# Royal Academy of Music TEF Submission, January 2018

## 1. Introduction

1.1 The Royal Academy of Music is a specialist institution based in central London. Founded in 1822, it is a constituent college of the University of London and Britain's oldest conservatoire. It currently has some 800 students on full-time programmes of study: 45% of them taking undergraduate BMus programmes and 55% on taught postgraduate and research programmes. Demand for student places is very high, and the Academy's admissions policy is selective, based on musical achievement and potential regardless of the background of the applicant. The Academy's student body is cosmopolitan, with c. 50% of students coming from the UK and c. 50% from more than 50 other countries worldwide. The Academy currently awards BMus degrees of the University of London. In 2012 the Academy was granted Taught Degree Awarding Powers by the Privy Council. It has used those powers in the development of its taught postgraduate offerings, but has not yet used them in relation to its undergraduate programmes.

1.2 In accordance with its Charter of 1830 the Objects of the Academy are 'to promote the cultivation of the Science of Music and to afford facilities for attaining perfection in it by assisting with general instruction all persons desirous of acquiring a knowledge thereof'.

1.3 The modern statement of our Mission builds on these Objects:

The Academy's vision is that it should be the conservatoire of choice for top global talent aspiring to a successful and creative professional career. It will remain a distinctive provider of musical training at the highest international professional standards. To accomplish this:

- It will admit students of the highest quality and engage and retain staff of the highest calibre.
- It will maintain and enhance programmes of study with a broad and diverse range of principal-study disciplines, reconciling traditional art forms with the evolving contemporary music industry.
- It will maintain and develop its programme of artistic events, as a means of preserving and enriching musical culture and enhancing the experience of its students.
- It will encourage musical research through practice, scholarship and the creation of new music. It will develop its collaborative links with the music profession and industries and with other higher education institutions nationally and internationally.
- It will aim to maximise its public benefit by recruiting talented, ambitious students and by producing graduates who are able to contribute fully to society in the UK and internationally, by delivering a programme of high-quality public events, and by enriching Britain's musical culture.
- It will aim to widen access to higher education by enhancing its outreach activities, by developing its lifelong learning provision, by developing the work of the Junior Academy, and by broadening recruitment to its programmes of study.

To achieve these aims, the Academy will conserve and enhance its financial, physical and human resources. It will operate effective support and administrative

systems. It will develop its patronage network and private funding base to ensure that its operations are adequately resourced and its endowment is increased.

1.4 To this end, our current key strategic aims are:

1.4.1 To recruit and retain the best student and staff talent from around the world.

1.4.2 To deliver an exceptional educational experience underpinned by ambitious artistic projects.

1.4.3 To demonstrate outstanding engagement with the wider community.

1.5 High-level professional training for musicians incurs significant extra costs because of the necessity for specialist facilities across many disciplines and the preponderance of one-to-one and small group teaching delivered by expert staff with a high profile in the music profession. The Academy has successfully participated in the recent reiterations of HEFCE's Review of Institution-Specific Targeted Allocation [RISTA]. In the 2016 RISTA exercise eligible institutions had to demonstrate the 'world-class' qualities of their provision and make a case for the extraordinary costs of delivering their teaching programme. The specialist international panel commented on the Royal Academy of Music: 'This institution was seen to be setting global standards in conservatoire education. There was compelling evidence that hugely impressive major international artists were both engaging with and emerging from the institution. Collaborations with other leading institutions around the world were seen as indicative of the esteem in which the peer group holds the Royal Academy of Music.'

1.6 Our approach to teaching quality, our learning environment and student outcomes stems from three core values:

- The tailoring of each student's learning experience within the programme structure so that they can achieve their creative, artistic and professional ambitions.
- The ethos of professional protocols and standards within which our programmes are delivered, so that our students are well prepared to establish high-level careers after graduation.
- The encouragement of collaboration and reciprocity in all aspects of learning, musical creativity, and professional development.

1.7 In this submission we make the same case for excellence that we did in our submission to TEF Year 2 in 2017. In addition we reflect on institutional developments over the last year and how they impact our students' experience. In particular we comment on three enhancements: the completion of major new facilities (a theatre, recital hall, percussion studios, dedicated jazz studios and a complete overhaul of recording facilities: see section 3.3 below); a 100% increase in staff dedicated to the delivery of institution-wide professional development for students (see section 2.3 below); and further progress with the enhancement of feedback mechanisms and the effective use students make of feedback on their work throughout their programme (see section 2.2 below).

1.8 Our student body has been involved in the development of this submission in two ways: first, student representatives sit on all the committees that have discussed the relevant components of this text; second, the President of the Student Union, representing the entire student body, has been consulted during the drafting of this document.

## 2. Teaching Quality

2.1 In order to tailor our students' experience, the core components of the Academy's programmes of study are mostly taught one-to-one or in small groups. All students follow a core curriculum which has 15.5 contact hours per week in the first year of the BMus programme, reducing to 12 contact hours per week in the fourth (final) year of the programme. These contact hours include 1.5 hours per week of one-to-one tuition in the student's Principal Study discipline (for example, piano, voice, composition, and so on); a series of academic-studies classes designed to develop students' knowledge and critical skills (three hours of cohort-wide lectures and five hours of small-group tuition with a maximum of 12 students per class in Years 1 and 2, 4.5 hours of small-group seminars in Years 3 and 4); the remainder of the core contact hours are taken up by a series of professional development classes which focus on the development of skills which are specific to the students' discipline (for example, language classes for singers, music technology classes for composers, and so on).

In addition to the core components of the curriculum, a key aspect of the students' experience at the Academy is a busy schedule of artistic projects, working with coaches, conductors, composers and directors who are leading members of the music profession. Most of these projects lead to public performances, contributing to the Academy's annual programme of over 500 publicly-accessible events. The artistic projects are supplemented by a weekly timetable of faculty performance classes and masterclasses in which students learn with distinguished visiting teachers who have a high global profile in the music profession.

Depending on her/his Principal Study discipline and the stage in the programme of study, an Academy student could have contact hours ranging from 12 hours per week to c. 40 hours per week (if, for example, they were preparing a major role in an opera production alongside their core curriculum). The balance of contact hours with independent study time is regularly monitored by a team of Programme Tutors who work in one-to-one sessions with students to reflect on the balance of their programme-related activities in addition to providing pastoral support.

2.2 With a preponderance of one-to-one and small-group delivery, our programmes present ample weekly opportunities for each student to receive informal tailored feedback on their progress and performance. Formal summative feedback takes the form of written reports following the assessment of submitted written work and performance exams such as technical tests, recitals and productions of operas and musical-theatre pieces.

Because this summative feedback is provided in response to a 'snap-shot' of students' achievements rather than the steady drip of formative feedback which responds to and shapes developmental issues, its purpose is sometimes misconstrued by our students. For example, the dip in our student's approval rating of feedback and assessment in the first year of the sample (indicated with a blue flag in the metrics) was also picked up in more detail by the Academy's own student surveys that academic year. We consulted in detail with the student body and three related issues were identified:

- Student expectations of the timescale of returning written summative feedback after performance and practical assessments was not always being met.
- Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) were not consistently taken into consideration in assessment processes and feedback.

- The Academy needed to refine the way in which it teaches students to make more effective use of the different types of feedback they receive.

As a result, we immediately put measures in place to remedy that situation:

- New protocols were developed for the timely return of formal written feedback, and academic staff training events were dedicated to good practice in feedback report writing (particularly in relation to performance and other practical assessments).
- A new set of protocols (including timely deadlines) for the compilation and circulation of PLPs was established; relevant staff undertook training on effective follow-up mechanisms; students with PLPs were given extra on-going tutorial support to ensure that PLP-related measures were effective and relevant to the support of their studies.
- Students have been given clearer guidance on how to make the most of the large amount of informal face-to-face feedback they get in their weekly one-to-one and small-group contact time in addition to the formal written feedback they receive on summative assessed work. We have also developed guidance for students on making the most effective use of the many examples of peer-to-peer feedback that are facilitated and encouraged by ensemble project work and collaborative work in academic classes.

Following the implementation of these measures, the indicator returned to a 'no-flags' position in the following year of the cycle. Our aim, following the implementation of these enhancements, is to move to a 'green-flag' position in the metrics as soon as possible.

To help us accomplish this goal, we have in the last year introduced an electronic submission system for all written assessments within our taught programmes of study. This has enabled us to shorten the turn-around period for returning marked work to students, to encourage staff to give more detailed feedback, and to monitor the quality of their feedback. At the same time, we have continued to develop the way we educate our students on how to make the most of feedback on their work: new initiatives in the last year include dedicated sessions at the start of the academic year, and the piloting of some informal peer assessment schemes within modules. We also continue to highlight good practice in providing feedback on student work in our staff development programme. Early indications are that these initiatives are having a positive effect on our students' learning: there is clear evidence of improvements in the presentation of written work submitted for assessment, and there are informal indications of improved student satisfaction with feedback on their work. We will continue to monitor our progress carefully so that we do not lose momentum in a project that we envisage will stretch over three years at least.

2.3 Enhancements to learning and teaching are identified and implemented following feedback from students, either via our detailed institutional, programme, departmental and module feedback systems or in the case of the examples below, via processes such as Periodic Programme Review. The last BMus review in 2015 used student feedback collected through a variety of means over a period of time to form the basis of some critical changes to the programme in respect of the assessment framework, delivery of core modules and module content.

Key examples of student feedback having made a demonstrable impact on learning and teaching are:

- The strengthening and embedding of professional development provision in the syllabus through the implementation of a reflective portfolio which is built upon during all four years of the programme.
- The acquisition of significant additional high-quality practice facilities within easy reach of the Academy.
- The implementation of a conservatoire-specific timetabling and room booking system to enable students to make maximum use of the space available to them.

The impact of involving students in these processes can be measured externally through our consistently high and increasing progression and retention rates and increased overall NSS satisfaction rating.

For the last eight years the Academy has annually undertaken detailed institution-wide surveys which include questions designed to gain feedback on students' engagement with their studies as well as any impediments to this engagement. As a result of this feedback, we have acquired significant additional practice facilities within easy reach of our main building in central London and have introduced an on-line room booking facility; we have introduced an electronic submission system for all assessed written work; we have increased the number of dedicated staff in our recording department by over 400%, thoroughly overhauled our recording facilities (with five Academy venues now fully networked for recording), and introduced a new range of modules to develop our students' skills as recording artists; and we have increased the number of staff dedicated solely to the delivery of professional development to students by 100% in 2017.

2.4 The Academy employs five External Examiners on its BMus programmes. This high number enables us to have thorough, detailed scrutiny of the design and effectiveness of the programme and its assessment, substantial external feedback on the quality of programme delivery and the standards of our students' achievements, and a range of academic and professional expertise which is appropriate to the range of disciplines covered by the programmes (including composition and jazz as well as classical performance). We timetable External Examiner visits in such a way that they have the opportunity to meet groups of students to discuss informally the delivery of the programme and to get students' views on the Academy's assessment strategy and operations.

External Examiner reports are discussed by the relevant Examinations Board and by the relevant Programme Board. They form a key evidential component of the Annual Monitoring Process and Periodic Review of the BMus programmes. Recent examples of the impact of External Examiners' feedback includes revisions in 2015 to the musicology curriculum and its delivery in Year 1 of the programme to enhance the development of students' study skills and critical skills; revisions in 2015-16 to the framework of ensemble activity to encourage students to form stable duo partnerships at an earlier stage of the programme; and revisions in 2014 to the wording of assessment descriptors for final recitals to enhance the systematic progression in standards described by marking bandwidth descriptors.

The Academy employs a second layer of Specialist External Assessors [SEAs] who are independent members of performance assessment panels and experts in the particular discipline (piano, cello, and so on). They are required to report to the Chair of the Examinations Board on the conduct of assessments, the standards of student achievement, and any issues requiring enhancement. Since 2013 in response to SEA comments we have made several operational enhancements to Final Recitals,

including timetabling more time for assessment report writing, giving students clearer guidance about the provision of scores and programme notes, and clarifying the rules for applying penalties for over-running or under-running of recitals.

Whilst expensive, this two-layered externality provides an essential assurance of the quality and standards of our provision.

2.5 The Academy's ability to achieve positive outcomes for its students, as demonstrated for example by our metrics for 'highly skilled employment or further study', rests on the effectiveness with which our BMus curriculum blends a strong academic education with intensive high-level training for the realities of today's music profession. The programme has very strong links with the top of the music industry and is delivered by expert teachers with much experience of working at the highest levels of the profession. Students are supported by a strong tutorial system which ensures that they balance the academic and professional-training components of the programme with a clear view to their future employment in the music profession.

Despite the fact that the Academy was granted TDAP in 2012, our BMus degree is a University of London award. Therefore, it does not fall within the scope of the requirement (as set in the current TEF guidance, section 5.16–5.20) that we submit details of the classification of our awards in 2007, 2014 and 2017. Nevertheless, we monitor carefully trends in the classification of the undergraduate degrees we award. Each year the Examinations Board analyses classification data from the previous five years and External Examiners are asked to comment on the results of the current year in relation to the historical data. While we have seen a rise in the number of first-class awards made over the last ten years, we are confident that this does not represent grade inflation. We base our confidence on several factors:

- All written work contributing to a student's degree profile is either blind double marked or systematically moderated. All practical work (including the Final Recital – the heaviest component in a student's profile) is assessed by an expert panel including an independent Specialist External Assessor. This comprises a second layer of externality to complement the programme-wide role of the External Examiners.
- External Examiners and Specialist External Assessors are required to report formally on the comparability of standards between the Academy and other similar institutions, and to comment on the scaling of marks to performance standards. Over the last three years, External Examiners and Specialist External Assessors have consistently noted the maintenance of the demands of our undergraduate programmes, the standards of students' achievements, and the quality of assessment. Additionally, many members of academic staff at the Academy serve as External Examiners and specialist external assessors at a wide range of comparable institutions in the UK and bring that experience to bear on their role as assessors at the Academy.
- In the last two periodic reviews of our undergraduate programmes (the BMus in 2015 and the BMus [Jazz] in 2017) the review panels (with expert external input) have given detailed consideration to the fitness for purpose of the shape of the curriculum, the academic demands of the programme and the rigour of its assessment framework. Each of these reviews has assured us about the rigour of our programmes and the standards of our awards. Nevertheless, each of these reviews has resulted in the introduction of greater academic challenges within the respective programme, in particular to historical musicology and professional development strands.

- We have begun to analyse entrance standards, monitored through the marking of a thorough and rigorous audition and assessment process, and to track the attainment of students from audition through each stage of the programme under they receive their final award. Early indications are that while the most outstanding candidates at audition have historically been likely to gain a first-class degree, enhancements to our student support structure over the last ten years have increased the value-added to the next layer of applicants, enabling some of them to improve their attainment from upper-second to first level. At the same time, as competition for places on the programme has risen, so have the entrance standards of the weakest students in each cohort. This, in turn, has boosted the number of students who eventually receive an upper second.

In summary, we believe that the trend in the classification awards of our undergraduate degrees is best explained by the following factors:

- Competition for places is very high (in an international market) and growing; and because it has a world-wide reputation the programme tends to attract very talented, ambitious and highly motivated individuals.
- The four-year, intensive experience, consisting mostly of one-to-one and small-group tuition, coupled with regular exposure to the highest professional artistic levels through regular participation in projects with leading practitioners, enables our students to realise their potential.

We believe that our DLHE and LEO statistics are indicative of our students' high level of achievement at graduation and of their employability.

2.6 A key aspect of our teaching quality is the recruitment and retention of expert teachers with a strong track record of experience at working in the top levels of the music profession. Of our some 300 teaching staff, only a small number (around 30) are ‘conventional’ academics working in music as a scholarly discipline – though many of these, too, have parallel distinguished careers as performers or composers. Most of our teaching staff are distinguished professional musicians with strong teaching experience whose teaching at the Academy takes place within the context of their high-profile artistic careers in the profession. With this combination of academics and practitioners, the Academy can ensure that our students’ learning experience has an excellent blend of intellectual and practical training, with engagement in scholarly and research developments as well as the latest developments in professional practice to prepare them for a career in music.

With this preponderance of part-time teaching staff, the Academy addresses the pedagogical development of its teachers through a variety of routes: regular staff training events, departmental meetings, strategic training initiatives (for example, related to enhancements to feedback), and tailored CPD supported from a Staff Development Budget. For example, in the last three years three members of learning support staff have been supported through PhD studies.

Teaching observation plays an important role in the BMus programme. A rolling plan of observations, both by senior staff and peer-to-peer observation, feeds into teaching strategy and curriculum development. The impact of observation on working practice includes, for example, the sharing of teaching materials, improved assessment tasks, enhanced links between large cohort lectures and small group seminars, as well as various staffing changes. Teaching observation feeds into the annual appraisal scheme. Its effectiveness comes in part from the small size of the institution, where the observer is not an unknown one-off visitor, but also from the explicit link between observation and feedback within the programme.

The Academy rewards teaching excellence and pedagogical leadership through its progression and promotion schemes. A track record in teaching excellence, innovation or leadership may be rewarded with incremental pay increases through the annual round of staff appraisal and departmental planning. A significant track record in teaching excellence, innovation or leadership is one of the key criteria for promotion to Professor or Associate Professor. As of January 2018 there are currently 18 professors (including emeriti) who have been granted their title through promotion. Another index of effective staff development is that out of the current 22 heads of programme and heads of department, 13 were by internal promotion and nine were external appointments.

## 3. Learning Environment and Student Outcomes

3.1 The characteristic features of our learning environment are:

- The specialist facilities which enable students to engage fully with the professional ethos of the programme: these include practice rooms, rehearsal rooms, performance spaces (including a theatre, concert hall and several recital halls), a specialist library with particular strengths in performance materials, instrument collections (including a globally significant collection of fine stringed instruments on loan to students), a concerts department to plan and coordinate the full schedule of artistic projects and performances, a specialist recording team and studios, and specialist technology.
- The deep and all-pervasive level of employer engagement in the programmes of study.
- The complementarity between the core components of the programmes and student participation in artistic and professional development projects.

3.2 Because our learning environment and student outcomes are so closely intertwined, we address both fields in this section of our submission.

3.3 In our submission to TEF Year 2 in 2017, we outlined how c. 67% of our annual operating budget directly supports the delivery of our taught programmes. There is no significant variance this year. But it is significant that in January 2018 we have taken delivery of the most fundamental enhancement to our facilities in the last 20 years: a new theatre, a new recital hall, percussion studios, dedicated jazz studios, and a complete overhaul of our recording infrastructure. The new theatre and recital hall will enable our students to train in state-of-the-art facilities. They will therefore be better prepared than ever for the professional conditions in which they are likely to work following graduation. The new facilities also enable better access to the Academy's programme of events. The enhanced recording infrastructure, coupled with the introduction of an expanded range of teaching in this area, will enable more of our students to develop further the recording skills that are an essential requisite of a successful career as a musician in the twenty-first century.

3.4 It is difficult to describe the impact of employer engagement on our learning environment because it is all-pervasive in the design, delivery, assessment and enhancement of the programmes of study. The following examples are indicative of the reach of employer engagement in our learning environment:

- Consultation with stakeholders from the music profession and industry forms a key component of our programme accreditation and periodic review processes.
- In an average teaching week there are between 15 and 25 distinguished visiting artists working with Academy students in master classes, workshops, or

rehearsals. These visitors bring with them the 'realities' of today's music profession, its international standards and evolving protocols.

- Our annual programme of artistic projects enables students to work intensively (along professional patterns of rehearsal and performance) with leading conductors, composers and directors. For example, during the last three years orchestral projects have been conducted by the Music Director of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, the Music Director of English National Opera, the Chief Conductor of the Hallé Orchestra, the Chief Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Music Director of Bayreuth, Chief Conductor Emeritus of the Philharmonia Orchestra, and the Music Director of Glyndebourne Festival Opera among others. All these figures are significant employers working at the very top of the music profession.
- The Academy annually facilitates a large number of external collaborative projects for our students. These include side-by-side experiences with leading ensembles such as the London Sinfonietta and the BBC Symphony Orchestra; collaborations with other leading arts institutions such as the Juilliard School New York, RADA, Tokyo Geidai and the Glenn Gould School, University of Toronto; outreach and community engagement projects with over 50 schools through our Open Academy department; concert performances at festivals throughout the UK; and opportunities to broadcast on BBC Radio and on various TV stations throughout the world.
- Auditions for orchestral projects within the Academy are conducted by principal players from London's leading orchestras in conditions which mirror professional auditions for those ensembles.
- Students are given regular opportunities to perform to agents.
- Vocal Studies and Opera students are given the opportunity to audition for Salzburg, Glyndebourne, Garsington and other summer-season festival opera companies. Should they be successful, their programme assessments are arranged flexibly around their rehearsal commitments, thereby enabling them to undertake these valuable professional development opportunities.
- An institution-wide programme of professional development events is held annually, enabling students to network with influential members of the music profession and to learn from them. This has expended in 2017-18.
- Most teaching staff at the Academy are part-time, enabling them to pursue high-level performance careers simultaneously with their work at the Academy, and thereby allowing our students to benefit from the 'real-time' professional values their teachers bring to the programmes of study.
- Within the programmes of study the Academy has in the last five years introduced a four-year long 'Professional Portfolio' core module which encourages students to reflect holistically on their professional development activities and employer- engagement opportunities. Hand in hand with this development, we have rethought the ways in which professional development activities are coordinated across the Academy to enhance their effectiveness and their impact on students' learning experiences.
- Assessments include an external dimension from a music industry perspective in the form of Specialist External Assessors.
- In recognition of achievements of our alumni and their potential as role models for our current students, we have developed our Alumni Network to facilitate

contact between current students and successful, influential former students in the music profession.

3.5 It follows from 3.3 that our students are given every opportunity and encouragement on a daily basis to engage with the latest developments in the professional practices of music. One of the key purposes of the academic studies components of our programmes of study is to foster our students' intellectual and artistic independence. To that end, academic studies lecturers are expected and encouraged to blend their own research and scholarship into their teaching, as well as reflecting on broader developments in musical scholarship and research. Because of the very high standards in student performance, many academics incorporate into their research collaborative work with students. This in itself is a good training for students in preparation for further study as well as for the independent skills they will need for lasting, successful careers at the top of the music profession.

3.6 An index of the successful impact of employer engagement in our learning environment is the number of Academy students who have forged innovative careers in music immediately after graduation. In our RISTA submission of 2016 we gave many indicative examples of Academy alumni who have had a demonstrable impact on the fabric of the music profession over the last 20 years. In its response, quoted in paragraph 1.5 above, the expert review panel agreed with the Academy's self assessment of its success in this area.

3.7 The initiatives that we have taken to support our students' transition into and through higher education include the following:

- A thorough set of diagnostic tests at the admissions interview and audition, enabling us to establish tailored preparatory schemes (pre-matriculation) if needed. For example, we have a dedicated team of specialist English Language teachers to support international students into and through their programme of studies.
- We take immense care to match each student with their Principal-Study teacher to ensure that their specific educational and artistic needs will have the best possible 'fit'. This process can also extend to the loans of Academy instruments to students: for example, outstanding strings students might be loaned outstanding instruments such as a Stradivari violin for the duration of their studies.
- A team of Programme Tutors is responsible for coordinating the academic, pastoral and professional development well-being of each student. This is complemented by a mentoring scheme in which first-year students are paired with students from later stages of the programme at the start of the Academic year to help support a smooth start to their studentship.

3.8 The Academy enjoys a very high retention and progression rate across the full range of our programmes and we notice no obvious correlation between equality groups and performance and therefore there is little need to specifically target students that fall into these categories at present. Our successes in this area are primarily due to the nature of taught provision at the Academy where the high proportion of one-to-one teaching and system of rigorous tutorial support enables us to identify any attainment problems at an early stage. Although the number of students from different backgrounds such as BAME, disadvantaged backgrounds and those with disabilities as a proportion of our overall intake at the Academy is low in comparison to HE sector standards, we nonetheless ensure that these students are given every possible opportunity to attain as highly as their non-disabled or white counterparts.

There is no evidence that students with these backgrounds are underperforming in comparison with the rest of the cohort.

It is important to recognise that preparation for a music career and development of the skills required to undertake advanced musical training in a conservatoire setting begin at an early age. Additionally, there is currently limited (or, at best, highly variable) provision of music education in state schools. A particular challenge for the Academy is therefore increasing the participation in its own programmes by young people from under-represented groups where access to the appropriate music education from a early age is not normally available. To address this, our outreach work is therefore targeted primarily at raising awareness and aspiration more generally, rather than as a direct contributor to recruitment to the Academy in the short-term.

This long-term commitment to widening participation is detailed fully in the various iterations of our Access Agreement.