At CUK we are an influential voice speaking to government, policy makers and opinion formers, nationally and globally. Currently, our membership comprises nine conservatoires, including all of the UK’s music conservatoires.

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.

“We’re influencing the development of the performing art forms and creating the artistic and cultural leaders of tomorrow.”

Colin Lawson Director, Royal College of Music
The Conservatoire Way
Specialist professional education for music, dance and drama

The UK's conservatoires play a unique and pivotal role in the higher education (HE) landscape as providers of specialist performing arts education. Unlike any other HE provider, our 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 into the body of working performance professionals. Together with the rest of the arts, they are the lifeblood of culture in the UK and leaders in the global arts industry.

Conservatoire education has a long history as part of the country's remarkable HE diversity. Today's contemporary conservatoire is a multi-dimensional institution preparing self-starting performing artists to work across any medium, platform or context. The contemporary conservatoire way inculcates technical excellence, individuality, creativity, and originality, and prepares future performers for careers across a wide range of genres and styles.

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 (CUK) 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. Over the coming years we intend to create the right environment for all conservatoires to adapt to new challenges – and to flourish – as we develop future generations of performing artists.

"CUK is brim-full of ideas to keep the UK as the world-leader in the creative and cultural industries. We’re busy working to influence public policy to ensure the UK retains its competitive edge."

John Wallace Principal, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

The exceptional nature of conservatoire education

The UK's cultural pre-eminence on the global stage is sustained by the exceptional quality of our country’s conservatoire education and training. The factors that help create this quality need to be maintained and developed:

- 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.
- Early experience of the conservatoire way, including ‘junior departments’, extends access to children and develops innate artistry from school age and before.
- An outstanding diversity and breadth of experiences are provided for conservatoire students and the wider community, demonstrating how conservatoires are in tune with the needs of fast-changing creative and cultural industries and economies.

Exceptional graduate employment rates

Across all the conservatoires, the high graduate employability rates are significantly higher than HESA benchmarks. The 95% average for conservatoires places our sector in the top ranks of HE institutions for relevant graduate employment in the UK. This follows on from undergraduate retention rates of close to 100%.

“The conservatoire difference is that students learn by working with tutors and mentors who are all highly skilled practitioners at the top of their professions. It’s a rigorous and intensive approach, with creativity at its heart.”

Anthony Bowne Principal, Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance
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). 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. Recent research makes the case that £12.6 million of annual central government investment in just three of the London conservatoires yields £800 million in direct and indirect benefits to the UK economy per year. In comparison to similar institutions in the USA, the conservatoires’ spending is remarkably low given our internationally respected standards and the exceptional success of graduates. In economic and value-for-money terms, we are highly 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.

Promoting progression in the performing arts and exposing more people to the Conservatoire Way

Conservatoires are outward-looking.

Our members frequently partner with other providers in the formal and informal youth arts. 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

To develop talented individuals to lead the global performing arts sector through the intensive experience of a specialist conservatoire education.

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. Through the conservatoire way our members aim to nurture and develop rounded, versatile artists who are capable of becoming the cultural leaders of the future, enabling the fertile performing arts ecology of the UK to flourish whilst sustaining and developing the country’s key role in the arts worldwide.

Almost 77,000 people of all ages attended community outreach and school age programmes at our conservatoires in 2011–12

“As pre-tertiary performing arts education comes under increasing pressure, conservatoires will play an ever more important role in providing access to high quality training and coherent progression routes for those who would otherwise be unable to benefit. While supporting the next generation of professional artists, this work will reach out to society, enriching lives and developing future audiences.”

Linda Merrick Principal, Royal Northern College of Music
Aims and Objectives

Aim 1: Presenting the case

Objectives
1. Continue to build 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. Continue to 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 and robust data to accurately depict the conservatoire student experience.
3. Undertake longitudinal conservatoire graduate destination research from 2013-18.
4. Position conservatoires for funding within the same intensive specialist higher education brackets as other high cost subjects such as medicine.

Aim 3: Driving innovation in conservatoire learning and teaching at all ages and stages

Objectives
1. Influence the development of new and innovative ways of delivering and extending conservatoire learning programmes and curricula, including cross-disciplinary work.
2. Support and influence research to drive innovation in conservatoire learning, teaching and performance.

Aim 4: Extending our reach through widening access

Objectives
1. Work with CUKAS to develop more sophisticated contextualised admission data to track students from first contact to graduation and into employment.
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. Continue to develop the CUK website including databases for the range of learning programmes, artistic genres, research, conferences, concerts, performances and key partnerships offered across all age ranges.

“Collaboration at all levels – both educational and within the music industry – is what makes the UK conservatoire scene so exciting, varied and inter-connected. It also sets students up for the kind of networking which fuels creativity and forges diverse careers.”

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood Principal, Royal Academy of Music
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 support a growth in the public knowledge of the scope and reach of conservatoire activities.

Aim 6: Driving research and knowledge exchange in the performing arts

Objectives
1. To promote collaborative research among our members and their professional networks through the CUK Research Forum.
2. To research the student experience of learning and teaching within the conservatoire context, focused upon linking theory and practice within a supportive and empowering environment.
3. Through the Research Forum’s work, to bring the essential conservatoire ethos to the attention of the wider public.

“Aim 7: Engagement

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 programmes for conservatoire staff, students and graduates.

Supporting the network
Because we unite the UK’s music, drama and dance schools and other specialist arts training institutions, which all share the same characteristics, we can be a forum for sharing ideas and information.

Aim 8: Providing high quality service to members

Objectives
1. Provide conferences, seminars and other ways to share policy developments and information and to promote networking between members.
2. Support the work of CUK’s Research and HR Forums in professional and leadership development for staff and students.
3. Promote, support and work with CUKAS to improve its service, so that it becomes the primary route for most applicants to apply for performing arts programmes.
4. Support the use and development of digital technologies to enhance member services.

Philip Meaden  Principal, Leeds College of Music

“In addition to their national and international significance, Conservatoires are catalysts for high quality cultural and educational opportunities in their regions. Through our students and staff, and in partnership with other local arts organisations, we greatly enrich the lives of our communities.”
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 CUK 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 recently led successful campaigns on key issues including the rights of overseas artists to work in their area of specialism while studying, and the definition and application of the ‘exceptional talent’ criteria for the award of work visas for foreign nationals graduating from conservatoire higher education.

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) and NASM (US-based National Association of Schools of Music), reflecting the global partnerships and activities of individual members. CUKAS is our bespoke online admissions service; applicants all over the world use the website to decide where to learn in the UK, and subsequently apply simultaneously to up to six conservatoires.

Positioning the sector internationally

CUK 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.

Commissioned research on career destinations will enable us to track the career patterns and lives of music, dance and drama graduates. This information on employment paths, added to our existing data sets, will create a more complete picture of the economic impact of conservatoire education beyond high profile success stories, and support our advocacy and policy work. Combined with objectives to develop more contextualised admission data, we envisage the development of systems that can eventually track students from first entry to a conservatoire to graduation and beyond through the course of their careers. Being more informed about the past will enable us to be more effective in catering for future trends in graduate employment.

Over the long term, the closer synergies between CUK and the forum of Universities UK will help position conservatoires within the mainstream of UK Higher Education. The UK has, arguably, one of the most flourishing artistic environments in the world, as evidenced by the cultural programme of the London Olympics. 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

The nature of our work is not always measurable by conventional statistical methodologies. Consequently, a balance of quantitative and qualitative indicators is being developed, including:

- **Inputs** measures of cost and efficiency
- **Outputs** measures of activity
- **Outcomes** measures of effectiveness
- **Impact** the high-level influence of CUK’s work collectively

The most appropriate indicators will be selected 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 CUK Board
- Publication of updates on the CUK website

“The great cities of the UK have an astounding cultural diversity and a thriving creativity which makes them a magnet for students. Birmingham is well known for its wonderful orchestra and great musical traditions – add to that theatre and ballet and Conservatoires like ours give the UK an unrivalled choice within a network of world-class provision.”

David Saint  Birmingham Conservatoire
Where we are

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