Royal Academy of Music

Access and participation plan 2026-27 to 2029-30

Introduction and strategic aims

The Royal Academy of Music is one of the world's leading conservatoires and a member institution of the University of London. We were ranked as number 3 in Arts, Drama & Music in the Good University Guide 2025, and number 2 for Music in the QS World University Rankings 2025. The Academy has continuously maintained TEF Gold status, largely due to our investment in tailored and personalised teaching and career-focused mentoring. Most teaching is conducted either 1:1 or in small groups.

We are a small, specialist institution with around 770 students at any one time – half undergraduate, half postgraduate. Of those 770, half are international students from around 60 countries. At both undergraduate and postgraduate level the UK to international student ratio is roughly 1:1. This reflects professional reality: music is a highly competitive global industry, for which intensive training alongside peers recruited internationally is necessary preparation.

Each year between 55 and 60 new UK students start on one or other of the Academy's undergraduate programmes, BMus and BMus jazz. Both run for four years. These are extremely small cohorts by most university standards, and as a result the access and participation data we report must be interpreted with care. Small fluctuations in absolute numbers may look anomalously large in percentage terms.

Entrance is via competitive audition (performers and conductors) or interview/portfolio submission (composers). The relevant academic entry requirements are comparatively modest (two A level passes, neither of which needs to be in Music). The Academy promotes an inclusive learning and working environment in which all students, staff and visitors are welcomed, with individual needs recognised and supported.

Each year we hold 2,500 auditions for undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Every applicant for an undergraduate place is assessed for entry to the Academy. This requires significant investment of time and resources.

In common with other leading international conservatoires, the Academy mainly recruits students who have already achieved a very high standard in their practical discipline or show clear promise of doing so. Most successful applicants will have benefited from high quality individual tuition from an early age, for which their parents or other family members are likely to have paid. Some will have attended specialist music schools or a conservatoire's junior department. Applicants without this prior experience are at a disadvantage. Because bursary schemes enabling students from low-income households to attend specialist music schools and conservatoire junior departments do exist, some providing full fee remission, there is no tidy correlation between family income levels and applicants' chances of success at Academy audition.

Our Access and Participation Plan positions the Academy alongside other institutions and organisations working to the same end, to ensure that risks to equality of opportunity are recognised and mitigated at every stage of the educational journey to which students commit. We do this in partnership with others. Resource shortages at one stage – for music teaching in state primary schools, for instance – will impede or completely prevent student progression to the next. As a matter of deliberate choice we intervene at key points along the whole chain leading from early recognition of musical ability (often at primary school age) through group workshop and individual lesson provision to develop that ability, on to conservatoire audition stage. We accept, as valid plan outcomes, that many of the school-age students involved in our Widening Participation Programme will enrol on other institutions' Music degree courses, or decide against a career in music while still identifying strongly as musicians and continuing to perform or compose in their spare time. We do not judge the success of our Plan solely in terms of student progression to an Academy degree programme in other words. When other destinations are preferred we actively support students through the application processes that will take them there.

Each year about as many UK students join the Academy at postgraduate stage as start on one of our undergraduate programmes. The widely-reported "winner-take-all" character of artists' labour markets makes some students from low-income families reluctant to stake everything on career success in music. They may prefer to spread career bets, taking an undergraduate degree in some subject other than Music before coming to the Academy. Recent recruitment figures show that UK postgraduate applicants are more likely to be offered a place than non-UK applicants. The postgraduate entry route also allows students who were unsuccessful at Academy BMus admissions stage to try again later. Our Access and Participation Plan makes needs-based bursary provision for postgraduates just as it does for undergraduates.

Risks to equality of opportunity

Our Access and Participation Plan addresses the following risks on OfS's Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR):

1. Knowledge and skills   2. Information and guidance   3. Perception of higher education   4. Application success rates   …

8. Mental health   …   10. Cost pressures   11. Capacity issues   12. Progression from higher education.

Risks 5 (Limited choice of course type and delivery mode), 6 (Insufficient academic support), 7 (Insufficient personal support) and 9 (Ongoing impacts of coronavirus) are not addressed explicitly. The Academy is a small, specialist provider whose students look for highly specific types of course and delivery mode. We have robust academic and personal support systems in place, to which additional financial and staff resources have been committed since 2020 partly to mitigate the ongoing impacts of coronavirus on students' mental heath. Students at an economic disadvantage or under-represented in their ethnicity tend to do as well or better than other students once they are admitted to the Academy. We have noticed an indication of risk among multiply disadvantaged students: for example, disabled students from low-income family backgrounds. (See Annex A.) Academy students with declared disabilities or learning differences are, compared to others in their year-group, marginally less likely to achieve first class or 2:1 degrees. We have identified this as our Risk 5 and are monitoring closely.

Risk 1: Students from under-represented backgrounds often know little about entry routes to specialist performance post-18 education, little about the nature of such education, and little about the variety of careers to which it can lead. We know this from talking to school-age students taking part in Academy Widening Participation activities, and from research commissioned by (among others) the young people's mentoring charity Arts Emergency.

Risk 2: Resource constraints leave many UK state schools struggling or unable to develop the high-level music performance skills, knowledge and understanding that students are required to demonstrate at conservatoire admissions stage. Research summarised in a fairly recent (2023) UK Parliament briefing paper points to a "Disadvantage Gap" between the state-funded and private music education sectors, now so wide as to "challenge the very existence" of the former. The Incorporated Society of Musicians' 2022 report Music: A Subject in Peril? *showed that music departments in independent schools receive on average over four times the funding available to their equivalents in academies and free schools, and over five times the amount available in maintained schools. As far as UK school music is concerned, risks to equality of opportunity fully materialized some years ago. In common with other UK conservatoires the Academy has to navigate a world of wide, known and deeply embedded inequality. We do and will continue to do everything we can to compensate for it.*

Risk 3: Overall the Academy's student population is highly diverse, but British nationals in some of the ethnic groups recognized by OfS are under-represented within it. Data supplied to OfS (published via the OfS access and participation data dashboard) make this very clear. Prospective students may be reluctant to apply to the Academy if they interpret present under-representation as evidence of institutional bias against groups to which they belong.

Risk 4: Concern about the cost of studying in central London, about the additional costs often involved in studying Music, and about wellbeing and mental health stresses caused by financial insecurity, may lead potential applicants from low-income family backgrounds to look elsewhere or to decide against music altogether. We know the pressure that some students are under from talking to them, often about the Academy's hardship fund and how to apply to it. We know how many are supported by the Academy's counselling team. And we know how many students are awarded needs-based bursaries each year.

Risk 5: Academy students with declared disabilities or learning differences are, compared to others in their year-group, marginally less likely to achieve first class or 2:1 degrees. Numbers in this cohort continue to expand. We are monitoring closely and will further invest in our Disabilty and Study Support programmes if data analysis points to a widening attainment gap.

Objectives

Objective 1: Increase the proportion of applications for undergraduate places submitted by prospective students in all categories significantly under-represented at the Academy, so that by 2030 73% of all auditionees belong in one or more. (Sometimes the categories intersect: state schools in Low Participation Neighbourhoods for instance.)

Young people are in many cases very poorly informed about career possibilities in the performing arts. They are much more likely to apply for a conservatoire place if older family members or mentors have made successful careers in music and encourage them to follow suit. Our Widening Participation Programme's "Your Academy" strands seek to narrow knowledge and confidence gaps by giving students who need it more of the sorts of cultural capital that successful entrants to UK conservatoire and university Music departments typically possess. We provide multiple entry points and opportunities for familiarisation. Examples include Open Academy, Museum visits and tours, the Widening Participation Department's Audition Club, Junior Academy Musical Theatre outreach sessions, and free concert tickets to MA Musical Theatre Degree shows. The Widening Participation Department provides information – guides, leaflets for parents, briefing sessions to advise on routes to entry into Junior and Senior Academy – and works to build relationships with music educators active in a range of school, college and community settings across London. Partnerships have been established with schools in 28 of London's 32 boroughs and with all 5 London Music Hubs. A strong BMus Student Ambassador Pool has been established to connect Widening Participation students with current Academy undergraduates, the latter willing to share their experiences and supported to do so in a responsible, constructive way. All this work will continue at least to 2030.

Objective 2: Increase the proportion of places offered to state school students applying for undergraduate places at the Academy, so that by 2030 they receive 50% of all UK undergraduate offers made.

All of our Widening Participation activity is focused on pupils from the state school sector, who compared to private school pupils generally receive fewer opportunities to develop the advanced skills that are needed to thrive in conservatoire education and to seek out and develop career opportunities in a competitive and fast-changing music industry.

We are also working to increase the percentage of state-school students in Junior Academy (from which 73% of students go on to study Music at higher education level). Progress has been faster here than at BMus level, and now 42% of Junior Academy students are from the state sector. This should result in more state-school student admissions to Academy degree programmes over the lifetime of the plan.

Objective 3: Maintain the proportion of places offered to prospective students who identify as from the Global Majority (26% in the 2024 admissions round). Increase the proportion of places offered to Black British applicants specifcally, so that by 2030 they receive 5% of all offers made.

As a London-based conservatoire, we recognise that our student body, while diverse in comprising a community from over 60 countries, is not representative of the UK student population as a whole. Our Belonging strategy is now embedded throughout the institution, and includes partnerships with Black-led organisations such as Blueprint for All, as well as supporting Students' Union initiatives such as the African-Caribbean Society. Students are active in researching, studying and programming repertoire from more diverse communities, through initiatives such as Students Create and Seen and Heard Festivals, and our curriculum has expanded to foster these skills in modules such as Diverse Voices and Diverse Programming. We prioritise the leadership of Global Majority role models and teachers through our choice of workshop leaders, teachers and mentors in our Widening Participation activity.

Objective 4: Increase the proportion of places taken up by prospective students from low-income family backgrounds, many of whom are likely to live in Low Participation Neighbourhoods, so that by 2030 they represent 18% of UK undergraduates.

The BMus programme at conservatoire level is a four-year course, requiring significant financial commitment on the part of students. Some may have to cover costs additional to those incurred by students taking other subjects (if they need to buy higher-quality instruments for instance).

We have seen a rise in applications to our Bursary and Hardship funding from students and prospective students since 2020, when the challenging economic consequences of Covid 19 on the performing arts and career prospects were initially felt. This, combined with the high cost of living in the capital, has impacted students even on family incomes higher than the statutory bursary minimum. The Academy does not own or manage any student accommodation buildings, though we have a small number of allocated places in University of London halls of residence. Much of our targeted support helps students deal with the challenges of the private rental sector. We raise awareness of our Bursary and Hardship funding internally and, for prospective students, via our website so that concerns about the levels of available financial support do not prevent their applying. (See https://www.ram.ac.uk/study/fees-and-funding/scholarships-and-bursaries)

Objective 5: Ensure that Academy students with declared disabilities or learning differences achieve the best possible final degree results, further investing in Academy Disability and Study Support programmes if year-on-year data monitoring reveals a widening attainment gap.

Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

Intervention strategy 1 – raise awareness and build trust

Plan and deliver a full programme of Widening Participation activities designed to bring young people and their families into the Academy building and introduce them to Academy teachers and students (on or offsite), so spreading awareness of the Academy's existence and building trust with a growing number of potential applicants.

Intervention strategy 2 – targeted support for state school pupils

Provide sustained, intensive support – including specialist tuition – for musically gifted state-school pupils across the age range 8-18, reaching as many as resources available to the Academy and its delivery partners allow.

Intervention strategy 3 – Belonging: promote a learning and teaching environment in which all students feel welcome

Create and maintain a fully inclusive teaching and learning environment at the Academy, through a range of interventions apparent to prospective Global Majority students. Ensure that Widening Participation activities are designed to interest students beyond the white community, and involve them fully. Make specific scholarship and (where necessary) needs-based bursary provision for Black British and British Asian students.

Intervention strategy 4 – financial and other targeted support for low-income students

Make needs-based bursary provision for students from low-income family backgrounds. Ensure that Academy hardship funds support students from low-income family backgrounds as a matter of priority. Ensure that present and prospective students from low-income family backgrounds know about all forms of non-financial support available to them at the Academy, in particular our student counselling service and high-value instrument loan scheme.

Intervention strategy 5 – targeted support for students with declared disabilities or learning differences

Further invest in Academy Disability and Study Support programmes if year-on-year monitoring reveals a widening attainment gap between students with declared disabilities or learning differences and fellow students declaring neither.

Intervention strategy 1 – raise awareness and build trust

EORRs 2, 3, 4

Activity	Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes	Cross IS
Presenting the Academy as a hub	Widening Participation team lead activities, produce	Visits to observe MA Musical Theatre and other student performances	Opportunity to experience live classical, jazz and musical theatre	IS3

for cultural engagement	information and guidance materials, recruit and mentor Student Ambassadors, and broker external partnerships Junior Academy Musical Theatre Co-Directors deliver outreach sessions alongside MA Musical Theatre graduates now working in the industry 20 + UG and PG Student Ambassadors Associated operational and administration costs	Handouts explaining Widening Participation, Junior Academy and BMus application processes Information sessions on progression routes and the wider Music HE landscape 3 annual JAMT outreach school workshops; each attended by 90 participants under 16 Audition Club sessions: 11 per year across London Partnerships with all 5 London Music Hubs and 20+ schools annually Creation of pool of trained Student Ambassadors	performances in a professional setting Feeling "the Academy/Music in higher education is for me" Being more informed about progression routes to music at conservatoire and/or degree level Defining the rewards of studying and performing music in broad terms (life satisfaction as well as economic) Opportunities to perform in a supportive environment and gain specialist advice The dissemination of Your Academy's offer across London Gain insight into under 18s' musical communities via input from schools and music hubs	
Discovery Events: Open Days held by individual departments for the BMus, and Junior Academy	Co-ordination, promotion and delivery Associated operational and administration costs	16 Discovery Events across the different Academy departments including 4 for Junior Academy (Junior Academy, Primary Academy, Junior Jazz and Junior Academy Musical Theatre)	Awareness raising about the opportunities, expectations and processes in applying to the Academy within specific departments	IS3
Open Academy: Works with schools, disability and inclusion groups, health and wellbeing providers. It enables BMus, post-graduate and student Fellows to develop	Open Academy staff co-ordination, promotion and delivery Associated operational and administration costs	20 projects per year working in partnership with Wigmore Hall, Royal London Hospital, nurseries, schools and Pupil Referral Units, Into University and City of London Sinfonia amongst others. Also specialist healthcare and dementia /autism centres	Increased awareness of the Academy, conservatoires and / or higher education more widely Participants have a greater understanding of different instruments and performance styles Participants have access to high-quality music-making and develop a	IS4 Open Academy Fellowships provide paid early career support **a**nd broaden the range of career

community leadership skills, addressing risks EORR 1,2,3 in the longer term and to connect with the wider community.		Open Academy reaches 6,000+ people outside of the Academy every year. It is embedded within the UG and PG curriculum of the Academy	deeper understanding of chosen curriculum topics	opportunities available to graduates
Royal Academy Museum and Collections team increases awareness, understanding and enjoyment of our collections of musical instruments, art and other objects through displays, outreach and programming	Collections Department contribution to planning, co-ordination, management and evaluation of action plan activities and visits Associated operational and administration costs	An accessible online Museum presence (including sound recordings), exhibition space with associated community events GCSE music workshops Collections tours. In 23/24 the museum hosted 10 school visits and collaborated with the Widening Participation Department on 15 tours of the Academy building related to concerts and performances	Increased awareness of the Academy, classical music and its history Opportunity to see and hear historic instruments Exhibitions representing a range of global cultures – e.g. the Oud and Lute exhibition	IS 4 Each year the Academy loans around 250 high-value instruments and 180 bows to students

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £252,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale

This Intervention Strategy addresses the risk that students from under-represented backgrounds often lack the knowledge, confidence, and familiarity to consider specialist performance-based higher education as a viable and achievable pathway (EORR Risks 2 & 3). These students may have had limited access to accurate, high-quality information about conservatoires, few opportunities to experience live performance, and little guidance in navigating the routes to a professional career in music. These conditions can reinforce a sense of exclusion or "not belonging" within the conservatoire sector (Thomas & Quinn, 2007; PEC, 2020).

Evidence shows that raising awareness of what conservatoire education involves – and making progression pathways more visible and accessible – plays a key role in reducing perceived barriers and supporting informed decision-making (TASO, 2023). High-quality information, advice and guidance (IAG), delivered through ambassadors, professional artists, and educational partners, has been found to increase motivation, aspiration and engagement (EEF, 2016; Austin & Hatt, 2005). Activities that humanise the conservatoire experience – such as Q&As, Discovery events, and

student-led sessions – are particularly effective at increasing confidence among young people who may not see themselves reflected in traditional music education routes (UCAS, 2021).

This approach aligns with wider research on the role of early cultural exposure in raising aspirations. Engaging with music and performance in formal and informal settings helps young people build familiarity, creative confidence, and a sense of place within the cultural landscape (Hallam, 2010; Youth Music, 2021). Activities that take place within the conservatoire itself, or that allow students to connect with current staff and students, can increase their sense of "fit" – a key factor in progression and retention (HEPI, 2017).

The Academy's Belonging Scheme and its accompanying Action Plan further underpin this work, ensuring that our access activities are situated within a clear institutional commitment to equity and inclusion. The Belonging framework sets out how the Academy supports staff and students to thrive regardless of background or identity — and recognises the importance of demystifying higher music education for those from underrepresented groups. Our outreach work aims not only to inform but to signal to participants that they are welcome here.

This strategy reflects sector guidance that specialist providers must take proactive steps to build familiarity and trust with underrepresented communities — ensuring that talent is not lost due to structural or perceptual barriers (DfE National Plan for Music Education, 2022).

Evaluation

Activity	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Presenting the Academy as a hub for cultural engagement	Evaluation using a combination of Type 1 (Narrative) and Type 2 (Empirical Enquiry) data. Our definition of "awareness" in this context can be measured by an understanding of conservatoire routes and career paths, knowledge of application process and audition expectations, awareness of support available, and an increased confidence to pursue music at HE. These will be captured through pre/post activity surveys, monitoring engagement, tracking applications and destination of study, focus groups and short interviews, workshop observations and reflective prompts. Our Theory of Change will be reviewed regularly and updated if necessary.	Findings from this intervention strategy will inform the Academy's annual Access and Participation Plan impact review reports and ongoing internal monitoring and strategy development. We will share key findings across the music education sector – including with music services, teaching staff, schools, and other partners – particularly where insights can support wider access and progression initiatives. We will collaborate with other institutions – such as TASO, the OfS, Higher Education Evaluation Library (HEEL), Conservatoires UK – to share emerging findings and contribute to sector learning. However, we remain mindful of the small size and specialist nature of the Academy and the potential for student and participant identification, even with anonymised data. We are committed to transparency and

		collaboration while ensuring the privacy and integrity of our community is upheld.
Discovery Events	Participant numbers and feedback gathered by our Communications Dept and monitoring how many applicants have attended the relevant Discovery Day (Types 1,2)	Internal sharing for planning purposes.
Open Academy	Quantitative impact: data on the number of interactions reported each term to Access and Participation Committee on interactions with different groups. Termly newsletter with summary of activity. Qualitative evidence from participant feedback. Students' reflective writing portfolios assessing their experience and skills gained (Types 1,2)	Open Academy staff publish in peer-reviewed journals on the impact of musical co-creation in health and other settings.
Museum and Collections	Schools tours: student and teacher qualitative feedback to be gathered along with quantitative data of number of attended (Types 1,2)	Reporting to Arts Council England to maintain Accreditation status.

More detailed information on evaluation can also be provided in the Evaluation section or at Annex B.

Intervention strategy 2 – targeted support for state school pupils

EORRs: 1, 2, 3, 4

Activity	Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes	Cross IS
Your Academy A structured programme for musicians aged 14-18, who perform at Grade 5 and above. Participants are encouraged to attend several sessions over time,	Widening Participation team devise and co-ordinate activities Workshop leaders, music tutors (from a pool of regular freelancers, plus	Clubs: Composers, Jazz, Transition to Tuned Percussion, Theory, Orchestral Percussion, Mentor Club	Improvement in musical skills over a sustained period supported by tutors, teachers and students of the Academy Improved understanding of the progression routes and	

developing their technical skills and confidence.	Junior and Senior Academy staff), supported by Student Ambassadors Performance space and operational costs (Events Team)	Collectives: St Mark's Sundays (Woodwind, Brass, Percussion), Beyond the Dots Summer Schools and Showcases: Springboard to Grade 5 Theory, Composers, Spring and Winter showcase, Takeover Day, public performance opportunities for Widening Participation students Annually Your Academy works with c.350 x 11-18-year-olds. There were 650 unique interactions in 2023/24.	requirements for applying to study music in higher education Improved confidence gained by playing with peers in a professional performance setting	
Widening Participation links with Junior Academy and BMus Your Academy participants are given information, and advice on applying to Junior Academy, other junior conservatoires and (in due course) higher education institutions	Widening Participation team devise and co-ordinate activities Audition fee waivers (costs borne by the Academy) Workshop leaders, music tutors (from a pool of regular freelancers, plus Junior and Senior Academy staff), supported by Student Ambassadors Junior Academy, Junior Jazz and Junior Academy Musical Theatre teams' specialist information and guidance Performance space and operational costs	Audition and application sessions Feedback on Junior Academy applications and auditions Inner Ear Summer School 4-day Bootcamp for BMus Applications In 23/24 34 Widening Participation students applied for Junior Academy, 17 places were offered. 2 applied for the BMus with no offers Over the course of the Your Academy programme, since 2021 18 Widening Participation students have succeeded in transferring their music skills to raise the level of their HE aspirations, attaining places at Russell Group universities and Oxbridge. Our Widening Participation programme has developed as a "feeder" to	Greater knowledge about and confidence in applying to Junior Academy and (later) university departments and conservatoires Greater knowledge of the audition process Improvement in knowledge of ways to develop musical skills Development of a peer community of applicants, for mutual support Gain experience of feedback, a core aspect of study and careers in the performing arts	IS4

		other conservatoires as well as the Academy.		
Community First Strings Experience (CFSE) A whole class, progression-based strings project taught for three years at two South London primary schools, CFSE works with 270 Reception to YR2 participants annually.	Widening Participation team support visits to and performances at the Academy, and liaise with schools 0.6 FSE Director plans curriculum and leads a delivery team of 4 tutors Performance space and operational costs (Events Team) for concerts and visits Academy funding so that CFSE classes and events can be delivered free to participants. (Schools provide instruments.) In the fourth year up to 9 CFSE participants are invited to join the First String Experience (a non-Widening Participation activity) at the Academy. They are offered a reduction in fees, support with additional lessons and instrument hire	30 violin or cello lessons per year for 90 x 4 to 7-year-olds, over a 3-year period School performances Visits, tours, workshops, concerts and graduation ceremony at the Academy Information sessions on next steps Continuing links with Lambeth and Southwark music services, to offer post-programme opportunities	Improvement in musical skills over a sustained period supported by tutors, teachers and students of the Academy. Improved understanding of the progression routes and requirements for applying to study music within ABRSM Grade system Improved confidence from playing with peers in both familiar (school) and professional performance settings Increased focus and concentration in other areas of the school curriculum Cultivation of an informed network support motivation and skill development from an early age Involvement in the Academy community In the final year of CFSE, 9 participants were offered a place on the CFSE Pathways Project and subsequently the chance to audition for First String Experience 4 (FSE 4)[1], part of Junior Academy.	IS1, 3

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[1] First String Experience (FSE) is an the Academy's non-auditioned 3 year programme of early years strings education aimed at 4-7 year olds. It takes place on Saturdays during standard school term times. FSE4 is a new (2024/25) development from the FSE programme. It is audition based.

Variations Our pre-professional development programme for 16-18 year olds	Free tickets to professional classical / jazz performance – either at the Academy or off site. Fees paid to professional tutors and students supporting masterclasses.	1 x audition and application guidance from student mentor 1 x masterclass & Q&A from Academy graduate working professionally in music 1 x visit to classical / jazz concert outside the Academy; each term = 9 sessions annually. Each session attended by an average of 20 young people with prior experience of Widening Participation activity.	Group solidarity, helping Widening Participation students feel more confident when applying for places on higher education music courses. Opportunity to meet and see Academy alumni professional musicians in a professional setting - offering a clearer career trajectory.	IS3, 4
Progression to Junior Academy	Widening Participation team team mentor students to apply to Junior Academy and other conservatoires. Numbers and outcomes monitored	In 2024-25, 52 Junior Academy students are receiving means-tested bursaries and audition fee waivers	Junior Academy recruits more students from state schools.. [The % of state-educated entrants to Junior Academy (ages 13-18) increased from 38%-42% in 2024-25 from the baseline year of 2024. Primary Academy (ages 10-13) increased from 18% to 29% in the same period.]	IS1, 3
Junior Academy Musical Theatre (JAMT)	JAMT reserves one third of its places (around 30) for low-income students to whom needs-based bursaries are offered JAMT mentoring for students applying to study musical theatre post 18	60 x 11- 18 year olds participate in a weekly, term-time professional musical theatre training programme acting, voice, singing, musical theatre repertoire and movement, with projects and masterclasses. 10 participants are mentored each year	Enthusiasm, confidence and experience developed from mentorship Connections to industry; understanding of higher education and industry requirements, expectations and context	IS1, 3, 4

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £328,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale

Our strategy for developing sustained progression routes is rooted in both empirical research and internal evaluation and responds directly to systemic inequities in access to music education. Access to conservatoire-level study is heavily impacted by early exposure to sustained, high-quality musical training – a resource disproportionately limited in state-funded schools and rarely available to students from underrepresented or low-income backgrounds (Hallam, 2010; Youth Music, 2021; Cultural Learning Alliance, 2019).

National reports have highlighted the decline in provision of creative subjects in schools (Ashton & Ashton, 2023), particularly Music, with this reduction most acute in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. This has significant implications for progression into specialist institutions: ABRSM's report *Making Music* (2021) found that students from low-income households are less likely to access instrumental lessons, ensemble experience, or formal examinations.

Our internal evaluation echoes these findings. For example, participants engaged in Your Academy, our structured long-term music programme for students aged 14–18, have shown marked improvement in technical skills, confidence, and application outcomes. Since 2021, 18 Widening Participation students from this pathway have progressed to conservatoires or universities to study Music – or related – degrees. Similarly, through our Community First Strings Experience project, we support over 270 pupils annually in South London primary schools, with a clear route into the Junior Academy through the CFSE Pathways model. Five CFSE participants progressed to FSE4 in 2024/25, demonstrating a successful pipeline from early instrumental access to conservatoire readiness.

This rationale is supported by our Theory of Change model, which ensures interventions are designed with long-term outcomes in mind, linking inputs (e.g., tuition, mentoring, guidance) with measurable outputs and outcomes. Our focus on sustained engagement – rather than one-off encounters – aligns with research from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2016). This emphasises the importance of long-term confidence-building and personalised support for under-represented students.

Overall, our strategy is grounded in an understanding of the cumulative disadvantage experienced by many young musicians, and the need to provide not just access, but progression pathways that are sustained, supported, and genuinely empowering.

Evaluation

Activity	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan

Your Academy	Your Academy activity will use a process and impact evaluation to understand effectively how our programmes support learners from initial engagement through to higher education. The Theory of Change (Type 1 – Narrative) will be regularly reassessed. For impact evaluation (Type 2 – Empirical Enquiry) the following mixed-methods will be drawn upon: participant tracking to demonstrate actual progression routes, application and offers, engagement and retention, demographic data, pre/post activity surveys, interviews and feedback forms, case studies.	Findings from this intervention strategy will inform the Academy's annual APP impact review reports and ongoing internal monitoring and strategy development. We will share key findings across the music education sector – including with music services, teaching staff, schools, and other partners – particularly where insights can support wider access and progression initiatives.
Widening Participation links with Junior Academy and BMus	Theory of Change (Type 1 – Narrative) will clarify intended progression routes and allow alignment to be tested. Mixed methods (mostly Type 2 – Empirical Enquiry), will help us evaluate the link between these departments; participant tracking and mapping progression routes, pre/post surveys, applications and offers.	We will collaborate with other institutions – such as TASO, the OfS, Higher Education Evaluation Library (HEEL), Conservatoires UK – to share emerging findings and contribute to sector learning. However, we remain mindful of the small size and specialist nature of the Academy and the potential for student and participant identification, even with anonymised data. We are committed to transparency and collaboration while ensuring the privacy and integrity of our community is upheld.
Community First Strings Experience (CFSE)	Theory of Change (Type 1 – Narrative) will clarify intended progression routes, long term outcomes and assumptions. A mixed-methods evaluation approach will be used (Type 2 – Empirical) to assess foundational engagement and early indicators of success. This will continue to make use of partner and staff feedback, teacher case study, parent observations, progress tracking and participant/narrative case studies. An existing Impact and Process Evaluation will be reflected on.	
Variations	As a pilot programme, Variations will undergo an Implementation and Process Evaluation (Type 2 – Empirical) using session logs, team debriefs, early and mid-point feedback as well as tracking participants applications and offers.	
Junior Academy Musical Theatre	Impact Evaluation (Type 2 – Empirical) through participant monitoring of access points and engagement, pre/post surveys and staff observations.	

More detailed information on evaluation can also be provided in the Evaluation section or at Annex B.

Intervention strategy 3 – Belonging: promote a learning and teaching environment in which all students feel welcome

EORRs: 2, 3, 8, 10, 12

Activity	Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes	Cross IS
Pre-18: Representation and role modelling	Engaging teachers, mentors and workshop leaders from Global Majority communities to play key roles in the design and delivery of the Academy's Widening Participation progamme.	Clubs, workshops and mentoring sessions run by a delivery team carefully balanced in terms of ethnicity, gender and age.	Students meet a wide range of role models in the classical music, jazz and musical theatre fields.	
Participant selection	Some Widening Participation programmes (e.g. CFSE) are whole-class inclusive; others have capacity limitations. Global Majority students are prioritized in the latter case, with reference to prior participant data.	Club membership and workshop participant groups in which Global Majority students are not obviously under-represented.	Increased participation by students of mixed or multiple ethnicity, reflecting the changing makeup of London's under-18 population. (See table in Annex A.)	
Building Community	20+ Academy student mentors (undergraduate and postgraduate) with personal experience of the Widening Participation programme supporting ongoing delivery, and paid to do so. Free / discounted tickets to Academy performances.	Student mentors run audition clubs and mentor clubs, organize and assist with outreach workshops, and perform music written by Widening Participation composers. Academy events well attended by Widening Participation students and family members. Concerts, tours, post-performance socials, free tickets for Academy concerts and information sessions and printouts for friends and family. In 2023/24 we engaged with 700 Widening Participation students (Your Academy and CFSE) and their support networks. 21 performances attracted 20-300 attendees each.	Widening Participation student support networks are involved in their longer-term development	IS1

	Post-performance socials.			
Post-18: Academy BELONGING	Regular curriculum refreshment following annual undergraduate and postgraduate course monitoring. Student focus groups are an important part of this monitoring process. Staff and Students' Union representatives committing time to the Academy's Belonging Committee (termly). Academy funds supporting partnership with Blueprint for All – an inclusive social change consultancy.	Elective modules in Diverse Voices and Diverse Programming. Required repertoire lists reviewed and updated to diversify content. Artist Development strands of Academy curriculum encouraging and supporting students to explore issues of identity and diversity. Student-run festivals such as "Seen and Heard". Staff/student oversight of Belonging Strategy. Content for Academy's twice-yearly Belonging update generated collectively. (Updates published via the Academy website so accessible to prospective students.) 3-year longitudinal evaluation of Academy DEI policies, processes and culture, assessing student and staff perceptions of DEI progress across the Academy.	Academy public performance projects representing a greater diversity of creative voices in classical music, jazz and musical theatre. Sense of shared ownership of Belonging Strategy and joint responsibility for its implementation. Staff accountable to students via their representatives on the Committee. Through clear communication, enhanced understanding of DEI issues and their impact on student experience.	IS1
Sony Scholarships	Financial support from Sony Music's UK Social Justice Fund, for Sony Scholarships at the Academy.	2 scholarships sustained over 4 years, worth £40,000 each (£10,000 per annum per student).	Awareness, in- and outside the Academy, of synergies between the Academy's mission and that of Sony Music's Global Social Justice Fund.	IS4

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £52,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale:

The perception that a career in music is precarious, financially unstable, and socially exclusive continues to shape who applies to conservatoires — disproportionately deterring students from underrepresented groups, particularly those from state schools, LPNs and ethnic minority groups (TASO, 2023).

National evidence shows that access to visible career pathways and relatable role models increases student confidence in choosing performing arts at HE level (Austin & Hatt, 2005; PEC, 2020). Our work demonstrates that providing opportunities for students' support networks to see and celebrate their progress builds trust and advocacy, while sustained investment in musical development – supported by inclusive communications and financial aid – increases confidence, aspiration, and a sense of belonging. This approach is underpinned by the Academy's Belonging Scheme and Action Plan, which places equity and inclusion at the centre of our community and culture.

Evaluation

Activity	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
	Include type of evidence you intend to generate e.g. empirical (Type 2).	When evaluation findings will be shared and the format that they will take.
Representation and role modelling	Type 1 interview Widening Participation students about the effect of representation on their motivation and confidence.	Annual reporting
Participant selection	Type 1 student interviews around community. Type 2 continue to gather data on participant ethnicity.	Annual Belonging reports, monitoring of the Access and Participation Plan
Building Community	Findings from this intervention strategy will inform the Academy's annual APP impact review report and ongoing internal monitoring and strategy development.	Where appropriate, we will collaborate with other institutions – such as TASO, the OfS, Higher Education Evaluation Library (HEEL), Conservatoires UK - to share emerging findings and contribute to sector learning. However, we remain mindful of the small size and specialist nature of the Academy and the potential for student and participant identification, even with anonymised data. We are committed to transparency

		and collaboration while ensuring the privacy and integrity of our community is upheld. Annual internal reporting, and external reports to funders. Where and when appropriate, evaluations will be shared across the sector (e.g. at conferences, journals, through Conservatoires UK, HEEL)
Academy BELONGING	Review progress in Belonging Committee and other student-staff fora. Student and staff surveys include questions on experience of Belonging at the Academy.	Annual Equality Report published on the website. More narrative Belinging updates (Dean of Students) published on on the Academy website Belonging page.
Sony Scholarships	Type 2: Monitor attainment of scholars and check effects on recruitment of Black British/Caribbean/African heritage students.	Equality report on student numbers published annually on the Academy 'swebsite.

More detailed information on evaluation can also be provided in the Evaluation section or at Annex B.

Intervention strategy 4 – financial and other targeted support for low-income students

EORRs: 8, 10, 11, 12

Activity	Inputs	Output	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy

Needs-based bursary provision	Financial resources; Philanthropy team time (securing funds, reporting to donors); academic and Registry staff time (advising applicants, assessing applications).	c.35 UK students p.a. on automatically- awarded low-income bursaries (family income less than £35,000) (See Annex A for detail) Bursary provision on application for UK students with family incomes £35,000-c.£60,000.	Ability to commence and continue studying at the Academy	
Hardship funding	Financial resources (c.£30,000 p.a.); Philanthropy team time; hardship funding manager time; Dean of Students' time.	Ad hoc/crisis awards made throughout year. Rapid, confidential, light-touch assessment. Average award £500.	Ability to continue studying at the Academy	
Counselling service	20% of:1 F/T Head of Psychological Support Services; 3 FTE equivalent Counsellors; 2 trainee counsellors.	Personal, confidential support for students. Guidance around Academy processes for accessing financial support.	Ability to continue studying at the Academy.	IS5
Pastoral Support	20% of 4 x P/T Heads of Year, F/T Senior Case Manager, senior management oversight, Dean of Students (the Academy's Designated Safeguarding Lead).	Pastoral support on a 1:1 basis available to all students.	Student awareness of Academy interest in their personal circumstances, and full engagement with support services.	IS3

Students' Union	20% of F/T President of Student Union (paid, full-time role funded by the Academy); P/T officers paid modest honoraria. Total Academy support for Students' Union activities £47,000 p.a.	Student representation on Belonging, Student-Staff Liaison, Access & Participation, Safeguarding & Support committees General student advocacy, information and support services provided by Students' Union Occasional student-facing publications researched and written by SU officers (example: *Mental Health and Finance Survey* 2024).	Greater understanding across the Academy of student perspectives, concerns and stresses whilst studying.	IS3, 5
Instrument loans	20% of (mainly) stringed instruments in the Academy's collection; 4 P/T luthiers to maintain instruments; in-house workshop facilities.	Over 200 instruments on loan each year.	Students developing their playing and accessing public performance opportunities using higher-quality instruments than they are likely to own.	

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £832,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale:

The evidence base for this intervention draws on internal data, dialogue with our students and wider research on financial disadvantage in Higher Education and in the performing arts sector. Increasing numbers of have caused us to expand our Bursary Committee capacity to accommodate two round of applications, and we engaged a member of staff to advise on budgeting, external sources of funding, and Academy financial assistance processes. We have seen numbers increase so that over a quarter of our students overall are in need of financial assistance. We triage and target our funding resources to students on the lowest incomes, and these students are prioritises in recommendation for a higher value instrument loan in order that their attainment is not determined by financial circumstance. Following the HEPI report (2024) "A Minimum Income Standard for Students" Our Students' Union organised a survey on the impact of the cost of living crisis on Academy students' – especially those from lower income families – lives. 29% of all students receive no financial support from family sources. 19% of students said financial strain and undertaking more paid work impacted their mental health "severely" and 31% reported it had impacted their mental health "moderately" See Annex B for wider research.

Activity	Method(s) of evaluation Include type of evidence you intend to generate e.g. empirical (Type 2).	Summary of publication plan When evaluation findings will be shared and the format that they will take.
Needs-based bursary provision	Track students in receipt of bursaries across all stages of the student life cycle.	Data on continuation, completion and progression published in annual reporting and our Access and Participation Plan.
Hardship funding	Monitor continuation, completion and progression both through student lifecycle data and through pastoral support and in-person wellbeing checks.	Annual reporting to internal and external funders (e.g. the Henry Wood Accommodation Trust, the Academy Response Fund).
Counselling service	Students complete post-counselling feedback forms. Annual Student Survey has a section on mental health support.	Anonymised data on types of issue presented (including financial anxiety) are reported termly to Safeguarding and Support Committee for review, along with qualitative feedback. Internal sharing.
Pastoral Support	Annual monitoring reports and student surveys have sections on students' experience of support. Student-Staff liaison and Belonging Committees gather feedback from student representatives.	Results of annual monitoring and student surveys shared with students, senior leadership, academic and programme management teams and Departmental Heads for planning purposes.
Students' Union	Student feedback in annual surveys, Committees and regular dialogue	Mental Health and Financial Hardship surveys shared internally with students, staff and Governing Body
Instrument loans	Qualitative: feedback to luthier team from students. One to one teachers make recommendations for future loans based on a demonstrable difference in playing level, confidence or success as measured in performances, auditions or group activity.	We do not publish instrument values for insurance reasons, but the number of students playing on Academy instruments is highlighted in programme material for performances.

Evaluation

More detailed information on evaluation can also be provided in the Evaluation section or at Annex B.

Intervention strategy 5 – targeted support for students with declared disabilities or learning differences

EORRs: 8, 11, 12

Activity	Inputs	Output	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy
Disability Advisor	0.5 FTE post	Personal Learning Plans (created with 1:1 support from the Advisor); properly completed applications for Disabled Students' Allowance; referrals to educational psychologist for further, Academy-funded assessment.	Expert diagnoses of students' support needs; funding secured; barriers to academic progression lowered.	IS3
Further invest in Academy Disabilty and Study Support programmes	Additional Learning Support tutor, 0.5 FTE; plus team of early-career study support mentors (8, mainly PhD students)	Personalised study support sessions; Personal Learning Plans created (as above).	Improved academic performance and wellbeing.	IS3

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy £81,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale

Internal Academy and UCAS data on the numbers of new students entering the Academy with a declared disability or learning difference enable us to plan resource and support. We invite students to declare their challenges and learning needs, and assist towards a diagnosis if one is desired and not already in place. 1:1 meetings and confidential reports from our funded Educational Psychologist are monitored by the Disability Advisor and Learning Support tutor and used to advise and train academic staff. Evidence from across the sector is included in Annex B: we have put this as a moderate risk as we aim to avoid a widening attainment gap.

Activity	Method(s) of evaluation Include type of evidence you intend to generate e.g. empirical (Type 2).	Summary of publication plan

		When evaluation findings will be shared and the format that they will take.
Disability Advisor, Personal Learning Plans, DSA applications	Monitor the numbers of successful DSA applications. Measure the continuation, attainment and progression of students with disabilities and learning differences	These data will be published in our statutory EDI report and Access and Participation Plans.
Further invest in Academy Disabilty and Study Support programmes	Student feedback and early career tutor reflections to be gathered each year for annual reporting internally. Numbers of students attending sessions to be monitored along with their academic outcomes.	Internal sharing of data to evaluate effectiveness of tutor resource.

Whole provider approach

Our institutional Strategic Plan focuses on three priorities: Education, People and Resources. We are committed to strengthening our community through ensuring a more diverse range of students and staff, and in resourcing our efforts to do so via Philanthropy and allocation of financial support as well as staff expertise. We aim to develop the skills students need to thrive in a fast-changing employment landscape. Many will become freelancers. Skills of decision-making, balancing demanding work priorities and maintaining confidence and resilience are essential to our educational mission.

Widening access and equity of opportunity are important values throughout the institution, from the youngest ages (4 upwards) through to PhD and early career Fellowships. Student representation on committees such as Student-Staff Liaison Committee, Access and Participation Committee, Belonging, E-learning and Museum and Library keeps this area of work under constant review. Regular student feedback forms part of our annual monitoring of the BMus, BMus Jazz, and Postgraduate pathways. These mechanisms have enabled us to review our teaching materials and methods, in response to a strong motivation from students and staff to tailor study towards individual career pathways that have relevance in the contemporary world. For example, students are encouraged and enabled to research a diverse curriculum through assessed modules (Diverse Voices, Diverse Programming) and through community leadership skills development in Open Academy. Our teaching qualification, the Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music, has broadened its scope to reflect more contemporary teaching situations in groups, schools, and via Music Education Hubs, rather than remaining within the private studio. We regularly invite teachers from Hub partners to lead sessions with students. Our Artist

Devlopment programme encourages students to balance finding their own artistic voice with the necessity of earning a living, and of developing a varied portfolio of professional activity.

Widening Participation and Your Academy activity is supported by a committed and skilled group of students who work (in a paid capacity) alongside workshop leaders and Academy staff to teach, mentor and encourage young people in a range of contexts from clubs and collectives to showcases and summer schools, museum tours of our historic building and its facilities. We have found that it is often the case that the small number of students who have come via this route, or who have received pre- or post-offer mentoring and coaching, are the most powerful advocates and leaders in this area. We also enable weekly booked schools' visits to our Instrument Galleries where expert staff curators collaborate with students in areas of relevance to the GCSE curriculum. These sessions garner positive feedback from class teachers who use us as a resource to support their pupils' learning.

Our Students' Union has a strong focus on Belonging (formerly Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging) and undertakes surveys such as the impact of financial insecurity on mental health (2024): this has influenced our mental health staffing structure and our approach to bursary and hardship funding. Each year the Belonging representative chooses a theme with colleagues, supported by the resources of our Concerts Department, for our annual Seen and Heard Festival. Composers and performers from diverse cultural heritages, or from disabled communities, are featured in a range of public events. Sub-groups such as the African Caribbean Society and the disability focus group are in constant dialogue with staff, and are able to pursue their own initiatives either with staff support or independently. Helping students develop the skills needed to plan and deliver events is an essential part of our educational strategy.

Our Communications team, represented on the Widening Participation Committee, works to highlight stories of students whose journey to the Academy was via Widening Participation. This campaign seeks to raise wider community awareness of the opportunities available.

The Dean of Students works with colleagues in Registry, Student Support and Finance as well as our Heads of Undergraduate and Postgraduate programmes, triaging and assessing over 300 bursary applications across the board, during two rounds of assessment. Information is signposted to current and prospective students here: https://www.ram.ac.uk/study/fees-and-funding/scholarships-and-bursaries. Our means testing process uses information that UK students assemble for Student Finance England, to ensure that providing the information does not impose a barrier to accessing financial support. We also assess the availability of earning opportunities for different groups of students, taking contact hours carefully into account. Our under-18 bursary assessments are based on the methodology of the Music and Dance Scheme (currently 18 students on full low-income bursaries). Our hardship funding is lighter touch, and designed to assist with inequities in accommodation, for example for students who are in the volatile private rental sector, or are faced with sudden changes in circumstances through health, family or other factors and who need a smaller

amount of financial help for a time-limited period. This triage system follows recommendations made by The Bridge Group who undertook research, commissioned by the Academy, into the effectiveness and transparency of financial support processes (Bridge Group, 2019).

As a small provider, we are able to connect pastoral, financial and learning/mental health support very quickly when needed, while maintaining confidentiality and compliance with Data Protection legislation. The Dean of Students chairs the Safeguarding and Support Committee, where issues such as the intersection of financial insecurity and mental health are acknowledged, and staff across these areas are connected in order to plan effective interventions.

We publish an Annual Report as required by the 2010 Equality Act and this underpins our Belonging strategy, overseen by the Director of Human Resources, the Registrar and the Dean of Students, and drawing on the expertise of our Belonging Committee. In 2020 we began a partnership with Blueprint for All, an inclusive consultancy who evaluated our activity and staff and student perceptions of equality in action. Their values are aligned with ours and they have an expertise in the small specialist education sector: "we work with young people, communities and organisations to create an inclusive society in which everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity or background, is provided with tangible opportunities to thrive" (https://www.blueprintforall.org/about-us/our-annual-reports/). More information about this process of organisational change can be found on the Belonging page on our website, along with more informal updates from the Dean of Students. https://www.ram.ac.uk/student-life/belonging.

Student consultation

Students are represented on the Academy's Access and Participation Committee which meets three times a year and monitors data concerning access, progression and career outcomes of our target groups of UK students where the ORR and internal data suggest risk indicators:

- Students on low income or from low-participation neighbourhoods
- Students from the Global Majority
- Students experiencing a disability or learning difference, including long term mental health conditions
- The Widening Participation Department, Open Academy and Junior Academy all submit written reports on their access and support activity.

Our Belonging Committee, Museum and Library Committee, Safeguarding and Support and Student-Staff Liaison committees all consider Access and Participation matters. All report regularly. All include student representatives: some from the Students' Union (President, Belonging Representative) and others through of personal or departmental interest.

In addition, a specific consultation on the draft of this Plan was held with seven students who are part of Widening Participation Student Ambassador Pool. The Plan was discussed in the context of Risks to Equality of Opportunity, a draft of the Intervention Strategies and our means of

evaluation. The students were paid for their time and came from range of backgrounds and departments: first year undergraduate to post graduate both UK and International, and from a variety of school types. A number had benefited from prior Your Academy activities detailed in this Plan.

Students were asked to reflect on their own experiences of access and their observations of working with pre-18 students. This was framed within the context of:

- increasing confidence and familiarity with the Academy, processes of application and the longer term positive outcomes to be reached through music in HE
- progression routes and gaining access to sustained intensive support
- Belonging and inclusivity within the Academy community
- financial concerns regarding the studying of music at a conservatoire.

The students were positive about the range and depth of activities offered to Widening Participation students within the intervention strategies, combining information, advice and guidance, pastoral support and an inclusive approach with teaching led by Junior Academy tutors and experienced freelancers working professionally within the conservatoire sector. They felt that ensuring the support network of future applicants were also informed, included and given the opportunity to celebrate their children, relatives or friends was a key part of their journey to applying to conservatoire. They also recognised the long-term nature of access work in music training, and the determination and commitment that is required to progress. Seeing examples of "what is next" after university confirmed their decision to take this path and inspired them to continue. Three of our student consultees attended the Chineke! Orchestra's "Tributes and Triumphs" concert at the South Bank Centre, with Widening Participation team members and a number of Your Academy participants.

Students are invited to get involved in Access and Participation Plan implementation through mentoring and education delivery, for which they are paid as colleagues. They gain experience in leading and assisting workshops. Students regularly visit primary and secondary schools, for example as part of Community First String Experience, Audition Club and through Open Academy activity (the latter as a credit-bearing part of their degree). Student performers showcase Widening Participation composition work in public performances at the end of our Winter and Spring showcases, Takeover Day and summer schools.

Further consultation with student stakeholders took place on 15 May 2025, during a meeting of the Access and Participation Committee on which they serve.

Evaluation of the plan

1. Strategic Foundations and Institutional Commitment

We have engaged with the Office for Students' (OfS) self-evaluation framework to assess the strengths and limitations of our current Access and Participation activity. The outcomes highlighted areas of strength – such as learning from evaluation (rated "advanced") – and areas for development, including programme and evaluation design (rated "emerging"). These findings have informed our strategic priorities and our evolving evaluation approach.

To support this, we are developing a cross-institutional Evaluation Toolkit to assist staff in designing, implementing, and reflecting on evaluation consistently and effectively. This toolkit will serve as both a practical resource and a framework for embedding evaluation as a core institutional practice, enhancing the quality and comparability of evidence across programmes.

We are also redefining what success looks like. Rather than focusing solely on entry into the Academy, we now measure success by how well we support students to make autonomous, informed decisions – whether that leads them here, to another conservatoire, or along a different creative or academic path. This student-centred perspective reflects our institutional values and is central to how we evaluate our impact.

We predominantly use Type 1 (narrative) and Type 2 (empirical enquiry) evaluation methods – including surveys, interviews, Theory of Change models, and attendance, engagement, and progression tracking – to inform both internal reflection and philanthropic reporting. As part of our commitment to reflective practice, we are exploring ways to incorporate Type 3 (longitudinal and causal) evaluation where meaningful and proportionate, while acknowledging the limitations posed by our small sample sizes.

2. Evaluation Culture and Capacity

Our team continues to build evaluation capacity through professional development and sector engagement. We are active members of the TASO Community of Practice, and staff have undertaken Theory of Change and evaluation training through NERUPI. At the time of writing (Summer 2025), colleagues are also scheduled to attend both the TASO and UK Evaluation Society conferences. Our Widening Participation team includes a dedicated Evidence, Evaluation and Project Coordinator, and evaluation is a standing item on the agendas of relevant governance and operational meetings, reinforcing its institutional importance.

To ensure that insights from evaluation are embedded across the institution and disseminated externally we produce internal reports, run reflective staff sessions, hold student partner panel sessions, and contribute to sector forums and publications. In 2023-4 our Widening Participation and Open Academy teams worked with the SHM Foundation (SHM Consultancy's philanthropic arm) on a project exploring the full range of personal growth

outcomes achievable through sustained engagement with music before the age of 18. To better understand engagement and progression challenges faced by under-represented young people we commissioned a report from Andrea Spain and Helen Hendry (Spain & Hendry, 2020), and are acting on its recommendations.

3. Methods and Approach

We have adopted a Theory of Change model (see Annex B) to ensure that our activities are purpose-driven, evidence-informed, and measurable, with clear pathways from inputs to outcomes. Articulating our assumptions and aims provides a strong foundation for robust evaluation and continuous improvement.

Our small institutional scale allows for deep, meaningful engagement with students and partners, though it also necessitates a proportionate and creative approach. While quantitative datasets may be limited, we generate rich qualitative insights through methods such as reflective journals, case studies, interviews, and creative response tools like audio diaries and visual storytelling.

We are mindful of evaluation fatigue, particularly in a high-contact environment. To mitigate this, we use light-touch but robust methods that are timely, meaningful, and often co-designed with participants. Feedback is streamlined across projects and fed directly into programme planning and development cycles.

4. Responsiveness and Reflective Practice

A key strength of our institution is our responsiveness. Our small scale and strong internal relationships allow us to act swiftly on student, staff, and partner feedback. This agility is central to our evaluation practice and enables a cycle of continuous improvement, where evaluation is not separate from delivery but fully integrated into our way of working.

5. Summary: OfS Self-Assessment Tool 2024/25

Area	Current Score	Commitment
Strategic Context	17 - Good	Ongoing training and embedding of evaluation culture among delivery teams. Schedule periodic reviews of practices and evidence.

Programme Design	13 - Emerging	Apply Theory of Change frameworks to most Widening Participation programmes.
Evaluation Design	6 - Emerging	Develop an Evaluation Toolkit and standardised evaluation plan templates.
Evaluation Implementation	14 - Good	Work with colleagues to evaluate 2026-27 to 2029-30 Access and Participation Plan outcomes. Develop data sharing protocols with Junior Academy. Review ethics, data protection and risk assessment procedures. Conduct Impementation and Process Evaluation for new Widening Participation activities.
Learning from Evaluation	18 - Advanced	Share internal briefings; increase externally facing publications and contributions.

Monitoring and reporting

Monitoring and reporting are embedded into our governance structures through the Access and Participation Plan Committee, one of our most active and wide-reaching committees, which meets termly. These meetings serve as a formal space to review progress against the Access and Participation Plan, reflect on activity, and provide mutual feedback, supporting a culture of transparency, collaboration, and continuous learning. Our Evaluation, Evidence and Project Coordinator leads on the monitoring and internal reporting of Widening Participation activity, ensuring alignment with Access and Participation Plan priorities and enabling wider dissemination where appropriate. We produce annual and mid-term reports on our Widening Participation work, structured around the Access and Participation Plan, and from 2025 will conduct an annual review of the Access and Participation Plan to assess our adherence to its commitments and understand any deviations from planned activity.

Provision of information to students

Fees

Our fees for BMus 2025-6 are £9535.00 p/a. This has been approved by OfS. (See Fee information for new entrants in 2025-26)

Income bursaries: all students from households with annual incomes of less than £35,001 automatically receive an income bursary of £3,000. This is renewable for all four years of undergraduate study if the household income remains the same.

Financial assistance towards maintenance is assessed on the basis of household income up to £60,000 as determined by information disclosed to Student Finance England. Application forms for these bursaries can be found on our website (https://www.ram.ac.uk/study/fees-and-funding/financial-assistance). These bursaries are also renewable each year provided income eligibility remains the same.

We address all funding queries about bursaries, Academy and other funding opportunities, within three business days. Information on our website about all forms of scholarship and bursary support can be found here: https://www.ram.ac.uk/study/fees-and-funding/scholarships-and-bursaries

Audition fee waivers

Applicants who currently receive free school meals or have been in receipt of them in the last six years can apply for a waiver of the UCAS fee when they email admissions@ram.ac.uk.

Academy application fee waivers are offered when candidates (or their parent or legal guardian if the candidate is under 28) are in receipt of the following UK government benefits: 16-19 Bursary Fund, Education Maintenance Allowance, Disabled Students' Allowance, Universal Credit, Income Support, Job Seeker's Allowance.

Audition travel costs

The Academy will support audition travel costs for students receiving the UCAS or the Academy application fee waiver.

On-course funding assistance

Students have access to financial and funding advice from our Student Funding Manager, from Heads of Year, the Students' Union and the Counselling team, who signpost students to Hardship Funding where this intersects with mental health challenge.

Royal Academy of Music

Access and participation plan 2026-27 to 2029-30

Annex A: Further information and analysis relating to the identification and prioritisation of key risks to equality of opportunity

Identification of risks

The five risks to equality of opportunity identified in our Access and Participation Plan mainly emerge from analysis of data gathered by the Academy and reported according to the HESA Data Futures schedule. Annex B reviews research persuading us that interventions proposed to mitigate these risks are appropriate. The same research reveals that, while some risks are acknowledged across much of the UK's higher education sector, some are specific to the specialist conservatoire sector to which the Royal Academy of Music belongs.

Data relating to applicants and to students admitted to the Academy has been retrieved from our student record system. Data are presented as percentages rounded to the nearest whole number or where necessary to one decimal place. We follow the Standard Rounding Methodology employed by HESA (https://www.hesa.ac.uk/about/regulation/data-protection/rounding-and-suppression-anonymise-statistics). To supplement and contextualize our own we have used data from the following sources:

- Office for Students access and participation data dashboard data (where data is not suppressed): https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/
- HESA Student record, 2017-18 to 2023-24: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/
- HESA Graduate Outcomes record, 2017-18 to 2022-23 https://www.hesa.ac.uk/
- UCAS Provider EXACT Record Supplies (PERS): https://www.ucas.com/providers/our-products-and-services

To ensure compliance with data protection regulations, some of tables following present data aggregated across a number of years.

<u>1.Access Data:</u>

1.1 Students from state schools: 5-year trends (PTA_2)

Entry year	% of applicants	% of offers	% of entrants
2020-21	63%	46%	43%
2021-22	57%	35%	35%
2022-23	61%	48%	50%
2023-24	60%	47%	47%
2024-25	53%	40%	41%

State school applicants and entrants as a percentage of all applicants, offers made and new entrants. Source: RAM internal data.

1.2 Global Majority students: 5-year trends

We place students from South and East Asian, Black, mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds in the Global Majority category.

Entry year	% of applicants	% of offers	% of entrants
2020-21	18%	18%	15%
2021-22	18%	18%	20%
2022-23	21%	21%	21%
2023-24	20%	21%	18%
2024-25	28%	32%	26%

Global Majority students as a percentage of all applicants for UK first degree places. Source: RAM internal data.

Our 2022-23 to 2026-27 Access and Participation Plan set a 17.5% target for Global Majority first degree entrants in 2024-25. This was significantly exceeded.

Within the Global Majority category, historically the Academy attracts a low number of applicants who identify as Black. We will focus on this group in particular. (PTA_3)

Entry year	% of applicants	% of offers	% of entrants
2020-21	0.6 %	0.8%	1.6%
2021-22	3.1%	2.7%	2.3%
2022-23	3.0%	3.0%	2.0%
2023-24	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%
2024-25	3.0%	2.0%	2.0%

Black-identifying students as a percentage of all applicants, offers made and new entrants. Source: RAM internal data.

1.3 Students from low-income households (PTA_4)

Income bursaries are automatically awarded to students at the Academy with annual household incomes under £35,001. Numbers increased markedly in 2020-21, when covid lockdown put some families' finances under heavy strain, and have stayed high owing to the war in Ukraine (2022). The Academy admitted a number of Ukrainian students who have UK fee status and very little income. These figures also EU students eligible for UK fees, the number which is reducing each year. For this reason in PTA_4 we are using 2024-25 as our 'normal' baseline year.

Academic year	% of UK UG students
2020-21	18.4%
2021-22	15.4%
2022-23	16.2%
2023-24	18.8%
2024-25	15.0%

UK first degree students receiving an income bursary (household income of less than £35,001). Source: RAM internal data.

1.4 Students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods: 5-year data tracking the Participation Gap

This table presents "Participation Gap" data. By Participation Gap we mean the difference in size between groups of students placed in POLAR4 quintiles 4+5 (combined), and groups placed in POLAR4 quintiles 1+2 (combined) – expressing size in percentage terms, with the gap as a percentage point difference:

Entry year	Gap at application stage	At offer stage	At accepted places stage
2020-21	57 % points	62 % points	49 % points
2021-22	64 % points	66 % points	75 % points
2022-23	54 % points	57 % points	52 % points
2023-24	60 % points	61 % points	57 % points
2024-25	59 % points	64 % points	68 % points

Participation gap - POLAR4 Quintiles (4+5) minus POLAR4 Quintiles (1+2) UK only, under 21, first degree applicants. Source: RAM internal data, excluding unassigned/unknown.

Our Access and Participation Plan for 2022-23 to 2026/27 set a 4 percentage point target decrease in the Participation Gap each year. The target was not met. We consider this a significant and challenging risk. We are addressing it through IS4, with targets detailed at PTA_4.

1.5 Self-declared disability, health condition or learning difference: headline figures

Entry year	% of applicants	% of offers	% of entrants
2020-21	13%	12%	18%
2021-22	19%	19%	23%
2022-23	20%	18%	26%
2023-24	26%	21%	20%
2024-25	29%	29%	32%

Applicants with a disability, health condition or learning difference as a percentage of all applicants, offers made, and new entrants. Source: RAM internal data.

1.6 Declared disability, health condition or learning difference: intersectional analysis

Students with declared disabilities, health conditions or learning differences are not at present under-represented either in the Academy's applicant pool or in our undergraduate population. We are monitoring data in case risks to equality of access increase when disabilities, health conditions and learning differences combine, and numbers of students in these intersecting groups also increase. The following tables will support future intersectional analysis.

1.6.1 Low household income students also declaring a disability, health condition or learning difference

Table showing the percentage of UK first degree entrants in receipt of an income bursary also declaring a disability, health condition or learning difference (averaging over eight academic years, 2017-18 to 2024-25):

	Income Bursary	No Income Bursary
With a disability, health condition or learning difference	24.3%	16.3%
No known disability, health condition or learning difference	75.7%	83.7%

1.6.2 Global Majority heritage students also declaring a disability, health condition or learning difference

Table showing the percentage of UK first degree entrants from a Global Majority background, also declaring a disability, health condition or learning difference (averaging over eight academic years, 2017-18 to 2024-25):

	White	Identify as Global Majority
With a disability, health condition or learning difference	18.8%	20%
No known disability, health condition or learning difference	81.2%	80%

2. Continuation and Completion

The following tables present Continuation and Completion data for students

- from Low Participation Neighbourhoods and/or low income households
- from Global Majority backgrounds
- from state schools (vs private schools, including specialist music schools)

Successful continuation is defined as still being at the Academy 1 year and 14 days after starting in Year 1. Undergraduates who complete their studies successfully leave the Academy with a degree.

Entrants 2020-21 to 2023-24: Continuation
(four-year averages)

Low Participation Neighbourhoods

			Income Bursary	
POLAR4 Quintile 1 and 2	97%		Income bursary	98%
POLAR4 Quintiles 3 to 5 [for comparison]	95%		No income bursary	95%

Ethnic diversity

			School type	
Global Majority	93%		State school	96%
White	97%		Other	95%

Entrants 2017-18 to 2020-21: Completion

(four-year averages)

Low Participation Neighbourhoods

			Income Bursary	
POLAR4 Quintile 1 + 2	91%		Income bursary	88%
POLAR Quintiles 3 to 5	85%		No income bursary	85%

Ethnic diversity

			School type	
			State school	91%
Ethnically diverse	91%			
White	86%		Other	83%

3. Attainment and Progression Data

The following tables show data for student attainment (of a first class or 2:1 degree), and student progression (into graduate-level employment or on to further study).

Entrants 2017-18 to 2020-21: first class or 2:1 degree attainment

Low Participation Neighbourhoods

			Income Bursary	
POLAR4 Quintile 1 + 2	90%		Income bursary	90%
POLAR4 Quintiles 3 to 5	94%		No income bursary	96%

Ethnic diversity

			School type	
Ethnically diverse	97%		State school	94%
White	94%		Other	95%

Disabilities, health conditions and learning differences

	Entrants 2017-18 to 2020-21
Have a disability, health condition or learning difference	91%
No impairment, health condition or leanring difference	96%

Academy students with declared disabilities, health conditions or learning differences are, compared to others in their year-group, marginally less likely to achieve first class or 2:1 degrees. Numbers in this cohort continue to expand. We are monitoring closely to see whether or not the attainment gap widens. Risk 5 acknowledges the possibility; IS5 proposes further investment in Academy Disability and Study Support programmes if found to be necessary; PTS_1 sets corresponding targets.

Entrants 2014-15 to 2019-20: successful progression

Low Participation Neighbourhoods			**Income Bursary**			**Ethnic Diversity**	
POLAR4 Quintile 1 + 2	90%		Income bursary	90%		Ethnically diverse	80%
POLAR Quintiles 3 to 5	94%		No income bursary	96%		White	93%

Progression data obtained from Graduate Outcomes surveys covering the period 2014-15 to 2019-20 show no significant difference between POLAR4 Quintile groupings 1+2 and 3 to 5, and little difference between students who have income bursaries as compared with students who do not. Global Majority students are less likely to progress to paid employment or further study than their white counterparts. This difference may reflect progression challenges within the sector. For perspective: the national picture for 2020-21 showed 83% of graduates in full time, part time or volunteer work. Only 50% of Academy students complete the survey in a typical year.

Royal Academy of Music

Access and participation plan 2026-27 to 2029-30

Annex B: Further information that sets out the rationale, assumptions and evidence base for each intervention strategy that is included in the access and participation plan.

A core theory of change informs each intervention strategy. It suggests intermediate outcomes that should be observable as change unfolds. Work to develop it has been guided by the Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO) mapping outcomes and activities tool (MOAT), and the Network Evaluation and Researching University Participation Interventions (NERUPI) framework to identify relevant outcomes. Over the lifetime of the Plan our core theory will be refined in light of experience, as will risk-specific sub-theories likely to evolve.

Goals

- To make high-level education in musical performance more accessible to students from a wider, more diverse range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds.
- To ensure that UK students wishing to progress to higher education can compete for places at the Royal Academy of Music on a fair and equal basis.
- To ensure that students once admitted to the Academy have equal opportunities to excel, to continue from year to year, to complete their degrees and to progress to worthwhile professional employment.

Context and Problem Statement

1. **Current State**:

   a. Under-representation of students from Global Majority and disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.
   b. Barriers include lack of access to consistent early musical training, financial challenges, and family support (time and resources).
   c. Lack of knowledge about music industry career paths.

2. **Root Causes**:

   a. Economic barriers: high cost of music lessons when delivered by specialists, the cost of instruments, and application/audition fees.
   b. Cultural barriers: lack of awareness that careers in (mainly) classical music are open to people from diverse backgrounds.
   c. Structural barriers: decrease in funding and music provision in state schools; music an endangered subject in the state education sector.
   d. Personal/social barriers: confidence, familiarity, support network.

Inputs

1. **Resources**:

   a. Funding for scholarships, outreach programmes and staff training, mentoring, technical skill sharing, cultural knowledge and information sharing.
   b. Partnerships with schools, community organisations, and industry stakeholders.
   c. Expertise in inclusive pedagogy and curriculum design.

2. **Stakeholders**:

   a. The Academy – BMus programme delivery team, Widening Participation team, Junior Academy.
   b. Community groups and schools in London areas, music hubs.
   c. Students and alumni from diverse backgrounds.

Activities

1. **Outreach and Early Engagement:**

   a. Offer free or subsidised workshops, masterclasses, and music lessons in schools with high ethnic and economic diversity.
   b. Partner with music hubs/schools.
   c. Provide information about accessible pathways, building greater familiarity with conservatoires.

2. **Removing Financial Barriers**:

   a. Needs-based bursaries at all levels.
   b. Needs-based remission of audition fees.

3. **Monitoring and Feedback**:

   a. Maintain robust data collection systems to track applications, retention, and progression by ethnicity and economic background.
   b. Engage students and community stakeholders in continuous improvement.

Outputs

1. More student engagement with Widening Participation activity.
2. Higher awareness – open days for Junior Academy

3. More applications for places at Junior Academy and on Academy BMus programmes, submitted by students from Global Majority and disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.
4. More financial support offered to eligible students.

Outcomes

1. **Short-Term**:

    a. Greater awareness of conservatoire opportunities among under-represented communities.
    b. Improved perception of the Academy as a welcoming and inclusive space.

2. **Medium-Term**:

    a. Increased enrolment and retention of students from Global Majority and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
    b. More culturally responsive teaching and learning practices.

3. **Long-Term**:

    a. A more ethnically and economically diverse alumni network refreshing the music industry's workforce.
    b. Systemic change in conservatoires, so that principles of equality and inclusion are fully embedded in all aspects of their operation.

Assumptions

1. Communities will engage if outreach is authentic and acknowledges cultural/financial barriers.
2. Partnerships with schools and music hubs/organisations can create sustainable pathways.
3. Students admitted to the Academy (whether to Junior Academy, senior Academy or both) will have an excellent educational experience, helping them develop skills useful to them later in life.

Indicators of Success

1. Proportionately balanced admission of students from a range of backgrounds, so that Global Majority and economically disadvantaged students are fairly represented across the Academy.
2. Continuation, attainment and progression rates comparable for Academy students in all subcategories.
3. Positive employment outcomes for alumni from diverse backgrounds.
4. Increased concentration and focus – so improved general educational attainment – demonstrated by children and young people engaging with Academy Widening Participation activities.
5. Belonging/Community – the Academy's reputation for inclusive teaching and equal opportunities admission spreading nationally and internationally.

Evidence from research commissioned by ourselves and more widely shows that Music performance (including composition) is a discipline which requires sustained investment and opportunity rather than short-term interventions. For example, the Academy commissioned arts consultants Andrea Spain and Helen Hendry to explore the success or otherwise of interventions across ten youth music activities: "Engagement and Progression in Instrumental and Vocal Learning by Under-Represented Young People", January 2020. See further published research included in the reference list below.

We start from the assumption that all children have the capacity to develop musical skills. Identifying children with the motivation and support to sustain the practice hours and have access to skilled teaching is more of a challenge. Success depends on local infrastructure, family/carer support and the availability of opportunities during school hours.

Intervention strategy 1 – raise awareness and build trust

Plan and deliver a full programme of Widening Participation activities designed to bring young people and their families into the Academy building and introduce them to Academy teachers and students (on or offsite), so spreading awareness of the Academy's existence and building trust with a growing number of potential applicants.

As a specialist institution, the Academy has highly specific and often unfamiliar entry routes, audition procedures, and requirements. Many students from under-represented backgrounds know little about these routes or what conservatoire education entails – including the types of career to which it can lead. This intervention addresses a risk to equality of opportunity by ensuring those who have least access to high-quality, accurate information are supported to make informed decisions.

We know this lack of awareness exists both from qualitative evidence gathered through Academy Widening Participation activities and from external research. For example, Arts Emergency (2022) reported that young people from low-income or Global Majority backgrounds are less likely to know about creative higher education pathways, and feel unsupported in navigating them. These students may also have limited cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), fewer opportunities to attend live performances (Youth Music, 2021), and less exposure to peers or mentors who have taken similar routes (Hallam, 2010). This can foster a sense of exclusion or "not belonging" within the conservatoire sector (Thomas & Quinn, 2007; PEC, 2021).

Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) refers to factual, accessible, and tailored support that helps students and their support networks understand what a conservatoire education involves, what the entry and audition processes require, what career outcomes are possible, and how to navigate progression routes over time. IAG alone is not sufficient to raise aspirations, but is necessary to remove key informational barriers (Gorard et al.,

2006). As TASO (2023) and EEF (2016) note, when combined with mentoring, role-modelling, and experiential activities, IAG plays a vital role in decision-making and engagement.

Teachers and primary carers are key influencers in shaping student aspirations and post-18 decision-making. Yet they often lack the specialist knowledge required to guide young people through conservatoire applications. Alcott (2017) found that "teacher encouragement has the greatest influence on those students most likely to be on the margin for university attendance". Parents/carers of students from Widening Participation access points often defer to the young person as the "educational expert" in the family (Canovan & Luck, 2018). However, Khattab (2015) shows that parental expectations and education levels significantly affect higher education access. When parents are unfamiliar with the conservatoire sector, they may feel ill-equipped to support applications. That is why our IAG approach includes direct engagement with parents/carers through bespoke resources, talks, and student representatives from similar backgrounds.

Interventions such as parent information sessions, tours, and printed information guides are designed to humanise the conservatoire experience, demystify processes, and help students and their networks see themselves within this environment (HEPI, 2019). Our Audition Club – where we run information sessions in state schools and bring current Academy students to perform alongside the class/music cohort – is specifically designed for students from low POLAR4 quintiles or with limited access to specialist music education/resources, from low-income backgrounds, and racially minoritised groups. It also targets teachers who may not be familiar with specialist music pathways but are central to the student decision-making process.

Intervention strategy 2 – targeted support for state school pupils

Provide sustained, intensive support – including specialist tuition – for musically gifted state school pupils across the age range 8-18, reaching as many as resources available to the Academy and its delivery partners allow.

Our strategy to develop sustained progression routes is rooted in empirical research, internal evaluation, and sector guidance. It directly addresses the persistent and well-documented systemic inequities in access to music education. Access to conservatoire-level study is profoundly shaped by early and consistent exposure to high-quality music tuition – a resource unevenly distributed across state-funded schools and communities facing socioeconomic disadvantage (Hallam, 2010; Youth Music, 2021).

Recent national reviews such as *The Music Education: State of the Nation* report (ISM, 2019) and the ABRSM *Making Music 2021* survey found stark disparities in instrumental tuition access and music participation. Pupils from lower-income households are significantly less likely to:

- receive individual or small-group instrumental tuition

- participate in ensemble or orchestral activities
- access graded music exams or formal progression routes.

These disparities have been exacerbated by reductions in curriculum time, staffing, and funding for music education, particularly at Key Stage 3. As a result, the talent pool for conservatoires is narrowed at an early stage, and many musically able pupils may not reach the audition room at all.

While we do not yet have quantitative baseline data, consistent observations across multiple activities point to a reoccurring trend. Many Widening Participation students enter with limited or no access to structured tuition. For example: Widening Participation registration forms often report participants as being ungraded (so they have not taken any formal grade exams), and few share experience of having had one-to-one tuition. However, participants often talk about playing in orchestras/ensembles, often outside school either via local music hubs, church or music organisations such as Tomorrow's Warriors. This baseline data will be formalised during the lifetime of this report.

We know that early, structured, and sustained musical opportunities make a meaningful difference. The National Plan for Music Education (DfE, 2022) calls for stronger pathways between schools and out-of-school providers, with a specific focus on progression to the highest levels of study. Our interventions meet this brief by offering targeted, durational programmes – rather than short-term enrichment – to build skills and aspiration over time.

Your Academy supports young people aged 14-17 from state schools, through tuition, performance opportunities and audition preparation. We ask participants to update us about their applications and offers. While this is not yet a formalised process we know that, since 2021, at least 18 participants have progressed to conservatoires or music-related university degrees. Another example is our Community First Strings Experience (CFSE), which delivers sustained, in-school string teaching to over 270 Key Stage 2 pupils in South London. This has a clear and identified progression route into the fourth year of the First Strings Experience (FSE4) programme run by our Junior Academy. In 2023/24, five participants transitioned into the FSE4 programme, and in 2024/25, eight transitioned – a strong indicator of the pipeline's effectiveness.

Research from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2016) indicates that interventions sustained over a longer period have a greater impact on attainment and engagement, particularly when combined with personalised support. Similarly, UCAS (2021) identifies early engagement and regular contact with specialist providers as key to raising aspirations among under-represented groups.

This aligns with socio-cultural models of progression, which emphasise not only skills acquisition, but the development of musical identity and a sense of belonging within the classical music world (Lamont et al., 2017; Burke, 2012). By embedding support across multiple age stages, our strategy helps to scaffold a young person's musical and educational journey from first access through to conservatoire entry.

This rationale is supported by our core Theory of Change, which ensures interventions are designed with long-term outcomes in mind, linking inputs (e.g., tuition, mentoring, guidance) with measurable outputs and outcomes such as increased technical proficiency; deeper understanding of conservatoire pathways; greater resilience, motivation, and identity as a musician; and eventual application to and enrolment in specialist higher education.

We are committed to reaching as many musically-motivated students as possible through both direct delivery and strategic partnerships (foe example music services, hub partners, primary schools). Our approach is targeted and based on need, musical potential, and eligibility for Widening Participation status; scalable; deliverable through modular programmes with defined progression routes; and sustainable, as it is built on cross-departmental collaboration and long-term relationships with families and schools. We are also working to track the longitudinal journeys of our Widening Participation students, using data-sharing agreements, alumni contact, and follow-up surveys to assess how early interventions influence eventual entry into higher-level study.

Intervention strategy 3 – Belonging: promote a learning and teaching environment in which all students feel welcome

Create and maintain a fully inclusive teaching and learning environment at the Academy, through a range of interventions apparent to prospective Global Majority students. Ensure that Widening Participation activities [IS1] are designed to interest students beyond the white community, and involve them fully. Make specific scholarship and (where necessary) needs-based bursary provision for Black British and British Asian students.

Despite ongoing work across the higher education sector, students from Global Majority backgrounds – particularly Black British and British East and South Asian students – remain under-represented in UK conservatoires. National research indicates that these students are less likely to access formal pathways to elite music training, and more likely to report a lack of belonging or visible representation within conservatoire environments (Bull et al., 2022).

Access alone is insufficient if students do not feel welcomed, represented, and supported once inside the institution. Creating a fully inclusive environment is essential for ensuring equity not only in admissions, but in student success, wellbeing, and progression (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015). At conservatoires, structural inequalities in music education are compounded by persistent perceptions that classical and specialist music training cater predominantly to white and affluent students (Bull, 2019; Born & Devine, 2015). These perceptions are often reinforced by curriculum, pedagogy, staffing, and repertoire – all of which signal who "belongs" in these spaces.

Our strategy explicitly acknowledges these dynamics, drawing on both sector-wide data and our own institutional reflections. The following ethnicity table shows a more diverse student representation at Junior Academy than we presently see on BMus programmes (see Annex A, p.32).

Junior Academy 2024-25

Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
White – British, European or any other White background	226	46.7%
South Asian (British South Asian, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Bengali, Sri Lankan, South Asian Other)	12	2.5%
East Asian (British East Asian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Singaporean, Vietnamese, Thai, East Asian Other]	76	15.7%
Black – Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African, or any other Black background	19	3.9%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups – White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, or any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background	79	16.3%
Other – any other ethnic background	15	3.1%
Not declared/ Prefer not to say	57	11.8%
	484	

Our Widenening Participation activity prioritises Global Majority students, with results apparent in the tables following:

Widening Participation programme 2023-24

Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
White – British, European or any other White background	104	44%
South Asian (British South Asian, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Bengali, Sri Lankan, South Asian Other)	23	10%
East Asian (British East Asian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Singaporean, Vietnamese, Thai, East Asian Other]	14	6%
Black – Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African, or any other Black background	30	13%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups – White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, or any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background	22	9%
Other – any other ethnic background	12	5%
Not declared/ Prefer not to say	33	14%
	238	

Widening Participation programme 2024-25 (to date)

Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
White – British, European or any other White background	55	39%
South Asian (British South Asian, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Bengali, Sri Lankan, South Asian Other)	13	9%
East Asian (British East Asian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Singaporean, Vietnamese, Thai, East Asian Other]	8	6%
Black – Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African, or any other Black background	12	8%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups – White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, or any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background	30	21%
Other – any other ethnic background	6	4%
Not declared/ Prefer not to say	18	13%
	142	

Experiences of under-representation are not uniform. Students' identities intersect across race, class, gender, disability, and religion, producing different forms of advantage or marginalisation (Rollock, 2012). Our approach therefore uses an intersectional lens, recognising that meaningful inclusion requires more than representational diversity. It means dismantling systemic barriers and building practices that affirm all identities.

Research supports targeted, identity-conscious interventions. Inclusive pedagogy and representation among teaching staff are shown to positively impact engagement and retention (Thomas & May, 2010). Scholarship and bursary programmes tailored to historically excluded groups help to offset structural financial barriers and signal institutional commitment (Sutton Trust, 2024). Data on student experience from arts institutions suggest that

students from Global Majority backgrounds value visible community-building, culturally relevant content, and identity-affirming mentorship (Arts Council England, 2021).

This aligns with the Office for Students' emphasis on addressing inequalities not just in access, but in continuation, attainment and progression (OfS, 2023). It also reflects guidance in the National Plan for Music Education (DfE 2022), which calls for sustained inclusion from early access to professional careers, particularly for those under-represented in the music industry.

The Belonging Framework we adopt provides the institutional underpinning for this strategy, and we evaluate progress through student feedback, engagement tracking, and qualitative insight.

Intervention strategy 4 – financial and other targeted support for low-income students

Make needs-based bursary provision for students from low-income family backgrounds. Ensure that Academy hardship funds support students from low-income family backgrounds as a matter of priority. Ensure that present and prospective students from low-income family backgrounds know about all forms of non-financial support available to them at the Academy, in particular our student counselling service and high-value instrument loan scheme.

This intervention responds to long-standing evidence that financial insecurity is one of the most significant barriers to accessing, progressing through, and succeeding in higher education – particularly within high-cost disciplines such as music performance and composition, which often require private tuition, travel, accommodation, and costly specialist equipment (Pollard et al., 2019; Thomas, 2018).

For many young musicians from low-income households, the cost of participation in conservatoire-level education is prohibitively high. This includes not only tuition fees, but also associated expenses such as auditions, high-quality instruments, travel to performances, and extended practice time that limits paid work opportunities (Brook et al., 2018). Without adequate support, these students are at risk of exclusion or attrition even when academically and musically capable.

The Academy's financial support strategy is informed by this context. We provide a range of needs-based bursaries, scholarships, hardship funds, and an instrument loan scheme, alongside practical, mental health and academic support. These provisions are not only responsive to economic disadvantage but also proactive in reaching students who may not otherwise access such resources. Our counselling service and wellbeing team are also available to ensure students feel holistically supported, recognising the emotional toll of financial precarity on academic performance and wellbeing (NUS, 2022).

Research suggests that non-repayable bursaries can have a positive effect on student retention, particularly among the most financially vulnerable (McCaig et al. 2017). Importantly, this effect is amplified when financial support is clearly communicated and paired with wider wraparound support

(TASO, 2025). Our Widening Participation and Admissions teams signpost financial and wellbeing services, and we are reviewing our offer communications to ensure that these are fully accessible and inclusive.

We recognise the relationship between financial strain and hidden costs of cultural capital. Conservatoires may require or assume prior familiarity with cultural norms – such as owning concert clothing, attending certain types of performance, or knowing how to navigate elite musical spaces. Our needs-based support thus extends to practical and social inclusion, including access to mentoring, student societies, and ambassador roles which help to build confidence and foster a sense of belonging (HEPI, 2019).

Looking ahead, we will evaluate the impact of these provisions through student tracking, case studies, and feedback.

This strategy is grounded in our broader institutional commitment to equity, inclusion, and belonging. Our aim is not only to provide financial assistance but to embed a culture where support is visible, de-stigmatised, and integrated into the student experience.

Intervention strategy 5 – targeted support for students with declared disabilities or learning differences

Further invest in Academy Disabilty and Study Support programmes if year-on-year monitoring reveals a widening attainment gap between students with declared disabilities or learning differences and fellow students declaring neither.

The TASO report *What Works to Reduce Equality Gaps for Disabled Students* (February 2023) presents evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to address inequalities in higher education among disabled students. The strength of our work in supporting students with learning differences and disabilities was noted as part of our recent Teaching Excellence Framework Gold award. Our small size enables personalised and targeted support. However, to stop an attainment gap opening up we will continue to follow best practice recommendations as summarised in the TASO report, across the whole of the Academy including our Widening Participation programme.

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Fees, investments and targets

2026-27 to 2029-30

Provider name: The Royal Academy of Music

Provider UKPRN: 10007835

Summary of 2026-27 entrant course fees

*course type not listed

Inflation statement:

We will not raise fees annually for new entrants
We project to raise fees for Home Undergraduates in line with Government limits, for the duration of this APP.

Table 3b - Full-time course fee levels for 2026-27 entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree		N/A	9535
Foundation degree	*	N/A	*
Foundation year/Year 0 (classroom based)	*	N/A	*
Foundation year/Year 0 (non-classroom based)	*	N/A	*
HNC/HND	*	N/A	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	N/A	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	N/A	*
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year	*	N/A	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 3b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2026-27

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Sub-contractual provider name and additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0 (classroom based)	*	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0 (non-classroom based)	*	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Table 4b - Part-time course fee levels for 2026-27 entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	*	N/A	*
Foundation degree	*	N/A	*
Foundation year/Year 0 (classroom based)	*	N/A	*
Foundation year/Year 0 (non-classroom based)	*	N/A	*
HNC/HND	*	N/A	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	N/A	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	N/A	*
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year	*	N/A	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 4b - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2026-27

Sub-contractual part-time course type:	Sub-contractual provider name and additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0 (classroom based)	*	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0 (non-classroom based)	*	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Fees, investments and targets

2026-27 to 2029-30

Provider name: The Royal Academy of Music

Provider UKPRN: 10007835

Investment summary

A provider is expected to submit information about its forecasted investment to achieve the objectives of its access and participation plan in respect of the following areas: access, financial support and research and evaluation. Note that this does not necessarily represent the total amount spent by a provider in these areas. Table 6b provides a summary of the forecasted investment, across the four academic years covered by the plan, and Table 6d gives a more detailed breakdown.

Notes about the data:

The figures below are not comparable to previous access and participation plans or access agreements as data published in previous years does not reflect latest provider projections on student numbers.

Yellow shading indicates data that was calculated rather than input directly by the provider.

In Table 6d (under 'Breakdown'):

"Total access investment funded from HFI" refers to income from charging fees above the basic fee limit.

"Total access investment from other funding (as specified)" refers to other funding, including OfS funding (but excluding Uni Connect), other public funding and funding from other sources such as philanthropic giving and private sector sources and/or partners.

Table 6b - Investment summary

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Breakdown	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
Access activity investment (£)	NA	£1,039,000	£1,070,000	£1,094,000	£1,119,000
Financial support (£)	NA	£466,000	£466,000	£466,000	£466,000
Research and evaluation (£)	NA	£40,000	£41,000	£42,000	£43,000

Table 6d - Investment estimates

Investment estimate (to the nearest £1,000)	Breakdown	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
Access activity investment	Pre-16 access activities (£)	£330,000	£340,000	£350,000	£361,000
Access activity investment	Post-16 access activities (£)	£261,000	£269,000	£274,000	£279,000
Access activity investment	Other access activities (£)	£448,000	£461,000	£470,000	£479,000
Access activity investment	**Total access investment (£)**	**£1,039,000**	**£1,070,000**	**£1,094,000**	**£1,119,000**
Access activity investment	***Total access investment (as % of HFI)***	**134.9%**	**139.0%**	**140.4%**	**143.6%**
Access activity investment	***Total access investment funded from HFI (£)***	**£770,000**	**£770,000**	**£779,000**	**£779,000**
Access activity investment	***Total access investment from other funding (as specified) (£)***	**£269,000**	**£269,000**	**£260,000**	**£260,000**
Financial support investment	Bursaries and scholarships (£)	£436,000	£436,000	£436,000	£436,000
Financial support investment	Fee waivers (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Financial support investment	Hardship funds (£)	£30,000	£30,000	£30,000	£30,000
Financial support investment	**Total financial support investment (£)**	**£466,000**	**£466,000**	**£466,000**	**£466,000**
Financial support investment	***Total financial support investment (as % of HFI)***	**60.5%**	**60.5%**	**59.8%**	**59.8%**
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (£)	£40,000	£41,000	£42,000	£43,000
Research and evaluation investment	*Research and evaluation investment (as % of HFI)*	5.2%	5.3%	5.4%	5.5%

Fees, investments and targets

2026-27 to 2029-30

Provider name: The Royal Academy of Music

Provider UKPRN: 10007835

Targets

Table 5b: Access and/or raising attainment targets

Aim [500 characters maximum]	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone	2029-30 milestone
Increase the proportion of applications for undergraduate places submitted by prospective students in all categories significantly under-represented at the Academy, so that by 2030 73% of all auditionees belong in one or more	PTA_1	Access	Other	Other (please specify in description)		Increase the proprtion of applicants from student groups under-represented at the Academy to 73% by 2030	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage	67%	68%	70%	72%	73%
Increase the proportion of places offered to state school students applying for undergraduate places at the Academy, so that by 2030 they receive 50% of all UK undergraduate offers made.	PTA_2	Access	Other	Other (please specify in description)		Increase the proportion of offers to state school students to 50% by 2030	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage	39%	41%	44%	47%	50%
Maintain the proportion of places offered to prospective students who identify as from the Global Majority (26% in the 2024 admissions round). Increase the proportion of places offered to Black British applicants specifcally, so that by 2030 they receive 5% of all offers made.	PTA_3	Access	Ethnicity	Black		Increase the proportion of offers to Black British heritage students to 5% by 2030	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage	2%	3%	4%	4%	5%
Increase the proportion of places taken up by prospective students from low-income family backgrounds	PTA_4	Access	Low income background	Other (please specify in description)		Increase the proportion of students from low-income backgrounds to 18% by 2030. Baseline year 2024-25 chosen as UK-status students later arriving from Ukraine increased low-income numbers unexpectedly	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage	15%	16%	17%	17.5%	18%
	PTA_5														
	PTA_6														
	PTA_7														
	PTA_8														
	PTA_9														
	PTA_10														
	PTA_11														
	PTA_12														

Table 5d: Success targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone	2029-30 milestone
Ensure that Academy students with declared disabilities or learning differences achieve the best possible final degree results, further investing in Academy Disability and Study Support programmes if year-on-year data monitoring reveals a widening attainment gap.	PTS_1	Attainment	Reported disability	Disability reported	No disability reported	The present attainment gap is fairly small: 5 percentage points. We will monitor annually from the first year of the Plan and try to reduce it to 3 percentage points by 2029-30.	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage points	5%	5%	4%	4%	3%
	PTS_2														
	PTS_3														
	PTS_4														
	PTS_5														
	PTS_6														
	PTS_7														
	PTS_8														
	PTS_9														
	PTS_10														
	PTS_11														
	PTS_12														

Table 5e: Progression targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone	2029-30 milestone
	PTP_1														
	PTP_2														
	PTP_3														
	PTP_4														
	PTP_5														
	PTP_6														
	PTP_7														
	PTP_8														
	PTP_9														
	PTP_10														
	PTP_11														
	PTP_12														