

DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT

2023-24



SUMMARY

In May 2019, the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) published a [Statement of Intent](#) which instructed that institutions awarding degrees should publish a degree outcomes statement analysing their institutional degree classification profile and articulating the results of an internal institutional review.

The statement should demonstrate how institutions meet the expectations of the Quality Code for Higher Education that relate to protecting the value of qualifications and the Office for Students' ongoing conditions of registration on academic standards.

The College's degree outcomes statement focusses on final classifications for graduates on the College's undergraduate programme, the four-year Bachelor of Music Honours degree. This statement for 2023-24 reviews our progress returning to pre-pandemic levels of firsts and 2:1 undergraduate degrees, in line with [UUK's statement of July 2022](#).

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Director of Programmes
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RCM Degree Classification Profile

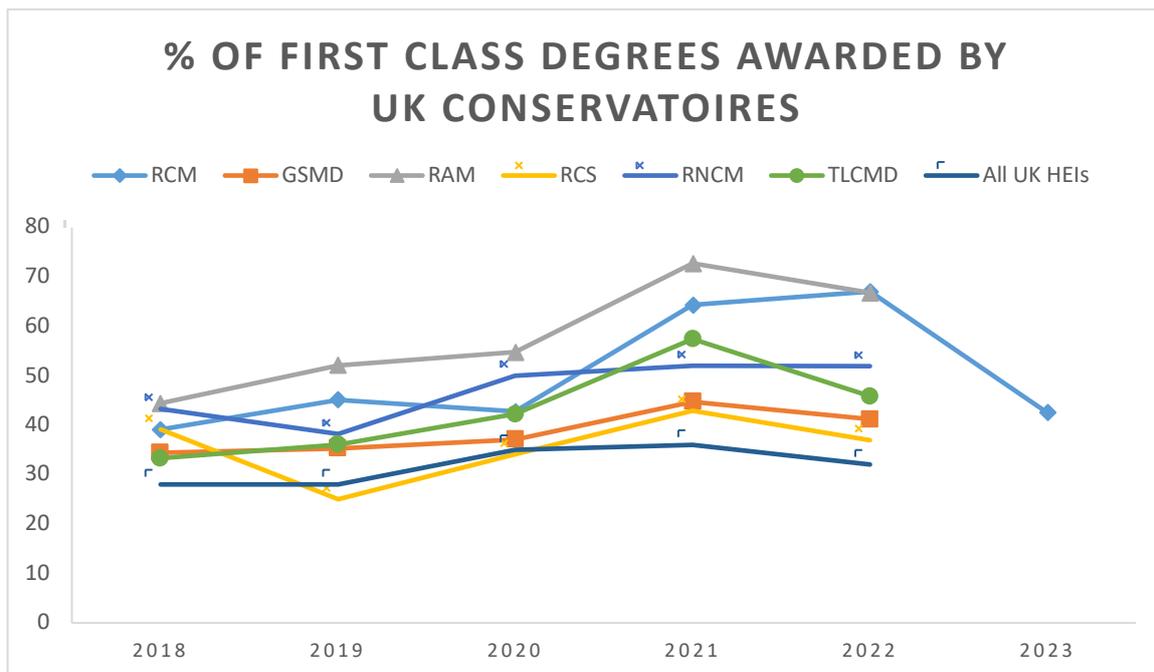
The College undertakes an annual analysis of degree outcomes. This includes comparison with the UK higher education sector as a whole and other small and specialist performing arts institutions in the UK. We also undertake analysis of the correlation between student demographics and outcomes as part of our Access and Participation Plan monitoring. To date we have not identified any awarding gap related to students from under-represented groups.

The table below summarises the most recent five years of BMus degree outcomes:

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
I	39.1%	45.1%	42.7%	64.3%	66.3%	42.5%
II:1	45.7%	39.6%	46.7%	28.6%	25.7%	38.7%
Combined upper-classification degrees	84.8%	84.6%	87.4%	92.9%	92.0%	81.2%
II:2	15.2%	14.3%	12.6%	7.1%	6.9%	16.0%
III	-	-	-	-	-	2.8%
Unclassified	-	1.1%	-	-	1.0%	-
Fail	-	-	-	-	-	-

Historically a high proportion of students graduate from the RCM with either a first-class or upper second-class honours degree. As a highly selective institution that attracts some of the finest young musicians internationally, it is unsurprising that a high proportion of RCM students achieve excellent or very good degree outcomes. Furthermore, the intensive teaching environment and support from outstanding resources and teachers enable our students to achieve their full potential as musicians.

As an illustration of this conservatoire-specific context, the table below shows the proportion of first-class degrees awarded by UK conservatoires in comparison to the rest of the UK HE sector:



To note that HESA classification data on external institutions for 2022-23 is not yet available.

There are two clear trends: of UK conservatoires awarding significantly more first-class awards than the general HE sector, even pre-pandemic, and the proportion of first-class awards increasing significantly for all conservatoires during the pandemic, as shown in the curve above. The RCM is therefore typical of the conservatoire sector in its pattern of awarding.

Explanation of changes

The College experienced a significant increase in the proportion of first-class degree awards in the 2020-21 cohort, from 48.9% to 69.2%. This coincided with the introduction of a No Detriment policy during the pandemic. Developed in consultation with the Students' Union and our external examiners, and approved by the Senate Executive Committee, this policy set out guiding principles to ensure that no student experienced adverse outcomes due to Covid. Exam penalties were not applied, borderline marks (e.g., 59 or 69) were rounded up, and the Undergraduate Board of Examiners had the discretion to disregard low grades if they were deemed to be unrepresentative of the overall student profile. In practice, the review of the consistency of principal study grades across three UG years, and the discounting of lower grades (up to 40 credits at UG level) was applied consistently and in full consultation with the Board of Examiners and our external examiners.

We are confident that the College's approach to recognising student achievement during the pandemic was fair and proportionate. In a practice-led performing arts context we believe these measures were required to ensure that no student was disadvantaged by extreme disruption to conservatoire learning and teaching. We recognise that all borderline students benefitted from the policy and consequently there was a higher proportion of first-class awards than we would have seen in a typical pre-pandemic year.

The No Detriment policy was revised for 2021-22 to remove the practice of disregarding grades that were unrepresentative of a students' overall profile, as this was no longer deemed necessary following the return to a broadly normal year of study.

However, the graduates of 2021-2022 had experienced significant disruption during their BMus 2 (2019-20) year, which led to significant elements of that year being graded on a pass/fail (unclassified) basis. As a result, students' classifications could only be calculated using the direct entry Year 3 and 4 calculation. This worked to all students' benefit as the calculation was based on the best 180 credits at L6 or above and the best 240 credits at L5 or above, out of a total of 300 classified credits i.e., the calculation recognised a smaller proportion of the students' best results.

As expected, during 2022-2023 the proportion of first-class awards returned to pre-pandemic levels as normal procedures for the classification of degrees resumed. However, the BMus Board of Examiners, Senate, and Council will continue to monitor the College's degree classification profile closely to ensure our awarding pattern remains stable.

Assessment and Marking Practices

The College applies rigorous processes to ensure that its qualifications are aligned with national expectations and sector reference points. The BMus programme is reviewed in full every five years, at which point there is detailed cross-referencing with the most up-to-date QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Music (currently the 2019 edition) and feedback from our external examiners. As a practice-based institution with a professionally focussed curriculum we also ensure that the programme aims, learning outcomes and assessment design are closely aligned with industry expectations.

The principles for assessment standards and marking are articulated in the College's 'Assessment Handbook' which is updated annually. This Handbook complements the BMus Programme Regulations, detailing the College's expectations for conducting assessments, threshold standards, grading, moderation, and high-quality feedback. The College provides annual training for members of recital panels and a programme of staff development and mentoring to support academic teaching staff, including Graduate Teaching Assistants, to develop consistent and high-quality approaches to assessment.

All year 3 and 4 recital examinations include an external specialist on the panel. The BMus programme also has two experienced programme external examiners who complete detailed annual reports on the College's assessment processes and standards. Feedback from external examiners informs the annual monitoring report and enhancement action plan.

Academic Governance

Responsibility for quality assurance procedures, including maintaining the standards of the College's taught provision, lies with **Senate**. Senate is responsible for the approval of revisions to the quality assurance procedures, initial programme approval and the subsequent review timetable, approval of reports from initial programme approval and review events, approval of annual programme monitoring reports, and approval of external examiner appointments.

The College's **Senate Executive Committee**, chaired by the Director, has responsibility for the approval of operational procedures and policy relating to student assessment, for instance the composition of practical assessment panels and procedures for panels. Senate Executive also approves minor and major modifications to programme content and of changes to regulations and is supported by two forums: a Student Curriculum Forum (chaired by the SU President) and the Programmes Forum.

The **Undergraduate Board of Examiners**, chaired by the Director of Programmes, approves assessment decisions and the award of qualifications. It also makes recommendations to Senate Executive and the Programmes Forum on revisions to regulations and assessment procedures.

RCM Council has overall responsibility for quality assurance. Council protects and promotes the collective student interest and the importance of a high-quality student experience, promotes excellence in learning, teaching and research, monitors institutional and governing body performance, receives copies of reports of initial programme approval and review events, and expects Senate to inform Council of quality and standards issues.

Further information on RCM Academic Governance and Quality Assurance and Enhancement Processes can be found in the RCM's [Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook](#).

Approach to Degree Classifications

The College uses a profiling approach to calculating degree classifications, rather than numerical mark averages. This means that the final degree classification is based on the classification profile i.e. the volume of credits achieved at classification levels of I, II:1, II:2 etc. rather than a numerical average. As such, marks of 61 and 69, or 71 and 90, will have the same impact on the degree classification result. A summary of the procedure is provided in the table below:

STEP 1 Profile of best 180 credits at Level 6 or higher	STEP 2 Profile of best 340 credits at Level 5 or higher	Overall classification
At least 90 Class 1; None lower than Class 2:I	At least 170 Class 1; None lower than Class 2:I	Class 1
Criteria above almost met but deficient by 20 credits		Normally Class 1
Criteria above missed by deficit of more than 20 credits		Normally Class 2:I
At least 90 Class 2:I; None lower than Class 2:II	At least 170 Class 2:I; None lower than Class 2:II	Class 2:I
Criteria above almost met but deficient by 20 credits		Normally Class 2:I
Criteria above missed by deficit of more than 20 credits		Normally Class 2:II
At least 90 Class 2:II;	At least 170 Class 2:II;	Class 2:II
Criteria above almost met but deficient by 20 credits		Normally Class 2:II
Criteria above missed by deficit of more than 20 credits		Normally Class 3
All 180 at Class 3	All 340 at Class 3	Class 3
Criteria above missed		Fail

This approach is designed to recognise all-round achievement, so a student who is awarded a first-class degree will need to demonstrate a consistent set of results in the first-class category, with few or no results lower than the 2:1 category. We believe this is important for encouraging RCM students to become all-round excellent musicians rather than musicians who excel in only select areas.

We recognise that the profiling approach means some students may be held back in their classification by a handful of poor results earlier in their degree. To mitigate this, the Board of Examiners has the discretion to apply up to 20 credits deficit at either step (as above). This has been helpful for some students who have achieved outstanding results across BMus 3 and 4 modules, but experienced a slower start in certain curriculum areas earlier in the degree.

In addition to the published information in the BMus Handbook, each year the Head of Undergraduate Programmes delivers a dedicated talk on the classification approach to BMus 4 students. This is followed by individual tutorials where students can ask questions about their individual academic profile and trajectory.

As a degree specialising in musical performance or composition, it is expected that achievement in the major, 'principal study' area will particularly influence the degree result. However, all BMus students have the flexibility to opt for higher or lower credit weighting in their principal study to shape the degree to their strengths and career aspirations. In practice this means that BMus students can opt for 60, 70, or 80 credits of principal study in the third and fourth years of the degree.

The College's approach to classifying undergraduate degrees is reviewed every five years as part of the BMus programme's periodic review.

Teaching Practices and Learning Resources

Detailed information on the College's approach to Learning, Teaching and Assessment can be found in the [Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2019-2014](#). This sets out and explains the five pillars of learning and teaching at the College: artistry, professionalism, community, innovation, and expertise.

The College's learning environment is practice-led and professionally informed. The curriculum centres on students' development as a performer or composer through specialist one-to-one teaching. This is complemented by a range of core contextual modules in areas including aural, history, musicianship, health and wellbeing, music education, and professional skills. Later in the degree, students may choose options (elective) modules to complement their strengths and career aspirations. Around the formal curriculum, students participate in a wide range of internal and external performance opportunities to experience professional practices. Learning and assessment activities make full use of the outstanding resources on offer at the College, including practice rooms, multiple performance venues, recording studios, a public Museum, Library, and specialist instruments.

In recent years the College has diversified its approach to assessment to ensure that assessment design is more inclusive, offering students more flexible ways to demonstrate their achievement of learning outcomes. There is a robust system of 'Learning Agreements' in place to support students with disabilities. Through this process, the College implements reasonable adjustments to assessments where appropriate.

The College has a very high proportion of international students, many for whom English is an additional language. We provide a range of high-quality English Language classes and tutorial support to ensure international students are fully supported with their assessments.

Good Practice and Teaching and Learning Enhancement Activity

As outlined above, we are confident that our processes for maintaining standards and institutional oversight of these standards are robust. Examples of good practice include:

- Training and peer support for teaching staff who are new to marking processes;
- Close academic and pastoral monitoring of all students, particularly students from under-represented groups, who may be provided with bespoke support packages;
- Support and mentoring for staff to work towards Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy;
- A non-credited induction module in Study Skills for all BMus 1 students that introduces key skills in preparation for HE assessments.
- Clear student-facing guidance on the responsible use of AI in assessment. This is continually updated to reflect new developments and connects with the College's Academic Misconduct Procedure.

Future Actions

- The College is committed to annual review of its degree outcomes in consultation with students and external stakeholders, including external examiners and Conservatoire UK sector peers. Progress will be reported to Senate and Council through annual updates on degree outcomes.
- The College recently refreshed its Strategic Plan and strengthened its focus on staff development for all involved in learning, teaching, and assessment, especially for faculty professors. Work is underway to design and deliver more robust induction, monitoring, and support processes for teaching staff.
- The College will continue to monitor degree outcomes for students from under-represented groups in accordance with our Access and Participation commitment with the Office for Students.
- We continue to be concerned about reduced access to school music and instrumental lessons for young people in the UK. The College is committed to raising awareness and tackling barriers to music-making. We actively

encourage our students and staff to advocate for the importance of musical opportunities for young people and wider society.