



Conservatoire for Dance and Drama



Strategic Plan

2013/2018





The eight schools of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama are among the best in the world in their fields of artistic training. Graduates, from the UK and internationally, make an outstanding contribution to artistic life and are global ambassadors for the UK's creative spirit.

## Preface

This strategic plan describes how we, as a partnership of schools, aim to contribute even more to the economic, social and artistic success of the UK.

Our students and our schools are successful. However we take nothing for granted. We know that major change is still underway in higher education and we know that public finances will be stretched in the years to come. We know too that competition is intense.

Therefore, to benefit from public support, we must continue our strong focus on cost-effectiveness and our artistic and educational excellence.

We are pleased that, following the introduction of student fees, the level of applications from exceptional students has not diminished. We are especially glad that the number of students from lower income households is substantial and continues to grow. Accessibility, diversity and equality are deeply part of our ethos.

Please read our plan. We, the Principals of the eight schools, together with all our colleagues, are passionately committed to the success of our students and to the contribution of the performing arts to the prosperity and wellbeing of the nation.

**Professor Veronica Lewis MBE** / Joint Principal of the Conservatoire & Principal, London Contemporary Dance School (The Place). **Edward Kemp** / Joint Principal of the Conservatoire & Director, Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. **Paul Rummer** / Principal, Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. **Sara Matthews** / Director, Central School of Ballet. **Joanna Read** / Principal, LAMDA. **Jane Rice-Bowen** / Joint Chief Executive, National Centre for Circus Arts. **Janet Smith** / Principal, Northern School of Contemporary Dance. **Dr Ross McKim** / Principal and Artistic Director, Rambert School of Ballet & Contemporary Dance. **James Smith CBE** / Chair of the Board of Governors, Conservatoire for Dance and Drama.

## Introduction

The Conservatoire was established in 2001 to provide financial security and continued autonomy for a group of leading dance, drama and circus arts schools, and it located professional training within higher education alongside music and art. In doing so, it reinforced British leadership in arts education and training delivered by a successful conservatoire sector as part of diverse higher education ecology.

As a partnership of eight schools, the Conservatoire is the leading provider of professional education and training in dance and drama and offers the only conservatoire-level preparation in circus arts in the UK. A quarter of our 1,200 students come from outside the UK from 52 different countries. We have been consistently rated within the top fifteen higher education institutions by our students in the National Student Survey, including being top in dance and drama. Our students are taught by leading professionals. Our external examiners annually recognise Conservatoire education as being the very best on offer. There is an exchange of international talent, including students, teachers and artists. The roll-call of graduates who have achieved the highest professional accolades shows no sign of diminishing. Graduates from the early 2000s, when the Conservatoire was first established, now headline productions and win awards.

Circus, in particular, enjoys greater popularity and prominence as an art form.

### A note on the plan

This is the Conservatoire's strategy rather than that of each individual affiliate school. It complements individual school strategies and sets out the collective ambition of the eight. It will also be referenced in the school plans, but does not seek to consolidate these into a single approach. The strategic aims and objectives arrived at in this plan are there to further the collective interests of the Conservatoire schools. Without the schools, the Conservatoire would not exist. Plans about programme development will be found at the school level, in other organisational strategies and in the work plans for individual Conservatoire committees.



*The Conservatoire's strategy complements individual school strategies and sets out the collective ambition of a partnership of eight.*



## Shared values

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As a partnership organisation, establishing and revisiting the values that the Conservatoire shares is essential. Governors, staff and students of the Conservatoire embrace these shared values:

- a belief in the power of art to transform people's lives;
  - a desire to prepare self-reflective artists, from diverse backgrounds, at all levels from preparatory to professional;
  - an intention to help staff achieve the artistic vision of the school and Conservatoire;
  - a commitment to working as equal and collegiate partners, operating in a cost-effective way.
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## Vision and mission

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The Conservatoire's vision reflects its uniqueness: it aims to **prepare exceptional artists together.**

Training the next generation of production professionals and performers is a shared enterprise, locally within each school, collectively across the schools and as part of the wider arts environment, to ensure that there are the resources, the expertise and the infrastructure to maintain the Conservatoire's elite position.

Recognising the ongoing potential within the Conservatoire model, its mission is **to harness the Conservatoire's unique power of eight schools to enhance the learning of student artists and performers and help them shape the future of their art forms.**



*Training the next generation of production professionals and performers is a shared enterprise, locally, collectively, and as part of the wider arts environment.*





## Strategic Aims: Summary

The plan constitutes four strategic aims for the plan period and a number of specific objectives. The purpose of the aims and the specific targets are outlined overleaf.

### 1. Inspirational Learning

The Conservatoire will pursue Conservatoire Degrees to enhance the learning and teaching offered by schools and, by so doing, will express its confidence in the quality of its programmes to the external world. It will create and support opportunities to stretch the possibilities of conservatoire-level training and enhance the experience of students. It will provide routes into professional training for young people and support staff as teachers and managers. Finally, it will enable research and enterprise within the schools.

### 2. Sharing the Benefits

The Conservatoire will build increasingly dynamic relationships with its industries, nationally and internationally, and communicate more strongly the public benefit of specialist conservatoires.

### 3. Create Resilience

The Conservatoire will secure the necessary funding from government to meet its aims, along with funds from its student body and the schools' enterprise and fundraising activities. Through improved resources, it will deliver the highest quality intensive education and training. To focus its activities to meet these strategic aims, it will review its governance and management structures (and the associated overheads) to ensure that they are fit for purpose and future proof.

### 4. Do Something Extraordinary

The Conservatoire is a creative organisation and will harness its collective creativity to make something happen that inspires students and young people beyond the everyday.

# 1/ Strategic Aim One: Inspirational Learning

The Conservatoire champions inspirational learning and opportunities for development. This extends from children and young people experiencing the arts for the first time, to a senior staff member engaging in research into his/her practice.

The Conservatoire's activities cover five areas: plans to deliver Conservatoire degrees, supporting students, providing routes into professional training for young people, supporting staff as teachers and managers, and enabling research and enterprise.

## Conservatoire degrees

The Conservatoire and its schools have learning and teaching strategies that set out plans for the constant renewal of programmes to ensure professional relevance, connection with industry and a positive response to student feedback. For the period of this plan, the Conservatoire is focusing its work on one overarching objective that will have an impact on many areas of its work: to obtain Conservatoire degrees.

The Conservatoire schools have validating relationships with the University of Kent, King's College London and the University of the West of England. Some of these relationships pre-date the Conservatoire's existence. The Conservatoire and schools have benefitted from relationships that have extended beyond the act of validating programmes and offering awards and wish to maintain the connections. However, the time has come for the Conservatoire to pursue degree awarding powers in order to enhance the work of the Conservatoire schools, express confidence in the quality of their programmes and build a strong identity for conservatoire-level education and training.

## OBJECTIVE 1 /

**To deliver the organisational change and development necessary for the achievement of Taught Degree Awarding Powers thus offering students the opportunity to graduate with Conservatoire degrees, and to review the Conservatoire's name to reflect the range of disciplines taught.**



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## Supporting students

The Conservatoire's students are immersed in a professional environment from the moment that they arrive. The Conservatoire schools offer programmes focused on the students' futures as artists and production professionals. The Conservatoire schools, collectively, offer education and training in dance, acting, circus arts performance, stage management, technical theatre (including design), choreography and directing. Over the past ten years, the Conservatoire has developed inter-affiliate projects (stage management and technical support for circus arts, shared performances in circus arts, drama and dance) in addition to the core curriculum and teaching within the individual schools.

The challenge for the next five years in supporting students is fourfold. First, is how the Conservatoire schools can draw on one another's expertise to enhance the experience of their own and all students. Second, is providing the right support, context and infrastructure for students working at conservatoire-level within higher education whilst balancing the close relationships of the schools with the arts sector. Third, is ensuring the Conservatoire remains at

the forefront of preparing graduates with exceptional skillsets to enable them to have sustainable careers as performers and makers. Finally, advances in digital technology will provide opportunities not only for how students learn and are taught, but how the Conservatoire schools share their work with the rest of the world.

### OBJECTIVE 2 /

**To identify opportunities where working together will enhance the student experience and better prepare our graduates as performers, makers and production professionals.**

## Routes into training

Collectively, the Conservatoire schools offer many opportunities for young people to participate in the arts. Without this intervention, there would be a much shallower pool of talent ready to take up conservatoire-level education and training.

Together the Conservatoire schools spend around £1.5 m on outreach activities and the Conservatoire contributes another £850k in bursaries and scholarships for higher education students. Since 2001,

the Conservatoire's student body has become more diverse and it performs better than any comparable institution in securing students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The barriers to professional training may not have disappeared but, together, the schools have severely dented them.

The next challenge is to target more specifically those young people who do not go on to higher education, or would not consider that a conservatoire is somewhere they might attend. The Conservatoire has set specific access goals which can be found in its latest Access Agreement (with the Office for Fair Access).

### OBJECTIVE 3 /

**To target activities to increase the participation of young people who might not consider conservatoire education and training and to meet access goals.**

The evaluation of widening participation and outreach work is a subject of debate (and criticism) within higher education and the arts. Much evaluation is focused on the enjoyment of participants, rather than its effectiveness in meeting stated

aims. By 2018, the Conservatoire intends to have in place more robust mechanisms for evaluating the success and impact of access measures.

### OBJECTIVE 4 /

**To lead the arts sector in developing robust methods of evaluating the impact of outreach activities.**

International students enrich the experience of everyone engaged in conservatoire-level education and training. They bring different approaches to the discipline and different training patterns. These students act as ambassadors for the Conservatoire schools. The exchange between students (and staff) nurtures artistic training and the art forms themselves. International students contribute to the artistic and financial sustainability of the Conservatoire schools.

### OBJECTIVE 5 /

**To grow relationships with European and international feeder schools to ensure an increased flow of international students (see also Objective 13).**





*The Conservatoire will establish specific training routes to support its staff in developing their professional practice.*



## Professional teachers and managers

Support for the professional training and accreditation of academics and HE teachers has significantly increased during the Conservatoire's lifetime: in many cases staff have been supported by the Higher Education Academy.

The Conservatoire has also provided training for academics who move into management roles, often through the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education. The Conservatoire has nominated five staff for National Teaching Fellowships, two of whom won an award, including the first in circus arts. Conservatoire programmes, particularly dance, include some teaching practice, and thus staff have been supported to achieve postgraduate Learning and Teaching qualifications in order to enhance their practice.

The Conservatoire wishes to build on these initiatives and will establish specific training routes to support its staff in developing their professional practice as teachers and as managers. This will be a priority for the 2013-18 strategy.

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### OBJECTIVE 6 /

**To support and enable teaching staff to pursue professional qualifications in teaching, including the development of such awards by the Conservatoire.**

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### OBJECTIVE 7 /

**To support staff new to management by providing dedicated training programmes.**

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## Research and scholarship

The Conservatoire has developed its research and scholarly activity and has appointed a Research Associate (consultancy basis) to work with schools and individual staff in developing their own research activities.

This support has created a pool of staff who are engaged in their own disciplinary research and have presented or published their findings. It has also supported scholarship into practice and pedagogical research. Because of the practice-based nature of their activities, staff tend to be more interested in practice-based research rather than theoretical or historical research.

The Conservatoire wishes to support staff who are active in academic and arts research networks. Its principal goal for the plan period is to move its research practice to a level where it can be measured against sector standards, for example using the 'units of assessment' from the current Research Excellence Framework, or equivalent.

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### OBJECTIVE 8 /

To provide time, support and use of appropriate funding (such as Higher Education Innovation Fund) to encourage research, scholarly activity and dissemination.

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### OBJECTIVE 9 /

To build an organisational ethos and capacity for staff so that they become more research-active and to support staff in successfully applying for funding for research projects.

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## 2/ Strategic Aim Two: Sharing the Benefits

Conservatoires and specialist institutions are jewels in the UK higher education crown. They contribute to the diversity of higher education, are focused on delivery and are popular with students seeking to immerse themselves in arts practice.

Maintaining the unique nature of a conservatoire requires an unrivalled quality of teaching and learning, close engagement with the profession and a robust communication of the benefits of its activities to industry and the public. The principals, governors and staff share the conviction that to ensure a greater understanding of the excellence of its work and output, the Conservatoire needs to raise the profile of conservatoire-level education and training.

The Conservatoire has led in developing the concept of a 'conservatoire' within those artistic fields outside of classical music. It now has an opportunity to set the highest standards for those institutions aspiring to be conservatoires as well as articulating the value of conservatoire learning and practice. Indeed, the Conservatoire is regularly required to demonstrate the public value of specialist institutions and the 'additional value' they bring to the learning and teaching of performing arts, nationally and internationally, particularly as a justification for additional HEFCE funds. In order to convince its funders, its industry, its students and other interested publics of its significant contribution to the UK, it intends to commission research into its economic and cultural value to the UK economy as well as to the UK and international arts and cultural industries. This research will include the economic impact of high-achieving performers at the box office as well as softer measures such as health and wellbeing.

'Sharing the benefits' includes the particular role that conservatoires play within the artistic ecology. As well as feeding the industry with new talent, the Conservatoire schools develop the careers of both emerging and established artists by commissioning them to work on the annual production cycle. There is a deliberate policy of developing new artists from the UK and internationally. This enhances the student experience whilst supporting the arts community which will employ Conservatoire graduates, and places the Conservatoire schools at the heart of UK culture.

### OBJECTIVE 10 /

Commission, produce and disseminate research about the impact, social and economic value of the Conservatoire and conservatoires more generally to inform policy makers.

The Conservatoire schools generate some £4.4m in enterprise activities annually, including exploiting their intellectual property to provide short courses or business development training and hiring out their specialist facilities. The Conservatoire will continue to play a supporting role in these activities and publicise their range and impact. Supporting an enterprise culture includes building entrepreneurship into the curriculum for students and in staff development activities.

### OBJECTIVE 11 /

Work with schools to support/ maximise enterprise activities, for example through accessing specialist funding, or developing shared resources.

## 3/ Strategic Aim Three: Create Resilience

The funding of higher education has changed significantly since 2001, with a greater burden being placed on student and institution to meet the cost of training. The HEFCE grant proportion of the Conservatoire's overall teaching and learning costs is 50%. The student loan element is 23%. The remainder comes directly from personally-funded students or from school activity, including fundraising.

The Conservatoire will need to secure a greater proportion of the resource available for professional performance training from government funding agencies in order to maintain its international competitive position.

### OBJECTIVE 12 /

**To argue successfully, on the grounds of the Conservatoire's significant economic and cultural contribution to the UK, that government funders will realise an excellent return on increased investment in the Conservatoire over the period of the plan.**

In addition to the public contribution, the Conservatoire plans to increase its income from student fees to offset the reduction in HEFCE teaching grant. The majority of Conservatoire students are from the UK, with approximately 15% of students coming from elsewhere in the EU and 11% from outside the EU. The Conservatoire's goals in the plan period are, first, to maintain access routes for UK students; second, to maintain a steady flow of EU students and build strong relationships with European conservatoires; and third, to increase the proportion of overseas students. This will result in a small increase in the overall population, to around 1,250 students by 2015 (5% in total) ensuring that the student population remains at a level that is sustainable for the Conservatoire and for the arts sector it serves.



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*Maintaining the unique nature of a conservatoire requires an unrivalled quality of teaching and learning, close engagement with the profession and a robust communication of the benefits of its activities.*






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**OBJECTIVE 13 /**

To ensure sustainable finances by growing student fee income by 50% from 2012/13, including increasing the international student population to 15% of the total by 2018.

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The Conservatoire operates as a partnership. It is led by the principals of the schools. The Conservatoire has not substantively changed its governance and management structures since its creation in 2001. The Board effectiveness review in 2013 concluded that it needed to reconsider these structures to ensure that the organisation remained fit for purpose.

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**OBJECTIVE 14 /**

To review and address changes needed to the governance and management structure by 2015.

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The Conservatoire staffing comprises a small (9 full-time equivalent) staff team which facilitates the partnership and acts as an interface with funding bodies. The majority of the Conservatoire's work takes place at affiliate schools, and this includes affiliate staff leading in particular areas of work. At present, affiliate schools contract

separately for a variety of activities which may be more cost-effectively provided in one organisation on behalf of others. The method of distributing funds needs to have sufficient flexibility to fund shared services wherever they are most effectively provided.

In particular, an application for taught degree-awarding powers would reduce the costs currently paid by each school to its awarding body; these would be offset by new activity not currently funded centrally. There will also be additional costs associated with making and pursuing any application for powers during the plan period, and these will need to be funded appropriately.

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**OBJECTIVE 15 /**

To review potential areas where shared services might deliver a more efficient outcome and develop and adopt a funding model to resource these appropriately.

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**OBJECTIVE 16 /**

To maintain an efficient and cost-effective shared administrative service at the minimum level required.

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*The real success of this plan will be seen by everyone who watches our students perform, or experiences a production with brilliant design and flawless technical support.*

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## 4/ Strategic Aim Four: Do Something Extraordinary

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The Conservatoire schools make exceptional things happen every day. In this plan period, the Conservatoire wants to make something extraordinary happen (in both senses of the word: beyond the everyday and that which creates wonder and surprise). The largest-scale creative project to date has been *Sequins and Sawdust*, which involved the National Centre for Circus Arts, BOVTS and a professional circus company making and staging work in a big top and touring to Bristol and central London.

By ensuring that the Conservatoire and affiliate schools are resilient, the governing body intends to provide opportunity for the creative staff, who are the lifeblood of the schools, to let their imagination take flight. At the end of the plan period, the Conservatoire hopes to look back on a creative exchange, a project or event which changes how dance, circus arts and drama are perceived, taught or practised.

### **OBJECTIVE 17 /**

**To do something extraordinary in both senses; it is outside the everyday and it should be inspirational.**

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## Monitoring

This plan is the result of extensive consultation with the Conservatoire's governing body, students, staff and trustees of individual schools. Its objectives will be underpinned by a range of targets (and concomitant risks) and the Board of Governors will measure progress at least annually. The Board will also take stock half way through the planning period to extend the plan and the timescale if this is deemed necessary. Performance indicators that are derived to measure performance against plan will be quantifiable as appropriate, time limited and monitored on a regular basis.

## Conclusion: measuring success

There is real support from students, staff and governors for a plan that will make the Conservatoire look and feel different in five years' time. Through delivering this plan, the principals and governors hope that the Conservatoire will truly be part of the everyday fabric of its staff and students' working

lives. This means that all staff know that there is a wealth of information, support and guidance from their peers in other schools. For students, the Conservatoire is a benchmark of quality and a wider network to take with them as Conservatoire graduates into their professional lives. Externally, the success of this plan can be measured by greater understanding of the essential role that independent conservatoires play in both the art and education sectors, underpinned by hard facts about the achievement in raising aspiration, economic benefit and social impact.

The real success of this plan will be seen by everyone who watches our students perform or experiences a production with brilliant design and flawless technical support. The ultimate purpose of the Conservatoire is to give talented students the time, space, skills, knowledge and higher education that they need to make dynamic, exciting and entertaining art, now and in the future.

*Written, on behalf of the Conservatoire,  
by Julie Crofts, Executive Director.  
November 2013.*



**Production coordinated by** Emma Swift.  
**Photography by** Dave Agnew, Graham Burke,  
Linda Carter, Alicia Clarke, Bill Cooper,  
Nicole Guarino, John Haynes, Josh Hawkins,  
John Pridmore, Bertil Nilsson, Brian Slater,  
Richard Hubert Smith, Ivar Sviestins.





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