



## Royal Conservatoire of Scotland Student Transitions Enhancement Theme: End of Year 3/End of Theme Synopsis

The key purposes of this report are to:-

- provide a framework for HEIs to report on their Year 3 activity
- help share information across the sector on the benefits and challenges around Theme engagement.

<b>Institution</b>
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
<b>Theme Leaders' Group institutional representative(s)</b>
Andrew Comrie ( Jamie Mackay)
<b>Institutional team membership</b>
Andrew Comrie, Director of Academic Innovation (Convenor) Jamie Mackay, Head of PG Learning and Teaching and Academic Development Will Stringer, SU President Ros Maddison, Head of Production, Drama, Dance, Production and Film Diana Salazar, Acting Head of BMUS Marie Green, Assistant Registrar Rachel Drury, Lecturer Lucy Hollingsworth, Doctoral Research Student Beth Strachan, Student Heather Black, Administrator Quality Assurance Caroline Cochrane, Head of Information Services

**Outline what was achieved in relation to your Year 3 plan of work, at the time of submitting this report.**

**Identify what future outcomes are anticipated to be delivered by the end of the Theme.**

**Have there been any unintended outcomes/unexpected findings?**

**Transitions support model for students from marginalised, SIMD 20/40 and care experienced background.**

Guidance and support for those students transitioning into a specialist arts institution from the most under privileged areas of Scotland has been a core focus of our work in this enhancement theme. Over the three years, we have developed a mentor scheme for students from socio-economically disadvantaged and care experienced backgrounds. By the end of year 3, the mentor scheme has been offered to 188 students entering the Conservatoire via our 'Transitions'20/40 programme. Mentors have acted as positive role models for students and have provided them with support to develop skills and knowledge in: Leadership and self-confidence; Analytical and problem-solving skills; Communication and presentation skills; The ability to receive and offer constructive criticism; Powers of reflection and networking within and understanding Scotland's cultural and performing arts landscape. Over the course of this academic year we have recruited and trained just over 20 staff/industry mentors, and seven student mentors who have benefitted from the Transitions 20/40 programme and are now in second year of their UG programmes. An unintended outcome from this work is that we were invited to give an interactive workshop at the SFC Fair Access Conference in Perth in June 2017 and have been shortlisted for a Herald HE Award for this work in the 'Student Support Team of the Year' category. Future outcomes anticipated is that we aim to extend the mentoring scheme over the three years as an activity in our new Fair Access Plan to UG students who are from marginalised backgrounds and include those students declaring as young carers or excluded from their families.

**Transitions support for students living with mental health disabilities**

We identified that there was a sharp increase in the number of students entering study at RCS declaring that they had a mental health disability (MHD) either at the point of entry to the RCS or during their studies. We wanted to better understand the support needs of students studying with MHD as they entered and transitioned through their studies. This has been a key focus of our work and has resulted in a comprehensive research project over the three years producing a set of recommendations aimed to enhance support. This work has been considered of significant importance that the findings and recommendations were presented to our Board of Governors at their away-day on 31 March 2017 and actions agreed for enhancement. The chair of our Board personally attended and introduced a sector-wide event we ran in May 2017 with approximately 60 people attending from across the Scottish HEI sector and UK Conservatoires Sector. Outputs from the symposium are accessible from the RCS website

[https://www.rcs.ac.uk/about\\_us/aboutus/conferences/mental-health-disability-symposium/](https://www.rcs.ac.uk/about_us/aboutus/conferences/mental-health-disability-symposium/)

The actions agreed will now be progressed in 2017-18 and beyond. An unintended outcome is that this work has led to the need for further research study to investigate 'student identities' and the impact this has on the mental health of music students over the next three years. The team leading this work have recently submitted and been successful in receiving an 'Athenaeum Award from our research team to continue this work.

### **Transitions Examples and Multi Media Output**

Throughout the course of the enhancement theme we have contributed a variety of case studies illustrating ways in which RCS contribute to the transitions agenda. This year, we re-visited five case studies with our students and have produced an annotated update to the chosen case studies reflecting student views. All case studies, including our most recent annotated versions will be available from the RCS institutional pages on enhancement theme website. <http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/institutional-work>

Throughout the course of the theme, our students have played an active role in leading the development of short films illustrating the transitional journeys different students from across our art forms have taken to RCS. The films aim to illustrate what student life is like the Conservatoire and aim to inspire others thinking about studying at RCS and offer encouragement that access to a specialist institution is for anyone with potential and motivation to work in the performing arts industry. The output from this work has been assembled into an area of our website now and can be seen at <https://www.rcs.ac.uk/studyhere/studentssupport/student-transitions/>

### **Sharing and adoption of our transitions work across the RCS**

Over the three years, we have proactively worked through the Theme Leaders Group and associated events to promote our work to a larger HEI audience. Colleagues have proactively offered papers and presentations at QAA conferences over the three years too. This year, RCS launched its new 'Teaching Excellence Award' scheme to enable us to encourage others to engage in enhancement theme work. In 2016-17 three bids have been funded:

- B Music programme team received funding to address transitions barriers in relation to academic writing
- BA Musical Theatre programme team to progress a widening access transitions initiative to engage with partners in the wider learning community to develop students' skills to lead and actively participant in student-led work.
- BA Traditional Music programme team to progress developments to support students to "fine tune" their Personal Learning Plans to their own needs and support them in the development of confidence, planning, reflection, style, practise ideas, approaches to arranging, suggested reading, check points, self-assessment, a presentation.

These projects will not be completed until December 2017. Their outcomes will be shared as part of RCS' annual teaching and learning conference.

**In what ways have institutional team members (including students) engaged in Theme activities during this session?**

**It would be helpful to reflect on the following aspects: developing the institution's plan of work, contributions to institutional team meetings, participation in the Theme Student Network and TLG meetings, participation in the International Enhancement Conference, participation in the institutional team event held in November 2016, institutional work undertaken as part of the year 3 plan etc.**

Institutional team members including students have engaged in the theme in the following ways:

**Institutional Team Meetings.** Members have attended institutional team meetings and acted as conduits about the theme work through other institutional meetings and committees such as School Management Team Meetings and Programme Committees.

**Multi-media Output and Annotated Case Studies.** Representatives from the students union have owned and led the development of our multi-media output both in terms of developing the content of the films produced and identifying students to take part in the films. We are deeply indebted to the three SU Presidents that have taken an active interest in this work over the three years of the theme. Through student representatives on programme committees, we were able to identify students to participate in focus groups to produce our annotated case studies this year.

**Theme Leaders Group /Student Network and associated events.** Our students have engaged in sector events organised by the TLG including the kick-off events each year, the conferences and attending the student network meetings and subsequently TLG meetings. Similarly staff have actively participated in TLG events each year.

**Conferences.** Each year staff and student members have attended the theme conferences, and in each year, some have submitted abstracts for papers, all of which have been accepted and presented at conference. The 2017 conference saw three papers being presented on our work and the institutional team convenor hosting a session at the conference. One of our Doctoral students, who has been working alongside our widening access work over the last three years, has given papers on his work both in the first year of the theme and at this year's conference.

**Dissemination Events.** Institutional team members have actively assisted in the dissemination of our work across the institution. This has been accomplished in a number of ways, including: presenting CPD workshops for staff, leading workshops to showcase work at our annual learning and teaching conference, promoting our new Teaching Excellence Scheme and encouraging colleagues to apply and actively assisting in the design and planning of our Mental Health Symposium.

Both staff and students lead busy lives and often their involvement in the theme is on top of very busy student and professional lives. We are indebted to their contribution.

**Identify good practice in supporting the TLG representative/alternate both in their TLG role and in their institution.**

- Support from Institutional Team members to disseminate information and resources to a wider constituency of staff/students
- Assisting in finding students to participate in planned theme work.
- Advocacy role for the theme and its work in different institutional committees and meetings.
- Planning and organising events.

**Which mechanisms has your institution employed to disseminate outcomes and resources internally, and to the sector?**

**Which approaches have been most effective?**

**Illustrative examples would be valuable.**

**Dissemination Events.** Institutional team members have actively assisted in the dissemination of our work across the institution. This has been accomplished in a number of ways, including: presenting CPD workshops for staff, leading workshops to showcase work at our annual learning and teaching conference, promoting our new Teaching Excellence Scheme and encouraging colleagues to apply and actively assisting in the design and planning of our Mental Health Symposium. The student devised multi-media output (short films) have been an effective way of engaging students in our work.

We believe that a mix of activities are necessary to reach across the institution in different ways.

Most effective:

- There was a high demand from staff and students for our Mental Health Disability workshops and symposium
- An interactive workshop on mentoring for widening access students which has included our students talking about the impact mentoring has proved a powerful way to illustrate the added value offered to students through mentoring
- Our student devised short films have proved to be a powerful way to share the barriers and attitudes students from the most marginalised parts of society need to overcome to successfully transition into HE study.

**Outline your approach to collaborative working with other Higher Education institutions and what you perceive as the benefits and challenges.**

**Examples of activities and outcomes through inter-institutional collaboration would be helpful.**

This has been one of the most challenging elements of the theme. There is a desire to collaborate, but pressures of time to deliver our own agenda in an already busy and small specialist institution often means that it is difficult to prioritise and find time to plan and progress collaborative ideas with other HEIs, despite any enthusiasm we have for this.

This is an area future enhancement themes need to pay close attention to and consideration must be given to what's realistic both in terms of time and resource with so many competing pressures.

Outside of collaborative activities we took part in as part of the TLG work, we have only one example of collaboration. We worked with the University of West of Scotland (UWS) who contributed a workshop in our mental health disability symposium.

**To help facilitate the sharing of practice please provide:**

- **a list of the case studies further developed during Year 3 to include student reflective commentary on successful transitions practice (5 examples)**
- **details of your student-facing multimedia resource.**

**You might also wish to report on any aspect of work that you are particularly proud of and want to promote.**

Details of both our annotated case studies and multimedia output can be found on the Enhancement theme website. Our multi-media output can be seen online at <https://www.rcs.ac.uk/studyhere/studentsupport/student-transitions/>

**Identify the ways in which your institution has contributed to Theme evaluation and other commissioned work.**

We have participated in a number of ways to commissioned work and theme evaluation:-

**TLG:** Regular attendance and contribution to TLG meetings where commissioned work was discussed and reviewed.

**Transitions Map:** Input to initial workshops when the transitions map was being conceived. Contribution of resources for the transitions map.

**Evaluation:** Participation in telephone interviews with evaluators and most recently, staff and students participated in an evaluation focus group help by year 3 evaluators.

**As a result of engaging with the current Enhancement Theme, what has changed/is done differently within your institution and across the sector?**

**It may be helpful to reflect on changes in strategy, policy, and practice and how these changes have affected the student learning experience.**

**Fair Access:**

The work of this enhancement theme has contributed to the development of a new 'Fair Access plan for 2017-2021. This plan will, amongst other things progress the development of the mentor scheme started in this enhancement theme.

A new Fair Access Committee has been constituted to oversee our fair access work. The new committee will report to both Academic Board and our Board of Governors.

**Mental Health Disability** We have made significant progress in better understanding the transition support needs of students with mental health disability. Work is now underway to act upon the recommendations made in the report considered by our Board of Governors.

**Reflecting on the totality of Theme activity what are your perceptions of both the short and longer term impact of the Theme?**

**It may be useful to refer to the Theme's Logic Model here.**

**Improve our understanding of successful Student Transitions.**

We believe that this theme, both institutionally and as a sector has advanced our knowledge and understanding of successful student transitions. RCS has now developed a new mentor scheme, a better understanding of transitions support for students studying with MHD and has actively contributed to the development of an expanded knowledge base and resource set including case studies that are now available to the sector. As reported above, our work has had a short term impact but we anticipate will continue to be progressed further over the next three to five years

**Engage the Scottish higher education (HE) sector in using what we have learnt to improve/reflect on how Student Transitions are supported in practice**

The Theme Leaders Group under the direction of Professor Bamber has provided strong leadership, direction and purpose to this theme. RCS was privileged to participate in this. There has been interest and high levels of engagement from across the Sector. This was evidenced by the 2017 enhancement theme conference which saw high attendance/participation both from staff and students and an excellent set of papers and presentations that effectively showcased the work undertaken across the sector.

**Embed student engagement into the Theme work.**

We were delighted at an institutional level with the engagement we have had from our students. This is evidenced in the body of student-led output we have produced. Student participation across the sector was evident across all three years evidenced by attendance at TLG and at the 2017 conference.

**Further enhance the reputation of the Scottish HE education in the rest of the UK & internationally by showing how we work collaboratively as a sector.**

In the last three years we have seen increasing interest in our work to support those from the most marginalised communities transition into higher education at a small specialist institution. Our work in transitions support for students with mental health disability attracted interested from across the UK as well as from HEIs in Scotland. This has been true too of the theme at sector level. It was encouraging to see international representatives taking part in the conference in June 2017 and engaging in our work.

**Show how our work effects change, supporting more successful student transitions.**

We have some early indications that our work has a positive impact. However, we plan to use the next enhancement theme 'Evidence Informed Enhancement' to continue to build a longitudinal evidence base that our work does lead to transformational change.

**Recognising that this is the end of the current Theme, what one piece of advice would you give to colleagues supporting the next Theme?**

We have a few pieces of advice:

- Start your planning early
- Involve your student body from the start. We felt that having a student led component which was at the core of our institutional plan for the three years was a positive way in engaging and involving our students.
- Participate in the early sector events that scope and shape the theme in the initial stages.
- Keep your work focussed and where possible aligned to strategic ambitions and institutional priorities to make your workloads more manageable and the outcomes institutionally relevant.