

Guidelines for Applicants (entry 2026-2027)

PhD in Musicology, Music Psychology, Music Education, Performance, and Composition

The RNCM offers the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** (PhD). The RNCM does not yet have research degree awarding powers. Degrees are awarded by Manchester Metropolitan University for a collaborative programme of research, undertaken and supervised at RNCM.

Research topics, methods and supervision

The RNCM uses the Arts and Humanities Research Council [definition of research](#) (**Appendix A**). It takes a broad view of the topics that can be investigated within the five strands of the PhD programme. These may range from a traditional exposition of a historical musicological thesis or report of original research in music psychology to other project-based work that relates in imaginative ways to performance studies, composition, recordings, theory and criticism, etc.

The research topics and methods of postgraduate research students (PGRs) should, as far as possible, be congruent with those of their supervisors so you should consult the list of staff research interests (**Appendix B**), to identify at least one potential supervisor for your project and/or, particularly if you are a performer or composer, approach the appropriate Head of School for advice. The Head of Doctoral Programmes, Dr Tom Parkinson (pgr@rncm.ac.uk), can provide further guidance if necessary.

Admissions requirements

Applicants for PhD are normally required to hold a good (Distinction or Merit) master's qualification in a relevant subject, having undertaken research training and produced a dissertation and/or portfolio of compositions or performances. They will also be considered for a place on the RNCM-Man Met research degree programme if they expect their master's qualification to be awarded within the first three months after they have enrolled. All enrolments are expected to take place in September.

Potential applicants who do not meet these requirements should contact the relevant pathway leader (see below) or the Head of Doctoral Programmes (pgr@rncm.ac.uk).

All applicants are required to submit a research proposal directed clearly towards one of the five strands of the programme.

Please note that the proposal, including tables, table and figure captions and bibliography or references (ancillary information), must be no more than 1500 words. This is congruent with the current word limits for AHRC funding proposals through the NWCDTP.

Musicology

The research proposal (of no more than 1500 words including ancillary information) must set out a clearly defined topic, a description of the proposed methods of research, and an indication of the aims and likely outcomes. It is recognised that these may change as the research develops. The proposal must be presented under the following headings (submissions that do not conform to this structure may be rejected and returned to the applicant for further preparation):

1. Suggested title
2. Aims (general) and objectives (specific)
3. Brief summary description of project – content and structure (organised, if appropriate, under provisional chapter headings)
4. Proposed research methods (e.g., music analysis, philosophical critique, historical enquiry, biographical study, reception history, archival work, experimental / empirical tests, interviews)
5. Indicative bibliography (no more than 15 items).

For advice on applications for research degrees in Musicology, please contact the Head of Undergraduate Studies, Professor Nicholas Reyland (nicholas.reyland@rncm.ac.uk).

Music Psychology and Music Education

The research proposal (of no more than 1500 words including ancillary information) must set out a clearly defined topic, the rationale for the research questions to be addressed, based on a review of the existing literature, the specific aims and hypotheses (if appropriate), and a description of the proposed methods. It is recognised that these may change as the research develops. The proposal must be presented under the following headings (submissions that do not conform to this structure may be rejected and returned to the applicant for further preparation):

1. Suggested title
2. Background / context: literature review(s)
3. For each study proposed: rationale, research questions, aims and hypotheses as appropriate
4. For each study proposed: methods - design, participants, materials/apparatus (if appropriate), procedure, analyses
5. References.

For advice on applications for research degrees in Music Psychology, please contact the Head of Enterprise (Academic), Dr Michelle Phillips (michelle.phillips@rncm.ac.uk).

For advice on applications for research degrees in Music Education, please contact the Head of Music, Health and Wellbeing, Professor John Habron-James (john.habron-james@rncm.ac.uk).

Composition

Scores of THREE examples of your own recent compositions with high-quality audio recordings where available.

You should submit a preliminary research proposal (of no more than 1500 words including ancillary information) articulating the research enquiry to be demonstrated in the portfolio of

compositions and/or setting out the topics addressed in the critical commentary that will form part of your eventual submission for PhD.

For advice on applications for research degrees in Composition, please contact the Head of School of Composition, Dr Larry Goves (larry.goves@rncm.ac.uk).

Performance (practice / practice-led research)

You should submit a preliminary research proposal (of no more than 1500 words including ancillary information) articulating the topic(s) that you propose to address in your research and the ways in which you plan to demonstrate your research enquiry in the proposed portfolio of performances and accompanying critical commentary that will form your eventual submission for PhD.

The proposal must be presented under the following headings (submissions that do not conform to this structure may be rejected and returned to the applicant for further preparation):

- Suggested title
- Aims (general) and objectives (specific)
- Brief summary description of project, including an outline of where your research would fit in with a) your own practice and b) research by others that has already been published
- Proposed means by which you will demonstrate the outcomes of your research in a) performance(s) and b) a written commentary
- Indicative bibliography, and discography, where relevant (no more than 15 items).

Applicants for the PhD in Performance are also required to submit the following additional material:

- high-quality audio- and/or audio-visual recordings (links to online recordings are acceptable)

For advice on applications for research degrees in Performance please contact the Head of Graduate School, Professor David Horne (david.horne@rncm.ac.uk).

Evaluation of portfolios and research proposals

Portfolios of compositions and performances will be evaluated for quality. Research proposals will be evaluated on the extent to which they demonstrate the applicant's

- Ability to raise original research questions on a suitably focused topic
- Potential, in the case of Performance or Composition, for articulating a convincing linkage between the thesis or critical commentary and portfolio of performances or compositions
- Potential to undertake the proposed research and complete a thesis / portfolio within the specified time and word limits
- Potential for the thesis / portfolio to make a valuable and original contribution to knowledge
- Language skills, which have to be at the level required for writing a doctoral thesis.

Applicants whose native language is not English

Minimum scores on language tests are required for entry to all programmes of study at RNCM and Manchester Metropolitan University, regardless of how long applicants have lived in the UK and whether they undertook their bachelor's and/or master's degrees at UK higher education institutions. Applicants may be exempted if they achieved the minimum scores required before they undertook their master's degree at RNCM, or another HEI where their learning was undertaken in English, and can provide evidence of having produced a dissertation of at least 8,000 words.

The minimum requirement for applicants to the **music education, music psychology and musicology** pathways is an **average IELTS (Academic) score of 7.0 including a minimum of 7.0 for writing and no less than 6.0 in any of the other three components** (listening, reading and speaking), or equivalent scores on a test approved by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) taken no more than 12 months before the application was made.

The minimum requirement for applicants to the **composition** and **performance** pathways is an **average IELTS (Academic) score of 7.0 with no less than 6.0 in any of the four components**, or equivalent scores on a test approved by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) taken no more than 12 months before the application was made.

For more information, please see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prove-your-english-language-abilities-with-a-secure-english-language-test-selt> (updated 12 June 2023). For an unconditional offer to be made, the test must have been taken no more than 12 months prior to application; where offers are made conditional on the results of language tests, these must be available for checking prior to enrolment.

Making your formal application

Once you have received feedback on your proposed research from the appropriate member of staff, and are ready to make a formal application, you should complete the application form and submit it with your research proposal via [Acceptd](#), along with any relevant attachments such as links to MP3 files, scores in pdf format etc.

Applications are approved for evaluation by the appropriate research degree pathway leader: Head of School of Composition (composition); Head of Graduate School (performance); Head of Undergraduate Studies (musicology); Programme Leader (music psychology); Head of Music, Health and Wellbeing (music education). In consultation with the initial evaluator and/or the potential primary supervisor, the Programme Leader will appoint at least one other member of staff, besides the potential primary supervisor, to evaluate the proposal and/or portfolio of compositions/performances. If the proposal is rejected, then feedback and further advice may be obtained through the Programme Leader prior to one re-submission of a revised proposal. No more than two submissions are possible.

Applicants whose research proposal and/or portfolio receive(s) positive evaluation will be called for interview, and if appropriate, audition (c. 45 minutes). The interview panel will consist of no fewer than two appropriately qualified research-active members of staff, ideally including those who evaluated the application and not excluding the potential primary supervisor. The Head of School of Composition or his nominee will interview all applicants for PhD in composition. The offer of a place on the programme will be made only after the applicant has been interviewed, and will be subject to the availability of a Principal Supervisor at Manchester Metropolitan University.

The normal entry point for the PhD is the first day of the academic term in September.

Appendix A

Definition of research (from the Arts and Humanities Research Council guidelines, at p. 10 of <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/AHRC-230821-ResearchFundingGuideV5.5-2021.pdf>).

For all schemes except Research Networking and Follow-on Funding for Impact and Engagement (FoF), the AHRC's definition of research is as follows: research activities should primarily be concerned with research processes, rather than outputs. This definition is built around three key features and your proposal must fully address all of these in order to be considered eligible for support:

It must define a series of research questions, issues or problems that will be addressed in the course of the research. It must also define its aims and objectives in terms of seeking to enhance knowledge and understanding relating to the questions, issues or problems to be addressed

It must specify a research context for the questions, issues or problems to be addressed. You must specify why it is important that these particular questions, issues or problems should be addressed; what other research is being or has been conducted in this area; and what particular contribution this project will make to the advancement of creativity, insights, knowledge and understanding in this area.

It must specify the research methods for addressing and answering the research questions, issues or problems. You must state how, in the course of the research project, you will seek to answer the questions, address the issues or solve the problems. You should also explain the rationale for your chosen research methods and why you think they provide the most appropriate means by which to address the research questions, issues or problems.

Our primary concern is to ensure that the research we fund addresses clearly articulated research questions, issues or problems, set in a clear context of other research in that area, and using appropriate research methods and/or approaches.

The precise nature of the research questions, issues or problems, approaches to the research and outputs of the work may vary considerably, embracing basic, strategic and applied research. The research questions, issues, problems, methods and/or approaches may range from intellectual questions that require critical, historical or theoretical investigation, to practical issues or problems that require other approaches such as testing, prototyping, experimental development and evaluation. The outputs of the research may include, for example, monographs, editions or articles; electronic data, including sound or images; performances, films or broadcasts; or exhibitions. Teaching materials may also be an appropriate outcome from a research project provided that it fulfils the definition above.

The research should be conceived as broadly as possible and so consideration should also be given to the outcomes of, and audiences for, the research. The outcomes of the research may only benefit other researchers and influence future research, but consideration must be given to potential opportunities for the transfer of knowledge into new contexts where the research could have an impact.

Creative output can be produced, or practice undertaken, as an integral part of a research process as defined above. The Council would expect, however, this practice to be accompanied by some form of documentation of the research process, as well as some form of textual analysis or explanation to support its position and as a record of your critical reflection. Equally, creativity or practice may involve no such process at all, in which case it would be ineligible for funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Appendix B: RNCM Staff Research Interests 2026-2027

Musicology

Dr Amanda Babington – Handel; French Baroque; Editing; Music history and performance practice, especially pertaining to Violin, Recorder and Musette. Amanda.Babington@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Simon Clarke – Continental philosophy in general, deconstruction and critical theory in particular, the long 19th century, Ravel, orchestration, metal. Simon.Clarke@rncm.ac.uk

Professor Cheryll Duncan – Professional music culture in Britain during the 17th and 18th centuries; singers, instrumentalists, composers and impresarios; music publishing; iconography; theatre history; archival studies, particularly legal documents. Cheryll.Duncan@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Nico de Villiers – unearthing the works of overlooked and underrepresented song composers with particular interest in American Art Song and South African Art Song during the first half of the 20th century. Specific research speciality: The life and music of Dutch-American conductor and Oscar-winning composer Richard Hageman (1881-1966). Nico.deVilliers@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Annika Forkert – History, analysis, and aesthetics of early and mid-20th century music in Britain; musical modernism; microtonal, atonal and serial music; female composers (focus on Elisabeth Lutyens and Rebecca Clarke) and feminist musicology; film music in Britain up to 1970. Annika.Forkert@rncm.ac.uk

Professor David Horne – Composition; arranging; improvisation; orchestration; electroacoustic music with live instruments; twentieth-century analysis; contemporary British music; opera since 1900; contemporary performance practice; Wagner; Puccini. David.Horne@rncm.ac.uk

Dr David Jones – French music 1800 to the present, especially *mélodie*; art song from the 19th centuries to the present; 20th century British composers. David.Jones@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Michelle Phillips – Research interests include perception of large-scale musical form, audience response to live music, perception of contemporary music, music and time, music analysis, and music and the golden section. Michelle.Phillips@rncm.ac.uk

Professor Nicholas Reyland – screen music, theory and analysis, music since 1900, Witold Lutosławski, narrative, affect, trauma. Nicholas.Reyland@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Helen Seddon-Gray – Composition, Cross-cultural studies in composition, improvisation, repertoire and performance, 20th Century Music, the influence of belief systems on music, AI. Helen.seddon-gray@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Adam Swayne – pianist and composer; Ferdinand Ries; the concerto from the late 18th century; contemporary music; chamber music and ensemble performance. Adam.Swayne@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Geoff Thomason – Adolph Brodsky – Music in Manchester c.1890-1930 – Music in the First World War – British concert life and repertoire reception / development. Geoff.Thomason@rncm.ac.uk

Professor Wiebke Thormählen – social and cultural history of music in the long eighteenth century; performing practice (particularly violin); history of music education particularly in Britain; sound heritage; musical engagement in the home past and present including digital curation and dissemination of opera. Wiebke.Thormahlen@rncm.ac.uk

Dr David Vickers – Handel and his contemporaries; Historical Performance and the Classical Recording Industry; Editing operas and oratorios; Baroque Music from Monteverdi to Telemann; 17th-century and 18th-century vocal music for the chapel and theatre (Purcell, Vivaldi, Bach, Rameau, Mozart and Haydn). David.Vickers@rncm.ac.uk

Music psychology

Dr Sara Ascenso – music psychology, musicians' health and well-being, positive psychology Sara.Ascenso@rncm.ac.uk

Professor Jane Ginsborg – music psychology: preparation for expert performance, particularly singing; memory for music; musicians' health and well-being (not accepting further primary supervisees) Jane.Ginsborg@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Michelle Phillips – music perception, audience response to live and live-streamed music, perception of contemporary music, music and time, music and maths, music and the golden section, and music and Parkinson's. Michelle.Phillips@rncm.ac.uk

Music education and pedagogy

Dr Robert Gardiner – music education and teacher education; music education, society and culture; teacher identity, ideology and discourse; cultural policy and music education in schools; curricular music and instrumental teaching; equitable approaches to music education. Robert.Gardiner@rncm.ac.uk

Professor Karin Greenhead – qualitative (especially hermeneutic phenomenology and related, experiential and practice-based approaches), inter/trans disciplinary and historical research in musical interpretation, rehearsal and performance (solo and ensemble); situated action; Dynamic Rehearsal; Dalcroze Eurhythmics; music and movement; Plastique Animée; improvisation; musical teaching and learning; situated action; syllabus development and assessment in Dalcroze Eurhythmics. Karin.Greenhead@rncm.ac.uk

Professor John Habron-James – qualitative, theoretical and historical research in music education and music therapy; Dalcroze Eurhythmics; music and healthcare; music and SEND (special educational needs and disability). John.Habron-James@rncm.ac.uk

Professor Jennie Henley – music pedagogy and educational practice: the relationship between pedagogy and inclusion, music curricula design and development, music education policy, instrumental teaching, ensembles in education, music in prisons, action research in music teaching, adult learning and community music. Jennie.Henley@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Tom Parkinson – popular music education, higher music education, informal learning, participatory action research, cultural policy, alternative and subcultural pedagogies. Tom.Parkinson@rncm.ac.uk

Composition

Dr Laura Bowler – Composition, Experimental Music Theatre, Contemporary Opera, Multimedia Composition, Theatre Direction, Physicality in Performance, Grotowski Theatre Practice, Extended Vocal Technique. Laura.Bowler@rncm.ac.uk

Visiting Professor Gary Carpenter – Composition and arranging. Gary.Carpenter@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Rodrigo Constanzo – Composition, improvisation and popular music.
Rodrigo.Constanzo@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Steven Daverson – Composition, contemporary European music, multitemporality/polytemporality, intersections of contemporary music with visual art and cinema, composing with live and interactive electronics. Steven.Daverson@rncm.ac.uk

Professor Adam Gorb – Instrumental and vocal composition for the concert hall and the theatre. Writing and arranging for Wind Ensemble. Beethoven, Mahler, Puccini, Stravinsky, Shostakovich, Britten, Sondheim. Music and the Holocaust. Adam.Gorb@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Larry Goves – Composition (acoustic and electronic), collaboration (both composer/performer and as co-creators), music and projected text, composition that foreground ensemble behaviour and interaction, the entanglement of composition and curation.
Larry.Goves@rncm.ac.uk

Professor Karin Greenhead – qualitative (especially hermeneutic phenomenology and related, experiential and practice-based approaches), inter/trans disciplinary and historical research in musical interpretation, rehearsal and performance (solo and ensemble); situated action; Dynamic Rehearsal; Dalcroze Eurhythmics; music and movement; Plastique Animée; improvisation; musical teaching and learning; situated action; syllabus development and assessment in Dalcroze Eurhythmics. Karin.Greenhead@rncm.ac.uk

Professor David Horne – Composition; arranging; improvisation; orchestration; electroacoustic music with live instruments; twentieth-century analysis; contemporary British music; opera since 1900; contemporary performance practice; Wagner; Puccini.
David.Horne@rncm.ac.uk

Professor Emily Howard – Composition; Music and Mathematics; Multidisciplinary collaboration; Research projects in conjunction with PRiSM, the RNCM's Centre for Practice & Research in Science & Music. Emily.Howard@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Stuart McCallum – guitarist, composer, producer; jazz, folk, ambient, electronica; immersive audio in studio/live performance and music production; www.stuartmccallum.com;
Stuart.McCallum@rncm.ac.uk

Hannah McGuigan - vocalist, vocal arranging, live electronics; pop, jazz, electronica -
Hannah.mcguigan@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Sam Salem – PRiSM Lecturer in Composition. Creates audiovisual works for performers, electronics and video, which challenge traditional notions of concert presentation and instrumental virtuosity. Sam.salem@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Helen Seddon-Gray – Composition Cross-cultural studies in composition, improvisation, repertoire and performance, 20th Century Music, the influence of belief systems on music, AI.
Helen.Seddon-Gray@rncm.ac.uk

Matt Steele - piano, synthesis, arranger, producer; pop, jazz, electronica.
Matt.steele@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Adam Swayne – pianist and composer; Ferdinand Ries; the concerto from the late 18th century; contemporary music; chamber music and ensemble performance.
Adam.Swayne@rncm.ac.uk

Sam Vicary - electric bassist/double bassist, producer, live programmer, musical director; ambient, electronica; ambisonics. Sam.vicary@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Nina Whiteman – Composition. Multimedia composition. Contemporary Opera. Experimental vocal performance and composition. Improvisation. Extended notation.
Nina.Whiteman@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Raymond Yiu - composer, jazz pianist, conductor; research areas include transcultural composing, musical heritage, music of 20th and 21st Century (with special interest on Julian Anderson, Denys Bouliane, Chou Wen-chung, Lukas Foss, Fred Ho, Doming Lam, José Maceda and Chinariy Ung), yellow music/shidaqui and the legacy of Australian pianist-composer Noel Mewton-Wood. Raymond.Yiu@rncm.ac.uk

Performance

Dr Amanda Babington – Handel; French Baroque; Editing; Music history and performance practice, especially pertaining to Violin, Recorder and Musette. Amanda.Babington@rncm.ac.uk

Steve Berry – Head of Jazz and Improvisation. Steve.Berry@rncm.ac.uk

Professor Rob Buckland – saxophone, cross-genre. Rob.Buckland@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Harvey Davies – pianist and harpsichordist; 18th century historically informed performance; 20th century British music; archives and performance. Harvey.Davies@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Nico de Villiers – unearthing the works of overlooked and underrepresented song composers with particular interest in American Art Song and South African Art Song during the first half of the 20th century. Specific research speciality: The life and music of Dutch-American conductor and Oscar-winning composer Richard Hageman (1881-1966).
Nico.deVilliers@rncm.ac.uk

Geth Griffith – improvisation, particularly pedagogical approaches and techniques; music for solo bass guitar, particularly cross-stylistic. geth.griffith@rncm.ac.uk

Michael Harper – The study and performance of art songs and other music by composers of African heritage. Expanding the repository of these songs and related materials at the Royal Northern College of Music to establish a European base for research on these materials.
Michael.Harper@rncm.ac.uk

Professor Mark Heron – Head of Conducting. Mark.Heron@rncm.ac.uk

Professor David Horne – Composition; arranging; improvisation; orchestration; electroacoustic music with live instruments; twentieth-century analysis; contemporary British music; opera since 1900; contemporary performance practice; Wagner; Puccini. David.Horne@rncm.ac.uk

Dr David Jones – pianist, répétiteur and accompanist; the art of the collaborative pianist especially with reference to *mélodie* and other art song; French music 1800 to the present; 20th century British composers. David.Jones@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Stuart McCallum – guitarist, composer, producer; jazz, folk, ambient, electronica; immersive audio in studio/live performance www.stuartmccallum.com; Stuart.McCallum@rncm.ac.uk

Hannah McGuigan - vocalist, vocal arranging, live electronics; pop, jazz, electronica - Hannah.mcguigan@rncm.ac.uk

Professor John Miller – brass performance; history of brass bands and brass-band repertoire. John.Miller@rncm.ac.uk

Professor Andy Stott – Head of Popular Music. Andy.stott@rncm.ac.uk

Matt Steele – piano, synthesis, arranger, producer; pop, jazz, electronica. Matt.steele@rncm.ac.uk

Dr Adam Swayne – pianist and composer; Ferdinand Ries; the concerto from the late 18th century; contemporary music; chamber music and ensemble performance. Adam.Swayne@rncm.ac.uk

Dr David Thornton – brass band performance and repertoire; innovations in contemporary brass literature. David.Thornton@rncm.ac.uk

Sam Vicary – electric bassist/double bassist, producer, live programmer, musical director; ambient, electronica; ambisonics. Sam.vicary@rncm.ac.uk

In addition, please consult the extensive lists of performance staff by following the links to the appropriate Schools of [Conducting](#), [Keyboard Studies](#), [Popular Music](#), [Strings](#), [Vocal Studies](#) and [Wind, Brass and Percussion](#).