

Student Protection Plan

Provider's name: **ROYAL NORTHERN COLLEGE OF MUSIC**

Provider's UKPRN: **10007837**

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for enquiries about this student protection plan.

Student protection plan for the period 2024/25 – 2026/27

1. An assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for your students, how those risks may differ based on your students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise

The Higher Education and Research Act (2017) and the Office for Students require that the College has in place a Student Protection Plan designed to protect your interests in the case of a material change to our circumstances, including changes to your advertised programme (programme delivery and/or content), programme closure, or the closure of the College as a result of closure of the College's world-renowned, long established music programme as the College is a single-subject institution. These events may be triggered by internal or external factors, the latter being outside of our control.

We are in a secure financial position with demand for student places consistently high due to the highly specialist nature and quality of our provision. Our standard of teaching has been deemed excellent in the Teaching Excellence Framework (being awarded Gold in 2023) and our world-class provision is recognised through receipt of World Leading Specialist Provider Funding. The College's External Auditors confirm that we continue to maintain healthy cash reserves and have identified no issues that would suggest that the College is unable to continue to operate as a going concern.

The key external risk that could impact on us if they were to materialise are changes to student recruitment. This is currently considered as medium risk in terms of occurring, but low risk in terms of impacting on your continuation of study due to the steps we would put in place to mitigate it as described in the table below. This risk, and the actions taken in mitigation, is reviewed regularly by the College Executive, Audit and Risk Committee and the Board of Governors.

Internal risks, all of which are considered unlikely to materialise and therefore of low risk to your continuation of study are detailed in the risk analysis below. They fall within the scope of our comprehensive risk assessment and management arrangements which are reviewed and updated on a regular basis by our Executive Team, and monitored for effectiveness by the internal auditors; reporting to the Audit and Risk Committee of the Board of Governors. Any matters of concern are brought to the attention of the Audit and Risk Committee or the Board of Governors with recommended actions being addressed by the College in a timely fashion. Actions and procedures to mitigate risk are embedded in everyday working practices and business planning processes.

The table below summarises these risks, which are grouped into cognate areas relating to financial sustainability, teaching and academic standards, student recruitment, and estates.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY	
Risk	Mitigation and evidence of effectiveness
Inadequate financial management and control leading to a risk of financial unsustainability	We review our financial forecasts on a regular basis through the College's Executive Committee and the Finance and Investment Committee of the Board of Governors. In the case of changes to Government funding, a significant reduction in student tuition fee income or a statutory requirement to increase expenditure on, for example, staff pensions, cost saving measures will be implemented to safeguard your interests. The External Auditors assess the risk of the College with regards to financial sustainability on an annual basis with the outcomes being considered by the Audit and Risk Committee and the Board of Governors. The most recent assessment stated that we continue to maintain healthy cash reserves and the auditors have identified no issues that would suggest that we are not able to continue to operate as a going concern.
TEACHING AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS	
High quality provision and maintenance of consistently high academic standards are critically important to us, and crucial to our success in continuing to attract high quality students who will benefit from this provision. We attract the highest quality tutors due to our reputation as a world-class conservatoire. If key staff become unavailable leading to knowledge and skills gaps, other experienced staff will be brought in on a temporary basis while recruitment takes place. Alternative tutors may also be sought via reciprocal arrangement with other institutions, Conservatoires UK or our European partners. If the College is unable to deliver teaching and/or assessment due to temporary closure of the building as a result of <i>force majeure</i> , these activities will move to online delivery and/or be delivered in alternative accommodation. The standard of our provision and teaching is evidenced by our Teaching Excellence Framework Gold award in 2023, receipt of World Leading Specialist Provider Funding, the healthy ratio of applicants to places, continuation rates for students in excess of 97% and the positive degree outcomes achieved by students.	
Risk	Mitigation and evidence of effectiveness
Failure to meet required academic quality and teaching standards with a threat to the College's ability to award degrees.	We routinely monitor student achievement and academic standards through the Board of Examiners and the Academic Board. The Head of Undergraduate Programmes and Head of the Graduate School are responsible for addressing any areas for action, reporting to the Director of Programmes. Programmes are subject to continuous monitoring of standards, a summary of which is considered by the Education and Quality Committee and the Academic Board. We have an annual appraisal process in place for full-time staff during which training and support needs are identified.
Consistently poor responses in the National Student Survey (NSS) and their impact on student recruitment.	We carefully analyse the results of the NSS every year. An action plan is implemented based on the outcome of the NSS – this being complemented by other surveys to address areas of potential weakness. The NSS outcomes are considered by the Academic Board and Board of Governors. Our NSS scores are near or above benchmark in the key question categories.
Failure to recruit academic staff of sufficient quality, impacting on student recruitment.	We offer a market supplement to attract staff of a suitable calibre where required. Our world-standing reputation draws high quality staff as evidenced by the teaching and professional profiles of our staff. The 2023 RNCM Staff Engagement Survey showed a very high level of staff engagement compared to other providers in the sector.
Key staff unavailable leading to knowledge and skills gaps.	As a single subject specialist institution, we can draw on a wide pool of highly qualified and experienced practitioners to provide interim

	cover. Your satisfaction with your teaching and academic support remains high in the NSS. Our world-leading reputation draws high quality staff as evidenced by the teaching and professional profiles of our staff.
Inability to deliver teaching / undertake assessment face-to-face as a result of <i>force majeure</i>	We will move as much of your teaching online as possible, including your Principal Study. Where you do not have access to your required instrument we will seek to make alternative arrangements wherever possible including instrument loan, accessing your instrument through one of our partner organisations or enabling you to have additional lessons when the building is operational again.
STUDENT RECRUITMENT	
Applications to our programmes far exceed the number of available places and this is not anticipated to drop significantly in the foreseeable future due to our world-renowned reputation and the quality and breadth of our provision. If we are no longer able to deliver your programme of study (undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes in music) or there is failure to recruit students in sufficient numbers to maintain the viability of a programme, we will ensure that you can complete your programme at the College, or in extreme circumstances be offered an alternative programme of study at other UK institutions / Conservatoire UK (CUK) institutions (see protocols below), or through the our extensive network of European partners.	
Risk	Mitigation and evidence of effectiveness
Loss of UKVI sponsor licence, impacting on international student recruitment.	We have Highly Trusted Sponsor Status with UKVI. Internal and UKVI audit regularly monitors compliance with UKVI requirements. The robustness of our procedures have been confirmed by our internal auditors.
Failure to recruit students of sufficient quality, or in sufficient numbers.	We set clear admissions targets on an annual basis through the Student Recruitment Committee. The Executive Committee reviews progress towards achieving admission's targets monthly. There is continuous monitoring of recruitment progress and targets by Heads of School on a weekly basis. Student recruitment is considered by the Academic Board, Executive Committee and the Board of Governors. We would adjust our overall student ecology and invest more in bursaries and scholarships if EU and International student number targets are not achieved. We consistently meet our overall student number targets.
Implication of Brexit for the recruitment of EU students and failure to meet International student number targets	
Poor progression into employment/further study.	We analyse and review results from the Graduate Outcomes Survey and Longitudinal Educational Outcomes survey at a strategic level through the Executive Committee, Academic Board and Board of Governors. Outcomes of the Graduate Outcomes Survey show that proportion of our students in graduate level employment or further study is consistently high.
ESTATES and SERIOUS DISRUPTION	
In the unlikely event that the College as a whole is unable to operate, full emergency and serious incident plans will be put into action through our Disaster Recovery Plan. Reciprocal arrangements may be drawn upon with other institutions / CUK for some aspects, such as instruments and teaching space unless these too are unable to operate. In this case the College will move, as far as it is possible, to online learning and support. A formal Business Continuity Plan is in place with regular testing and review.	
Protocols for intra-conservatoire communication and cooperation through Conservatoires UK (CUK)	

In the event of a crisis, the CUK member(s) affected will lead on managing the crisis, on media relations and communications in liaison with other CUK members for advice and assistance. Each CUK member will appoint a named first point of contact and a list of those contacts will be circulated to all CUK members with this document. In the event of a crisis, this intra-conservatoire group will be chaired by the conservatoire affected, or if more than one conservatoire is affected, by a chair appointed from within their number. The purpose of the group will be consultative and to facilitate intra-conservatoire coordination and mutual assistance if the crisis permits, particularly where specialist expertise is required in relation to, for example, specialist staff or facilities such as concert hall, recording studio, sprung dance floors rehearsal suites, etc.

2. The measures that you have put in place to mitigate those risks that you consider to be reasonably likely to crystallise

No significant changes to the level of tuition fee income *per capita* and direct government funding are anticipated in the immediate future. However, there remains some uncertainty over the number of students who will enrol/return for the 2024/25 academic year. The College's current risk assessment in this particular regard is 'medium' to reflect a higher level of uncertainty in the short-term over tuition fee income. If the risk of a *per capita* reduction in student tuition fees were to crystallise in a way which reduced the College's income to a level where its programmes of study in their present form ceased to be viable, creating a situation where continuation of study for its current students was under threat, we would anticipate that transitional funding be put in place to allow existing students to be 'taught out'. Whilst such an event would clearly present us with some challenges, the risk to existing students being unable to complete their course of study would be 'low'.

3. Information about the policy you have in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to your students and to provide compensation where necessary in the event that you are no longer able to preserve continuation of study

Discounting institutional closure, we cannot identify any circumstances that would threaten the continuity of your programme of study in the foreseeable future. Should face-to-face teaching not be possible, we will move to online teaching and student support, with all core components of the curriculum being delivered through this means. Being a single subject provider, if our core programmes become no longer viable, then we would close. The risk of this is extremely low (the circumstances in which such an event might occur have been described in section 2 above). If the College became financially unsustainable, the risk of which is also extremely low as detailed in section 1 above, this would manifest itself over several years allowing us to plan any programme closure and as such, preserve continuation of your programme of study and make any necessary teach-out arrangements for you. Should we find ourselves in the position of needing to pay compensation to any student who could not successfully complete their programme, the numbers of whom would be small, we would do so by drawing on our reserves.

We have in place business interruption and increased cost of working insurance to ensure the continuity of its functions, including the delivery of a students' programme, should our estate be disrupted or damaged.

Our Tuition Fee Refund Policy provides details of refunds for students who withdraw from their programme of study or take leave of absence.

4. Information about how you will communicate with students about your student protection plan

We will publicise our Student Protection Plan in a user-friendly format for current and future students through our website for prospective students and via the VLE (Moodle) for our current students, making reference to it in the Student Information Handbook and on student noticeboards. Students will be made aware of the Plan during induction.

We will ensure that staff are aware of the Student Protection Plan and its implications through internal communications and that they are aware of the implications of the Plan when they propose programme changes by incorporating a statement in our regulations for the approval of programmes of study and into the Academic Quality Handbook which details the processes involved in making changes to a programme.

The Student Protection Plan will be reviewed on a three-year cycle by the Executive Committee with input from the Students' Union and student representatives, at which time the risk level of the areas identified above will be formally reviewed. As part of the review, you will be directly involved through student representation on the key committees at which the plan will be considered.

We will inform you if there are to be material changes to your programme by email and seek your agreement. Such changes are made in the preceding year to the year in which the change would be implemented and as such, you would have a minimum of six months' notice.

Should the Plan need to be implemented we will organise a meeting to discuss this directly with you and provide a permanent notice by email. This will be followed by a series of open meetings with you and our senior staff. In addition, in certain circumstances we may elect to provide individual support to students, as appropriate. We would plan at least two years in advance should the risk of College closure be unavoidable.

In extreme situations, Business Continuity Plans would be brought into action and we may implement arrangements to ensure that you have access to independent advice if required. You would have the right to complain about the manner in which the Plan was being implemented through our formal Student Complaints Policy. If required, we will inform the Office for Students.