



<b>Institution: Royal Conservatoire of Scotland</b>
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<b>1. Context and mission</b>
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The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is a small specialist institution that has an impact and reputation which belies its size.

We are an independent teaching-intensive institution, and with around 1200 students, one of the twenty smallest Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK. We have, however, been judged to be in the top ten institutions globally in five of the first six years of the QS World Subject Rankings for the Performing Arts, an outcome based substantially (80%) on perceptions of research excellence; we are ranked third in the world at the time of writing.

Notwithstanding the QS Subject Ranking, ours is a research environment that has potential for further development. This submission is being finalised as we 'come of age', having begun our sustained strategic programme of research development twenty-one years ago in 1999, with a Strategic Research Development Grant (SRDG) from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). In our submission to REF2014, we spoke of a great leap forward for our research following RAE2008 and the core funding received, for the first time, following that exercise. In our particular context as a small specialist institution, the present submission evidences a further step-change in the vitality and sustainability of our distinctive research environment, while also indicating areas for further strategic attention.

	2014	2021	%
Submitted Staff	14.78 FTE	26.41 FTE	c.+75%
Doctoral Completions	9	15	c.+65%
External Income	c.£232k	c.£735k	c.+215%

Excellent research is undertaken by staff across the institution, led and supported by the team of academics and support professionals who make up the Research and Knowledge Exchange directorate, known as the 'Exchange'. This autonomous unit, led by the Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange, employs c.10 FTE (18 H/C) staff (cf. 3.4 FTE, 6 H/C in 2014) and is charged with:

- leading by example in all areas of research, impact, knowledge exchange and innovation;
- driving institutional policy and strategy, and promoting external collaborations, for these areas;
- supporting staff research and researcher development;
- overseeing doctoral degree provision (validated by the University of St Andrews);
- all research office functions.

The Exchange therefore unites functions that in larger institutions would be distributed across academic and professional services divisions. The ethos of the Exchange, and of the Conservatoire's research more widely, can be characterised by two 'I's' - interdisciplinarity and impact – which are evidenced across the range of our output, and underpin the way we develop our researchers and organise our support for research.

Our work encompasses research in music and drama, with developing work in dance, production and film; there are two main strands of activity:

- Artistic Research (Practice Research or Research in-and-through the arts)
- the Performing Arts in Society

Within these strands, there are clusters around New Work and Improvisation; Transdisciplinary Artistic Research; Art in the Anthropocene; Health and Wellbeing; and Performing Arts Education.

As a small specialist institution, the Conservatoire's research resides squarely within Unit of Assessment 33: unit and institution are one and the same for the purposes of this submission. This REF5a submission focusses on strategic matters and should be read first; REF5b offers a detailed account of our approach in practice.

## 2. Strategy

### Review of Strategic Approach 2014-2021

We developed a forward strategy for research during our preparations for REF2014, and pursued its objectives single-mindedly throughout the assessment period (AP). The 2014 panel rightly noted that while there were 'areas of internationally recognised vitality ... sustainability was less evident', and sustainability has, therefore, been a significant theme of the work we have done to meet our strategic objectives. Taking each objective in turn illustrates the distance travelled:

*'Further embedding research as a coherent strand of activity for a wider section of academic staff'.*

While there is further work to do on this objective, the size of this submission, the wider range of outputs and the consistent arrangements that now underpin staff recruitment, support, appraisal and activity planning, all speak to considerable progress and increased sustainability since 2014.

*'Capitalizing on our research activities and outputs by better promoting and supporting the impact of staff research'.* We have enhanced our processes for supporting and promoting the impact of research, and for fostering sustainable programmes of research, with linked projects, outcomes and further applications.

*'Fostering a greater number of productive research collaborations with other universities and conservatoires, in Scotland, the UK, Europe, and globally.'* Collaborative working has been transformed through our participation in game-changing partnerships such as the AHRC Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) Scottish Graduate School for the Arts and Humanities (SGSAH) and greater numbers of collaborative projects with partners across the sector. We have also pursued a deeper relationship with the University of St Andrews, our partner for doctoral degree validation, and international partnerships with specific objectives (such as the global benchmarking of our doctoral programmes). This work sits alongside increased and diversified partnerships with arts organisations and businesses; together they support in a practical way our ethos of 'impact and interdisciplinarity'.

*'Supporting staff to generate and follow through more bids for external research funding, seeking both large and smaller seedcorn awards from a range of sources.'* Professional support for external bids has been significantly enhanced, increasing their number, range, quality and success rate, evidenced in increased external funding for research (recognising that there is significant scope for improvement). In pursuit of enhanced sustainability, we have also maximised the impact of institutional seedcorn funding by working with researchers to build in match funding, planning, impact and public engagement activities.

*'Increasing research student numbers to exceed the median FTE per researcher for our disciplines and draw in greater numbers of research supervisors.'* In 2014, the panel noted that we were 'working hard to build an internationally excellent postgraduate community' and that work has continued: the number of research students (MPhil, PhD and DPerf) has grown from 12.5 FTE (17 H/C) in 2013 to 28 FTE (42 H/C) in 2021, with the number of Conservatoire-based supervisors increased from 6 to 23. This growth in quantity and quality of doctoral students is substantially down to the embedding of research across the institution, partnerships we have pursued in the AP, and the direct and indirect benefits of our membership of SGSAH, latterly as a member of the DTP that is embedded in the Graduate School. Our processes for effective training of students and supervisors have been extended and reviewed to take account of this growth.



## Impact

The notion of impact, and the ethos of making a difference in the world, has been central at the Conservatoire since the application for the SRDG that kickstarted our research in 1999. In that proposal, we argued that:

Research in a conservatoire context should embrace musical composition, dramatic writing, performance, artistically-oriented and practice-based research, creating in the conservatoire a laboratory for the performing arts where socially-relevant ideas are both generated and tested [...] It will lead to the general enhancement of the cultural environment, improve the overall quality of life and impact upon the nation's health and well-being.

Although our approach has evolved, that original vision remains relevant and, twenty-one years later, much of it has been realised. For the great majority of our researchers, the work that they do and the impact that it will have are inseparable considerations: they see effecting change in a wider societal context as a principal goal of their research.

Considerations of impact inform work at all levels in the Conservatoire: at the broadest strategic level, we understand our role as Scotland's national conservatoire to encompass not only world-leading teaching and research, but also a responsibility for the continued vitality of the arts, cultural sector and creative industries, and the education system that sustains them, in Scotland and beyond.



1 Searle conducts Drake Music Scotland's Digital Orchestra (see ICS 2)

The same ethos is also in evidence at the level of the individual outputs that make up this submission, many of which relate to work that will have a direct impact – whether on policymakers, practitioners or individual audience members. It is because considerations of impact are central

both to individual researchers and the strategic ambitions of the institution, that we feel confident in claiming impact as a hallmark of our research environment.

### Interdisciplinarity

The Conservatoire is distinctive internationally for the range of performing arts education it offers across music, drama, dance, production and film – with education programmes also forming part of the portfolio. For this reason, we are proud of the interdisciplinarity that is a unique feature of our curricular offer, and integral to who we are as a community.

In research terms, our commitment to interdisciplinarity grows from the same foundation as our commitment to impact: a desire to place our research in a wider societal context. Interdisciplinary working in the wider context of performance and the arts is an important feature of many outputs in the present submission, whether text or practice-based. But our interdisciplinarity goes beyond that to consider interfaces with the humanities, sciences and medicine, working, as we must necessarily do, in partnership with colleagues at other HEIs across Scotland and beyond.



2 PGR Alexander South performs his music at Bell Pettigrew Museum (image: Steve Smart)

The appointment in the AP of two Athenaeum Fellows with a remit to promote and support interdisciplinary work has catalysed developments that were already in evidence in 2014, and the work of SHARE (Science, Humanities and Arts Research Exchange), a joint initiative of the Conservatoire and St Andrews University, established in 2017, has brought further focussed work in this area, resulting in symposia, three co-tutelle interdisciplinary doctoral studentships, and the means to develop new collaborations and resources.

Embracing interdisciplinarity allows us to ask new questions, find new partnerships and explore new ways of working together. It grows from and, we believe, should richly inform disciplinary excellence – it also changes us. We especially seek out ways of shaping interdisciplinary discourse – an example being the *Art-making in the Anthropocene* series of international seminars (202



participants from 14 countries), co-funded by the Conservatoire and the Royal Society of Edinburgh and led by researchers in the Exchange team working across musical composition and contemporary performance making.

### Open Research

Notwithstanding the particular issues around open access in our disciplines, we nonetheless cultivate an approach that values the free and wide sharing of the outcomes of our research and the insights it generates. There is evidence of this across our work, from our publication of two open access journals (the Scottish Journal of Performance ([scottishjournalofperformance.org](http://scottishjournalofperformance.org)) and Music Performance Research ([musicperformanceresearch.org](http://musicperformanceresearch.org))) to the way we encourage and promote the free dissemination of outputs through our Current Research Information System (CRIS), to our wider work in public engagement. During the global pandemic, our performance programmes and public engagement work have reached new global audiences online.

Many of the outputs produced by our researchers have a commercial dimension that may inhibit free access to them. The CD releases that make up around 12% of our submission are an example, and the fact that these are typically the outcome of working with a commercial partner means that we cannot (for reasons of licensing) require our researchers to make this work freely available. Nor would we wish to: in many cases, the commercial partnership enables the work to be widely disseminated, and reach audiences far beyond the Conservatoire (and, indeed, wider academia).

### Research Integrity

We promote a culture of research integrity both through our support for staff and through a governance structure overseen by our Academic Board and enacted through our Ethics Committee. Just as considerations of impact align with the basic ambitions of artistic work in our fields, so the notion of research integrity is closely allied to artistic integrity – the aspiration to do what we do as well as we can.

Neither research with human participants nor work that poses a foreseeable risk to the researcher may take place without the express prior approval of the Ethics Committee, formed during the AP following a restructuring of our approach to ethics. The Committee is chaired by the Director of Research and KE and draws its membership from across the Conservatoire. Members receive a comprehensive induction to the processes and protocols of ethical approval and the Committee, under the overall guidance of the Academic Board, maintains our Research Ethics and Performance Ethics Policies, receives and considers applications from staff, student and external researchers, and deliberates on other matters of ethics, offering advice to programme teams and Senior Management. It reviews and monitors infractions of the Ethics Policy and any other breaches of research integrity, ensuring that all significant issues are raised to the Academic Board. We are members of the Scottish Research Integrity Network and, through our Outcome and Impact Framework with the SFC, we annually confirm our adherence to the principles of the Research Integrity Concordat.

### Future Strategy

Finalisation of the next iteration of our institutional Strategic Plan – of which the Research Strategy is an integral part – has been delayed due to the pandemic and will be reshaped by the lessons we learn from the present crisis. At the time of writing, a good early draft of our strategy for research has been developed in consultation with staff across the institution, reflecting on the strengths and addressing the weaknesses we perceive in our environment for research.

One priority must be to continue to grow and diversify our external income. Although it has increased considerably in the AP, we recognise that this is from a low base. We believe we have the right practices in place to support success and need to continue our work in this area. In terms of people, our priorities will be to ensure that we are able to attract, support and, crucially, retain excellent and diverse researchers at all levels. Among other objectives, this will mean:

- pursuing the objectives of our Anti-Racism Action Plan to increase representation of black and global majority researchers at the Conservatoire;
- further action to address the imbalance between music and other disciplines in the Conservatoire's research culture;
- reviewing our position on academic promotion and exploring how we build an excellent post-doctoral community to support the career development of researchers in our field;
- pursuing, and reviewing, our new workload model.

All in all, we seek to grow the quality and quantity of research at the Conservatoire, while maintaining the openminded, collegial and playfully creative environment that we currently enjoy.



3 *Dream On* (collaboration with Glasgow University, Glasgow School of Art and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra)

### 3. People

#### A single ecosystem

Before detailing the strategy and arrangements for supporting researchers, it is important to note that the Conservatoire is a teaching-intensive institution employing many staff on a part-time basis, either on a pro-rata (that is, part-time salaried) or hourly-paid basis; there is a mixture of permanent and fixed term appointments, and while rolling contracts are common, short term contracts (<24 months) are generally avoided for Category A eligible staff. There are independent researchers, Early Career Researchers (ECR), and senior researchers in each of these employment types, but the Conservatoire does not currently operate an academic promotion structure, meaning that our support for staff research does not intersect with formal rewards and recognition, with the exception of personal chairs (professorships).



4 Contemporary Performance Practice Degree Show 2021

It is a principle of our approach to support staff research that it is available to all staff, whether full time, pro-rata or hourly paid; to those that have Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR), and those that do not. This approach reflects the reality of supporting a still-developing research environment in disciplines where the boundary between research and professional practice is porous; it also reflects a belief that the sustainability and vitality of the environment are best promoted by treating it as a single ecosystem. We actively try to engage all academic staff, whatever their existing expertise in research, and when budgets permit, we support proto-research and KE activity from staff who do not have SRR, where this will demonstrably support their individual development and enhance the Conservatoire's wider culture of innovation and creativity.

All in all, we work hard to promote an inclusive culture for research to flourish – a creative and effervescent environment, in which research is understood holistically and constraining notions are



eschewed. We see no tension between a nurturing environment and the pursuit of world-leading research.

### Staffing strategy

The larger size of the submission to this exercise reflects an increase in the number of researchers at the Conservatoire since 2014, rather than changes in the criteria for REF. Our growth in this period is down to a recruitment strategy that has seen:

- strategic recruitment of academic staff to the Exchange, to pursue high-quality research and support staff across the institution to do the same;
- the mainstreaming of research profile as a factor in academic appointments across the institution, where previously this was ad hoc.

The Conservatoire has implemented a new academic workload model, ensuring that those with SRR are supported in a consistent, transparent, equitable and accountable way. Only a relatively small proportion of our academic staff (c.30%) are independent researchers, though virtually all (c.97%) of those who have SRR and are included in this submission. The process of developing and rolling out the workload model has allowed us to standardise aspects of our practice that previously varied from department to department. Likewise, during the AP we have agreed that research profile will be a consideration in all full time and pro-rata academic appointments and systematised how we assess research profile for personal chairs.

As noted above, our Athenaeum Fellows have a specific remit to support staff research across the institution and foster an open and inspiring culture of interdisciplinary work; their appointment has been transformative. Further senior and ECR appointments in the Exchange have enabled us to support this work with complementary skills, ensuring a breadth of expertise, with the ECRs especially contributing to the vitality and longer-term sustainability of the team. Most staff within the Exchange team are part-time, reflecting patterns of employment across the institution but also the fact that many pursue an arts practice beyond the institution.

### Supporting equality and diversity

We are resolutely committed to equality, diversity and inclusion, seeking to ensure that our staff and student body is ever-more representative of wider society. Our institutional expectations and procedures are set out in a suite of policies for dignity and equality and reported annually in a formal Equality and Diversity Review. We are also pursuing a detailed and challenging Anti-Racism Action Plan.

Recruitment of researchers is governed by the same principles that underpin all our appointment processes: we are clear that best practice selection methods are essential to ensure that the right candidate is appointed and that the decision making process is fair, transparent and effective. The Conservatoire has a centralised HR function which ensures that fair and equal recruitment practices are observed. We advertise all posts, and train all recruitment panel members in recruitment best practice before we allow them to take part in any appointment process.

HR records, monitors and reports on all recruitment decisions and, across our operation, we review the cumulative equality impacts of key decisions for insights into the effectiveness of our approach. In the current submission, for example, there are 16 (44%) female and 20 (56%) male Category A Submitted staff, a proportion that mirrors the gender balance of all Category A Eligible staff (45% F, 55% M). Among the outputs selected for inclusion, 49% are by female researchers and 51% by male researchers. We are, therefore, confident that in terms of gender, there has been no systematic bias in the processes that led to this submission and, over time, our recruitment of researchers is at least as equitable as our recruitment of teaching staff. Our recent Interim Review

of Equality Outcomes (<https://www.rcs.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Interim-Review-of-Equality-Outcomes-20172021-April-19.pdf>) outlines our approach to monitoring wider equality outcomes.

The Conservatoire's Family Friendly Leave and Disability at Work policies enshrine procedures to ensure working patterns that are responsive to individual needs, and we use flexible working, including homeworking and flexible hours, extensively within the Exchange team and in the wider Conservatoire to support a diverse staff to pursue excellent research. Our Employee Assistance Programme is available to all staff and covers areas such as health, wellbeing and financial management.

Our small scale makes it possible to ensure that support for staff is responsive to need - but we also embed responsiveness in our formal processes. An example is our use of Athenaeum Awards to cover conference attendance: staff apply for the actual costs of attendance, based on their needs, rather than receiving a standard 'conference grant'. In the AP, we have funded childcare and special travel and accommodation arrangements according to need.

We use a similar approach in supporting our PGRs. We have many part-time students and take particular care to manage their studies effectively, recognising that their needs differ from those of full time students. We use the Leave of Absence protocol to manage progress in a way that is responsive to circumstances (for example, a need to undertake a period of full time work is considered an appropriate rationale for a period of leave, an important consideration when many students are self-funding). We have also developed and deployed a parental leave policy that retains students in the programme while they take a substantial break, and support PGRs who have declared a disability using the same system of agreed adjustments that we use for taught students - at present, 5 PGRs (c.12%) have a declared disability.

**4. Income, infrastructure and facilities**

Research at the Conservatoire is underpinned by the world-class specialist facilities of the institution: state-of-the-art performance venues and rehearsal facilities; recording and electroacoustic studios; the specialist collections of our archive and the Whittaker library (which for doctoral students and supervisors are supplemented by full access to St Andrews University library). We continue to invest in our campus and facilities to ensure the very best working environments for our students and researchers. To complement the five performance venues available in the Renfrew Street building, redevelopment has increased practice room provision by 50%. The Wallace Studios at Speirs Locks, a purpose-built facility for production, drama and dance, has been further extended during the AP and includes 8 large rehearsal and ensemble rooms.



5 Musical Theatre Showcase 2021 in the New Athenaeum Theatre

The growth during the AP of the Exchange team, itself a crucial part of the infrastructure for research at the Conservatoire, reflects the growing sustainability of our work. Just as the result of RAE2008 led to our first core funding for research, so the improved result in 2014 and further core funding since then has allowed us to grow our infrastructure, invest further in people and facilities, and improve our external research income.

Wherever possible, we have tackled barriers to our further development systemically. Our purchase of a comprehensive CRIS is an example (and our specially customised instance of Pure for a performing arts context remains unusual in the conservatoire sector). Another is our lobbying to enhance the subject weighting for performing arts research in Scotland, which is substantially lower than that used by Research England (1.0 cf. 1.3). When SFC undertook a review of subject weights, we made a strong argument for an increase and were pleased to see that weighting will now be increased from 1.0 to 1.2. We have also lobbied to have the Conservatoire accepted as a full RO by all research funders. During the assessment period, the Conservatoire was welcomed into the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, giving access to further small grant funding



**Institutional level environment template (REF5a)**

schemes and doctoral studentships – both vital to our development and especially important in the context of a monotechnic specialist institution where sources of research funding are relatively few.

We have vigorously sought external funding in the AP, pursuing a much greater number of smaller bids and large-scale bids in partnership with other ROs – such as a ‘Creative Industries Cluster’ bid to the AHRC with Glasgow University. REF 5b gives further details of our approach to external funding.