

Conservatoires UK

Strategic Plan 2015-2018

Welcome

At Conservatoires UK we are an influential voice speaking to government, policy makers and opinion formers, nationally and globally. Our membership comprises eleven conservatoires from across the UK providing specialist professional education in the performing arts.

Our role is threefold: to develop best practice for training and education, to promote the sector's excellence, and to negotiate with government and policy makers.

Conservatoires UK

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Specialist professional education for dance, drama and music

For over a century Britain's conservatoires have established a model of education which is world renowned for giving talented, ambitious young actors, musicians and dancers and arts practitioners the training, freedom and encouragement to fulfil their creative and professional aspirations in successful careers. Unlike any other HE provider, the conservatoire methodology is a distinctive blend of intensive one-to-one tuition, practice-based studio training, ensemble work and reflective education, which is provided all the way through from early years to postgraduate and professional level. And it's delivered to world-leading standards. The strength of our conservatoires is seen in the continual 'supply' of talented new actors, musicians and dancers equipped to make a substantial contribution to the lifeblood of culture in the UK and become leading professionals in the global arts industry.

Today's contemporary conservatoire is a multidimensional institution preparing self-starting performing artists to work across any medium, platform or context. The contemporary conservatoire inculcates technical excellence, individuality, creativity, and originality, and prepares future performers for careers across a wide range of genres, styles and platforms.

Globally, UK conservatoires are seen as beacons of artistic and educational excellence, leading the way in nurturing artists to discover their individual creativity. In short, we're a big part of the story of the UK's prominence as a cultural world leader. At Conservatoires UK, we act as a coherent voice for the conservatoire sector of music, dance and drama. More generally, we advocate for the many benefits the sector engenders in society and the creative and cultural economies, and for creating the right environment for all conservatoires to adapt to new challenges – and to flourish.

The exceptional nature of conservatoire education

Creativity lies at the heart of the conservatoire experience in the UK. Performance – in all its innovative manifestations – is studied rigorously alongside vocational skills in the context of a broad cultural experience. This is designed to enable artists to develop a distinctive profile that will give them a competitive edge in the fast-evolving creative industries. All conservatoires share a number of distinctive characteristics:

- Our unique blend of teaching, mentoring and coaching has been remarkably effective in bringing out the artist's individual voice and producing world-leading performing artists. The immersive experience of studying daily within communities of musicians, dancers and actors who share the same talents, ambitions, work ethic and interests is unique to the sector.
- Early experience of the conservatoire way, including 'junior departments', extends access to children and develops innate artistry from school age and before.
- The outstanding diversity and breadth of experiences that are provided for conservatoire students and the wider community demonstrates how conservatoires are in tune with the needs of fast-changing creative industries and economies.

Exceptional graduate employment rates

The high international standing of UK conservatoires rests on their ability to equip students with the necessary skills to mould and curate their own careers, leading to outstanding employment trajectories. Across all the conservatoires, the high graduate employability rates are significantly higher than HESA benchmarks. The 96% average for conservatoires places this sector in the top ranks of HE institutions, with four of our institutions being among the top ten universities for relevant graduate employment in the UK. This builds on undergraduate retention rates of close to 100%.

An outstanding return on investment through providing an environment where innovation can thrive

The UK's conservatoires offer remarkable value for money in developing future talent for the performing arts industry: this was the conclusion of a 2012 report, undertaken by the London School of Economics (LSE)¹. Our alumni and teachers perform across the country with ticket sales of over £60 million in London's West End alone, as well as generating revenue in other sectors of the UK music industry with an overall added value of £2.5 billion across the sector. The report makes the case that in just three of the London conservatoires £12.6 million of annual central government investment yields £800 million in direct and indirect benefits to the UK economy per year. Other research estimates that the Royal Northern College of Music as an integral part of Manchester's 'knowledge corridor' makes a significant annual contribution to its regional economy of £23.4 million, and contributes £34.6 million to the UK economy².

In comparison to similar institutions in the USA, the conservatoires' spending is highly efficient given our internationally respected standards and the exceptional success of graduates. In economic and value-for-money terms, we are remarkably effective in developing the future talent base in the performing arts. One of our key roles is influencing creative life and producing an environment where innovation can thrive. It's vital that we continue to build relationships and inform official and public opinion - and be the focus of a forward-looking and fast-moving sector.

¹ The Impact of Three London Conservatoires on the UK and London Economies: A project for the Royal Academy of Music, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Royal College of Music, with Universities UK, LSE London, July 2012

² Royal Northern College of Music Economic and Wider Impacts. New Economy (part of MGC), 2015

Promoting progression in the performing arts and exposing more people to conservatoire education

Conservatoires are outward-looking

Our members frequently partner with other providers in the formal and informal youth arts sector. As well as staging public performances, conferences, talks, workshops and other events, conservatoire staff and students play a significant part in the cultural life and arts education framework of their local and regional communities. Extensive programmes of courses, summer schools and other outreach opportunities enable a sharing of their unique resources with the community at large. In so doing, conservatoires deliver broader and complex benefits for education, culture and society.

Our Vision

Through the intensive experience of a specialist conservatoire education, we aim to develop the talents and potential of creative individuals to become leading professionals in their field.

Our Mission

We lead advocacy, drive innovation and project the UK's leading international position in conservatoire teaching, learning and research in the professional specialisms of dance, drama and music. Our members aim to nurture and develop rounded, versatile artists who are capable of becoming the cultural leaders of the future, sustaining the fertile performing arts ecology of the UK and its key role in the arts worldwide.

Aims and Objectives

Aim 1: Presenting the case

Objectives

1. Maintain effective relationships with government, councils, agencies and officials and key influencers to inform the debate on policy on matters of common interest for the sector.
2. Work with UK immigration agencies, the Migration Advisory Committee and other organisations on issues affecting conservatoire staff, students and graduates.
3. Continue to work with Universities UK to ensure that the concerns of conservatoires are fully understood by the HE sector as a whole.

Aim 2: Securing sustainability for the sector

Objectives

1. Work closely with funding councils and grant-making bodies to engender wider understanding of the importance of appropriate conservatoire funding to harness exceptional talent in the performing arts.
2. Develop bespoke public information, robust data and analysis to accurately depict the conservatoire student experience.
3. Position conservatoires for funding as world-class institutions within the same intensive specialist higher education brackets as other high cost subjects such as medicine.

Aim 3: Driving innovation, research and knowledge exchange in conservatoire learning and teaching

Objectives

1. Support and influence research to drive innovation in conservatoire learning, teaching and performance at all ages and stages.
2. Promote collaborative research among our members and their professional networks through the Conservatoires UK Research Forum.
3. Influence the development of new and innovative ways of delivering and extending conservatoire learning programmes and curricula, including cross-disciplinary work.
4. Bring the essential conservatoire ethos to the attention of opinion formers and the wider public through work of the Conservatoires UK Research Forum, such as the Healthy Conservatoire network and equality and diversity research.
5. Provide conferences, seminars and other ways to share policy developments and information and promote networking between members to share best practice.

Aim 4: Extending our reach through widening access

Objectives

1. Continue to work with UCAS to integrate and enhance the profile of the bespoke online admissions service, UCAS Conservatoires, supported by more sophisticated and contextualised admission data, and a strong web presence.
 2. Work with school, community and industry partners to extend the geographic and cultural reach of conservatoires and their junior departments, and so promote social inclusion and cohesion.
 3. Support and undertake research into equality and diversity in the performing arts, developing an evidence base to extend access and participation in the sector.
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4. Develop the Conservatoires UK website for the range of learning programmes, artistic genres, research, conferences, concerts, performances and key partnerships offered across all age ranges and an enhanced interface with UCAS Conservatoires.

Aim 5: Building support for conservatoire students

Objectives

1. Develop further co-operation and networking between our student associations and unions.
2. Assist students in developing their concept of a CUS - a Conservatoire Union of Students.
3. Support and develop the interface between the conservatoire and student voice through the co-promotion of conferences, seminars and events.
4. Marshal the student voice to increase public knowledge of the scope and reach of conservatoire activities.

Aim 6: Engaging with the arts and education sectors

Objectives

1. Develop, support and promote national and transnational engagement between CUK, educational and advisory bodies and creative and cultural industry partners.
2. Support and promote conservatoires' industry partnerships.
3. Support research streams to demonstrate the economic value and wider public benefit of the performing arts.
4. Support and sustain cultural leadership networks, succession planning, and professional development and leadership programmes for conservatoire staff, students and graduates.

Advocating for the UK Conservatoire sector

Conservatoire education is elite but not elitist; we inhabit an essential area where exceptional performance can become the norm. At Conservatoires UK we're ideally placed to ensure that this role is understood: we can speak as the unified voice for conservatoires in the UK. For example, we have campaigned on the rights of overseas artists to work in their area of specialism while studying, the definition and application of the 'exceptional talent and promise' criteria for the award of work visas, and other issues including post-study work opportunities for foreign nationals graduating from UK conservatoires.

Positioning the sector internationally

We take a leadership role in international, national and regional arts research and practice. Our international perspective is a vitally important context as we engage with, for example, AEC (European Association of Conservatoires), ELIA (European League of Institutes of the Arts), ISME (International Society for Music Education), NASM (US-based National Association of Schools of Music) and OISTAT (International Organisation of Scenographers, Theatre Architects and Technicians), reflecting the global partnerships and activities of individual members.

Applicants all over the world use our bespoke online admissions service UCAS Conservatoires.com to decide where to learn in the UK, and subsequently apply simultaneously to up to six conservatoires.

Over the long term, the closer synergies between Conservatoires UK and the forum of Universities UK will continue to position conservatoires within the mainstream of UK Higher Education. The UK has, arguably, one of the most flourishing artistic environments in the world. By collaborating with our many partners, we will ensure that the UK model of conservatoire education continues to lead the way both at home and internationally.

Measuring our performance

Conservatoires UK is well placed to develop enhanced mechanisms for evaluating and benchmarking the sector's performance. Over the course of fulfilling our objectives in the next three years we shall collect, analyse and present information and data in yet more sophisticated ways to give a more rounded picture of conservatoire education.

The nature of our work is not always measurable by conventional statistical methodologies. Consequently, a balance of quantitative and qualitative indicators is used to measure the efficiencies, effectiveness and impact of our activities, selecting the most appropriate indicators for each strategic objective.

All progress towards achieving our objectives will continue to be monitored and communicated in a number of ways, including:

- Regular updates to the Conservatoires UK Board
- Publication of updates on the Conservatoires UK website