

The Ideas Fund Guidelines

The Ideas Fund provides students at RCS with resource and support to explore new ideas, extend their practice, produce their own work, and take their first steps into creative enterprise.

The idea can be big or small. It could be an artistic idea, something you want to produce, an idea driven by a social or community impact. The idea could also be related to the development of your career or could help you earn a living as an artist.

The Ideas Fund should not be used for any coursework and should only be used for extra-curricular projects.

Wraparound support and mentoring by the Creative Enterprise Development Office will support prize-winners to further develop their idea and plan for their next steps.

Prizes are a fixed rate of £500 and there are a total of 16 prizes available in the academic year 2025 - 2026.

Eligibility

Recipients can use the fund for the following types of activities:

- Extra-curricular projects
- Seed funding for early-stage ideas, services or businesses
- To test or prototype an idea, project or collaboration through pop-up events, marketing, campaigns, brand development, research etc.
- To support starting up a freelance practice or company (e.g. set up costs, market testing, website)
- Registration costs for attendance at industry training, networking events or trade fairs that will support your idea's development
- Developing a prototype
- Public liability insurance
- Fees to cover your time and expertise on the project

The fund will not cover:

- Any retrospective costs from a project which has already taken place
- Any costs related to your curricular coursework
- Pieces of large-scale equipment including laptops
- Living costs, rent, overhead bills (Subsistence costs)
- Debts
- Business Consulting costs
- New instruments
- Membership of professional bodies
- Formal tuition fees

Proposals will need to meet the following criteria to be considered eligible:

- Applications should be led by a current RCS student (including undergraduate and postgraduate study)

- Funding should be used within 3 months
- You can only receive funding once per academic year

Student Visa Holders

If you are a Student Visa Holder you are eligible to apply for the Ideas Fund. However, there are conditions attached to your visa that you must be aware of before undertaking any form of work activity.

As per the terms of your visa laid out by the Home Office, you cannot: be self-employed or work in certain jobs.

You can work towards a business idea in a “*pre-trading phase*” and later, apply for a visa that allows entrepreneurship, like a talent visa, start-up visa, or a post-graduate work visa. Pre-Trading activities can include business planning, mentorship, shadowing a professional, attending professional training, R&D, market research, prototyping, and other preparatory work. However, it’s critical that these funds are not used for activities directly related to trading, as this would be outside the scope permitted during the pre-trading phase and would be a breach of Student Visa terms.

You cannot undertake any paid work as an entertainer according to the terms of your visa. Therefore, this fund cannot be used by Student visa holders to pay for their own performance work or to pay for other Student visa to undertake entertainment work.

You should also check your eVisa to confirm the number of hours you are permitted to work per week. Any time spent working on this funded project should be counted towards your maximum allowance per week.

Student’s studying on Visitor visas are not permitted to undertake any form of paid work and their for can only participate on a voluntary basis.

Student visa holders are responsible to ensure that their activities do not breach their visa conditions.

If you are unsure about any aspect of eligibility, please contact cedo@rcs.ac.uk.

Distance Learners

If you are a distance learner, on one of our Online & Blended Learning courses (i.e. MA Creative Arts Practice) you are eligible to apply for the Ideas Fund.

However, your project must be undertaken in your primary country of residence.

You are solely responsible to ensure that your activities do not breach the terms of any visa conditions laid out if you enter the United Kingdom.

Public Liability Insurance

On your application form, you will be asked if your project required public liability insurance. As these projects are happening outwith the curriculum, they are not covered by the RCS insurance policy.

Public liability insurance protects you against liability for damages following injury to a third-party person or damage to property during the course of your project, performance, rehearsals, filming or teaching practice.

We strongly encourage you to consider if public liability insurance is required for your project. If so, one option is for you to join your industry union which will allow you to access their public liability insurance for members (you should be able to join your union at a student rate):

- [Musicians Union](#)
- [Equity](#)
- [BECTU](#)
- [Scottish Artists Union](#)

If you are unsure about how to take out public liability insurance, or whether your project requires it, please contact us at cedo@rcs.ac.uk.

Systemic Barriers

We believe there can be no innovation in the performing arts unless systemic barriers are challenged, and actions taken to address structural inequality in the arts and higher education. We have therefore committed that at least 30% of this funding will be given to projects which are led by:

- people from the global majority and those from the global south
- people from working class backgrounds
- those who are neurodiverse and/or disabled people
- members of the LGBTQIA+ community
- care-experienced people
- migrants
- people who are or have been homeless
- those with lived experience of the criminal justice system
- Romany travellers
- those who face barriers to opportunities due to mental health issues, substance misuse, and unpaid caring duties

If you feel that this list is not representative of people facing systemic barriers, please let us know, so we can continue to improve our process.

On application forms, you will be asked if you identify as part of one or more of these communities (you will not be required to select which category). No proof will be required, and we expect our RCS community to be honest and only select this option on the form if it does apply to them.

Can I pay myself and my collaborators?

Within our community of artists, it is vital that you are paid fairly for your expertise and your time. This is not only important for yourself but as a form of solidarity with others. Paying yourself and your collaborators fairly should be an industry standard to help ensure that everyone is able to access and create art.

Wherever possible, we strongly encourage you to aim for payment of the [Real Living Wage](#) for yourself and for all people being employed to undertake work in your project. You may also use your chosen union rates (i.e. Musicians Union, Equity, etc), which should be clearly identified in your project budget. If you're not sure about union rates, then you should be using the Real Living Wage as a guide.

However, we understand that these are small pots of funding, so we encourage you to plan your project in such a way that you can ensure that you, and any of your collaborators, are paid fairly for their time and effort. This may mean slowing your pace, splitting your project into phases, and taking care to not fit a big project into a small budget.

In your project, if you are engaging with the community through research or workshops, we would also encourage you to consider carefully what offer you are making to these participants to ensure a fair transaction for their time and work.
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International Students: While on a Student Visa it is not permissible to undertake any paid work as an entertainer. Therefore, this fund cannot be used by International Students to pay for their own performance work or to pay for other international students to undertake entertainment work.

Application Criteria and Assessment

Applications will be assessed by the Creative Enterprise Development Office. There are a total of 16 prizes available in the 2025- 2026 academic year.

Application deadlines are as follows:

- Wednesday 26 November 2025 at 17:00 (panel meets Thurs 4 December, receiving funds in December)
- Wednesday 17 December 2025 at 17:00 (panel meets Thurs 15 January, receiving funds in January)
- Wednesday 28 January 2026 at 17:00 (panel meets Thurs 5 February, receiving funds in February)
- Wednesday 25 February 2026 at 17:00 (panel meets Thurs 5 March, receiving funds in March)

- Wednesday 25 March 2026 at 17:00 (panel meets Thurs 2 April, receiving funds in April)
- Wednesday 29 April 2026 at 17:00 (panel meets Thurs 7 May, receiving funds in May)
- Wednesday 27 May 2026 at 17:00 (panel meets Thurs 4 June, receiving funds in June)

Any application received after the date will be rolled forward to the next month's prizes.
Applications received after the deadline in May will not be accepted.

Those applications which make the strongest case for funding will be selected. We are looking for applicants to articulate clearly and specifically the opportunity that the prize will provide. It is vital that you highlight the difference that this small pot of funding will make towards the development of your idea.

A strong application is expected to do the following:

- Clearly communicate the core idea;
- Give indication of how the idea can grow and develop with this funding;
- Provide a clearly-defined plan for how the funding will be used;
- Provide a realistic timeline with key steps outlined.

[Please click here to submit an online application.](#)

Video application will also be considered. If you would like to apply this way, please contact Stephanie at cedo@rcs.ac.uk.

Before submitting this application, please be aware that The Research & Knowledge Exchange Department and The Royal Conservatoire expect you to act as leader on your project and that all responsibilities and accountabilities for its administration are devolved to you.

By submitting an application, you are agreeing to take ownership of your project.

We take your privacy very seriously. Please find a copy of our privacy notice at:
www.rcs.ac.uk/policy/privacy

Criteria Item	Weak (1 point)	Satisfactory (2 points)	Strong (3 points)
The idea and potential	The project idea is unclear and underdeveloped. Application does not indicate any potential for impact on communities, audiences or customers.	The project idea is somewhat clear. Application makes some indication of potential for impact on communities, audiences, or customers.	Concisely and clearly communicates the idea. Applicant clearly describes potential impact that can be made on communities, audiences, or customers.
Applicant's aspiration to grow or learn	Applicant does not indicate how this idea will grow or how it will create a learning opportunity for them.	Applicant gives some information on how this idea might develop in the future. Some detail is provided for how the idea creates a learning opportunity.	Applicant outlines how the idea can grow and develop with this funding. There is information provided for how their idea may help them learn new skills or creates a learning opportunity.
Project plan, budget, and timeline	Minimal information provided for how the funding will be used. No timeline provided or timeline is unrealistic.	Applicant provides some information on their plan. Applicant gives some idea of how the funding might be used, but it is unrealistic or lacking in detail. Timeline is somewhat realistic.	Applicant has a clearly-defined plan and indication of their timeline. Applicant provides detail how the funding will be used, including realistic costs. A realistic timeline is provided with key steps outlined.