



## Resilient Learning Communities

### Institutional Plan for: The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

This document will form your year 3 plan and should be around three to four sides of A4. You can find your year 1 and plans through this [web page](#).

<p><b>Context</b></p> <p>Provide any statements that might be helpful in explaining your institution's context and approach and how this plan supports the achievement of institutional priorities. Any context statement could draw on salient points from the previous year's learning/outcomes from Theme work and reflect any changes in the strategic direction of your institution.</p>
<p>In academic year 2022-23, the RCS will be seeking to revalidate its undergraduate provision. In line with most HE institutions this will need to take account of financial challenges and the impact of Covid, Brexit and other national and international issues. In this climate, there is clearly a need to help our students, staff and institution to become increasingly resilient. When we consider the term resilient, we are choosing to define it in terms of an ability to embrace changing circumstances through the ongoing negotiation of goals and associated strategies for action.</p>

<p><b>Institutional team</b></p> <p>Please specify for each member whether staff or student and for staff, their role title. Where the Theme Leaders' Group (TLG) staff or student nominee is unable to attend meetings, an alternate can attend on their behalf.</p>	
Institutional lead	Jamie Mackay – Head of PG Learning and Teaching and Academic Development
TLG staff representative	Jesse Paul – Fair Access Manager
TLG student representative	Ken Fairbrother – Student Union President
Staff member	Annie McCourt – Lecturer in Learning and Teaching
Staff member	Lio Moscardini - Lecturer in Learning and Teaching
Staff member	Jan Waterfield – Lecturer in Music
Staff member	Ken Davidson – Lecturer in Music Education

### **Overall outcomes/activity**

Are there any changes to your key priorities, outcomes and delivery activities that you identified at the start of the Theme?

In year 1, we set out our plan for the three years as:

*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, informing 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.*

On reflection, this plan is largely unchanged. Our year 2 activity focused closely on coaching models as mechanisms for developing resilience and this culminated in an evaluation of the work drawing on the content of interviews with all participants. Some of the key findings from that evaluation were that:

- *Coaching is an approach that supports learners to reflect on their learning, to critically evaluate their progress*
- *Coaching is a justifiable and appropriate approach in education and teaching.*
- *Coaching has a direct relationship with identifying and building resilience.*
- *Individuals practice developed and improved because of their active participation in the sessions.*
- *Knowledge of different approaches/models is useful for different coaching situations.*
- *It takes time to build up trust between coaches and coachees and within groups therefore ensure there is sufficient time for coaching sessions; sufficient time for reflection; and sufficient time to take what is learned into practice with reflection on that practice.*
- *Employing a coaching approach is very useful for one-to-one supervision with students who are supported over time.*

As the RCS is going into an academic year where all undergraduate programmes are to be revalidated, we delivered a Curriculum Development Day on the 10<sup>th</sup> September, designed to:

*'help colleagues engage in professional discussion around topic areas that will help inform the design of our programmes of study...*

*The day will also provide an opportunity to discuss our experiences over the past two years, and constructive ways forward to ensure the student voice is effectively included in curriculum and learning experience plans, whilst supporting staff to support resilience, post-pandemic'.*

Staff involved in the theme work and evaluation delivered two parallel sessions designed to help staff begin to answer the question *'How do we create a curriculum that encourages learners to take control of their own learning journey?'* These sessions were well-attended and began with a broader look at goals and learner choices before moving to a discussion of how a non-directive coaching practice could be applied as an approach to teaching and learning that would naturally develop learner autonomy and resilience. The sessions gave us an opportunity to publicise the theme work more widely and staff in attendance were clearly engaged and interested in further exploration of this area.

From these findings we are confident that we can now move into year three as planned, however we feel that, in order to maintain the integrity of the coaching approach, we need to manage the scale of the endeavour a little. Where we originally thought about an institutional roll-out, a series of pilot projects would appear to allow a more targeted evaluation of the impact of this work.

### **Year 3 outcomes/activity**

In answering the following, identify what is continuing from year 2 and what is new:

What are your key priorities?

What outcomes do you want to achieve?

What activities will you deliver to achieve your key priorities?

In the evaluation of the year 2 activity, the following suggestions for year 3 activity were made:

1. *Continued development by the group members and within MEd, Transitions and other teaching.*
2. *To meet as a group to share knowledge and experience of coaching practice and where, if at all, coaching is being practised and developed beyond the current contexts within the RCS.*
3. *Seek information from different external organisations and groups of practitioners within other organisations and contexts on their implementation of coaching models.*
4. *Gather evidence on the positive outcomes of coaching practice within the RCS.*
5. *Draft a set of coaching principles applicable to coaching practice within the RCS.*
6. *Once coaching principles are agreed, match these to current practice within the RCS.*
7. *Add to and develop existing online coaching resources.*
8. *Coaching offered as short course available to all RCS staff.*
9. *Involve students in any process of development and dissemination of coaching practice and ethos.*

In terms of tangible outcomes, we aim to produce a set of clear guidelines on what coaching is with a set of principles to which all coaches should adhere. From our exploration of coaching models, we recognised that the delivery of coaching must be consistent inasmuch as it believes in and adheres to a shared, common philosophy. The resources and development opportunities we offer need to make clear distinctions between coaching and other forms of support such as mentoring, counselling or training. Given the inherent sensitivities involved in working with students, it is particularly important that anyone acting as a coach, or leading on a group coaching approach with learners, knows when they are in danger of straying into a counselling role. Within our guidance document, we will be including contacts for other professional support, and making this available for coaches and coachees. In year three we are very keen to provide opportunities for students to develop coaching skills that can be applied in groups coaching contexts and for self-coaching. Again, we need to be very clear on how we support these approaches, and part of the first stage of year three is to draw on the coaching practice already being employed within the Transitions programme in our Fair Access Department.

One key aim for year 3 is to generate a model for coaching practice, possibly in the format of the AdvanceHE's UK Professional Standards Framework. We see this as acting like the hub of a wheel with all other coaching initiatives taking the role of spokes emanating from this central philosophy.

### Using Theme resources from sector projects

In the year 3 report we will ask you what resources you have used and which you have found to be most valuable. It would be helpful for us to know now, how, and which resources, you may be planning to use in year 3 of the Theme and beyond (from the Anti-Racist Curriculum project, Valuing and Recognising Prior Learning and Experience, Understanding Micro-credentials and Small Qualifications in Scotland, the Student-Led Project, Student Mental Wellbeing).

The RCS is engaged in a year of quite intensive undergraduate revalidation and staff are engaging with a number of key priorities as they revise and update their programmes of study. At our Curriculum Development Day, we invited Khadija Mohammed and Alison Eales to lead parallel sessions based on their work with the QAA Scotland/Advance HE 'Anti-Racist Curriculum Project' titled '*How do we create a curriculum that is inherently anti-racist?*' These sessions were well-attended and engaged staff in a further exploration of this priority area. This has become an increasingly important priority for RCS with further sessions on '*How do we create a curriculum that engages learners with a diversity of authentic and credible voices?*' and '*How do we create a curriculum that engages learners with a diverse range of cultural, social and political perspectives?*'

Another key priority area for RCS is student mental health and wellbeing, and at the Curriculum Day we delivered sessions '*How do we create a curriculum that supports wellbeing and good mental health?*' and '*How do we create a curriculum that prepares students for industry and supports good mental health and well-being for all?*'

Important for this project, we deliberately designed the sessions to encourage staff to engage in critical discussion around these core areas, and to take responsibility to consider how these conversations might impact their goals for their own programmes and how they might achieve these. This approach avoided a top-down expert dissemination of knowledge in favour of an approach that closely resembled a group coaching model. As part of the pilot of a new model, we are exploring whether a group coaching approach, perhaps using the Case Study model or Facilitated Action Learning Set model might be applied more directly to help groups of staff explore identified topic areas such as the Anti-Racist Curriculum, or Student Mental Health and Wellbeing. We will continue to explore the building resources from the sector work for the theme, particularly as a way of defining the challenges and identifying powerful questions.

### Evaluation

How do you intend to evaluate your year 3 projects and activities?

Prior to completing this section, it would be useful to refer to the QAAS website resource: [A Guide to Basic Evaluation in HE](#) (specifically, Section 8, Summary overview on page 23, and the Evaluation Checklist – Appendix A, on pages 28-29).

Please complete briefly the following 5 questions for each activity or intervention (N.B. Just cut and paste the table below as many times as necessary). This will help you complete your end of year 3 report.

Title of project/activity
An RCS Coaching Model
What change is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)

We are aiming to develop a set of guidelines and principles for effective coaching at the RCS

Why are we making it? (Rationale for the change)

The RCS has a number of existing coaching offers and we feel there is scope to connect this provision in a meaningful way to enhance the resilience of staff and students and help them successfully navigate learning and development challenges.

What difference will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change envisaged)

We hope that the work will ensure that anyone engaged in coaching at the RCS will have an understanding of the core principles of coaching and the practices and beliefs that underpin its successful application in a learning context. Ideally, we would develop some kind of institutional accreditation that staff and students could gain after engaging in professional learning with us. Ultimately, we believe that coaching has the potential to help people develop autonomy and positive resilience, and all activity would be focused on that end.

How will we know? (How the change is measured)

We intend on embedding evaluation into all of the provision that we pilot this year and will produce a report at the end of the project, that critically analyses the impact of the approaches we engage in, further influencing the ongoing development of the framework, principles and practice.

### **Dissemination of work**

How will you promote and communicate your work internally and externally?

Internally, we will invite staff and students to engage with the work through our Programme Committee structure, through the Student Union and through offering particular opportunities to engage with one of the pilot projects. We will also report on progress throughout the year through our Quality and Standards Committee structure. Part of our plan is to develop an online resource for coaching and we will be disseminating findings from our work through this open forum.

We will be publishing the evaluation report through the QAA webpages and hope to deliver a session at the QAA Conference in 2023. We believe this work would be of interest to all HE colleagues, but in particular, we believe it has the potential to support students and staff in arts programmes, so we would like to involve creative arts colleagues in the sector in the evaluation and further expansion of the work.

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

How will you support your community to engage with planned activities?

This is answered to a degree in the previous box. We have found that there is an expanding core of staff who are becoming engaged with this particular approach to development, and we will be continuing to build a network of interested parties. We are conscious that our year 2

activity did not involve much student engagement and it is a priority to work with the new Student President to maximise this in year 3. Whilst the work, as it stands will impact learners as staff begin to engage with it, we would like to see much more first-hand benefit for students, and will work closely with the SU President to achieve this.

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