RNCM PhD Programme

Guidelines for Applicants (2027 Entry)

Introduction

The Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) PhD Programme supports original research across a broad range of musical disciplines. We welcome applications from candidates proposing innovative and intellectually rigorous projects that align with the College's research expertise and contribute new knowledge, understanding, creative outputs, or professional practices within music.

The RNCM PhD Programme supports scholarly, creative, practice-based and practice-led research in:

- Composition
- Music Education
- Musicology
- Music Psychology
- Performance
- Popular Music (inc. practice-based)

Research students join a vibrant research community and benefit from expert supervision, specialist facilities, research training, and opportunities to engage with performers, composers, researchers, educators and audiences across the College.

Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to discuss their project with a potential supervisor before submitting an application.

The Head of Doctoral Programmes, **Professor Tom Parkinson** (tom.parkinson@rncm.ac.uk), can provide further guidance where necessary.

Research Topics, Methods and Supervision

Applications are welcomed in areas that align with the research interests and expertise of RNCM staff. Projects may be theoretical, historical, empirical, creative, practice-based or interdisciplinary.

Applicants should identify potential supervisors whose expertise is relevant to their proposed research.

Research proposals should demonstrate:

- A clear and original research question or creative focus
- Awareness of relevant literature and current scholarship
- Appropriate research methods or creative methodologies

- A viable plan of work and timetable
- The potential to make an original contribution to knowledge or practice

Admissions Requirements

Applicants will normally possess:

- A Master's degree in a relevant subject, usually with Merit or Distinction, or equivalent international qualification; and
- Evidence of appropriate preparation for doctoral-level research.

Applicants may also be considered for a place on the RNCM PhD Programme if they expect their Master's qualification to be awarded within the first three months following enrolment.

All enrolments are normally expected to take place in September.

The College may exceptionally consider applicants who do not meet the standard academic requirements where there is compelling evidence of equivalent professional achievement, research experience, creative accomplishment, or other suitably relevant qualifications.

Composition

Applicants wishing to undertake doctoral research in composition should normally submit:

- A research proposal
- A portfolio of recent compositions
- Supporting materials where appropriate

Applicants are encouraged to discuss prospective projects with relevant academic staff before submitting an application. For advice on applications in Composition, applicants should contact **Dr Larry Goves**, Head of School of Composition (larry.goves@rncm.ac.uk).

Performance

Applicants proposing doctoral research in performance should normally submit:

- A research proposal
- A performance portfolio appropriate to the proposed project
- Any additional documentation necessary to evaluate the proposal

Projects may include performance-led, practice-based or practice-as-research approaches. For advice on applications in Performance, applicants should contact **Professor David Horne**, Head of Graduate School (david.horne@rncm.ac.uk).

Musicology

Applicants proposing doctoral research in musicology should submit a detailed research proposal demonstrating:

- The originality of the project
- Knowledge of relevant scholarship
- Appropriate methodological approaches
- A feasible plan of research

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

Music Psychology

Applicants proposing doctoral research in music psychology should submit a detailed research proposal outlining the aims, significance, methods and feasibility of the project. For advice on applications for research degrees in Music Psychology, please contact **Dr Sara Ascenso,** Music Psychology Pathway Lead (sara.ascenso@rncm.ac.uk)

Music Education

Applicants proposing doctoral research in music education should submit a detailed research proposal outlining the aims, significance, methods and feasibility of the project. For advice on applications for research degrees in Music Education, please contact **Professor Tom Parkinson**, Music Education Pathway Lead (tom.parkinson@rncm.ac.uk)

Applicants whose first language is not English

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. 46

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.

Equivalent qualifications recognised by the College may also be accepted.

Applicants requiring a Student Visa must satisfy all applicable UK visa and immigration requirements.

Making Your Formal Application

Applications are approved for evaluation by the appropriate PhD pathway leader. Applications should normally include:

- A completed UCAS Conservatoires application
- A completed Acceptd application form, which should include:
    - A research proposal (c.1500 words)
    - Academic transcripts and certificates
    - References
    - A portfolio, where relevant
    - Evidence of English language proficiency, where required

Incomplete applications may not be considered.

Evaluation of Applications

Following submission, applications are reviewed by the appropriate pathway leader and potential supervisors.

In consultation with the initial evaluator and/or the potential primary supervisor, the Head of Doctoral Programmes will appoint at least one additional suitably qualified member of staff to assess the application.

Evaluation will consider:

- Originality and significance of the proposed research
- Academic or artistic merit
- Methodological appropriateness
- Feasibility within the proposed timeframe
- Availability of appropriate supervisory expertise and resources

Applicants may be invited to interview as part of the admissions process.

Interviews

Shortlisted applicants will normally be invited to an interview.

The interview provides an opportunity for the applicant to:

- Discuss the proposed research
- Demonstrate their preparedness for doctoral study
- Explore the fit between the project and RNCM expertise
- Discuss supervision arrangements and training needs

Interviews may be conducted in person or online.

Offers

The offer of a place on the RNCM PhD Programme will normally be made only after successful evaluation of the written application and interview.

Offers are subject to:

- Satisfaction of academic entry requirements
- Verification of qualifications
- English language requirements where applicable
- Availability of appropriate supervisory expertise within RNCM

Resubmission of Proposals

Where a proposal is not approved, applicants may receive feedback and guidance from the Head of Doctoral Programmes. One resubmission of a revised proposal may be permitted. No more than two submissions will normally be considered.

Further Information

Prospective applicants seeking general advice on the RNCM PhD Programme should contact pgr@rncm.ac.uk.

The College welcomes enquiries from prospective applicants at an early stage of project development and strongly encourages discussion with prospective supervisors before submission of a formal application.