



Royal Conservatoire *of* Scotland

Research Programmes
MPhil/PhD

Guide for Applicants
Academic Year 2026/27

THE ROYAL CONSERVATOIRE OF SCOTLAND

In 1994, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (then, the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama) became the first UK Conservatoire to be awarded degree-awarding powers for taught courses by the Privy Council. Since then, the Conservatoire has developed a range of vocationally-orientated degree courses in music and drama performance, production and film, including taught Masters courses in vocal and instrumental performance, opera, composition, conducting, acting, directing and producing. In 1998, the Royal Conservatoire won springboard funding from the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council to establish a National Centre for Research in the Performing Arts which has evolved into [The Exchange](#). From October 2000, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland has offered research programmes leading to the awards of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Master of Philosophy (MPhil) of the University of St Andrews. The Conservatoire's first doctorate was awarded in 2005. In 2015, the Conservatoire launched a Doctor of Performing Arts (DPerf) programme which enables professional artistic development at the highest level and a significant and original contribution to a particular artistic field. A separate Guide for Applicants is available for this programme of study.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

Research programmes offered by the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland lead to awards of the University of St Andrews. Research students will matriculate at both the Conservatoire and the University and will have access to the facilities of both institutions. **Programmes of study will be undertaken at, and administered by, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.** All fees will be payable to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

RESOURCES

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is housed in a modern, specially designed building and has some of the best performance and rehearsal facilities of any conservatoire in Europe. The auditoria include the New Athenaeum Theatre as the principal auditorium for plays and opera, the Chandler Studio Theatre and the Stevenson Hall. In addition the Alexander Gibson Opera School, which opened in 1998, houses rehearsal and coaching rooms and a stunning performance space. The Royal Conservatoire library contains one of the most comprehensive performing arts collections in the UK. The collections feature extensive print and online material covering all Conservatoire subject disciplines and wider multi-disciplinary research materials. The RCS Archives is also a unique research resource, rich in both the depth and diversity of holdings. ICT facilities and a study lab for research students are available.

Conservatoire research students also have access to the extensive library resources held by the University of St Andrews (<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/library/>) and to specialist academic training through the university's Centre for Educational Enhancement and Development (CEED) (<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/ceed/>).

All research students undertake training within the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland through participating in a number of study days held throughout the academic year and engaging in The Exchange Talks series (held weekly in term time). The resources of the

Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities (SGSAH), of which the Conservatoire is a member, can also be accessed (<http://www.sgsah.ac.uk/>)

A DISTINCTIVE RESEARCH ETHOS

The vision of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is:

To be Scotland's globally-recognised and inspirational leader in learning for the performing arts, attracting and nurturing the next Scottish and international creative talent.

As performance to the highest standards is central to all of the Conservatoire's work, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's research activities will always be located within that context. The key elements of **performance and/or creation** give the Royal Conservatoire's research profile a clear and individual identity, both in general as regards research within the Conservatoire and in particular as regards the acceptance of research students and the awarding of research degrees.

SPECIALIST AREAS OF STUDY

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland offers opportunities for suitably qualified students to work towards the achievement of research degrees in appropriate areas of enquiry. Applications will only be successful if it is clear that the proposed research can best be undertaken within a Conservatoire context, in which performance and/or creation is held central.

The specific areas for research degrees are:

- the processes and methodologies of developing new performance work (music/drama/music theatre), including collaborative and devised performance
- performance
- musical composition, in all genres, for live, electro-acoustic and mixed media
- Scottish music
- methodologies of specialist performance training, including the use of IT
- socio-cultural studies of performance
- performance education and pedagogy

TYPES OF SUBMISSION

MPhil and PhD

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland will accept any one of three possible forms of submission for an MPhil or PhD research degree. The final proposal as to which form of submission is most appropriate to a student's work will be agreed between the student and her/his supervisors and submitted to the Research Degrees Committee for approval in good time before the anticipated date of submission. Three forms of submission for the degrees of MPhil and PhD will be acceptable. In the following examples (which relate to PhD), the word "portfolio" is used to signify the presence of **performance-centred** and/or

practice-based work in a submission, and therefore in a student's research processes throughout their programme of study. Candidates will be examined on their submissions through a *viva voce*.

1. Portfolio accompanied by Written Commentary

A substantial body of original work that represents or embodies new knowledge, derived from original research. It will be accompanied by a succinct written commentary (of around 12,500 - 15,000 words) contextualising the production and/or presentation of that original work. The original work submitted must be documented fully in appropriate forms that will be accessible to future researchers.

2. Joint Portfolio with Dissertation

A combination of original work and an extended written text (of up to 40,000 words excluding bibliography and appendices) which together (but not necessarily separately) represent or embody new knowledge and derive from original research. The original work submitted must be documented fully in a form that will be accessible to future researchers.

3. Thesis

A substantial written thesis (of up to 80,000 words excluding bibliography and appendices) representing or embodying within the text, new knowledge deriving from original research.

HOW TO APPLY

Thank you for your interest in the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. If you require further information regarding the application and selection process generally, please do not hesitate to contact the Royal Conservatoire's Admissions office in the first instance. Contact details are:

tel: 0141 270 8265
email: admissions@rcs.ac.uk
website: <http://www.rcs.ac.uk>

We advise all applicants to discuss their ideas informally, before applying, with Dr Bethany Whiteside (Senior Lecturer and Doctoral Degrees Coordinator) via doctoraladmissions@rcs.ac.uk

CLOSING DATE

Applicants intending to commence their studies at the beginning of academic year 2026/27 are advised to submit their applications by **30 January 2026**.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Applications for all RCS programmes must be made online through the **UCAS Conservatoires** website at www.ucas.com/ucas/conservatoires. The Royal

Conservatoire of Scotland institution code is R58. You will find details of the admissions process on [UCAS](#) and you can call UCAS Conservatoires on 0371 468 0470 (UK) or +44 330 3330 232 (outside the UK) should you need advice or assistance.

You will also require the following course codes to apply:

Course	Course Code
MPhil Master of Philosophy Full Time	500F
MPhil Master of Philosophy Part Time	500P
PhD Doctor of Philosophy Full Time	555F
PhD Doctor of Philosophy Part Time	555P

Application Fee

There is a UCAS Conservatoires application fee of £28.95. In addition to that application fee, each Conservatoire charges an interview/audition fee. For the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the interview/audition fee is £55 per programme applied for. Fees are not refundable. The fees are paid via the UCAS Conservatoires website and not directly to the Conservatoire. The Conservatoire does not offer any fee waivers for research programmes.

References

It is your responsibility to nominate a referee as part of your UCAS Conservatoires application form. We may also request a second reference, if this is the case you will be contacted by email for the referee details. We cannot accept references from family, other relatives or close friends. You can read guidance about nominating your referee on the UCAS Conservatoires website.

[UCAS Conservatoire References](#)

Tuition Fees: Session 2025/26

	Full-Time	Part-Time
Research Home:	£9,680	£4,842
Research International (including EU):	£22,528	£11,266

From academic year 2021/22 all EU students commencing study in Scotland pay fees at the international rate. Confirmed fees for 2026/27 will be available from the Conservatoire website in autumn 2025. Please note that these fees are offered for guidance only and will be subject to annual increase. By agreement with the Conservatoire's Finance Officer, fees may be paid by instalment. Details will accompany any offer of a place.

ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS

Admission to doctoral level programmes is normally on the basis of a first degree at 2:1 level or higher (or the overseas equivalent) in the relevant subject, or a relevant postgraduate qualification. However, where a prospective student lacks a suitable first

degree, alternative mechanisms for assessing qualifications and preparedness, reflecting professional or other work experience, may be used. Increasingly the UK research councils in several disciplines require that funded students on doctoral programmes have first completed an approved masters programme that prepares the student for doctoral work. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is committed to the principles of the Accreditation of Prior Learning, including experiential learning, and will bring those to bear on the admissions process for its doctoral students. Applicants for whom English is a second language must demonstrate an IELTS score of 7.0.

DURATION AND MODE OF STUDY

Study may be undertaken on either a full- or part-time basis. The normal duration of study is as follows:

MPhil:	24 months full-time or 48 months part-time. A 6-month continuation period is normally allowed.
PhD:	3 years full-time or 6 years part-time. A one-year continuation period is normally allowed (two years for part-time students).

With the approval of the Research Degrees Committee, it may be possible for a student to change their mode of study depending upon individual circumstances.

THE SELECTION PROCESS

All applicants submit an application form via UCAS Conservatoires (<https://www.ucas.com/conservatoires>). Once you submit your online application, please then submit your research proposal online via Acceptd (<https://app.getacceptd.com/rcs>). Those applicants who meet the admissions criteria and whose proposed research projects accord with the Royal Conservatoire's research priorities and context will be interviewed/ auditioned. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland may require an applicant to provide additional material in support of their application prior to, or following, their interview/audition.

An interview/audition panel will include a specialist member of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland staff and will include other members of staff or external advisers as appropriate. An interview panel will normally be chaired by the Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange and will include at least one other member of staff or external adviser as appropriate. At the conclusion of the interview/audition process, the panel will formulate a recommendation to the Research Degrees Committee regarding the application. In exceptional cases, the panel may defer its recommendation until

- additional material has been requested and received from the applicant; and/or
- the applicant has participated in other interviews/auditions.

The Research Degrees Committee will recommend an applicant's admission to the University of St Andrews. (NB – although the offer of a place is made by the University, students will undertake their research programmes at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland).

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The research proposal is a key part of the application. A template of the research proposal form can be downloaded from the Conservatoire website - <https://www.rcs.ac.uk/apply/how-to-apply/research/> and this will allow you to view the online questions in advance and plan your response to each question. Your response to the questions should be submitted online via Acceptd (<https://app.getacceptd.com/rcs>) once an application has been submitted via UCAS Conservatoires. In general, the most successful applications are strong in three key areas: the proposal itself is strong, showing the context and need for the research with an awareness of previous work in the area; the application shows that the candidate is well-prepared, in terms of their previous experiences and/or training, to undertake the proposed research; and the proposal makes a reasoned case for the proposed course of research being undertaken here at the Royal Conservatoire – usually because a particular specialist supervisor or other resource is available here. As noted above, we advise all applicants to discuss their research ideas informally before applying.

SUPERVISORY ARRANGEMENTS

Supervisors for research students are appointed, with the approval of the University of St Andrews, by the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Research Degrees Committee. At least one supervisor must be a member of staff of the Royal Conservatoire. A second or joint external supervisor will also normally be appointed.

REGISTRATION AND PROGRESS

Successful applicants will initially be admitted as general research students. The Research Degrees Committee will review their progress after the first year of study (two years in the case of part-time students). On the basis of that review, the Research Degrees Committee will recommend to the University of St Andrews registration for either the degree of PhD or MPhil. After the initial review, the progress of students will be reviewed annually.

Following Your Interview/Audition

All decisions will be posted on UCAS Conservatoires following your audition via UCAS Conservatoires track, www.ucas.com/ucas/conservatoires/login (you will need your username and password). You will also receive notification from UCAS Conservatoires when decisions on **all** your choices are available.

Please see below for an explanation of UCAS Conservatoires codes –

Guaranteed Unconditional (GU)

The Conservatoire is satisfied from the information you have given, that you have already met the conditions for entry. Unless your application and/or qualification are subsequently shown to be fraudulent, a guaranteed unconditional offer is binding.

Guaranteed Conditional (GC)

The Conservatoire has made the offer subject to you meeting certain conditions such as examination results. Conditions can be viewed via UCAS Conservatoires track. Unless your application and/or qualifications are subsequently shown to be fraudulent, the offer is binding if you accept the offer and meet the conditions. You must meet the conditions of the offer by 31 August 2026, unless an earlier date is specified. If your conditions include obtaining IELTS (English Language test), you must meet this condition by 31 May 2026.

Reserve Unconditional (VU)

The Conservatoire is satisfied from the information you have given, that you have already met the conditions for entry and have offered a place on our reserve pool. See below for further information on reserve offers.

Reserve Conditional (VC)

The Conservatoire has offered a place on its reserve pool subject to you meeting certain conditions such as examination results. Conditions can be viewed via UCAS Conservatoires track. See below for further information on reserve offers.

Unsuccessful (R)

The Conservatoire does not wish to offer you any type of a place.

Reserve Offers Explained

A reserve (VC or VU) offer does not mean a place has been 'reserved' for you. Until such time as you receive (and accept) a guaranteed offer (GU or GC) from the Royal Conservatoire, you have not been accepted to study at the Conservatoire.

If you have received a reserve offer, it means that the Royal Conservatoire is not able to offer you a guaranteed place at the time it makes the offer. A reserve offer merely indicates that the Royal Conservatoire would like the opportunity to review its offer to you in the light of acceptances/declines to its guaranteed offers. You will become part of a 'pool' of reserve candidates and the Royal Conservatoire may choose to make you a guaranteed offer if a suitable place becomes available. If the Royal Conservatoire chooses not to make you a guaranteed offer, you will not be eligible to start at the Conservatoire.

If you have been given a reserve offer, in order to be considered for a guaranteed place (should one become available) you will need to accept the offer (and meet any conditions if applicable).

If you are holding a reserve offer, the Conservatoire can elect to make you a guaranteed offer at any time during the application cycle. Reserve offers remain active until the end of August. The decision to wait and see whether a guaranteed place becomes available, or to accept an offer at another conservatoire is entirely at your discretion.

Replying to offers

If you have one or more offers and UCAS Conservatoires has received decisions from all your conservatoires, they will send you a letter asking you to reply to your offers by a

given date. You must reply online via UCAS Conservatoires Track (www.ucas.com/ucas/conservatoires/login). Your reply date is also shown on Track. If you do not reply by the date given, your offers will be declined automatically. The reply date is your individual reply date so it may be different to other applicants'. This is because it is based on when you received the last decision from all the conservatoires you applied to.

2026/27 Entry Reply Dates

Last decision by	Your reply date is
8 January 2026	10 February 2026
12 March 2026	7 April 2026
14 May 2026	2 June 2026
7 July 2026	29 July 2026
1 August 2026	8 September 2026

You cannot hold more than one confirmed place in UCAS Conservatoires. A confirmed place in UCAS Conservatoires is a guaranteed unconditional offer as your first choice (GU1). If you receive more than one confirmed place, UCAS will ask you to accept one offer and withdraw from any others.

Feedback Policy

1. Programmes at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland are very competitive and attract high numbers of applications. In line with the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts, the Conservatoire has put in place a process for the provision of feedback where possible.
2. Feedback requests must be made in writing to feedback@rcs.ac.uk. The email must come from the address supplied on the UCAS Conservatoires application and must contain the applicant's full name, course and UCAS Conservatoires personal ID number.
3. Feedback requests will only be accepted from the applicant themselves. Requests from third parties will not be acknowledged.
4. Feedback requests must be received within eight weeks of the audition/interview date. Requests received after eight weeks will not be dealt with.
5. Feedback will usually take the form of a scanned copy of the audition decision sheet (assessment criteria). This will be emailed directly to the applicant. Feedback may take up to six weeks to process from the date of the request.
6. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland will not enter into a dialogue with applicants regarding the provision of feedback. Our courses are highly competitive and applicants need to recognise that feedback may simply state the fact that other applicants were stronger or that the course is not, in our opinion, suitable for them.
7. Applicants should not consider the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland as arbiters of their ability. Feedback given is based on performance in the audition/interview and suitability for a particular course of study. Applicants who are unsuccessful in their application to us, may go on to gain places at other Conservatoires, and similarly, applicants whom we accept may have been unsuccessful elsewhere.
8. There may be occasions where an applicant considers that the Conservatoire has failed to meet its high standards in the consideration of their application. Disagreement with the academic judgement of the audition/interview panel in reaching their decision based on aspects of the applicant's profile does not constitute grounds for a complaint by an applicant. Complaints will only be considered in relation to non-adherence to policy and procedure.

8.1 Complaints can be made in person, by phone, in writing, by email at complaint@rcs.ac.uk or by completing our Complaints Form at <http://www.rcs.ac.uk/complaints>.

8.2 The following information will be required when making a complaint –

- Your full name and address
- As much as you can about the complaint
- What has gone wrong
- How you would like the matter to be resolved

8.3 Normally, you must make your complaint within six months of:

- The event/issue you want to complain about
- Finding out that you have a reason to complain

In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

8.4 We will give you our decision in five working days or less. Should the complaint need to be investigated, a full response to the complaint will be given to you within 20 working days. If the investigation is likely to take longer, you will be informed.

8.5 Please refer to the Complaints Handling Procedure Guide for more information
- http://www.rcs.ac.uk/about_us/complaints/.

Applicants with Disabilities

We welcome applications from people with disabilities. Many disabled students have completed courses at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and many are studying here now, including students who are neurodiverse (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism, ADHD) students who have hidden medical conditions such as epilepsy, IBS, asthma, diabetes, ME and mental health issues such as depression or anxiety. Applicants who have a disability or medical condition and would like further information about facilities and support for your studies or who require support for audition or interview are invited to contact Derek Powell, the RCS Disability Adviser at disabilityservice@rcs.ac.uk. The Disability Adviser is also available to meet you when you come for audition/interview to discuss your particular requirements, sources of further information and can assist can assist with completing applications to your funding body (Student Awards Agency for Scotland, Student Finance England, Wales or NI) for the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). For more information, please see [Support for Disabled Students](#)

Equality and Diversity Statement

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland embraces a diverse population of students and staff. We believe that excellence can be achieved through recognising and celebrating the value of every individual, and are committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in all of our activities.

We are committed to developing and upholding a culture based on respect, inclusiveness, transparency and open-mindedness. We will proactively advance equity and inclusive practice in our activities and through effective and collaborative action, ensure that we all have the right to be seen, heard and celebrated.

Equality and Diversity are of central importance to our working ethos, find out more on our [Equality and Diversity pages](#).

Admissions Policy

Full details of our [admissions policy](#) and procedures can be found on the Conservatoire website.