

## Annex A: Template Plan of Work



### Resilient Learning Communities

## Institutional Plan for: The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

### Context

Like all other HEIs, this last year has brought significant levels of challenge to staff and students of the RCS. In the move to offer effective blended-learning provision much of our strategic focus has understandably been focused on ensuring our learners have access to high quality learning experiences. We are currently working on the development of a new institutional strategic plan, and whilst Covid has impacted on the progress of that plan, it is clear that it will incorporate much of what we already understand about resilient learning communities. Over this period, we have also made considerable progress in responding to other major and related priorities, such as developing an Anti-Racism Action Plan, making significant revisions to our Dignity at Work and Study Policy, and we are in the process of developing guidance on Gender Based Violence. In each case, this strategic documentation has been developed in partnership between our staff and student bodies, with our student union playing a vital role in ensuring the student voice is heard and acted upon.

The work of this theme is of great importance to the RCS community, and in many important ways, it allows us to follow on from some of our work in the previous Enhancement Theme: Evidencing Enhancement. Our research into student well-being highlighted some worrying trends on the prevalence on mental health issues within our student cohort. A comparison of statistics from academic year 2014-15 to those from academic year 2019-20 show a 213% increase in students disclosing a mental health condition. A second study asked students from across the institution to respond to the question 'How much does performance anxiety affect you?' Using a scale from 1 (It doesn't affect me at all) to 10 (It is completely debilitating), the 107 responses showed a mean score of 6.58. A third project asked students to respond to the question 'What makes a good teacher?' receiving the following 'top 10' most frequently used terms:

- |                               |                  |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Passionate                 | 6. Inspiring     |
| 2. Caring                     | 7. Knowledgeable |
| 3. Understanding              | 8. Patient       |
| 4. Listens                    | 9. Encouraging   |
| 5. Adapts to Individual Needs | 10. Supportive   |

It is interesting to note the prevalence of terms that focus on the good teacher as someone who has a vested interest in the well-being of the student, and how few responses relate to

the subject discipline itself. Responses to ‘What makes a good learner?’ positioned ‘resilient’ in the number 4 position.

In their 2018 book ‘The Coddling of the American Mind’ Lukianoff & Haidt (2018) track the evolution of a new type of learner, encouraging educators to focus on designing learning that actively develops anti-fragility. The authors also discuss the importance of encouraging diversity not solely in relation to the membership of their communities, but also in relation to the diversity of viewpoints. For our institution, we are conscious of an increasing need for sensitivity around the use of language, whilst also encouraging freedom of individual expression. The arts have always been a vehicle for the complex interplay of ideas and for the synthesis of new perspectives often from apparently binary opposites. We feel that our institution has an obligation to support our RCS learning community to develop individual and collective resilience, to become ‘anti-fragile’, and to achieve this through the development of meaningful arts practice.

### Institutional team

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Institutional lead	Jamie Mackay (Head of PG Learning and Teaching Programmes and Academic Development)	Jamie Mackay (Head of PG Learning and Teaching Programmes and Academic Development)	Jamie Mackay (Head of PG Learning and Teaching Programmes and Academic Development)
TLG staff representative	Jesse Paul (Fair Access Manager)	Jesse Paul (Fair Access Manager)	Jesse Paul (Fair Access Manager)
TLG student representative	John Craig (SU President)	TBC	TBC
Staff member	Annie McCourt (Lecturer in Learning and Teaching)	Annie McCourt (Lecturer in Learning and Teaching)	Annie McCourt (Lecturer in Learning and Teaching)
Staff member	Roz Caplan (Conservatoire Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer)	Roz Caplan (Conservatoire Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer)	Roz Caplan (Conservatoire Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer)
Staff member	Angela Jaap (Lecturer in Professional Learning)	Angela Jaap (Lecturer in Professional Learning)	Angela Jaap (Lecturer in Professional Learning)

Staff member	Ken Davidson (PT Lecturer (Teacher Education))	Ken Davidson (PT Lecturer (Teacher Education))	Ken Davidson (PT Lecturer (Teacher Education))
Staff member	Ruth Slater (PT Lecturer (Strings and BMus))	Ruth Slater (PT Lecturer (Strings and BMus))	Ruth Slater (PT Lecturer (Strings and BMus))
Staff member	Jan Waterfield (PT Lecturer (Keyboard))	Jan Waterfield (PT Lecturer (Keyboard))	Jan Waterfield (PT Lecturer (Keyboard))
Staff member	Rachel Drury (Lecturer in Learning and Teaching)	Rachel Drury (Lecturer in Learning and Teaching)	Rachel Drury (Lecturer in Learning and Teaching)
Staff member	Eilidh Slattery (Lecturer in Arts Education)	Eilidh Slattery (Lecturer in Arts Education)	Eilidh Slattery (Lecturer in Arts Education)
Staff member	Giulia Montalbano (PT Lecturer (Junior Conservatoire – Contemporary Dance))	Giulia Montalbano (PT Lecturer (Junior Conservatoire – Contemporary Dance))	Giulia Montalbano (PT Lecturer (Junior Conservatoire – Contemporary Dance))
Staff member	Lio Moscardini (Lecturer in Learning and Teaching (Inclusive Practice))	Lio Moscardini (Lecturer in Learning and Teaching (Inclusive Practice))	Lio Moscardini (Lecturer in Learning and Teaching (Inclusive Practice))
Staff member	Mercy Ojelade (BA Acting Auditions member)	Mercy Ojelade (BA Acting Auditions member)	Mercy Ojelade (BA Acting Auditions member)
Staff member/student member	James Slimings (PhD Student/ Choral Co-ordinator)	James Slimings (PhD Student/ Choral Co-ordinator)	James Slimings (PhD Student/ Choral Co-ordinator)
Student member	Mahri Reilly (MEd Student, Year 1)	Mahri Reilly (MEd Student, Year 2)	Mahri Reilly (MEd Student, Year 3)
Student member	Maria Monteiro (BACPP, Year 4)	TBC	TBC

## Planned activity: Year 1

### Overall outcomes/activity

The ultimate aim for the work of this theme must be to demonstrably increase the resilience of our staff, students and institution. We have identified some key priority areas that we are confident will remain central to the work of the theme. These are:

1. Resilience and lived experience
2. Overcoming barriers to resilience
3. Resilience in the arts and arts education
4. Blended learning and resilience in arts education
5. Membership and voice in our learning community
6. RCS: our resilient community

We believe it is important that we recognise and learn from the actual lived experience of our staff, students and graduates in order to build an understanding of the challenges faced and the strategies utilised to effect positive outcomes. From the work of the Creative Collaborative Cluster from the previous theme, we developed an understanding of the non-linear learning journey that professionals within the arts commonly take. This research showed that, in the proto-professional performing arts education context, the membrane between education and profession can be very thin. Within their programme of study, our learners will be expected to perform in live, public contexts as musicians, actors, stage managers, and we know from research undertaken from the previous theme that performance anxiety is not only common, but common across all discipline areas. We need to continue to understand the real, lived experience of individuals from across our community from pre-HE to our alumni to gain insight into the patterns and behaviours that support the development of resilience and those that create barriers to resilience.

In varying degrees, students on a creative arts programme will be expected to develop their own creative voice, through generating new original work as choreographers, composers, designers and film-makers. As well as gaining the technical skills required to communicate effectively in their art form, students must learn to develop and share their own original work, and this can add another level of stress, especially where the work challenges established traditions. The resilience of the student therefore takes two forms: resilience to learn the discipline required to meet expected performance standards required for membership of the community, and the resilience to pursue original outcomes as a unique member of that community.

Like the rest of the global HE sector, the RCS is seeing a continued increase in perceived levels of 'fragility' within our student cohorts, however this is undoubtedly exacerbated by the rise of social media, fake news, divisive political systems and 24-hour news bulletins. The enforced shift towards a blended-learning model has particular challenges in an arts education institution where much of the learning traditionally happens through ensemble practice and performance. The requirement to offer online equivalents to the learning experience has clearly had an impact on the resilience of staff and students, as they have had to explore this unfamiliar learning context. At the same time, the limitations have encouraged new approaches to making and sharing work. Again, we find expressions of resilience in the drive to maintain standards of excellence *and* to pursue meaningful and transformative outcomes. In the Creative Industries sector at large, the impact of Covid

has highlighted the need for members of that sector to have the resilience to continually find new ways to collaborate, to creative and to share their work.

A community needs to be resilient in the face of external forces that may seek to erode the principles that serve as its foundation. However, the bigger challenge may be to build a community that is resilient in the face of internal challenge. As an institution we recognise the importance of ensuring our learning community is as inclusive as it can possibly be, and that it provides a learning experience that is equitable regardless of gender, sexuality or ethnicity, where diverse learning needs can be met and diverse viewpoints can be shared. The resilience of the community is inextricably linked to the degree to which the members of that community feel they have a voice, feel that they can contribute to the development of that community, and feel that they have the autonomy to direct their own actions within that community.

At RCS our students and our staff share a passion for the arts, and this passion creates a very strong sense of belonging. We celebrate the discipline required to perform at the highest levels, and we celebrate the creation of new experimental work. Through our work on decolonising the curriculum we are committed to expanding the diversity of historical examples of excellence, which in turn should feed into the richness of the creative output. Recognising the potential for the arts to communicate lived experience in meaningful and original ways, at this point we intend that the work of the project will culminate in some new work that can be shared within our own community and with the sector at large. This would have to come as a natural progression of the work but examples such as a piece of verbatim theatre drawing on the experiences of our students and staff, can be a powerful way to bring the community together and help it understand itself better at the same time.

In summary, our plan for the three years is:

Year 1 – develop a shared understanding of what we mean by Resilient Learning Communities, and use this to establish meaningful outcomes for the work of the theme

Year 2 – develop an understanding of how to impact the development of resilience in individuals and in our learning communities, and use this to develop a strategic model for potential inclusion in the Teaching and Learning Strategy, informed the next round of UG programme review.

Year 3 – apply the strategic model within the institution and evaluate its impact on students, staff and the institution. This would be an early evaluation as such a complex issue would require a longitudinal study over a number of years.

### **Year 1 outcomes/activity**

Our key priorities for year 1 are:

1. To establish our understanding of the term 'resilient' as a personal characteristic or quality, drawing on real lived experience e.g. when have our learners and staff felt most and least resilient? What has impacted their levels of resilience?
2. To establish our understanding of the term 'resilient' in relation to our own institution i.e. what do we understand 'resilience' to mean in relation to an organisation, what does it comprise of, what is the opposite of 'resilience'?
3. To establish an understanding of the various communities that comprise our wider institutional community i.e. what are the qualifications for membership, what are

the shared principles or goals, what defines the community, how do they develop resilience?

4. To bring these together to establish an understanding of what we mean by a 'Resilient Learning Community' and of the factors that impact the resilience of a learning community.
5. To define meaningful and measureable goals for the duration of the theme, connecting these to institutional priorities, policies and strategic plans.
6. To shape the work of the theme in years two and three.

In year 1 of the theme, we would like to concentrate our efforts on developing a better understanding of what the phrase 'Resilient Learning Communities' means within our conservatoire context. This will involve some initial surveying of opinions from the staff and student body, to gain some insight into what we mean by the term 'resilient' in our learning community and the smaller sub-communities that it consists of.

Through funding some short-term research, we intend to articulate a definition of 'resilience', and of the constituent elements that define the term, drawing on examples of 'good practice' and on lessons learned. This will involve some broader, more generic survey-style researching alongside some specific case studies, drawn on the learning journeys of existing students, graduates and staff.

Alongside this we would like to explore the application and sharing of some of the models we have recently introduced, such as the use of non-directive coaching. We intend to offer some sample seminars specifically on Resilience Coaching, to determine whether this model may be worthy of further development in year two. Another line of enquiry will be to establish our existing project work, and our policies and determine where they intersect with the intentions for this work.

As such, year one will help us establish our current position in relation to the theme, creating a foundation for projects that will advance this position in years two and three.

In terms of benefit, the work done in this academic year will raise awareness of the theme across the institution. We have our annual Learning and Teaching Conference in September, and we see that as an opportunity to share the findings for year one, and to engage our staff in some of the challenges inherent in developing Resilient Learning Communities. Given the staff and student response to the initial call of interest, we believe there will be an increasing interest from our community as we begin to share this work more widely.

### **Dissemination of work**

As mentioned above, we will be sharing the work of the theme at our annual staff Learning and Teaching Conference in September. As part of our quality assurance and quality enhancement process, each programme runs three Programme Committees over the course of the academic year, and Resilient Learning Communities is now a standing item on the agenda. Reporting on the work of theme is also on the agenda of our Quality and Standards Committee meetings.

At this point, it is too early to identify how we might disseminate our work beyond our RCS community, however it is worth stating that a number of the staff and students on the institutional group are part of additional professional communities either as artists or as

educators, so we will have opportunities to draw on their experiences and share our work more widely.

We do intend to share our progress in year one with colleagues at TLG meetings and any other appropriate QAA events over the year. The work on the theme will also feed into conversations within the Scottish Higher Education Developers group, and Artworks Scotland meetings.

### **Collaborative cluster work**

We have not made any formal bids for cluster work this academic year, however, as a small specialist institution, there are clear parallels between our community of practice and those of Glasgow School of Art and the other creative arts institutions that formed the Creative Collaborative Cluster in years 1 and 2 of the previous theme. Whilst we have no immediate plans at this point, the potential for a cluster project in years 2 or 3 would be worth exploring.

### **Supporting staff and student engagement**

Beyond the formal mechanisms stated in the section on dissemination, we intend to engage students and staff in the work of the theme by inviting them to share their opinions and experiences with us, to help us develop a deeper understanding of what we believe as a community. In a slight shift from previous themes, we recruited to the institutional team through an all-staff and all-student email invitation. We received a very good response rate to the call out, suggesting that the theme itself was something that was of great importance and relevance. In year 1 we will be exploring the ways in which the work of the theme connects to existing projects, which should help integrate the theme within the ongoing work of the institution. We intend to grow the network over the duration of the theme through sharing progress and in calls for new projects.

### **Evaluation**

*How will you monitor progress and impact of the enhancement activities?*

In year one the outcomes are primarily around establishing the foundation for understanding, and we intend to test the relevance of this foundation at the annual Learning and Teaching Conference in September. At this event, we will have the opportunity to share what we have been able to surmise from the research activities, and to gain feedback from staff on the year ahead. Through the student union we will circulate the same findings and draw on student feedback, again to help direct the work of year two of the theme.

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