

## Telford and Wrekin Music Education Hub

### Learning from commissioner priorities

Teaching music in school isn't just about uncovering the stars of tomorrow: research links music to improvements in reading, maths, and social development.<sup>1</sup> In 2011 the government's *National Plan for Music Education* set out its vision to give all children in England a chance to learn an instrument and make music with others. **Music education hubs**, like the one set up in Telford and Wrekin, were commissioned by the Arts Council on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE) to bring England's patchy music education coverage up to scratch.

Hubs would build on the work of local authority music services to support music teaching in schools and draw in outside expertise: professional musicians, local ensembles and charities. *'In some respects we had already been operating like a hub,'* says Ian Thomas, Music Education Manager at Telford and Wrekin Council, *'but this formalised the way we were working.'*

### Starting conversations

For Telford and Wrekin, the commissioning process for the hub was relatively smooth—mainly because Ian and his colleagues were well-prepared. Because hubs were key to published government plans, the council knew funding would become available, and began to think through its bid in advance. *'We started conversations with schools, cultural partners and arts organisations in Telford,'* says Ian.

*'We ran three twilight planning sessions with partners to brainstorm what we wanted to do and look at needs in the borough.'* The council mapped the cold spots—areas where music provision was low—and areas of oversupply. Ian used a mix of approaches to gather data to inform the bid, including online surveys for teachers about training needs and provision in their schools. *'When we sat down to write the bid, we had all the bits we needed—like comments from schools—and could just drop them in.'*

Ian's advice for others is to do your research and build good relationships. *'You need to know commissioners' priorities, so you don't give them a bid that doesn't meet their requirements. Talk to them before applying, so they know your track record.'* Clarity is also important: *'if you're clear in your own mind, you can communicate what's special about the project'*.

### Positive partnerships

The hub has been running for 18 months, with two main strands of work. It directly supplies a range of music education services, from early years lessons to after school clubs. It also supports schools in developing their own music provision: running instrument hire schemes, offering teacher training, and helping schools achieve the Artsmark award. It employs five music development officers, each linked to a school cluster on the ground.

The hub also draws on a wide network of partners, bringing in specialists for projects where the council's service has gaps, such as work with talented learners. In this way, the hub acts as a commissioner itself—something Ian thinks has helped develop the hub's own approach to engaging with commissioners.

### Understanding impact

Ian and the team use several indicators to monitor the project's impact. *'One is the numbers of young people that we engage with across an academic year. A second indicator is the number of schools in the borough that have been awarded Artsmark, which we use as an indicator of quality. We also look carefully at Ofsted reports, and log all the comments on arts and culture.'* So far the hub is performing well against its numerical targets: for example, *'27% of the pupils we engage with are free school meal pupils,'* says Ian.

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<sup>1</sup> For details of research studies into academic and social benefits of music see 'Annex 3: The benefits of music' in *The Importance of Music: A National Plan for Music Education* (2012) Department of Culture, Media and Sport.



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Measuring the artistic quality of provision, and wider educational and social impact, can be trickier. As well as fairly straightforward numerical indicators, the hub collects its own qualitative data, observing partners delivering sessions in schools, and gathering feedback from pupils, parents and teachers. Young people give feedback every half term, through questionnaires designed to explore soft outcomes including self-esteem and confidence. Parents and teachers are surveyed annually, feeding back on changes they have witnessed in pupils. Response rates are high: the surveys are a condition of the service level agreement between school and hub—but parents are also keen to have their say: *'We get good comments from parents, and sometimes good areas for development too. We have a good two-way conversation, and the surveys feed back into our thinking and planning for the next academic year.'*

Many delivery partners are drawn from the Arts Council's National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), whose artistic quality is monitored by a specialist Arts Council team. Because of this, says Ian, *'schools are confident that the artistic product is excellent. They want to hear about our impact on young people's academic and social skills. Our work has to fit with the educational outcomes they need to achieve—it's education first, art second.'*

That may sound stark, but the ability to talk about outcomes in terms of education, rather than artistic quality, is the secret to the hub's success—particularly in engaging directly with schools—and an area where hub partners, including NPOs, can struggle. *'They're used to thinking about artistic quality, but don't have the systems in place to look at what schools want,'* Ian explains. *'But we're having some very interesting conversations with them—we're slowly getting there.'*

### **Building the evidence bank**

Schools themselves are also commissioners of the hub's work: they can choose to spend pupil premium funding on music, and the hub is working with local academies to build music provision into their pupil premium policies. For the past three years it has run summer holiday courses for free school meal pupils, funded by the [DfE's summer school programme](#), which offers an additional £250 to £500 per disadvantaged pupil available directly to schools. The hub is keen to explore the potential of pupil premium funding, and this is an area where building up the bank of evidence linking music to wider academic and social outcomes is key.

A recent toolkit developed by the Education Endowment Foundation for spending pupil premium funding concluded that the impact of arts for pupils with free school meals was weak. Ian hopes that the impact of [In Harmony](#), a music-based social development programme that forms part of the hub's work, can challenge this finding. Based on Venezuela's [El Sistema](#), responsible for the famous Simon Bolivar Orchestra, In Harmony is credited with narrowing gaps in attitude, aspiration, attainment and behaviour between children from deprived backgrounds and their peers. The Arts Council has commissioned an independent evaluation of In Harmony, focusing on pupils' academic achievement and other social outcomes, which it hopes will spark further research into the link between music and core subjects—something that could help all arts organisations engaging in commissioning, and open up more opportunities to access pupil premium money from schools. [Interim results](#) are very promising: In Harmony is engaging children and families from many cultural backgrounds, and after 23 weeks of the programme, their progress is equivalent to 2-years of 'normal' instrumental tuition. It is also enhancing children's well-being, self confidence, self belief, pride, and resilience, among other things.

### **The right language**

Not knowing where to look for tenders is often the first hurdle for arts organisations looking to engage with commissioning. But even with a tender, Ian thinks many struggle to say the right things. *'There's a knowledge gap around understanding—arts organisations have to get their head around unfamiliar local authority commissioning language.'*

Telford and Wrekin music service has a successful history of engaging in commissioning, accessing money from the EU and the Department for Education for other projects. Recently, one of the Music Education Hub partners, the council's Creative and Cultural Development Team, secured funding from its local GP commissioning group for an art therapy project for older people with dementia.

That's not to say the hub doesn't find articulating its work to those outside the arts world difficult: *'We know what we do, we know we've got the evidence for it, but we often communicate it in dense 'Arts Council speak',*' admits Ian. In response, the hub is developing key messages to engage commissioners, with economic, academic and social arguments for investment. *'We talk about influencing young people's social skills, academic achievement, and how investing in music education is value for money.'*