Degree Outcomes Statement 2026

This statement analyses the RNCM degree classification profile over the past five years to assure the College that it meets the Office for Students' ongoing conditions of registration on academic standards (B4 and B5).

The statement covers final classifications for graduates on **Level 6 FHEQ** degrees, including:

- Bachelor of Music (with Honours) (BMus)
- Bachelor of Music (with Honours) in Popular Music (BMPM)
- Graduate Diploma of the RNCM (GRNCM)

The RNCM statement is aligned to the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) Statement of Intent and Guidance to protect the value of UK degrees.

Introduction

The RNCM is home to over 900 students from more than 60 countries and is dedicated to providing an outstanding education that propels students into careers as inspiring and versatile musicians, fully equipped for exciting futures both on and off stage.

The RNCM is acknowledged worldwide for its exciting and innovative approach to teaching and research. Rated Gold in all areas of the 2023 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), Gold for both Student Experience and Student Outcomes and ranked No 5 for music in the 2025 QS World University Subject Rankings.

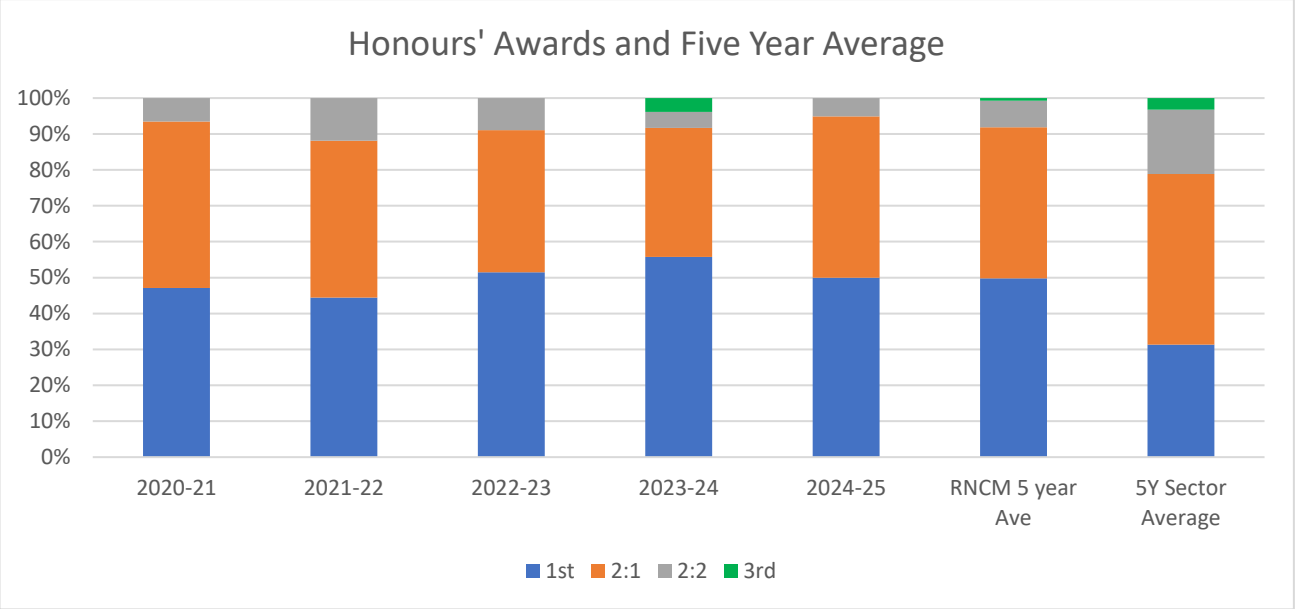
The RNCM received its sixth Times Higher Education Award in 2025 for Outstanding Library Team of the Year. The RNCM was also shortlisted in a second category for Outstanding Contribution to Environmental Leadership in recognition of its *The Future is Green* programme. Prior to this, the RNCM won five THE Awards for Outstanding Entrepreneurial University (2023), Technological and Digital Innovation (2022), Widening and Participation Initiative of the Year (2020), Outstanding International Student Strategy (2016), and Excellence and Innovation in the Arts (2015). The RNCM also received a Global Teaching Excellence Spotlight Award and two Greater China Awards, all of which highlight our commitment to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to create an incredible future, inspired by music.

Our current Strategic Plan, Defining the Future of Music, is nearing the end of a six-year tenure that delivered ambitious and exciting educational provision to train musicians to the highest level. It focused on nurturing and developing students' capacity to innovate, to inspire others and to be musical leaders of the future. The renewal of the RNCM Strategic Plan is taking place during this academic year 2025-26.

As leaders of the innovative International Benchmarking Group and Interplay network and the only UK member of the European Chamber Music Academy, the RNCM strives to enhance the professional and personal development of young musicians through exceptional collaboration and real-world experience.

1 RNCM Undergraduate Degree Classification Profile

Bachelors level awards
The following chart shows the RNCM classification outcomes from 2021 to 2025 for all bachelor's level awards.



The achievement of students across all programmes remains high. The Board of Examiners annual report to the Academic board provided statistics to demonstrate that the high percentage of students who achieve a first-class degree is the result of their year-on-year attainment and educational maturation, and RNCM programmes of study scaffold progressive learning.

External Examiners confirmed that the assessment processes measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programmes and they consider that the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which they had experience.

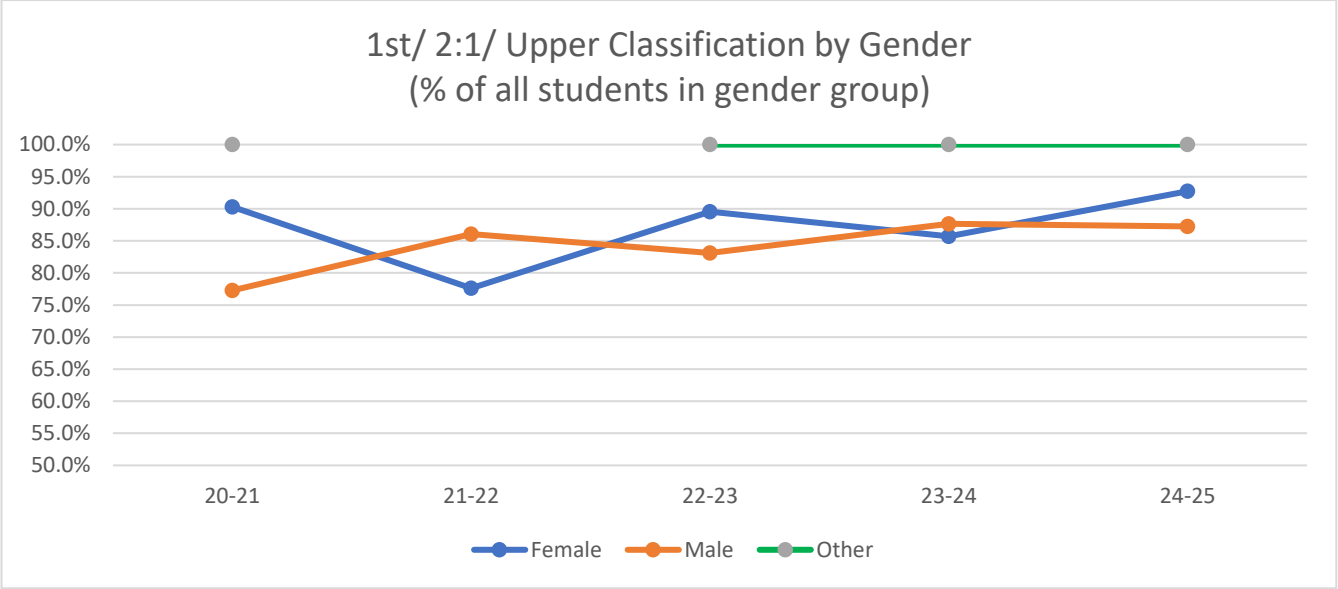
In addition, the RNCM appoints professional practitioners as Specialist External Assessors to sit on all level 6 performance assessment panels. All SEAs agree that the assessment criteria for assessment is appropriate and that the quality of student output across the assessments remained consistently high within the sector.

Graduate Diploma (GRNCM)

GRNCM students complete a Bachelor's degree with the University of Manchester concurrently with a graduate diploma at the RNCM. Places are limited and the application process is highly competitive, resulting in highly motivated and talented students, which is reflected in the outcomes.

Classifications are separated into an Upper award (over 60%) and Lower (40% to 59%). From 2020 to 2025, 100% of students received an Upper award.

Gender - Comparison of 1st/ 2:1/ Upper Classifications

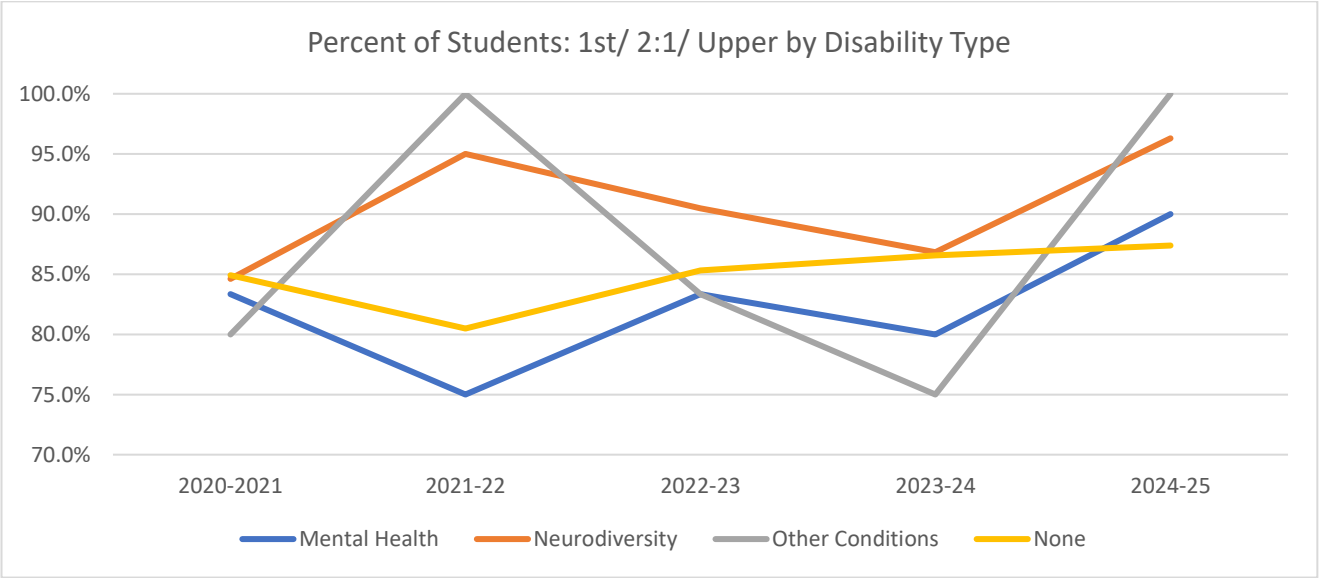


As a small and specialist institution, percentages can vary from year to year. There are no specific trends relating to gender and students of all genders are performing well.

Records on students who identify as 'other' gender are fairly new and the number of students selecting this option when registering is anticipated to increase. The classification of these students is currently 100% receiving a 1st, 2:1 or Upper award. There were no graduates in this category in 2021-22.

Disability - Comparison of 1st/ 2:1/ Upper Classifications

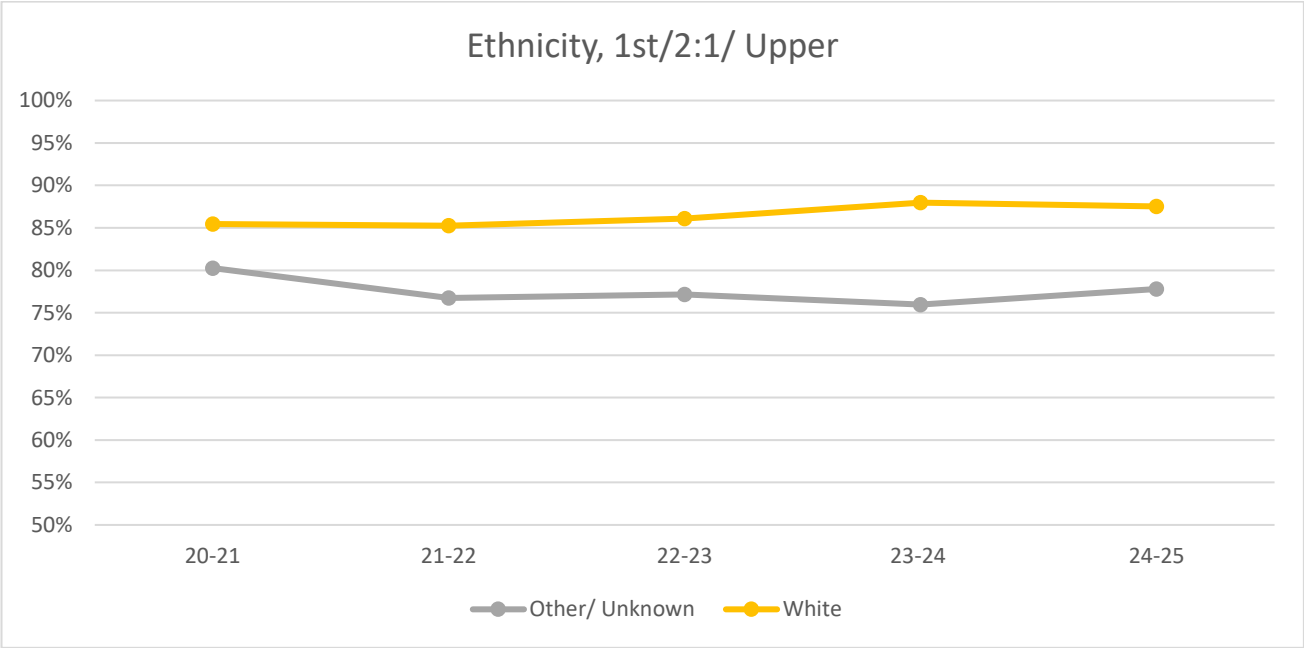
Students may have multiple conditions and may be included in more than one disability type.



Students with a declared disability have performed well in comparison to those with no disability. Mental Health appears to have the most detrimental effect on results, however, over 75% of these students are achieving high awards. The RNCM team of counsellors has been expanded in recent years and reduced waiting times. Students with neurodiverse declarations continue to outperform students with no declared disability.

Ethnicity - Comparison of 1st/ 2:1/ Upper Classifications

Due to the small student population, percentages can vary significantly from year to year. To mitigate these swings in outcomes the following data is presented in a five-year rolling cycle.
For example, this means that data from 2020-21 is an average of results from 2017-18 to 2020-21 and rolls forward each year, so that the 2024-25 data point relates to data from 2020-21 to 2024-25. This means that any significant trends will stand out in the chart..



The data includes all students, that is, a combination of those classified as Home and International. This two-part split of 'white' and 'other or unknown' ethnicity shows that the percentage of high awards for other ethnicities generally falls behind those of white students. The RNCM Access and Participation Plan has been developed to encourage participation of UK applicants and improve outcomes for all ethnicities.

2 Assessment and Marking Practices

The RNCM's **Academic Regulations** are approved by the Academic Board, which holds ultimate responsibility for the quality and standards of academic programmes in the RNCM. The Regulations are informed by the OfS B Conditions of Registration and meet the general guidance for the exercise of taught degree awarding powers as recommended by the OfS.

All taught programmes are governed by the RNCM's Academic Regulations, which include the Assessment Regulations.

Assessment, marking and moderation practices are set out during each programme approval process. Programme approval panels are established to include a minimum of two external experts with relevant academic/ professional expertise; and at least one student member.

The approval panel considers the appropriateness, currency and relevance of the structures and content of the programme, including assessment, and consider the programme in relation to external points of reference including the OfS 'B' Conditions of Registration, the OfS Sector Recognised Standards and informed by the QAA Quality Code, subject benchmark statements, and requirements of the music profession.

Marking and Moderation

Marking guidelines are employed for all assessments within each programme, details of which are published in each Programmes' Handbook.

All internally set, summative assessment and examinations at undergraduate and taught postgraduate level are subject to internal moderation and oversight by an external examiner.

Marking panels are employed for all performance assessments and are witnessed and blind-marked by at least two assessors for assessments at Level 6 and above. In addition, the RNCM has introduced cross-school moderation of Performance Study Recitals at levels 6 and 7 by an approved Moderation Panel.

Calibration of Marking

- Programme specific regulations are set out in each Programmes' Handbook.
- Programme Leaders and Module Coordinators provide marking standardisation briefings and guidance to markers.
- Principal Study Panel Chairs meet annually to clarify their role and duties.
- The moderation panel attend an annual standardisation meeting prior to the assessment period.

All programmes leading to an award of RNCM are subject to **Continuous Monitoring of annualised data** throughout the year by the Degrees Committees, reporting to the Education and Quality Committee. This includes monitoring of progression and awards data and the receipt of external examiner and specialist assessor reports.

External review of the overall standards of assessment is provided by two means:

- **External Examiners** are invited to inspect a sample of marked and moderated written work and to attend a sample of live practical assessments across all modules which occur in the years of the programme under their jurisdiction.
- **Specialist External Assessors** are external professional musicians who are appointed as expert external members of taught performance assessment panels. Each 'live' performance panel at level 6 or above includes a Specialist External Assessor.

The RNCM ensures that there are no reciprocal external examiner appointments between institutions with an annual survey of internal RNCM staff members acting as examiners at other institutions. The report is presented to the Education and Quality Committee.

3 Academic Governance

Details on the Governors of the RNCM may be found here which includes a Statement of Primary Responsibilities.

Committees

Within the RNCM, three bodies derive their powers and responsibilities directly from the provisions of the RNCM's Instrument and the Articles of Government, namely the Board of Governors (the 'Board'), the Academic Board, and the Principal.

The Academic Board acts autonomously and may establish committees or other deliberative or advisory bodies with duties and powers it directs. The Academic Board receives assurance reports relating to Academic Standards, including External Examiner's Reports, summaries of programme monitoring and results analysis.

The Academic Board has established an Education and Quality Committee for taught degrees which is responsible for safeguarding and enhancing the student learning experience and the maintenance of academic standards for taught degrees. It is responsible for the RNCM's Education Strategy, academic policies, and procedures. The Committee provides a forum to debate national developments and operational aspects of learning and teaching, academic standards and strategy, quality assurance and the professional development of tutors.

Each year EQC receives reports on the Continuous Monitoring of programmes, External Examiner reports, classification analysis, and details of staff performing external examining duties at other HEIs.

EQC also receives an update on current sector news and mapping to new and revised regulations and guidance documents from the OfS, OIA, QAA etc., which informs the annual review of the Academic Regulations.

Quality Assurance
All programmes are aligned to the OfS B Conditions of Registration and informed by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, discipline-specific Subject Benchmark Statements, and The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

All colleagues are responsible for the quality assurance of programmes, and a cyclical schedule of continuous monitoring is in place to enable critical reflection on the quality of programmes and to maintain high standards.

An Academic Quality Handbook provides a central reference document for staff that sets out the policies, procedures and guidance that define and assure the academic standards and quality of the RNCM's programmes. The overarching regulations for taught programmes are set out in the Academic Regulations.

The RNCM regularly reviews its academic quality procedures in light of internal and external changes, to reflect sector-wide good practice and teaching excellence.

4 Classification Algorithms

Universities UK reported in 2020 that institutions from across the UK had agreed new principles to tackle grade inflation, reconfirming the sector's strong collective commitment to protect the value of qualifications. The RNCM compared its algorithms against the UUK principles and found that the RNCM's practice was in-line with the sector.

The RNCM is compliant with these principles, as follows:

- The RNCM has no discounted marks in any year of study.
- The RNCM permits border-line classification of two percentage points for Bachelors' programmes and rounding takes place once at the final stage.
- The RNCM weighting has emphasis on exit velocity with 0/0/33/67 across its four-year programmes.

The **OfS** 'Lessons Learnt' report on degree classification algorithms, November 2025, discusses concerns about the use of two steps sometimes included in algorithms, that is, awarding a student the best result from multiple algorithms and discounting credit with the lowest marks.
The RNCM does not use either of these steps.

Each year the OfS publishes analysis of changes in the proportion of first and upper second-class degrees awarded since 2010-11. The RNCM has implemented a data driven Continuous Monitoring process with statistics being considered by Programme Boards and reported through to senior committees. The Academic Board receives longer term statistics and external comparator data for strategic comparison and development.

A condition of registration with the OfS requires higher education providers to ensure that the qualifications awarded to students hold their value at the point of qualification and over time.

Undergraduate Degree classifications at the RNCM are calculated according to algorithms which have not changed since they were strengthened in 2008-09 with the tightening of the requirements for the borderline cases from 3% to 2% in each band.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, alternate assessments were developed and a **no detriment** policy was implemented for affected students. Regulations have now returned to those agreed at point of validation but the effects are still seen in the five-year statistics.

The progression requirements for each programme may be found in the Programme Specifications on each programme's webpage: https://www.rncm.ac.uk/study-here/what-you-can-study/undergraduate/

5 Teaching Practices and Learning Resources

The current Education Strategy outlines seven aims to develop exceptional musicians with the artistic integrity, creativity and imagination to drive the music profession forward and ensure music remains relevant to future generations. The aims are picked up by the Continuous Monitoring action plan.

The diversity of the learning and teaching methods employed in the curriculum enables students to acquire and apply a broad range of skills. As performers, students learn communication and presentation skills as a soloist and as a member of ensembles/ bands in a professional environment. They employ sophisticated self-devised strategies for study, practice and learning and identify and apply strategies for mental preparation for performance in a variety of contexts.

Teaching methods aim to support the learning needs of all students. The essential specialist training for performers, composers and producers is necessarily one-to-one, complemented and supported by performance classes, masterclasses and small ensemble coaching.

The range of creative and innovative learning and teaching methods are diverse, complementary, challenging and stimulating, with a variety of modes of interaction between students and their tutors and industry professionals. Students' experience of the global music profession is further enhanced through regular masterclasses delivered by a range of world class musicians.

This variety allows students to learn in numerous different contexts within each year and module of the programme. Most modules include more than one teaching method and all teaching at the RNCM requires students to take responsibility for their own private study, practice, reading, and listening.

The RNCM's virtual learning environment is used to support all areas of study, and includes activities, supporting materials, details of modules, and multimedia content. The VLE is also the repository for student assignment submissions and the return of feedback. It links directly to an award-winning library with a wide range of materials and online resources, including online content, that facilitates research and enables ready access to materials set by tutors for preparation in advance of classes.

There are over 70 tutorial practice rooms, more than 120 pianos, Composition labs with a suite of iMac machines, as well as performance venues and studios. There is a professional recording department offering student recording services and a Digital Hub for equipment loan. There are Wi-Fi hotspots inside the College, an online room booking system and access to PCs, with Sibelius, on the student deck.

6 Identifying Good Practice and Actions

Good practice is identified through staff development events, Degree Committee meetings, Continuous Monitoring, annual SEA and EE reports.

The RNCM has moved from an Annual Review of its programmes to a **Continuous Monitoring Process** which embeds discussion between staff and students, facilitating partnership in the monitoring of quality and standards, as well as the enhancement of programmes of study. The action plan (Student Experience Enhancement Record) informs the activities of each degree management committee. A summary of good practice is presented to the Academic Board annually via the Continuous Monitoring end of cycle report.

7 Risks and Challenges.

The Risk Management Policy forms part of the RNCM's strategic planning and performance management procedures. Risks are regularly reviewed and recorded in the RNCM's Strategic Risk Register with agreed actions and management responses reviewed at the RNCM's Executive and Audit and Risk Committees.

The Continuous Monitoring process considers challenges to programmes of study and the action plan opens and closes action points identified by the committee on a cyclical basis. The Committees reflect on enhancements from the previous year and current data in a continuous cycle of monitoring activity.

Sector risks relate to the decline of music education in schools, which disproportionately affects less affluent families. The RNCM has developed flagship projects around access with the RNCM Engage programme which includes initiatives such as Pathfinder, Young Voices, and Young Projects, which are open for all young players of school age, whether a beginner or more experienced.