Royal Northern College of Music

Access and Participation Plan 2025/26 - 2028/29

RNCM
ROYAL NORTHERN
COLLEGE of MUSIC

RNCM Access and Participation Plan
2025/26 - 2028/29

1. ## Introduction and strategic aim

The Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) is a sector-leading international conservatoire located in the heart of Manchester, with a reputation for attracting highly talented students, teachers, performers, conductors, composers, and researchers from all over the world. The RNCM is fiercely proud of its Manchester home and committed to the significant responsibilities it has in helping to drive the cultural, educational and commercial ambitions of the city and wider region. As well as being a leading education and training provider, the RNCM is a distinctive and vibrant live music venue, offering unparalleled opportunities for students to perform in public and to work alongside top professional musicians.

As articulated in its Strategic Plan 2020-2026[1], the purpose of the RNCM is to educate and train musicians to the highest level in an environment that is both stimulating and rich in opportunity, for the benefit of individuals and society at large. A global outlook is instilled across every facet of the RNCM's teaching and research, and its students develop the networks, skills and resilience to help them shape sustainable careers at the highest international level. The RNCM is a thriving conservatoire that currently has 892 students, 68% of whom are undergraduate, 29% postgraduate taught and 3% postgraduate research. The academic portfolio comprises two four-year undergraduate degree programmes, Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Music in Popular Music; four postgraduate taught programmes, Master of Music, Master of Performance, Master of Education and a Postgraduate Diploma in Advanced Practice; a suite of professional qualifications including an International Artists Diploma and an Advanced Strings programme, and a thriving postgraduate research community with doctorates currently being awarded by Manchester Metropolitan University. In addition, 418 young people under the age of 18 study on one of our RNCM Junior Programmes.

The vision for the RNCM Education Strategy 2021-2026 is to support learners in understanding, leading, creating and making music to the best of their abilities at whatever their level of study, from the RNCM junior programmes through to postgraduate programmes of study. The strategy is underpinned by four strategic drivers: quality, partnership, visibility and research. These drivers run through the strategic aims and objectives, which focus on creativity, co-creation and experimentation, the student voice, diversity through partnership and collaboration, social and civic responsibility through music education, creative engagement and ambition for social change. The RNCM's degree programmes combine scholarship with opportunities to apply this in practice, thereby developing deep thinking and understanding that drives student innovation, research and artistic practice. Research and knowledge exchange are integral to the curricula and artistic programme, driving societal and educational change. Each undergraduate student undertakes a placement with an industry partner, working in the UK and internationally, and a creative project, which is often the pinnacle of their degree.

Recognised by Gold TEF status in two consecutive TEF exercises, the RNCM demonstrates ongoing excellence, innovation and creativity in education, continually reshaping the music education it delivers. Five Times Higher Awards have been awarded to the RNCM since 2015 (Excellence and Innovation in the Arts – 2015, Outstanding International Students Strategy – 2016, Widening Participation or Outreach Initiative of the Year – 2020, Technological or Digital Innovation of the Year – 2022, Outstanding Entrepreneurial University of the Year - 2023). The artistic programme provides a site for learning through experimentation and risk-taking that inspires originality and interaction with musicians at the forefront of the profession.

As the RNCM delivers on the aspirations set out in its Strategic Plan to define the future of music, its ambition remains to continue to lead and shape conservatoire education internationally and nationally, from pre-tertiary work through to postgraduate research, attracting the very best students, regardless of background, to study and work at the RNCM. This ambition drives our Access and Participation agenda.

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[1] Our Vision - Royal Northern College of Music (rncm.ac.uk)

2. Risks to equality of opportunity

2.1 Access

2.1a Approach to identifying risks to equality of opportunity

The risks to equality of opportunity in accessing world-leading specialist music education are clear and are the result of a complex set of interlinked circumstances impacting music education. Opportunities to access the necessary learning needed to nurture talent and prepare for conservatoire study are not equally distributed and, in areas where provision within school and/or government funded provision within music services is sparse, those who might have the potential to succeed are often reliant on self-funded private instrumental music tuition to build the knowledge and skills that they need to progress into Higher Education.

Our approach to identifying the risks to equality of opportunity for access to the RNCM is two-fold. Firstly, we have synthesised the findings of research conducted to understand the barriers to progression in music with the Office for Students' Equality of Opportunity Risk Register. This has enabled us to understand where research has identified specific areas of risk in relation to accessing Higher Music Education. Secondly, we have reviewed our current Access and Participation strategic approach and interventions to identify what is working, what is not working, and why. Bringing these two things together provide us with a research-informed evidenced-based approach to risk.

2.1b Research

RNCM research[2] has demonstrated that barriers to accessing high quality opportunities relate to:

Diversity and inclusion: a whole range of factors impact diversity and inclusion such as knowledge of conservatoires and how to access advanced study, affordability of music learning opportunities, geographical 'cold spots' where no provision exists, and challenges in declining school music provision preventing those from non-traditional conservatoire student backgrounds from accessing conservatoire study.

Value and Purpose: an under-appreciation of the value of music as a valid subject of study and parental, cultural and social under-valuing of the pursuit of a career in music create barriers for those who might otherwise excel in music study.

Teacher Education and CPD: a lack of provision, particularly at Primary level, within initial teacher education courses [3] and a lack of CPD for in-service teachers create an educational eco-system where even if opportunities for music learning do exist, there is no guarantee of quality.

Collaboration: a compartmentalised music education landscape exacerbated by music education being funding reliant (whether that is parental paid fees, third sector funding, charitable or philanthropic funding) makes progression pathways difficult to see and navigate.

Transition points: gaps in provision to support the pedagogical transition from whole-class learning to the intensive 1:1 teaching needed to progress, excel and succeed, moving between school phases, and moving between schools and geographical locations where there is music provision to schools and locations where there is no provision create barriers to progression.

Resourcing: lack of physical space for music, dedicated curriculum/extra-curriculum time needed to nurture collaborative musicianship and learn how to perform, lack of quality instruments and paucity of information create barriers for accessing music learning opportunities.

Pupil and participant voice: perceptions that music education provision is designed without young people's input leads to perceptions that this provision does not cater for all learners' needs.

Funding: funding runs throughout the above themes. Being reliant on third sector funding, philanthropy, and charitable donations makes for a fragile music education landscape with significant risk to the sustainability

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[2] Jennie Henley and David Barton, 'Time for Change? Recurrent Barriers to Music Education', *British Journal of Music Education* 39, no. 2 (July 2022): 203–17, https://doi.org/10.1017/S026505172200016X.
[3] Jennie Henley, 'How Musical Are Primary Generalist Student Teachers?', *Music Education Research* 19, no. 4 (12 July 2016): 470–84, https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2016.1204278.

of the provision – often the life of a funded project is shorter than the amount of time needed to study an instrument so as to be in a position to access conservatoire level study.

Synthesised with the OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register, the risks to equality of opportunity as identified by this research relate to:

1. Lack of opportunities to access programmes that build **knowledge and skills** to a sufficient level to gain access to conservatoire
2. Having adequate **information and guidance** as to the possibilities of conservatoire study
3. Perceptions of conservatoire study including understanding what conservatoire study is and **valuing music** as a viable degree subject.

2.1c Current approach to access interventions

Our current access interventions are driven strategically through RNCM Engage and supported by our bespoke recruitment support within RNCM Transitions. Named as the THE Widening Participation or Outreach Initiative of the Year 2020, RNCM Engage brings together the RNCM's work in community outreach and education. The RNCM Engage strategy for widening participation is embedded within the Education Supporting Strategy (Aim 6 – Widen Participation), ensuring that widening participation is central to our educational mission and, as such, we take a whole provider approach (see section 5). The drivers for the RNCM Education Supporting Strategy, quality, visibility, partnership and research, steer RNCM Engage work and provide a point of reflection on our evaluation work.

Driver 1: Quality – developing knowledge and skills

The RNCM commits to providing high quality music education so that musicians can progress to the next stage of their study and music-making. Through research, we know that in a quality education, one size does not fit all[4] and so, in our context, as well as the quality teaching, facilities, and performance opportunities that the RNCM is known for, this means taking an individual approach. Our flagship Pathfinder programme, funded through philanthropic funding, provides opportunities for young people to engage in quality music learning in a bespoke way so as to enable them to find their pathway to advanced study. Our evaluation work shows that by taking a bespoke approach to support those with the most challenging barriers works to build the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully enter conservatoire study, as well as providing the information and guidance needed to make informed choices as to further study[5].

Driver 2: Visibility – aspiration and perception of Higher Education

Recognised by our TEF Gold status, our signature pedagogy involving side-by-side learning, where our students learn with professional musicians, is mirrored within our RNCM Engage access interventions. Student mentorship is key in raising aspirations as well as building our students' capacity for carrying out inclusive teaching that, in turn, will contribute to addressing barriers to music education in the longer term. Our evaluation work shows that the involvement of our students is fundamental in showing learners what is possible, raising their aspirations, and building understanding of how they might achieve their goals[6].

Driver 3: Partnership – information and guidance and raising attainment

The RNCM recognises that there is a limit to what it can achieve on its own. Partnership working is critical to successful widening participation work in music as the nature of music is such that different skills are developed in different arenas. For example, performance skills, ensemble skills, musicianship skills including the application of theoretical knowledge to practice, require different inputs from schools, Music Services and organisations such as grass roots bands, ensembles and Music Hub activities as well as the RNCM. We firmly believe that music education should take place in schools, as every child and young person has access to a school education. Our approach within RNCM Engage is not to replace school music education, as this would intensify the risks to equality of opportunity, but to work *with* schools, Music Services and Hubs, and other providers of music learning in the knowledge that collaboration will provide the best opportunities for young people to develop their musical skills, knowledge and provide the information and support that they need to progress. Our evaluation work shows that by understanding what we can provide, what our limitations are, and using this as a basis for partnership work, young people can

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[4] Jennie Henley and Lee Higgins, 'Redefining Excellence and Inclusion', *International Journal of Community Music* 13, no. 2 (1 June 2020): 207–16, https://doi.org/10.1386/ijcm_00020_1.

[5] RNCM Pathfinder

[6] RNCM Young Artists

flourish in their music learning and build both the aspiration and attainment needed to be successful in progressing to advanced study.

Driver 4: Research – evidence-based practice

Evidence-based practice is fundamental to the success of RNCM Engage activities. Our access interventions are designed drawing on research and evidence and are also research-generating so that we can continue to understand what is working, why it is working, what the impact is and disseminate this beyond the RNCM to support others in their widening participation work. The RNCM has a strong music education research specialism and it is through this research that we have developed this Access and Participation Plan and can meet our ambitions laid out in our Strategic Plan, outlined above.

Based on evaluation of our current interventions, the risks to equality of opportunity in Access relate to:

1. programmes, projects and interventions that learners can access not being of a high enough **quality** to raise attainment and enable progression
2. programmes, projects and interventions that raise aspirations not being **visible**
3. lack of **partnership** working limiting opportunities for transition and progression
4. programmes, projects and interventions being designed without drawing on **research** and evaluation evidence to ensure their success, thus replicating and reinforcing barriers

2.1d Data

To apply the risks identified through research on barriers to music education and the evaluation of our access to our specific context, we have conducted a thorough analysis of our application, offer and enrolment data. Our numbers are small. This being the case, much of our data is unreportable and care is needed in presenting data. Rather than analysing data to gain statistical certainty, we have looked for patterns that might indicate where our specific risks to equality of opportunity lie and therefore to inform our objective-setting. To interrogate the data and identify patterns, we have used percentages rather than numbers. It should be noted that our BMus Popular Music programme is a smaller programme than our BMus programme, with an intake of approximately 40 students (home and international), which is one third of the intake for our BMus programme at approximately 120 students (home and international). In addition, it should also be noted that data are collated based on known qualifying indicators, i.e. known postcodes and self-reported characteristics, which reinforces the challenges with reliability and the rationale for using data to look for patterns rather than provide statistical certainty.

Mirroring the data available publicly via the Office for Students Access and Participation Data Dashboard, our application and entry data show distinct challenges in the profile of our applicants and entrants as identified by metrics relating to likelihood to attend Higher Education (POLAR4 and TUNDRA), ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic status (IMD and Free School Meals). These challenges exist for both our undergraduate degree programmes; our BMus and BMus Popular Music (BMus PM). We have moved to close the gap between these different populations of students, but there is more work to do. However, on analysing the conversion rates from application to offer and offer to enrolment, an interesting picture emerges.

Our data show that although there are stark gaps in our applicant pool and enrolment to the RNCM between those who are White British and other ethnicities, those reporting disability and who report no disability, those with a background in a geographical area that is more likely and backgrounds less likely to support entry to Higher Education, and those experiencing low levels and high levels of deprivation, the percentage of conversion from application to offer viewed metric by metric is similar across all metrics. We can see that the percentage of applicants from different backgrounds who are made an offer is similar. For example, viewed by IMD decile, our BMus applicant pool for 2022/23 contained 13.8% applicants from deciles 1-4 and 86.2% applicants from deciles 5-10. Offers were made to 20.7% of those applicants from deciles 1-4 and 22.3% of those applicants from deciles 5-10. Out of these offers, 91.3% of offer holders from deciles 1-4 enrolled for the programme, and 79.2% of offer holders from deciles 5-10 enrolled for the programme. This pattern is repeated across characteristics and BMus and mostly for BMus Popular Music, with some deviations due to very low numbers causing large percentage swings.

This suggests that our RNCM Engage activity aimed at building knowledge and skills combined with our RNCM Transitions activity to provide information and guidance, including our contextual audition processes where we use contextual information to inform the process of making an offer, and supporting applicants through the process of application to offer, is working. A similar picture can be seen in the percentage rates of conversion from offer to

enrolment, indicating that our package of support for offer holders through RNCM Transitions is also working (see section 3.1 for associated data).

What this tells us is:

- The risks to equality of opportunity as identified by research and our own evaluation work apply to applicants across all the different characteristics of ethnicity, disability, low socio-economic status and likelihood to go to Higher Education.
- Our access interventions are working to support students across the different characteristics with conversion from application to offer and offer to enrolment.
- Our work needs to be targeted to increasing the diversity within the application pool and maintaining our conversion rates.

2.1e Summary of risks to equality of opportunity in access

Taking account our research, evaluation and data, we have identified the following risks to equality of opportunity:

1. Lack of opportunities to access programmes that build **knowledge and skills** to a sufficient level to gain access to conservatoire.
2. Programmes, projects and interventions that learners can access not being of a high enough **quality** to raise attainment and enable progression.
3. Programmes, projects and interventions that raise aspirations not being **visible.**
4. Lack of **partnership** working limiting opportunities for transition and progression.
5. Programmes, projects and interventions being designed without drawing on **research** and evaluation evidence to ensure their success, thus replicating and reinforcing barriers.
6. Having no knowledge of conservatoire as a choice including lack of understanding what conservatoire study is and low **value music** as a viable degree subject.
7. Not having adequate **information and guidance** as to the possibilities of conservatoire study.

2.2 On Course and Progression

2.2a Approach to identifying risks for equality of opportunity On Course and in Progression

As demonstrated by the paucity of data found on the Office for Students Access and Participation Data Dashboard in relation to On Course and Progression risks, our student numbers are too low to report without risk of identifying individual students and the data sets too small to analyse and make inferences with any statistical certainty. We have therefore taken a different approach to identifying risks to equality of opportunity.

Our approach to identifying On Course and Progression risks has involved four steps:

1. Review data relating to different characteristics to identify any trends in attainment and progression, including that presented on the OfS Data Dashboard and internal continuation, attainment and progression data.
2. On finding no significant trends within step 1, a number of consultations were held to understand where the risks may lie and identify sources that might provide indications of risk:
    - Formal consultations through our Education and Quality Committee and Academic Board via strategic discussion agenda items (noted in committee minutes), these involved staff from across the institution and student representatives.
    - Informal consultations with teaching staff, Student Health and Wellbeing Hub staff, and leadership teams, collated via field notes.
    - Convening two student panels, one for each undergraduate programme, for consultation, leading to the co-creation of the objectives with the Students' Union President (see section 6).
3. Identify where areas revealed through step 2 strategically align within our Education Supporting Strategy and apply this to the OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register to show where we may make the biggest impact.
4. Exploration of different sources of data that could indicate specific risks to equality of opportunity within these areas, such as that gathered through our Continuous Monitoring process.

2.2b Consultation

Our consultation has involved various stages involving formal committees, informal meetings with Programme Leaders, Health and Wellbeing Hub colleagues, and students. Initial consultations involved analysis of the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register and interpretation of risks to our context. Through this consultation, we have identified that the access risks identified through our research and evaluation are interlinked with on course risks. Where there are gaps in knowledge and skills due to lack of access to pre-tertiary opportunities, a student may be successful in gaining a place at the RNCM but start their studentship without essential prior knowledge and skills that others who have had opportunity to develop these hold. As reported to Academic (paper 24.12), Education and Quality Committee members identified that the key risks for learners are lack of access to adequate music education and lack of opportunities within activities that contribute to the building of skills within music prior to higher education study, creating knowledge gaps that are invisible at audition but can have a negative impact on attainment. These include participation in activities that:

- build ensemble skills
- provide performance opportunities and build performance skills
- give access to professional venues and the live music industry
- provide opportunities to develop production skills and use of technology
- develop knowledge of a broad range of music through access to live performances
- prepare students for academic music study

Not having access to these activities was also deemed to have a detrimental impact on a sense of belonging and might lead to feelings of isolation, which can ultimately result in withdrawal from programme. In addition, all of these build essential formative skills beyond the immediate skills related to playing an instrument/singing that lead to success within conservatoire study.

Furthermore, coupled with the lack of A-level provision as evidenced in research reports[7], the risks associated with lack of music education provision go beyond learners with characteristics addressed via Access and Participation Plans, however those without these characteristics may have the financial, social and cultural mechanisms to seek opportunities that will build the skills they need to be successful at the RNCM, whereas those with characteristics might not. Therefore, the challenges with access lead into potential challenges in continuation, attainment, completion and progression. This suggests that risks to Access using the OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register also feed into On Course and Progression risks.

Consultation with students revealed that whilst cost pressures are a considerable issue for all students, the key student concerns in relation to equality of opportunity in accessing the learning needed to succeed surround neurodivergence and mental health. These two areas have been the focus of Students' Union activity. Working together, the Executive Committee have set the strategic direction for the Student Health and Wellbeing Hub and the Students' Union President has been working with the Hub to devise student-led activities.

The result of this consultation has suggested that neurodivergence and mental health should be the areas of focus. Therefore, to identify On Course risks we have firstly looked at our current strategy to identify where we can make the most impact and then reviewed different data sources to test whether the concerns revealed in student consultation are underpinned by evidence.

2.2c Current strategy and wider data indicators

Similar to our RNCM Engage strategy, supporting student health and wellbeing is embedded in our Education Supporting Strategy (Aim 4 – Supporting Student Health and Wellbeing). The RNCM Student Health and Wellbeing Hub brings together our wellbeing services with academic support and is driven by a research-led strategy, operationalised through our Student Support Framework. This framework brings together student engagement monitoring, applications for reasonable adjustments through Personal Learning Plans, applications for deferrals due to extenuating circumstances, usage statistics of counselling and wellbeing services, engagement with personal and academic tutoring and study skills programmes, and provides a mechanism to track students through their studentship, identify indicators that a student might need additional support, and put in place interventions as

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[7] Adam Whittaker, 'Teacher Perceptions of A-Level Music: Tension, Dilemmas and Decline', *British Journal of Music Education* 38, no. 2 (July 2021): 145–59, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051720000352; Adam Whittaker and Martin Fautley, 'A-Level Music Decline and Disadvantage Attainment Gaps' (BCU, July 2021), https://bcuassets.blob.core.windows.net/docs/a-level-report-290621-pdf-132695100641559063.pdf.

appropriate to the students. Strategic alignment with our other Education aims and objectives ensures that this work is embedded and provides an opportunity to draw together wider data to understand where we are able to make the most impact.

As we are building our knowledge through evaluation and monitoring of the Student Support Framework, we are able to test the consultation findings that students with neurodivergence and mental health conditions experience the greatest on course risks. Through analysis of our extenuating circumstances applications and assessment deferrals, we have identified that mental health is the single biggest factor in requesting a deferral due to extenuating circumstances (reported to Education and Quality Committee, minute 24.05). On reviewing our Personal Learning Plans, we recognise that we are seeing a rise in students disclosing a neurodivergence. We know from research that neurodivergence and mental health conditions are often interlinked[8] and we can also see that mental health and neurodivergence cuts across other Access and Participation characteristics such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, educational background, and multiple factors that impact a student's potential for successful Higher Education study.

This being the case, analysing the wider data sources used to underpin strategic alignment with student health and wellbeing and academic achievement supports the outcomes of our consultation in relation to which students to target through our Access and Participation Plan. We believe that neurodivergence and mental health is where we can make most impact.

2.2d Data

To understand how studentships are impacted by neurodivergence and mental health in relation to continuation, progression and attainment, we have reviewed our continuous monitoring data sources. As reported consistently each year, deferrals and withdrawals are low at the RNCM, and continuation is high (evidenced within Education and Quality Committee agendas and minutes). Therefore, to identify where the specific risks lie, we have carried out analysis of year averages within mark bands to understand how students with various characteristics perform year on year against those characteristics.

Due to low numbers, multiple variables such as interruption, deferrals and point at which recognition or diagnosis of a disability is made, making the data less certain, and risks of identifying students, the data are not reportable. We have noted earlier that we are using percentages rather than numbers to look for patterns, but caution is also needed as small numbers cause large percentage swings, particularly on the BMus Popular Music programme. However, we have carried out detailed analysis of three cohorts of students: 2018/19 intake, 2019/2020 intake, and 2021/2022 intake, to understand their progression through their years of study, and, in the case of the 2018/19 and 2019/20 cohorts, to compare this with their final degree result. Noting that our undergraduate degree programmes are four years in duration, our rationale for not going any earlier is that the 2017 and 2016 intake cohorts had their degree awarding years impacted by the Covid pandemic. During the pandemic, we carried out a significant amount of analysis to ensure that our alternative assessments did not create an inequality of opportunity, and this work gave us confidence that what we put in place for was robust. However, for this exercise, we have made the decision not to go back further than five years so we can understand post-pandemic attainment.

This analysis did not reveal any patterns related to ethnicity, socio-economic status or likelihood to attend Higher Education, but it did reveal a pattern within disability, specifically with neurodivergence and mental health.

We can see through our data that there is a year-on-year improvement of year averages. We call this the attainment velocity. Typically, students are less likely to achieve a year average above 70 in year 1, but the likelihood of achieving a year average above 70 increases progressively as they move through their degree programme:

- In year 2, there is a slightly higher percentage of students achieving a year average above 70 than in year 1, increasing by between 3 and 5 percentage points.
- In year 3 there is a higher percentage of students achieving a year average above 70 than in year 2, increasing by between 10 and 15 percentage point.

[8] Bury, Simon M., Jennifer R. Spoor, Susan M. Hayward, and Darren Hedley. 'Supporting the Mental Health and Well-Being of Autistic and Other Neurodivergent Employees in the Work Environment'. In *Neurodiversity in the Workplace*, edited by Susanne M. Bruyère and Adrienne Colella. Routledge, 2022.

- A higher percentage of students achieve a first-class honours degree than those who achieve a year average of above 70 in year 3, increasing by between 10 and 15 percentage points.

As year averages above 70 increase, year averages between 60-69 and 50-59 decrease. We have high ambition for our students and, in line with the conservatoire sector, our students are high achievers (Academic Board paper AB24.9). This achievement is monitored each year to ensure the robustness of our assessment processes, and we attribute the attainment velocity leading to high achievement to the educational gain as a result of our rich curriculum and co-curriculum, enhanced through links with industry, professional partners, and our signature pedagogies, all recognised as outstanding through our TEF Gold status.

By undertaking more detailed analysis, we can see that students who have disclosed a neurodivergence still achieve an attainment velocity, but in years 1 and 2 particularly, the percentage is lower than those who have reported no disability. By year 3, the percentage of neurodivergent students attaining a year average of 70 and above, and going on to achieve first class honours degrees, is mainly in line with those with no reported disability. Furthermore, those who have disclosed a mental health condition still achieve an attainment velocity, but in years 1 and 2 particularly and to a lesser extent in year 3, the percentage is lower than those students who have disclosed a neurodiversity. These students' degree classifications are mostly in line with neurodiverse students and students who report no disability. This detailed analysis was carried out across different categories of ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status and likelihood to go to university, and, as mentioned earlier, no similar patterns emerged. We attribute this to the fact that we have higher numbers of students with neurodivergence and mental health conditions than those with characteristics revealed by using other metrics. We note the intersectionality, but also note that the intersections between neurodivergence, mental health and other characteristics are greater. Again, we attribute this to having a greater number of students with these characteristics than other characteristics and therefore have detected no patterns for students with other characteristics.

In considering what these data are telling us, we acknowledge that there are many variables and contextual factors that impact neurodiverse students and those disclosing a mental health condition in years 1 and 2, such as knowledge of their own condition, knowledge that they can seek help, and often diagnosis comes whilst at the RNCM, which could account for lower attainment in the earlier years during a period where a condition is unrecognised, undiagnosed and unsupported. These contextual factors have been independently identified by our student panel, who also highlighted that often it was awareness on the part of the student that they have a neurodivergence or low mental health and/or that their issues were severe enough to warrant support. Therefore, the biggest risks in relation to equality of opportunity in accessing the support needed to succeed lie in awareness and confidence to come forward.

In terms of Progression into employment or further study, we can see no trends or patterns in graduate outcomes. Our graduate outcomes are outstanding, as evidenced by our TEF Gold Status, and all students are supported in their career aspirations through our Artist Development curriculum strand, running through both of our undergraduate degree programmes, alongside our rich co-curricular and professional experience and professional engagements offers. Our Destination of Leavers of Higher Education data show 91% of our BMus and BMus Popular Music graduates are in employment or further study[9].

This being the case, our focus for students On Course in this current Access and Participation Plan is to ensure students with neurodivergences and mental health conditions have equality of opportunity in relation to continuation and attainment.

2.2e Summary of risks to on course equality of opportunity

We have identified the key On Course risks to equality of opportunity as:

1. Students with **neurodivergence** not being aware of or able to access **academic** support in years 1 and 2
2. Students with **neurodivergence** not being aware of or able to access **personal** support in years 1 and 2
3. Low **mental health** creating a barrier to accessing **academic** support in years 1 and 2
4. Low **mental health** creating a barrier to accessing **personal** support in years 1 and 2

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[9] Bachelor of Music at Royal Northern College of Music | Discover Uni, Popular Music at Royal Northern College of Music | Discover Uni

2.3 Summary of risks to equality of opportunity

The full set of risks to equality of opportunity as identified through the analyses presented above are:

1. Lack of opportunities to access programmes that build **knowledge and skills** to a sufficient level to gain access to conservatoire.
2. Programmes, projects and interventions that learners can access not being of a high enough **quality** to raise attainment and enable progression.
3. Programmes, projects and interventions that raise aspirations not being **visible.**
4. Lack of **partnership** working limiting opportunities for transition and progresssion.
5. Programmes, projects and interventions being designed without drawing on **research** and evaluation evidence to ensure their success, thus replicating and reinforcing barriers.
6. Having no knowledge of conservatoire as a choice including lack of understanding what conservatoire study is and **undervaluing music** as a viable degree subject.
7. Not having adequate **information and guidance** as to the possibilities of conservatoire study.
8. Students with **neurodivergence** not being aware of or able to access **academic support** in years 1 and 2.
9. Students with **neurodivergence** not being aware of or able to access **personal support** in years 1 and 2.
10. Low **mental health** creating a barrier to accessing **academic support** in years 1 and 2.
11. Low **mental health** creating a barrier to accessing **personal support** in years 1 and 2.

3. Objectives

3.1 Approach to identifying objectives and targets

With such small numbers of students with specific characteristics enrolled at the RNCM, the Education and Quality Committee proposed that our 2025/26-2028/29 should be weighted toward access, with on course interventions being directed to neurodivergence and mental health. Then, once the plan is reviewed beyond 2028/29, the amount of students with different characteristics on course will have increased and the subsequent Access and Participation Plan can be designed to widen support for students with different characteristics. This has led to the development of a 10-year Theory of Change that is front-loaded with access, moving to On Course interventions as we see our student body change (see Annex B).

To identify the objectives and targets for this plan, we have reviewed the progress made against our 2020/21-2024/25 Access and Participation Plan and considered other indicators within our RNCM Engage and Junior Programmes, such as bursary information and self-reported metrics such as eligibility for Free School Meals. These have helped us to identify where we can make the most impact and what the best metrics are to measure our progress.

Reviewing our Access and Participation Plan 2020/21-2024/25, and associated annual monitoring, we have made progress against our aims to reduce the gap in access for between students from POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 5, IMD quintiles 1 and 5, and students in different ethnic groups and white British students. This can be seen in the data presented in Annex A. However, the numbers are small and the percentage gaps variable, meaning that we have no statistical certainty surrounding the trajectory of this progress. Therefore, we have used internally-derived data sources to identify where we can make the most impact through our Access and Participation Plan 2025/6-2028/29. We have analysed:

- Participation in RNCM Engage programmes and conversion through our Centre for Advanced Training, Junior RNCM, to our degree programmes in relation to:
  o Low income: IMD quintiles, self-reported Free School Meal eligibility, and Pupil Premium where available and using internal bursary information.
  o Disability: using self-declared information on registration
  o Likelihood of participation in Higher Education: using POLAR4 and TUNDRA metrics
  o Ethnicity: using self-declared information on registration
- The conversion from application to offer in relation to:
  o Low income: using audition fee-waiver information, linked to household income levels stipulated for eligibility for government benefits
  o Disability: Using UCAS data
  o Likelihood of participation in Higher Education: using POLAR4 and TUNDRA metrics
  o Ethnicity: using UCAS data

- The conversion from offer to enrolment in relation to:
    - Low income: using Student Loan Company data
    - Disability: Using UCAS application data
    - Likelihood of participation in Higher Education: using POLAR4 and TUNDRA metrics
    - Ethnicity: using UCAS data
- Performance against KPIs in our RNCM Engage work:
    - RNCM Young Artists, launched 2022/23, KPI of 50% bursary supported participation.
    - RNCM Pathfinder, our bespoke access programme working alongside other Access Interventions, KPI of 100% participation from those experiencing single or multiple barriers related to low income, disability, likelihood of participation in Higher Education, and ethnicity.

Although not reportable due to small numbers, we can see that there is an increasing conversion rate for students who have progressed through our RNCM Engage programmes into both RNCM undergraduate degree programmes as well as onto degree programmes at other institutions, both in Music and other subjects. We can also see that we are meeting our Pathfinder KPI and the programme is reaching and supporting those most at risk of not developing the knowledge and skills and having access to adequate information and support about higher education. In addition, our Young Artists programme is surpassing its KPI and achieving 70% of bursary supported participants.

Our data shows us that metrics related to postcodes are not necessarily the best metrics to use. As reported earlier, the music education landscape is challenging, and geographical areas without quality music education provision create 'cold spots' in provision. However, these cold spots do not necessarily map onto the postcode areas that show the least likelihood to go to Higher Education or multiple deprivation. Often, funded music education programmes are targeted at geographical areas where there is least provision and so those who live in these postcode areas may have music education provision funded by third sector funding, charities, and philanthropic funding. This being the case, and for the reasons outlined in section 1, we have made the decision to focus on ethnicity, disability and low socio-economic status, but not likelihood to go to Higher Education, as these metrics use postcodes. To measure socio-economic status, we are using Free School Meals as the indicator. The rationale is that we have found that Free School Meals is the closest data point that matches both IMD quintiles and Pupil Premium. In addition, Free School Meals eligibility is the metric that many of our partners use to identify those who would benefit from additional support or targeted music programmes, such as Olympias Music Foundation[10]. Therefore, we can track learners through our partner organisations and into our Access interventions more effectively than by using other metrics.

In relation to our On Course objectives, we have identified where we can make most impact beyond support that is open to all students through our Student Health and Wellbeing Hub, Academic Tutoring and Co-curricular offer, and our objectives surround neurodivergence and low mental health in years 1 and 2 in line with the risks identified in section 2.

3.2 Objectives

Our access and participation objectives are therefore:

1) Increase opportunities to build knowledge and skills, raising attainment and providing progression pathways for those young people reporting:
    a) Non-White British ethnicity
    b) Free School Meals
    c) Disability
2) Increase the application pool for applicants reporting:
    a) Non-White British ethnicity
    b) Free School Meals
    c) Disability
3) Maintain conversation rate from application to offer for applicants reporting:
    a) Non-White British ethnicity
    b) Free School Meals
    c) Disability
4) Maintain conversion rate from offer to enrolment for applicants reporting:
    a) Non-White British ethnicity

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[10] [Charity | Olympias Music Foundation | Manchester](#)

b) Free School Meals
c) Disability

5) Close the attainment gap for neurodiverse students in years 1 and 2
6) Close the attainment gap for students with a mental health condition in years 1 and 2

3.3 Targets

Our aim is to increase the number of students with different characteristics studying on our RNCM Junior Programmes, working in partnership with schools, music services and other organisations, so as to raise attainment and provide progression pathways that will in turn increase our applicant pool. Mapped against our risks and objectives, our targets are:

	Objective	Target	Risk
Raising Attainment	1a. Increase opportunities to build knowledge and skills, raising attainment and providing progression pathways for those young people reporting non-White British ethnicity.	PTA_1 50% non-White British participants across all RNCM Junior Programmes	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
	1b. Increase opportunities to build knowledge and skills, raising attainment and providing progression pathways for those young people reporting Free School Meals.	PTA_2 40% participants eligible for free school meals across all RNCM Junior Programmes	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
	1c. Increase opportunities to build knowledge and skills, raising attainment and providing progression pathways for those young people reporting a disability.	PTA_3 20% participants with a disability across all RNCM Junior Programmes	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Access	2a Increase the application pool for applicants reporting non-White British ethnicity	PTA_4 40% applicants of non-White British ethnicity	6, 7
	2b Increase the application pool for applicants reporting Free School Meals	PTA_5 25% applicants eligible for free school meals	6, 7
	2c Increase the application pool for applicants reporting a disability	PTA_6 30% applicants reporting a disability	6, 7
	3a Maintain conversation rate from application to offer for applicants reporting Non-White British ethnicity	PTA_7 <5% difference between application to offer conversion rates between non-White British and white applicants	6, 7
	3b Maintain conversation rate from application to offer for applicants reporting Free School Meals	PTA_8 <5% difference between application to offer conversion rates between those eligible for free school meals and those not eligible	6, 7
	3c Maintain conversation rate from application to offer for applicants reporting Disability	PTA_9 <5% difference between application to offer conversion rates between those reporting a disability and those reporting no disability	6, 7
	4a Maintain conversion rate from offer to enrolment for applicants reporting Non-White British ethnicity	PTA-10 <5% gap between offer to enrolment conversion rates between non-White British and White British applicants	6, 7
	4b Maintain conversion rate from offer to enrolment for applicants reporting Free School Meals	PTA_11 <5% gap between offer to enrolment conversion rates between	6, 7

		those eligible for free school meals and those not eligible	
	Maintain conversion rate from offer to enrolment for applicants reporting Disability	PTA_12 <5% gap between offer to enrolment conversion rates between those reporting a disability and those reporting no disability	6, 7
Attainment	5. Close the attainment gap for neurodiverse students in years 1 and 2	PTS_1 <5% gap of students achieving a year average of 70 and above in year 1 between students with a neurodivergence and those reporting no disability. PTS_2 <5% gap of students achieving a year average of 70 and above in year 2 between students with a neurodivergence and those reporting no disability.	8, 9
	6. Close the attainment gap for students with a mental health condition in years 1 and 2	PTS-3 <5% gap of students achieving a year average of 70 and above in year 1 between students with a mental health condition and those reporting no disability. PTS_4 <5% gap of students achieving a year average of 70 and above in year 2 between students with a mental health condition and those reporting no disability.	10, 11

3.4 Rationale for targets

Our targets are ambitious yet achievable. We have set our targets using the following rationale:

- The percentage of non-White British learners in school is 37%[11]. At present, where ethnicity is reported, our Junior Programmes have 42% non-White British participation. With targeted interventions, 50% of non-White British participation across all our Junior Programmes is achievable.
- The percentage of eligibility for Free School Meals in school is 24.6%[12]. At present, where Free Schools Meals are reported, our Junior Programmes have 9.5% of participants eligible for Free School Meals. We have set an ambitious target of 40% of applicants eligible for Free School Meals for two reasons. Firstly, we do not collect this information across all our junior work, and we will do this. We believe that this will identify more learners than we know of at present eligible for Free School Meals. Secondly, our partnership approach and new interventions will specifically enable us to reach and track learners eligible for Free School Meals, as our partners also use this metric. We will monitor this target closely.
- The percentage of the population reporting as disabled is currently 17.7% in England and 21.1% in Wales[13]. At present, where reported, 11.4% of participants in our Junior Programmes report a disability. We have set our target to be between the reported percentage of the population in England and Wales and believe that with targeted intervention, we can achieve this.
- Our applicant pool contains between 15-20% non-White British applicants in any given year. With our ambitious target of 50% non-White British across junior programmes, and given that our applicant pool is wider than our Junior Programmes, we have doubled the highest percentage to set our target of 40%

[11] Schools, pupils and their characteristics, Academic year 2023/24 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)
[12] Ibid
[13] Disability by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

applicants from non-White British ethnicities. We believe that with our raising attainment targets, we can achieve this.

- Our current applicants falling in IMD Deciles 1 to 4 are between 12-15% in any given year. We have set our target for 25% of applicants eligible for Free School Meals to be in line with the national percentage. We believe that with targeted intervention, we can achieve this.
- Our current percentage of applicants reporting a disability is around 15%. We have doubled this to 30% as we believe that our raising attainment target will enable us to achieve this and we will work in partnership with those providing opportunities for learners with disabilities to support them to progress to our applicant pool.
- With the data showing that our conversion rates for applicants with different characteristics are the same, continuing with our access interventions we believe that we can maintain these rates and have set the targets to be less than 5% difference to account for some leeway.
- We have set our targets related to attainment velocity to reduce the gap in years 1 and 2 for students with neurodivergence and mental health conditions to be less than 5%. We believe that our attainment interventions will enable us to achieve this.

4. Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

4.1 Strategic approach

The RNCM continues to provide financial support, health and wellbeing support, and individualised study support to students of all backgrounds as need requires. We will continue to provide hardship funding and bursaries for those with the characteristics that we are targeting in this plan, and we have recently committed to creating a policy for the RNCM to act as guarantors for hall of residence accommodation for care leavers (Student Awards Committee, agenda item 24.38). The interventions in this plan are focused to mitigate the specific risks identified within this plan.

Our Access and Participation intervention strategies sit within three areas of the RNCM's work:

- RNCM Engage: providing pathways through Junior programmes of study to raise attainment and enable progression.
- RNCM Transitions: providing advice, guidance and information supporting learners through the process of applying and auditioning for conservatoire study.
- RNCM Accelerate: providing academic and personal support for RNCM students on course to enable them to accelerate in their attainment.

1. RNCM Engage

RNCM Engage brings together the RNCM's work in community outreach and education. The two strands of work under RNCM Engage comprise 1) outreach work that serves to engage the community in artistic work, and 2) raising attainment and progression work that serves to engage learners in education, thus raising attainment and providing progression pathways to Higher Music Education and beyond. Our outreach work is well established and encompasses activity such as the RNCM Children's Opera, working with Primary Schools, RNCM Family Days and the RNCM Community Chorus, bringing the RNCM closer to its community through artistic projects. RNCM Engage outreach work, delivered by the RNCM Creative Engagement team, is a vital first point of contact reaching wider audiences and a site for identifying those who would benefit from the specific raising attainment and access interventions in this plan. RNCM Engage education work, delivered by the RNCM Junior Programmes team, is also well established. To prepare for this Access and Participation plan, we have been working to consolidate our Junior Programmes work and build clear and coherent progression pathways, working in partnership to ensure that those encountering initial and first access learning through large-group teaching with our partner organisations can transition into RNCM Junior Programmes and access intermediate level learning that acts as a foundation for advanced study. Our flagship RNCM Pathfinder programme wraps around our Junior Programmes, providing additional bespoke support for learners who experience specific and multiple barriers, supporting their progression through our programmes.
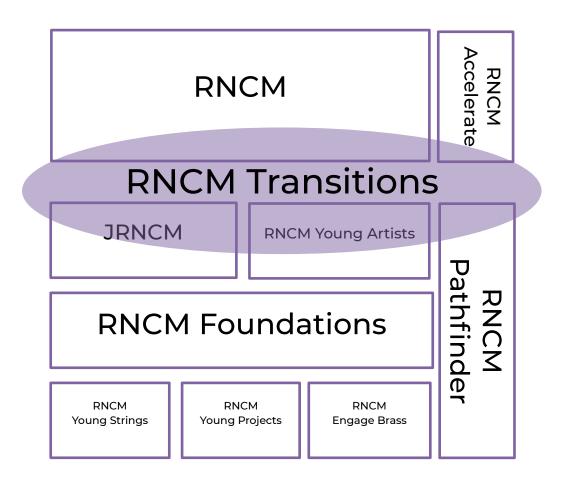
2. RNCM Transitions

RNCM Transitions brings together all our work in supporting learners with our targeted characteristics through the process of deciding, applying, auditioning and progressing into Higher Music Education. This includes support with information and guidance and specific targeted interventions around audition processes. These activities work with RNCM Engage with some activity being embedded within specific programmes, such as our Young Artists Transition programme, and other activity being wrapped around our Engage and Junior programmes.

3. RNCM Accelerate

RNCM Accelerate is a new initiative developed for this Access and Participation Plan in response to the risks to equality of opportunity identified for RNCM students On Course. RNCM Accelerate brings together our work within our Student Health and Wellbeing Hub with our academic provision to provide opportunities for additional support for those experiencing barriers to their learning. In the same way that RNCM Pathfinder provides bespoke provision to support those experiencing barriers to progress through our Junior Programmes, RNCM Accelerate will provide bespoke provision to support those experiencing barriers to progress through our degree programmes. For this Access and Participation Plan, the focus is on students with neurodivergence and low mental health. As we meet the objectives of our access work, RNCM Accelerate can be extended to those students entering the RNCM with different characteristics experiencing barriers who may need additional support to enable them to accelerate through their degree programme.

These three areas interact to create a holistic approach to mitigating the risks to equality of opportunity as identified in this Access and Participation Plan.

4.2 Access interventions

RNCM Engage

Evidence base and rationale

RNCM Engage access interventions have been designed using pedagogical models that are research-informed and evidence-based. Through a process of continuous review and reflection, we have worked to align our junior

programmes to create a through-planned progression route where learners can join at any stage. Our monitoring shows that around 87% of Junior RNCM leavers go on to study in Higher Education. Of these, approximately 80% study music, and 40% enter the RNCM. Many of the remaining 13% who do not go onto to Higher Education straight away, do so after a gap year. Our ambition is to replicate this in our RNCM Young Artists programme. Launched in 2022/23, the programme has already seen 20% of its leavers join the RNCM. Therefore, our RNCM Engage interventions are based on providing routes into Higher Education through our Centre for Advanced Training, Junior RNCM, and our Saturday Popular Music Programme, RNCM Young Artists. Each junior programme is targeted to a different group of learners, and these are brought together in the new RNCM Foundations programme to prepare them for Junior RNCM and RNCM Young Artists study.

Until 2023/24, our RNCM Junior Programmes have been located within Greater Manchester. Our RNCM West Cumbria initiative, funded by the Benny Walker Trust until 2028, will enable us to test whether we can successfully work in partnership with a Music Hub in a different geographical location to the RNCM with a view to building more remote work, working in partnership with Music Hubs and schools in different geographical areas in subsequent access and participation activity.

RNCM Engage Intervention Activities

Activity	RNCM Pathfinder		
Description	A programme of musical and socio-emotional support for learners and families to overcome specific barriers, raise attainment and progress into Junior Programmes and on to the RNCM or other HEIs. The programme is for any learner experiencing social, economic and/or cultural barriers. Tracking metrics are ethnicity, free school meals, and disability. On campus.		
Risks	1, 2, 4, 5	Targets	PTA_1, PTA_2, PTA_3
Inputs	Funded by a mixture of core funding and philanthropic funding. Teaching, administrative and management staff. Non-staffing includes travel bursaries, instruments, examination fees, and materials as well as meals for participants and family support.		
Outputs	Learners will progress into Junior RNCM directly or via other Junior Programmes listed below.		
Cross interventions	RNCM Pathfinder works with all other Access intervention strategies.		
Activity	RNCM Young Artists		
Description	A structured programme for learners to build knowledge and skills in popular music. RNCM Young Artists works in partnership with Multi-Academy Trust United Learning to identify suitable learners. This is a targeted intervention for ethnically diverse young people. Tracking metrics also include disability and free school meals. On campus.		
Risks	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Targets	PTA_1, PTA_2, PTA_3, PTA_4, PTA_5, PTA_6
Inputs	Funded by Sony Social Justice Fund until 2025. Teaching, administrative and management staff.		
Outputs	RNCM Young Artists KPI is 50% bursary funded participants. The RNCM applicant pool will be diversified and learners will progress into the RNCM.		
Cross interventions	RNCM Transitions supports RNCM Young Artists through the RNCM Young Artists Transitions activity.		
Activity	Junior RNCM Bursary Support		
Description	Junior RNCM is the RNCM's Centre for Advanced Training. Young people qualify for the government funded Music and Dance Scheme. This is a targeted financial support for young people experiencing financial barriers. Tracking metrics are free school meals, ethnicity and disability. In addition, bursary support is provided by the RNCM Access Agreement and the Junior RNCM Trustees. On campus.		

Risks	1, 2, 6	Targets	PTA_1, PTA_2, PTA_3, PTA_4, PTA_5, PTA_6
Inputs	Financial bursaries and instruments.		
Outputs	Learners will be successful in building knowledge and skills necessary to progress into conservatoire study. The RNCM applicant pool will be diversified. Success indicators are entry to the RNCM, other conservatoires and other Higher Education Institutions.		
Cross interventions	RNCM Pathfinder sits alongside JRNCM providing socio-emotional support for those coming through the Pathfinder programme to support their advanced studies. RNCM Foundations provides a progression route into JRNCM for those who cannot access high quality intermediate learning.		

Activity	RNCM Foundations		
Description	A new programme designed to enable young people to make the pedagogical transition from larger group interventions to advanced musical study. This is a targeted intervention to raise attainment and provide a critical progression pathway into intermediate study and onto advanced study. The intervention will link the initial and first access work of partner organisations with Junior RNCM. Tracking metrics are free school meals, ethnicity and disability. On campus.		
Risks	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Targets	PTA_1, PTA_2, PTA_3
Inputs	Teaching, administration and management staff.		
Outputs	KPI 50% bursary supported places and 50% non-White British participation. The outcome of RNCM Foundations meeting its KPIs is the learner population of Junior RNCM will diversify. In turn, this will diversify the RNCM applicant pool.		
Cross interventions	RNCM Foundations sits between RNCM Young Projects, RNCM Engage Brass and RNCM Young Strings and Junior RNCM. It will provide a vital progression route for RNCM Pathfinder learners.		

Activity	RNCM Young Projects		
Description	A series of instrument-specific workshops to raise attainment and provide a vehicle to progress via RNCM Foundations, Junior RNCM. RNCM Young Projects works in partnership with the Greater Manchester Music Education Hub to provide complementary activities. On campus.		
Risks	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Targets	PTA_1, PTA_2, PTA_3
Inputs	Teaching, administrative and management staff.		
Outputs	Learners who attend RNCM Young Projects will be enabled to progress to advanced study via RNCM Foundations. Young Projects provides a site to identify learners who would benefit from RNCM Pathfinder. In turn, the RNCM applicant pool will be diversified.		
Cross interventions	RNCM Young Projects provides a first point of contact with RNCM Junior Programmes.		

Activity	RNCM Young Projects Schools Programme		
Description	A series of workshops to raise attainment in schools, providing support for KS3 and KS4 curricula. This will also provide a vehicle to progress via RNCM Foundations, Junior RNCM. RNCM Young Projects Schools Programme has been developed following activity formerly funded by Uniconnect funding. Off campus.		

Risks	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Targets	PTA_1, PTA_2, PTA_3
Inputs	Teaching, administrative and management staff. Non-staffing costs include travel and materials.		
Outputs	Learners who engage in RNCM Young Projects Schools Programme will be enabled to progress to advanced study via RNCM Foundations and/or directly into JRNCM or the RNCM. Young Projects provides a site to identify learners who would benefit from RNCM Pathfinder. In turn, the RNCM applicant pool will be diversified.		
Cross interventions	RNCM Young Projects provides a first point of contact with RNCM Junior Programmes.		

Activity	RNCM Engage Brass		
Description	A focussed programme of activities based on partnership working to support school, music hub and grass roots brass bands. Based on side-by-side activity with RNCM student mentors. This is a targeted intervention for learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, with a focus on White working-class boys, and under-represented ethnicities. Tracking metrics are ethnicity, free school meals and disability. Off campus.		
Risks	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Targets	PTA_1, PTA_2, PTA_3
Inputs	Teaching, administrative and management staff. Non-staffing costs include instruments, travel and materials.		
Outputs	RNCM Engage Brass works with a range of partners. Learners may progress directly into the RNCM or they may progress via Junior RNCM or RNCM Foundations.		
Cross interventions	RNCM Engage Brass serves as a first point of contact for RNCM Junior Programmes.		

Activity	RNCM Young Strings		
Description	A structured programme based on large-group string teaching providing beginner to intermediate learning. Activities are planned to support learners with neurodivergences. Bursary support is available for those with low household incomes. This access and participation plan aims to increase participation of learners from diverse ethnic backgrounds and those in receipt of free school meals. On and off campus.		
Risks	1, 2, 3, 5	Targets	PTA_1, PTA_2, PTA_3
Inputs	Teaching, administrative and management staff. Non-staffing includes materials and instruments.		
Outputs	Diversification of the characteristics of learners in Young Strings at beginner level coupled with the introduction of a progression route into Junior RNCM via RNCM Foundations will contribute to the diversification of the learner population across RNCM Junior Programmes. In turn, diversifying the RNCM applicant pool.		
Cross interventions	The introduction of RNCM Foundations will enable a clear progression route to Junior RNCM for learners who start their musical journey with RNCM Young Strings.		

Activity	**RNCM Engage West Cumbria**		
Description	A focussed programme of activities in partnership with Cumbria Music Hub. Working with schools and local community ensembles, includes side-by-side RNCM student mentoring, raising attainment and progression activities. Engage Cumbria is a place-based intervention that takes all of the above interventions and creates a programme specifically addressing barriers faced in the local community in West Cumbria. This is a targeted intervention for		

	hard-to-reach young people within West Cumbria. Tracking metrics are free school meals, ethnicity and disability. Off campus.		
Risks	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7	Targets	PTA_4, PTA_5, PTA_6
Inputs	RNCM Engage West Cumbria is funded until 2028 by the Benny Walker Charitable Trust. Teaching, administrative and management staff. Non-staffing includes transport and travel, instruments, examination fees, CPD activity for teachers and bursary support for fee-paying music learning activity.		
Outputs	Learners in West Cumbria will have access to high quality music education provision in partnership with schools and local Music Hub and Music Service activities. This will raise attainment and increase opportunities for access into Higher Music Education.		
Cross interventions	RNCM Engage West Cumbria combines other raising attainment interventions to deliver them in a geographical location away from Greater Manchester.		

Total Cost of RNCM Engage activities	£3,028,000

Evaluation

RNCM Engage interventions are monitored and evaluated on an annual basis. Each intervention has programme specific KPIs and through this access and participation plan, we will create an evaluation framework that will serve to monitor progress against the KPIs (outlined in section 7). In addition to programme specific KPIs, we have set KPIs for our Junior Programmes as a whole in recognition that the interventions have been designed to interact and contribute to the objectives and targets of this plan.

The common tracking metrics of Free School Meals, ethnicity and disability will enable us to monitor participation of targeted learners and track learners through our interventions and understand how each programme is contributing to the common outcomes and mitigating the risks to equality of opportunity. This will be done via registration data and destination data. In addition, these metrics are also used by our partner organisations to monitor equality of opportunity, and therefore we can benchmark our progress against that of our partners and identify learners who would benefit from a collaborative approach between ourselves and our partners.

Tracking data to monitor progress against KPIs will be used alongside qualitative evaluation to understand the process and impact of our interventions. An evaluation cycle will be designed to ensure that we can manage our evaluation work within our capacity as a small institution whilst generating data and evidence that can be used to inform and enhance our work.

RNCM Transitions

Evidence base and rationale

Through our evaluation work we have identified a suite of activities to which we can attribute the successful entry of applicants from diverse backgrounds. In 2023/24, we were awarded an ISME-Parsons Music Advocacy Award, one of just two awards made across Europe, and a total of ten in the world, to devise our RNCM Young Artists Transitions programme. To do this, we appointed a RNCM Young Artists Transitions mentor who represents the characteristics of learners who we wish to target and drew on our recruitment team's knowledge and experience of providing bespoke support to those applying to the RNCM from educational backgrounds where conservatoire application is not catered for within school careers advice. Through a package of personal support with applications and audition preparation and offer holder's support, the programme has been successful in supporting 81% learners to offer of a place at Higher Education with 55% of these offers for subjects other than music, 45% of offers to study Music, half of which are offers of study at the RNCM[14]. In addition, evaluation of our partnership work with Love Music Trust and Sandbach School shows that providing a programme of advice auditions and consultation lessons, information and

guidance, offer holders' support and using our contextual audition process, learners are supported into Higher Music Education. The data presented in Annex I suggests that these activities are working to maintain a similar conversion rate for those from under-represented backgrounds to those from more traditional conservatoire student backgrounds.

RNCM Transitions forms a package of activities that is available to learners from low-income backgrounds evidence through either free school meals or bursary support for either RNCM Engage activities or with one of our partner organisations, ethnic backgrounds and with disabilities.

Activity	Advice Auditions		
Description	Supportive mock auditions that give constructive feedback on where the learner is at and what they need to do to prepare for audition.		
Risks	6, 7	Targets	PTA_4, PTA_5, PTA_6
Inputs	Teaching, administrative and management staff.		
Outputs	Advice auditions build confidence, provide knowledge and experience of the audition process and lead to a successful audition experience.		
Cross interventions	Advice auditions are also built into RNCM Engage activity.		
Activity	Audition Information and Guidance		
Description	Work with schools, both music departments and careers services, involving school visits, and bespoke information and guidance days with RNCM Engage programmes as well as personal support at an individual level.		
Risks	6, 7	Targets	PTA_4, PTA_5, PTA_6
Inputs	Teaching, administrative and management staff. Non-staffing includes various materials, digital assets, and travel costs.		
Outputs	Bespoke advice and guidance enable learners to make an informed decision about where to apply, what they need in order to apply, what the process is and how they can access support.		
Cross interventions	Bespoke information and guidance supports all of the activities within RNCM Transitions.		
Activity	Contextual Auditions		
Description	Audition panels are provided with information about each applicant, including household income status if known and eligibility to free school meals, ethnicity, likelihood to go to higher education, disability. This enables audition panels to take into consider equality of opportunity to access the appropriate knowledge and skills prior to conservatoire audition when making a decision as to an offer.		
Risks	6, 7	Targets	PTA_7, PTA_8, PTA_9
Inputs	Administrative and management staff time.		
Outputs	Conversion rates from application to offer are in line for all students, regardless of background.		
Cross interventions	Contextual auditions provide information that enable appropriate students to be identified for support through RNCM Accelerate.		
Activity	Love Music Trust Specialist A-Level Programme		

Description	A specialist A-Level Music partnership with Sandbach School and Love Music Trust. This programme draws together all RNCM Transitions activities for A-level learners at Sandbach School.		
Risks	1, 6, 7	Targets	PTA_4, PTA_5, PTA_6
Inputs	Teaching, administrative and management staff. Non-staffing costs include travel costs and materials.		
Outputs	Learners are successful in audition at the RNCM, other conservatoires and Higher Music Education.		
Cross interventions	The Love Music Trust partnership programme combines other RNCM Transitions activities and puts them into one package for learners at Sandbach School to support their KS5 curriculum. Learners can transition into Junior RNCM via activities under RNCM Engage.		

Activity	RNCM Young Artists Transitions		
Description	RNCM Young Artists Transitions draws together all RNCM Transitions activities to support learners on RNCM Young Artists programme. This is specifically targeted to learners from different ethnic backgrounds but also encompasses low household income and disability.		
Risks	6, 7	Targets	PTA_4, PTA_5, PTA_6 PTA_7, PTA_8, PTA_9
Inputs	Teaching, administrative and management staff. Non-staffing includes materials, digital assets and travel costs.		
Outputs	RNCM Young Artists are successful in gaining offers at the RNCM, other conservatoires and Higher Music Education courses.		
Cross interventions	This activity works directly with activities under RNCM Engage.		

Activity	Offer holder support		
Description	Once an offer has been made, offer holder support includes consultation lessons, meetings with Heads of School and tutors, information and guidance, and academic advice.		
Risks	6, 7	Targets	PTA_10, PTA_11, PTA_12
Inputs	Teaching, administrative and management staff. Non-staffing costs include materials and digital assets.		
Outputs	Successful conversion to enrolment and smooth entry into the RNCM.		
Cross interventions	This activity feeds into RNCM Accelerate as learners can be identified as needing additional support offered through RNCM Accelerate.		

Total Cost of RNCM Transitions activities	£145,000

Evaluation

Evaluation for RNCM Transitions will combine tracking and monitoring using UCAS data and case study evaluation will collect qualitative data to underpin the data monitoring. As the outcomes of these activities are specifically targeted to applications, offers and enrolments, we will take each application cohort as a case and bring together the range of evidence available through each of these different activities to conduct comparative case study analyses. In addition, data collection via an in-depth evaluation will seek to understand the contribution that RNCM Transitions has made to the successful enrolment of students within our target populations.

The common tracking metrics of Free School Meals, ethnicity and disability will enable us to track learners through our RNCM Engage raising attainment interventions and understand how RNCM Transitions is supporting these students moving into application, offer and enrolment.

Tracking data to monitor progress against KPIs will be used alongside qualitative evaluation to understand the process and impact of our interventions. An evaluation cycle will be designed to ensure that we can manage our evaluation work within our capacity as a small institution whilst generating data and evidence that can be used to inform and enhance our work.

RNCM Accelerate

Evidence base and rationale

The evidence base for RNCM Accelerate activities has been articulated in section 2.2 On Course and Progression. We have undertaken wide consultation and have analysed data including Student Health and Wellbeing Hub usage data, continuous monitoring data such as applications for extenuating circumstances and personal learning plans, as well as monitored our new Personal Tutoring system. We have compared this activity with Board of Examiners data and we can see that interventions such as personal and academic tutoring have an impact on the number of difficult cases seen at Board of Examiners. In addition, the new activities included in RNCM Accelerate have been co-designed with our student panels.

Activity	Neurodiversity Awareness		
Description	Awareness raising for students to build understanding of neurodiversity, who can ask for support and what support is on offer. This activity will set up and a self-sustaining peer-support group for neurodivergent students.		
Risks	8, 9	Targets	PTS_1, PTS_2
Inputs	Teaching, administrative and management staff. Non-staffing includes materials.		
Outputs	Levelling of attainment between neurodiverse students and students reporting no disability.		
Cross interventions	This activity dovetails RNCM Pathfinder activity, where neurodivergent learners are supported by RNCM Engage activity. This also works with staff training activity.		
Activity	Mental Health Awareness		
Description	Awareness raising for students to build understanding of mental health conditions, who can ask for support and what support is on offer. This activity will also involve training for students to know how to support and signpost peers who may be experiencing low mental health.		
Risks	10, 11	Targets	PTS_3, PTS_4
Inputs	Teaching, administrative and management staff. Non-staffing includes materials.		
Outputs	Levelling of attainment between students with low mental health and students reporting no disability.		
Cross interventions	This activity dovetails RNCM Pathfinder activity, where learners with mental health conditions are supported by RNCM Engage activity. This also works with staff training activity.		
Activity	Study Support		
Description	A series of seminars to provide study skills support for students with neurodivergences.		

Risks	8, 9	Targets	PTS_1, PTS_2
Inputs	Teaching, administrative and management staff. Non-staffing includes materials.		
Outputs	Levelling of attainment between students with neurodivergences and those reporting no disability.		
Cross interventions	This activity works with the awareness raising activity.		

Activity	Personal Support		
Description	Additional 1:1 personal tutorials to support students identified as having a neurodiversity or mental health condition. This is in addition to personal tutorials offered to all students.		
Risks	8, 9, 10, 11	Targets	PTS_1, PTS_2, PT_3, PTS_4
Inputs	Teaching, administrative and management staff. Non-staffing includes materials.		
Outputs	Levelling of attainment between target students and those reporting no disability.		
Cross interventions	This activity works with the awareness raising activity.		

Activity	Staff Training		
Description	Training for staff to build understanding of how to support students with neurodivergence / mental health conditions.		
Risks	8, 9, 10, 11	Targets	PTS_1, PTS_2, PT_3, PTS_4
Inputs	Teaching, administrative and management staff. Non-staffing includes materials.		
Outputs	Increased engagement by staff with support services and curriculum design reflecting diversity of learning and assessment approaches.		
Cross interventions	This activity works with awareness raising activity and will support study support and personal support activity.		

Activity	Safe Spaces		
Description	Dedicated safe space sessions for students with neurodivergences to work flexibly, including studying together in an environment that gives them what they need – distractions, quiet space, etc., recognising that some may prefer to work alone.		
Risks	8, 9	Targets	PTS_1, PTS_2,
Inputs	Teaching, administrative and management staff. Non-staffing includes materials.		
Outputs	Levelling of attainment between neurodivergent and non-neurodivergent students.		
Cross interventions	This activity works with awareness raising activity.		

Total Cost of RNCM Accelerate activities	£501,000

Evaluation

Evaluation of RNCM Accelerate will draw on evidence collated through our case management system. We will monitor Student Health and Wellbeing Hub usage statistics and fold our tracking and monitoring into our continuous monitoring of attainment data, withdrawals and deferrals, uptake of personal learning plans, engagement monitoring and other wider data sources that indicate student success. Through bi-annual case study evaluations, we can construct a comparative case study analysis to understand change over time. Case study evidence will be qualitative and will complement cohort tracking data, providing two points in each four-year study cycle to understand how RNCM Accelerate is supporting students as they move through their degree programme.

Tracking data to monitor progress will be used alongside qualitative evaluation to understand the process and impact of our interventions. An evaluation cycle will be designed to ensure that we can manage our evaluation work within our capacity as a small institution whilst generating data and evidence that can be used to inform and enhance our work.

5. Whole provider approach

The RNCM takes a whole provider approach to addressing the risks to equality of opportunity by integrating equality considerations into every aspect of the RNCM's operations, policies, and culture. This holistic approach ensures that all stakeholders, including staff, students, and partners, are engaged in promoting equality and eliminating discrimination. By taking a whole provider approach, the RNCM not only complies with legal obligations but also creates an inclusive, fair, and diverse environment where 'belonging' is prioritised.

The principles of our approach are contained within our BEDI Policy, in compliance with the Equality Act 2010. Our approach is summarised as follows:

> The RNCM ensures that senior leadership and governance structures demonstrate a clear commitment to equality and diversity. This is achieved through delivery of our Strategic Plan and its supporting strategies (Education, Research and Artistic), as well as regular communications, training and events emphasising the importance of these values.

> The RNCM is committed to a culture where diversity is valued, and all individuals feel respected and that they belong. This also includes addressing harassment and bullying, via clear procedures for addressing harassment and bullying, whilst ensuring that complaints are taken seriously and handled promptly.

> The RNCM has established feedback mechanisms for receiving and acting on feedback, including staff and student satisfaction surveys, focus groups and staff/ student fora for discussion of equality issues.

> The RNCM regularly reviews and monitors equality data relating to staff and students, using the analysis to inform strategic and service delivery initiatives and developments. Therefore ensuring we design and deliver support and services that are accessible and meet the diverse needs of the college. In addition, the RNCM publishes an annual Impact Report, which is approved by Board of Governors and published on the website.

> The RNCM engages with diverse local, national and global communities via its RNCM Engage activities and its global collaborative initiatives, enabling diverse voices and lived experiences to have influence in our community and to participate in the achievement of our strategic aims.

> The RNCM has comprehensive equality and diversity policies that comply with the Equality Act 2010. These policies cover all protected characteristics and are regularly reviewed.

The RNCM has fair and transparent recruitment practices to ensure equal opportunity for all employee and student applicants.

6. Student Consultation

This Access and Participation Plan has been devised in consultation with students and the Students' Union President in two successive years has mentored the Director of Programmes to ensure the student perspective remained at the centre of plan development. In addition, young peoples' voices have been collected through internal evaluation of RNCM Engage and Junior Programmes to ensure that planned interventions are in line with what learners feel works for them.

On publication of the OfS Equality of Opportunities Risk Register (EORR) in the 2022/23 academic year, the Director of Programmes consulted with the 2022/23 Students' Union President to talk through the new approach to Access and Participation and carry out an initial analysis of the risks and how they manifest for the RNCM. An analysis was presented to the executive team for information, and the Director of Programmes began work with RNCM Junior Programmes Team to begin the process of identifying raising attainment activity and preparing for the new approach to access and participation. Alongside development of the TEF submission, the SU President and Education Officer worked closely with the Director of Programmes in 2022/23 to ensure that the TEF submission was aligned strategically to the work being done to prepare for the new approach to Access and Participation.

On announcement of the requirement to submit a new Access and Participation Plan in the 2023/24 academic year, the Director of Programmes consulted with the Students' Union president to agree and approach to developing the plan with students. Plan development involved:

- Initial review of OfS Access and Participation Data Dashboard (Director of Programmes and Students' Union President) (January 2023)
- Briefing of Education and Quality Committee student representatives on Access and Participation and the OfS EORR (February 2023):
  - SU President
  - SU Education Officer
  - SU Diversity Officer
  - UG Rep
  - PGT Rep
- Strategic discussion at Education and Quality Committee (minute 24.05). One student representative working with a small group of staff to:
  - Review the OfS Data Dashboard data
  - Review the OfS EORR
  - Identify the challenges to Access, On Course and Progression that might indicate risk areas
  - Agree the approach to be taken to identifying risks, objectives and strategies
- Discussion with Students' Union President to prepare paper for Academic Board
- Academic Board discussion involving student representative to approve approach (minute 24.09)
- Two student panels convened and consulted through a series of meetings to:
  - Identify challenges On Course for students with neurodivergence and mental health
  - Reflect on and discuss the themes arising from identifying challenges
  - Develop interventions
- Student Experience Forum collected feedback on what support those with different characteristics at the RNCM might need
- Students' Union President and Director of Programmes reviewed student panel outcomes and reflected on internal data analyses to confirm objectives, targets and interventions.
- Students' Union President reviewed drafts of plan and drafted Forward.

7. Evaluation of the plan

Our evaluation framework brings together process and impact evaluation to provide a comprehensive evaluation programme that aims to generate understanding of what is working for the RNCM. The framework lays out the evaluation cycle and methods for our interventions and ensures that we can collect a variety of data that serves to construct a matrix of type 1, 2 and 3 evidence:

- Type 1 (narrative) – theory informed evaluation
- Type 2 (empirical) – changes over time
- Type 3 (epistemological) – determination of causality

Using TASO guidance for small number evaluations[15], we have designed our evaluation programme to combine theory-informed tracking and monitoring on an annual basis, with case study evaluation on a biannual basis, with each intervention undergoing a 'deep-dive' evaluation every four years. This will ensure that over the life of our Access and Participation Plan, we can understand changes over time and begin to determine causality.

There are ethical challenges with conducting evaluations that seek to determine counterfactual causality such as randomised controlled trials within education, particularly within the arena of widening participation. To do so involves constructing an experiment with a control group and an intervention group. The ethical challenge this presents is that through this evaluation methodology, the group of learners within the control group do not participate in an intervention that is designed to support their access and participation in Higher Education. In carrying out this type of evaluation, we are denying the opportunity to engage in activities that we believe will support their learning and that goes against our values. In addition, as noted throughout this Access and Participation Plan, there are many variables surrounding widening participation that cannot be controlled through our evaluation programme. We therefore are taking a realist approach to Type 3 evaluation and adopt a multiple causation evaluation design.

Our evaluation framework uses the following methodologies:

Evaluation type	Methodology	Rationale
Tracking and monitoring (annual)	Process tracing	The hypothesis used for process tracing is provided by our theory of change. Our causal graph follows our milestones and the relevant moments in the process tracing will be annual points in time. We will devise a case management system and bring together the evidence against each target, and each intervention activity will be classed as a single case. This will feed into our bi-annual comparative case study evaluation. The benefit of this evaluation methodology is that we are able to monitor progress against our targets on an annual basis at the same time as constructing a picture over time to determine causality as far as possible over the four-year life of the Plan.
Case study (bi-annual)	Comparative case study	Using a grounded theory approach, each intervention activity will undergo a case study evaluation twice during the life of the plan. This will enable use to carry out a comparative case study using two data points. The grounded theory approach enables us to build narrative that has a theoretical orientation derived from the research used to underpin this Plan. Using Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)[16] for cross-case analysis, we can analyse cases that are both similar and different to understand both the process that leads to change and the impact of the activities.
Deep-dive (every 4 years)	Contribution analysis	Using contribution analysis for our deep-dive evaluation will enable us to gather together the evidence collected for our annual tracking and monitoring and our case-study evaluation, analyse the contribution that the activity is making on the basis of that evidence, and then seek out additional evidence to determine the robustness and

[15] Understanding the impact of interventions to address inequality in the student experience (taso.org.uk)

[16] Henley, Jennie. 'Prisons and Primary Schools: Using CHAT to Analyse the Relationship between Developing Identity, Developing Musicianship and Transformative Processes'. *British Journal of Music Education* 32, no. 02 (2015): 123–41.

		credibility of the contribution of our activities to the change process. This then allows us to review and revise our theory of change as we learn from our deep-dive evaluation.

Our theory of change is fundamental in bringing these three evaluation types together, and, in turn, the evaluation will test the robustness of the theory of change. We believe that process tracing, comparative case-study and contribution analysis together will enable us to thoroughly evaluation our Access and Participation Plan interventions within the context of a small, specialist institution set with a backdrop of multiple challenges, and therefore multiple variables, within the music education landscape.

Due to our small numbers, it is important that we follow strict ethical guidelines in relation to external publication of our evaluations and ensure that we do not make any student identifiable. We will review progress internally each year and, if appropriate and without compromising student identity, we will make a decision as to external publication. We intend to publish externally at the end of the Access and Participation four-year cycle on progress against the Theory of Change.

8. Provision of Information to Students

Appropriate information about this Access and Participation Plan will be made available and published on the RNCM VLE and website. Additionally, the website includes clear information on all forms of support available at the RNCM. A section of the website, entitled 'Fees and Funding', provides details of tuition fees, audition fees, scholarships and bursaries and external funding sources for prospective and current students. Furthermore, details of the bursary scheme, together with a bursary application form, are sent to all eligible applicants offered a place. An Undergraduate Home access bursary is awarded to students whose household income is £40k or less. For those with a household income of £0 – £24,999, an access bursary of £1,510 is awarded. For those with a household income of £25k - £40k, an access bursary of £1,250 is awarded.

Anyone who is a current UK resident and receives Free School Meals (FSM) or financial support from the UK Government (either directly themselves or their parent(s)/guardians) is eligible for an Audition Fee Waiver. Forms of financial support include:

- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income Support
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax support
- Income-based Employment Support Allowance
- Personal Independence Payments (PIPs)
- Pension credit (guaranteed element only) with an award notice showing annual gross household income of less than £25,000
- Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit or Universal credit with an award notice showing annual gross household income of less than £25,000
- Full-time carers allowance
- The applicant is under 18 and in residential or foster care
- Care leavers
- Estranged students
- Students in receipt of financial support via a means tested bursary from their previous institution (including specialist music schools and Junior RNCM).

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

As outlined in this plan, much of our data is not publicly reportable due to low numbers. Additional data to support analysis of risks and identification of objects is available to the Office for Students on request.

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

We have developed a theory of change to underpin this Access and Participation Plan. The timeline is as follows:

2024/25	Prepare for new Access and Participation Plan. Launch RNCM Foundations. Undergraduate programmes revalidation project to include review in light of access and participation plan. National Plan for Music Education implemented.
2025/26	New Access and Participation Plan implemented. Small percentage increase in raising attainment and access targets in Year 1 milestone. Initiate Evaluation Framework. Undergraduate programmes revalidation event.
2026/27	Larger percentage increase in raising attainment and access targets in Year 2 milestone. Launch revalidated undergraduate programmes. **Those in year 12 at start of ToC will enter Higher Education**
2027/28	RNCM student body will start to diversify as raising attainment and access targets begin to be met. Larger percentage increase in raising attainment and access targets in Year 3 milestone.
2028/29	Analyses of performance against targets. Identify new student populations for targeted intervention under RNCM Accelerate. The RNCM student body will be visibly more diverse. Review of contribution to aims and objectives of National Plan for Music Education. **Those in year 10 at start of ToC will enter Higher Education**
2029/30	Raising attainment and access targets refreshed and weight becomes more equally distributed between mitigating Access and On Course risks. RNCM Accelerate grows. Undergraduate programmes revalidation project to respond to outcomes of access and participation plan evaluation.
2030/31	Undergraduate programmes revalidation event.
2031/32	Diversity of RNCM student body will reflect the diversity of the UK in terms of percentages of different ethnicities, disabilities and household income. Launch revalidated undergraduate programmes. **Those in year 7 at start of ToC will enter Higher Education**
2032/33	As the diversity of the RNCM student body sustains, the impact on the industry will be noticeable.
2033/34	The artistic workforce will be more diverse and artistic practice will reflect the diversity of the workforce.

Assumptions:

- Music education provision will continue to be distributed unequally and there will be a need to support schools and Music Hubs with their work.
- The barriers that have existed for over 20 years, identified by research, will continue to prevail. These barriers need to be addressed through our work.
- What we provide will work for all students regardless of background, however the external pressures on Higher Education and cost of living

Stakeholders:

Young people
Students
Staff
Industry
Schools
Music Services and Hubs

Enablers:

Quality provision
Visible provision
Partnership
Research

The RNCM aims to:

- Open doors to people regardless of background.
- Provide high quality advanced music study where all can achieve and sustain excellence in their music making.
- Change the music industry, defining the future of music, where those traditionally under-represented in music thrive.

INPUTS	OUTPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES	INDICATORS

INPUTS

People:

- RNCM Junior Programmes Team
- Student Health and Wellbeing Hub team
- Tutors
- Student mentors

Strategy:

- Education Strategy
- Engage Strategy
- Holistic strategic leadership of learning and teaching and access and participation

Finance:

TBC after costing

OUTPUTS

50% non-White British participants across all RNCM Junior Programmes

40% participants eligible for free school meals across RNCM Junior Programmes

20% participants with a disability across RNCM Junior Programmes

40% applicants of non-White British ethnicity

25% applicants eligible for free school meals

30% applicants reporting a disability

<5% difference between application to offer to enrolment conversion rates

<5% gap of students achieving a year average of 70 and above in year 1 and 2 between students with a neurodivergence or mental health condition and those reporting no disability.

ACTIVITIES

RNCM Engage:

- RNCM Pathfinder
- RNCM Young Artists
- Junior RNCM bursary scheme
- RNCM Foundations
- RNCM Young Strings
- RNCM Young Projects
- RNCM Young Projects Schools Programme
- RNCM Engage Brass
- RNCM Engage West Cumbria

RNCM Transitions:

- Advice auditions, information and guidance, offer holder days and contextual auditions
- Love Music Trust A-level Programme
- RNCM Young Artists Transitions

RNCM Accelerate:

- Awareness raising, personal and academic support on course
- Staff training
- Safe spaces for peer networks

OUTCOMES

Raising attainment activity will build knowledge and skills for learners from non-White British ethnic groups, with disabilities and low household incomes.

This will lead to an increase in applications from learners within these populations.

Maintaining the conversion rates from application to offer and offer to enrolment will increase the number of students at the RNCM from these populations.

Providing additional personal and academic support whilst on course will ensure that students with specified disabilities will succeed.

Overtime, on course provision can be expanded to students from low household income backgrounds and non-White Ethnicities.

Maintaining our outstanding progression pathways into industry will ensure that the industry becomes more diverse.

INDICATORS

Learners are able to participate in advanced music education and training at the Junior RNCM and RNCM Young Artists regardless of background.

Learners from all backgrounds are confident in applying to the RNCM in the knowledge that if successful in application, they will succeed in their studies.

The diversity of the student body at the RNCM is more noticeable.

Artistic work at the RNCM reflects the different influences diverse students bring.

The diversity of students working with our industry partners is more noticeable.

The diversity of the artistic workforce is changed, resulting in innovative artistic work

By raising attainment and providing progression pathways, we will:

- Increase the number of students from ethnical diverse backgrounds studying at the RNCM
- Increase the number of students with disabilities studying at the RNCM
- Increase the number of students from low-income households studying at the

By providing specific holistic academic and wellbeing support, we will:

- Ensure students with neurodivergences can achieve and progress in line with those without neurodivergences.
- Ensure students experiencing mental health conditions can achieve and progress in line with those without neurodivergences.

Annex C: Targets, Investments and Fees

OfS will append on approval of the plan.

Fees, investments and targets
2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: Royal Northern College of Music

Provider UKPRN: 10007837

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 CPIH

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	*
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 Northern College of Music

Provider UKPRN: 10007837

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 OfS 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	£973,000	£1,021,000	£1,048,000	£774,000
Financial support (£)	NA	£240,000	£240,000	£240,000	£240,000
Research and evaluation (£)	NA	£89,000	£92,000	£94,000	£97,000

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 (£)	£572,000	£603,000	£619,000	£425,000
Access activity investment	Post-16 access activities (£)	£401,000	£418,000	£429,000	£349,000
Access activity investment	Other access activities (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Access activity investment	**Total access investment (£)**	**£973,000**	**£1,021,000**	**£1,048,000**	**£774,000**
Access activity investment	*Total access investment (as % of HFI)*	68.3%	68.9%	67.8%	50.8%
Access activity investment	*Total access investment funded from HFI (£)*	£307,000	£360,000	£369,000	£377,000
Access activity investment	*Total access investment from other funding (as specified) (£)*	£666,000	£661,000	£679,000	£396,000
Financial support investment	Bursaries and scholarships (£)	£200,000	£200,000	£200,000	£200,000
Financial support investment	Fee waivers (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Financial support investment	Hardship funds (£)	£40,000	£40,000	£40,000	£40,000
Financial support investment	**Total financial support investment (£)**	**£240,000**	**£240,000**	**£240,000**	**£240,000**
Financial support investment	*Total financial support investment (as % of HFI)*	16.8%	16.2%	15.5%	15.7%
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (£)	£89,000	£92,000	£94,000	£97,000
Research and evaluation investment	*Research and evaluation investment (as % of HFI)*	6.2%	6.2%	6.1%	6.4%

Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: Royal Northern College of Music

Provider UKPRN: 10007837

Targets

Table 5b: Access and/or raising attainment targets

Aim [500 characters maximum]	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
50% non-white participants across RNCM Engage and Junior Programmes	PTA_1	Raising attainment	Ethnicity	Not specified (please give detail in description)		Aggregated ethnicity data. Data taken from self-reported RNCM Junior Programmes registration data.	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage	42%	45%	48%	50%	50%
40% participants eligible for free school meals across RNCM Engage and Junior Programmes	PTA_2	Raising attainment	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible		Data taken from self-reported RNCM Junior Programmes registration data.	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage	9.5%	15%	25%	35%	40%
20% participants with a disability across RNCM Engage and Junior Programmes	PTA_3	Raising attainment	Reported disability	Disability reported		Data taken from self-reported RNCM Junior Programmes registration data.	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage	11.4%	15%	18%	20%	20%
40% applicants of non-white ethnicity	PTA_4	Access	Ethnicity	Not specified (please give detail in description)		Agregated ethnicity data	No	UCAS data (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage	9%	15%	20%	30%	40%
25% applicants eligible for free school meals	PTA_5	Access	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible		We have used IMD data as the closest data point to FSM, taking D1-4 aggregated. We will be using FSM for reasons outlined in our APP.	No	UCAS data (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage	13.8%	15%	18%	22%	20%
30% applicants reporting a disability	PTA_6	Access	Reported disability	Disability reported		Data taken from UCAS applicant data	No	UCAS data (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage	17%	20%	25%	30%	30%
<5% gap between application to offer conversion rates between non-white and white applicants	PTA_7	Access	Ethnicity	Not specified (please give detail in description)		Agregated ethnicity data	No	UCAS data (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage points	6	5	5	5	5
<5% gap between application to offer conversion rates between those eligible for free school meals and those not eligible	PTA_8	Access	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible		We have used IMD data as the closest data point to FSM, taking D1-4 aggregated. We will be using FSM for reasons outlined in our APP.	No	UCAS data (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage points	1.6	5	5	5	5
<5% gap between application to offer conversion rates between those reporting a disability and those reporting no disability	PTA_9	Access	Reported disability	Disability reported		Data taken from UCAS applicant data	No	UCAS data (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage points	2.6	5	5	5	5
<5% gap between offer to enrolment conversion rates between non-white and white applicants	PTA_10	Access	Ethnicity	Not specified (please give detail in description)		Agregated number of non-white ethnicities	No	UCAS data (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage points	1.5	5	5	5	5
<5% gap between offer to enrolment conversion rates between those eligible for free school meals and those not eligible	PTA_11	Access	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible		We have used IMD data as the closest data point to FSM, taking D1-4 aggregated. We will be using FSM for reasons outlined in our APP.	No	UCAS data (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage points	12.1	9	6	5	5
<5% gap between offer to enrolment conversion rates between those reporting a disability and those reporting no disability	PTA_12	Access	Reported disability	Disability reported		Data taken from UCAS applicants data	No	UCAS data (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage points	11.3	9	6	5	5

Table 5d: Success targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
<5% gap of students achieving a year average of 70 and above in year 1 between students with a neurodivergence and those reporting no disability.	PTS_1	Attainment	Reported disability	Cognitive or learning disabilities		Internal attainment data	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	2020-21	Percentage points	14.6	10	7	5	5

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
<5% gap of students achieving a year average of 70 and above in year 2 between students with a neurodivergence and those reporting no disability.	PTS_2	Attainment	Reported disability	Cognitive or learning disabilities		Internal attainment data	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	2021-22	Percentage points	10	7	7	5	5
<5% gap of students achieving a year average of 70 and above in year 1 between students with a mental health condition and those reporting no disability.	PTS_3	Attainment	Reported disability	Mental health condition		Internal attainment data	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	2020-21	Percentage points	4.6	5	5	5	5
<5% gap of students achieving a year average of 70 and above in year 2 between students with a mental health condition and those reporting no disability.	PTS_4	Attainment	Reported disability	Mental health condition		Internal attainment data	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	2021-22	Percentage points	5.6	5	5	5	5
	PTS_5														
	PTS_6														
	PTS_7														
	PTS_8														
	PTS_9														
	PTS_10														
	PTS_11														
	PTS_12														

Table 5e: Progression targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
	PTP_1														
	PTP_2														
	PTP_3														
	PTP_4														
	PTP_5														
	PTP_6														
	PTP_7														
	PTP_8														
	PTP_9														
	PTP_10														
	PTP_11														
	PTP_12														