



LEYMN Apprentice Training Programme Pilot Year Review

“I hope I will look back on my time as an Apprentice as a solid building block towards becoming an early years music specialist. I hope I will be able to contribute all I have learned back into the system in interesting ways.”

Nicky Dewar

June 2015

Background

Sound Connection's London Early Years Music Network (LEYMN) was established in 2010 in recognition of the need to support experienced music leaders in early years music. By offering a platform for reflection, sharing of effective practice and debate, we can support members' progress, draw on their knowledge and skills, and share it with the wider sector. LEYMN quickly established itself as a unique voice in London for early years music, has a national profile through contributing to conferences across the country and advises on our training Programme. Its annual conference brings together keynote speakers and inspirational case studies to share innovative thinking and approaches.

Our role in providing this network is now highly valued by those working across the music education sector:

"As a newcomer to early years music in London, I have found the networking opportunities, CPD and sharing of good practice and resources from Sound Connections - and in particular the London Early Years Music Network – invaluable. It is my first port of call when looking for news, information and support in early years music on both a regional and national level." - Daisy Swift, Wigmore Hall

The activities of LEYMN enrich and develop the knowledge and skills of those delivering and engaging in music-making with early years. There has been extensive research into why professional development of music educators is so relevant in this field. In the Government backed "Review of Childcare and the Development of Children aged 0-3: Research Evidence and Implications for Out-of-Home Provision" (Trevarthen and Marwick, 2002) it is stated that:

“Practitioners are the most important resource in out-of-home provision for children less than 3 years old.” The recommendation for what practitioners should be able to do include:

“have opportunities to reflect (with others) on their practice, articulate the implicit theories that guide their practice, consider ways of implementing in their context generalised prescriptions for practice, learn about evidence-based understandings of children's learning and development and be aware of their own values, beliefs and their construction of the child and childhood” and “be offered initial and in-service training and coaching that stresses the kind of social, responsive, creative learning and discovery that infants are capable of with the support of attuned adults and, later, the company of peers”.

We know from our Training Needs Survey (July 2013) that there are many barriers preventing people accessing professional development: prohibitive costs, timings of events and being unable to find CPD with suitable content being identified as the top three barriers. We also know that people are looking for a combination of benefits from their professional development; they want to learn new tools and techniques as well as understanding how to improve their links with schools, hubs and other organisations. Our findings are mirrored in the EarlyArts national consultation from February 2013 in which 52% of respondents cited refining, challenging and stretching the creative early years skills and knowledge they already have as a priority. The feedback regarding preferred methods of developing practice highlighted that traditional approaches, such as training and workshop sessions, were less popular. Respondents favoured reflective approaches such as learning journals and large scale events such as seminars to share and learn.

Our core LEYMN members of expert practitioners, academics and researchers, regularly discuss this challenge of the need for quality professional development and the lack of

appropriate opportunities at our meetings. The LEYMN Apprentice Training Programme has been devised by myself in conversation with the core group and is a direct response to the needs identified and challenges faced.

Programme Overview

The funding

Sound Connections secured concurrent grants (2012 – 2015) from the National Foundation for Youth Music through their 'Networking' module to launch and support LEYMN. In 2014 we secured funding to allow us to incorporate the Apprentice Training Programme into LEYMN's overall offer.

Recruitment & Selection process

The Apprentice Training Programme offer was promoted through LEYMN and Sound Connections' various marketing and communication channels, our fortnightly e-newsletters and our social media feeds. Targeted emails were sent to partners, including the Music Education Hub lead organisations. Word of mouth proved key in spreading the word, with core LEYMN members and active wider members encouraging friends and colleagues to apply for the opportunity.

15 applications were received for the ten possible places. Candidates were asked to submit a cover letter explaining why and how they would benefit from the Apprentice Training Programme along with their CV.

As Sound Connection's Programme Manager for early years I consulted with LEYMN core member Nina Swann to make our final selection. We reviewed each application, looking specifically at the reasons why candidates felt this Programme would support their professional development. This both demonstrated their understanding of what was on offer

and the possibilities it could open. We looked at CVs to establish a general picture of each candidate.

Our final ten Apprentices were selected as they convinced us of their commitment to the process and the clear potential for them to make real improvements in their skills, knowledge, confidence and early years music practice.

Those who were unsuccessful were encouraged to continue to engage with the wider LEYMN offer.

The Training Programme Content

The Apprentice Training Programme (figure 1) was structured to connect different elements together to provide a holistic experience. An induction session, Mentoring and Development Needs Analysis (DNAs) were core elements with training sessions, shadowing and conference attendance flexible to respond to individual opportunities and need.

We asked all Apprentices to produce a resource and attend the wider training sessions LEYMN hosted (including the annual conference and Play Dates).

Training sessions and conferences were identified on a rolling basis as new events were programmed.

Job shadowing opportunities were sourced from partners who kindly opened their doors to Apprentices.

As the LEYMN network continued to grow through the year more opportunities were identified and shared.



Figure 1

Who were our first cohort?

Eight of our Apprentices were music specialists, of which four were already working within early years music. Only two Apprentices were non-specialists and based in education settings. Both had responsibility for music within their role (figure 2).

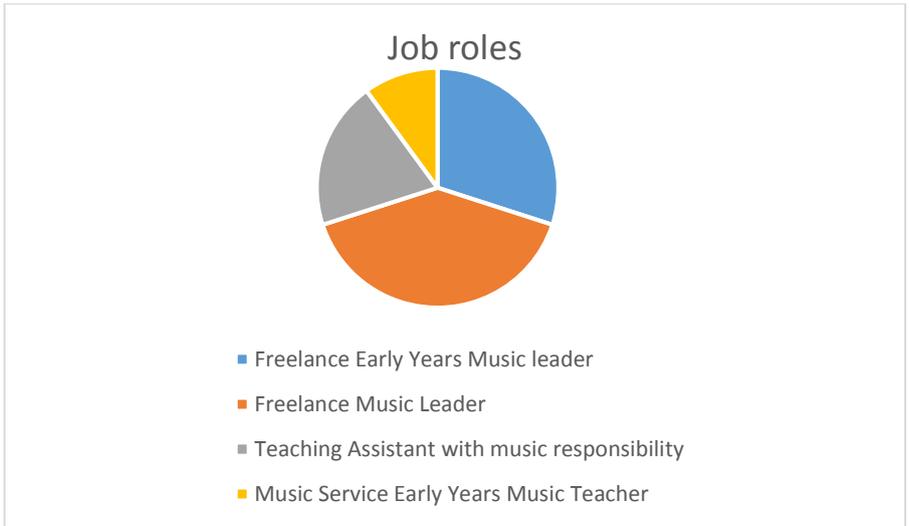


Figure 2

Understanding their needs

We asked Apprentices to complete an online survey to establish some baseline awareness of their confidences in different areas and capture their individual aspirations.

I was not surprised that the data this produced was wide-ranging, although all Apprentices identified themselves 'quite' or 'very confident' in a number of key areas: using their voice, using instruments or percussion, props, working in small groups and working alongside parents or carers.

When asked about their confidence to deliver work outside and working with larger group the response was even more wide ranging, with only the minority identifying as 'very confident'.

When asked about their confidence in incorporating the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework into their work and articulating the benefits/learning outcomes of their activities the majority of Apprentices identified as 'not at all confident'.

Areas for Development

Each Apprentice identified specific areas for development or specialism. This information was used to select the most appropriate Mentor, training sessions and shadowing opportunities for each individual. The areas identified were numerous and wide-ranging, including:

- Working within formal early years curriculum agendas and age specific development needs
- Developing musical skills and confidence (i.e. in singing, repertoire, instruments, percussion, technology, etc.)

- Individual session planning and long-term activity plans
- Group dynamics and being more responsive and reflective in their practice
- Understanding of research and ways to share impact with different stakeholders
- General confidence and communication techniques

The Apprentice's experience

At the end of the Programme we asked all Apprentices to complete a final evaluation survey.

The final survey was completed anonymously so no comments can be linked to a particular person and no Mentor or session could be identified. Of the nine Apprentices that completed the Programme, 8 completed the survey.

Induction

The feedback regarding the Induction session was mixed. Apprentices were uncertain about what to expect from the Programme and what they needed to do but felt very positive about meeting new people and, most importantly, left the session feeling inspired. Now that we have completed a year of the Programme we can be clearer about the process, Apprentices' role and how best to respond to the flexible nature of the Programme.

"On the day I felt that the explanation of the Programme was rather vague e.g. expectations, deadlines, but looking back that has allowed people with a variety of commitments [to] make it work for them. Our open discussion about types of practice was good but could have benefitted with a round up talk that explained reasons/theories behind why practitioners deliver the way they do. The practical session was great."

Mentors

The majority of Apprentices summarised their experience with their Mentors as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ with two [11] citing it as ‘adequate’. All engaged in a mix of communication methods (email exchanges and in person, or email exchanges, telephone catch-ups and in person). It is worth noting that those classing the experience as ‘adequate’ experienced the same number of hours and mix of communication as those classing the experience as ‘excellent’.

All Apprentices experienced the agreed three hours of Mentoring time, with half citing they had had more time (one Apprentice calculating time had as being between 10 and 15 hours).

All Apprentices valued the opportunity to shadow, share learning and be observed by an expert.

“My Mentor has a widely respected approach to the early years using improvisation, which contrasts to other approaches I have seen and worked with. It helped to experience the contrast to keep my mind open to the different ways of working.”

“It’s been exciting to have access to an expert to bounce around ideas with and find out more about resources, the latest research and generally be inspired by.”

It is clear that the role of the Mentors is crucial to this training experience. Utilising the expertise within the core LEYMN group is a unique opportunity offered to Apprentices through the Programme. This pilot year has helped to formalise the role Mentors play and has allowed Sound Connections to better articulate the role and expectations of Mentors within this process.

Shadowing

Seven of our Apprentices undertook shadowing opportunities; the majority doing so numerous times. All felt it was beneficial as a rare opportunity to take time to observe and experience different approaches.

“I am learning how instrumentalists and singers use their background to work with the early years. I have experienced free play, circle time, invited guest musicians and how this is handled in a nursery setting, learned new repertoire and how to connect each activity to each other for a seamless session, how to use anticipation to keep the children's attention, and much more!”

“Seeing others at work is such a novelty and it helps to not only increase your confidence but also to be able to sit back and enjoy music sessions.”

“Yes - opportunity to observe other practice makes you reflect on your own. Chance to learn new repertoire or see old repertoire delivered in new ways.”

One Apprentice didn't shadow any activity as there was a struggle to find appropriate opportunities that fitted into their existing commitments. This should be less of an issue in the next year of the Programme as more partners will be opening their activities up to Apprentices.

DNA

Nine of the ten Apprentices felt they gained 'a lot' in least one area with the majority stating benefits in multiple areas from their Development Needs Analysis (DNA) session led by LEYMN core member and Apprentice Mentor, Linda Bance (figure 3). Only one [12] of our Apprentice's felt they gained 'a little'.

As the intention of the session was to help provide an action plan for 'next steps' for each Apprentice, it was heartening that the session delivered on this point and provided the information to help them achieve this.

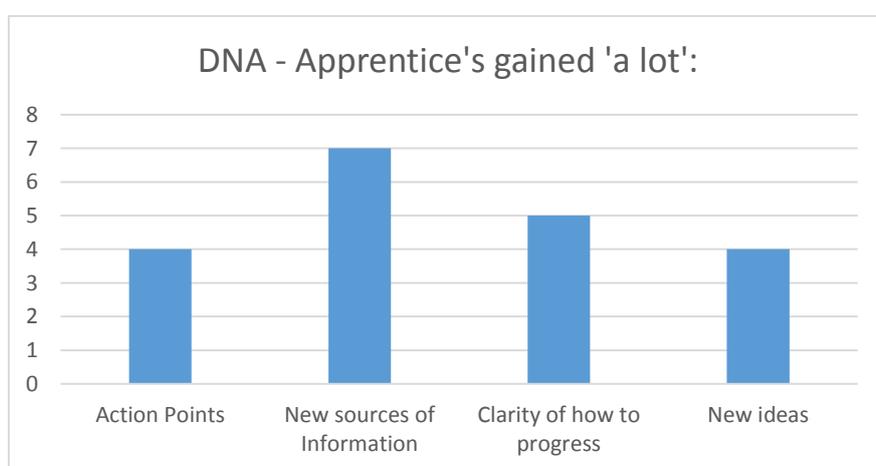


Figure 3

Resource production

We asked all Apprentices to produce a resource, case study or toolkit. This enabled the Apprentices to share some of the learning they had gained to the wider sector and document their own experiences.

An example of those produced to date (and can be found on the Sound Connections website):

- [LEYMN Evidence Review](#)
 - This evidence review is whistle-stop hurtle through some of the literature and research in the field of early years music. It is aimed at practitioners and providers, giving quick access to some of the headline evidence that supports why the work we do is so important.
- [What's in your music session? Toolkit](#)
 - This resource has been compiled as a result of observing several adult-led Early Years Music sessions delivered by specialists. It can be used as a planning check point for new-starter practitioners as they select their repertoire. A table detailing a profile of different Early Years music-making activities and the rationale for including them in your Early Years music sessions.
- [If I am not a specialist, how can I teach music? Case Study](#)
 - LEYMN Apprentice, Sarah Schliech, shares her motivation for becoming a London Early Years Music Network Apprentice and tells her story about the lessons she's learnt over the last 9 months.

Overall

After reading the feedback it is clear that shadowing is seen as the most important element of the Programme by half of our Apprentices, despite the fact that it is also cited twice as the least helpful element.

When asked what they perceived to be the least important part of the whole Programme, only 3 Apprentices answered 'none'. When asked what they perceived to be the most important part of the whole Programme, 1 Apprentices answered 'all of it' (figure 4 and 5). Apprentices told us they felt 'more confident' across the areas we asked about it the baseline survey (figure 6). This was very heartening to find!

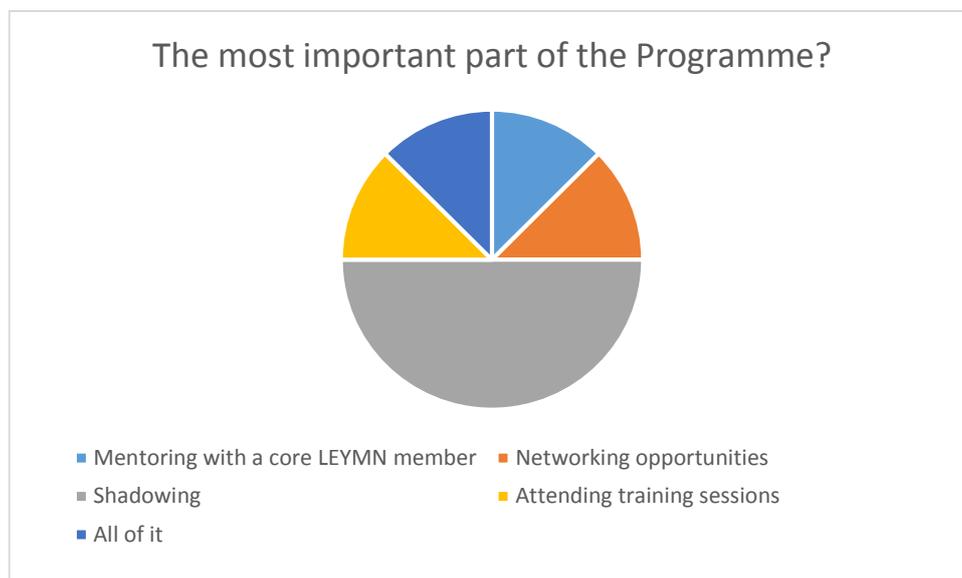


Figure 4

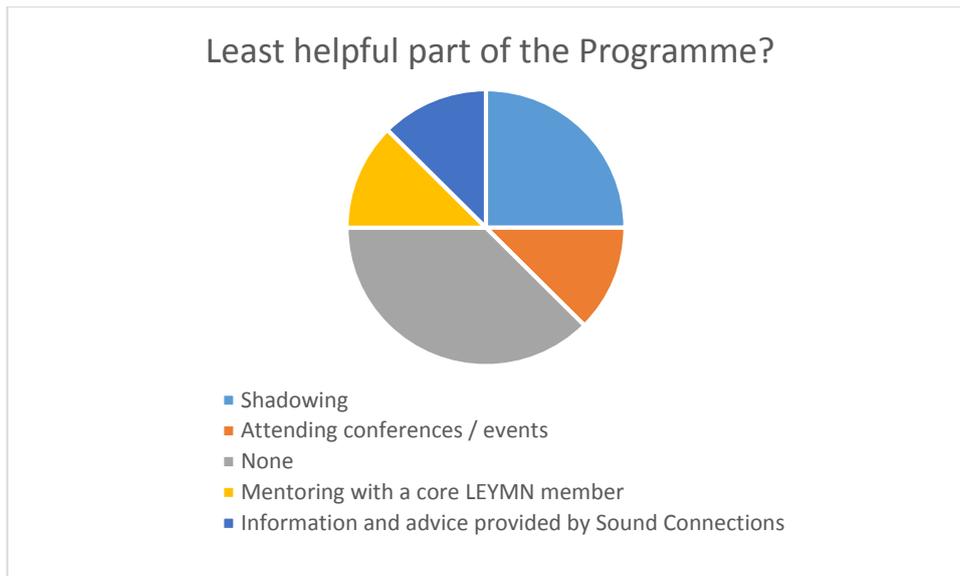


Figure 5

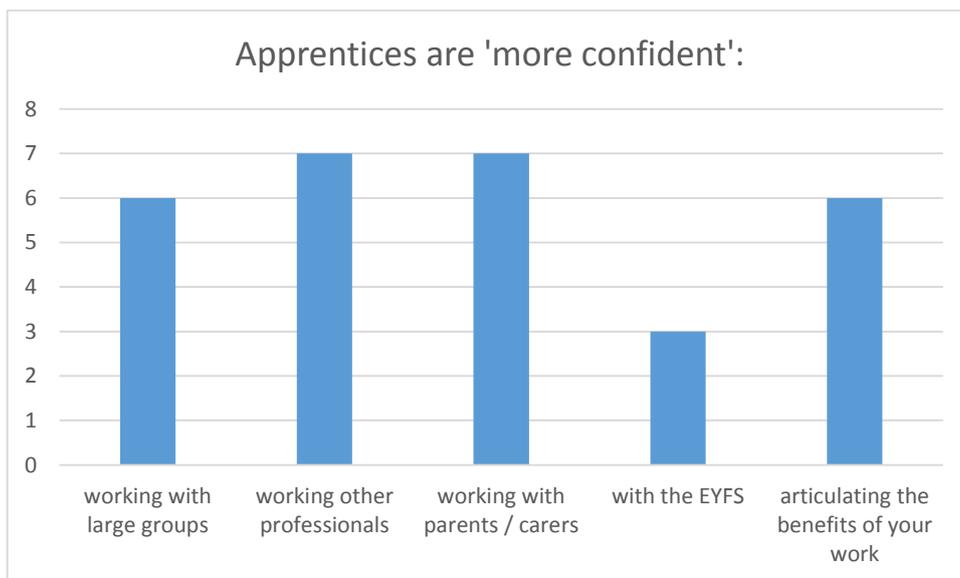


Figure 6

Suggestions of improvements for the Programme fell into a number of clear categories, including:

- Clarity about the Programme structure and what is expected from Apprentices
- Clarity around the Mentor relationship and how this can be improved

Other suggestions have also been considered for the next year of the Programme:

<p>A. More opportunities for Apprentices to meet as a group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will embed this into next round of Programme
<p>B. Opportunities to lead sessions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will talk to our partners about whether this is possible in their projects / settings
<p>C. Information shadowing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although this is currently part of the Programme, the offer will be increased as more partners come on board in future rounds. • We will improve how we share information about shadowing opportunities to Apprentices. • Sound Connections is currently exploring how it can develop this offer across all our work.
<p>D. Apprentices own engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some felt that they could have gained more from the experience if prior commitments had allowed. We will endeavour to ensure new cohorts understand how to make best use of opportunities from Induction onwards. • We will continue to work closely with Apprentices from all cohorts so that the relationship does not stop at the end of their Programme. We shall look at how we can use email groups and Facebook to support this.

Even without these changes in place **all** Apprentices said they would recommend the LEYMN Apprentice Programme to colleagues.

Apprentices' Future

Although only three of our Apprentices state the Programme has changed their future plans, it is clear that the experience has provided support and confidence for all.

"I wasn't sure whether to continue with my current work but this has given me the inspiration to continue, adapt and better my existing practise."

"The Programme has opened up many doors to me and I'm still absorbing all that I have learned."

"I have a clearer idea of where my journey with my music sessions is heading that will fulfil our Early Years Curriculum as well as engaging all children and adults within my setting."

"Haven't really changed, but it's helped me feel more confident about the work I'm doing, and clarified I really do wish to be working in this area."

"My plans haven't changed - I have always wanted to offer my work to a charity to provide low cost sessions for hard to reach groups but I feel more confident and more able to approach them since completing the Programme."

Further feedback

Feedback from our partners and Mentors has been gathered informally throughout this pilot phase and will be used to inform the next steps of the Programme, as well as adapting future offers.

“I’m so glad we could be part of the Apprenticeship Programme – it was perfect timing for us as we were looking to formalise our Chamber Tots traineeships, and this was a great way to do this. I hope we can continue the partnership! Both Apprentices were enthusiastic and open, bringing valuable insight, ideas and skills to the project team – so a big thank you to you! From informal conversations thus far they seem to be getting a lot from the project (and indeed the Apprenticeship Programme as a whole).”

Daisy Swift, Wigmore Hall

“I believe that this Programme was a very good start in helping those early years music leaders focus on their career paths. Of course there is much to learn as always from a pilot and I would welcome a discussion with the other Mentors so that the next cohort can benefit from possible modifications and improvements.”

Linda Bance, Mentor

Conclusion

Overall the Apprentice Training Programme has been a huge success. We have developed the skills and confidence of the Apprentices and enabled them to connect to the wider early years music education sector.

Through this process we have brought together more organisations and partners looking to engage and support the workforce, enabling practitioners to become equipped with the skills and confidence to deliver high quality music making to young children.

There are clear areas we can build on to strengthen the experience of the Programme for future cohorts and there is much we can share with colleagues about the process. We hope this review will be a good starting point.

For Sound Connections the Programme has enabled us to better explore a holistic approach to continuing professional development and better understand the benefits of job shadowing. We will use this as starting point to consider integrating into our wider offer for the music education workforce.

“You are a great way to keep up to date with what is happening in the EY music world and you provide great training days that I will continue to tap into it.”