DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT
2025-26

ROYAL COLLEGE OF MUSIC London

SUMMARY

In May 2019, the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) published a Statement of Intent which instructed that institutions awarding degrees should publish a degree outcomes statement analysing their institutional degree classification profile and articulating the results of an internal institutional review.

The statement should demonstrate how the College protects the value of its qualifications, with reference to the sector-agreed principles of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the Office for Students' ongoing conditions of registration relating to academic standards and the credibility of awards.

The College's degree outcomes statement focusses on final classifications for graduates on the College's undergraduate programme, the four-year Bachelor of Music Honours degree. This statement for 2025-26 reviews our progress returning to pre-pandemic levels of firsts and 2:1 undergraduate degrees, in line with UUK's statement of July 2022.

Dr Diana Salazar
Director of Programmes
September 2026

RCM Degree Classification Profile

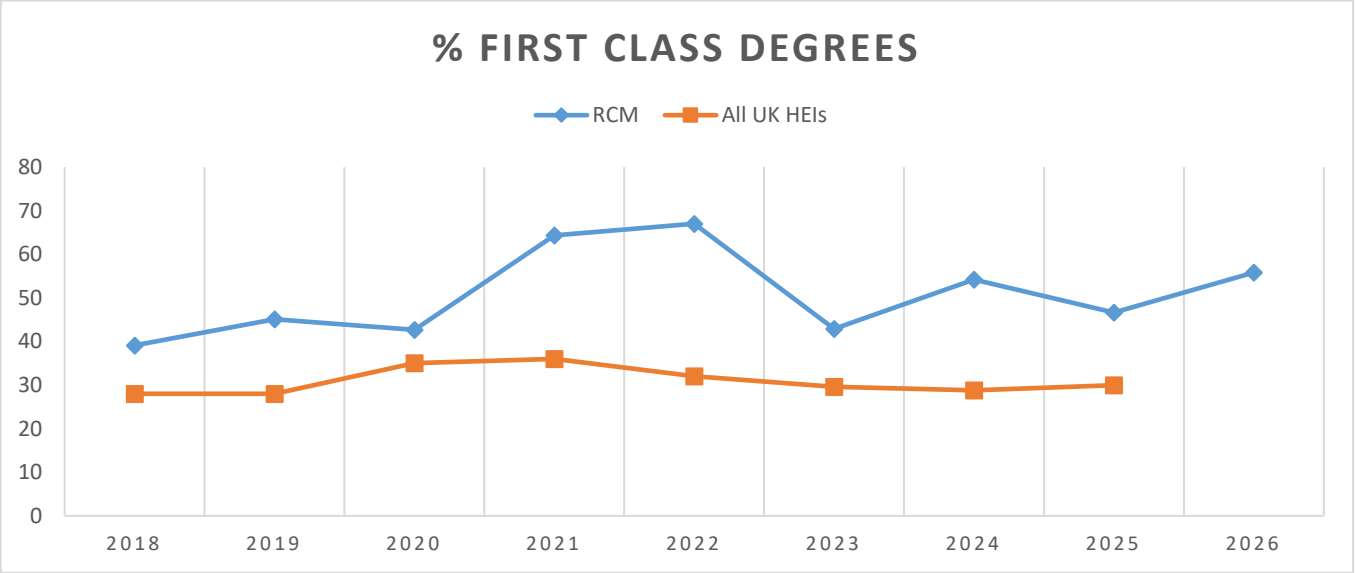
The College undertakes an annual analysis of degree outcomes, including comparison with the UK higher education sector and with other small and specialist performing arts institutions. As part of the Access and Participation Plan 2025-26 to 2028-29, the College also analyses outcomes by student characteristics to identify any statistically or educationally significant gaps. To date, this analysis has not identified an awarding gap affecting students from under-represented groups.

The table below summarises recent BMus degree outcomes over the last seven years:

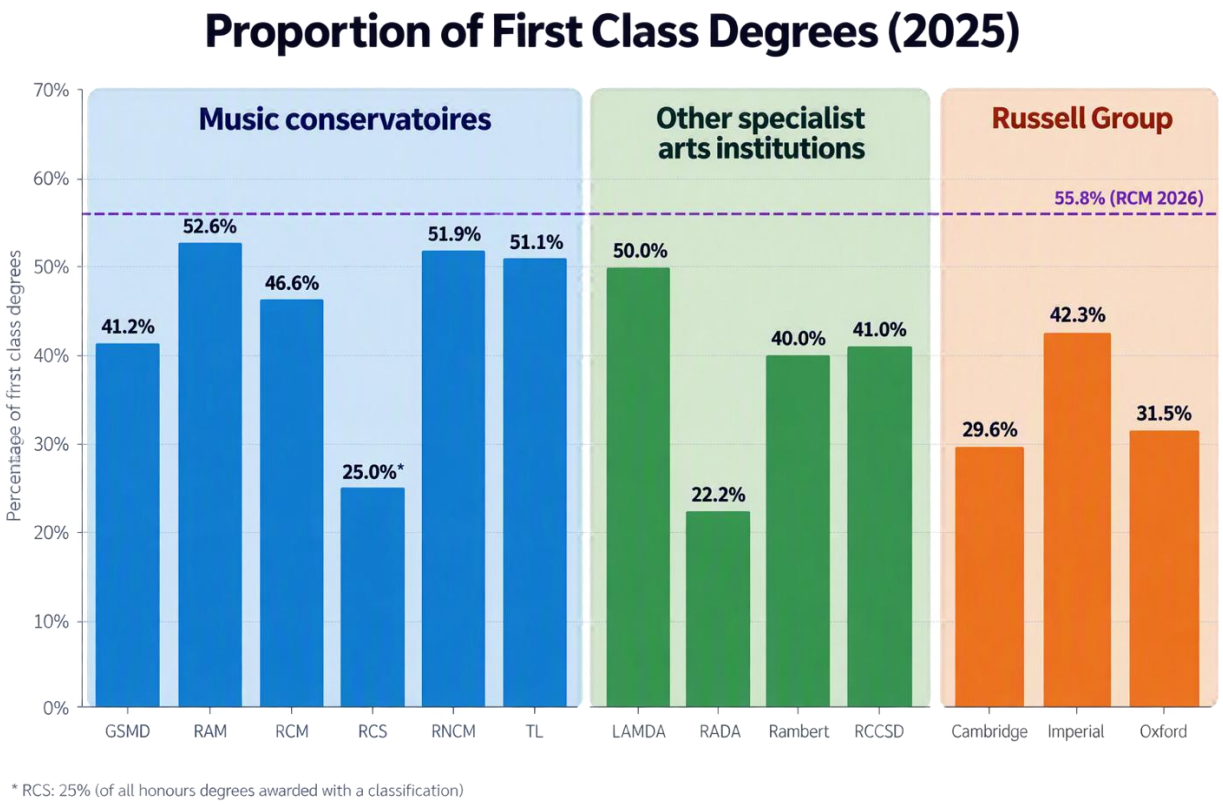
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
I	42.7%	64.3%	66.3%	42.5%	54.2%	46.6%	**55.2%**
II:1	46.7%	28.6%	25.7%	38.7%	37.5%	36.8%	**33.2%**
Combined upper-classification degrees	87.4%	92.9%	92.0%	81.2%	91.7%	83.4%	**88.5%**
II:2	12.6%	7.1%	6.9%	16.0%	8.3%	14.3%	**8.3%**
III	-	-	-	2.8%	-	1.5%	**2.08%**
Unclassified	-	-	1.0%	-	-	-	**1.04%**
Fail	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Historically, a relatively high proportion of RCM students have graduated with either a first-class or an upper second-class honours degree. The College is highly selective and attracts accomplished young musicians from the UK and internationally. Its intensive teaching environment, specialist resources and four-year programme provide substantial opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate their achievement at FHEQ Level 6. These contextual factors may contribute to the College's degree-outcomes profile, although we recognise that they do not in themselves establish the reasons for changes in classifications over time.

As an illustration of this context, the table below shows the proportion of first-class degrees awarded by RCM in comparison to the rest of the UK HE sector. (HESA data are not yet available for 2026.)



As an illustration of the specialist context, the chart below compares the proportion of first-class degrees awarded by the RCM in 2026 with the proportions awarded by selected conservatoires, specialist arts institutions and highly selective Russell Group universities in 2025, the latest year for which comparable HESA data are available. The different reference years should be taken into account when interpreting the comparison.



UK music conservatoires have tended to award significantly more first-class awards than the general HE sector, even compared to other highly selective institutions, including world-leading specialist HEIs in the other arts and top-ranked Russell group universities. The additional year of study in music conservatoire undergraduate programmes, which are typically four years in duration, may be a factor. (Four-year programmes in other fields, such as STEM, tend to lead to integrated masters awards.) However we recognise that our proportion of first-class honours degrees awarded in 2026 is the highest since the special measures during the pandemic.

Explanation of changes

The College experienced a significant increase in the proportion of first-class degree awards during the pandemic, from 42.7% in 2020 to 64.3% in 2021 and 66.3% in 2022. This increase coincided with the introduction of a no-detriment policy during the pandemic. Developed in consultation with the Students' Union and external examiners, and approved by the Senate Executive Committee, the policy set out principles intended to ensure that students did not experience adverse outcomes because of Covid-19 disruption. We are confident that the College's approach to recognising student achievement during the pandemic was fair and proportionate. In a practice-led performing arts context, these measures were required to mitigate the exceptional disruption to conservatoire learning and teaching. The policy applied to all students whose results fell within the relevant borderline provisions and consequently contributed to a higher proportion of first-class awards than would have been expected in a typical pre-pandemic year.

As anticipated, during 2022-2023 the proportion of first-class awards returned to pre-pandemic levels as normal procedures for the classification of degrees resumed. However, since 2023 we have seen fluctuations in the proportion of first-class awards, and in 2026 we have seen the highest level since the pandemic. The overall proportion of first-class awards remains broadly in line with other music conservatoires, including the Royal Academy of Music (52.6% in 2025)

and Royal Northern College of Music (51.9% in 2025), although it is recognised that RAM, RCM and RNCM are among those awarding the highest proportion of first-class degrees in the UK.

Recent steps taken to maintain standards

As a world-leading institution we are committed to upholding world-leading standards and ensuring that the value of an RCM degree is maintained.

In November 2025, the OfS published a report on bachelors' degree classification algorithms, which coincided with the periodic review of the College's BMus programme. The report identified discounting credits with the lowest marks as a practice that may increase a provider's risk of non-compliance with ongoing condition B4. In response, the College has developed a revised classification approach that removes discounting for students commencing under the new regulations.

For undergraduate students who commenced study in 2024-25 or earlier, the RCM will continue to apply its existing profiling approach to degree classification, which includes the 'discounting' of a limited amount of credit with the lowest marks, typically up to 40 credits out of 360 (see appendix 1). This approach is being retained for these cohorts to avoid changing, mid-way through their programme, the academic regulations that applied when they commenced their studies. 2027-28 will be the final academic year in which this approach is applied.

In the interim period, we have removed a clause from the current regulations that indicated the Board of Examiners would consider a higher classification if grades from BMus 2 were limiting the classification. As this would constitute a further layer of discounting, it is no longer appropriate for the College to apply this approach.

Following the recent periodic programme review, the RCM will move to a credit-weighted average approach for all undergraduate students commencing study from 2025-26 onwards (see Appendix 2). The new approach has been informed by detailed modelling of the likely impact of the revised algorithm, including consideration of the potential risk of grade inflation. In response to the modelling, there will be no separate borderline consideration, and students will be required to achieve at least 60 credits in BMus 4 at the level of the classification awarded. On the basis of the modelling, the RCM is satisfied that the change is not expected to contribute to grade inflation. Outcomes will continue to be monitored as the revised approach is implemented.

During 2026-27 the College's Senate Executive Committee will continue to monitor principal study recital and portfolio marking procedures to ensure that marking thresholds are being applied correctly and consistently. This work will be supported by a new set of marking grids to support markers and exam panels.

Assessment and Marking Practices

The College applies rigorous processes to ensure that its qualifications are aligned with national expectations and sector reference points. The BMus programme is reviewed in full every five years, at which point there is detailed cross-referencing with the most up-to-date QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Music (2025) and feedback from our external examiners. As a practice-based institution with a professionally focussed curriculum we also ensure that the programme aims, learning outcomes and assessment design are closely aligned with industry expectations.

The principles for assessment standards and marking are articulated in the College's 'Assessment Handbook' which is updated annually. This Handbook complements the BMus Programme Regulations, detailing the College's expectations for conducting assessments, threshold standards, grading, moderation, and high-quality feedback. The College provides annual training for members of recital panels and a programme of staff development and mentoring to support academic teaching staff, including Graduate Teaching Assistants, to develop consistent and high-quality approaches to assessment.

All year 3 and 4 recital examinations include an external specialist on the panel. The BMus programme also has two experienced programme external examiners who complete detailed annual reports on the College's assessment processes and standards. Feedback from external examiners informs the annual monitoring report and enhancement action plan.

Academic Governance

Responsibility for quality assurance procedures, including maintaining the standards of the College's taught provision, lies with Senate. Senate is responsible for the approval of revisions to the quality assurance procedures, initial programme approval and the subsequent review timetable, approval of reports from initial programme approval and review events, approval of annual programme monitoring reports, and approval of external examiner appointments.

The College's Senate Executive Committee, chaired by the Director, has responsibility for the approval of operational procedures and policy relating to student assessment, for instance the composition of practical assessment panels and procedures for panels. Senate Executive also approves minor and major modifications to programme content and changes to regulations. SEC is supported by two committees: a Student Curriculum and Experience Forum (co-chaired by the SU President and the Director of Programmes) and the Learning and Teaching Committee.

The Undergraduate Board of Examiners, chaired by the Director of Programmes, approves assessment decisions and the award of qualifications. It also makes recommendations to Senate Executive and the Programmes Forum on revisions to regulations and assessment procedures.

RCM Council has governing-body oversight of quality assurance. Council protects and promotes the collective student interest and the importance of a high-quality student experience, promotes excellence in learning, teaching and research, monitors institutional and governing body performance, receives copies of reports of initial programme approval and review events, and expects Senate to inform Council of quality and standards issues.

Further information on RCM Academic Governance and Quality Assurance and Enhancement Processes can be found in the RCM's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook.

Teaching Practices and Learning Resources

Detailed information on the College's approach to Learning, Teaching and Assessment can be found in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. This sets out and explains the five pillars of learning and teaching at the College: artistry, professionalism, community, innovation, and expertise.

The College's learning environment is practice-led and professionally informed. The curriculum centres on students' development as a performer or composer through specialist one-to-one teaching. This is complemented by a range of core contextual modules in areas including aural, musicology, musicianship, health and wellbeing, music education, and professional skills. Later in the degree, students may choose options (elective) modules to complement their strengths and career aspirations. Around the formal curriculum, students participate in a wide range of internal and external performance opportunities to experience professional practices. Learning and assessment activities make full use of the outstanding resources on offer at the College, including practice rooms, multiple performance venues, recording studios, a public Museum, Library, and specialist instruments.

In recent years, the College has diversified its approaches to assessment to make assessment design more inclusive and to offer students appropriate flexibility in demonstrating their achievement of learning outcomes. It has also implemented measures to uphold academic integrity and the continuing relevance of assessment in the context of generative AI. Learning Support Agreements are available for disabled students, through which the College implements reasonable adjustments to assessment where appropriate.

The College has a high proportion of international students, many of whom use English as an additional language. We provide a range of high-quality English Language classes and tutorial support to ensure international students are fully supported with their studies and assessments.

Good Practice and Teaching and Learning Enhancement Activity

As outlined above, we are confident that our processes for maintaining standards and institutional oversight of these standards are robust. Examples of good practice include:

- Training and peer support for teaching staff who are new to marking processes;
- Close academic and pastoral monitoring of all students, particularly students from under-represented groups, who may be provided with bespoke support packages;
- Support and mentoring for staff to work towards AdvanceHE Fellowship;
- Clear student-facing guidance on the responsible use of GenAI in assessment. This is continually updated to reflect new developments and connects with the College's Academic Misconduct Procedure.

Future Actions

- The College is committed to annual review of its degree outcomes in consultation with students and external stakeholders, including external examiners and Conservatoire UK sector peers. Progress will be reported to Senate and Council through annual updates on degree outcomes.
- The College has strengthened its focus on staff development for all involved in learning, teaching, and assessment, especially for faculty professors. Since 2025-26 we have implemented more robust induction, monitoring, and support processes for teaching staff.
- The College will continue to monitor degree outcomes for students from under-represented groups in accordance with our Access and Participation commitments with the Office for Students.
- We continue to be concerned about reduced access to school music and instrumental lessons for young people in the UK. The College is committed to raising awareness and tackling barriers to music-making. We actively encourage our students and staff to advocate for the importance of musical opportunities for young people and wider society.

APPENDIX 1: PROCEDURE FOR CALCULATING FINAL DEGREE CLASSIFICATION (2024 entrants or earlier)

For students who commenced their BMus studies in 2024 or earlier

1. **For students joining the RCM in either Year 1 or in Year 2** only the best 340 credits at Level 5 and above are used. Most students will have earned 360 credits (more if they fast-tracked by taking L5 or L6 modules in Years 1 or 2).

    - To obtain a First, half of the credits at each step of the procedure need to be at First standard, and the rest no lower than a 2:I.
    - To obtain a 2:I, half of the credits at each step of the procedure need to be at either a 2:I (or higher) standard and the rest no lower than a 2:II.
    - To obtain a 2:II, half of the credits at each step of the procedure need to be at either a 2:II (or higher) standard
    - Borderline students may have up to 20 credits deficit at either step. This deficit may be applied once only.

STEP 1 Profile of best 180 credits at Level 6 or higher	STEP 2 Profile of best 340 credits at Level 5 or higher	Overall classification
At least 90 Class 1; None lower than Class 2:I	At least 170 Class 1; None lower than Class 2:I	**Class 1**
Criteria above almost met but deficient by 20 credits		**Normally Class 1**
Criteria above missed by deficit of more than 20 credits		**Normally Class 2:I**
At least 90 Class 2:I; None lower than Class 2:II	At least 170 Class 2:I; None lower than Class 2:II	**Class 2:I**
Criteria above almost met but deficient by 20 credits		**Normally Class 2:I**
Criteria above missed by deficit of more than 20 credits		**Normally Class 2:II**
At least 90 Class 2:II;	At least 170 Class 2:II;	**Class 2:II**
Criteria above almost met but deficient by 20 credits		**Normally Class 2:II**
Criteria above missed by deficit of more than 20 credits		**Normally Class 3**
All 180 at Class 3	All 340 at Class 3	**Class 3**
Criteria above missed		**Fail**

APPENDIX 2: PROCEDURE FOR CALCULATING FINAL DEGREE CLASSIFICATION (2025 entrants onwards)

For students who commenced their BMus studies in 2025 or later

1. **For students joining the RCM in either Year 1 or in Year 2** the degree classification for the BMus with Honours is determined according to a credit-weighted average grade between programme years 2, 3 and 4 and the credit profile in BMus 4. The weighting applied at each stage of study to calculate the average grade is:

Year	
BMus 1	0%
BMus 2	20%
BMus 3	30%
BMus 4	50%

2. **For students joining the RCM in Year 3** the degree classification for the BMus with Honours is determined according to a credit-weighted average grade between programme years 3 and 4 and the credit profile in BMus 4. The weighting applied at each stage of study to calculate the average grade is:

Year	
BMus 1	n/a
BMus 2	n/a
BMus 3	40%
BMus 4	60%

3. The student's overall average mark, calculated using an arithmetic mean of all individual module marks and weighted to take account of the module credit weighting and the stage of study (as above), will determine the degree classification, based on the criteria below:

Overall classification	
Class I	Weighted average of 69.5 or higher AND a minimum of 60 credits in BMus 4 at class I
Class 2:I	Weighted average of 59.5 or higher AND a minimum of 60 credits in BMus 4 at class 2:I or higher
Class 2:II	Weighted average of 49.5 or higher AND a minimum of 60 credits in BMus 4 at 2:II or higher
Class 3	Weighted average of 39.5 or higher. (No profiling requirement as all modules must be passed.)
Fail	Criteria above missed