



Institutional Plan for: The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

This document will form your year 2 plan and should be around three to four sides of A4. You can find your year 1 plan through this [web page](#).

Context

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.

Like all HE institutions, this has been a challenging year for staff and students of the RCS. The nature of our programmes of study demand a proto-professional learning environment where ensemble groups of performers work with production specialists to realise collaborative outcomes, traditionally performed to an audience. Whilst we have been able to offer a degree of in-person learning, all staff have had to adapt to a blended model of delivery, and continue to do so as the impact of the pandemic extends into another academic year. This has clearly had an impact on the wellbeing of our students and staff, and this has been exacerbated by concerns for the future of the industries our students are preparing to enter.

Through this period, our community of staff and students have made significant steps towards addressing the challenges of embodying anti-racism across our institution. Staff and students have pulled together and have developed a number of innovations within key priority areas. Understandably the necessary attention on immediate and proximate challenges, has taken time away from longer-term strategic planning conversations and from institution-wide professional development.

As we enter this academic year, there is a sense that staff and students are suffering from an unprecedented level of fatigue. The scaling down of our initial intentions for the work of the theme for year 2 are in direct response to where we find ourselves at this point in time. Within this context, staff have had to reconsider all of the 'taken-for-granted' ways of working and to look for alternatives, some of which might actually represent enhancements to practice. We have designed this proposed work to explore a new model of development that could prove more effective and might help strengthen the sense of community so vital to the individuals that make up our institution.

Institutional team

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.

Institutional lead	Jamie Mackay (Head of PG Learning and Teaching Programmes and Academic Development)
TLG staff representative	Jesse Paul (Fair Access Manager)
TLG student representative	John Craig (SU President)
Staff member	Annie McCourt (Lecturer in Learning and Teaching)
Staff member	Roz Caplan (Conservatoire Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer)
Staff member	Angela Jaap (Lecturer in Professional Learning)
Staff member	Ken Davidson (PT Lecturer (Teacher Education))
Staff member	Ruth Slater (PT Lecturer (Strings and BMus))
Staff member	Jan Waterfield (PT Lecturer (Keyboard))
Staff member	Rachel Drury (Lecturer in Learning and Teaching)
Staff member	Eilidh Slattery (Lecturer in Arts Education)
Staff member/student member	Giulia Montalbano (PT Lecturer (Junior Conservatoire – Contemporary Dance)) (MEd Student, Year 2)
Staff member	Lio Moscardini (Lecturer in Learning and Teaching (Inclusive Practice))
Staff member	Mercy Ojelade (BA Acting Auditions member)
Staff member/student member	James Slimings (PhD Student/ Choral Co-ordinator)
Student member	Mahri Reilly (MEd Student, Year 2)

Overall outcomes/activity

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

At the start of year 1, we outlined the following priority for 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.

On reflection, the richness and complexity of the outcomes from year 1 of the theme have highlighted the fact that our ambitions for year two were a little inflated. Whilst it is still our intention to use this year to design and pilot a model that will help develop resilient learning communities, we feel it would be more prudent to do so at a more manageable scale and in a way that can effect a more robust level of evaluation. As timelines for our institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy have extended to acknowledge the impact of Covid on staff and on our perceptions of how we support learners, our pilot can still influence this process in year 3 of the theme. Undergraduate programmes will be revalidated in academic year 2022-23, so again, this pilot may also have an impact as staff prepare for these validation events.

However, recent developments have led us to shift the focus a little towards considering Action Learning Sets as a potential model to support many types of development activity across the institution, and for staff and students alike.

Year 2 outcomes/activity

In answering the following, identify what is continuing from year 1 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 year 1, our focus was on developing an understanding of what we meant by the term 'resilience' and how it could be seen as a quality that was possessed and/or developed by an individual and by a community of learners.

In the Executive Summary of the RLC Creative Conversations, we identified a few fundamental learning points:

- *Resilience is a process, rather than an innate quality that is possessed.*
- *Institutional resilience and personal resilience are different. Institutional resilience relies on the efficacy of its community in their belief that the institution is able to provide a positive learning experience for their students. Individual resilience is the ability to overcome challenges.*

As such, at an institutional level, and an individual level the development of resilience can only happen through a process of learning. This finding led us to consider how this process might best be facilitated.

In year one, we found the opportunity to engage in creative conversation around key topic areas was hugely important to our development as a community. In a number of the talks, the efficacy of a coaching model for development was explored in some depth by attendees, and there was considerable support for this approach to a collegiate, less hierarchical model for development.

The Action Learning Set model effectively combines the non-directive coaching approach with the democratic facilitation of creative conversation, and our planned focus for year 2 is to test the efficacy of this model with a pilot study.

The activity for this year will focus initially on development activities for facilitators of the Action Learning Sets, the creation of guidelines to frame the intention and process, the building of Action Learning Set(s), the delivery of the actual meetings, and an evaluation of the efficacy of the model.

In this year, we want to be in a position to present an evidence-base that will help us make a decision on whether there is merit in advocating the Action Learning Set model to support the development of a more resilience institution and more resilience individuals.

Evaluation

How do you intend to evaluate your year 2 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 2 report.

Title of project/activity

Action Learning Sets for Development

What change is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)

The intention for this project is to use findings from year one of the theme to inform a pilot project that will explore models for staff development. The aim is to design, run and evaluate a model based on facilitated Action Learning Sets.

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

The RCS has evolved a largely bespoke approach to staff development, addressing needs based on request and requirement. Between 2012 and 2019, our annual Learning and Teaching Conference served as the one time in our academic calendar where staff were able to get together across the institution to engage in three days of professional learning. Feedback from the conferences was typically mixed, but one key theme kept emerging - staff enjoyed the opportunity to share their practice and engage in critical

discourse around the key issues that mattered to their day-to-day practice of supporting learners.

Covid restrictions and the subsequent impact on staff workloads led to a decision not to run the Conference in 2020, and in 2021, a reduction in the available staff development budget led to a decision to reframe the conference days as Development Days. Here staff were invited to engage with an institutional 'portal' page containing outcomes and resources from QAA Enhancement work for the Evidencing Enhancement Theme, and from year one of the Resilient Learning Communities theme.

Whilst there were clear strategic reasons for setting aside specific days in the year for staff development, this approach did have some issues, primarily that there was a perceived lack of continuity in-between conferences, and that outcomes were seldom being measured in a meaningful way.

Having had significant success with Action Learning Sets within some of the programmes of study, and guided by staff development in this area from Valerie Jackman of the College Development Network, we feel that this model presents an opportunity to reconsider the role of peer-supported development.

In effect, the Action Learning Set becomes a microcosm of the Learning Community. Following some of the themes addressed in year 1 of the study, we have an opportunity to explore whether this model supports the development of resilience within this micro-community.

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

Our intention is that, through evaluating the success of a pilot case study of this approach, we will develop an evidence-base to support a wider roll out of the Action Learning Set model to support staff and student development.

Within the scope of this year, we would like to use the findings from this pilot to inform institutional dissemination at a 2022 Learning and Teaching Conference.

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

We intend to build an evaluative process into the pilot roll out. This will track the success of the model in relation to four key transitions:

- The transition from Issues to Questions
- The transition from Questions to Goals
- The Transition from Goals to Actions
- The Transition from Actions to Review
- The learning gained through the process

Dissemination of work

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

We will be developing the institutional portal space over this year to capture some of the findings of the pilot study, ensuring this is accessible to all staff and students. We will continue to develop the Conversation Points toolkit with new data points as we further unpack the research from year 1 of the theme and will be updated students through the standing item on each student Programme Committee, through the standing item on our Quality and Standards Committee and in collaboration with the students' union. As mentioned previously, it is our intention to share the findings of the pilot more directly at the Learning and Teaching Conference 2022 in whatever form that will take place.

Through QAA events, we expect to be able to share the findings from our Action Learning Set pilot later in the year, and would welcome opportunities to work with partner institutions in piloting this where there is potential for enhancement.

Supporting staff and student engagement

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

Our Resilience Learning Communities strategy group is formed of self-selected staff and students across our institution, and we intend to build our first Action Learning Set from this group. We are conscious of the degree of overwhelm felt by staff and students as they continue to navigate through the current pandemic. In this climate, we believe that staff and student engagement will be most effectively grown through advocacy and through the building of evidence to support the success of the model. In the first instance, we will be investing in the development of facilitators to lead the Action Learning Sets, and through an investment in the development of a small number of individuals who have already demonstrated a commitment to the principles and values of this approach, we have the opportunity to build something that is founded on a secure base. This may mean that the impact across the institution may not be widely felt within this year. However, the benefit of keeping this relatively small-scale study contained in this way, will allow us to ensure that staff and students who choose engage with the model next year, will benefit from a more deeply considered approach than would be possible with a more ambitious year 2 impact.

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