Innovation Studio Seed Fund Guidelines

[Academic Year 2026-27]

Please read through these Guidelines before applying

Click here to apply

Innovation Studio empowers the RCS community by supporting creative experimentation, collaboration, and interdisciplinary work.

What is the Innovation Studio Seed Fund?

The Innovation Studio Seed Fund is dedicated to fostering the creative ambitions of RCS students and staff by providing seed funding to shape new and existing ideas.

This funding helps to create space for play, experimentation, and innovation - where trying, failing, and refining concepts are all part of the journey.

Who can apply?

The Innovation Studio Seed Fund specifically supports RCS students and staff with early-stage ideas, helping individuals develop new projects or advance existing ones.

All current students and staff members are eligible to apply. Your project does not need to be directly related to your course of study or your area of work. It cannot be related to a project which you will be graded on within your curriculum.

From November 2026 until October 2027 the lead applicant must be legally resident in the UK*.

During your project you are welcome to work with international collaborators or use funding towards a project which has international aims or focus.

If you have previously been awarded £1,000 you are eligible to apply to the £4,000 fund. You cannot be awarded £4,000 more than once in an academic year.

**If you are a Student visa holder you are eligible to apply for the Seed Fund. However, there are conditions attached to your visa that you must be aware of before undertaking any form of work activity. As per the terms of your visa laid out by the Home Office, you cannot: be self-employed or work in certain jobs.*

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

You cannot undertake any paid work as an entertainer according to the terms of your visa. Therefore, this fund cannot be used by Student visa holders to pay for their own performance work or to pay for other Student visa to undertake entertainment work. You should also check your eVisa to confirm the number of hours you are permitted to work per week. Any time spent working on this funded project should be counted towards your maximum allowance per week.

Students studying on Visitor visas are not permitted to undertake any form of paid work and therefore can only participate on a voluntary basis. Student visa holders are responsible to ensure that their activities do not breach their visa conditions.

If you are unsure about any aspect of eligibility, please contact innovationstudio@rcs.ac.uk or reference UKCISA - https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/student-advice/working/

What funding is available?

There is a total of £25,000 per funding round this academic year, which is available in two schemes:

- Up to £1,000 - For very early-stage ideas.

- Up to £4,000 - For ideas and propositions that have already begun taking shape and require additional financial support for further development.

Explore the people and projects previously supported by clicking here.

Timeline

Autumn 2026

- Seed Fund opens: Wednesday 7 October 2026.
- Application deadline: Wednesday 18 November 2026 at 17:00.
- Applicants will be notified of a decision by email within 6 weeks of the application deadline.
- Projects must be completed within 12 months of commencement.

Spring 2027

- Seed Fund opens: Wednesday 28 April 2027.
- Application deadline: Wednesday 9 June 2027 at 17:00.
- Applicants will be notified of a decision by email within 6 weeks of the application deadline.
- Projects must be completed within 12 months of commencement.

How to apply

Applicants should complete the online application form and submit this **by 5pm on Wednesday 18 November 2026.** We are unable to accept applications after this deadline.

We want to ensure that our application process does not present any accessibility barriers to potential applicants. If we can provide any assistance to support you through this process (or if you want to discuss alternative ways to apply), please email innovationstudio@rcs.ac.uk

If a project involves vulnerable people or dealing with sensitive material, awardees may be required to submit a proposal to the RCS Ethics Committee for approval before the project commences.

Application Process

Applications will be reviewed by a panel of representatives from our growing Innovation Community at RCS and invited industry experts. The Innovation Studio will coordinate the process and chair the panel meetings.

Funding decisions will be made in relation to:

- The feasibility of the project.

- The expertise or opportunity presented for the team involved.
- The approach and the commitment from your collaborating partner(s).
- The project's relation to the stated goals of Innovation Studio empowering creative experimentation, collaboration, and interdisciplinary work.

All unsuccessful applicants can request feedback on their application, and we can work with you to support you in applying for a future round. There is no limit on how many times you can re-apply with the same project.

Systemic Barriers

We believe there can be no innovation in the performing arts unless systemic barriers are challenged and structural inequality in the arts and higher education is actively addressed. Innovation Studio has therefore committed that at least 50% of this funding will be awarded to projects led by people who identify with one or more of the following communities or lived experiences:

- *People from the global majority*
- *People from working-class or low-income backgrounds*
- *Neurodivergent people and/or disabled people*
- *People with lived experience of mental health challenges or long-term mental health conditions*
- *LGBTQIA+ people*
- *Care-experienced people*
- *Migrants and people with lived experience of seeking asylum*
- *People with lived experience of homelessness*
- *People with lived experience of the criminal justice system*
- *People with lived experience of substance use challenges*
- *People with unpaid caring responsibilities*
- *Romany, Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities*

On the application form, you will be asked whether you identify with one or more of these communities or experiences. You will not be asked to specify which, and no proof will be required. We trust our RCS community to answer honestly and only select this option if it applies to them.

Accessibility

Innovation Studio is committed to ensuring our Seed Fund is accessible to all. If you have any questions or require further support, please email us at innovationstudio@rcs.ac.uk

We acknowledge that additional funding may be required for your own and your collaborators' access needs throughout a project. On the application form, you will be asked if additional funding is needed for accessibility requirements.

Access costs are essential expenses that enable individuals to participate fully in your project, regardless of their personal circumstances or abilities. Please note this is not for audience participation.

Accessibility costs will be covered by a separate Access Award, if applying for this please add your costs in the Access Budget Template provided on page 2 of the Project Budget Template.

These costs are separate to the £1,000 or £4,000 Seed Fund Award you are applying to. Access costs cannot make up more than 50% of your Project Budget. For example, if you are requesting £3,000 project funding, then access costs can be claimed up to £1,500. This would make the overall budget £4,500.

Eligible access costs may include, but are not limited to:

- Reasonable adjustments for neurodivergent and disabled individuals.
- Translation or interpretation services.
- Essential care costs for primary caregivers.

If you are funded and would like some support to make your project accessible to others/audiences, the Innovation Studio team can help work with you to develop an access plan, recognising this may be a new element to your practice and something some applicants may require more support with than others.

Budget Information

Eligible costs include:

- Costs related to extracurricular (non-graded) work
- Materials and producing costs (including fees)
- Professional development and training
- Specialist expertise and advice
- Software, web hosting, web design costs
- Licences and permissions
- Small items of equipment

- Promotional and marketing costs, printing
- Performance/exhibition space, venue hire, room hire
- Language-related costs (e.g. interpretation or translation services)
- Travel and related costs (note: overnight accommodation costs are only permitted where necessary)
- Essential books and publications
- Workspace/rehearsal studio rental
- Subsistence allowances (clear rationale for these must be provided).
- Artistic fees (Note: we encourage you to include a proportion of your time-related costs into the budget, however we cannot pay additional time-related costs for full-time staff members)
- Administrative fees
- Market research

The awards CANNOT be used to pay for:

- Any projects which are within your curriculum/graded coursework
- Formal tuition or course fees
- Living expenses
- Capital purchases (e.g. major equipment, laptops, vehicles, property ownership)
- Legal expertise (if you need support from a lawyer, we can help support this separately)
- Time-related costs for full-time staff members

Projects must submit a full budget which will be uploaded to the application form. The only accepted file types are Word documents (.doc) or PDF (.pdf). An example budget can be found on pages 3-4 of the Project Budget Template.

If applying for partial funding of a project, please include a full project budget with indication of other funding noted. If applicable, please include in-kind costs.

When applying for your costs on the project you should consider realistically the time you will need to spend making the project happen.

If you need help with your budget, please let us know and we can support you. You can email us at innovationstudio@rcs.ac.uk.

If successful, we can agree with you how the funds will be dispersed to best suit your project's needs.

Documentation

From the outset of your project, we strongly encourage you to consider how you will document and record the project. Every individual project requires a unique kind of documentation. This will help your project develop and can help you seek further funding. It can also help us at the Innovation Studio by ensuring that we can tell the story of our community and continue to provide this support for RCS students, staff and graduates.

Innovation Studio will contribute £200 to each successful awardee to go towards project documentation costs and will host a workshop on how to document your project. With this £200 contribution you agree to share a selection of media with Innovation Studio.

You do not need to include this contribution in your budget, however, please tell us how you will approach documentation within your application.

Documentation may include:

- Film and photography.
- Audio recording.
- Small print runs of performance notes/write-ups.
- Other text or sketch-based documentation.

Reporting and Evaluation

We care that your work is well documented, in a way that feels best suited for your project, for your own purposes and to help us tell the story of innovation at RCS. We are committed to exploring: what does innovation look like at RCS? What does the funding enable? What did it seed? We will work with you to discover where your project sits within the wider innovation ecology at RCS.

To facilitate knowledge sharing in the Innovation Studio Community, you will be required to complete an evaluation and attend a sharing session to talk about your project for 5-10 minutes to the community of practice. We will provide further guidance on this closer to the time.

If you cannot attend the event, then we request that you have a 1-2-1 meeting about your project with Innovation Studio at the end of your project, so we can have a better understanding of the work being funded.

Public Liability Insurance

As a condition of this funding, you must have Public Liability Insurance protection in place. Public Liability Insurance (PLI) protects individuals, businesses, and non-commercial organisations from claims for injury or property damage. It can help cover the cost of compensation and legal fees if you are found liable for an incident.

- All students will be required to provide proof of PLI prior to receiving their funds.
- Staff members who are not covered within their RCS role, will need to provide proof of PLI prior to receiving their funds.

Many industry trade unions provide Public Liability Insurance cover as part of their membership benefits. Information can be found here:

- Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union (BECTU)
- Equity
- Musicians Union (MU)
- Scottish Artists Union (SAU)

If you are unsure how to obtain Public Liability Insurance, please contact the Innovation Studio team.

Intellectual Property

All intellectual property rights within your Innovation Studio project will belong to you. Please read the RCS Intellectual Property Policy.

We ask that Innovation Studio, and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is acknowledged on the work that you create or go on to create enabled through this seed funding. All awardees will be provided with an Innovation Studio comms pack and guidelines as part of the contracting process.

CLICK HERE TO APPLY

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

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

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

Innovation Studio Seed Fund 2026-27: Assessment Criteria

Criteria	Weak (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Strong (3 points)
1. Feasibility of the project	Description of the project lacks clarity. Project does not seem feasible. Minimal detail or justification on how the financial award will be spent.	Satisfactory description of the project. Project seems moderately feasible. Some detail and justification provided on how the financial award will be spent.	A clear and compelling description of the project. Project seems feasible. Strong description of how the award will impact the project, clear research displayed for costings, and justification provided for the budget.
2. Expertise or opportunity presented for the applicant or team involved	Unclear how the project will contribute to the applicant or team's development. Unclear if the applicant or team has the expertise required for the project's success.	Adequate description of how the project will contribute to the applicant or team's development. Partial explanation of how the applicant or team has the expertise required for the project's success.	Convincing description of how the project will contribute to the applicant or team's development. Clear description of how the applicant or the team has the expertise required for the project's success.
3. Approach and the commitment from collaborating partner(s)	No information given on potential collaborators. Unclear how the collaboration will function.	Some information provided on potential collaborators. Some detail provided on how the collaboration will function.	Potential collaborators are identified and substantial reasons are given for working with them. Clear description and plans provided for the collaboration.
4. The project's alignment with Innovation Studio's Manifesto and its goal of unlocking innovation potential within the RCS community	Project does not relate to the stated aims of Innovation Studio. Project does not adequately define innovation in their context or place their work within that context.	Project somewhat relates to the stated aims of Innovation Studio. Project defines innovation in their context but does not clearly place their work within that context.	Project clearly relates to the stated aims of Innovation Studio. Project clearly and concisely defines innovation in their context and provides a strong description or reasoning for how their work is placed within that context.
5. Overall panellist impression	Panellist is not drawn to the project and does not have confidence in the applicant.	Panellist is somewhat drawn to the project and has some confidence in the applicant.	Panellist is drawn to the project and feels confident in the applicant's abilities.