

A Guide to Keyboard Instrument Craft Training Resources in UK

This guide is intended to help anyone in the UK who might be considering a career working with keyboard musical instruments, particularly harpsichords, clavichords and early pianos, whether as maker, tuner/technician, restorer, or museum conservator. These are all distinct activities, but in practice there is considerable overlap between them in terms of the skills they require, and individual craftspeople are often active in several of these fields.

We have attempted to list here training resources that may be available within the UK at the present time. Inclusion in this list does not imply approval or endorsement: you should do your own research to establish whether any particular course or other training opportunity will be right for you, and if possible seek advice from someone already active in the field.

The guide is divided into four sections:

[College courses](#)

[UK Government-sponsored apprenticeships](#)

[Individual craftspeople who have shown an interest in providing training](#)

[Possible sources of funding](#)

Note that courses etc. on the continent of Europe have not (yet) been included here.

College courses

1. Newark Piano School: part of Lincoln College of Further Education

<https://www.lincolncollege.ac.uk/courses/ba-hons-musical-instrument-craft-piano-tuning-and-repair>

Three-year university course leading to BA Hons in Musical Instrument Craft (piano tuning and repair); moderated by the University of Hull. Heavily biased towards the modern piano, but some skills can be transferred.

2. West Dean College

<https://www.westdean.org.uk/study/degrees-and-diplomas/courses/foundation-degree-craft-practices-musical-instruments>

Two year course leading to a foundation degree (FdA) in musical instrument craft; moderated by the University of Sussex. Heavily biased towards luthery (i.e. stringed instruments such as viols and lutes), but that may change at some future date.

Note: West Dean College also offers degree-level courses in conservation.

3. The Piano Technology School, Northampton

<https://www.thepianotechnologyschool.com/>

The course is described as 'introductory' and leads to no formal qualification. The founder and director is Steve Droy. It is exclusively focused on the modern piano.

4. Conservation courses at Edinburgh University

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/library-museum-gallery/crc/conservation>

Internships working with the Musical Instrument Conservator, including two 4-8 week funded placements each year, with the potential for including keyboard technician skills as well as musical instrument conservation more generally.

Note: There are currently more than thirty other undergraduate, postgraduate or diploma courses in conservation taught in the UK; most of these are highly specialised, but a few might be an appropriate starting point for someone wanting to work with keyboard instruments. There is a useful summary on the website of the Institute of Conservation:

<https://www.icon.org.uk/training/conservation-training/higher-education.html>

Government-sponsored apprenticeships

Apprenticeship in organ-building with Harrison & Harrison Ltd:

<https://www.findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk/apprenticeship/-659345>

A two-year apprenticeship, combining work in an organ-builder's workshop and on site. Offered in collaboration with New College, Durham. Many of the technologies and skills involved in organ building are also relevant to stringed keyboard instrument making.

For general information about government-sponsored apprenticeships, see:

<https://www.gov.uk/topic/further-education-skills/apprenticeships>

Individual Craftspeople who have shown an interest in training

1. Lucy Coad

<https://www.squarepiano.co.uk/>

Mainly occupied in square piano restoration and conservation. Lucy has generously given training and experience to several trainees.

2. Andrew Wooderson

<https://www.woodersonharpsichords.co.uk/>

Harpsichord maker and tuner/technician: has had several trainees in the past.

3. Michael Parfett

<https://www.michaelparfett.com/>

Mainly focused on conservation, including musical instruments especially harps; he also has restored keyboard instruments, and has had a number of trainee/assistants.

4. Goetze and Gwynn (organ builders, Welbeck, Notts)

<https://www.goetzegwynn.co.uk/martin-goetze/training/>

They are organ builders but have worked with or trained those coming from a stringed-keyboard background.

Possible sources of funding

1. The Heritage Crafts Association

<https://heritagecrafts.org.uk/>

Set up in 2010 with the aim of promoting and supporting traditional crafts in the UK. They publish a 'red list' of endangered crafts: according to the most recent edition (2021) piano making was listed as 'critically endangered' and keyboard instrument making (essentially harpsichord making) as 'endangered'. The association offers grants of up to £2000 to fund projects that support and promote endangered crafts; there is also an annual prize of £3000 awarded to an individual craftsperson who will use that funding to ensure that craft skills are passed on to the future.

2. The Finchcocks Charity for Musical Education

<https://www.finchcocks.co.uk/charity.html>

Based at Waterdown House in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, the home of the Richard Burnett Collection of Historical Keyboard Instruments. The charity is conscious of the shortage of keyboard technicians and the need to train more, and to this end they have supported the training of several newcomers in collaboration with individual craftspeople and Newark College.

3. Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust

<https://www.qest.org.uk/>

Connected with the Royal Warrant Holders' Association. The trust offers scholarships of up to £18,000 for the training and education of talented and aspiring craftspeople.

4. City of London Livery Companies

<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/about-us/law-historic-governance/livery-companies>

Successors to the medieval craft guilds of London. Several livery companies, among their other charitable activities, have made grants to support craft education. Application has to be made to the individual companies. A complete list is here:

<https://www.liverycommittee.org/about/livery-companies-and-guilds/livery-companies-database/>

Among those with possible connections to early keyboard instruments are:

Furniture makers company: <https://www.furnituremakers.org.uk/>

Musicians company: <https://wcom.org.uk/>

5. The Crafts Council

<https://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/>

This is a charitable body, but it also receives government funds through Arts Council England. They have in the past given grants to musical instrument makers. However, the emphasis has always been on *contemporary* rather than on traditional crafts: i.e. on using craft skills to produce what are, in effect, unique fine-art objects. Originality is important, and they are less likely to support craftspeople who make and maintain traditional musical instruments as this does not fit well with their remit.

6. Benslow Music Trust

<https://benslowmusic.org/>

An adult music college; they have offered as yet unspecified help in any work towards the training of new builders and technicians.

Many thanks to those who have provided information and suggestions for this guide:

Peter Bavington, Lucy Coad, Dominic Gwynn, Cesar Hernandez, Lewis Jones, Christopher Nobbs, Jenny Nex, Michael Parfett, Judith Wardman and Andrew Wooderson.

Most recent update: 27 September 2021.