



# Youth Music Stakeholder Survey 2015 Findings

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## Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
1. Introduction.....	5
2. Applying for funding .....	8
3. Youth Music’s Outcomes Approach .....	15
4. Reporting to Youth Music.....	17
5. Youth Music resources .....	19
6. Youth Music and Arts Award.....	23
7. The operating context: Organisational needs and finances.....	27
8. Closing comments .....	30
9. Recommendations.....	34

## Executive Summary

The National Foundation for Youth Music (Youth Music) carries out an annual stakeholder survey to inform its role as a responsive and intelligent funder. Anonymous feedback is gathered from organisations and individuals who apply for or hold a Youth Music grant. Analysis of these responses allows Youth Music's work to be shaped and adapted in response to present needs.

This survey (July 2015) was carried out in the first year of Youth Music's refreshed funding programme, which comprises three funding streams (Fund A, Fund B, and Fund C). This is the first stakeholder survey sent out since the refresh of the system, so the responses are valuable in assessing the reaction to the new processes – particularly since findings from previous years informed the structure and criteria of the refreshed programme.

The report commences with an overview of the methodology and respondent information and is then broken down into a further seven sections, which can be summarised as follows:

### 1. Applying for funding

The majority of respondents were positive about Youth Music's grant application processes. The main areas receiving praise were:

- the clarity of application documents
- support and feedback from Youth Music staff
- the rigour of the application process
- feedback on declined applications
- additional resources and information available in support of the application process.

The main things that applicants would change about the application process would be to further simplify it and to increase the word count on the forms themselves. Whilst the quality of feedback on declined applications has improved from previous years, further clarity could be provided about declination reasons.

### 2. The outcomes approach

Eighty-five percent of respondents in this section praised Youth Music's use of the outcomes approach, seeing it as a useful tool for planning and evaluation. A small minority did not see the value, or found it confusing or too prescriptive.

### 3. Reporting

Most respondents thought that Youth Music's reporting structures were a good way of reflecting on their work, and some organisations stated that it has informed their organisational evaluation processes. The main areas for improvement related to the online reporting system, although some also commented on the amount of time required in report writing and the difficulties of collecting sensitive data on young people's challenges.

## **4. Youth Music resources**

There was widespread admiration about Youth Music's quality framework and its use has increased significantly from the time of the previous year's survey. A minority were concerned that using the framework could result in greater bureaucracy. A high proportion of respondents (82%) said that Youth Music's publications had informed their work.

The majority of respondents considered the Youth Music Network to be a useful resource, although just over half considered themselves to be active users. The most commonly reported uses of the Youth Music Network were to download the quality framework, research reports, search for projects and read blogs. The main area for improvement identified related to the navigability of the site.

## **5. Arts Award**

Most respondents offered Arts Award, with Bronze being the most commonly delivered. Those who don't offer the qualification stated that Arts Award was unsuitable for their participants (some of whom worked with children in their early years). The main area of support that could improve Arts Award delivery would be to receive dedicated funding and bespoke support to overcome barriers caused by participants' challenging circumstances.

## **6. The operating context**

Respondents were asked to report the most pressing issues facing their organisations. These were deemed to be primarily financial, linked to sustainability of organisations, programmes, and opportunities for progression. Staff capacity was mentioned as a pressing issue as budgets and personnel have been squeezed as a consequence of ever-tightening budgets.

Youth Music funding was deemed very important or vital to 71% of respondents, even though it commonly made up less than 10% of their overall turnover.

## **7. Closing comments**

Youth Music received a broadly positive rating as a funder (4.44 out of 5) and was considered to be unique in relation to other funders because of its primary focus on music and challenging circumstances, as well as its organisational ethos.

## **8. Recommendations**

The results of the survey are broadly positive, although there are some areas identified where Youth Music can improve the way it works. A series of recommendations have been provided in order to shape these improvements.

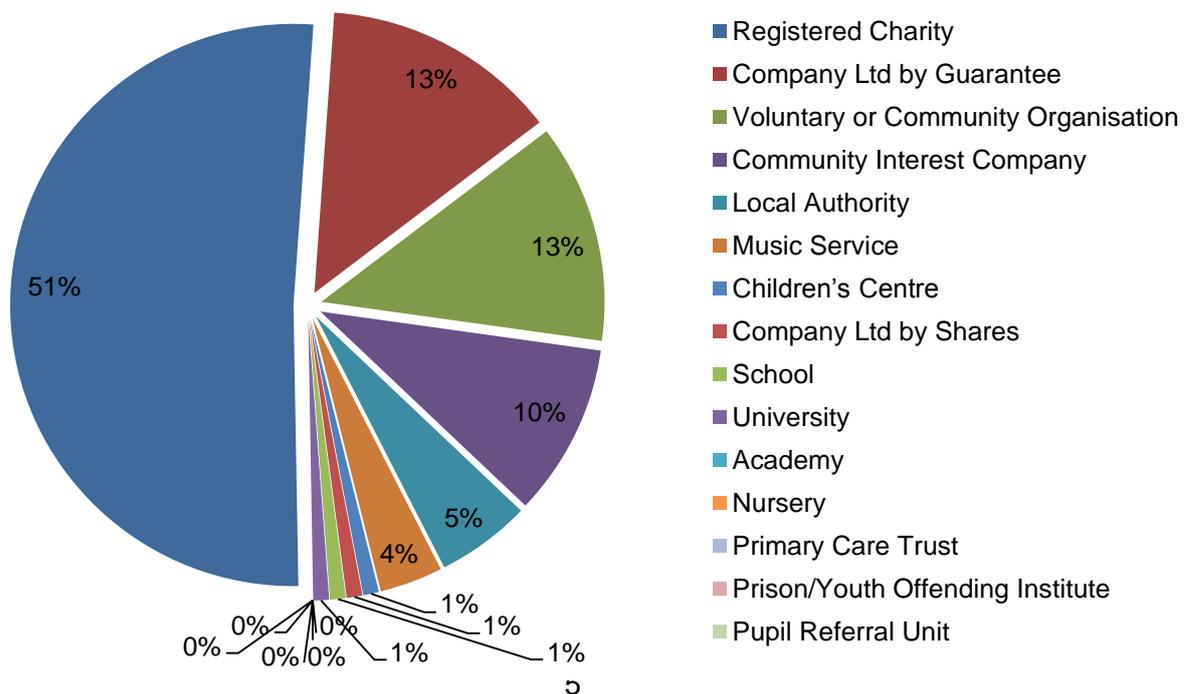
# 1. Introduction

The findings of the 2015 survey are presented in the following document. They are structured broadly in the same order as the survey itself, although some of the findings are not included here but instead reported on directly in Youth Music’s Impact Report.

## Method & Respondent Information

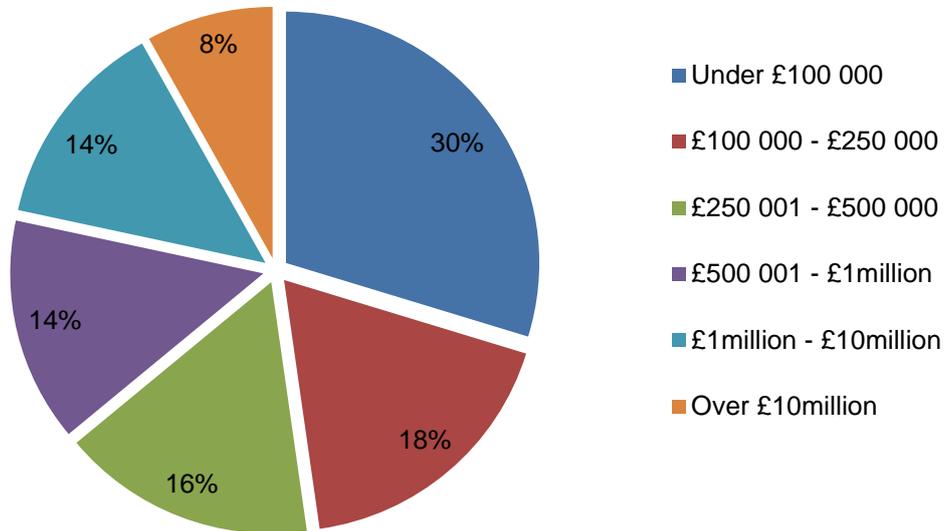
An online survey consisting of 45 questions was compiled by staff from across Youth Music departments (Grants and Learning, Development and Operations). A mixture of closed and open questions was used.

A distribution list of 429 organisations was compiled, made up of current grantholders and unsuccessful applicants who had applied and been declined since the last survey in April 2014. The organisations on this list were sent an email directly from the Research and Evaluation Assistant. The initial distribution list was sent a reminder one week before the survey closed. The survey was open for a total of 30 days. 111 respondents completed the survey – a response rate of 26%. The survey commences with several questions relating to organisation demographics, which is important in order to ascertain the context for findings. As Figure 1 shows, a significant proportion of respondents are made up of third-sector organisations. 51% of respondents represented registered charities, 13% represented companies which were limited by guarantee, and 13% were from voluntary or community organisations. Community Interest Companies, local authorities, and music services made up 19% of respondents, whilst the remaining 4% of responses came from children’s centres, companies limited by shares, and schools. This broadly represents the variety and weighting of organisation types making applications for Youth Music funding.



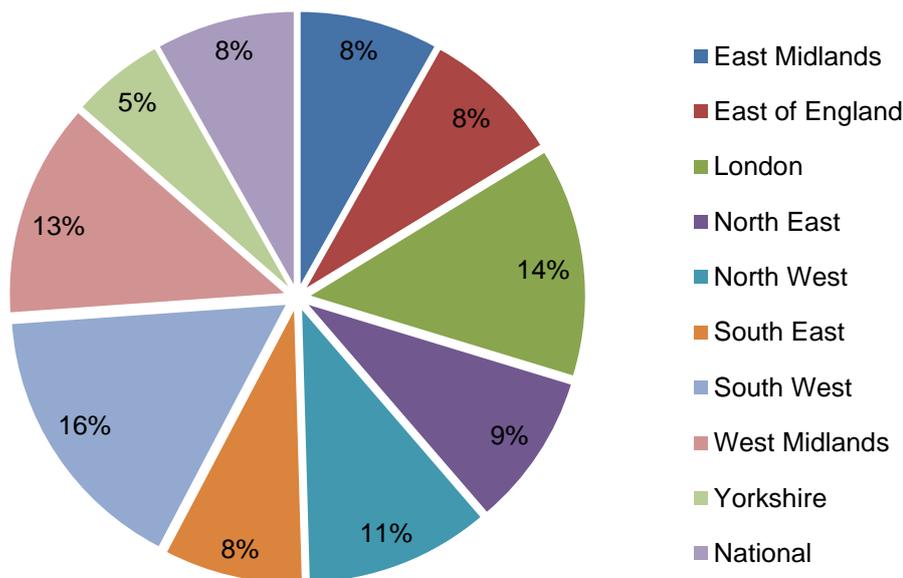
**Figure 1. Respondents by organisation type (n=111)**

Figure 2 shows the range of sizes of organisation that completed the survey. There is a wide range of organisation size amongst Youth Music stakeholders; 30% had a turnover of less than £100,000 whilst 22% represented organisations with a turnover of more than £1million. This range of organisation size and turnover exhibits a need for flexible application and grant management processes that respond to a diversity of organisational needs and capacities.



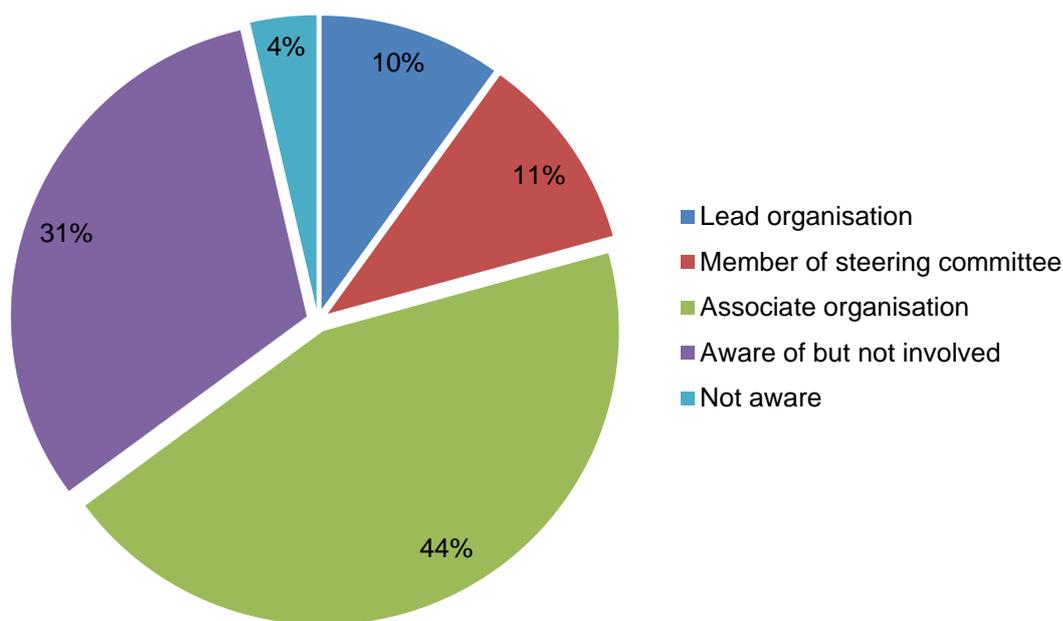
**Figure 2. Respondents by organisation turnover (n=111)**

Respondents were asked to select one option that best described the geographical area in which they 'usually' operated. Figure 3 shows that responses have been gathered from across the country, showing that the responses from this survey shouldn't present a significant regional bias. In terms of number of applications received and number of funded projects, there is however, a slight overrepresentation of the South West and national organisations and a slight underrepresentation of Yorkshire and the North West.



**Figure 3. Respondents' usual area of operation (n=111)**

Figure 4 shows the respondent organisations' relationship to the local music education hub. The majority of respondents - 65% - reported to be involved with the hub in some way. 31% considered themselves 'aware but not involved', while 4% defined themselves as 'not aware' of the music education hub at all. Whilst it is positive that the majority of applicants to Youth Music are involved with their local music education hub – the fact that one-third are not involved suggests that there is further work to be done on all sides to make hub partnerships more inclusive, and fully representative of the rich tapestry of organisations providing music-making opportunities for children and young people in a local area.

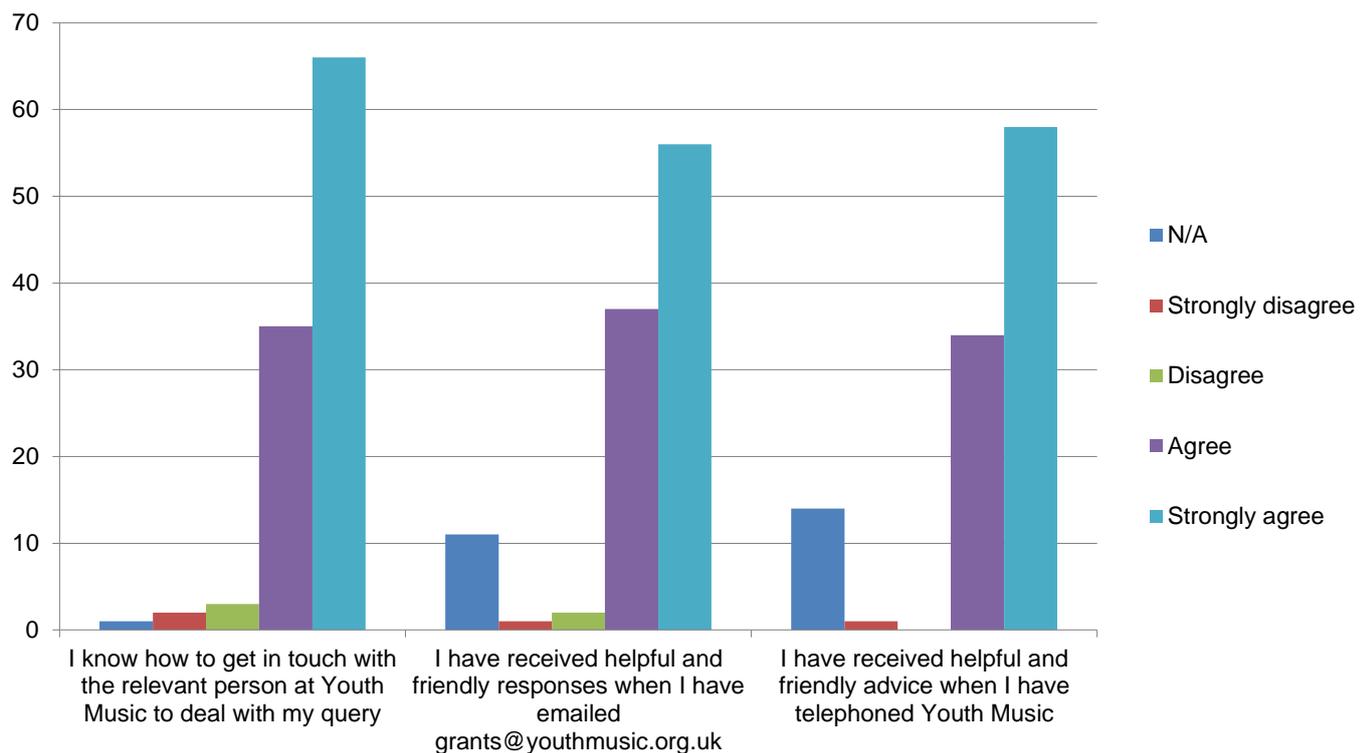


**Figure 4. Respondents by relationship with local music education hub (n=111)**

## 2. Applying for funding

### 2.1 Contacting Youth Music

Respondents were asked to rate to what extent they agreed with statements regarding a) knowing who to contact, and to rate the quality of their experience when they either b) emailed the Grants and Learning Team or c) telephoned the Youth Music office. A strong majority agreed or strongly agreed that they knew who to contact and had had a positive experience (a = 94%, b = 87% and c = 86%).

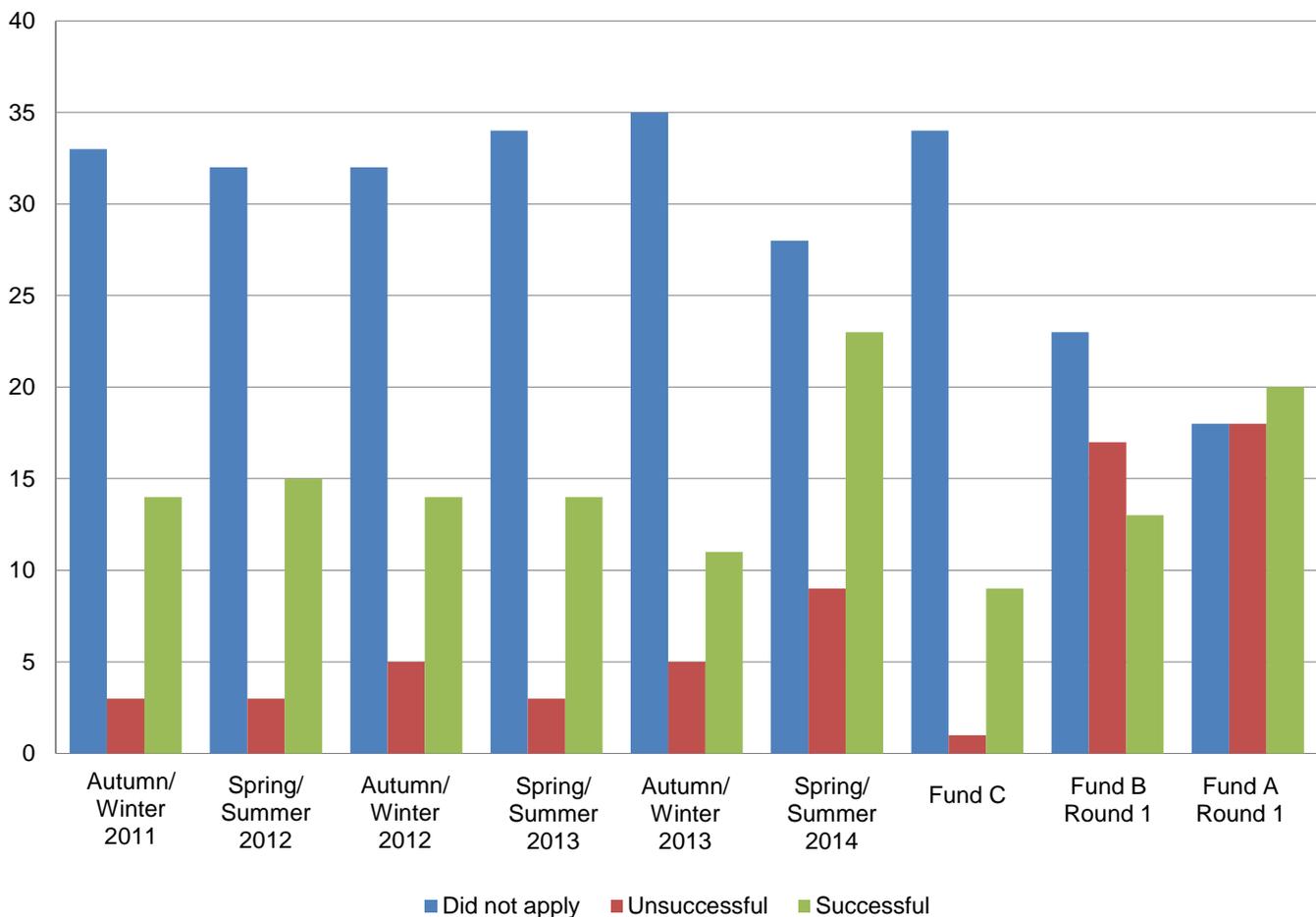


**Figure 5. Respondents' rating of experience contacting Youth Music (n=107)**

## 2.2 Applying for funding

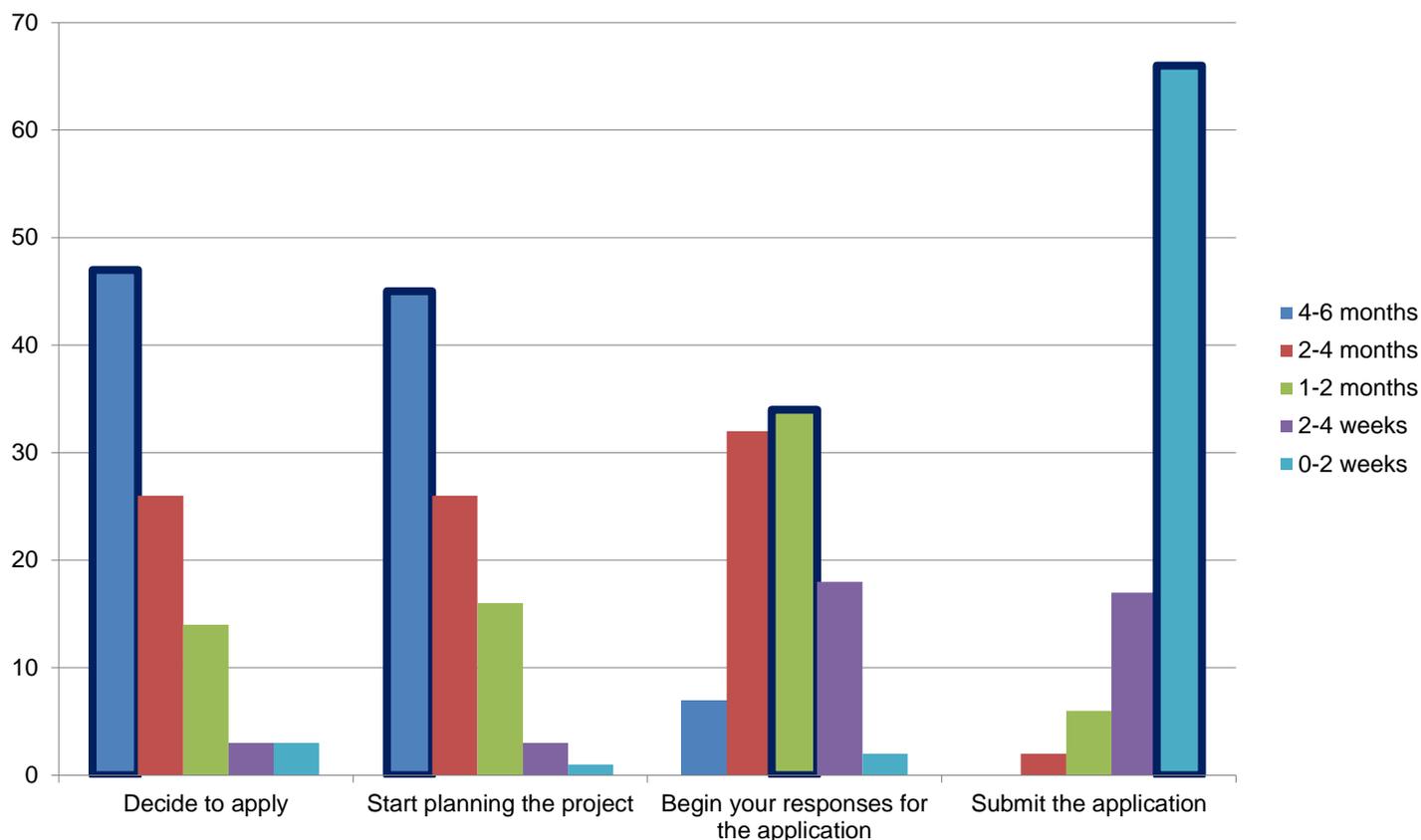
Respondents were asked to tick boxes stating whether they were ‘successful’, ‘unsuccessful’ or ‘did not apply’ for each funding round since the launch of the refreshed programme in 2011. 88 respondents answered in part, 23 skipped the question, and no respondents answered in full (suggesting that the question could be designed more simply in future surveys).

As seen in Figure 6, the number of those answering ‘did not apply’ has dropped somewhat since the launch of the refreshed programme, suggesting that many of this year’s respondents were new to Youth Music. Additionally, there was an increase in unsuccessful applications since 2014, and an increase in responses for the 2014 rounds overall, which is reflective of the increasing competition and demand for funding in 2014/15.



**Figure 6. Respondents’ funding applications and success rates (n=88)**

The next question asked about the time taken to plan and submit an application, split into four periods: deciding to apply, planning the project, beginning responses to the application and submitting the application. The responses are broadly similar to previous years with the longest period being the first stage of applying ('decide to apply'). This year, however, there has been a noticeable rise in respondents who took more time to prepare and plan their projects before the application deadline, suggesting that applicants are aware of the increasing competition for funding and the importance of submitting a high-quality proposal. It is also reflective of the outcomes approach, which is a methodology which encourages thorough project planning.



**Figure 7. Timescales involved in making an application (n=93)**

When asked about their experiences of applying for Youth Music funding, 84% of respondents to the question (n = 93) agreed or strongly agreed that the applicant guidance was easy to follow and useful for their application, whilst a further 83% agreed that the additional resources on the Youth Music Network were also useful.

80% agreed/strongly agreed that the amount of information required on a Youth Music application form is proportionate to the level of funding requested. This represented an 11% increase from last year, and demonstrates that the introduction of different funds for different size of grant (with different levels of application requirements for each fund) is an improvement from the 'one-size-fits-all' approach of the previous programme.

Only 63% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'It is easy to apply for a Youth Music grant'. This theme of how easy or difficult it is to apply for Youth Music funding is one

that has appeared consistently through this and previous surveys. On one hand, there are indications that the process could be made easier; and on the other, the process is praised for its rigour, and respondents have reported that the process of applying and holding a Youth Music grant has led to positive organisational developments (see 1.3 and 1.4 and section 2).

### 2.3 Positive aspects of the application process

When asked the question, 'what do you feel were the positive things about the application process?' 78 out of the 111 respondents chose to provide an answer. These were coded into four main themes (with a few less common responses) which are listed below and elucidated with examples.

#### 1. Clear, straightforward, easy to use:

*"Clarity, supporting information and rationale behind applications are clear."*

*"Clear guidelines around dates and different levels of funding available, with stages dependant on amount being sought."*

#### 2. Support and feedback from Youth Music staff:

*"There is a great deal of support when you ring up in person to talk to someone. There is a fair bit of useful information in the applicant guidance too."*

*"Most useful and constructive feedback I've had from any application process"*

#### 3. Application encourages rigorous planning of projects:

*"We can make up our own outcomes. YM's feedback is really useful. The questions really make you think about the proposal and how achievable it is. The supporting documents are clear and useful. It is easy to contact YM HQ and ask questions - both the learning team and tech support."*

*"It enables you to examine your practice and significantly focus on your future objectives; also to see your work in a national context."*

#### 4. Additional resources and information:

*"Youth Music provides a great deal of useful additional information which supports the application process. Applicants are encouraged to think about the impact of their work both locally and regionally."*

In addition, there were also a number of positive comments received about the refreshed programme:

*"The new process is a lot easier, and I think the different levels make much more sense in terms of how much detail you have to provide for the level of funding required. The supporting documentation is really helpful, particularly the evaluation toolkit."*

*"New fund A-C system is a great improvement. 2-stage process for larger applications is good, with not too much info required in stage 1. Single stage process for smaller fund is very good."*

## 2.4 Areas for improvement in the application process

Respondents were given the opportunity to tell us what they would change if they were given the chance. 68 out of 111 chose to answer this question, and the comments were coded into categories. Interestingly, most of the categories below can be linked with their more positive counterparts: for example, whilst one of the themes found in the positive comments about the application process was that people found it clear and straightforward, one of the main themes emerging from the question about what applicants would improve was that several found it difficult, requesting more guidance. The themes and comments from this question are presented below.

### 1. Application process is difficult, needs clearer guidance:

*"I was working with an experienced musician who understands very clearly how to ensure that we have clear targets and methods of recording baselines and impact to show how we meet the targets. In addition I have applied for other grants and understand the processes. For some this may be difficult."*

*"Make it more straightforward and easy so that other applicants with little or no experience of bid writing can apply, without being put off."*

*"Guidance seems to change, goal posts seem to shift."*

### 2. The application process takes too long:

*"It is very time consuming, we are very small - I am the only project manager and I am paid for 10 hours a week - writing the funding application is almost a full time job."*

*"It is extremely time-consuming but that is understandable given the size of the grants."*

### 3. The information required is disproportionate to the amount requested:

*"We only wanted a small amount of funding and a lot of information was required on the form."*

*"I feel that the application form is extensive and it is not always clear which information needs to appear in which section. I do appreciate, however, that in our case, applications cover a variety of work and are for a fairly high level of funding and therefore need to contain a lot of information."*

### 4. The form is too restrictive:

*"Have a longer word count per question. Editing down yet including all we want to say takes the most time. Alternatively, have a question/space to add something to an applicant's story that they couldn't fit in elsewhere"*

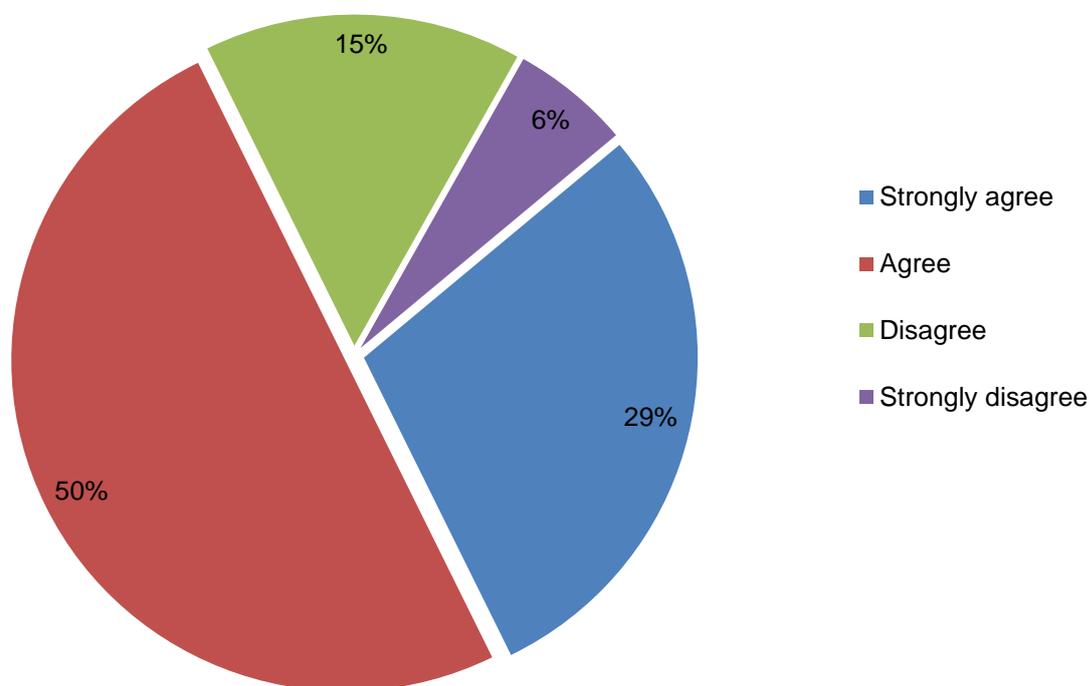
*"A bit more leeway on word counts: I of course understand the need for them but it can be quite restrictive, particularly when making the case for a large and complex project. At times I worry that the meaning suffers as a result of the amount of trimming that is necessary to fit within the restrictions."*

Whilst representing a mixed range of opinions, many of these comments seem to reflect a feeling of pressure to secure funding – often with additional constraints in terms of staffing and organisational capacity (see also section 6). Themes two and three in particular are similar to one another in the sense that respondents feel that applying to Youth Music for funding requires a lot of them. However, there is a split in respondents’ opinions of whether these requirements are justified or not: some feel that Youth Music is asking too much, whilst others feel that the level of information and effort required in an application is suited to the amount of funding they are applying for. If Youth Music wishes to keep the application form in its current form, then it should consider what further support or training can be offered to applicants [Recommendation 1].

Some respondents report felt too restricted by the word limits on the application form, identifying a disparity between the amount of information requested, and the number of words allowed. This is consistent with findings in previous years, and as such Youth Music should consider whether the word counts can be increased in the application form, particularly for larger grant requests (including a benchmarking exercise with other funders) [Recommendation 2].

## 2.5 Feedback on unsuccessful applications

Figure six shows that 79% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the feedback they had received on unsuccessful applications has been useful to their organisation, whilst 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed.



**Figure 8: To what extent respondents agree that Youth Music’s feedback on unsuccessful applications was useful (n=52)**

Respondents were then given the option to comment on further on the feedback that they received. Of the 43 who chose to leave a comment about Youth Music’s feedback on their unsuccessful

application, 65% (n = 28) of the comments were positive, and often considered the feedback to be “thorough” and “useful”:

*“Feedback was thorough and helpful. The content of the application was addressed in detail with clear indications as to why the application had been declined.”*

*“We submitted two applications that were unsuccessful and have always as a company been able to talk frankly with the Foundation about why this was the case. Really appreciate the honesty”*

Those with less positive things to say (n=10) about the feedback given by Youth Music mainly tended to fall into one of two categories.

Some found the feedback too vague or generic:

*“I was informed that the application did not fulfil the duration criteria - that was all.”*

Others had more complex complaints, with some respondents expressing disappointment at addressing feedback in subsequent applications and still being unsuccessful, either due to harsh competition in the funding rounds, or new areas of improvement identified by the Youth Music team:

*“Feedback received asked for further detailed information that wouldn't have been possible to fit into a new stage 1 application if doing a complex bid. It could easily have been answered in a stage 2. There is a feeling that the feedback is less about what it says and more about levels of competition and other factors being used to decide the results that are not necessary made clear upfront. Feels less transparent than before so easy to feel less trusting of the system and the feedback. That's feels a shame, old system felt like it had more integrity.”*

*“We were unsuccessful first time, but were told it was a strong submission so submitted again and addressed the 2 relatively small issues raised in the feedback and then were rejected again, with new issues identified in the feedback which hadn't been raised the first time. It all felt like a huge waste of time.”*

As a rule, all Youth Music feedback identifies strengths *and* areas for improvement (even for applications that have received a very positive assessment) as the purpose of Youth Music providing feedback is to be constructive. The comments highlighted above suggest that Youth Music could be clearer about the reasons for rejection (e.g. competition / scope of work less of a priority in the portfolio balancing process) and areas for development [recommendation 3].

### 3. Youth Music's Outcomes Approach

Of the 89 respondents who answered the question, just over a quarter (n=23) had attended Youth Music's 'Measuring Outcomes, Demonstrating Impact' training day in January 2014, whilst the remaining 66 had not attended. Similarly, 24 people responded that they had attended the 'Measuring Outcomes, Doing Analysis and Reporting Evidence' training day in October 2014.

A further 73 out of the respondents chose to leave comments regarding their experience of using the Outcomes Approach – 62 (83%) of these were broadly positive, and mostly referred to the approach being useful in terms of project planning and organisational knowledge:

*“The Outcomes approach has been invaluable in developing our company and our future thinking. It has also been very instrumental in designing our approaches to evaluation. With the Option C application - we started with the outcomes in our planning and the was a very positive experience.”*

*“A very useful way to plan project activity whilst keeping the desired end result in mind and being able to demonstrate [and] articulate what you have achieved. Takes some getting to grips with in terms of understanding the different elements and language but worth the effort.”*

Other respondents opted to tell us that the approach was familiar to their organisation already, having used a similar framework when working with other funders, or simply adopting similar approaches internally in their organisation:

*“We have been using it for many years inspired originally by the Big Lottery approach. We find it immensely useful as a theory of change approach.”*

*“An outcomes based approach is how I'm used to working. It makes really good sense and is a useful way of clarifying your thinking and shaping your plans”*

Of the 11 less positive comments made, several different themes emerged. The most common (n = 3) was that organisations did not see any benefit in using the approach:

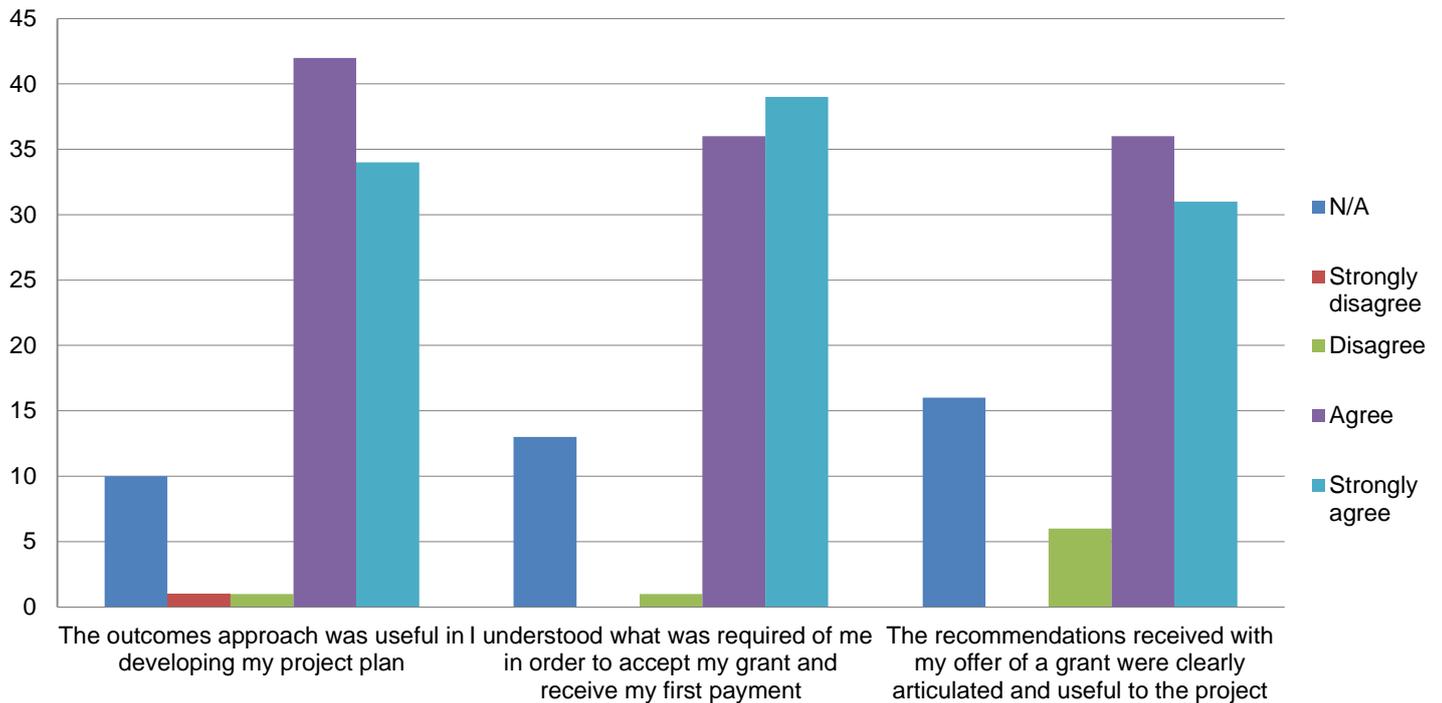
*“We understand there has to be accountability, and there has to be structure, but being honest a lot of this "outcomes approach" is... fake. It just looks good on paper.[...] We go along with it because most funders are now using an outcomes approach.”*

Others found the approach confusing (n = 2), too prescriptive (n = 2), or felt that the amount of evidence required of them was disproportionate (n = 2). Examples of these cases are given below.

*“This has been tricky in some ways as we initially had more outcomes than we really needed as we had figured every outcome. Feedback from staff allowed us to streamline the outcomes and made them easier to report on.”*

*“Forces you to shape projects to fit and tick boxes, sometimes inappropriately.”*

*“I think it is helpful to be rigorous about what we do - however again I feel like the amount of evidence that is required is overwhelming and unrealistic considering the amount of time there is.”*



**Figure 9: To what extent respondents agree with statements regarding their Youth Music grant (n=89)**

When asked whether “The outcomes approach was useful in developing my project plan” 76 out of 89 (85%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 9). From the comments above, it would appear that for those who do not find the outcomes approach useful, the problems could lie in the way the approach is being interpreted and implemented [Recommendation 4].

The next set of questions asked respondents to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with certain statements about their experiences of receiving a Youth Music grant. A further 79% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they understood what was required in order to accept a grant and receive the first payment, whilst 71% agreed or strongly agreed that the recommendations received with their grant offer were clearly articulated and useful to their project.

## 4. Reporting to Youth Music

88 respondents answered this question, 58% (n=51) of whom had submitted a report to Youth Music as part of their grant requirements. Those who had submitted a narrative report to Youth Music were taken to a page asking questions about the evaluation process and their opinions of it. 98% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the forms helped respondents to reflect on their project and their organisation's learning from it; 88% agreed or strongly agreed that the monitoring and evaluation information required by Youth Music is appropriate to their projects, and 84% agreed or strongly agreed that they understand how Youth Music uses the information that they submit.

In total, 21 respondents commented on this section of the survey. The main area for improvement identified through this set of questions related to Youth Music's online reporting system. Nine people disagreed that they found Youth Music's online reporting system straightforward to use and provided further comments:

Technical problems (n=9):

*"The online portal crashing sometimes. Finding the link to the online portal used to be frustrating but I think it got better."*

*"Forms given late / forms didn't work"*

A smaller number of comments related to confusion over what was required of grantholders (n=4):

*"It's not altogether clear when logging in where the relevant documents that need filling in are."*

One respondent also commented that the process was "daunting at first, but not so bad when you get into it", whilst the remaining four answers stated that they had not experienced problems with the reporting system.

The next section was dedicated to respondents' experiences of writing evaluation reports and using the Youth Music Quality Framework. 38 people provided further comments on their experiences of writing an evaluation report. Once again, these were categorised into positive (n = 32) and negative (n = 6) comments and coded against emergent themes. The most common responses were centred around the idea that the final evaluation report and the process of writing it were helpful for reflection (n=24). A lot of these answers were quite vague (e.g. "*It is certainly helpful in reflecting on your delivery*") whilst others were more specific:

*"It helps to reflect on the original aims and hoped for outcomes of the project and whether these were met. However, writing an evaluation report can also help to highlight areas of the project that didn't go as planned or did not happen, and help to identify reasons why."*

*"The evaluation reports are really key for reflecting on the project in a structured way and reviewing the delivery. They pull together the day to day monitoring and evaluation and go a bit deeper into looking at how the project is doing."*

A further five people made comments that they had incorporated elements of Youth Music's evaluation process into their own organisational processes:

*“Our organisation already has strong evaluation tools in place for all projects and we have been able to integrate the Youth Music evaluation tools into these, adding supplementary questions where required.”*

Finally, it should not go unnoticed that some also find the process enjoyable!

*“I enjoy it and found it an incredibly reflective experience as it brings a smile to your face remembering some of the positives.”*

The less positive comments about the experience were either of the opinion that the forms were too restrictive, or that there was too much information/time required to complete the evaluation forms thoroughly:

*“Personally I find the structure of reporting on each Outcome and Indicator in turn a little restrictive, with the result that for most projects I've then used the text from the YM report to create a more 'readable' project report. However, I can understand why you would want reporting by Outcome.”*

*“It can be very time consuming to provide triangulated evidence across 15 or more outcome indicators; and particularly when an indicator may relate to activity with children and young people, adults that work with them and setting representatives. It can be very useful to reflect on the distance travelled in order to achieve project outcomes and reflecting and learning from the challenges encountered along the way. It is useful to gather together the evidence and information collected for reportage purposes, as the timing of milestone reports makes you focus on getting that information collated; and it is useful when more than one staff member is involved in collating evidence so that information and knowledge is shared within the Company.”*

Some organisations also reported difficulties gathering evidence due to the constraints of working with young people in challenging circumstances (n=3).

*“We intended to create a safe space where these circumstances were not directly referenced and participants did not feel branded or singled out for their situation and instead felt part of an inclusive peer group. As such we found it difficult to find a way to ask about these specific backgrounds without it affecting the participants' experience, and were unable to provide the information.”*

This is a delicate issue that has been reported on in previous programmes. To help applicants navigate through tricky data collection issues, a bespoke resource was produced by Youth Music and its musical inclusion partners, available to download from [http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/sites/default/files/users/Collecting\\_information\\_from\\_young\\_people\\_final.pdf](http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/sites/default/files/users/Collecting_information_from_young_people_final.pdf)

## 5. Youth Music resources

### 5.1 Quality Framework

Respondents were asked to rate the Quality Framework on a scale of 1 to 5 (poor to excellent). 85 respondents answered, and the average rating was 4.07 out of 5. When invited to give further comments 35 respondents contributed. 30 of which were positive. Many discussed the usefulness and adaptability of the framework, and some reported using it in other areas of their work:

*“We are in the early stages of using this, but it is looking promising for providing a universal set of measurements for our programme and beyond.”*

*“We are working with a mixed cohort who have specific learning disabilities. Functioning roughly P6 - NC level 1/2. Plus some 'gifted and talented'. Our anticipated outcomes are 'not normal'! Many of our cohort can not self reflect because they lack the cognitive ability. So we are looking at specific things and use a lot of adapted, targeted observation. Some parts of the quality framework seem obvious but that's because I have led on a number of Youth Music projects since 1990's and feel very comfortable with a lot of it. It translate well as a baseline for good practice with a 'normal' mix of young musicians.”*

*“The quality framework is a really useful tool for assessing delivery, both in a quick manner - is it meeting these, how many is it meeting? - but also to support programme development, where particular criteria might be a focus for developments in approach, pedagogy, team training, etc.”*

Of the five who left less positive comments, the general feeling was that the resulting paperwork from the framework could, at times, be impractical to fill in during project sessions:

*“We have had to adapt it according to our groups. Not practicable in sessions to fill out so much feedback in one go and some of the questions are unclear but we have combined it with other relevant measures and find the process of observing highly useful.”*

*“It makes sense but is unwieldy. I expect it to generate a lot of paperwork”*  
[Recommendation 5]

Aside from these comments, and one claiming that the framework can be confusing to use, the reaction to the Quality Framework was overall positive. Several of the organisations who responded to the survey reported that they are using the framework in their own internal evaluations as well.

### 5.2 Youth Music publications

The next question asked respondents to rate the extent to which they agreed with statements regarding Youth Music's evidence based publications and resources (open to all respondents).

89 chose to answer: of these, 97% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “*I am aware that Youth Music produces publications based on evidence from project evaluation reports (such as impact reports and evidence reviews)*”. However, it is interesting to note that in a previous question, “*I understand how the information I submit is used by Youth Music*”, 8 people disagreed or strongly disagreed, whereas in this question, no one disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. This discrepancy might suggest that Youth Music need to be clearer when communicating how information from grantholders’ reports is used in its research and evaluations.

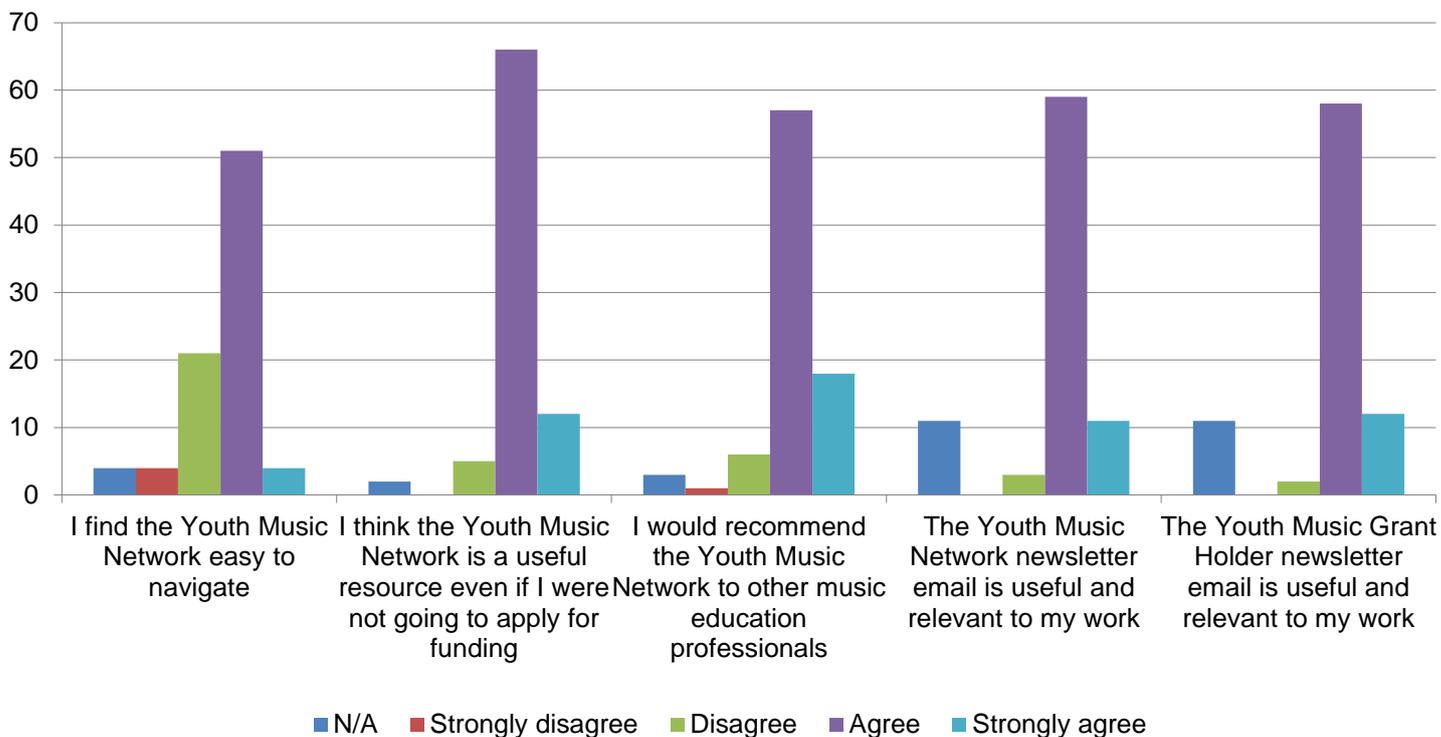
The remaining statements in this question again received largely positive responses, with 82% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that Youth Music’s evidence-based publications had informed their work, and that they had made use of Youth Music’s Quality Framework. A further 74% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had read some or all of Youth Music’s Impact Report 2013.

### **5.3 Youth Music Network**

When asked if they considered themselves to be active users of the Youth Music Network, 83 respondents answered, with 45 respondents (54%) stating ‘yes’, and 38 (46%) stating ‘no’.

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with five statements relating to the Youth Music Network, choosing between the options, “strongly agree”, “agree”, “disagree”, “strongly disagree” and “N/A” for non-users of the Network. Two respondents did not answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ but still answered this question in part or in full, making the response count for the question 85.

The statement most commonly agreed with was the second in the list, “I think the Youth Music Network is a useful resource even if I were not going to apply for funding”, with which 90% respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Similarly, 85% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the Youth Music Network to other music education professionals. The two statements regarding Youth Music Network/Grantholder newsletters were slightly lower due to more respondents answering that they were not applicable to them. Finally, one-quarter of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “I find the Youth Music Network easy to navigate”. The Youth Music Network is undergoing some updates to be launched towards the end of 2015, with the aim of improving the user experience. These results are illustrated in Figure 10 overleaf.



**Figure 10: Extent to which respondents agree with statements regarding the Youth Music Network (n=85)**

When asked about how the Youth Music Network was used, the most commonly-selected answer was to “download resources such as the Quality Framework” (76% of respondents). Other common responses from the list were “download research reports” (68%, n = 56), “search for Youth Music funded projects” (61%, n = 50), and “read blogs” (56%, n = 46). The four least popular uses of the Network were “participate in discussion groups” (17%, n = 14), “comment on blogs” (16%, n = 13), “advertise job vacancies” (16%, n = 13), and “search for jobs” (13%, n = 11). These results suggest that the Network is doing a good job as a resource bank, but that further active engagement from grantholders’ would enable it to be a more thriving online community. A further 19 respondents took up the option to leave additional comments, many reporting that a lack of time prevented fuller engagement:

*“It’s good for downloading monitoring and evaluation forms for example but, time/capacity is limited to spend lots of time on blogs/learning resources, for example - even if there is content there which may be of use, training as such requires capacity/time that is often limited even if the information is there to access.”*

*“I personally would use YMN much more if I had more time, we all would.”*

Some other comments illustrated that some users find the Network difficult to navigate:

*“I think it could be easier to use and specifically to search for information, and also easier to upload. It seems very clunky. And you can’t attach certain file types, such as PDFs.”*

*“It’s very full of interesting things and can be a bit overwhelming and hard to navigate.”*

Overall, the Youth Music Network was viewed as a useful resource, with several respondents providing positive comments to that effect:

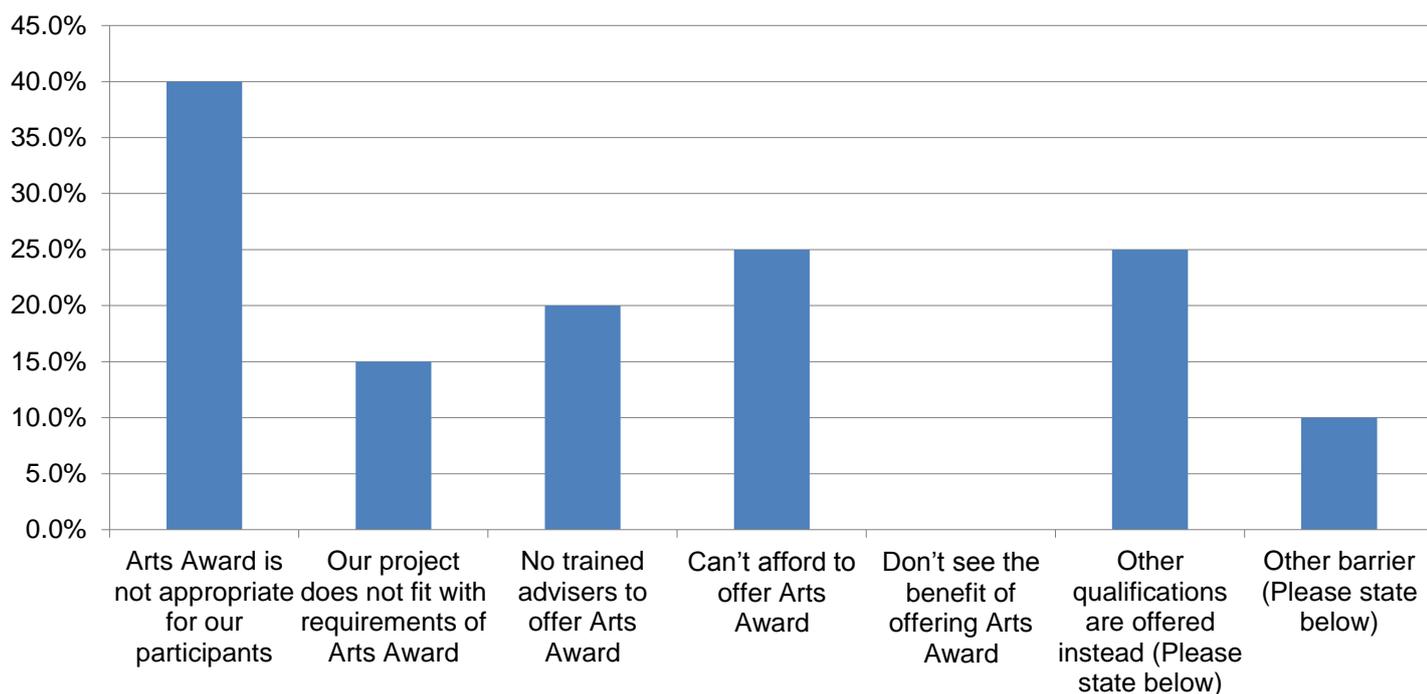
*“Just to keep it up! I think we’re going to get more and more out of it as our project progresses.”*

*“It is a good resource and we do not use it enough ....we will.”*

## 6. Youth Music and Arts Award

Youth Music projects should offer Arts Award, if it is appropriate. Youth Music has a partnership agreement with Trinity College in order to help increase the take-up and achievement of Arts Award across its portfolio of funded organisations. The following findings will therefore be important in helping to identify where support is required, and put in place appropriate strategies to support organisations who are delivering Arts Award.

Of 91 responses received, 73% (n = 66) stated that their organisation offered Arts Award. Of the 25 who answered 'no', 20 listed a number of barriers (figure 11).



**Figure 11: Barriers to offering Arts Award (n=20)**

The most popular response to the question was that Arts Award is not appropriate for the participants in that particular organisation's projects. The 14 comments received indicated this might be because of the age range of participants (e.g. Early Years projects working with very young children) or the challenging circumstances faced by the participants (e.g. projects working with young people with SEN/D).

*"Working with young children - mainly under 3 years old - on a relatively small scale. Maybe something to work towards in the future."*

*"Not appropriate for many of our participants who are SEN/disabled."*

Other common answers were that the organisations' financial or staffing capacities were not enough to offer the award,

*“We are considering this but as a small but very active organisation we have to consider resourcing issues (time and money).”*

*“We have two trained advisors but no capacity to offer this as all paid hours are used.”*

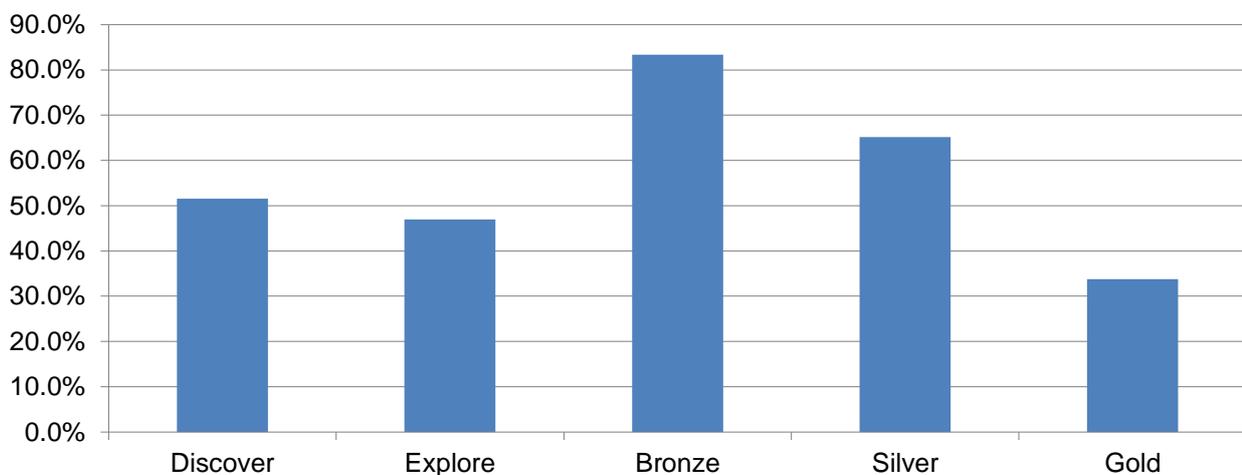
or because other awards and qualifications were offered instead,

*“We currently offer ABRSM music qualifications (grades and medals) and our project is largely structured in this manner”*

and some organisations were aware that Arts Award was being offered by other organisations or Hubs in their area, so an alternative accreditation was offered in order to avoid duplication:

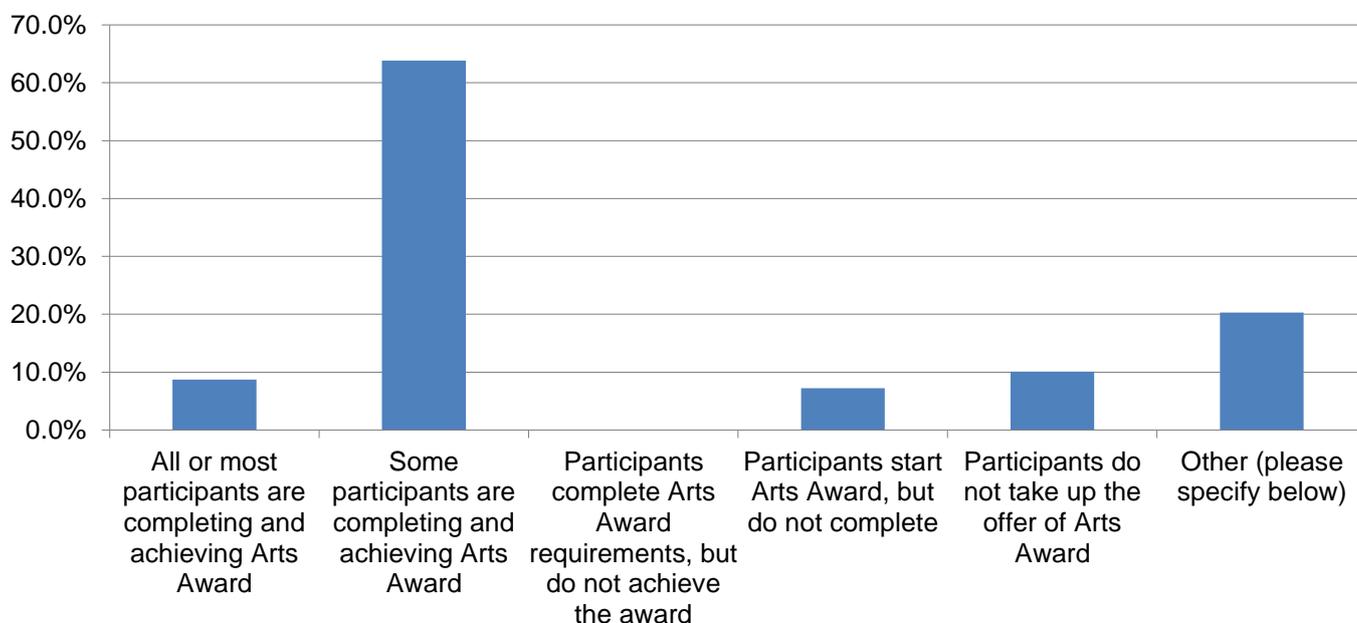
*“There is an offer of Arts Award provided by the Music Hub so we offer Rockscool as we deliver ESF funded training and this fits better with the delivery of this contract. We don't have the capacity to offer both without grant funding investment to build this in as an alternative accreditation plus it may not make sense given the focus on centralised music hubs already offering this and that it would be a duplication of what is already being delivered.”*

As for the 66 who do offer Arts Award, the most commonly offered level was Bronze (n = 55), whilst the least commonly offered was Gold (n = 23).



**Figure 12: Arts Award levels offered (n=66)**

When asked to describe their current situation with Arts Award, respondents were given several statements and asked to select which applied to them most accurately, before also being given the chance to make additional comments. Figure 12 below shows the extent to which respondents agreed with the different statements – the most popular being “Some participants are completing and achieving Arts Award” (n = 44) and the least popular being “Participants complete Arts Award requirements, but do not achieve the award” (n = 0).



**Figure 13: Statements describing organisations’ situations with Arts Award (n=66)**

A further 37 participants chose to give additional comments on the current situation of their organisation regarding Arts Award. Several stated that they had only recently begun offering the award, whilst, as in the previous question answered by those who do not offer it, others considered Arts Award inappropriate for their participants:

*“As we are in the early stages of the programme, some participants have just started arts award.”*

*“We have not started our activities yet. Our young musicians all have moderate to severe learning disabilities, but we're not sure of the individual levels just yet. We will offer the arts award to anyone who wants to do it and will endeavour to find a way in which they can complete it, whatever their disability. However, until we start we can't know how successful this will be.”*

Another common theme emerging from these comments, and those in the previous question, was that the organisation’s capacity (either funding-wise or staffing-wise) to run the programme was limited:

*“The Arts Award is something we are trying to embed in more of our outreach work. It fits very well with the work we are doing but the difficulty is planning time for portfolios to be compiled.”*

*“It is suitable for those that can work independently. Unfortunately we don't have the resources to mentor those that need more support for Arts Award. Our programme is much broader and Arts Awards is a minor part of it. We know how to do it, we value it but don't have the resources to support those who are less confident to get Arts award (we support them to do the arts/leadership work).”*

Ten percent of the 66 respondents reported that the participating young people were not interested in the offer of Arts Award, and several others left comments as follows:

*“The children are not into them but we have to persuade them and beg them to do them”*

*“Music Leaders need to spend time facilitating Arts Awards outside of the music sessions. This costs money and needs to be funded separately. Some participants see little value in Arts Awards and feel it is not relevant to them.”*

When asked what would help their organisation to develop its Arts Award delivery, 72 of the 111 respondents ranked eight different answers in priority ordering – 1 being the most helpful, and 8 being the least. The full list of statements respondents chose from is shown below, in their order as ranked by participants:

1. *Dedicated funding for Arts Award (e.g. Trinity College London's Access Fund) – 2.48 average rating*
2. *Bespoke support related to the challenging circumstances of young people we are working with – 3.32 average rating*
3. *Support from Youth Music – 4.38 average rating*
4. *Support from local Bridge organisation – 4.46 average rating*
5. *More Arts Award supporters in my local area – 4.63 average rating*
6. *More trained advisers – 4.67 average rating*
7. *More case studies and examples of projects like mine – 4.69 average rating*
8. *Support from Trinity College London – 5.61 average rating*

As the main barriers to/difficulties with delivering Arts Award pertain to time and money, Youth Music should be clearer about what support is available [Recommendation 6].

## 7. The operating context: Organisational needs and finances

When asked what the most pressing needs of their organisation were at the time of the survey going out (July 2015), 77 out of the 111 respondents chose to give an answer. Of these, over half the respondents (60%, n = 46) stated that their needs were primarily financial – related to sustainability of organisations, of programmes, and to facilitate progression opportunities for young people. Some highlighted the need to secure immediate and long term funding for sustainability, whilst others focused on the changing priorities of their local authority. Nonetheless, a pressing need to secure funding is evident in a significant number of examples:

*“Financial: trying to keep our building open for use and to continue provision of music-making activities & facilities for young people. We are based in an area of high multiple deprivation where 42% of young people under 16 are assessed as living in poverty.”*

*“Finding funding to help disadvantaged children to take part in large scale events to promote music making and then be able to continue learning to play an instrument or vocal lessons.”*

*“Sustaining our funding in the light of LA cuts. ensuring that children from low income families are able to reach a good level of development.”*

These responses are not dissimilar to those of previous years, and a separate report was written in July 2014 using data from past stakeholder surveys<sup>1</sup>.

Other pressing demands on organisations were listed, with the second most common response relating to the capacity of organisations to deliver their services. Organisations identified the need for more staff, time, and space capacity, and answers of this nature made up a further 23% (n = 18) of the responses:

*“Staffing or rather lack of it and funding to support our infrastructure as we are being increasingly stretched by the various demands of different funders who want more and more for their funding.”*

*“We are a small team, often over-stretched. More trained staff is a pressing need so that we can increase our output”*

*“Accommodation so we can develop our work experience and intern programme. Funding so we can continue to offer free workshops to young people aged 12 - 25years.”*

The final two themes emerging from the responses to this question, were the need for organisational development (9%, n = 7) and better partnerships and communication with other organisations (8%, n = 6):

*“We're a fairly new organisation but are growing rapidly - probably our most pressing needs relate to support and advice about how to do that sustainably .”*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/learning/blogs/carol-reid/%E2%80%9Cdepletion-referral-agencies-increase-demand-and-expectation-less-income-d>

*“to work closely with schools to recognise quality delivery and highlighting arts award and the benefits to our partners.”*

*“We need better links to local agencies supporting young people in need. We find it difficult to reach hard-to-reach young people.”*

### 7.1 Youth Music’s contribution

In order to better understand Youth Music’s role in supporting and enabling organisations to achieve their strategic objectives, we asked about the contribution of Youth Music funding to an organisation’s overall turnover (Figure 14), as well as perceptions about the importance of Youth Music funding in supporting the organisation’s aims (Figure 15). From the 80 responses received, over half (58%, n = 45) told us that Youth Music funding makes up between 1 and 10% of their overall turnover. Whilst Youth Music funding makes up a relatively small proportion of turnover for the majority of organisations surveyed, over two thirds (71%, n = 57) told us that Youth Music funding is either very important or vital to their organisational needs. This suggests that even small amounts or proportions of funding – from Youth Music or otherwise – are valued and needed by music and arts organisations.

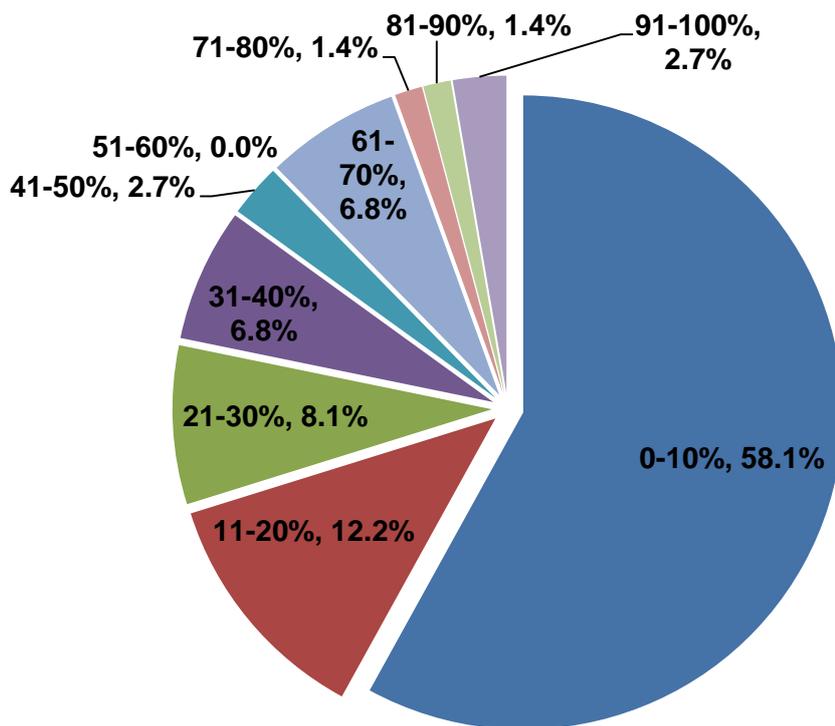
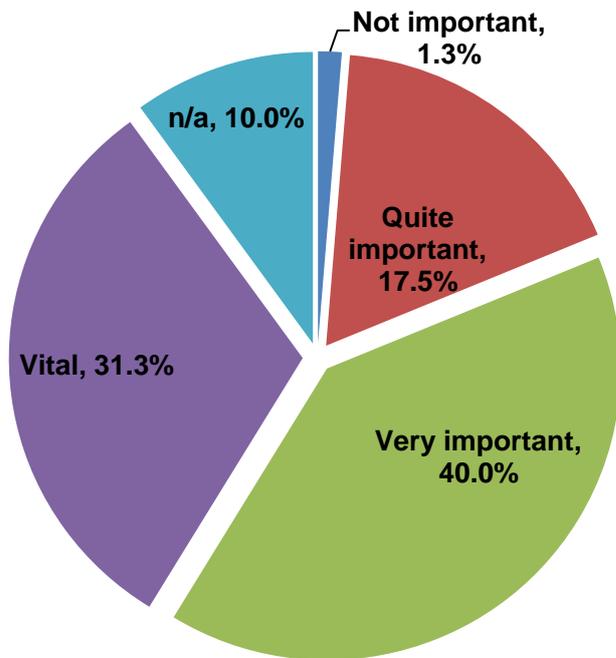


Figure 14: Pie chart of percentage of income from Youth Music funding (n=74)



**Figure 15: Pie chart of how important Youth Music funding is for enabling organisations (n=80)**

## 8. Closing comments

When asked what makes Youth Music different to other funders, 56 respondents chose to give an answer. The responses were coded into themes, and the most commonly stated answer, with 25 (40%) respondents either noting that Youth Music is different to other funders because of its specialist focus on music (n=20) or on children in challenging circumstances (n=5):

*“Youth Music is a significant funder that is absolutely vital for funding major education, community and participation programmes. Many funders are focused on social outcomes with music as a side product, however Youth Music values both equally, which enables more creativity. The scale of the grants also supports ambition and wider impact.”*

*“YM is a music specialist who matches our approach/ethos. Realistic money available for deep and meaningful work that has massive impact on CYP and communities. Very approachable, knowledgeable, understanding and flexible.”*

*“The focus on supporting young people in challenging circumstances was the main driver, the difficulties faced by the young people we support are not always attractive to funders.”*

The next most common theme (described by 30% (n = 19) of respondents) related to the organisation’s approachability and ethos, with some specific mentions about the relationship with staff:

*“It feels more like an equal partnership than other funders. We have the same values. It is a 2-way relationship, with someone available and willing to talk, feedback, help and comment on the work we are doing, in order to make sure it meets the aims of both funder and funded. I like the outcomes and evaluative approach.”*

*“Approachable, similar ethos, shared mission and vision to support music education.”*

*“YMF is approachable, its aims chime with ours, it allows us to do positive creative work with disadvantaged young people - that wouldn't happen without it. We are also proud to display to others that we are funded by YMF.”*

Another theme, which has been addressed in the preceding sections on evaluation and application, was the level of information required by Youth Music as what makes us different from other funders. Some saw this as a positive thing, allowing their organisations to develop and think critically and strategically, while others found it laborious, again referring to the opinion that the application and evaluation processes have become disproportionate to the amount of funding being awarded:

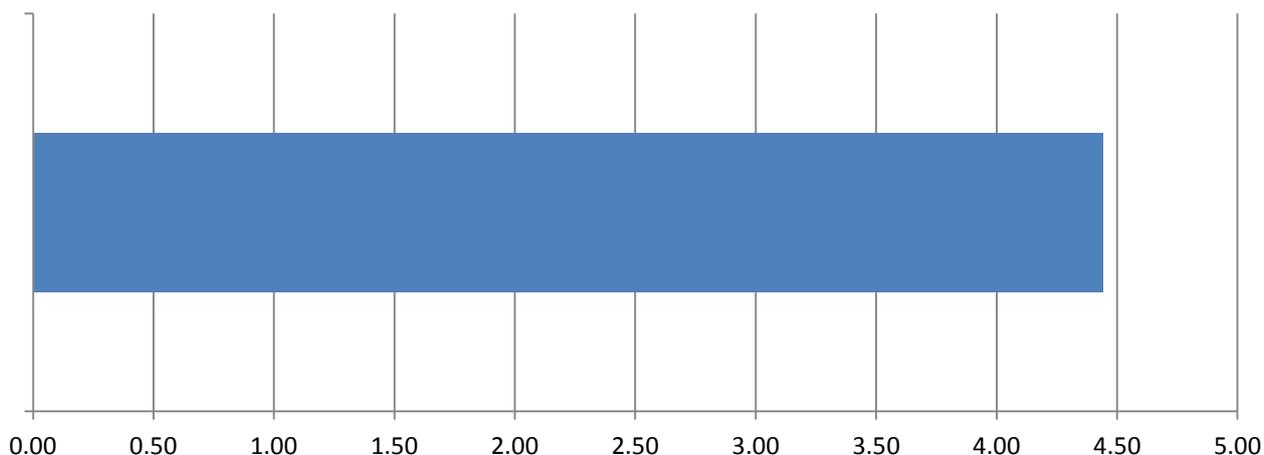
*“It's an intelligent and responsive funder which requires you to reflect on why and how you're working for young people's benefit.”*

One theme to emerge in the free comments section about Youth Music pertained to its role as a funder and the extent to which Youth Music funding is appropriate for driving strategic change: *“It used to be more the case that Youth Music invested at a level which allowed for strategic development as well as organisational development. Now youth music seems to be slicing this off whereas other funders are noticing the importance of funding in success rather than spreading themselves too thinly and not having an impact. This makes youth music less attractive as a strategic funder despite saying that was why the system changed recently. It used to be that youth music invested deeply in quality and training but this doesn't feel as true anymore. It is now asking a lot more and giving a lot less.”*

The content of this comment would imply that the respondent may be unaware of Youth Music's outcomes framework (which encourages strategic change through the workforce and organisational outcomes areas), and how it might be applied [Recommendation 7].

### 8.1 Overall rating of Youth Music

On the final page of questions, we asked respondents to give Youth Music an overall rating out of 5, 1 being very poor, 3 being average, and 5 being very good. Of the 111 survey respondents, 78 (70%) answered, and 53 gave comments. The overall average rating was 4.44, or 89% out of a possible 100.



**Figure 16: Youth Music's overall rating as a funder (n = 78).**

The additional comments were broadly positive (n = 44). In summary, the main themes were as follows:

- Youth Music's processes and ways of working (n = 11),  
*“The process is simple, the levels of funding are good, grant management is straightforward, there is support for grantees and a range of additional training and opportunities available, the fit to our objectives is good.”*
- Relationships with and support from Youth Music staff (n = 11),  
*“YM as a funder provide all the support necessary to organisations ensure their funds are used for the purposes intended; organisations are supported throughout planning,*

*delivery, evaluation and networked with others to share best practice etc YM staff are helpful and approachable”*

- The areas Youth Music funds (n = 10),

*“Very appropriated to the type projects we run and funding is targeted to the circumstances of the YP we work with”*

- Funding allows the organisation to continue their delivery (n = 8),

*“The recent grant has enabled us to achieve a sustainable future for our work with young children.”*

- General positive comments (n = 4):

*“You are BRILL!”*

Of the few more critical additional comments (n = 9), some themes corresponded with issues previously addressed in the report, such as Youth Music’s grant requirements being demanding:

*“The application process is so demanding and the amount the project demands you to deliver makes you feel that you are only doing this for love, dedication and pure service to humanity.”*

Whilst others were unclear why they had not been successful in securing a grant:

*“I can’t comment, we were unsuccessful in our application. We work in music, with young people... but we have never had a grant for that as a stated primary purpose.”*

*“Music is such an important area of creative development area for young people and we are working in an area where this is denied to many, Music Art and Sport are the main things that disappear from the curriculum for young people on part time timetables or those who are struggling. We are in an area where there are no major providers of music outside of schools and I would welcome discussing with you how we as a small and very localised organisation can increase our chances of accessing this funding.”*

*“We know the work we have done over many years is of tremendously high quality and has benefited hundreds of young people massively on many levels. This is even more important in an area of high multiple deprivation. We have based our stated aims on some research for Youth Music which I read years ago: We aim to remove barriers to participation. We were gutted we failed to secure a YM grant, and... puzzled.”*

The grant-making processes in place at Youth Music mean that applicants who are declined should not be ‘puzzled’ as to why they have not received a Youth Music grant, suggesting that some refinement to the feedback process is required [Recommendation 3].

## 8.2 Final comments

Finally, respondents were given the option to tell us anything they had not been able to in the survey. 17 respondents took up this option. These were coded in to three rough categories: application requirements (n = 5, 30%), suggestions (n = 6, 35%), and 'thanks' (n = 6, 35%).

The comments regarding application requirements are reflective of issues already discussed in the main part of this report so are not repeated here. Some of the suggestions or recommendations for improvement were as follows:

*"You need to reassess how you assess small grants. You need team members who visit the funded programmes of work to see first-hand who is youth led and achieving, and who is paying teams of bid writers to lie to you (which are many). One visit could have shown you how important our work is."*

*"We want to work with philanthropists as an additional income stream. It would be good to share learning on how to recruit and maintain these relationships, perhaps with a seminar or 2?"*

*"Please spend more time visiting your projects, meeting your grantees and better understanding what it is you are doing."*

Finally, others used the comments section to thank Youth Music for the support, and give positive feedback:

*"Thank you for our funding. We are spending it very carefully and hope to gain maximum benefit with careful input. We love our project and so do our young musicians."*

*"Refreshing to find a funder with so many boxes ticked i.e. flexible grant schemes, feedback to applicants, support from staff and high quality downloads e.g. quality framework. We feel that you have struck the right balance between being rigorous and helpful and are interested in improving project ideas and seeing them delivered"*

*"Thank you for your support over the years."*

## 9. Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** If Youth Music wishes to keep the application form in its current form, then it should consider what further support or training can be offered to applicants.

**Recommendation 2:** Youth Music should consider whether the word counts can be increased in the application form, particularly for larger grant requests (including a benchmarking exercise with other funders).

**Recommendation 3:** Youth Music should refine its feedback in order to be clearer about the reasons for rejection (e.g. competition / scope of work less of a priority in the portfolio balancing process) and areas for development. It should be made clear to grantholders who are declined on more than one occasion that further feedback can be provided in the form a telephone call.

**Recommendation 4:** Youth Music should consider offering further support in the outcomes approach for those who require it. This could come in the form of ‘measuring outcomes, demonstrating impact’ training, or outcomes and evidence “surgery” telephone calls following the award of a grant.

**Recommendation 5:** Youth Music should provide practical examples of how the quality framework can be used in ways that will minimise the need for additional paperwork.

**Recommendation 6:** As the main barriers to/difficulties with delivering Arts Award pertain to time and money, Youth Music should be clearer about what support is available, making it clear that Arts Award support time is a legitimate cost within grant applications and providing clear signposting to the Arts Award Access Fund from the Youth Music Network and grant application form.

**Recommendation 7:** Youth Music should consider producing some case studies of funded projects to exemplify the breadth of work within its portfolio, including programmes designed to effect strategic change.