

Further Study: Conducting Degrees, Courses and Practices in Different Countries

This guide to further study is intended to be supplementary to materials found elsewhere at www.conductit.eu as well as being an overview of various further education courses on offer. Whilst this is by no means extensive it will certainly be a useful guide for anyone considering studying conducting.

Disclaimer: this document was fact-checked in October 2021. Changes may have occurred since then. Minor mistakes may also occur.

Central Europe

The training of conductors in Central Europe (here meaning Germany, Austria, and Switzerland) is deeply rooted in the “opera house tradition”. Meaning that, broadly speaking, conductors studying in these areas are being trained with the view that they are likely to progress through the large number of opera houses in this part of the world. This has also meant a not insignificant emphasis on keyboard skills. While this is still the case at many institutions different approaches are slowly becoming adopted.

- **Germany** currently has twenty-four independent ‘Staatlichen Musikhochschulen’ (Colleges of Music) and nine colleges for church music as well as colleges for music connected to a university (2021). These represent the highest level of a tiered system of music education, have university status; and are the only colleges in which specific conducting studies can be undertaken. Schott has published a guide to studying music in Germany, which contains useful background on this system. Students studying at a German college of music could, generally speaking, expect to experience a range of supplementary studies alongside their conducting studies, which includes score reading classes, continuo classes, ear training, and theory. Unlike in schools elsewhere it is not unusual for students to begin studying conducting in Germany without having first studied an instrument/voice to degree level, as well as not being unusual for courses to be between four and five years in duration.
- **Austria** has a system that is historically similar, with several universities and academies of fine arts, some of them officially designated as ‘arts universities’. A three-cycle degree system has been in place since 2002 comprising a Bachelor degree of three or four years duration, a ‘Magister’ degree of one or two years duration and a ‘Doktor’ degree of two years duration. As a result, a student in Vienna, for example, could expect to be part of a significantly larger cohort (of up to 60 students across the entire course). Students are also expected to take part in piano classes where participation in accompanying the class is encouraged. These classes are normally designed to allow students to work on a specific set work before sharing

a session with a professional symphony orchestra at the end of term. Additionally courses here have a strong theoretical component and students are expected to take part in classes in order to progress to the next stage of their degree.

- **Switzerland** had always followed the German tradition, but in recent years Swiss conservatoires appear to have been influenced by other methods. Since 2005 Switzerland has offered a Bachelors / Masters system of three years and one and a half to two years duration respectively. At present there are no doctoral level qualifications offered in Switzerland. Orchestral conducting must be done at postgraduate level although it is possible to study choral or wind band conducting at undergraduate level.

Conducting is not necessarily a postgraduate field of study in central Europe, as is the case in many other countries, and in theory a course could be embarked on immediately following 'Gymnasium', or high school.

In addition to orchestral, opera and choral conducting classes and lessons, a wide range of the usual supporting studies are followed: theory; aural; musicology; languages and music education being typical. Piano studies are central to most courses and as well as individual lessons students will have classes in score reading, repetiteur studies in opera, lieder and concerto, and possibly harpsichord.

Conducting classes seem mainly to be individual lessons or group sessions with one or two pianos.

A current trend (2021) is to arrange visits to Eastern Europe for intensive periods of rehearsal with professional orchestras, with perhaps four or five students working with an orchestra one hour per day each over a week.

The USA

It is possible to study conducting at hundreds of universities, conservatories and colleges in the United States. In addition to orchestral conducting, it is also possible to study wind band and choral conducting as completely separate disciplines, each leading to its own specific career path.

The structure of professional music education in the US is complex and offered by several different types of institutions. Independent conservatoires, university music departments, and separate schools or departments within colleges all offer a variety of degrees and diplomas. Which, in turn, lead to a variety of different career pathways a student might choose to pursue.

Some highly regarded conducting programmes include:

University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music (CCM)
Curtis Institute of Music

Eastman School of Music - University of Rochester
The Juilliard School
Manhattan School of Music
Berklee College of Music
Boston Conservatory
Northwestern University
Peabody Conservatory - Johns Hopkins University
Rice University
University of Southern California
San Francisco Conservatory of Music
Indiana University: Jacobs School of Music
University of Michigan - Ann Arbor

Two types of regularly timetabled classes feature in most programmes: sessions with two pianos and sessions with a student orchestra. The two-piano sessions are used to prepare repertoire for the orchestral sessions and to illustrate particular points of technique.

Following a masters qualification, a doctorate level course may be taken. Generally, this qualification is titled a Doctor of Musical Arts, abbreviated to D.M.A., the Doctor of Philosophy or Ph.D. usually being awarded in musicology or music theory.

Both at masters level and doctoral level, a range of supporting studies will also be taught. These do seem to vary considerably from school to school and often they will be courses offered not specifically to conducting students but to the entire cohort as a whole. Some schools, including the University of Michigan, require conducting students to take language studies and pass examinations in Italian, French and German. The types of supporting studies are comprised of “core” and “elective” credits and most institutions offer modules in musicology, theory, aural training, and orchestration.

In the majority of schools, the conducting teacher is also the Director of Orchestras, which allows the conducting programme to be closely integrated with the principal ensembles within the school. In many cases, the conducting students serve as assistants to the Director of Orchestras with one or more of the student ensembles, and are given occasional opportunities to conduct items in public concerts. Additionally, certain schools expect doctoral students to be treated as if part of the faculty. As such, they may be given undergraduate lecturing duties, whilst also being assigned ‘non-major’ or ‘campus’ orchestras and ensembles. At schools where American Football is a strong focus, it may be a requirement that DMA students assist with the musical and drill training of the marching band.

An accepted career path for graduates in the US is to seek a position as an assistant conductor following completion of their academic training. Almost all American-trained conductors in music director posts have at one time held an assistant job. The duties of an assistant will vary from orchestra to orchestra but they will usually include covering for the music director, and possibly guest conductors, at rehearsals and concerts; conducting outreach concerts; assisting with sectional rehearsals; giving pre-concert talks; and anything else the music director may assign to them. In recent years the Dudamel Fellowship

Program in Los Angeles has been another pathway of note. The program takes on 4 young conductors each year that work with Gustavo Dudamel as an assistant, whilst each getting performance opportunities throughout the season.

Russia

The Russian music education system dates back to the mid-19th century marked by the foundation of conservatories in St. Petersburg and Moscow. From the very beginning they were focused on professional training of composers, conductors, instrumentalists and singers. The famous three-stage system «Sh-U-V» (a Russian “school-college-university” abbreviation) could be a route to higher music education for people with quite average musical abilities. The long educational road may start as early as in kindergarten and finishes only in the student's mid-twenties. Each stage has its own goals and teaching methods.

At present the highest musical educational institutions, conservatories and academies of music are a bit unevenly distributed throughout the country. In Moscow and St. Petersburg, there are many of them and on the Volga river every major city hosts a conservatory: Nizhny Novgorod, Kazan, Saratov and Astrakhan. Samara and Volgograd also offer higher musical education. At the same time, there are very few conservatories in Siberia on the other part of the Urals border between Europe and Asia. Only Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk and Vladivostok offer higher music education.*

Commonly, the music conservatories offer a variety of study programmes in conducting, similar to this example from The N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov Saint Petersburg State Conservatory:

- Bachelor Degree: «Conducting»
- Specialist Degree: «Artistic Direction of Symphony Orchestra and Academic Choir»
- Post Graduate Performance course: «The Art of Conducting (Academic Choral Conducting)»
- Special Training Non-degree Course
- Preparatory Course

If you want to study conducting in Russia, you should probably look into learning how to speak Russian. Very few study programmes are offered in English for international students.

*Information retrieved from ISME, International Society for Music Education, at <https://www.isme.org/news/russsme-activity-context-music-education-contemporary-russia> (2021).

United Kingdom

In England, if someone says they are studying conducting it can mean they are doing a general degree in a university and have had two private lessons. In Germany, you would only claim to be studying conducting if you were enrolled on a four or five-year course.

The UK system of professional music education is part of the general higher education sector. There is significant overlap between the programmes of study offered by the nine conservatoires and the music departments of universities.

Course lengths and titles are broadly rationalised and whether in a university or conservatoire environment the first degree will usually be a Bachelor of Music taken over three years in a university and four in a conservatoire. Postgraduate study is either a Postgraduate Diploma or a Masters Degree. Doctoral level study has historically been available only in musicology or composition but performance programmes have become more available in recent years.

In the past, course durations used to vary. However, at most colleges a postgraduate diploma or a Masters degree can be obtained in one but usually two years. A further possibility in the United Kingdom is to undertake a Junior Fellowship in conducting. Pioneered by the Royal Northern College of Music, other similar programmes now exist at other conservatoires.

One further possibility that should be mentioned is studying at a university, particularly Cambridge or Oxford. Despite what one might think given the number of times ‘... studied conducting at Cambridge’ seems to appear in the biographies of conductors, it is not actually possible to formally study conducting at either university, other than as a very minor part of an undergraduate programme in music. Postgraduate degrees are offered only in musicology, composition and ethnomusicology none of which contains a performance element. Having said that, both Oxford and Cambridge offer financial and other assistance to students to enable them to study privately, and the breadth and quality of music making which exists both there and at several other universities can mean that opportunities for aspiring conductors to actually conduct are significantly more plentiful than would be the case in a conservatoire environment.

The content of courses in the United Kingdom have gradually gained similarities as courses and ideas about conducting pedagogy have developed but significant differences remain particularly when one examines the amount of podium time afforded to students by the university. The following is a brief overview of what prospective conducting students might expect from studying in the UK.

As with many other institutions around the world, piano classes have become a core part of the taught portions of conducting courses. Whilst many practitioners will agree that conducting two pianos is far from ideal, they can be a useful tool in preparing technique and testing musical ideas, whilst allowing students to work with real musicians. The ideal, of course, would be to work twice weekly with a professional orchestra, however no course in the world can boast this! Having said that, many of the postgraduate programmes in the UK are keen to give their students podium time with real ensembles because, as we know, the best way to practice conducting is to actually do it! Therefore, students can expect to

rehearse and conduct the college's ensembles, as well as in "conductor labs" and masterclasses. Occasionally these opportunities coincide with side-by-side events where players are supplemented by experienced professionals affording a great opportunity to both instrumental and conducting students. In some circumstances where close relationships between institution and professional ensemble have flourished, opportunities exist to conduct such ensembles in masterclasses, workshops, or even small concerts.

As was touched upon, postgraduate conducting courses have sought closer connections and ties to local professional orchestras and as such students are able to work closely with these organisations by way of professional placement, and in some cases even in the role of assistant conductor. Access to these opportunities can vary from college to college and some opportunities may be more beneficial than others. For example, the RNCM is able to boast a close affiliation to both the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra where students from the Masters and Junior Fellow programmes have regular opportunities to gain experience as an assistant conductor. Additionally, students can look forward to a lunchtime concert with the BBC Philharmonic as part of their final year exam. Of course, other institutions have forged exciting links with their local orchestras: the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra being one such example.

One of the strengths of the UK's higher education system is that the structure of supplementary elements to courses is a requirement no matter where you study. Students can take electives on almost any musical topic that they feel will enhance their learning: from traditional musicianship and harmony classes to Dalcroze Eurythmics, and up to date seminars on building successful portfolio careers. Depending on the type of award you are studying for, there is normally a research project requirement.

It is important to note that opportunities (and especially podium time) are not uniform across every institution but open days or consultation lessons can be a great way to speak to staff and students to gauge how well a course may be suited to your own individual needs.

Whilst these sections do not seek to draw critical comparisons across the courses currently on offer, it may be helpful to highlight the Junior Fellow pathway in a little more detail.

The Royal Northern College of Music and Royal Conservatoire of Scotland offer a structured two-year program which features the opportunity to conduct full-scale opera productions, conduct full performances and explore links with the region's professional orchestras (at their discretion). These positions are often taken up by candidates at the beginning of their professional journey and the placeholder can expect remuneration as well as the time and support to explore their professional portfolio within a conservatoire environment. Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance also offers a fellowship in conducting.

In addition to a conservatoire setting a small number of opportunities exist within the professional sphere. The English National Opera (one such example) provides a structured programme -again two years- which places the fellow in the midst of a professional opera house, working closely alongside their music team and acting as an assistant conductor for ENO productions.

The Nordic Countries

- **Finland:** The Sibelius Academy in Helsinki has long been considered to be a powerhouse of conducting pedagogy in Northern Europe. Academic training in conducting started at the Sibelius Academy in 1943 and from 1973 to 1993 Professor Jorma Panula and his students made the Finnish training for conductors both widely known and highly acclaimed. Students at the Sibelius Academy have the benefit of being able to study either choral, wind band, or orchestral conducting in three separate programmes each with a focus on the practical element of conducting and in collaboration with some of Finland's professional ensembles.
- **Denmark:** The Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen offers not only a Masters programme in conducting but also an Advanced Postgraduate Diploma (which they term the Soloist Programme). The Soloist Programme has been designed for students that have already obtained a Masters level qualification and can opt for 3 possible learning pathways:
 - Soloist Performer
 - Soloist Artistic Research
 - Soloist with teaching qualifications

The latter two options may be particularly useful for students wishing to pursue conducting with either a research project already in mind or a conductor who has a particular interest in the pedagogical and methodological aspects of conducting. Students working on this programme also have the added benefit of being able to take advantage of its links with professional Danish symphony orchestras.

The Royal Academy of Music in Aarhus/Aalborg also offers a Classical Choir Conducting course, a 2-year Master's programme (MMus). In addition to personalised projects and ad-hoc Academy projects, once a week the students here get the opportunity to work with a dedicated training vocal ensemble at a high level, sometimes supplemented by an Academy instrument ensemble.

- **Norway** offers perhaps the most diverse of all the Scandinavian options in so much as the two institutions that offer formal conducting training (Norwegian Academy of Music, NMH, in Oslo and the University of Stavanger, UiS) are offering programmes from undergraduate all the way to doctoral level as well as having a national programme for conducting education called *Dirigentløftet*.

Both NMH and UiS offer choral and conducting training with UiS also offering the opportunity to study a specific wind band pathway. At a masters level, and higher, some preparatory work is done in piano class but it is not a large component of the courses. Most of the student's podium time is spent working with the university ensembles or with professional ensembles, which include the military. It is also worth pointing out that Norway has a very healthy amateur music-making scene that is

directed at a national level with many ensembles performing to a professional standard. Opportunities do exist with these ensembles that can be used to supplement the experience of students. Between the two schools, a reasonably consistent approach is taken with mandatory elective subjects (and some electives specific to conducting) forming the theoretical aspects of the programmes which include a core curriculum of music history, theory, musicianship training etc.

At a doctoral level, the core curriculum is flexible and students are expected to work on an artistic research project which comprises performance and reflection on artistic practice. Doctorate students at both institutions are also treated as members of the faculty for the duration of their programme and receive remuneration as part of this package.

In Norway, opportunities for conductors wishing to enhance their skills in a learning environment are not limited to academic institutions.

Dirigentløftet (a Norwegian Language pun for lifting conductors up/helping them) “contributes to mobilising the entire music-life from volunteers and music-schools, high schools, and universities, amateur orchestras, to all the professional Norwegian Symphony Orchestras.” This is a stand-alone programme that can boast a roster of conducting teachers, including Edward Gardner, James Gaffigan, Hannu Lintu, Sascha Goetzzel, Johannes Schlaefli, and Nicolas Pasquet.

In addition to this, Norway’s annual conductor’s week (Dirigentuka), the largest and most popular conducting course in Norway, hosts over 100 participants and between 15-20 internationally renowned teachers each year. The week itself is a collaboration between the Norwegian Band Federation and the University of Stavanger, Faculty of Performing Arts.

Portugal

Portugal currently has three institutions that offer dedicated training for conductors and it is possible to study formally at undergraduate and postgraduate level. This section offers a cursory look at each, in order to highlight what is available for prospective students. The Metropolitana in Lisbon is a private college, actually the only private school for music in Portugal at the time of writing. They offer a dedicated undergraduate degree in conducting and the institution itself is connected to a professional orchestra, which students can participate in at least once a year.

The Lisbon Music School also named Politecnico De Lisboa is a public college in Lisbon -public in this case meaning that they receive a degree of funding from the Portuguese state. This school too offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees in conducting and additionally offer a distinct wind band conducting pathway as well as a “Music Theory and Choral Conducting Pathway”. The undergraduate students, about 4 a year, can expect to conduct 6 concerts across the semester -the programme itself actually holds each concert

twice, one with a student conductor and the other with the programme leader conducting the same repertoire, 12 performances in total. The Lisbon Music School also offer a Masters degree program in either Choral Conducting or Orchestral Conducting (but not wind band). Students studying on this course have the opportunity to work as guest conductors with a number of professional ensembles across Lisbon.

Finally, the University of Aveiro offers a “Music Theory and Choral Conducting” programmes as an undergraduate degree whilst offering postgraduate opportunities in orchestral, wind, and choral conducting. Students studying in Aveiro can expect to conduct a performance in all 4 of the schools main concert schedules as well as working closely with the guest conductors that come to the university as well as taking advantage of the professional connections with the chamber orchestra in Aveiro. The university also offers a number of theoretical classes that aim to enhance the students' learning and are tailored to the specific student. These options include: Wind Literature, Ethnomusicology, Jazz, and self-directed artistic projects. Students are also expected to study using piano reductions, meaning that students studying here will need to have at least a rudimentary understanding of the piano -although being a concert pianist is by no means a requirement. Aveiro also offers a doctorate level qualification which is based heavily in music theory and can boast partnerships with professional ensembles and military bands.

