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HANDBOOK

## TODAY'S STUDENT: TOMORROW'S ALUMNUS

CULTIVATING GOOD ALUMNI RELATIONSHIPS IN CONSERVATOIRES

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Association Européenne  
des Conservatoires,  
Académies de Musique  
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ERASMUS THEMATIC NETWORK FOR MUSIC

*polifonia*



MALMÖ ACADEMY  
OF MUSIC  
Lunds University

ERASMUS THEMATIC NETWORK FOR MUSIC

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*A free electronic version of this handbook is available through [www.polifonia-tn.org](http://www.polifonia-tn.org).*



Education and Culture

**Socrates**

Erasmus

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## FOREWORD

The ERASMUS Thematic Network for Music “Polifonia”<sup>1</sup>, the largest European project on professional music training to date, involved 67 organisations in professional music training and the music profession from 32 European countries and 30 experts in 5 connected working groups in an intensive 3-year work programme from September 2004 – October 2007. The project, which was coordinated jointly by the Malmö Academy of Music – Lund University and the Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC), received support from the European Union within the framework of the ERASMUS Programme. The aims of the project were:

1. To study issues connected to the Bologna Declaration Process, such as the development of learning outcomes for 1st (Bachelor), 2nd (Master) and 3rd cycle studies through the “Tuning” methodology<sup>2</sup>, the use of credit point systems, curriculum development, mobility of students and teachers, and quality assurance in the field of music in higher education.
2. To collect information on levels in music education other than the 1st (Bachelor) and the 2nd (Master) study cycles, in particular pre-college training and 3rd cycle (Doctorate/PhD) studies in the field of music.
3. To explore international trends and changes in the music profession and their implications for professional music training.

Within “Polifonia” a working group on the Profession was set up which included representatives of both conservatoires and professional organisations as the European Music School Union (EMU), the European Music Council (EMC), the International Federation of Musicians (FIM) and the Association of British Orchestras (ABO). The working group researched and reflected on current trends in all sectors of the music profession, the rare and new competences they suggest, what this implies for conservatoire training, and the relevance of the AEC learning outcomes and the “Polifonia/Dublin Descriptors”<sup>3</sup> to these competences. Site visits, examples of innovative practice, alumni policies, qualitative research and analysis nourished this reflexion and provided the basis for portraits of the profession in individual EU countries and Europe-wide. In addition, the group developed a gallery of individual portraits of musicians’ representative of these new and emerging trends. The group reflected on these results and assessed the way in which these trends suggest new competencies, their relationship to the AEC learning outcomes and “Polifonia/Dublin Descriptors”, and suggested areas of potential development for conservatoires.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See for more information about “Polifonia” [www.polifonia-tn.org](http://www.polifonia-tn.org).

<sup>2</sup> For more information about the “Tuning” methodology please see <http://www.tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=172&Itemid=205>.

<sup>3</sup> More information about the AEC learning outcomes and the “Polifonia/Dublin Descriptors” can be found at [www.bologna-and-music.org/learningoutcomes](http://www.bologna-and-music.org/learningoutcomes).

<sup>4</sup> All information about the Profession working group and its outcomes can be found at [www.polifonia-tn.org/profession](http://www.polifonia-tn.org/profession).





## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Conservatoires are at very different stages of development in building alumni relationships. In an attempt to produce a comprehensive "how-to" handbook for such a varied readership, I have included some material that may seem very obvious. The deliberately detailed contents list should allow you to pass easily over sections that are of no interest. For those in a hurry, section 10 on page 25 summarises the key points.

The following definitions are used throughout for clarity and economy. *Alumnus* and *alumni* describe both male and female graduates. Similarly, it is anticipated that *he*, *him* and *his* will be understood to embrace *she*, *her* and *hers*.

*Alumnus* and *graduate* are used more or less synonymously, as are *teacher* and *professor*.

Alma mater	The conservatoire a student attended (Latin for "nourishing mother")
Alumnus	A former student, male or female (Latin <i>alere</i> "to nourish")
Alumni Officer	The individual responsible for alumni relations, regardless of exact job title
Development	Fundraising
External relations	Public relations
Freelance	Self-employed
Graduate	Having a degree or diploma of any kind from a conservatoire
Graduand	Student who is about to graduate or receive a diploma
Institution	A higher education/professional music training institution
Organisation	A dedicated association for alumni
Professor	A teacher
Registry	Department responsible for student and staff matters

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Leeds College of Music, UK

Manhattan School of Music, NYC

New England Conservatory

Royal Academy of Music, London

Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester

Royal Scottish Academy of Music & Drama, Glasgow

Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, Cardiff

Sibelius Academy, Helsinki  
Trinity Laban, London

Rebecca Bell at Royal College of Music.

Numerous contacts worldwide.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This handbook sets out to examine ways in which conservatoires can cultivate good relationships with their alumni. Behind this is the assumption that it is *desirable* to have good relationships with our alumni. Why do we want to do this? What can conservatoires do for their alumni? What can alumni do for conservatoires? What can alumni do for each other?

Alumni are the link between conservatoires and the outside world. As practising professional musicians in their own right, they keep us alert to ongoing developments in the profession and new opportunities for employment in music. Their feedback informs our curricula, ensuring that we are preparing students realistically for a rapidly-changing and increasingly competitive professional environment, one in which ever more highly-trained musicians are competing for work while resources are dwindling. Alumni provide professional opportunities, contacts, advice and guidance for students. Above all, they are advocates, acting as global ambassadors, steadily promoting their alma mater more effectively than costly advertising campaigns. At the same time, we can provide them with continuing professional training and ongoing networks of contacts, and a sense of being part of a unique musical and educational continuum.

Forging links with alumni is an enjoyable and interesting process; but it is also labour-intensive, time-consuming, sometimes dull and often repetitive. It requires energy, precision, imagination, warmth, sensitivity, diplomacy, judgement and firmness. Most importantly, however, it requires considerable investments of money, time and expertise. The financial impact on a small institution can be significant. To justify this expenditure, against competing demands in a 21st century conservatoire, the institution must be absolutely clear about its reasons for wanting to forge ever stronger links with its alumni.

A major change in the past ten years has been the revolution in communication resulting from new technologies. With their scattered locations, alumni have benefited enormously from this revolution, and much of the routine work of servicing a membership organisation has been removed from the Alumni Office to the IT department. In turn, the rise of on-line communities has shifted the focus - and control - from the heart of an institution to the wider world. This handbook is about relationships involving people, so it addresses basic principles of human communication before it looks in detail at technological solutions.

This handbook concentrates on the non-financial benefits that flow from a dynamic relationship between alumni and their conservatoire. Fundraising from alumni is a separate matter, not dealt with here in any detail. But establishing good relations with alumni builds trust, and encourages a climate in which the long-haul journey of cultivation can be initiated confidently when the time is right.

## 2. BACKGROUND

One of the challenges in preparing this handbook was assessing the extent to which national, cultural and local differences influence the relationship between conservatoires and their alumni. Despite globalisation and the exciting opportunities presented by recent developments in technology, there are still fundamental differences of aspiration and approach evident in alumni policies in conservatoires. A recent report from the Polifonia Profession Working Group helpfully describes some of the differences in European conservatoires<sup>5</sup>. For example, a survey found that, of 98 responses received from European conservatoires, 32 had official systems in place for contacting and tracking alumni; 40 were planning such a system; and 26 had no plans at that point to install such a system.

We may be at different stages on a journey, but we are all committed to the same destination: fostering ongoing good relations with our alumni. What is less clear is what we hope to achieve by this.

### 2.1 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Many conservatoires have a truly international student body with many different nationalities represented: for example, several have students from up to 50 countries at any one time. These students may return to their countries of birth but their cultural perspective will have been changed by the experience of study abroad. Despite this exciting mix of backgrounds and the broader implications of globalisation, our national characteristics, history and economics are still evident in the differing attitude each conservatoire has to alumni relations.

These differences are not confined to conservatoires, but part of a bigger picture. Musicians have traditionally been global workers, highly mobile in their careers. But the implications of technology are already felt in the way that performances are given and disseminated, reducing the need for travel. We live in the age of bedroom-studios, free downloads and technology that allows us to connect instantly with anything, anyone, anywhere, any time and any place. This evolution can only continue, affecting a musician's career in ways that will undoubtedly impact heavily on musical output, delivery, mobility and communication. The state of music employment varies considerably from country to country, with the result that some alumni believe they have more to gain than others from an ongoing connection with the alma mater. Continuing professional development opportunities and contacts are especially important for new graduates whose main work is freelance.

In the UK, for example, many musicians work in a freelance capacity throughout their careers. Unless they are lucky enough to secure a teaching post or one of the very small number of full time contracted roles in orchestras or opera companies, musicians will typically have two or three strands of work throughout their careers. The traditional mix is performance and teaching, but there are numerous others forms of musical employment, some of which are described in recent research

<sup>5</sup> Alumni Policies in Professional Music Training Institutions in Europe, July 2007, [www.polifonia-tn.org/alumnipolicies](http://www.polifonia-tn.org/alumnipolicies).

projects based at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris and the Royal College of Music in London<sup>6</sup>. With the exception of teaching, there are few “jobs for life” in the UK so most musicians have no guaranteed financial security. As a result, ongoing initiative, contacts and continuing professional development opportunities matter as much as talent. By contrast, France has in place a regime of “intermittence”, whereby musicians who have a certain number of days of work each year are supported to some extent by the state when they are not working.

## 2.2 EXISTING INFORMAL ALUMNI RELATIONSHIPS

While European conservatoires overall may be comparatively new to the formal business of alumni relations, most already have extremely useful informal alumni networks. For example, many of our teachers are alumni. We invite alumni back to perform, examine, coach and give masterclasses. Alumni give us feedback which feeds into curriculum development. We celebrate the success of stellar graduates’ successes. We may even benefit from an occasional financial donation from a grateful alumnus. These sorts of relationship are essentially informal and unregulated, usually fostered one-to-one by a particular member of staff, typically a teacher, with a favourite alumnus. In short, these relationships are effective in their own terms, but randomly established, and not systematically supported or sustained by the institution. The challenge is to harness these relationships and make them operate more productively for both alumni and conservatoires.

## 2.3 ALUMNI IN THE USA

The USA has a long tradition of cultivating strong alumni relations in schools, colleges and universities: it is embedded in the culture. This may be aided by the strong class-based approach to education and training that encourages bonding. A strong group of classmates is likely to survive beyond graduation, even if it fragments a little. Individual students take with them into professional life an allegiance not only to each other but also to the alma mater. It can be more difficult for an isolated alumnus to feel unswervingly positive about his student days, so being part of a group helps. There is also a long tradition of philanthropy in the US education system. College fees are high, normally paid by the students themselves and their families. Many alumni expect to give back to their alma mater, and do so to a level that is largely unknown in Europe. The prominence of alumni on the websites of the Juilliard School, Curtis Institute and Manhattan School of Music indicates the importance of their position in the ongoing life and financial health of the institution.

<sup>6</sup> The Observatoire based at the CNSMDP monitors graduates’ employment patterns [www.polifonia-tn.org/alumnipolicies](http://www.polifonia-tn.org/alumnipolicies). Working in Music was a research project conducted at the Royal College of Music funded by the Prince Consort Foundation. Led by Dr Janet Mills, it set out to research the career paths of RCM alumni, using interviews largely conducted by the telephone. See [http://www.musiceducation.rcm.ac.uk/working\\_in\\_music.htm](http://www.musiceducation.rcm.ac.uk/working_in_music.htm).

## 2.4 ALUMNI IN THE UK

In the UK, many universities (notably the long-established institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge) raise funds very successfully from alumni. The assumption is that such ambitious, high-flying graduates are likely to move into prominent positions in public life, industry and commerce, and consequently amass wealth. UK conservatoires, on the other hand, receive relatively few substantial financial donations from alumni, though it is common to receive gifts in kind, including instruments, books, scores, recordings and, of course, performances and classes given without a fee. It is not yet part of the culture in the UK to cultivate alumni as future financial donors. The main reason given is that most musicians earn too little to be regarded as wealthy, so they are not a worthwhile target. Alumni occasionally make significant financial contributions to particular projects, notably those connected with estate development, but these are exceptional.

As fee levels rise and student debt increases, UK conservatoires are now seeking external funding (non-government) more earnestly than ever, to provide scholarships and bursaries for talented students as well as funds for other initiatives. The main targets are individuals, trust and corporations. At the moment, no UK conservatoire declares publicly that it has a major, long-term alumni fundraising campaign, but it can only be a matter of time.

## 2.5 ALUMNI IN EUROPE AND REST OF THE WORLD

The tradition of staying connected with alumni is not yet well established in Europe, though many conservatoires have a thriving and well-used network of informal contacts. As previously mentioned, a recent survey held in the framework of the ERASMUS Network for Music 'Polifonia'<sup>7</sup> found that, of 98 responses received from European conservatoires, 32 had official systems in place for contacting and tracking alumni; 40 were planning such a system; and 26 had no plans at that point to install such a system.

In other parts of the world, the age of the alumnus is also dawning, brightly in many universities, more faintly – at the moment – in conservatoires. The Sydney Conservatorium is taking steps to reconnect proactively with its alumni. The Hong Kong Academy for the Performing Arts has an Alumni Association which offers a clearly articulated range of privileges and benefits. The Moscow Conservatory has an impressive on-line database that holds records of former students by year and – a clever touch – even features daily the names of all the students born on that day across the years.

<sup>7</sup> Alumni Policies in Professional Music Training Institutions in Europe, July 2007, [www.polifonia-tn.org/alumnipolicies](http://www.polifonia-tn.org/alumnipolicies).

### 3 CREATING STRATEGY AND POLICIES

Deciding why your institution wants to be in touch with its alumni, and agreeing precisely what that relationship will involve, provides the backbone for a strategy. Unless you decide to ask alumni to pay for membership or for specific services, the institution will be required to fund this operation. It is important to be realistic about what you can offer, therefore, and to be certain that the institution can sustain it. Technology has revolutionised the possibilities for enhancing the relationship between alma mater and alumni, shifting some of the work from the hands of the Alumni Officer to the care of the IT department, or even to a virtual community of alumni that technology can now enable. Despite this, fostering good alumni relations is as much about personal, individual contact as it is about direct benefits, so no amount of technological bells and whistles will ever replace the important human touch. Do not overestimate the benefits you can offer, believing that technology will take care of it all.

A weakness in many alumni strategies is the lack of clear goals. Simply gathering large amounts of alumni data and keeping contact details up to date is the means, not the end. A vibrant organisation does make progress in this way. Being endlessly benevolent by offering benefits that become too costly to deliver - the excessively alma mater - damages alumni relations as much as being ruthlessly forthright about fundraising. Aim for the point on that spectrum that is right for your institution, and nail the target there.

#### 3.1 DEFINING "ALUMNI"

It is now customary to include everyone who has ever been linked with the institution: past and present students and staff, board or committee members. Some institutions also include recipients of honorary awards. It is clear that most European conservatoires regard recent leavers as their key target. Young alumni are generally easier to stay in contact with, and are a good group to start with if your institution has no formal contact with any alumni. Simply catch each generation of leavers and sign them up. Recent graduates provide feedback that is up to date and relevant, and may be more eager to continue the relationship that they have so recently enjoyed. It is equally important to be in touch with older graduates, however, to achieve a balanced group and a range of views. If fundraising is an objective, then more mature graduates are likely to be better prospects.

#### 3.2 AIMING FOR WIN-WIN

The gains for the conservatoire are clear: feedback for curriculum development, contacts in the profession and an informal ambassadorial network to help promote the institution. Gains for alumni can include an ongoing network of professional contacts; career support; job opportunities; access to resources, services, events and lifelong learning opportunities; invitations to contribute to current work; opportunities for self-promotion and the dissemination of publications and recordings; discounts on goods and services. Section 7 describes in detail privileges and benefits for alumni.

### 3.3 ACHIEVING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

An alumni strategy needs to be adopted by the wider institution; teaching and administrative staff, governing body, sponsors, donors and other supporters and partners. Involve them as you develop the strategy, as the success of your alumni relations will depend to a large extent on them. Consult widely with staff and students. Identify a few committed individuals, possibly teachers who already have large numbers of alumni contacts, and persuade them to enthuse others. List all the existing links you have with alumni, as these can often be overlooked. Explain what the benefits are to both sides, and emphasise that commitment and investment will be needed. Describe the musical and professional continuum that your institution will create through embracing its alumni. Show them examples of good practice from other conservatoires.

### 3.4 KEEPING IT SIMPLE

It is helpful to summarise the strategy into a small number of clear aims and objectives. These will form the basis for detailed planning and policy development. Examples could be:

- To build a well-informed group of advocates
- To provide feedback for curriculum development
- To support student recruitment
- To encourage alumni to provide professional development opportunities for students and each other
- To have a role in philanthropic giving (if appropriate)

### 3.5 PLANNING AND POLICY

The strategy has to be enacted in plans and policies. If you want feedback for curriculum development, then you will need to consider exactly how that process will work. If you want a group of international alumni ambassadors then you must define exactly what you need from them. When offering tangible benefits to alumni, you must ensure that you can afford to sustain them. When running events, you must be totally clear about what they are achieving, and how you will follow them up. More detail appears in section 7 on defining and delivering benefits.



## 4 STUDENT EXPERIENCE SHAPES ALUMNUS PERSPECTIVE

Before considering how to develop good relationships with alumni it is important to review how the relationship with students is developed. The memory that a student takes away from the institution is the basis on which the alumni relationship will be built, so it is critical to get this right. The impression that the institution makes on an individual lasts longer than the time they spend studying there. The attachments they make, the experiences that they have, the teachers they learn with, the performances in which they participate, their success or otherwise in examinations and assessments: all these shape the impression that students have of their institution, and will influence their view of the institution in years to come.

### 4.1 EXPECTATIONS

When a student arrives for his first term at a conservatoire, he will have a set of expectations about what he will find, what he will do and what he will achieve. A student will have his own definition of success or failure and will undoubtedly place himself on a scale of success as he leaves the institution. Clearly it is not possible for every student to leave an institution with first class honours, all the major prizes and the promise of a stellar performing career ahead of them. It is important, however, to make each student feel that he is a success in his own right, that he has something distinctive to offer and, most of all, that he wants to continue to work in music for the rest of his life, feeling that his contribution, however it is made, is valued.

### 4.2 CENTRALITY OF THE ONE-TO-ONE RELATIONSHIP WITH TEACHERS

A defining feature of conservatoire training is the centrality of the relationship between student and teacher. For many alumni, this is what they remember most vividly of the institution. They may not remember in detail the harmony and counterpoint classes, nor the chamber music coaching, nor performances in which they have participated. It is the relationship with the individual teacher that is etched in the memory and leaves the strongest impression. This being the case, the institution should do all it can to ensure that its teaching staff are fully aware and committed to the values, ethos and priorities of the institution.

### 4.3 THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT'S EXPERIENCE

There is an argument for looking more closely at the experience of each student as they move through their training, assessing the precise value added to each individual. This "customised" approach means that the student is more likely to emerge with a sense of individual worth. The supreme strength of conservatoire training is that it focuses on the individual development of a musician, giving us every opportunity to build strong relationships with all.

#### 4.4 GAINING THE SUPPORT OF TEACHERS

It is vital that teaching staff understand and support the institution's mission and messages. We hire teachers for their individuality and unique contribution, so ensuring that they all share in the institution's core values and priorities can be a challenge. Consulting teachers – including part-timers – about curriculum development and delivery methodology, and keeping them as up to date as possible in general matters, can be useful in maintaining engagement. If teachers understand and support core values, mission and message, they may be less likely to “do their own thing” in ways that are ultimately unhelpful to forging positive alumni relationships.

#### 4.5 CELEBRATING EVERYONE

Clearly, each field of study or instrument has its own set of opportunities and limitations. Pianists are different from singers. Viola players are different from trombonists. Those with sights are set on a solo career will have a different experience from those who are aiming at orchestral playing. Composers are in a category of their own. Providing a chance for each student to shine is a challenge, and it is helpful if staff are able to celebrate the differences between individuals (as well as assess them according to rigorous criteria). Obvious tactics include things conservatoires already do: facilitating chamber music; enabling pianists to develop duos; encouraging all musicians to think outside their particular box, exploring unusual repertoire, or making relationships with other musicians that could lead to musical fulfilment, possible employment and, ultimately, to a stronger sense of the role that the institution has played in their development.

A bonus for students, especially those who are inexperienced, less ambitious or lacking confidence, is the opportunity to perform, teach, or participate in education and outreach work outside the institution. Working off-campus can build student confidence; indeed, a student may blossom and discover fresh self-esteem in a situation which is not assessment-related.

#### 4.6 EMPHASISING THE POSITIVE

It is also worth reiterating the major transferable skills that conservatoire training bestows: critical reflection, self-direction, self-discipline, organisation, teamwork, independence, leadership, focus, concentration, originality, precision, flexibility and perseverance. The skills acquired during violin practice or harmony classes may prove useful later, if musical work is sparse and other work has to be sought. It is often at the point when work is scarce that alumni become terminally detached from the institution. Blaming one's alma mater for a lack of success is common and understandable. After three or four years of intense musical activity while the training is underway, an unfortunate student may emerge into the world with, at worst, an empty diary. The student rarely holds himself responsible, and psychologically it feels too risky to blame the teacher who may have been a god for several years. Instead the “unsuccessful” student may hold the institution responsible. Clearly this attitude is profoundly unhelpful for the development of good alumni relations.

#### 4.7 UNDERGRADUATES AND POSTGRADUATES

An undergraduate student is different from the graduate student. The undergraduate, if he chooses not to undertake postgraduate study, has only one institution as his alma mater. The graduate student can choose where his or her allegiance lies in later life. Very few people feel equal loyalty to two institutions so the challenge is to ensure that your institution occupies prime position in the alumnus's affections.

#### 4.8 JUNIOR STUDENTS

There is considerable variation across Europe in the relationship that junior students (under 18 years old) have with their junior institution, and in the relationship that the junior division has with its "parent" institution. In the UK, the allegiance between junior students and institutions providing training at the pre-college level can be quite strong, especially among the many talented junior students who choose not to progress to music higher education. Pursuing other professions, they may continue to perform as adult amateurs. These talented individuals tend to be successful in a range of ways and, not relying on music as their major income stream, often have happy memories of their days as junior students. In the UK we have hardly begun to look at the potential of this relationship in detail but, certainly in terms of fundraising, it could be important. These "junior" alumni generally feel a stronger allegiance to the junior division than to the parent institution; this impacts on fundraising.

#### 4.9 INSTITUTIONAL REPUTATION

Reputation management is a key aspect of public relations, and its influence on alumni perceptions cannot be overestimated. Students who left an institution proudly twenty five years ago may change their view if the reputation of the institution declines. This fact alone should be a key driver for the marketing and external relations department.

#### 4.10 MAKING A POSITIVE IMPACT IN OTHER WAYS

In the ideal world, the student emerges from your institution eager to be an ambassador, enthusiastic to speak well of his experience. How can you ensure that this will happen? You have already looked at the quality of the individual student experience: now is the time to look at the total environment. The physical environment is important: well-equipped teaching and practice facilities, comfortable accommodation and welcoming social spaces, well-managed research resources such as libraries, recording studios, mediathèque, museums are likely to leave an enduringly positive impression on students. They are less important than human relationship, but still provide powerful memories for alumni. Unfortunately, other aspects of the conservatoire experience can impact negatively on students, and these may be more difficult to rectify.

#### 4.11 THE COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT

By its very nature, the prevailing ethos in a conservatoire is competitive. We monitor and evaluate constantly, audition, examine, assess and allot places in orchestras and ensembles according to ability and achievement. Students can hear for themselves where they fit in the hierarchy of musical and technical accomplishment at any particular point. It is impossible to remove completely this competitive dimension because it lies at the very heart of conservatoire training; indeed, it would be unrealistic and disingenuous to try to do so because the musical marketplace is itself ruthless and unforgiving.

## 5 INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALUMNI: WHERE DOES IT BELONG?

An individual (referred to here as an Alumni Officer, but it could be another post which contains alumni relations as part of a portfolio of responsibility) will lead the alumni relations for the institution. Selecting the right individual is crucial as he will be the first point of contact for thousands of key individuals. Appendix C is an indicative extract from a job description for a role advertised in September 2007 at the Royal College of Music.

### 5.1 THE POINT OF CONTACT

The location of the Alumni Officer post indicates the kind of relationship the conservatoire wants with its alumni. The most common departments with responsibility for alumni are the Student Administration/Registry, External Affairs or Development/Fundraising. The different "messages" may be broadly characterised as follows:

Office responsible for alumni relations	Advantages	Potential key "message"
Student Administration/Registry	Can move data easily from student records to alumni database. Regular contact with teaching staff means that Student Administration/Registry staff likely to obtain anecdotal knowledge of, and updates on graduates' musical achievements.	We are mostly interested in what you achieved as a student. Your career and professional development since graduation and your potential are less interesting to us.
External Affairs	Has tools to research career paths and to identify high achievers or figures of influence.	We are interested in your potential as an international ambassador, your contacts, and your capacity to influence.
Development/Fundraising	Has tools to research career paths and identify high achievers. Can encourage alumni to support the institution as a sponsor or donor <sup>8</sup> .	We are interested in your career path, personal profile and contacts, and in your potential as a future donor.

<sup>8</sup> In the mid-1990s, it was suggested to members of the alumni organisation of the Royal College of Music in London, the RCM Society, that merger with the RCM Friends (a supporters' group) was under discussion. Comprehensively rejected, the idea was dropped.

A recent survey of UK conservatoires suggests that awareness of alumni and their potential significance is generally considered to be moderately high within the institution (averaging 5 out of 10) but that there is significant variance between departments within institutions<sup>9</sup>. Current staff and students need to understand the place of alumni in the continuum of the institution's history, and the potential benefits of this continuing link. An internal awareness-raising campaign can be helpful (see section 6: Founding an Alumni Organisation).

## 5.2 FUNDING: STAFF COSTS AND EXPENDITURE BUDGETS

Adequate staffing and funding are fundamental to success. Researching and updating alumni details is painstaking, labour-intensive and time-consuming work with, generally, limited prospect of immediate financial return on the investment. Because alumni are generally poor at staying in touch, keeping thousands of records up to date is a big task. Only a small minority of European conservatoires has a full-time dedicated alumni post. This contrasts with universities in the UK, and most conservatoires in the USA, where investment in the alumni operation is considerable.

<sup>9</sup> Of the seven responding institutions, only one claimed that institutional awareness of alumni was 1, on a scale of 1-10. Trinity Laban, reported 8-9 [www.trinitylaban.ac.uk](http://www.trinitylaban.ac.uk).

## 6 CONTACTING AND TRACKING ALUMNI

The alumni strategy determines the priorities for contacting and tracking alumni. It is tempting to assume that the quantity of records is important but, without a set of aims and objectives for alumni relations, holding large numbers of alumni records is in itself meaningless. Tracking conservatoire graduates is difficult, especially immediately after graduation, as musicians are notoriously mobile as they search for work. This is especially true of freelance performers who do not enjoy the security and stability of being linked to a specific professional base, for example an orchestra or opera company. The situation is sometimes easier with older alumni who are more likely to be settled in career and home life. Despite this, they can still drop easily from the institutional radar.

Contact details for any group typically change at the rate of 15-25% per annum. Alumni are no exception. If members fail to notify the change themselves, the institution has to work very hard to keep track. Indeed, a key performance indicator for the alumni office might well be the percentage of alumni spontaneously updating the Alumni Office about changes in contact details. Figures from UK conservatoires vary, but on average are disappointingly low. This clearly indicates that keeping the link with the institution is not a priority for most alumni. It is not surprising, therefore, that institutions offering concrete benefits to their alumni report a significantly higher self-notification rate. Tools that permit alumni to update their own contact details and post information on-line themselves are most helpful (see section 8).

**Note that data protection legislation must be observed at all times when collecting and storing data.**

### 6.1 SELECTING AND LOCATING THE DATABASE

Spreadsheets or simple “flat” databases can record basic alumni information adequately. Through these standard tools, records can be maintained and mailings arranged, but undertaking more sophisticated tasks may be difficult. A relational database is more versatile, allowing a wider range of reports to be produced more easily. Records on a typical student database typically include quite complex and sensitive information, needing various levels of password-protection to ensure security. Most dedicated student databases have alumnus fields into which records can be migrated automatically on graduation. This is satisfactory, but possibly the best solution, in terms of access and security, is to store alumni data on an external relations database sitting on a separate, dedicated server. It saves time if the external relations database “speaks” to the student database easily, allowing the automatic migration of existing student data. If not, the data will have to be input manually each year.

It is important to determine the primary alumni data owner: usually this is the Alumni Officer. It

must also be decided who should have write-access; and who needs read-only access. The database should be able to record the relationship between individuals. For example: teacher and student; father and daughter; member of same class or cohort. This can be useful later when alumni get “lost”.

## 6.2 DESIGNING A RECORD

An alumnus record should include fields to hold the following information:

- First name(s)
- Current second name
- Second name while student (if now married)
- Date of birth
- Current mailing address
- Email address
- Telephone numbers including mobile
- Parental contact details
- Website (if applicable)
- Dates of study at institution
- Principal instrument or voice
- Teachers(s)
- Courses/programmes of study with year(s)
- Grades and marks
- Qualification(s) on graduation
- Prizes and awards
- Principal peers (for future relationship network)
- Current employment (nature, contact details, dates)
- Other comments and notes
- Record of communications (mailings, emails, phone calls, visits, donations etc)

## 6.3 CREATING A QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CONTACT DETAILS

Ensure that questionnaires or contact details forms are designed to align directly with fields on the database.

## 6.4 MAINTAINING CONTACT WITH CURRENT STUDENTS

Preparing students for their impending alumni status is time well spent (see section 2). An exit interview presents an excellent opportunity to explain the benefits of staying in touch with the institution (see below). As exit interviews are intended to help the student to look forward, they have a different



focus from interviews or feedback questionnaires promoted by teaching staff who are seeking input to inform curriculum development. If permitted, it is useful to cross reference all interviews/questionnaire responses given by an individual who is about to leave, in order to build up the fullest possible picture of the impression he is likely to take away from the institution.

The following suggestions may be useful in raising alumni awareness among students approaching graduation.

- Ensure that you hold a mobile phone number and personal email address.
- Involve students in focus groups or working parties on a range of employment-related issues in the year before they graduate, to help them see that their continuing input is likely to be valued beyond graduation.
- Encourage students to provide news for publications, to establish the habit.
- Consider offering a continuing institutional email address (see section 8).
- Hold a parental or other contact postal address, if the student it agreeable.
- Conduct exit interviews at some point in the final year.
- While they are still engrossed in study, ask students to identify which services they would most like to continue to access as alumni (but make no promises!).
- Create a simple questionnaire or contact form (see above) and make it available to graduating students on-line and in hard copy.
- Ensure that every graduating student is given a copy of all relevant alumni publications.
- Host a leavers' social event (the promise of refreshments boosts the acceptance rate) at which graduands can meet other alumni, experiencing at first hand the potential of the network.
- See that the alumni organisation has a major presence at the Graduation Ceremony. (In reality, graduands are normally preoccupied with saying farewell to friends and teachers, but you can make contact with parents.)
- Use a first destination (work) survey (a requirement in England)<sup>10</sup> with telephone-follow up to establish ongoing rapport.

## 6.5 PLANNING AN EXIT INTERVIEW

The exit interview has two obvious purposes: to gather information about the individual's experience as a student and aspirations for the future; and to discuss how the institution may be able to help support the alumnus's unfolding career. But it is also an opportunity for the interviewer to promote the institution, and gently remind the alumnus of his future role as ambassador for the institution.

<sup>10</sup> In England, the Higher Education Statistical Agency HESA collects data annually about first career destinations from a HESA-selected group of graduating students. Conducted by paper and on-line questionnaire (often completed by telephone chasing from the institution), the survey obtains snapshots of graduate employment on certain dates within 12 months of the date of graduation. These data inform the government's funding calculations for conservatoires.

This discussion has to be undertaken sensitively, as a graduating student who has performed badly in examinations, or been unhappy for other reasons, may not regard his alma mater positively at this point.

It may be impractical to interview every leaver each year. In this case, meet with a cross-section of a cohort, representing different level of study (undergraduate or graduate), course or programme (eg soloist, chamber musician, orchestral player), nationality, gender, instrument and teacher. It can also be enlightening to meet students from both ends of the achievement spectrum. If you interview only those who have "succeeded", their satisfaction is likely to be high. By meeting students who have not enjoyed their studies, you may learn more. This process will help you form a general impression of the year. It is also possible to conduct group interviews, but the responses are generally less candid.

## 6.6 SEEKING THE TRUTH

The exit interview is critical in shaping the student's impression of the institution. It should be carefully structured with questions designed to elicit frank responses but, equally, allowing time for discussion to focus on what the student has achieved. Encourage students to answer thoughtfully, trying to help them to articulate some positive aspects about the experiences that they have found negative. Exit interviews are best done face to face. This is time consuming and students may not wish to give up the time required. Telephone interviews are a very good substitute and, indeed, were the backbone of "Working in Music" project at the RCM London. Students may not find it easy to be entirely candid during interviews. Their capacity to face up to, and articulate, the truth is influenced by a number of factors. A student may be unwilling to disclose his true views about his student days, fearing that he may be labelled a failure. The student who claims to have enjoyed his time as a student may be lying and, five years later, may be confident enough to give tell a different story. While there is little to be done about this, it is important to take account of this when analysing responses. Comparing the responses given as feedback to curriculum developers with the responses given at exit interviews (to non-teachers) can reveal surprising differences.

## 6.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR THE EXIT INTERVIEW

- Which individuals - staff and students - have been your principal contacts? (These provide leads in the future, if an alumnus gets "lost")
- Which aspect of your studies have you most enjoyed?
- What are the most useful things you have learned?
- How would you describe the institution to other people? What are its chief characteristics? (If you ask for three adjectives, you will learn a lot)
- Would you recommend the institution to younger musicians?
- If so, why? If not, why not?
- What study or work plans do you have for the next three months/one year?

- Where are you likely to be based? Do we have your permission to stay in touch with you? (Take full contact details, if student gives permission to be held)
- What kind of alumni events would you be interested in attending in future
- What kind of benefits would you most value as an alumnus?
- How could the institution help you as you move forward in your career (making it clear that it may not be possible to deliver everything!)?

Some of these responses can be input immediately to the student's record on the database; others can be noted and summarised. With an individual's permission, positive comments could be collated for use in publications or on the website, anonymised if necessary.

## 6.8 RESEARCHING RECENT GRADUATES (LEFT WITHIN THE LAST TEN YEARS)

There are several methods of researching the current contact details of graduates who are likely still to be working, including:

- Paper and web-based conservatoire records (note that contact details become quickly out of date, so this method is useful only as a starting point)
- Individual teachers' records and informal networks
- The published directories, print and on-line, of professional organisations and musicians' unions
- Membership lists of performing organisations such as orchestras and opera choruses
- Artist management agencies
- Internet search engines
- Word of mouth, informal networks and the alumni network itself
- Advertising or editorial in the institution's publications and other music media
- Research project with face to face and telephone interviews

Recent graduates are generally interested in revisiting their alma mater for professional development rather than purely social purposes: further training, seminars and workshops prove the most popular, especially if designed only for alumni, led by an alumnus, and free of charge. Some conservatoires run alumni repertoire orchestras or choir, providing free rehearsal space and music hire, but this is uncommon in the UK.

## 6.9 RESEARCHING OLDER GRADUATES (LEFT MORE THAN TEN YEARS EARLIER)

"Cold-calling" is unpopular, and approaching long-lost alumni should be undertaken carefully. It is wrong to assume that former students will necessarily want to reconnect with their alma mater. If a new contact is suggested by an alumnus, try to persuade him to follow it up initially, drawing attention to the web-based questionnaire which can be completed on-line, or printed and mailed.

Otherwise, it can be useful to hold an event to which specific generations of alumni are invited. This can generate enthusiasm among the known alumni who may be pleased at the chance to contact old classmates. An event to attract older graduates should have an obvious purpose which is specified on the invitation, and may or may not be charged. There is more information on organising a successful alumni event in section 7. Though there are exceptions, older graduates seem most willing to visit their alma mater to see work in progress. This might involve an invitation to a concert or masterclass, or a visit to a department such as a library or museum which has special items on display or projects underway. Whatever the event, it is vital that the alumni who attend feel privileged so an encounter with the Principal is highly valued.

#### **6.10 UPDATING CONTACT DETAILS**

Contact details fall out of date at an alarming rate so a regular data “clean” is vital, at least once a year. This is a key task for the Alumni Officer. Ensure that every communication with alumni, print or web-based, includes a response mechanism for notifying change of address etc. This may not be well used, but reminds alumni that you want to stay in touch with them. When mail is returned, use all available channels to re-connect with the “lost” alumnus. A facility whereby alumni can update their own contact details on-line saves administration time and ensures a higher level of accuracy.

## 7 FOUNDING AN ALUMNI ORGANISATION

Gathering alumni data onto a database is only the beginning. To develop a dynamic, interactive relationship with your alumni, you need to build a lasting connection with them. Above all you need to consult them, talk to them and maintain the dialogue indefinitely. This can best be done through founding an alumni organisation. Membership of such a group can provide a structured system of rewards and benefits that will encourage individuals to participate. These benefits must also keep your alumni interested and engaged over the years, as their needs change and the institution itself evolves. A healthy alumni organisation gives life to your contacts, and keeps them alive.

Recent technological developments and the rise of on-line communities (see section 8) mean that some time-consuming aspects of servicing a membership organisation have vanished, but the human touch is still important in fostering good relationships. While the IT department might take on increasing responsibility for the technology, the Alumni Officer provides the personal touch so valued by alumni.

### 7.1 ESTABLISHING A STEERING GROUP

Even if your institution has an Alumni Officer post, you will benefit from a group of individuals to be the eyes and ears of the new organisation, and to help to steer its development. This can be an informal group, or a formal committee or steering group, Board or Council, depending on the objectives and terms of reference. These individuals should represent the whole alumni body as far as possible: by age, gender, musical studies, current occupation and location. They should also have a complementary range of skills, experience and personality that will contribute to a strong team. Some will present themselves; others you will need to recruit. These individuals will be the corner stones of your new organisation. It is helpful to have some stellar names on the group and you may also wish to include one or more current students and staff members. Some conservatoires use their alumni “ambassadors” to provide the direction for the organisation (see section 9).

### 7.2 WHO IS IN CHARGE?

From the outset, it is important that the relationships between the Alumni Officer, the institution itself, the alumni organisation and its committee or steering group are clearly articulated, and that the terms of reference for the organisation are agreed by your institution. Is your organisation going to be run by the alma mater for its alumni? Or will it be run by alumni for alumni? Whichever arrangement is chosen, it is strategically wise for the institution, which is, after all, funding this ambitious undertaking, to propose and formalise its own objectives, strategy, terms and conditions, and rules of engagement. The rise of on-line communities is shifting the responsibility from institutions to members, but for maximum benefit, the institution should continue to take the leadership role, if only as facilitator.

### 7.3 EXCLUSIVE OR INCLUSIVE? SUBSCRIBED OR FREE?

Very few alumni organisations are now requiring subscriptions. Subscribing to membership signals an individual's commitment and brings a sense of being special and exclusive. For the organisation, it brings an income to fund activities. By contrast, an inclusive, free-for-all organisation carries few expectations on either side. The trend is towards a free-to-users alumni service rather than a cumbersome, subscription-based club, but this means that the funding burden rests entirely with the institution. The following case study describes the Royal College of Music's experience as it moved from an exclusive subscription-based alumni society to an inclusive organisation with no membership fee.

### 7.4 CASE STUDY: THE RCM SOCIETY

Until 2001, the Royal College of Music, London, had a subscription-only alumni association, the RCM Society, formerly the RCM Union. Both former students and former staff members were entitled to belong. Its membership in 2001 was around 450, and the average age of the membership was estimated between 50 and 60 (difficult to calculate as many older records were incomplete). Membership was £15 per annum and a part-time Alumni Officer (two days per week) was employed to care for the members. Activity was limited to an annual social event, and members received a termly alumni newsheet. A significant capital sum had been built up over the years to offer to loans to alumni for the purchase of instruments. This much-appreciated Instrument Loan Fund was administered by the Alumni Officer. A small number of RCM Society members regularly attended concerts and other events, and generally took an active and helpful interest in the College as it developed over the years. Their involvement was highly valued by the RCM. Largely, however, the membership was inactive. Contact details fell out of date and were difficult to update. Deaths were rarely notified, with distressing consequences when mailings were mistakenly sent to deceased members. All in all, the RCM Society was not well supported by its alma mater, and the needs and wishes of its members were not properly understood.

The establishment in 1999 of the RCM's career support unit, the Woodhouse Centre (see Annex A) prompted a review of alumni relations. A basic principle of the Centre was that its services would be accessible to alumni for five years after graduation. After considerable market research, and consultation among members of the RCM Society, current staff and students, the decision was taken to make the RCM Society fully inclusive with free membership. The subscription was removed and immediately all past students and staff members automatically became members of the new RCM Society. This was communicated widely and after intensive research, the RCM at September 2007 is actively in touch with over 5000 alumni. All of them are now members of the new-look RCM Society.

The part-time Alumni Officer has now been replaced by a full-time Graduate Services Officer. The average age of the RCM Society membership is now 37, since the majority of new additions to the da-

tabase are recent graduates. Many of these new contacts were made through the telephone research as part of the Working in Music Project. Each member of the RCM Society now can:

- receive a copy of the RCM's magazine Upbeat each term
- receive regular invitations to professional development and social events
- enjoy discounted rates on RCM Studios services and room hire
- access the re-titled Instrument Finance Scheme
- benefit from work opportunities offered by the Woodhouse Centre
- sign up to the weekly e-work bulletin distribution
- continue to use the Library

The RCM has thus made a considerable financial investment in its alumni relations. It has lost the annual subscription of earlier days (approximately £7,500 which paid the part-time Alumni Officer) and taken responsibility for providing the following (2007-08 estimated figures):

[From September 2007]	GBP(£)	Euro
Full-time Graduate Services Officer	25,000	36,100
Newsletters and mailing each term	15,000	21,700
Professional development events	6,000	8,680
Social events	2,000	2,890
Loss of revenue after discounts offered	2,000	2,890
Other	1,000	1,450
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TOTAL	51,000	73,800

## 8 BENEFITS AND PRIVILEGES

A benefit is “something worth having, an advantage or a profit, which can often be measured”. The direct benefits of membership - such as receiving newsletters, invitations to events and discounted offers - are simple to quantify and, if resources are in place, straightforward to deliver. The institution gives and the alumnus takes. But alumni may also enjoy the sense of giving back, and regard this as a privilege. The “gift” given back does not have to be money; it can be professional expertise or wisdom. Indeed, alumni may derive more satisfaction from an opportunity to share part of their experience than from a direct benefit such as free concert tickets. Above all, alumni want to feel valued, not just as part of the whole alumni group but as individuals in their own right.

Possibly the most meaningful “benefit” of being an alumnus is difficult to quantify. It is the sense of pride and loyalty at having once attended – and continuing to feel connected with - a prestigious institution, and its community of staff and students, which continues to command respect long after individuals have graduated. In an ideal relationship, the institution itself continues to benefit in a range of ways from its link with graduates. Thus we have a marriage which is not only made in heaven but also blessed by St Cecilia.

### 8.1 DEFINING BENEFITS

Before launching an alumni organisation, first agree precisely which benefits you can offer. You must be confident that the institution can sustain them in the future. All deliverable benefits should be fully costed according to your institution’s formula. Try to arrange a variety of benefits or privileges, in view of the fact that alumni needs and interests may vary according to age, generation (ie years of study), instrument, teacher, location or current employment situation. You may find that recent leavers are more interested in work- or training-related opportunities, while older alumni, possibly more settled in their lives and careers, will appreciate the chance to reconnect with alma mater as “givers” or observers.

Remember the many grouping options when planning events. Alumni seem most interested in meeting up with, or learning about, the classmates they studied or performed with. Arranging an event for students of a particular teacher can be an effective way of contacting large numbers of contemporary alumni by word of mouth. Often, the impetus for such an event will come from an individual alumnus, who may be persuaded to help make the arrangements and issue the invitations. The benefits and privileges most highly rated by conservatoire graduates are described below.

### 8.2 CONTINUING ACCESS TO FACILITIES

This is the benefit that most students imagine they will want as alumni: continuing access to the facilities they most value such as the library, recording facilities and rehearsal spaces. In reality, only a



small percentage of alumni take up these opportunities. Ensure that opening up facilities to alumni does not limit the access to current students. Also, opening up facilities for use by alumni inevitably adds to overall workload, so you will need colleagues' co-operation. The support of senior management will also be important, as extra work might require higher remuneration.

### 8.3 CONTINUING NETWORK OF CONTACTS

The main teacher and the peer group are the most missed by alumni after graduation. "I never realised how lucky I was to have everyone just sitting there waiting to play with me. I wish I'd made more of that opportunity as I now miss it more than anything else." The ongoing importance of the cohort and specific classmates seems poorly appreciated by UK conservatoire students. Some student ensembles, in order to survive graduation, continue to function professionally for some years, but the potential of the wider network of peers is commonly overlooked. In the USA, by contrast, it is normal for members of a class to regard the group of classmates as its key network of professional contacts in the future. Indeed, many are still in touch and working together decades after graduation.

This approach is worth encouraging. It is easier in situations where teaching is mostly delivered in classes, and more difficult where the training and performance is more solitary. In the UK, many musicians work freelance (self-employed), so initiative and enterprise are vital. A network of contacts is an important base for future professional collaboration. It is true that students who manage to organise their own performances in non-conservatoire venues, collaborating with other students and performing the work of fellow student composers, are more likely to carry those contacts through to their professional lives.

On-line alumni communities can facilitate such networking, but the habit of being in touch is best established while individuals are students.

### 8.4 CAREER SUPPORT AND WORK OPPORTUNITIES

Providing continuing support for career development can be a key benefit for alumni. Career services for musicians were pioneered in the USA in the 1980s, notably at the New England Conservatory<sup>11</sup>, Manhattan School of Music<sup>12</sup> and the Juilliard School<sup>13</sup>. Throughout North America, music schools and departments have impressively-resourced career units, most with experienced and dedicated staff. While focused on serving students, the service is in some cases extended to alumni.

<sup>11</sup> See [www.newenglandconservatory.edu/career/index.html](http://www.newenglandconservatory.edu/career/index.html).

<sup>12</sup> See [www.msmnyc.edu/careers](http://www.msmnyc.edu/careers).

<sup>13</sup> See [www.juilliard.edu](http://www.juilliard.edu).

This excellent practice has now been taken up enthusiastically in the UK. The Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, for example, offers Sound Advice which helps students, graduates and alumni find out about employment and professional development opportunities as well as providing a service for promoters looking to engage graduates and alumni for performances. Run by the Professional Development Team, Sound Advice is the RNCM's programme for continuing professional development of students and alumni. It helps RNCM students gather the wide range of skills they need for their professional life and extends this support to graduates for several years after they have moved on from College. The programme provides support in several forms:

- Help and advice on a wide range of topics, such as self-promotion and financial matters
- Regular information for students and alumni on job opportunities
- Seminars and workshops covering a broad range of topics including improvisation and outreach skills, world music, business and marketing skills, project leadership, teaching techniques
- Personal development and confidence training
- A select number of professional engagements referred or co-ordinated for graduates registered on the Sound Advice Musicians Database
- Introductory sessions from representatives from notable arts organisations

The careers service offered through the Woodhouse Centre has proved the backbone of the Royal College of Music's alumni benefits. For details on the Woodhouse Centre see in Appendix A.

## 8.5 LIFELONG LEARNING

Lifelong learning opportunities designated specifically for alumni are popular in the USA but are still in fairly early development in the UK and most of Europe. Most institutions simply offer a discount to alumni on open-to-all lifelong learning programmes, whether they are delivered on campus, at local centres, or on-line as distance learning.

Seminars on professional topics for alumni are much appreciated. The Paris Conservatoire's impressive *Journées de la profession* is a series addressing important topics including: the future direction for serious music, funding, audience development, improving public understanding, the place of education work, planning career routes, and include practical workshops ranging from project development to successful orchestral auditioning and self-promotion. These 2 day-long seminars are presented by a combination of practising musicians and promoters such as festival directors and venue managers, and may also involve CNSMDP alumni and staff, including its Director. Feedback from participants is unfailingly positive. The "Observatoire", described in the Polifonia profession's group findings<sup>14</sup> and led by CNSMDP, has examined professional integration routes for musicians; its findings are invaluable for the Conservatoire's curriculum and professional development.

<sup>14</sup> See [www.polifonia-tn.org/alumnipolicies](http://www.polifonia-tn.org/alumnipolicies).

## 8.6 OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISSEMINATING PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDINGS

An appreciated service, if it can be coordinated, preferably through the website. Otherwise, this can be self-administered by alumni through an on-line community.

## 8.7 PROVIDING TRANSCRIPTS

This is a necessary service for alumni, which can be managed through the Alumni Office. Most institutions charge a fee.

## 8.8 DISCOUNTS ON PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Musicians may be interested in discounts on instruments and repairs; books and music; equipment (including IT); hotel accommodation; car hire, insurance and legal advice; print and web subscriptions; performance clothing; dry cleaning bills; and hairdressing. These arrangements can be time-consuming for a conservatoire to negotiate and maintain. Generally, bigger organisations can do this better and more cost-effectively so it may be simpler to offer discounted membership of a major professional organisation (in the UK this is the Incorporated Society of Musicians, ISM). Through this membership, alumni can access a range of products and services for which the partner organisations, not your institution, bear the responsibility.

## 8.9 MERCHANDISE

There is a tradition in some conservatoires of offering crested ties, scarves, T-shirts, cufflinks and tie pins exclusively for alumni to purchase. In small institutions, it may be more cost-effective to offer a discount to alumni on general merchandise (pens, engraved glass etc). Manhattan School of Music offers class rings, made by a respected jeweller, for sale to its alumni each year.

## 8.10 ALUMNI AWARDS

Some conservatoires offer dedicated awards to alumni, to recognise formally their contribution to the alma mater and to the music profession. Most UK conservatoires have a similar honorary awards scheme, but it is open to all, not exclusively for alumni. Though many alumni do receive these awards, a dedicated alumnus award clearly has more impact in terms of public relations.

## 8.11 SOCIAL EVENTS

Invitations to attend social events appeal to some alumni. The event can be for alumni only, or a general event at which alumni are special guests. The event will be more successful if it has a purpose, or a focus. It could be a reunion of a particular cohort, or an opportunity to attend a masterclass

given by a distinguished fellow alumnus. Use the opportunity to gather more information about “lost” alumni and ensure that each alumnus leaves with information about current activity and a supply of questionnaires to distribute. Follow up everyone who attended with a letter and possibly an invitation to a further event.

An alumnus may suggest a local gathering that he will organise in their home town. The Alumni Officer may provide the contact details of local alumni (subject to data protection legislation) and, if time allows, may even issue the invitations. These local meetings should be encouraged as they may help to create a local group that can be useful in promoting the institution in a range of ways. If successful, the alumnus could be invited to become a local ambassador in a formal ambassadors’ network (see section 10).

The Curtis Institute in Philadelphia reports a recent event it organised in February 2007 when an alumni visit to Cleveland was arranged. A group attended a Cleveland Orchestra concert conducted by an alumnus, and then met at a reception afterwards the eleven Curtis alumni members of the Orchestra (who came from the classes of 1976-2003).

#### **8.12 PARTICIPATION IN MENTORING SCHEMES**

This can be a valuable way for an alumnus to contribute, and many do so already informally. Mentoring schemes can be labour-intensive to administer, monitor and evaluate, and the success rate is variable. It may be more effective to use the technique of the career interview, in which a student or alumnus is put in touch with an alumnus who is working successfully in a particular branch of music. This is a one-off opportunity to meet and talk. If the encounter is successful, the relationship can proceed if both parties deem it worthwhile. This has worked effectively at the RCM through the Woodhouse Centre which operates an informal scheme on this basis, matching current students with alumni. It is not onerous, but does depend on knowledge of individuals and their career paths. For example, an alumnus, now 30, set up a successful small business in classical music video production. He is happy to meet current students and other alumni to share his experience of business start-up. “It was so useful to talk to someone who has actually set up his own business”, commented a young alumnus. “Because he is not much older than I am, I did not feel daunted, and learned so much about approaching banks, sourcing funding, taxes and employment law. It was invaluable.”

#### **8.13 CONTINUING EMAIL ADDRESS**

See Section 9.5 for lifetime email addresses and web page hosting.

## 9 COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Technology is transforming communication, with mobile technologies opening up exciting opportunities for musicians. But technology can only provide the means through which communication can happen. Deciding what to communicate - why, when, how and to whom - requires human intelligence. No amount of technological gadgetry can replace that. Ten years ago, alumni relations depended largely on the alma mater deciding the "message", communicating it to its alumni, and alumni occasionally responding. There might be occasional pockets of activity generated by alumni themselves, but the alma mater remained the heart of the operation. Now, on-line communities mean that alumni can communicate among themselves, often quite independently of the alma mater. This is both a threat and an opportunity. The challenge for conservatoires is to remain the hub of alumni communication, facilitating rather than necessarily controlling. Good communication channels must be matched by good content, and content must be matched by contact data of the highest quality. No matter how fascinating the content is, if a communication is not actually received by an intended recipient, it is wasted. This section focuses on the principles of communication, whether delivered electronically or by the postman. It begins with print publications, any of which can also be disseminated through the web.

### 9.1 EDITORIAL POLICY

The Alumni Officer should take responsibility for editorial policy for alumni publications, working with the marketing department. If the publication is for a wider readership, the editorial group should include the Alumni Officer and alumni material should be included in every issue. There are generally two sorts of material: institutional "key" messages, and alumni activity. The institution's current priorities should always be reflected in alumni communications. Publications should reinforce a sense of pride in alumni. This should be the basis of editorial policy. It is important to decide who has control of any publication. Is this a publication by alumni for alumni, or by the institution for alumni? A dedicated alumni publication may be preferable, but there is an argument for incorporating alumni information into a general publication intended for a wider readership. This strengthens its effectiveness as a public relations tool, especially if the readership group includes current staff, students and other external stakeholders such as sponsors and donors, who will be impressed and inspired by alumni achievements. Have a strong commissioning policy. Beware of relying solely on submitted contributions: this approach risks downgrading the publication to the level of a school magazine.

### 9.2 NEWSLETTERS, MAGAZINES AND BULLETINS

These are among the key tangible benefits by which the quality of the alumni organisation, and the whole institution, may be judged. They are prime tools for reinforcing the brand and promoting the institution. Agree the frequency of publication, and stick to it. Produce a lively, confident magazine once a year, rather than an indifferent one each term. A dedicated email address,

[alumni@conservatoire.org](mailto:alumni@conservatoire.org) for example, can encourage alumni to submit their news and stories to the Alumni Officer. Some will still send news by post, and even over the telephone or by word of mouth. Be prepared for a wide variety of information arriving in a range of media and, whenever possible, acknowledge receipt of the message. Submitted copy may not be interesting; it may simply be a routine update about an individual's current activity. "Routine" information from a stellar alumnus, however, may be of interest to many. If you cannot use all the material submitted in a print publication, post it on the website. Plan features with photographs, and summarise the less newsworthy material alphabetically by decade. Letters pages are popular with alumni, though inevitably they occasionally difficult points are raised, needing a careful response.

Alumni enjoy reading about the continuing success of the alma mater, especially about distinguished visiting musicians, new staff appointments, outstanding student achievements, estate development, research projects, professional development opportunities and links with the outside world (sponsorships, collaborations and partnerships). Most of all, they relish news of alumni (especially themselves, naturally). Balance the individual alumni stories in your publications. Feature the stellar alumni, of course, but avoid focusing exclusively on this particular sort of success, as alumni whose careers have been less illustrious may feel disheartened. Be sensitive to this, and celebrate different kinds of achievement alongside the names-in-lights. To avoid creating a parochial, self-congratulatory impression, put the stories into context, drawing external comparisons (tactfully) where appropriate. Think beyond the institution's walls, to the world outside.

If mailing the magazine, enclose a covering letter from the Alumni Officer. Always ensure the magazine is available as a PDF through the website.

### 9.3 WEBSITE

As a minimum, create a dedicated password-protected alumni zone on your website. As well as describing current activity at the institution, it can include details of benefits, alumni news and photographs. Depending on the capacity of the IT department, it may also incorporate a directory of alumni contact details, discussion forum or a message board through which individuals can contact each other. These on-line resources may require monitoring or moderation for which the Alumni Officer will be responsible. Try to enable alumni to update their own contact details on-line. Interesting alumni news can be featured in the general news section on the homepage of the conservatoire's website. Routine information about individuals can be posted on part of the alumni zone dedicated to this purpose. It can be posted with a time-limit, or indefinitely. Ensure that the alumni questionnaire is easily available on that part of the site. Trinity College in London has a simple, clear, user-friendly alumni zone<sup>15</sup>. The Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester has a more developed alumni

<sup>15</sup> See [www.tcm.ac.uk/alumni](http://www.tcm.ac.uk/alumni).

web presence<sup>16</sup> including professional development opportunities and access to advice services (see section 7). Advertisers may be interested in taking space on the alumni zone, especially if they can offer special deals for alumni. Before publishing any personal information or images on the web you will need the written permission of individuals. Data protection legislation varies from country to country, but this is a minimum standard which you will need observe. Check before you publish.

#### 9.4 ON-LINE COMMUNITIES

Web-based technologies have enabled some conservatoires to facilitate the creation of on-line alumni communities. This begins to shift the responsibility from the Alumni Office to the individual members but does not mean that the Alumni Office is now redundant. Far from it: the Alumni Officer is more important than ever, remaining the conduit between the alumni community and the alma mater. An on-line community should never replace the alumni zone on a website. Alumni are a prime promotional tool for the institution, so their news and activities need to be visible to the wider world. The Juilliard School has an extensive alumni web presence which includes an on-line community<sup>17</sup>.

#### 9.5 LIFETIME EMAIL ADDRESSES AND WEB PAGE HOSTING

Some higher colleges and universities offer an email address for life. A common benefit in US colleges, this is an effective way of keeping track of your alumni, and a good public relations tool. Some also host individual web pages for alumni. This promotional benefit is attractive but onerous for the institution to maintain. Who will update the material? Who will take pages down when they fall out of date? Who will deal with the technical problems when the audio or video clips fail to work? While it is an attractive benefit to offer, it becomes a bad advertisement for an institution when not properly monitored and managed. It may be preferable to negotiate a web-hosting deal with a partner or supplier which can be offered to alumni at a discount. A conservatoire's core business is to educate and train musicians: we cannot do everything ourselves, and must judge when it is wiser to outsource.

<sup>16</sup> See [www.rncm.ac.uk/content/blogsection/6/50/](http://www.rncm.ac.uk/content/blogsection/6/50/).

<sup>17</sup> See [www.juilliard.edu/alumni](http://www.juilliard.edu/alumni) .

## 10 ALUMNI AS AMBASSADORS

This is the most important product of healthy alumni relations. Alumni who feel positive about their alma mater will act as unpaid advocates, promoting the institution and enhancing its reputation wherever they go. There may be advantages in formalising this, by creating a network of alumni ambassadors nationally and internationally. Some conservatoires pay a small fee to international alumni who play a major role in a key recruitment area overseas.

### 10.1 RESPONSIBILITIES

These may include:

- Being first point of contact for other alumni in their area, whether local, regional, national or international
- Arranging social or professional development events, or master classes given by alumni
- Offering advice, contacts or access to networks
- Encouraging recruitment through contact with local teachers
- Arranging local auditions and organising the hospitality connected with them
- Offering to meet or host students, staff or alumni travelling for competitions or work
- Promoting concerts in which current students can perform
- Setting up an alumni orchestra or choir
- Fundraising

### 10.2 SPECIAL BENEFITS AND PRIVILEGES

- Communicate with these “super” alumni regularly via an email distribution list or portal.
- Ensure that their email addresses are publicised through the website.
- Ensure that they receive key pieces of information before the general alumni group.
- Publicise them individually on the website, and run promotional photo features. Acknowledge their contribution in publications.
- Offer them preferential discounts rates on goods and services, or special deals and invitations not available to other alumni.
- Show appreciation by an invitation to an annual event at the institution, perhaps a meal and concert hosted by the Director, at which they can meet the Alumni Committee, selected students and staff.

### 10.3 ORGANISATIONAL AMBASSADORS

Once an alumnus has been identified in an orchestra or opera company, that individual may be persuaded to take responsibility for other alumni in the same organisation. If agreeable, he will be the “local representative” and main point of contact, ensuring that colleagues remain informed and in-



volved. The Royal College of Music used this approach successfully in 2002 during the BBC Promenade concert season which takes place annually in the neighbouring Royal Albert Hall. Alumni who were members of the orchestras performing in the Hall were invited to tea at the RCM on the day of their concert, between the rehearsal and performance. Invitations were co-ordinated by the “local representative” alumnus in each orchestra. Fourteen orchestras were involved, and a total of 63 alumni took up the invitation over eight concert days. Many happy relationships were re-forged that day over a slice of cake.

## 11 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Remember that the view of your institution taken away by a student on graduation is the one he holds as an alumnus.
- Be clear about why your institution wants to engage with its alumni.
- Review and evaluate the existing relationships you have with alumni, as many of these will already be highly productive.
- Develop a clear strategy and operating plan.
- Define appropriate benefits and privileges, ensuring that they are deliverable.
- Ensure that alumni interests are represented in all appropriate fora. (forums, or all committees and groups at every level . . .)
- Encourage staff and students to understand and support alumni initiatives, especially those who are alumni themselves.
- Provide adequate resources: funding and staff.
- Appoint a sympathetic, IT-literate Alumni Office to lead on alumni relations.
- Involve alumni in current institutional activity wherever possible.
- Communicate regularly with alumni.
- Enable alumni to communicate among themselves.
- Encourage and support alumni-generated activity where appropriate.
- Draw upon each individual's expertise, experience and contacts.
- Value individual alumni and celebrate their achievements.
- Mobilise alumni as advocates and ambassadors.
- Publicise alumni successes among current students and staff, and other stakeholders.
- Ensure that alumni feel loyalty to their alma mater as well as to individual teachers.
- Exploit technology imaginatively to improve communication but . . .
- . . . never forget that relationships are about people.

## APPENDICES



## APPENDIX A

### WOODHOUSE CENTRE (TEXT TAKEN FROM PUBLICITY LEAFLET)

Part of the Royal College of Music's Communications department, the Woodhouse Centre is a pioneering career development for musicians. It offers:

- opportunities to perform, teach and participate in outreach work
- advice on preparing effective CVs (resumés), covering letters, biographies and other publicity materials
- step-by-step suggestions on planning concerts
- numerous resources and directories, print and web-based, about the music profession
- technological support and guidance for building websites
- factsheets designed to answer most frequently asked questions
- guidance on self-management and self-employment including finance
- practical ideas on finding funds to support musical ventures
- specialist expertise drawn from a network of key figures working in music
- seminars, workshops and special events to give a better view of the professional landscape

It also helps musicians to assess and develop their transferable skills, including:

- self discipline
- organisation
- team playing
- independence
- leadership
- concentration
- originality
- precision
- flexibility
- focus
- determination
- perseverance

In addition to the range of performance opportunities on offer at the RCM, the Woodhouse Centre provides other kinds of work experiences, listed below.

### **External Engagements**

The Woodhouse Centre offers students and alumni the chance to perform in a wide range of concerts and recitals, and to provide background music at prestigious venues and occasions. This calls for inventive programming, immaculate presentation and a highly professional attitude. The team offers guidance on image, comportment and repertoire, and musicians are given feedback after each event.

### **Teaching Service**

Matches RCM students and alumni with members of the public who want to learn.

### **Job Opportunities**

The Graduate Services Officer compiles details of work and training opportunities from a range of sources, and disseminates them to alumni and students. Many alumni use this service to advertise vacancies to students or other alumni. This information is disseminated via weekly e-bulletins and is also available in hard copy for students.

### **Volunteering**

Musicians can access a wide range of volunteer opportunities through collaboration with the Volunteering Office of a neighbouring institution, Imperial College of Science, Technology & Medicine. Volunteering can be an effective way of getting experience of the workplace, as well as strengthening the non-musical skills needed to succeed in music: particularly administration, fundraising, marketing and copywriting.

### **Consultants' network**

A collective of almost 40 leaders in the field of music, some of whom are alumni, make themselves available to students and alumni for individual advice, guidance and contacts. This group meets once a year to be updated about the work of the Woodhouse Centre. There is no paperwork. Students and alumni are put in touch with these individuals through the Alumni Office.

### **Education & Outreach projects**

"RCM Sparks" offers students and alumni the opportunity to participate in projects in schools, kindergartens, hospitals, elderly residential homes and community settings. Specialist training is offered and the commitment is usually at least one year. Students and alumni are also involved as leaders in the RCM's annual summer schools for young people, to encourage participation in higher education.

### **Mentoring**

A selected number of alumni offer mentoring to students and other alumni, through an informal scheme.

## APPENDIX B

### EXTRACT FROM JOB DESCRIPTION, ROYAL COLLEGE OF MUSIC, LONDON GRADUATE SERVICES OFFICER

*The postholder is responsible for researching, establishing and maintaining active contact with alumni. This includes taking responsibility for retaining contact with recent leavers, - a process that begins during the final year of students' study at the RCM - and researching and establishing contact with graduates from earlier years. The postholder provides career support, advice and guidance to all users of the Centre: graduates for five years after leaving, and current students.*

#### DUTIES

These include:

- 1 Maintaining and developing contacts with alumni, recording contacts on the external relations database, ensuring that the collection, entry and use of data complies with the requirements of the Data Protection Act, and producing reports and returns as required
- 2 Providing data and contacts as requested for projects or data collection exercises
- 3 Organising and hosting social and work-related events for alumni including planning and organising recruitment hospitality events overseas
- 4 Advising graduates and students individually on careers matters including cvs (resumés), work and funding applications
- 5 Researching work and training opportunities, and producing and distributing the weekly e-bulletin to alumni and current students
- 6 Taking responsibility for developing and maintaining the careers resources which include factsheets, books, journals and web-based materials; and for organising associated subscription payments and maintaining noticeboards
- 7 Researching, collating, editing and contributing alumni information for the RCM newsletter, and being a member of its editorial team
- 8 Administering the Instrument Finance Scheme, maintaining financial records and monitoring payments in line with RCM practice and standards

Knowledge, experience, personal qualities and skills required

- Experience of database management and data analysis
- Experience of keeping financial records using spreadsheets, and working to a budget
- A degree in music
- Good knowledge of the music profession, and information sources
- Skilful, confident and persuasive communicator, with strong interpersonal and negotiation skills

- Administratively self-sufficient, methodical, and well organised
- Able and willing to work flexible hours; some weekend and evening work will be required
- Careers service experience desirable

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Education and Culture

**Socrates**  
Erasmus