or not, to seek support. In addition, empowering staff by increasing their understanding of mental health can enable them to provide better informal support to students and could facilitate stronger connections to further support.¹⁴⁶ We will continue to provide teaching staff and personal advisors with regularly updated online resources and training to increase their mental health literacy, improve their ability to recognise early signs and to strengthen the process of early signposting and timely referrals to support.

¹³⁸ Koops, L. H., & Kuebel, C. R., 2021. Self-reported mental health and mental illness among university music students in the United States. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 43(2), 129-143. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X19863265>

¹³⁹ Perkins R., Reid H., Araújo L.S., Clark T. and Williamon A., 2017. *Perceived Enablers and Barriers to Optimal Health among Music Students: A Qualitative Study in the Music Conservatoire Setting*. *Frontiers in Psychology* 8:968. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00968

¹⁴⁰ Student Minds, 2023. University Mental Health Framework. Available at: <https://hub.studentminds.org.uk/resources/charter-framework/>

¹⁴¹ Student Minds, 2024. The Student Mental Health Manifesto: <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/studentmentalhealthmanifesto.html>

¹⁴² UCAS, 2021. *Starting the Conversation: UCAS Report on Student Mental Health*. Available at: <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-reports>

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Simmons, L., Jones, T., and Bradley, E., 2017. "Reducing mental health stigma: The relationship between knowledge and attitude change." *European Journal of Mental Health* 1.12, 25-40.

¹⁴⁵ Kegelaers, J., Schuijjer, M., & Oudejans, R. R., 2021. Resilience and mental health issues in classical musicians: A preliminary study. *Psychology of Music*, 49(5), 1273-1284. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735620927789>

¹⁴⁶ Gulliver A, Farrer L, Bennett K, Ali K, Hellsing A, Katruss N, Griffiths KM., 2018. *University staff experiences of students with mental health problems and their perceptions of staff training needs*. *J Ment Health*. 2018 Jun;27(3):247-256. doi: 10.1080/09638237.2018.1466042. Epub 2018 May 3. PMID: 29722579.

11.2 Supporting the transition to Higher Education

The transition to Higher Education can be a period of increased stress and pressure for students¹⁴⁷ and preparation plays a role in influencing how positive, or negative, a student's experience of transitioning to Higher Education may be.¹⁴⁸ This in turn informs students' overall success and wellbeing during their studies.¹⁴⁹ We will address this by enhancing the information and support provided to incoming students at the pre-enrolment stage, aiming to manage expectations and help students to feel better informed and more prepared as they navigate their transition to Higher Education.

Support with transition at the RCM will continue during the first year of undergraduate studies via the delivery of our core Healthy Musician module, alongside support from a dedicated personal advisor and access to pastoral support, wellness activities and counselling via Student Services. The Universities UK Stepchange Framework refers to Universities as "health settings" calling on HEIs to ensure that health outcomes are parallel with learning outcomes.¹⁵⁰ The Healthy Musician module is a key example of embedding wellbeing into the curriculum, tailored to the specific needs of Conservatoire students. Embedding health and wellbeing should be firmly rooted in an institution's ethos and culture and not only be inherent in the curriculum content but also in its design and delivery.¹⁵¹ Continuing to review and update our Healthy Musician module in response to research findings will support our commitment to this.

11.3 Identifying students at risk and expediting support

In June 2023, The Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP (Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education) wrote to all Higher Education Institutions following a petition calling on the Government to create a statutory legal duty of care for students in Higher Education. The petition was not upheld, instead a package of initiatives aimed at improving mental health across higher education institutions was created, overseen by a new Higher Education Mental Health Taskforce (HEMHIT).¹⁵² HEIs have been urged to actively demonstrate their support of this agenda by embedding best practice and common standards across the sector, ensuring improvements are made in identifying students in need of mental health support and committing to more compassionate communication and processes.¹⁵³

In response to this, the RCM will connect data points (around attendance, VLE logins, non-submissions and disclosures on Mitigating Circumstances applications) to allow more rapid identification of students who may need support, thus enabling earlier intervention. Students disclosing issues that might be impacting their mental health on Mitigating Circumstances applications will be directly contacted in a timelier manner with the reassurance that they are not alone, and support is available to them. Working in line with the Mental Health Charter Framework and ongoing guidance from the HEMHIT will continue to inform the RCM's work to ensure that we are adopting best practice.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁷ Advance HE, Education for Mental Health Toolkit. Available at <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/education-mental-health-toolkit>

¹⁴⁸ Worsley J.D., Harrison P., Corcoran R., 2021. *Bridging the Gap: Exploring the Unique Transition From Home, School or College Into University*. *Frontiers in Public Health*. Doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2021.634285. PMID: 33816421; PMCID: PMC800997

¹⁴⁹ Advance HE, Education for Mental Health Toolkit: Transition. Available at: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning/curricula-development/education-mental-health-toolkit/scaffold-design/transition>

¹⁵⁰ Universities UK, 2020. *Stepchange: Mentally Healthy Universities*. Available at: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2020/uuk-stepchange-mhu.pdf>

¹⁵¹ Lister, K. and Allman, Z., 2024. *Embedding mental wellbeing in the curriculum: a collaborative definition and suite of examples in practice*. *Frontiers in Education*, 8:1157614. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2023.1157614

¹⁵² Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/higher-education-mental-health-implementation-taskforce>

¹⁵³ HEMHIT, 2024. HE Mental Health Implementation Taskforce – first stage report. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65ba1fb7ee7d490013984a12/HE_Mental_Health_Implementation_Taskforce_first_stage_report_Jan_2023.pdf

¹⁵⁴ Student Minds, 2023. University Mental Health Framework. Available at: <https://hub.studentminds.org.uk/resources/charter-framework/>

11.4 Theory of Change

THEORY OF CHANGE				
		Inputs	Change Factor	Impact
Key Institutional Enablers	Increased Staffing Resource	Investment in Student Services team to minimise risk of disruption	Improved staff capacity; improved access to staff; reduced risk of staff burnout; more appropriate allocation of tasks to senior roles; improved capacity to deliver staff training and awareness-raising activities (see below)	Consistent level of service for students and staff, with capacity to deliver evaluation and strategic enhancements aligned to the Mental Health Charter Framework
	A Wellbeing Culture	Promotion of the Report + Support platform; regular review of mental health support with reference to the Mental Health Charter Framework; promote sharing and signposting about mental health through a year-long programme of activities	Reduced stigma around musicians' mental health; improved awareness of support available at RCM;	An institutional culture where mental health is valued by all members of the College. All students and staff understand how to access support and feel confident to self-refer and refer others.
	Improved Data Systems	Upgrade Student Records System to provide more integrated data solutions; strengthen information cross-referencing between data points and processes e.g. mits circs and Student Services; improve staff self-service access to student information including attendance records, LAAs and contextual flags.	Improved access to student information; more efficient channels to communicate and log confidential student data	Systematic flagging of students of concern based on known data indicators leads to earlier and more targeted mental health interventions
Access Strategies	Enhanced Transition to HE	Enhanced pre-enrolment information about 'what to expect' and sources of support; enhanced induction activities including face-to-face introductions and signposting to support staff.	Reduced anxiety amongst new students; improved understand of key contacts at RCM;	Reduction in BMus 1 mitigating circumstances, interruptions and withdrawals due to mental health difficulties.
Outcomes Strategies	Embedded Wellbeing in the Curriculum	Delivery of core health and wellbeing module in undergraduate curriculum, informed by current research; annual review and updating of content to reflect research and professional practice	All students are equipped with tools to improve their health and wellbeing as musicians. The inclusion of health & wellbeing as a formal component of the degree increases its importance and students are more likely to view this as a critical component of their continuous professional development.	Improved student wellbeing and resilience; reduction in mitigating circumstances, interruptions, and withdrawals due to mental health difficulties
	Early Intervention	Develop improved early-warning indicators and referral/intervention processes based on improved student data systems (as above).	Earlier intervention, especially where students are unlikely to self-referral	Earlier referral of students for mental health support, leading to a reduction in the frequency and seriousness of student mental health crises

11.5 Evaluation plan

We consider it inappropriate to set a numerical target in respect of this intervention strategy due to the small sample size involved and the large number of variables that may affect an individual student's mental health outcomes. It is therefore particularly important that the evaluation plan is robust to ensure the desired objectives are being met.

Evaluation will draw upon a range of qualitative and quantitative data points to build clear understanding of in-year and longitudinal progress in this area:

Quantitative data:

As a small institution, the RCM is able to offer its students very individualised support services, which is a great asset. Students are known personally to many teaching and support staff and are not "just a number". However, in designing the activities that form this Intervention Strategy, it was identified that the RCM's Student Services data collection and monitoring capacity is currently limited, and that the casework monitoring system lacks sophistication. There is not currently the means to identify intersection of student characteristics through comparison with Registry student records data. An important commitment in this Intervention Strategy is to develop this capacity, without which evaluation will be very challenging.

During the academic year 2024/25 the Student Services team will carry out a review of its resources and develop a plan to enhance its data collection and management. As an institution the RCM's Strategic Plan has already committed to improving our data systems.¹⁵⁵ For this intervention strategy we will focus on robust data collection and integration of key metrics and indicators such as mitigating circumstances, Learning Agreements, counselling referrals, engagement in mental health activities and support including TogetherALL, personal advising referrals, student analytics (attendance and VLE data), and student outcomes including interruptions, withdrawals and

¹⁵⁵ Royal College of Music Strategic Plan 2017-2027, <https://www.rcm.ac.uk/media/RCM%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf>

progression rates. The roll-out of a new Student Records System (expected 2026) will assist greatly in streamlining and strengthening our approach to this data sharing and analysis.

We will approach analysis of quantitative data through two lenses: the individual student experience and longer-term trends across the RCM undergraduate student population. Since the College only has one undergraduate programme, we will measure our progress with reference to previous years and relative to national sector benchmarks.

The use of quantitative data comes with the caveat that we must take a cautious approach to data analysis to avoid making incorrect assumptions. A numerical trend in this intervention area could indicate positive or negative situations depending on interpretation; for instance increased referrals to counselling might indicate a worsening of mental health, or conversely improvement in student awareness and confidence to self-refer. Further contextual (qualitative) information will be required to support interpretation of the quantitative evidence.

Qualitative data:

All students who have completed a course of counselling with the College will be invited to complete an anonymous **post-counselling survey**. This will provide insights into a critical area of our intervention plan, however we are committed to undertaking more comprehensive evaluation that also explores the efficacy of low-intensity or non-clinical support.

We will conduct an **annual online Student Services survey** with all RCM students to evaluate access to mental health support, the appropriateness of the offer, and the impact of the resources for students. We recognise that this broad approach across a whole body of students may produce generalised results that overlook the many complex and individualised factors that impact on mental health and engagement with support. Nonetheless, it is important to consult the whole student population.

We will continue to embed a '**students as partners**' approach in our reporting and decision-making processes through student representation on key committees such as the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee and the EDI Committee.

We will also draw upon the **feedback from frontline staff** such as personal advisors and Mental Health First-Aiders to provide a staff lens on the effectiveness of the intervention strategy.

We plan to work closely with the Centre for Performance Science to develop more **specialised and research-informed evaluation techniques** designed to recognise the specific mental health challenges that musicians may experience. We also expect the outcomes of specific Centre for Performance Science research projects, for instance the HEARTS Professional Project,¹⁵⁶ to inform our interventions and continuing enhancement, for example through **research-informed updates** to the BMus curriculum.

Data-Informed Enhancement:

We will recast the annual Student Services report to ensure that this follows an **enhancement approach** where annual actions are set in response to robust reflection on our qualitative and quantitative data. We will set actions and measure our success with close reference to sector best practice, such as the Mental Health Charter Framework.

¹⁵⁶ Health, Economic and Social Impact of the Arts (HEartS) <https://performancescience.ac.uk/hearts/>

Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: Royal College of Music

Provider UKPRN: 10007778

Summary of 2025-26 entrant course fees

*course type not listed

Inflation statement:

Subject to the maximum fee limits set out in Regulations we will increase fees each year using RPI-X

Table 3b - Full-time course fee levels for 2025-26 entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree		N/A	9250
Foundation degree	*	N/A	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	N/A	*
HNC/HND	*	N/A	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	N/A	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	N/A	*
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year	*	N/A	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 3b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2025-26

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Sub-contractual provider name and additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Table 4b - Part-time course fee levels for 2025-26 entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree		N/A	5650
Foundation degree	*	N/A	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	N/A	*
HNC/HND	*	N/A	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	N/A	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	N/A	*
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year	*	N/A	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 4b - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2025-26

Sub-contractual part-time course type:	Sub-contractual provider name and additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: Royal College of Music

Provider UKPRN: 10007778

Investment summary

A provider is expected to submit information about its forecasted investment to achieve the objectives of its access and participation plan in respect of the following areas: access, financial support and research and evaluation. Note that this does not necessarily represent the total amount spent by a provider in these areas. Table 6b provides a summary of the forecasted investment, across the four academic years covered by the plan, and Table 6d gives a more detailed breakdown.

Notes about the data:

The figures below are not comparable to previous access and participation plans or access agreements as data published in previous years does not reflect latest provider projections on student numbers.

Yellow shading indicates data that was calculated rather than input directly by the provider.

In Table 6d (under 'Breakdown'):

"Total access investment funded from HFI" refers to income from charging fees above the basic fee limit.

"Total access investment from other funding (as specified)" refers to other funding, including OIS funding (but excluding Uni Connect), other public funding and funding from other sources such as philanthropic giving and private sector sources and/or partners.

Table 6b - Investment summary

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Breakdown	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Access activity investment (£)	NA	£225,000	£229,000	£233,000	£239,000
Financial support (£)	NA	£115,000	£115,000	£115,000	£115,000
Research and evaluation (£)	NA	£14,000	£14,000	£15,000	£15,000

Table 6d - Investment estimates

Investment estimate (to the nearest £1,000)	Breakdown	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Access activity investment	Pre-16 access activities (£)	£106,000	£108,000	£110,000	£113,000
Access activity investment	Post-16 access activities (£)	£11,000	£11,000	£11,000	£11,000
Access activity investment	Other access activities (£)	£108,000	£110,000	£112,000	£115,000
Access activity investment	Total access investment (£)	£225,000	£229,000	£233,000	£239,000
Access activity investment	Total access investment (as % of HFI)	32.1%	31.6%	31.9%	32.7%
Access activity investment	Total access investment funded from HFI (£)	£169,000	£173,000	£176,000	£179,000
Access activity investment	Total access investment from other funding (as specified) (£)	£54,000	£54,000	£55,000	£57,000
Financial support investment	Bursaries and scholarships (£)	£108,000	£108,000	£108,000	£108,000
Financial support investment	Fee waivers (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Financial support investment	Hardship funds (£)	£7,000	£7,000	£7,000	£7,000
Financial support investment	Total financial support investment (£)	£115,000	£115,000	£115,000	£115,000
Financial support investment	Total financial support investment (as % of HFI)	16.4%	15.9%	15.7%	15.7%
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (£)	£14,000	£14,000	£15,000	£15,000
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (as % of HFI)	2.0%	1.9%	2.1%	2.1%

