

Shining the light on young music leadership in England: towards a national youth music council



Young music leadership is a growing area of practice, which puts young people at the heart of leading and shaping their own music provision. The Children and Young People's Unit (2011) states that young people should have the opportunity to participate in decisions about services which affect their lives. But, as young participant Alika from Southwark explains: "sometimes it's like [the decision makers] are up there, and we are down here... we have important things to say too, they should listen to us." When asked about the need for youth voice by Sound Connections at The Barbican Centre Music Education Expo, UK Minister for Culture Ed Vaizey agreed that "young people's voices should shape their own music education."

Sound Connections set up Wired4Music in 2009 to better understand and meet this need in London. We identified Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation (*Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*, UNICEF, 1992) as a key model that would enable us to progress this work. Whilst this model is used globally to advance youth citizenship and democratic participation, Wired4Music is currently the only programme in the world using it in musical contexts. We continue to promote its benefits in London through Wired4Music council meetings, manifesto and a major symposium earlier this year. We now believe these practices should be shared more widely, on a national scale.

We are also keenly aware that other effective and equally innovative models of young music leadership exist - from young producer programmes (e.g. Serious in London or More Music in Morecambe) to music leading schemes (e.g. Grand Union or Wren Music's Young Roots Choir). We therefore feel there is a compelling need to spotlight young music leadership work both in London and nationally and learn from the collective experience of a breadth of organisations.

Nonetheless, our research and conversations show that in other cases attempts to set up youth voice initiatives in music are inconsistent and often inward-looking, with partners expressing a lack of confidence and expertise in delivering such programmes. There is a clear opportunity to scope and map the young music leadership landscape feeding into Youth Music's own evaluations and broadening the work to include Bridge Organisations, Music Education Hubs, National Portfolio Organisations and other key providers of youth music-making opportunities.

Over a period of 12 months (January-December 2015) we will audit young music leadership activity across the country and highlight three case studies to explore in-depth and share findings at a national summit. The work will provide a greater understanding, awareness and confidence in activity, which will be shared through the production of new resources and toolkits, and contribute to the growth of young music leadership more broadly. The aim is to encompass all regions and the full diversity of music organisations working with young people, so that together we can support more young people to experience music in ways that best meet their needs and desires.

We are looking for organisations interested in sharing their young music leadership stories and learning. In February we shall be issuing a nationwide survey and from this data we will identify case studies to explore in depth and be part of our national summit.

To take part, please contact us: sian@sound-connections.org.uk or 0207 729 7220