

Research into support for musical progression
for young people from In Harmony
programmes

Phase Two Research:
Action Research and Case Studies

Executive Summary

Susan Hallam
Susanne Burns
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Harmony was launched in 2008 with three pilot projects for an initial period of two years. In 2012/13, the funding responsibility for *In Harmony* shifted to Arts Council England (ACE) and a decision was made to continue to fund two of the initial pilots, Liverpool and Lambeth. In 2012, four new programmes were initiated: Telford and Stoke, Nottingham, Newcastle and Leeds. Over time the core principles of *In Harmony* have evolved to reflect how the six programmes operate in their different settings. Each project is distinct and they are all bespoke to their specific contexts but share common principles.

In 2017, research was commissioned by Opera North, one of the six lead organisations of *In Harmony* programmes, funded by an evaluation grant from ACE to examine musical progression as the young people progressed from primary school into secondary education. The research was carried out by Dr Sue Hallam, respected music education academic, currently based at the UCL Institute of Education and Susanne Burns, a management consultant specialising in the arts sector. '*Research into support for musical progression for young people in In Harmony Programmes*' was published in 2017. Based on interviews with children, schools, parents and data from the projects, the findings were supported by a detailed literature review into musical progression across a range of programmes internationally; examining social, educational and musical factors and their impact on continued musical participation and learning. Recommendations were made based on existing practice, showing how challenges and barriers to continued musical progression can be overcome through support from families, schools, music education infrastructure and programmes such as *In Harmony*.

Hallam and Burns recommended that further research be undertaken to:

- Ensure that all programmes are gathering consistent data on progression beyond primary school enabling comparisons to be made and engendering a more accurate picture of retention patterns;
- Map out the journeys of young people as they transition as it is clear that some young people continue their musical journeys informally or through other providers;
- Test potential strategies that might support transition but that have not yet been trialled.

ACE commissioned each *In Harmony* programme to develop and implement an action research project putting the recommendations of the report into practice and testing potential solutions to supporting musical progression. The aims of the action research were to explore approaches to enhancing the successful progression of children into extra-curricular activities while at primary school, at the transition from primary to secondary school and as they transition from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4.

Alongside this, a second phase of research was also commissioned that would evaluate the action research programmes and also further the initial research by developing a series of case studies of individual young people to demonstrate the initial findings.

Case Studies

19 case studies of individual young people shed light on the earlier findings. It is apparent from the 19 case studies presented that **a range of factors contribute to supporting successful progression**. These illuminate the earlier research rather than providing new data. They include:

- Good home school liaison and pastoral support can support progression;
- Proactive family support is crucial but there is a need for a balance between this and the need to generate independence;
- Professional Musicians acting as role models and mentors;
- Sibling support and modelling appears to be an important motivating factor;

- Where there are social elements to the activity provided young people are motivated to continue to take part;
- Where out of school activity is available at an early age, young people appear to become more independent participants taking greater responsibility and agency;
- Cross agency/ partnership working supports progression;
- Logistical and financial support mitigates against the barriers faced by many families;
- There is evidence that being ‘pushed’ hard to achieve motivates and helps to support progression.

Similarly, the stories illustrate the **barriers and challenges** that young people face in continuing with their involvement which were outlined in depth in the earlier research.

- Opportunities may be there but the power to take them is not within the control of the young person;
- Logistical barriers such as money, travel, the location of the secondary school or the time the school day ends are common and recurrent and again, often not within the control of the young person;
- Provision may not be available – and when it is, the style and approach may be different or the provision may be too elementary for the musical stage of development so it does not meet the needs of the young person;
- Complex and challenging home circumstances can be barriers to progression;
- Lack of parental engagement and support or even passive support is often a barrier.

Action Research Projects

Seven Action Research projects took place between January and September 2018. The projects were very different and met needs identified locally. Full case studies of each project are contained in the appendices.

In Harmony Lambeth

Lambeth tested two interventions:

- A Summer Orchestral Holiday Course – 7th – 10th August 2018 - for 30 year 6 students bridging between primary and secondary school which will focus on building closer relationships with parents/ carers in preparation for progression to secondary school in September 2018.
- A formal Youth Voice programme between February and July 2018 in partnership with Sound Connections.¹

Areas of Focus:

- Create opportunities for young people to feed into future plans for *In Harmony* to empower them and increase the likelihood that they are successful;
- Be connected and have extensive partnerships with other local providers of music education opportunities.

In Harmony Leeds

Leeds developed Opera North Junior Strings which was launched in January 2018 and was open to string players aged 10 – 14 across Leeds. The ensemble sought to support the development of outstanding musicianship, and offered *In Harmony* players the opportunity to develop a positive musical identity outside of their local area and make social networks with children from across Leeds in their final year of primary school. In addition, the running costs of minibuses were supported which enabled the children pursuing extra curricular activity outside of their immediate local area.

¹ <https://www.sound-connections.org.uk/what-we-do/youth-voice>

Areas of Focus:

- Provide a range of extra-curricular activities for *In Harmony* and other young people that is joined up and offers clear progression pathways;
- Provide subsidies, transport and logistical support where necessary.

In Harmony Liverpool

Liverpool tested two interventions:

- An intensive weekend Chamber Music course - building on pathways available to support young musicians, a weekend, intensive chamber course for *In Harmony* young musicians playing at Grade 4+ equivalent level;
- A pilot Pre-Associate membership scheme for individual young musicians - As part of Liverpool Philharmonic's commitment to encouraging progression in orchestral music making, Associate Membership of Liverpool Philharmonic Youth Orchestra is available to aspiring *In Harmony* musicians. The pilot **Pre-Associate Membership Scheme** for 3-4 identified *In Harmony* young musicians aims to drive individual skill, confidence and musical progression for *In Harmony* participants who have already reached a Grade 4* equivalent level and need additional resources to quicken their progress to the next level.

Areas of Focus:

- Provide a range of extra-curricular activities for In Harmony and other young people that is joined up and offers clear progression pathways;
- Offer pastoral support to young people;
- Provide subsidies, transport and logistical support where necessary.

In Harmony Newcastle

Newcastle worked in partnership with the regional Music Partnership North (Music Education Hub) to track musical progression and development post year 6. It was believed that the hub would provide greater access to information and enhanced communication with secondary schools. At the same time the team wished to pilot ways to track year 6 leavers.

Areas of Focus:

- Be connected and have partnerships with other local providers of music education opportunities;
- Be connected and have strong relationships with secondary schools where this is possible and have knowledge of the musical opportunities that they offer.

In Harmony Nottingham

Nottingham led a pilot project between January and October 2018 that sought to support musical progression and to create musical communities for young people outside of school with the aim of increasing the numbers of secondary age young people in Nottingham City engaging in music making:

- Identify 2 pilot schools and cohorts of year 5 and 6 pupils;
- Recruit a family support worker in each school;
- Hold a series of sharing and play events for families and siblings of targeted cohorts;
- Invite cohorts to join Area Band, RHYO Connect or RHYO Intermediate (as appropriate);

- Provide transport and supervision for children attending each of the groups;
- Facilitate meetings with secondary school music teachers introducing the specific cohort of pupils and families to their new school, music department and opportunities;
- Hold discussions with schools, pupils and families to evaluate the impact;
- Prepare Youth Music funding application to roll out the programme to the wider group of IH schools.

Areas of Focus:

- Offer pastoral support to young people;
- Provide subsidies, transport and logistical support where necessary;
- Be able to advise and support young people and their parents in making decisions about which musical progression opportunities to pursue;
- Be connected and have strong relationships with secondary schools where this is possible and have knowledge of the musical opportunities that they offer.
- Be tenacious in following up non-attendance in students recently transferred to secondary school
- Provide information to parents about the musical opportunities in local secondary schools

In Harmony Stoke

Stoke tested the development of an out of school orchestra based at Thistley Hough Academy. This orchestra built on best practice from *In Harmony* Telford and the successful orchestra that takes place at Old Park Primary. The orchestra was open to all pupils in Year 7 and 8 and Loquela (EAL unit) taking part in *In Harmony* with different playing abilities catered for. The new *In Harmony* orchestra was led by 3 members of In Harmony staff so that each instrumental discipline is catered for. The orchestra was also developed so that feeder primary school pupils were invited and links between KS2 - 3 are developed. School staff were also involved in the sessions, that upskilled non instrumental specialist music teachers.

Areas of Focus:

- Provide a range of extra-curricular activities for In Harmony and other young people that is joined up and offers clear progression pathways

In Harmony Telford

Telford tested a twofold approach:

- A short **Chamber Ensemble course** for the most engaged Year 5 and 6s which provided more performance opportunities. In 2017, a pilot Chamber Ensemble project took place for the most engaged Year 5s and 6s in the programme to inspire them to continue when they transitioned to secondary school. The project culminated in 4 performances in the local area at care homes and at the school fete. The pilot will include a similar project with a new cohort, learning from what we did last year, as they found that this was useful for retention and feeding into the Nucleo Orchestra and Youth Ensemble. The team were also seeking other opportunities for the Chamber Ensemble to perform in the same setting as the Youth Ensemble, to make the progression route visible to Chamber Ensemble members, and inspire them to continue on their instrument.
- Increase the number of rehearsals for the **In Harmony Youth Ensemble** to provide greater continuity. This ensemble is the first permanent ensemble to be run which children join on teacher recommendation only, once they reach a certain level of proficiency on their instrument. As Telford doesn't have any youth orchestras or ensembles for the children in the programme to progress to, this ensemble is intended to be the main vehicle for progression from the mixed ability ensembles. The pilot will be used to ensure the Youth Ensemble runs for 10 weeks per term, bringing greater continuity to the rehearsal period.

Areas of Focus:

- Provide a range of extra-curricular activities for *In Harmony* and other young people that is joined up and offers clear progression pathways

Outcomes of the Action Research projects can be grouped as follows:

- Improved musical, social and leadership skills;
- Commitment to continued involvement;
- Wider friendship networks and the creation of music-making peer groups and support networks in individual schools and across them;
- Greater parental involvement and increased understanding of opportunities by families;
- Children have better understanding of the range of pathways available to them;
- Provision has been embedded.

Key learning has been extrapolated and the following strategies and approaches appear to have been effective:

- **Family Liaison and Support** is an effective way to support young people and breaks down many barriers to engagements as well as building parental understanding, engagement and support.
- **Engaging Parents early in the programme**
Play sessions worked well in Nottingham but it might just be about an open invitation to observe a session or a letter home, informal conversations build trust and confidence and that will be crucial.
- **Setting high expectations and striving for higher playing standards**
Several projects adopted approaches to accelerating progression. Several were selective - which runs against the inclusivity of the *In Harmony* programmes in primary school - but this appears to support progression as it is motivating. Other projects referred to setting progression targets that push the young person whilst recognizing that individual circumstances often mean that a flexible approach needs to be taken and setting high expectations of what can be achieved and offering opportunities for accreditation/validation of achievement.
- **Summer holiday courses** that bridge between primary and secondary school and focus on transition.
- **Partnership working** – especially with the secondary schools and the Music Education Hubs - and across teams where appropriate supports the development of diverse pathways. Projects cited a wide variety of other partners including London Music Masters, the MEHs, the Ruth Gorse Academy in Leeds as well as internal partners such as the Liverpool Philharmonic Youth Orchestra.
- Providing **ensembles that span a wide range of year groups or across provision** can be an effective approach.
- **Logistical Support** – Leeds provided minibuses to transport young people.
- **Small cohorts - chamber and small ensemble provision** are approaches that proved effective across several projects. There also is a value in investing in **1 to 1 lessons** - with targeted goals as this can really accelerate progression.
- **'Reunions' and other social events** that provide opportunities for young people to come along, reconnect with each other and talk informally with tutors.

In Harmony is a unique long-term intervention and as a site of learning it is rich and deep. Much can be learned from the programme to inform other music education interventions as well as other art form based interventions. This two part research programme has examined musical progression from primary to secondary through multiple lenses. A literature review was carried out which then led to an extensive research programme and report published in Autumn 2017. This report reflects a more practice based research approach of case studies of individual children that highlight the earlier research along with some action research projects.

The work has highlighted several things:

- The power of peer to peer learning within the In Harmony network and how a focus for a somewhat disparate group – in this case, secondary progression - can generate rich and deep learning, shared and next practice;
- How small amounts of funding – in this case £5k - can enable risk taking and experimentation and generate new solutions to challenges being faced;
- How small steps can contribute to a larger change within programmes.

It is recommended that the network consider further areas of inquiry that concern them all and set aside small sums each year within budgets for action research programmes/ risk in areas of mutual interest.

We have suggested a core set of quantitative indicators that may help to develop some consistency across the programmes across 2017/18 which can inform the national evaluation and be revised for 2018/19.

However, from a more quantitative perspective, it is suggested that the following might be achievable within resources:

- The Case Study children interviewed for this research could continue to be tracked by the projects and that projects might like to consider producing more case studies of individual children;
- The reunion event that *In Harmony* held in Newcastle might be something that other projects want to adapt and adopt as a means of staying in touch with the young people who move on; The children who have taken part in the action research projects should be tracked to assess long term effectiveness of the interventions.