PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Music (LEVEL 8)

Awarding Institution: Royal Northern College of Music
Programme Leader: Dr Tom Parkinson, Head of Doctoral Programmes

Contents

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) (LEVEL 8) 1
1. INTRODUCTORY PROGRAMME INFORMATION 1
2. CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION AND ENTRY 2
3. COURSE OVERVIEW 3
4. TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODS 4
5. OVERALL WORKLOAD 4
6. ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK 4
7. STUDENT SUPPORT, DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING 5
8. COURSE COSTS AND SOURCES OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT 6
9. THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT 6
10. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND DIVERSITY 6
11. REFERENCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION: 6

1.INTRODUCTORY PROGRAMME INFORMATION

Award **On successful completion of the course, students will receive:**	**Duration**	**Mode of study**
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Music	3 years 6 years	FT PT
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Music, by Published Works	6 – 9 months 12-15 months	FT PT

Period of Registration: **FT** Minimum: 36 months Maximum: 48 months
PT Minimum: 72 months Maximum: 84 months

Academic Year: September to September

OTHER POTENTIAL AWARDS: Programme levels and qualifications (*Exit Awards*)

Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Music

Date of Writing:	July 2026	
Period of Approval:	**From:** September 2026	**To:** December 2031

Expectations of Achievement

Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated attainment against the following:

Descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 8 on the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications: doctoral degree

- the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication
- a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice
- the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems
- a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas or approaches.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments

Doctoral Degree Assessment Parameters
In accordance with the Office for Students' conditions of registration and the Dublin descriptors the following sector-recognised standards apply to Doctoral Degrees:

- have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field
- have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity
- have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication
- are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas
- can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise
- can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge-based society.

2.CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION AND ENTRY

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

For applicants whose first language is not English, minimum scores on language tests are required for entry to all programmes of study at RNCM, regardless of how long applicants have lived in the UK and whether they undertook their bachelor's and/or master's degrees at UK higher education institutions. Applicants may be exempted if they achieved the minimum scores required before they undertook their master's degree at RNCM, or another HEI where their learning was undertaken in English, and can provide evidence of having produced a dissertation of at least 8,000 words.

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

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

3.COURSE OVERVIEW

The RNCM research degrees programme is intended for postgraduate researchers (PGRs) undertaking doctoral study in the following areas:

- Composition
- Music education
- Music psychology
- Music performance
- Musicology (history/ cultural history and theory)
- Popular music studies
- Popular music practice (including but not limited to performance, songwriting, production)

At application stage, candidates should indicate one of these as their core discipline. In practice, many projects sit across two or more of these sub-disciplines (e.g. music performance and musicology), and some may also be interdisciplinary, requiring engagement with disciplines and fields beyond music.

Work Placement
There is no formal work placement on the programme. Students are encouraged to develop collaborations and partnerships with regional organisations where relevant.

Timetables
Supervision is arranged between tutors and students on an individual basis. Research training takes place on Wednesday mornings and afternoons during term time. Timetables are published on the RNCM virtual learning environment, Moodle, and the room booking system, ASIMUT.

BENCHMARKING

Programmes are based on national standards for degrees in music through external scrutiny of the programme during development by both academics and professional musicians and by reference to nationally agreed standards: OfS Conditions of Registration and Sector Recognised Standards.

4.TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODS

As a Level 8 (doctoral level) postgraduate research (PGR) programme, the PhD entails self-directed study. Doctoral study also comprises regular supervision across all years of study, mandatory research training in Year 1, and optional research training and wider research training opportunities across all years of study.

Full-time (FT) PGRs can expect 30 hours of supervision over the course of each academic year, and Part-time (PT) PGRs can expect 15 hours of supervision, but this does not necessarily involve face-to-face meetings. The precise nature of research supervision (e.g., number, length and format of supervisory meetings) will vary depending on factors including the stage of the research and type of research project. Supervisors will spend some of their hours reading and providing written feedback on work that has been submitted to them, and some meetings may be virtual by agreement with the supervisory team. The whole supervisory team should meet as soon as possible after the PGR has enrolled to establish all parties' expectations, including when and how work will be received by the team for review, and when and how feedback will be given to the PGR. If supervisors are concerned about the PGR's progress, they should consult and follow the Procedure to Support PGR Progress.

It is expected that PGRs will attend research training in person, to enable them to benefit from interactive research training, engagement with other researchers across staff and students, and with the wider research environment of the RNCM. Remote or asynchronous participation should be cleared with the primary supervisor and Head of Doctoral Programmes on a case-by-case basis. Allowances will be made for those with caring responsibilities or other reasons why in-person attendance may be difficult, in line with RNCM's Belonging, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion policy.

5.OVERALL WORKLOAD

FT postgraduate research degree students (PGRs) are expected to spend a minimum of 35 hours per week on their studies, typically for 45 weeks in each calendar year, with supervision and examination likely to take place during the 34 weeks of the taught academic year.

PT PGRs are expected to spend a minimum of 17.5 hours per week on their studies also for 46 weeks in each calendar year, with supervision and examination likely to take place during the 34 weeks of the academic year.

6.ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

Annual Progress Review

Annual progress reviews (APRs) take place at the end of each year of a FT PGR's registration (PT PGRs should undergo three APRs across their registration, typically in years 1, 3 and 5). They are conducted by a review panel (plus external for the second APR) independent of the supervisory team and provide the opportunity for the panel to review the standard of the PGR's work, to make recommendations to the supervisory team, and to flag any concerns or development needs with the Head of Doctoral Programmes. The review panel, appointed for the full period of the PGR's registration, consists of two reviewers, one of whom fulfils the role of panel chair. The Head of Doctoral Programmes reports all actions arising from annual progress reviews to the Research Degrees Committee.

Feedback

Regular informal feedback will be provided throughout the programme by the student's supervisory team. During and after each formal review, the student will receive oral and written feedback on their work from the review panel.

Submission and examination of thesis or portfolio

Candidates must submit a thesis or portfolio and accompanying portfolio examination team will normally consist of two suitably qualified examiners, one internal and one external. Examination teams are nominated by the candidate's supervisory team and approved by the Research Degrees Committee. An independent chair will be appointed to chair the viva voce examination. The candidate must give three months' notice before submission of the thesis or portfolio.

The viva voce examination normally takes place 8-12 weeks following submission. Examiners normally have six weeks to examine the thesis or portfolio and critical commentary and provide preliminary reports, which will not be made available to the candidate. Standard attendance at the viva voce examination consists of the candidate, two examiners and an independent chair. Members of staff and PGRs at RNCM may attend the examination with the candidate's prior consent.

The viva voce examination will be conducted at RNCM, or via video conferencing if deemed appropriate and the candidate agrees. All candidates must defend their thesis in English.

To qualify for the award, students must have received and completed all requested corrections or revisions (if any) to the satisfaction of the examiners.

7.STUDENT SUPPORT, DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING

You will receive an induction programme in the Welcome Week activities, a week before the start of the academic year.

STUDENT VOICE

Students are represented at every level of the College's deliberative structure, except for those committees (for example the Board of Examiners, Extenuating Circumstances Committee) in which confidential student data is discussed and/or evaluated.

Postgraduate Research Degrees Committee (RDC)

Representatives report to the RDC on matters affecting their cohort, with particular emphasis on providing feedback to staff on the programme.

Student Experience Forum (SEF)

The Student Experience Forum meets once a term, with student representatives being allocated according to Schools rather than programmes. The committee operates as a discussion forum between students and staff representing key College services and functions on any matters not relating to academic programmes

Students' Union

The RNCM Students' Union (RNCM SU) exists to promote student interests through representation on most College committees and by providing an extensive welfare and advice service. The RNCM SU integrates the social and academic areas of student life through the organisation of various events throughout the academic year and works in collaboration with senior academic members of staff to ensure that the student voice informs strategic decision making at the College. The Union is affiliated to the National Union of Students, subject to annual confirmation by the membership.

Personal Support

Students experiencing personal difficulties that are affecting their ability to fulfil the requirements of their degree programme should contact the Student Wellbeing Advisors, Wellbeing@rncm.ac.uk, who will direct them to the appropriate service.

Disability

It is your responsibility to consider whether to disclose a disability or not; the College will only consider whether reasonable adjustments are required from the point of disclosure by you and adjustments cannot be made retrospectively, e.g., following assessments or at the end of the academic year.

8.COURSE COSTS AND SOURCES OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Details of fees, and potential funding sources, including bursaries and scholarships, may be found on our website: **FEES**

9.THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

RNCM Library:

The RNCM Library has a wide range of materials to support learning, research, and performance, and is a key resource for all areas of the degree programme. Our knowledgeable library staff have vast musical expertise and will help students to make the best use of the resources available. You have access to over 90,000 catalogued items of books and printed music, 96 current journal titles, a significant collection of CDs and DVDs and the College's own archive of recordings. You also have online access to e-books, databases, selected journals, and audio-visual streaming services, as well as the use of PCs with music software, listening stations and a viewing area. You are encouraged to make use of the library's archives and special collections: the RNCM Archives are of international importance, and the RNCM Collection of Historic Musical Instruments consists of over 300 instruments, bows and miscellaneous items dating from the 16th to the 20th century.

10. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND DIVERSITY

In keeping with the RNCM's commitment to, and policy on, equal opportunities, our programmes:

- are offered to all students with no discrimination in terms of race, age, gender, sexual orientation or family circumstances (where possible every effort is made to accommodate students with special needs as a result of disability or socio-economic disadvantage);
- will, where appropriate, cover issues of equality of opportunity within the programme;
- aims to ensure that every effort is made to provide learning spaces accessible to students with disabilities and to support them throughout their programme.

Further details of the RNCM Belonging, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy and Ethics Framework may be found, under 'Institutional' policies, on the 'RNCM Policies' website**.**

11. REFERENCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available on the College website: **:**

RNCM Policies

Academic Regulations

College Policies