

Music In Higher Education



KING EDWARD VI COLLEGE
MUSIC

Any questions?
Please speak to Tom or email

Choosing a Course

Studying music at university or conservatoire offers exciting opportunities to do some or all of the following, but different courses will have very different focuses.

- Develop as a performer
- Develop as a composer (including specialist skills like arranging or writing film music)
- Explore the history of music (musically, sociologically etc.)
- Analyse music in depth
- Learn about applied fields (education, business, therapy, administration etc.)



Conservatoire (info starts on p. 32)

Offers based on audition

- Professional training in performance or composition (4 years)
- Students specialize in:
 - An instrument/voice
 - Composing
 - Conducting
 - Music technology (some only)

University (info starts on p. 5)

Grades-based offers through UCAS application

More general degree course (3 years) usually includes:

- Creative / performing work
- History, theory and analysis of music
- Cross disciplinary study (e.g psychology / sociology / philosophy)
- Professional / vocational studies (some only)

Choosing a Course

Search for courses on Guardian, Complete University Guide etc. but take the actual **rankings** with a pinch of salt. Concentrate on the detail – how happy are students with courses? what grades do students go there with?

Students generally do well at university because they are on the **RIGHT COURSE FOR THEM**.

Go on the websites and look carefully at the courses:

- What is their pitch?
- What modules will you do/can you do in each year of the course? How would you feel doing those combinations?
- What do the staff who teach the course do? What are their backgrounds?



Universities

Complete University Guide Rationale

- **Entry Standards** (maximum score n/a)
The average UCAS tariff score of new undergraduate students.
- **Student satisfaction** (maximum score 4.00)
A measure of student views of the teaching quality at the university.
- **Research quality** (maximum score 4.00)
A measure of the quality of the research undertaken in the university.
- **Research intensity** (maximum score 1.00)
A measure of the proportion of teaching staff involved in research.
- **Graduate prospects**
A measure of the success in employability or further study of graduates completing their first degree.

<https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings/music>

The top-ranking universities on this list are a mixture of traditional high-performing institutions such as Cambridge, Bristol and Durham alongside some conservatoires.



Universities

Guardian. “Unlike other league tables, the Guardian rankings focus on the things students care about, such as good teaching and job prospects, rather than basing them on academic research. We rank universities through nine different scores, which form a total out of 100. These include what students say about their teaching, feedback and the course itself in the annual National Student Survey. This year we combined 2021 and 2022 to reflect how universities responded to the pandemic. We also look at how big class sizes are through the student-to-staff ratio and how much universities spend on teaching per student, as well as students’ A-level grades and whether their academic performance improves at university (the value-added score), and how likely they are to continue with their course.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/ng-interactive/2024/sep/07/best-uk-universities-for-music-league-table>

The top-ranking universities on the Guardian are a similar list, but Surrey (internationally renowned for its recording engineering) and conservatoires (internationally renowned for music performance) feature much higher.



‘Traditional’ university departments

These Russell Group / Redbricks tend to have more traditional courses (i.e. following on clearly from A level) although sometimes with a twist (e.g. folk music at Newcastle)

Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle, Cardiff, Durham, Sheffield, York, Southampton, Leeds, Edinburgh, Royal Holloway, Kings College London, Oxford, Cambridge, Queens Belfast, Bangor, Royal Holloway.



Newer universities

These often have a more distinctive course, sometimes with a more industry/vocational/non-Classical focus.

Bath Spa, City University, Wolverhampton, De Montfort, Liverpool Hope, Kingston, Brunel, Napier, Salford, Oxford Brookes, Goldsmiths



The programmes offered by university music departments are very different and you need to check what is taught on each course very carefully.

The following slides outline the main types of module that you might encounter.



Practical work

- traditional 'high-art' composition
- composition projects/collaborations
- electro-acoustic / acousmatic / live electronic
- orchestration and arrangement
- songwriting
- solo performance
- ensemble performance

Some Unis offer very specific creative modules, for example. **Game audio**: “Exploring further the creative potential of sound in the context of game, graphics and physics engines. It introduces students to licensed software (e.g. Unity3D) and current methods to publish outcomes for alternative media such as mobile devices, tablets, web browsers, and stand alone applications. One of its aims is to increase students' employability either working as freelance composers and aggregators or as part of an interactive media company”



Harmony and theory (often in first year)

- basic theory
- style composition
- orchestration
- basic tonal and formal analysis



Historical and analytical work (musicology)

- style history
- musicology
- cultural studies/theory
- analytical approaches
- ethnomusicology
- editing
- research projects

Semester 1

Italian Opera from Rossini to Puccini (Dr Jennifer Sheppard)

Music, Sound and Automobility (Dr Roddy Hawkins)

Semester 2

Beethoven: Life, Works, and Cultural Context (Prof. Barry Cooper)

Music in Bollywood (Dr Chloë Alaghband-Zadeh)



Applied and interdisciplinary

(modules focused on practical application or links to other subjects)

- community music
- music therapy
- music education
- psychology of music
- acoustics
- arts administration
- skills for music industry



Example courses

The following slides gives some examples of university courses. Note these are examples and may be out of date.

These are not particularly recommendations but give an idea of the huge range out there.



Manchester University

The MusB is diverse in content and flexible in structure, enabling you to choose the course units that interest you the most.

It allows you to build upon existing interests while discovering new forms and traditions of music and new ways of understanding, performing, and creating music.

The course offers excellence in [Performance](#) , [Composition](#) and [Musicology](#) , incorporating specialisms in Music, Culture and History, Music Theory and Analysis, Applied Music, and Ethnomusicology.

Our course content is regularly updated based on our research to reflect the latest findings in music scholarship.

You will also receive support in preparing for the workplace; our graduates go on to work in the music profession, the creative industries and beyond.

You will learn from internationally recognised academics and a roster of professional instrumental and vocal tutors drawn from Manchester and the wider north-west.



Manchester University (Year 1)

Gain a thorough grounding in all the fundamental areas of musical training: performance, composition, analysis and music theory, musicology and ethnomusicology, and most importantly make connections through synergies between studies in these areas. In the second semester you can choose from a range of optional units in addition to core units

Title	Code	Credit rating	Mandatory/optional
<u>Tonality: Form and Harmony</u>	MUSC10011	20	Mandatory
<u>Sonic Invention A</u>	MUSC10311	10	Mandatory
<u>Sonic Invention B</u>	MUSC10312	10	Mandatory
<u>Approaches to Musicology</u>	MUSC10511	20	Mandatory
<u>Music and Its Contexts</u>	MUSC10512	20	Mandatory
<u>Solo Performance 1</u>	MUSC10600	20	Mandatory
<u>Tonality: Theory and Analysis</u>	MUSC10022	10	Optional
<u>Techniques of Tonal Harmony</u>	MUSC10112	10	Optional
<u>Musical Notation</u>	MUSC10212	10	Optional



Manchester University (Year 2)

Course units for year 2

The course unit details given below are subject to change, and are the latest example of the curriculum available on this course of study.

Title	Code	Credit rating	Mandatory/optional
Analysis	MUSC20011	20	Optional
Music, Literature, and the Visual Arts	MUSC20042	20	Optional
Fixed and Electroacoustic Composition	MUSC20061	10	Optional
Interactive Media Composition Environments	MUSC20072	20	Optional
Instrumental Composition	MUSC20321	20	Optional
Vocal Composition	MUSC20362	10	Optional
Music and Consumption in the Digital Age	MUSC20511	20	Optional
Solo Performance II	MUSC20600	20	Optional
Ensemble Performance A (10 credits)	MUSC20611	10	Optional
Ensemble Performance A (20 credits)	MUSC20621	20	Optional



Manchester University (Year 3)

Course units for year 3

The course unit details given below are subject to change, and are the latest example of the curriculum available on this course of study.

Title	Code	Credit rating	Mandatory/optional
Advanced Analysis	MUSC30011	20	Optional
Composition Portfolio	MUSC30300	40	Optional
Dissertation	MUSC30400	40	Optional
Aesthetics	MUSC30502	20	Optional
Advanced study in Musicology A	MUSC30510	20	Optional
Advanced Study in Musicology B (40)	MUSC30520	40	Optional
Composition for Film or Game Audio	MUSC30540	20	Optional
Recital	MUSC30600	40	Optional
Music Performance Studies	MUSC30711	20	Optional
Modern Spanish Music: A Cultural History	SPLA31081	20	Optional



Bath Spa

Starting with your own interests as a musician, our Music degree develops your core skills as an artist (singer, songwriter, performer or composer), and explores the many ways you can build a sustainable career in music.

This is a broad and hands-on course. Throughout your studies, you'll delve deeper into your own musical interests and explore various genres and styles. Our experienced staff will help you develop your own sound and become a confident performer.

Most of what you produce for assessment could be used beyond your studies in support of your future career. In other words, what you make for us you also make for you. You'll learn new skills in areas such as:

- Performance, improvisation and ensemble musicianship
- Composition, arrangement and music for media
- Recording, documenting and music production
- Blogging, podcasting and online media
- Music teaching and coaching, including leading workshops
- Event management, marketing, freelancing and the business of music.



Bath Spa

Year one

In your first year, our focus is almost exclusively on developing your musical skills: singing or playing on stage, creating your own music, and understanding the wider musical world.

During practical musicianship workshops, you'll try new instruments, sing in choirs or join ensembles. Through this practical work, you'll learn about music in relation to what's going on in society and explore the ways your music can make a difference in people's lives.

You'll create a portfolio of your performances that showcases your skills as an artist. In the process, you'll develop your ability to make recordings and videos and edit these for online contexts.

Year one (Level 4) modules

- Practical Music Skills
- Playing, Performing and Recording
- Listening and Hearing
- Music in Society
- Improvising and Devising
- Creative Sandbox



Example Courses

Bath Spa

Year two

In your second year, you'll continue to develop your practical music-making skills while considering how external factors such as collaborating with others or undertaking research can generate new ideas for your music.

Core modules focus on making music accessible to all and using it as a means of communication. Optional modules allow you to enhance your research or event planning abilities.

You'll also develop your ability to communicate ideas about music using different media, such as podcasts, video and social media.

Year three

This year is all about you, your musical interests and who you are as a musical entrepreneur.

You'll get the chance to run a range of large-scale projects in areas that you choose, such as education, community music, wellbeing, and arts management. We help you plan and manage these projects, balancing creative, research and entrepreneurial decision-making to reach your goals.

You'll also gain valuable industry experience through a short, observational work placement, helping you to transition to the professional world and demonstrate your skills to potential employers.



Example Courses

Bath Spa

Year two (Level 5) modules

- Practice and Research
- Music for All
- Music for Learners
- Communicating Music
- Interdisciplinary Collaboration
- Music as an Event

Year three (Level 6) modules

- Wellbeing, Inclusivity, and Sustainability
- Professional Placement
- Creative Project
- Research Contexts
- Research Project



Example Courses

Bath Spa



York University

Studying music at York will deepen your understanding of that experience and how it has shaped and responded to the world.

Our course integrates practical music-making, musicology, analysis and music technology, and offers options in composition, music psychology, music education and many other areas. Our modular approach lets you shape your learning to your passions and career aspirations.

We'll give you a generous allowance of [one-to-one tuition](#) to develop your playing to the highest level - our staff have performed with internationally-recognised ensembles, from BBC Philharmonic to Opera North. Our professional partners and artists-in-association regularly give talks, masterclasses and concerts.



York University

Year 1

Core modules

- [Core Skills for Musical Study](#)
- [Listen to This!: Critical Approaches to Music 1](#)
- [Creative and Professional Practice 1](#)
- [Analyse This!: Critical Approaches to Music 2](#)

Option modules

You will also study two option modules. We update these modules every year. Recent examples include:

- [Alternative Perspectives: Interdisciplinary Ideas about Performance](#)
- [Conducting](#)
- [History of Film Music](#)
- [Introduction to Music Psychology](#)
- [Music in the Community](#)
- [The Social Power of Popular Music](#)



York University

Year 2

You'll focus on developing your independence, critical thinking and confidence; improving your core skills; and continuing your instrumental/vocal studies. You'll also begin to prepare for your Solo Project, Composition Folio and/or Recital in your final year. The Critical Thinking and Listening module develops critical reflection on music and its performance, while your specialist option modules allow you to explore the areas you are most interested in.

Core modules

- [Critical Thinking and Listening](#)
- [Creative and Professional Practice 2](#)

Option modules

You will also study four option modules. Recent examples include:

- [Alternative Perspectives: Interdisciplinary Ideas about Performance](#)
- [Conducting](#)
- [History of Film Music](#)
- [Introduction to Music Psychology](#)
- [Music in the Community](#)
- [The Social Power of Popular Music](#)



York University Year 3

During your final year, you'll specialise further with Recital and Composition Folio options alongside your choice of option modules.

You will also have the opportunity to devise, research and produce a [**Solo Project**](#). Building on skills you've acquired across your degree, this is an opportunity for you to develop a piece of large-scale work that will be useful to your future career. Past Solo Projects have included dissertations, editions, albums, innovative performance events, orchestrations, film music, community music projects and many other types of work.

Core modules

- [**Extended Recital**](#) or [**Extended Composition Folio**](#) or [**Extended Solo Project**](#)
- [**Creative and Professional Practice 3**](#)

Option modules

You will also study up to 3 option modules. You will choose from similar options to those available to you in your second year. If you wish, you can substitute one of your option module choices for a second block of specialised individual study, through the [**Recital**](#), [**Composition Folio**](#), and [**Solo Project**](#) options.



Brunel University

About the course

Music at Brunel: *Informed by the past, grounded in the present, focused on the future*

Are you a composer, a singer-songwriter, a producer, a performer, a DJ, a noise artist, an improviser, a curator or a music journalist? Then our brand new, bold and broad-based programme is for you. It's a hybrid of core and bespoke activities catering to the new reality of a career in music. Our aim is to form a new generation of musical creators who are capable of navigating real-world projects and collaborations at the forefront of our changing world. At its heart is creativity, technology, collaboration, entrepreneurship and innovation.

Right from your very first week, we foster all the skills you'll need for a career in music. Through an attractive range of engaging modules we place you, the creative musician, at the heart of our teaching, allowing you to develop independent and open-minded thinking. You can also combine your music-making with other disciplines such as theatre, creative writing, design, journalism and games.



Brunel University

Year 1

Compulsory

- Ensemble I: The Art of Performing
- Materials of Music I: Inside the Language
- Ways of Hearing I: Genres Through Time
- Composing I: Capturing Ideas
- Studio Production I: Introduction to the Art of Sound and Technology
- Professional Development I: Building a Collaborative Musical Project from A-Z



Brunel University

Level 3

Compulsory

- Professional Independent Project

Optional

- Ensemble III: Creating Performance
- Materials of Music III: Advanced Technical Portfolio
- Ways of Hearing III: Cultures and Subcultures
- Composing III: Advanced Portfolio
- Studio Production III: Taking Sonic Art To the Stage



Example Postgrad Opportunities

Postgraduate and career opportunities

Postgraduate academic studies

Taught masters or PhD in musicology, theory, composition, ethnomusicology etc.

- academia
- teaching

Postgraduate performance studies

Postgraduate diplomas in performance / Doctor of Musical Arts (US)

- professional musician (contract/freelance/portfolio)
- teaching / instrumental teaching

Music College & UCAS Conservatoires Applications



KING EDWARD VI COLLEGE
MUSIC

UCAS Conservatoires Music Courses

- Royal Birmingham Conservatoire
- Leeds College of Music
- Royal Academy of Music
- Royal College of Music
- Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
- Royal Northern College of Music
- Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama
- Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance
- Also LAMDA

Non-UCAS Cons. Institutions

Apply through UCAS

- LIPA
- BIMM

etc.

Apply through own system:

- Guildhall

Dates

2026 entry applications open on 10 July 2025.

Application deadlines:

- **2 October 2025** for music courses.
- **14 January 2026** for most other undergraduate courses
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Before applying

- Course search on UCAS Conservatoires – links to lots of information
- Attend an open day
- Consultation lessons
- Think very carefully through the different options
- Check audition requirements for on college websites

Process

- Currently totally separate from main UCAS system.
- Opens mid-July
- Deadline is 2nd October
- Web-based system
- Auditions from 15th October
- For most students, offers will be received by the new year and replied to by the end of January

Auditions (Music)

Play two or three pieces to a panel – requirements differ by institution and instrument with some requiring specific pieces. **CHECK ON THE WEBSITE.**

Personal statement

- Why you are applying to courses
- Relevant musical experience
- Career plans
- Non-accredited courses or activities
- Unit grades for AS level
- 4,000 characters

Referees

- Academic referee (college teacher)
- Practical referee (instrumental tutor or equiv.)
- Enter your referee details into the reference section of the application. Once saved, you can choose to send a reference request email directly to the referee you have named. We then send an email to your referee with instructions on how they can supply your reference. When your referee has completed your reference, after following the steps in the email, it will be attached to your application. You will get email notification of this, and we then ensure your reference is sent with your application to your chosen conservatoires.

(<https://www.ucas.com/conservatoires/filling-your-conservatoires-application/references-conservatoires>)

Cost

- £26 fee
- Between £45 and £90 per audition

Outcomes

- Conditional or unconditional offer
- Guaranteed or reserve offer

Web

<https://www.ucas.com/ucas/conservatoires/>
www.gsmd.ac.uk