

# Leeds Conservatoire Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2020-2025



## Introduction:

This Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy outlines our approach to the delivery of our strategic aims through our curriculum. Leeds Conservatoire has around 1,300 full-time undergraduate and postgraduate students. This strategy is the third Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy to be produced by the conservatoire since becoming a wholly owned subsidiary of the Luminare Group.

The strategy has been developed by the Vice Principal, in consultation with the Learning and Teaching Quality Committee Group, the Director of the School of Performance, the Director of the School of Pop and Production and the Head of Postgraduate Studies. It has been approved by the conservatoire's Academic Council. One particular ambition of the strategy is to ensure that, as stated in our Access and Participation Plan, we are "committed to valuing diversity and promoting equality and inclusion" and that we will "seek to maximise the potential of our staff and students, be responsive to new ideas, and equip our students for life in a multicultural and diverse society". Whilst there are challenges to be met across access and participation, this Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy will focus on success, and specifically attainment gaps for students from underrepresented groups in music and performing arts.

## Pedagogy:

The Leeds Conservatoire Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy 2020 is underpinned by an international outlook and a proactive academic community of practitioners and researchers. Our inspirational learning environment is designed to ensure that the needs and goals of each individual student can be met (Regelski, 2009: 15–19). Our faculty encourages a 'creative mindset' (Haddon, 2016) and works in partnership with students (Healey, 2014) to extend their knowledge of music through critically informed creative practice. Students and faculty engage in learning by doing (Nelson, 2013), investigating how to apply their skills and understand their place within society (Fautley, 2010: 43-47).

At Leeds Conservatoire, our inclusive learning community equips students with the tools they need to understand the personal and cultural dynamics which shape society. We empower students to be proactive Artistic Citizens (Elliott, 2012) and to strive for a more equal, inclusive and diverse artistic community (Spain, 2017) where the greatest possible number of students can thrive (Rigby, 2019).

Real-world industry relevance is at the heart of our curriculum. Strong national and international ties to the wider creative industries ensure currency and drive employability for our students (Sveidahl, 2015). We are committed to community engagement, embedding our institution in the wider cultural ecosystem (Castle, 2018) and acknowledging the role of society in shaping the lives of our graduates (Lion et al, 2013: 252). We see our institution as a community resource (Aksdal, 2018), supporting our

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students to engage in activities that happen both inside and outside of the formal taught environment (Wilkinson, 2017).

We believe critical thinking skills are integral to professional development (Cloonan and Williamson, 2018). The World Economic Forum Future of Jobs Report (2019) identifies problem solving skills, critical thinking and creativity as the most essential skills for employability. Our students embrace this challenge to become innovators, connectors, partners and, most of all, reflective practitioners (Bolton, 2010), equipping them to enter rapidly changing arts professions with confidence and understanding (Smilde, 2014).

Students at Leeds Conservatoire gain employability skills by developing their emotional intelligence and expertise as communicators (Ritchie, 2016), which helps them to make better-informed decisions in all areas of life (Iturriaga, 2016). We support our students to move out of their comfort zones and challenge them to find new knowledge in order to solve problems (Tryantafyllaki, 2015).

We also recognise that entrepreneurial skills are crucial in professional life, with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) accounting for up to 70% of all European employment (Kumar and Rao, 2015). Our curricula champion 'entrepreneurial creativity' (Burnard, 2012: 16), encouraging students to take risks, to learn from failure, to extend the boundaries of disciplines and institutions, and to venture beyond the expected. Our students are equipped both to thrive now and to reinvent creativity for the future (Lehikoinen, 2018: 29).

Leeds Conservatoire curricula emphasise student-led learning and teaching, preparing graduates for learning throughout their working life (Nerland, 2018). We help our students to forge their own path and we focus on the individual needs of each learner in our community (Iversen et al, 2015). Rejecting a 'one size fits all' model, we embrace the principles of respect, reciprocity and shared responsibility between students and faculty (Tong et al, 2018: 27). This gives our students a voice, enabling them to acquire greater autonomy and to successfully make the transition from education to the professions (McLean, 2019).

## Monitoring:

The strategy will be monitored by the conservatoire's Academic Council. It will be reviewed on an annual basis, taking into account (where appropriate) Annual Monitoring; student data; feedback from students, staff, the Leeds Conservatoire Board and employers; outcomes of QAA reviews; and external legislation and regulation (where applicable) from the OfS, and the provisions of the Bologna Accord. We also review the strategy based on developing pedagogical research and changing industry expectations. The strategy is to be used as a driver to inform the aims of departmental plans (where

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appropriate) across the conservatoire. Cross-departmental working will be key to successful delivery of the strategy.

All provision at Leeds Conservatoire should prioritise the guidance of this strategy, which is itself informed by the interim 24-month Leeds Conservatoire strategic priority plan and the Luminate Education Group Higher Education Learning and Teaching Strategy 2020-2025.

The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is triangulated to several points of reference:

- Interim 24-month Leeds Conservatoire Strategic Priority Plan
- Leeds Conservatoire Access and Participation Plan
- Leeds Conservatoire Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan
- Leeds Conservatoire Student Charter and Student Handbook
- UK Quality Code for Higher Education
- Luminate HE Strategy

## **As per the Strategic Aims from the Leeds Conservatoire Strategic Plan/ Luminate Education Group HE Learning and Teaching Strategy, we will:**

1. Support all our students in every aspect of their journey to success, and close the gaps with students who have longer distances to travel;
2. Ensure that our curriculum is rigorous, stretching and aligned with the evolving demands of the creative industries;
3. Create a culture that provides an inspirational climate for learning;
4. Develop excellent learning relationships between students and staff, working to create an inclusive learning community which supports all learners to achieve their full potential;
5. Build a portfolio of intellectually challenging, industry-relevant and sustainable degrees;
6. Innovate in teaching, learning and assessment at undergraduate and postgraduate level;
7. Equip staff with the professional characteristics, skills, knowledge and understanding of contemporary pedagogy to deliver exceptional learning programmes;
8. Provide high quality learning resources and accommodation to create inspirational learning environments;
9. Create innovative assessment and feedback that improves student achievement and progression to allow all our students to reach their full potential.

## **The Leeds Conservatoire student attributes:**

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Graduates who have successfully completed an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification at Leeds Conservatoire will have developed the following qualities and skills through the course of their study and engagement in student life.

They will:

1. Have acquired expert knowledge and skills appropriate to the level of their exit award as performers, actors, composers and producers, including skills of self-reflection, critical thinking and listening skills and the ability to work independently and collaboratively with others;
2. Have acquired the knowledge and skills appropriate to their exit awards as entrepreneurs, complemented by an array of employability skills, including communication and presentation skills, and be digitally literate in academic, social and professional contexts;
3. Have learned and developed in partnership with academic staff: musicians, actors, songwriters, composers and producers, gaining qualifications and active professional profiles appropriate to the level of the exit award;
4. Have been given the opportunity to perform at a high level, for example through large ensembles or full-scale productions;
5. Value collaboration with other professionals from the creative industries as a method to enhance creativity, originality and employability;
6. Display confidence and independence, and be inquisitive learners who will have used the Leeds Conservatoire environment to experiment with new ideas and practices;
7. Be prepared for the international music and performance industry, and have an appreciation and understanding of wider cultures and communities;
8. Have demonstrated the knowledge and skills to progress to further study, and/or to become professional composers, directors, actors, musicians, performers, producers or entrepreneurs who could contribute to the global marketplace.

**To deliver the both the strategic aims of this strategy and to ensure that successful graduates have these attributes, we will focus on the following seven areas:**

## **1. Curriculum**

We will ensure that our curriculum is rigorous, decolonized, has equality, diversity and inclusion embedded within it and is aligned with the needs of the contemporary music industry. It will enable individual students to explore a range of musical genres. The curriculum will value artistic expression, creative risk, employability and collaboration, and will be developed using both internal and external reference points.

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Curriculum development will be informed by:

- Consulting with recognised industry practitioners, employers and relevant sector networks during curriculum development and validation and as part of annual monitoring, self-assessment and periodic review;
- Monitoring trends in genre, technology, recognised pedagogic research and sector good practice in the UK and across the world;
- Building on recognised success within the conservatoire by students, ensembles, alumni, visiting professors and staff;
- Seeking to collaborate with external partners/ institutions/organisations to develop new curriculum and student-focused projects;
- Improving engagement with industry;
- Consulting with students.

Engagement with our curriculum and access to our provision will be driven by:

- Improving and demonstrating the quality of our provision, by improving internal engagement, strengthening our external reputation and enhancing the student experience;
- Engaging with local communities via curriculum design that embeds students within the community;
- Engaging with those who influence the future studies of potential conservatoire students (e.g. school and music teachers) by placing Leeds Conservatoire students in these institutions, through existing modules;
- Engaging with FE providers and schools, as well as with our own Junior Conservatoire provision to further develop progression routes to study at Leeds Conservatoire.
- Maintaining a commitment through our Access and Participation Plan to help students from diverse backgrounds aspire to access higher education.

## 2. Teaching strategies:

Students will be provided with the range of professional and transferable skills appropriate to the level of their exit award, and the critical skills required for further research or practice-based study. The core learning experience is delivered through a range of learning and teaching strategies, including one to one instrumental/compositional tuition, ensemble/band coaching, rehearsals, lectures, seminars, projects, placements, performances, studio sessions, Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) sessions, self-reflection and evaluation, group and individual tutorials. These are supported by learning technology, workshops and masterclasses.

- Intellectual skills are delivered through formal lectures, seminars, workshops and tutorials, as well as directed study. In seminars, students are encouraged to contribute to discussions, to

present work in progress, to present topics and arguments, and to engage in the evaluation of existing repertoire and other students' work;

- Practical and professional skills are delivered through taught sessions in studio and practical environments, as well as through directed study. Learning and assessment are predominantly practice-based and embrace a wide range of genres. Workshop sessions are practical and/or interactive. Learning and teaching is supported by learning technologies to encourage student-centred active learning within the classroom, structured independent study and to maximise the impact of working with industry professionals;
- Creative and contextual skills are delivered through taught sessions, workshops, masterclasses and through formal lectures, as well as through directed study. Creative skills at HE level are also supported through collaborating with other students in large scale practical projects, for example participation in orchestras, ensembles, studio work or musical groups. In this manner, students are able to contextualise their own specific musical specialism/skill in terms of the wider sector of cultural production;
- Transferable skills are delivered through formal lectures supported by guest lectures, workshops and directed study. All BA students have the opportunity to apply their practical skills in curriculum-based projects as part of the conservatoire's focus on preparing students for a portfolio career;
- Industry practice and professional engagement will be supported by Musicians' Development and Booking Agency (MBDA) which will offer tailored services to students beyond the curriculum, supporting the development of ideas and encouraging innovative approaches to the foundations of their careers
- The MBDA will also look to increase engagement of underrepresented groups in the conservatoire's employability initiatives, seeking guidance from student representatives about how best to do this.

### 3. Assessment strategies:

Assessments will be driven primarily by the need to demonstrate learning outcomes as specified in the programme and module descriptors or short course literature. They will measure a student's knowledge, understanding and ability, so that they can demonstrably use that knowledge in a range of scenarios.

All assessment will include a design stage, to ensure benchmarking against pedagogic research and industry practice, parity with other assessments, and alignment with learning outcomes. Assessments will be validated either as part of a Programme Specification, or in accordance with our own processes (e.g. for short courses). All assessment should be reflected upon by teachers and by the student body and this reflection may feed back into design and validation and/or into any other stage of the process.

Practical and professional skills are assessed through performance, composition, installation, production, group work, technical exercise and presentation. Our assessment panels at levels 6 and 7

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include distinguished external professional musicians and performers (external assessors), who bring experience of the professional world to the assessment process and provide students with opportunities to present their work to a wider audience. External assessors are specialists appointed by Leeds Conservatoire in the appropriate instrument, skill or voice and genre, who have demonstrable experience of internal and/or external examining in UK higher education.

Forms of assessment will include:

- Performance, for example as instrumental/vocal recital or performed and acted text;
- Portfolio, for example short performances, compositions or productions, evidence of solo or group project work or research;
- Written submission, for example essay or report;
- Reflective journal, for example essay or report reflecting on personal experience of solo or group project work;
- Composition, for example presentation of an original composition in score and/or recorded format;
- Production, for example, presentation of an original music production in recorded format.
- Group work, for example presentation of a portfolio or performance produced wholly or partly as a group;
- Technical exercises, for example tests of fundamental musical skills, e.g. aural skills, sight reading.

The assessment process will promote:

- Assessment tasks with real-world relevance;
- Academic integrity;
- Dialogue between teachers and learners that facilitates reflective learning;
- A good understanding and clear communication of the criteria at all stages of assessment;
- Timely and effective feedback, both formal and informal, that is supportive, that enables development, and that is useful in the next stage of learning.

## 4. Performance and Showcase Opportunities:

Performance and showcases are integral to the experience of students on all pathways. Whilst they are not assessed and are voluntary, they are programmed to align with the vision of the conservatoire, and in particular to ensure that students are prepared to enter the creative industries at the end of their course.

We will provide exceptional support and opportunities by:

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- Improving engagement with repertoire, providing opportunities for students to practice and attend rehearsals, enabling better performances;
- Providing opportunities for producers and composers to showcase their work;
- Encouraging originality and competition between students, through increasing performance opportunities and through external partnerships;
- Supporting and nurturing our students artistically and pastorally throughout their entire journey, and their voice will be at the heart of the conservatoire experience. Our students will have opportunities to perform at the highest level with professional musicians, visiting professors, conductors and musical directors, both within and outside the conservatoire;
- Encouraging and supporting students to perform outside the institution and supporting touring activities;
- Encouraging the performance of challenging and contemporary repertoires outside the traditional conservatoire canon;
- Encouraging the use of non-traditional performance spaces for live music performance.
- Providing a Musicians Development and Booking Agency to provide professional performance opportunities for Leeds Conservatoire students;
- Implementing the Professional Studies strand across all levels of all undergraduate degree programmes, ensuring that students receive both course-specific and generic career development guidance from a range of high-quality industry professionals

## 5. Student Voice

Support for the student experience will be achieved through:

- Listening to what our students say through development of the 'Student Voice';
- Providing evidence-based support to students and reviewing our provision based on performance indicators, student feedback and identified good practice;
- Providing disability and learning support services, assistive technologies, financial support, targeted health and wellbeing initiatives including Alexander Technique classes and physiotherapy clinics;
- Providing international student support, counselling and mental health support and pastoral care in the form of a personal tutoring scheme;
- Publishing Service Standards, providing clear timescales for the provision of these services;
- Continually reviewing and enhancing the information that we provide to students to ensure it is clear and current, for example information on our website, the virtual learning environment, electronic noticeboards and campaigns throughout the year.
- Investing in accommodation year-on-year to provide safe, sustainable and industry-standard facilities that support the experience of our students;
- A Student Charter and a strategy for Student Communication which ensure the right information is provided to the right students at the right time and by the right means.



- The provision of comprehensive safeguarding procedures which are readily accessible on Space, which are subject to regular review and include reference to 'Prevent', one of four elements of the Government's counter terrorism strategy.

## 6. Staff and Resource Development to Support Learning And Teaching

Our core values will be delivered through the guidance and example of our key asset, our staff. We are committed to the development and success of our staff, to recruiting a more diverse range of staff and ensuring that there are no obstacles to recruitment. Key elements of our people strategy will be further investment in training and development, support for professional practice and research and a focus on recruiting and retaining talented staff. Curricula will engage students directly with innovative practice and cutting-edge scholarly activity through inspiring academic leadership and practice-led and student-led teaching. Our teachers and visiting professors are themselves active professionals, usually of national, or international, standing. We will:

- Enable part-time academic staff, engaged on teaching-only contracts, to engage in scholarly and professional practice and projects that are specifically linked to their learning and teaching activities and funded through staff development;
- Train our personal tutors so that they may better understand and support students from underrepresented groups who are at higher risk of loss or failure. Our aim is for tutors to have a deep understanding of the personal circumstance of their tutees, beyond their academic needs, and therefore be more able to support them throughout their time at Leeds Conservatoire;
- Encourage and support staff to undertake higher level qualifications, e.g. Doctoral study;
- Engage external professionals in the annual review of existing programmes and the development of new programmes to ensure that the conservatoire's portfolio of programmes remains innovative and professionally relevant;
- Seek to develop an open access online resource of staff publications and research;
- Provide appropriate management training for Pathway Leaders, Curriculum Coordinators and Module Coordinators;
- Support academic staff with their on-going professional development, enabling engagement with good practice and innovation in learning and teaching. Academic staff will be encouraged and trusted to develop their own innovative practice, specific to learners' needs. Excellence in learning and teaching, research and professional practice will be celebrated and rewarded;
- Develop and disseminate good practice in learning and teaching, and enable staff to discuss and reflect on their own practice through Staff Development and Training days;
- Continue teaching/peer observation schemes that are developmental in focus, aimed at supporting early-career lecturers. Experienced staff will be appointed as mentors to all new staff.

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## 7. Estate and facilities

We will continue to invest in our estate via our Estates Strategy, recognising that exceptional teaching and working environments are essential to the delivery of our mission. Our ambition will remain to provide the best teaching facilities in the sector. We will create strong support for the development of blended and mobile learning that will meet student expectations, identifying technologies for collaborative work and sustainable development to support the delivery of our courses.

Leeds Conservatoire is equipped with multi-track recording studios, specialist music workstation facilities and rehearsal facilities that are specified to industry standards. Resources include suites of Apple-based composition and production environments suitable for electronic music, electroacoustic music, music production and composing for moving image. A range of portable recording equipment and microphones are also available for recording on location. Leeds Conservatoire has a range of ensemble rooms, band practice rooms and smaller practice rooms for individual practice, along with a recital hall and a 350-seat auditorium, Library and Business facilities. Our learning environment and facilities reflect those that students will encounter in their professional lives.

We will:

- Ensure that our facilities are benchmarked against industry standards, whether studio, ensemble or teaching space;
- Respond to student needs as captured by a variety of Student Voice activities;
- Ensure that our estate is fit for purpose and that all instrument and technical support is updated and maintained through continuous refurbishment;
- Continue to invest each year in the provision of book, journal, video and sound recording collections in both print and digital form;
- Ensure that learning technology is led by research, pedagogic design and student needs;
- Define and embedding a blended learning approach for each course/pathway that enhances learning and teaching, supports students and enables digital literacy development.

**To monitor the strategic aims of this strategy and to ensure that successful graduates have the specified attributes, we will:**

- Use the Annual Monitoring, Review and Enhancement of Programmes (AMREP) reporting cycle, (including a Programme Review and Enhancement Report). This is where student data is

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reviewed, lead outcomes for student outcomes KPIs are considered, and risks are actively managed and reported through the leadership and committee structures;

- Via the Access and Participation Working Group (APWG), monitor Access and Participation action plan targets with regards to closing success (continuation and attainment) gaps for underrepresented groups. If there are indications that objectives will not be achieved then objectives and investment may be reprioritised. In severe cases, milestones may be amended to a more realistic success level;
- Updates to the APWG Action Plan, including progress towards targets, risk and further actions will be presented to the Students' Union, EDI Committee, Executive Leadership Committee (ELC) and the Leeds Conservatoire Board (governing body) at least biannually;
- Assess progression for all students, but with a focus on results of the Graduate Outcomes Surveys for underrepresented groups, and then set specific targets related to improving the progression of underrepresented groups from 2021/22 onwards.

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