Youth Music
Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey 2013
Findings

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Introduction

To support the fulfilment of its role as an intelligent funder embedded in the music education sector, each year The National Foundation for Youth Music carries out a stakeholder satisfaction survey. This enables us to gather anonymous feedback from a range of organisations and individuals whom encounter Youth Music in the course of their work. Analysis of the responses and recommendations allow us to adapt and improve our processes and respond to the ever-changing needs of the sector.

Before this survey (March 2013), the most recent survey was carried out in December 2011, soon after the closing date for the first round of the new funding model – the Youth Music Programme. This survey was carried out during the third round of this new funding programme – at a time when applicants and grantees are more familiar with the structure and aims of the programme.

The findings of the 2013 survey are presented in this document. Section one of the findings details stakeholders' experience of getting in touch with Youth Music. Section two relates to the application process – the application form and supporting documents as well as feedback received on unsuccessful applications. Section three was targeted at grant holders, asking them about their experience of accepting and managing a grant. Section four relates to evaluation and research including Youth Music's research publications and use of grant holder monitoring information. Section five details stakeholders' views on the structure and criteria of the funding programme (the Youth Music Programme). Section six is about Youth Music's sector facing, practice sharing website, the Youth Music Network. Section seven details the responses to two final questions.

Method and respondent information

An online survey was compiled, consisting of 25 questions drawn from across the departments of Youth Music (Grants and Learning, Communications, Fundraising and Operations). A mixture of closed and open questions were used. It was anticipated that the survey would have taken a maximum of 15 minutes to complete.

The survey was distributed to grant-holders and applicants to the Youth Music Programme: a total of 517 organisations were invited to complete it. The survey was initially included in the Youth Music grant-holder newsletter and then also sent to a distribution list of unsuccessful applicants. Youth Music grant-holders were sent a follow up email directly from their Youth Music Grants Officer. The entire distribution list was sent a reminder two days before the survey closed.

The survey was open for three weeks. 117 organisations completed the survey – a response rate of 23%. This is considered a large enough sample to make firm inferences from the total population invited to take part.

The results were collected online. Quantitative responses were analysed using frequency and proportion, with some cross-tabulation between responses. In order to identify trends, qualitative responses were coded thematically.

73% of respondents were successful in their applications to Youth Music. It should therefore be borne in mind that there is a potential for a bias towards a favourable view of Youth Music.

As Figure 1 shows, 38% of respondents defined themselves as Registered Charities, 15% of respondents represented Local Authorities or Music Services, and 15% represented

Voluntary or Community Organisations – usually small organisations which are not registered with a body such as the Charity Commission or Companies House.
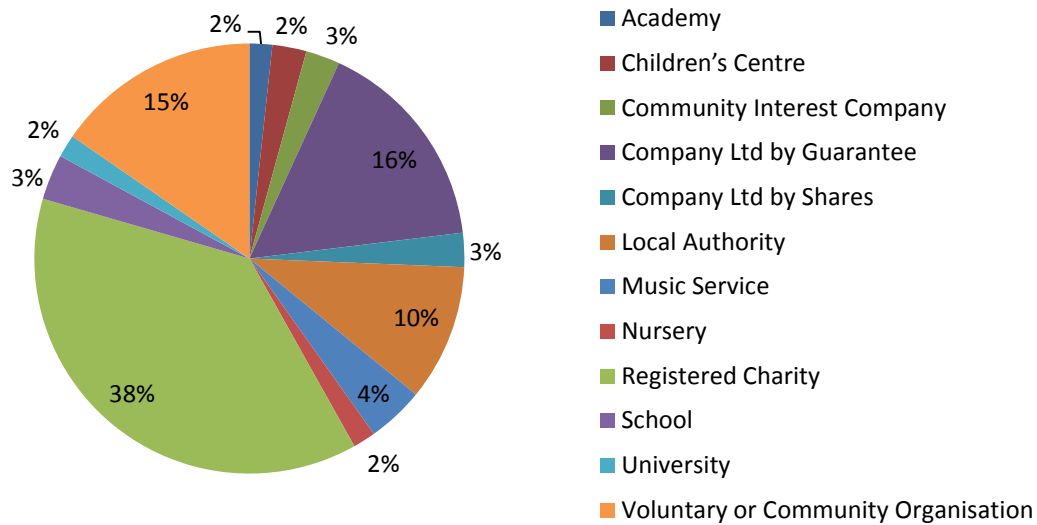
Figure 1. Respondents by organisation type (n=117)

Figure 2 shows the range of sizes of organisation that completed the survey. 31% represented organisations with a turnover of under £100,000 and 26% had a turnover of more than £1million.

The differences between the operational structures of organisations with a turnover of under £100,000 and over £10million are vast (from a one person outfit, or a volunteer project co-ordinator to a team of professional fundraisers) – and this figure demonstrates the need for our processes and supporting literature to be clear and accessible to all.
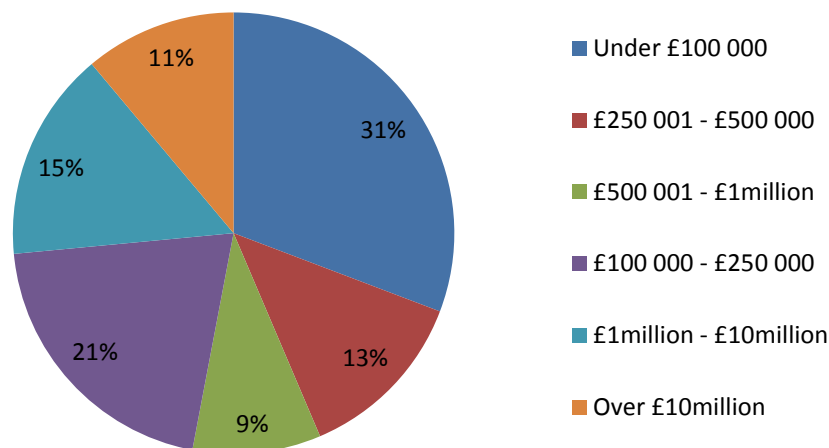
Figure 2. Respondents by organisation turnover (n=117)

Respondents were asked to describe where their organisation 'usually operated'. Figure 3 shows that responses have been gathered from across the country (including 7% that had a national remit), and that the findings of this survey will be able to support Youth Music's work as a charity for the whole of England.
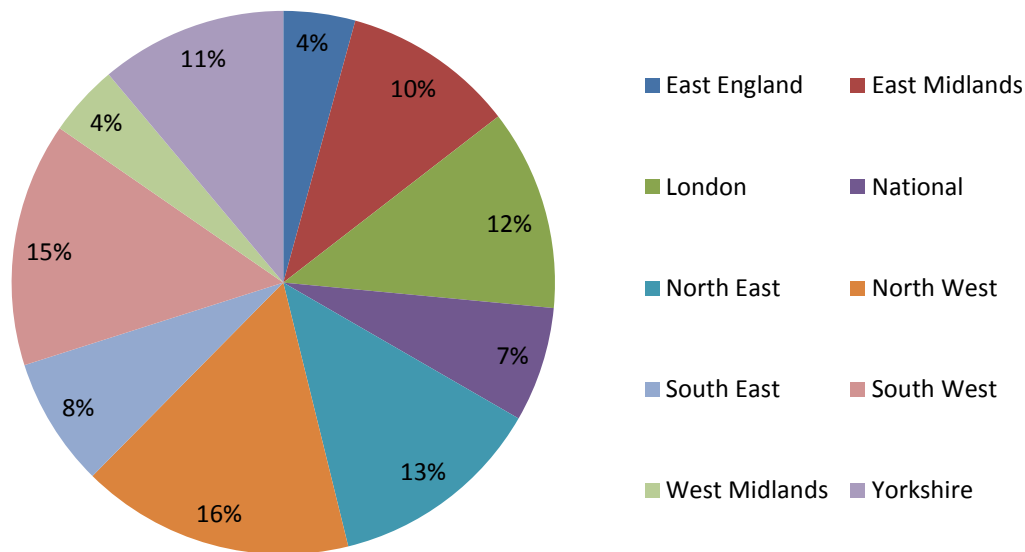
Figure 3. Respondents' area of operation (n=117)

When considering this geographical distribution of respondents in relation to Youth Music's current portfolio of grants, it seems that proportionally the responses reflect the current distribution – with a slight underrepresentation of the West Midlands and the South East and slight overrepresentation of the North West.

The findings of this survey are presented through the following seven sections:
1. Contacting Youth Music
2. Applying for funding
3. Grant holders
4. Evaluation and research
5. Youth Music Programme
6. Youth Music Network
7. Final Questions

1. Contacting Youth Music

When asked to rate their experience of getting in touch with Youth Music, by phone and by email, most respondents (76%) were satisfied that they had had a good experience. A slighter higher proportion (40%) rated their experience of *telephone* contact as very good compared with those who rated their experience with the *email* contact as very good (33%).

With 1 in 5 respondents stating that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement *I know how to get in touch with the relevant person at Youth Music to deal with my query,* it could be argued both that more needs to be done to communicate the structures and responsibilities of each member of staff, and that ways of getting in touch (the main telephone number and general enquiry email address) should be more easy to find. (Recommendation 1)

2. Applying for funding

**How did you hear about the Youth Music Programme**

In an open question asking 'how did you hear about Youth Music funding', 88 organisations gave responses that were coded into five categories.

1. Historic relationship with Youth Music
   'I have known about Youth Music since it began and keep an eye on the website'
2. Actively looking for funding
   'funding web search'
3. Word of mouth
   'Recommended to apply'
4. Youth Music direct communication
   'e-bulletin'
5. Through employer
   'Through a project that had already been carried out within the local authority'

The respondents were then asked how far in advance of the application deadline they had begun their application: 2% said less than two weeks before, 39% said between two and six weeks before and 59% said more than six weeks before. The majority of respondents began their applications with more time until the deadline, and the majority (73%) of respondents were successful – from this it would seem that beginning your application earlier is more likely to result in a successful application.

Guidance and other support documents

As figure 4 below shows, over 80% of respondents were satisfied with the guidance documents provided by Youth Music – these documents therefore seem to be working well for applicants. This is firmly supported by the responses to 'best aspect of the application process' below.

Guidance and Supporting Documents
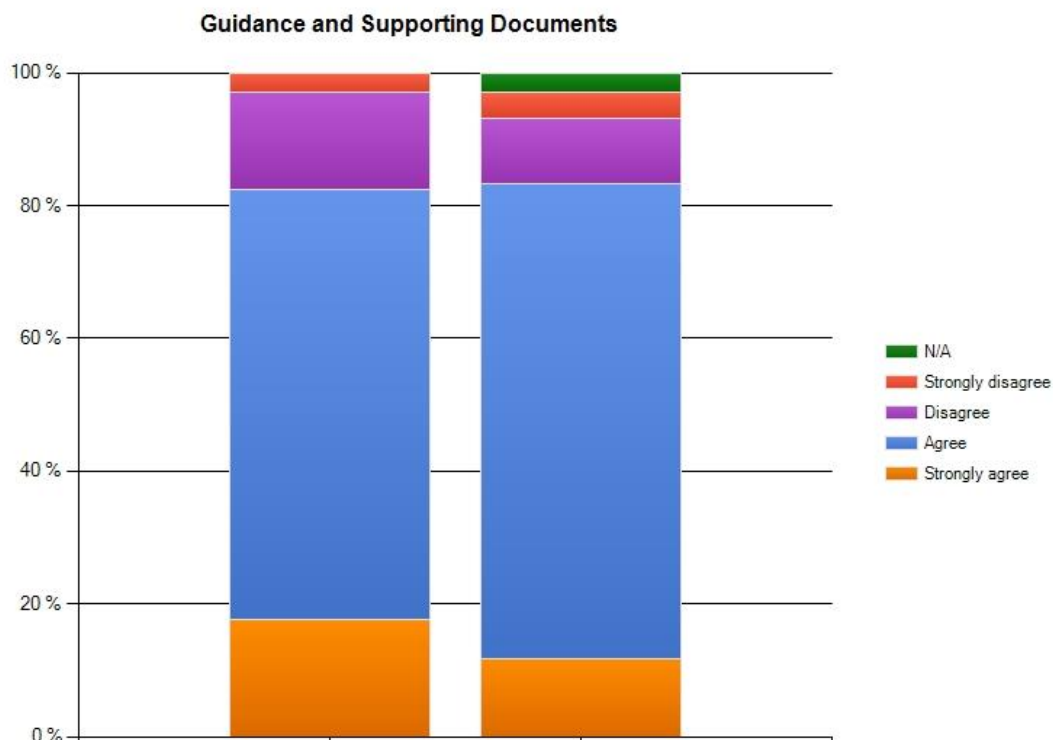
Figure 4 – 'The applicant guidance was easy to follow and useful for the application' (left column)
'I found the resources on the Youth Music Network useful in making my application' (right column)
(n=102)

Resources required for application

When asked whether they agreed with the statements: 'the level of detail required was proportionate to the amount of funding I was applying for' and 'the amount of time I spent on the application was appropriate to the amount of funding I was applying for', 102 organisations gave a response. Figures 5 and 6 below show that the majority of applicants felt that both were appropriate. The fact that a greater number of respondents were unhappy with the time than the level of detail required (37% compared to 31%) shows that we been relatively successful in communicating the need for the information required in the application form.

Proportionate detail

Strongly Agree 17%
Agree 52%
Disagree 19%
Strongly Disagree 12%

Proportionate time

Strongly Agree 16%
Agree 47%
Disagree 24%
Strongly Disagree 13%
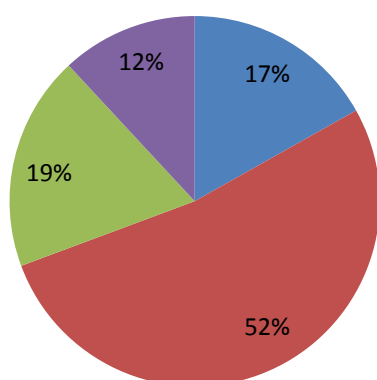
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
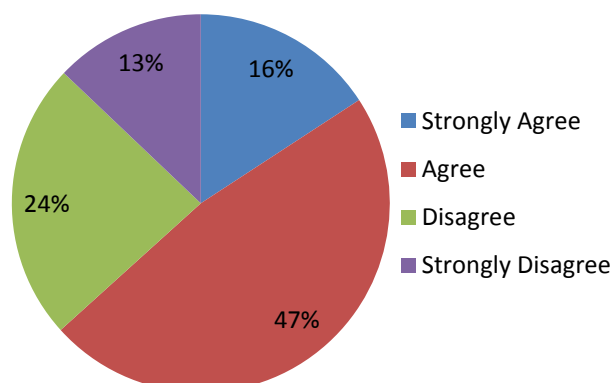
Figures 5 and 6 – showing whether applicants feel the level of detail required and amount of time spent on making an application felt proportionate to their request (n=102)

Best aspect of the application process

The open statement 'the best element of the application process was' gathered 77 responses. It has been possible to group these responses into five main categories: application form, guidance, programme structure, outcomes approach and contact with Youth Music staff.

Over 50% of responses stated that elements of the **application form itself** were the best aspect of the process:

- "*The application form was clear and we had no problems completing it.*"
- "*Overall the online forms are clear and well structured.*"
- "*Online forms, could be saved and returned to*"
- "*The budget form*"
- "*The layout and easy to follow requirements.*"

Youth Music's applicant **guidance notes** and other online support resources were mentioned by 14% of respondents.

- "*Clear guidance notes, lots of resources to use & easy to access these resources*"
- "*The useful tools online*"
- "*A clear sense of encouragement articulated in the written notes and guidance process*"
- "*Brilliant clear guidance notes*"

12% of the responses related to the **structure of the overall programme**, these refer to either the modular approach or the two stage process:

- "*The ability to answer the questions raised by the assessors [between stage one and stage two]*"
- "*Clear module definitions*"
- "*The questions and structures during both stages. It really made us think in great detail about what we wanted to do/objectives/outcomes etc. Some funding applications are incredibly light touch (even for large amounts of money) which I don't think does the funder or successful organisation any favours*"
- "*It's a two stage process. We were unsuccessful, so it was good not to have spent more time on the application than we did.*"

Youth Music's use of the **outcomes approach** was cited by 10% of respondents:
- *"I think that the outcomes based approach gives the right focus to planning from the start and I have been using this to develop our funding applications for other organisations as well."*
- *"What I learnt from the process of outcome-led planning - I was relatively new to applying for funding but I now feel confident of my capabilities because I structure my planning around project aims and objectives and expected outcomes."*

Having friendly, informed and timely **advice from Youth Music staff** formed the best aspect of the application process for 7% of respondents:
- *"Very good advice from the youth music team on certain sections."*
- *"The response to queries and availability of people to help with questions was exemplary."*

These five categories account for 75 of the 77 responses. The remaining two respondents stated:
- *"I like the rigour"*
- *"[The process] allowed us to make our case and to set what I consider professional standards of sessional pay'.*

Worst aspect of the application process

The survey then presented a second similar statement to respond to: 'if I could change one thing about the application process it would be', to which 81 organisations gave an answer.

Some suggestions in this vein were not specific enough to feed into the review of the programme, for example:
- *"Completely overhaul the organisation"*
- *"[I would change] the assessment process"*
- *"Start again and redesign it"*

For this reason, discussed below are the main points that were raised within areas that the authors consider there to be potential for change within the processes of the Youth Music Programme.

On the face of it, some areas presented responses from both sides of the same suggestion – for example, one respondent described that there was not enough scope within the application to describe the project fully, and another said they would prefer if less information was required in the form. When you examine these responses in the context of the other suggestions made – many similar themes appear.

A large number of respondents to this section mentioned that they were unhappy with the word limits imposed in the form or, similarly, that they felt their ability to secure funding would have been enhanced by being able to provide more information.
- *"We understand the need for word limits but the word limits for the outcome indicators were just too low. Much of the feedback we received might have been addressed if we'd been able to include a bit more detail."*
- *"The word count! Limitation is good in terms of getting us to think hard about what we want to achieve but for the amount of funding we were applying for it sometimes felt like we didn't have the opportunity to completely justify why it's so important for us."*

A final quote to demonstrate this also leads into the next main theme of responses.

- *"Increased word limits in some areas dependent on the number of modules being applied for. E.g. if the application is for 1 module and £15k the form is fine. If applying for 5 modules and £200k the form is too limiting and there is not enough space to adequately describe plans."*

In this vein, a few respondents suggested that a positive change would be to require different levels of information for different levels of funding requested (supported by the 31% of respondents -shown on page 7- who feel that information required is not proportionate to the amount of funding being applied for). (Recommendation 2)
- *"less information required for small grants"*
- *"The level of detail required would be proportionate to the amount of funding I was applying for and wouldn't be so time consuming"*
- *"The sheer amount of detail and supporting documentation required. It seemed to be the same whether you're applying for 15k or 200k. It is really labour intensive for a small organisation and there's no guarantee you'll be successful."*

While not linking it explicitly to the request amount, a few said they felt the process was currently too complex (Recommendation 3):
- *"Adapt it so that is a quicker process."*
- *"Make it simpler and the process easier to understand"*
- *"Initially quite confusing having so many different [modules]"*

Supplying less information when making an application was a theme that continued with two further suggestions:
- *"Simplify it for the… amateur community."*
- *"One stage application for [organisations with] previously successful applications."*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the main themes in response to this statement was a request for more personalised support in making applications, which was mentioned by nine separate organisations (12%). These ranged from praise for the former Regional Executive Officers to a request for more personalised feedback that would have enabled a resubmission of the application to have a greater chance of success. (Recommendation 4)
- *"Having sense of where the pockets of funding are likely to be going geographically before starting process."*
- *"The opportunity to talk through or submit an 'interest' application which [Youth Music] then look at and say yes apply or no this won't work. Something really short that simply outlines the project, it's aims and why we think you should fund it."*
- *"I would have appreciated greater guidance from Youth Music about appropriate timescales for project management and evaluation alongside appropriate pay-scales for staffing. This would have provided me and other newcomers to the process of planning projects of this scale with a benchmark to work from as I think I was unrealistic about some of this."*

Seven respondents highlighted issues specifically with the application budget form template:
- *"I found the budget forms a little confusing on both occasions and was unsure if I had filled it out correctly."*
- *"We had technical problems with the budget form both times we applied."*
- *"The budget spreadsheets are confusing and not appropriate to the budgeting systems of every kind of organisation."*

Difficulty with faulty and/or poorly designed templates will affect the good will of applicants. With many applicants saying they find the process long and laborious, running into technical issues within a required template (an easily fixed issue) which, if unaddressed would likely result in applicants being further unsatisfied with the process. (Recommendation 5)

To enable easier working between project partners, project staff and given the style of working of many applicants, five respondents shared the view that:

- *"It would be useful to have the option of downloading a word document with the questions and required attachments/supporting documents."* (Recommendation 6)

Some smaller scale changes were suggested, which should be straightforward considerations for alterations to the programme (Recommendation 7):

- *"Clearer guidance on what was required within the Risk Analysis form and Project delivery schedule (i.e. level of detail required)"*
- *"The log in for existing grant holders should be on the front web page."*
- *"Auto-responder emails received had errors in turn around dates, such as dates that had already passed"*
- *"[It would be good if] you could link your outcomes to indicators and to evidence yourself – e.g. upload a spread-sheet."*
- *"More information [available at stage one] about what would be required in stage 2"*
- Consider having *"more grants rounds per year"*

Feedback received from Youth Music

Figure 7 shows the responses to the statement *'from the feedback I received I was able to understand why the module application was declined'*. 50% of respondents were unable to understand why they were turned down, meaning if Youth Music wishes to continue to offer this function to applicants, this is clearly an area of the Youth Music Programme which needs to be reviewed. (Recommendation 8)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
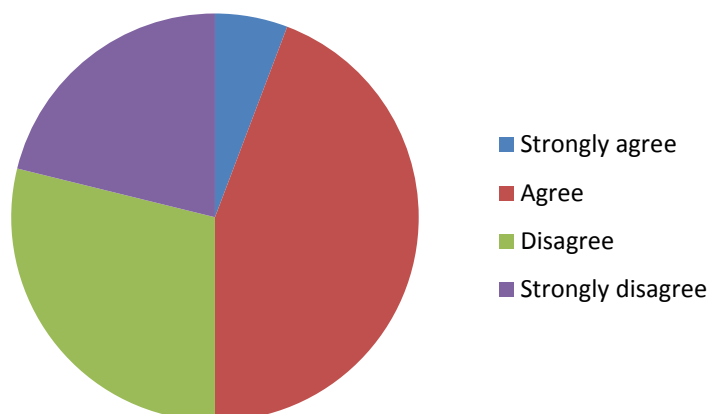
Figure 7 - responses to the statement 'from the feedback I received I was able to understand why the module application was declined' (n=61)

Respondents were asked 'is there anything else you would like to suggest relating to the feedback you received?' A handful of respondents (5 out of 24 responses) were satisfied with the feedback they had received, with two of these noting that the offer of a follow up phone call had been very useful:

- *"[Following our written feedback] we still needed to get further advice from Youth Music to go into more detail as to exactly what was required. Once we'd had a long feedback [phone call], we were able to gain a better sense of where we had gone wrong and how much more work we needed to do."*

Amongst respondents who felt their feedback could have been improved, there were three clear themes that emerged from responses.

Inconsistencies in feedback – particularly between multiple modules or between applications for the same project that had been submitted to multiple funding rounds.

- *"Reduce the level of inconsistency. Some declined at stage one applications have similar queries, feedback, recommendations… as those that have been invited to stage two."*
- *"Sometimes conflicting advice i.e. told in one round there wasn't enough wider evidence, then in following round having put wider evidence in was told it wasn't specific enough evidence."*
- *"If feedback is given to [an unsuccessful] Stage One application and addressed [for resubmission]… [that] application needs to be re-assessed by the same marker in order to insure consistency. Our Stage One application was given feedback, which we addressed in order to re-submit, only to be assessed by a new marker who then gave us a whole new set of feedback which we needed to address."*

More in-depth or comprehensive:
- *"We applied twice for a project. The second time around we fixed all feedback received but were rejected again - for reasons that were not raised the first time, which was a shame as we would have looked at those too."*
- *"More in depth if possible"*
- *"More context in order to place our success or failure in a regional/national context and understand the wider failure rate."*

Unconstructive feedback:
- *"I was told that our application was for such a small amount that we were better off applying elsewhere. I think that this should have been clearer in the initial information"*
- *"More advice on what would have made it successful."*
- *"5 points were listed in our feedback. 4 of these points were positive things which were good about the application. The negative feedback was something very minimal - nothing which ought to 'make or break' an application. The feedback needs to be much more specific and critical to be helpful."*
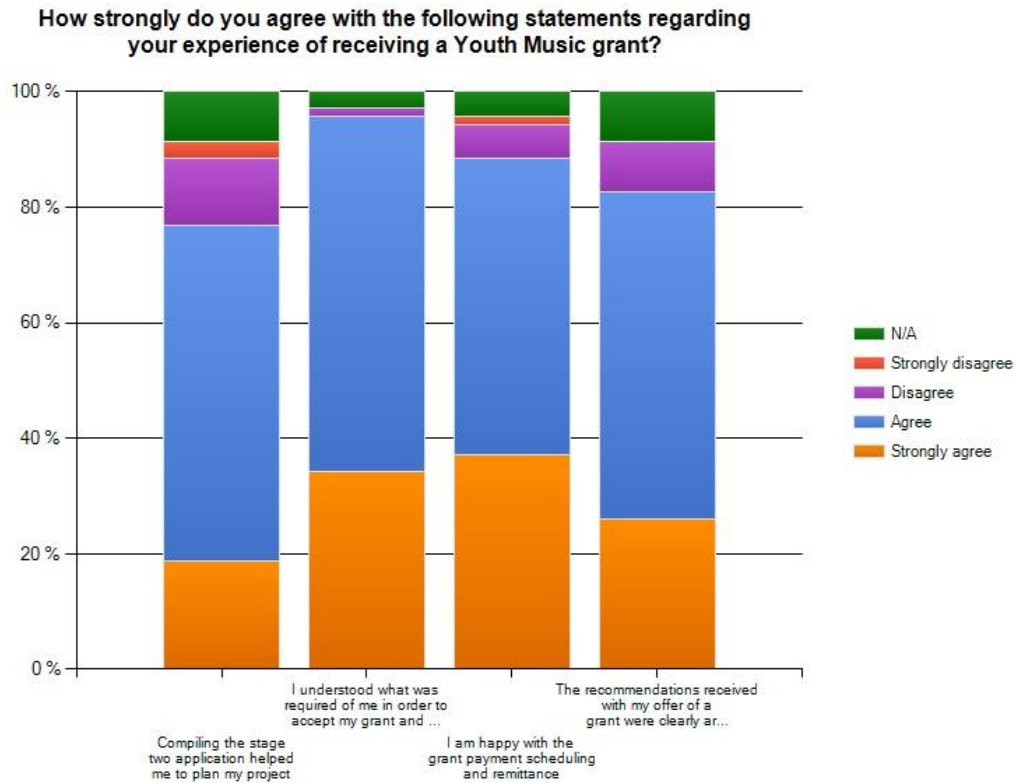
It is interesting to note that one respondent felt that feedback received from Youth Music had improved over successive application rounds:
- *"The feedback has improved and we hope to see those improvements continued."*

3. Grant holders

75 of the respondents were successful in their funding application to Youth Music, and were asked a series of supplementary questions relating to their experience of holding a grant. 28 respondents were unsuccessful and 14 declined to tell us whether they had been successful.

The questions relating to being offered a grant had two areas of focus: how the requirements of Youth Music had impacted upon the project (*'compiling the stage two application helped me to plan my project'* and *'the recommendations received with my offer of a grant were clearly articulated and useful to the project'*), and whether the process of receiving a grant was clear and appropriate (*'I understood what was required of me in order to accept my grant and receive my first payment'* and *'I am happy with the grant payment scheduling and remittance'*). As figure 8 below shows – more than 80% of respondents found three of the four processes clear and useful to their project (second, third and fourth columns). 10 organisations (within the left column) said they felt that compiling the stage two application had not helped them to plan the project, which represents the largest group that were not satisfied with each of these processes. (Recommendation 9)

How strongly do you agree with the following statements regarding your experience of receiving a Youth Music grant?

Figure 8. Questions for grant holders (n=70)

This group of grant-holders was then asked whether they had ever 'submitted a Youth Music milestone or evaluation report', of which around half (47%) said yes.

Three of the questions that followed related to whether Youth Music asks for the right information in milestone and evaluation reports: broadly speaking, whether the information required is appropriate for a) the project, b) the organisation and c) Youth Music.
Figure 9 shows that an overwhelming majority (92%) of respondents felt that the information required in evaluation reports are appropriate to their project – allowing them to accurately describe the activities and outcomes of the project.

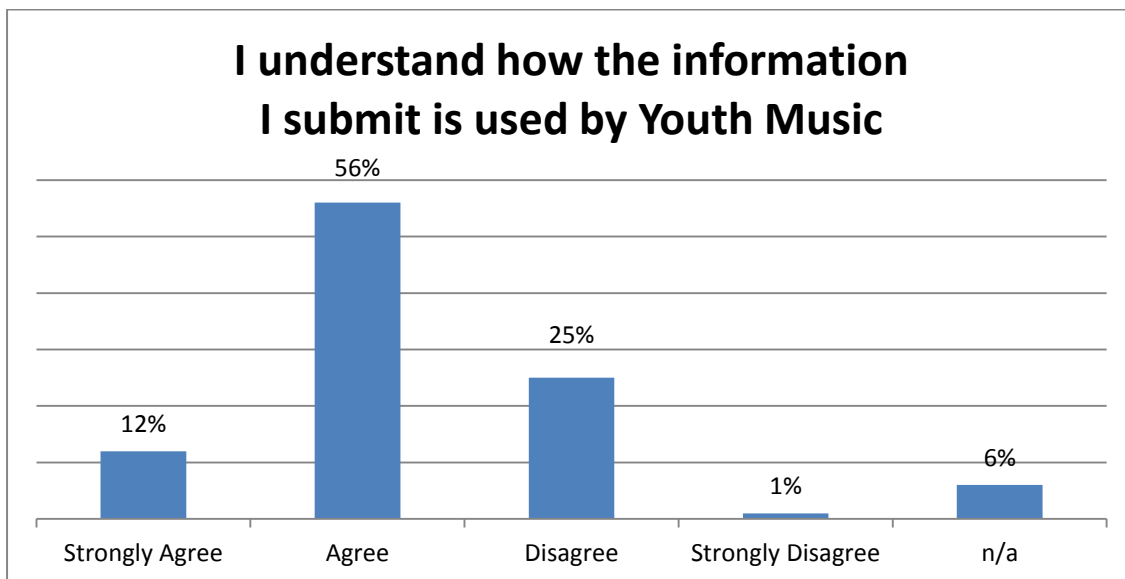The monitoring and evaluation information required by Youth Music is appropriate to my project
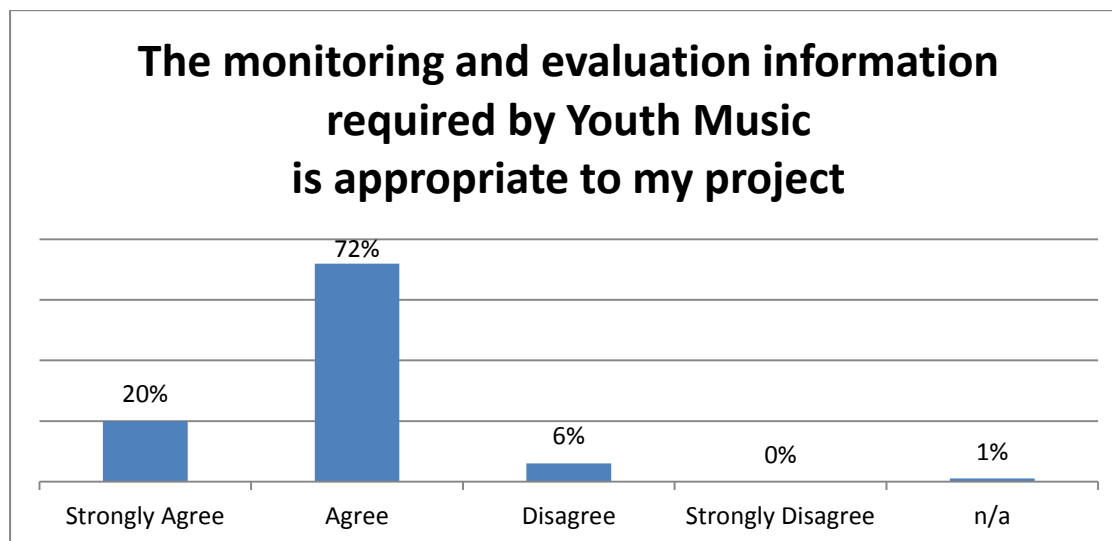
Figure 9 – is required information appropriate to the project? (n=69)

Figure 10 shows that almost as many respondents (77%) felt that the process of compiling the reports was useful to their organisation and allowed them to reflect on the learning from the project.

The report forms helped me to reflect on the project and my organisation's learning from it

- Strongly Agree: 15%
- Agree: 62%
- Disagree: 5%
- Strongly Disagree: 0%
- n/a: 18%

Figure 10 – is required information appropriate to the organisation? (n=69)

I understand how the information I submit is used by Youth Music

- Strongly Agree: 12%
- Agree: 56%
- Disagree: 25%
- Strongly Disagree: 1%
- n/a: 6%

Figure 11 – is the use of required information understood by the grant holder? (n=69)

Within in Figure 11 above, the majority of respondents agreed that they were aware that we publish research reports based on the information submitted through project reports. However, ¼ of respondents stated that they disagreed with this statement, showing that there is scope for Youth Music to further raise awareness of the publications produced from grant holder reports. (Recommendation 10)

93% of respondents agreed that, upon being offered a grant, they had '*immediately familiarised'* themselves with all monitoring and evaluation requirements. Given that Youth Music was the host of the survey, there is a chance some people answered this question the way they thought they ought to (i.e. tell the funder they did exactly what they should have). But given that 77% went on to state that the report forms allowed them to reflect on the project and their organisation's learning – it would suggest that the forms had been

consulted over the course of the project and had informed ongoing learning, rather than just at the end when they were due.

To conclude the Grant Holders section (completed by 75 grant holders), in response to the statement, *'I find Youth Music's online reporting system straightforward to use (this relates to the technical processes)',* only 10% said they would disagree, and none strongly disagreed. When asked to elaborate, this cohort of 10% raised the following issues (Recommendation 11):

        -The layout of the website is too complicated (n = 3)
        -There are errors within the budget template (n = 2)
        -It is not possible to upload statistical information as a spreadsheet (n = 1)
        -It is only possible to have one login to the online account (n = 1)

4. Evaluation and research

All respondents were asked to agree or disagree with two statements relating to Youth Music's evaluation processes.

1. I am aware that Youth Music produces publications based on evidence from project evaluation reports (such as evidence reviews)
2. Youth Music's evidence based resources and publications have informed my work

Figure 12 shows that of the 94 respondents who answered this question, 83% were aware that Youth Music produces evidence based publications, and 69% of respondents agreed that the research had informed their work. When cross-referenced with responses to a question asking if they were aware that Youth Music produced evidence based publications, 82% of the group that said they were aware also said Youth Music research had informed their work. However, without further questioning it is not possible to know whether those that agreed are referring to their work as a whole, or only to Youth Music funded work – which through it's applicant guidance and compulsory generic outcomes, heavily endorses the use of this evidence based research in project planning and practice review. As Figure 10 shows, 1 in 4 respondents said that Youth Music's evidence based resources had not informed their work, demonstrating the scope for further impact of these resources. (Recommendation 10)
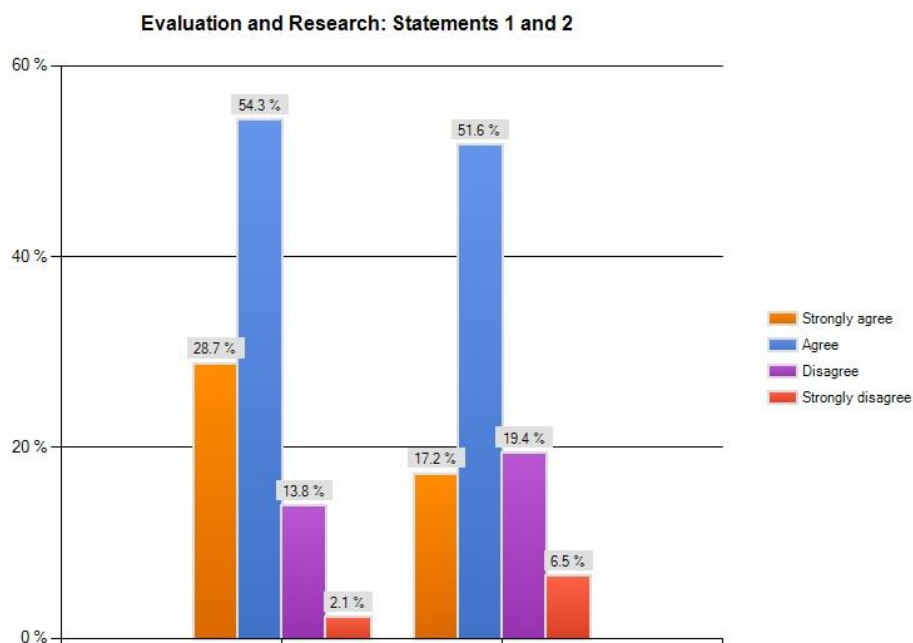
Figure 12 – Engagement with Youth Music's research publications (n=94)

Using Evaluation Report Findings

When asked, 'how else could Youth Music use information and insights it gains through grant-holder evaluation reports?' 32 organisations (27%) made suggestions. These fell into two categories: 1) To share findings more widely through events or a National conference; and 2) To use findings in 'strategic work' & 'advocacy'.[1]

As well as sharing national trends within findings, several respondents also expressed as desire to read and compare similar projects' evaluations, one grant-holder described: '*Being able to read evaluation reports of other projects would really help my work.*'

It was also mentioned that the work Youth Music already does in sharing its expertise in the processes of evaluating is valuable, *'the evaluation training days you do… are great'.* (Recommendation 12)

Another large proportion of applicants and grantees thought that Youth Music could utilise findings for strategic or advocacy work, for example through '*National campaigns to illustrate the impact of music education to a wider audience'* and '*campaigning to government'.* It is worth noting that these national and strategic suggestions indicate that respondents have made the connection between their project reporting to Youth Music and wider impact on the music education landscape.

In a slightly unrelated suggestion, there was a request that our staff visit more projects. While this is not strictly a response to this question, there might be scope for formal findings from our project visits to contribute to the findings of grant holder reports. (Recommendation 13)

5. Youth Music Programme

Outcomes

Youth Music is an outcomes funder, "at the heart of the Youth Music Programme is a commitment to achieving positive outcomes for children and young people and their long-term engagement in music making."[2] Each of Youth Music's funding modules has set outcomes that the project must work towards. 82 respondents (88.2%) agreed or strongly agreed that "*the outcomes that Youth Music specified for the module I applied for are relevant to the target group of my work"* (no respondents strongly disagreed) – see figure 13.

When asked if they would have preferred to be able to set their own outcomes for all the modules on offer, just over half of the respondents (53%) disagreed – showing their satisfaction with Youth Music's set outcomes. 27% agreed (and 15% strongly agreed) that they would have preferred to have more control over the outcomes. (Recommendation 14)

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[1] Several respondents used this section to make suggestions for changes to the evaluation report template (these have been included in the Grant Holder section) or to make comments on the application process (these have been included in the Application Process section) – which in itself reflects a lack of understanding of with the precise cycle of information within the Youth Music evaluation processes. (Recommendation 10)
[2] http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/funding/what-youth-music-programme
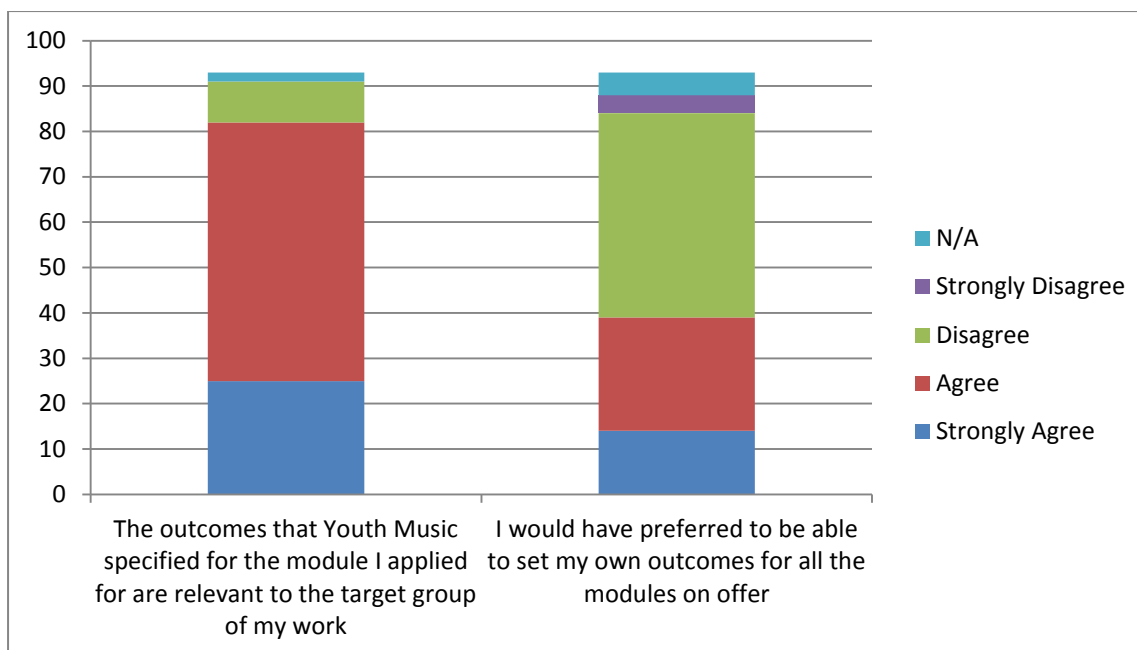
Figure 13 – Applicant satisfaction with Youth Music set outcomes (n=93)

The Youth Music Programme and the sector

Of the respondents to the question 'how far do you agree that the Youth Music Programme as a whole supports and responds well to the music education sector, 23% strongly agreed and 57% agreed (80% in total).

For those who were highly aware that Youth Music produces publications based on evidence from project evaluation reports (such as evidence reviews)[3], 89% felt that the programme supports the sector well. This may suggest that continuing to publish learning from project evaluations will strengthen perceptions of what Youth Music contributes to the music education sector. (Recommendation 15)

New Module Suggestions

When asked in an open question to suggest additional modules they would like to see offered by Youth Music 33 individual organisations responded. 36% of these respondents commented that they were totally satisfied with the current range of modules. *"I think the modules on offer are good and comprehensive as there is always open programme of you don't fit the others."* In support of this finding, 80 out of 93 respondents (86%) either agreed or strongly agreed that '*the modules on offer in the Youth Music Programme are appropriate and relevant to the work I want to do'*.

It would seem that several of the responses to this question stemmed from a misunderstanding of Youth Music's current criteria or could be fulfilled with additional guidance rather than a new module. For example: *"development of music leaders skills embedded into projects",* "*I might like to see the definitions of vulnerable and/or challenging youth extended, e.g. it previously included those newly arrived in the UK*", and *"a module for all children, not just those in challenging circumstances".* (Recommendation 16)

Other suggestions which were made more than once: (Recommendation 17)
Core funding (9%): "*Support for organisational/core/staff costs as project funding can be easily raised elsewhere. Support for capacity building*" and "*organisational development modules*".

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[3] See page 14

Early Years (9%): "*An early years module which is not stipulated to be 'elevated risk'*" and "*more early years options.*"

Progression (12%): "*progression routes for young people in the whole music based industry including arts leadership*" and "*a more careers based module to help develop pathways into employment, focusing on music technology, events management, teaching etc.*"

Suggestions for altered criteria that were each made by one respondent were:
- Cross art form (e.g. music and film)
- Funding for one off events
- Follow up funding: *"the roll-out of already successful programmes on a larger scale, identifying successful work and helping to roll this out to other partners/organisations"*
- A module aimed specifically at children and young people in rural areas

6. Youth Music Network

The Youth Music Network[4] is a free online community for people who work in and around music education projects in the UK. It is a space for professionals to access and share a huge range of music education resources. It's also the main gateway for accessing Youth Music funding.

Despite having all applied for funding through this website[5], only 40% of respondents considered themselves to be 'active users' of the Youth Music Network.

When asked to agree or disagree with the statement *I find the Youth Music Network easy to navigate,* 54% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. But concurrently 38% disagreed (almost the same percentage of the cohort that described themselves as active users). This is a high percentage to find navigation difficult, and it is recommended that Youth Music investigate improving navigation of the Youth Music Network in order to make this free resource more useful to the sector. (Recommendation 18)
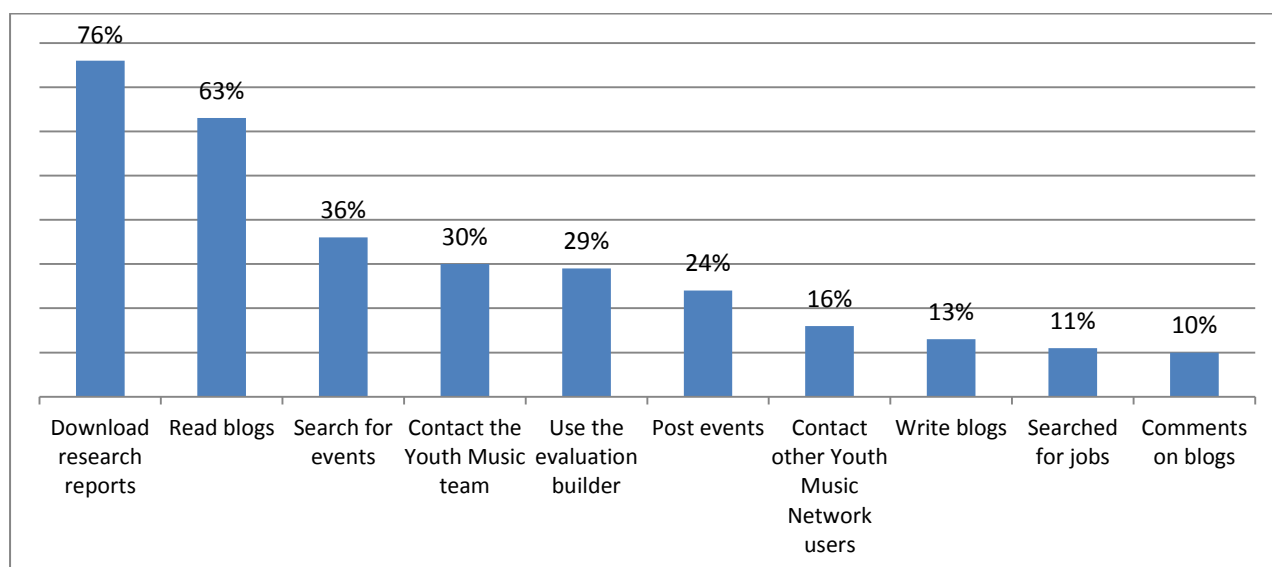

Figure 14. What do you use the Youth Music Network for? (n=80)

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[4] www.youthmusic.org.uk/network
[5] The survey was distributed to grant-holders and applicants to the Youth Music Programme – see page 3

In support of our work in encouraging comprehensive evaluation of music projects, 26% of respondents had used evaluation builder and 76% had downloaded research reports – which suggests that the Network supports well our 'learning' function - to support good evaluation practices, measuring outcomes and demonstrating impact

Of the 80 respondents: 63% had read blogs, 13% had written blogs and just 10% had commented on blogs. This represents a disconnect between passive review of the information on the Network and active contribution to the content. While this may be stimulating discussion in practitioners' 'offline' lives, it would benefit Youth Music for it to be easier and more strongly encouraged for users to contribute their comments to the Network. (Recommendation 19)

Similarly, 30% of respondents had used the Youth Music Network to contact us, but only 16% had used it to contact other users. If we intend for the Youth Music Network to be of and for the music education sector, then making contact with other stakeholders should be more straightforward and encouraged. (Recommendation 20)

This slightly deeper analysis of the numbers might shed some light on the initial figure (only 40%) of respondents who considered themselves active users: that people perhaps do not consider themselves active if they do not contribute.

For Youth Music as a thought leader and proponent of practice sharing, and given the high numbers of respondents engaging with the evaluation and practice sharing elements of the Network, it is encouraging that 71% of respondents agreed that '*the Youth Music Network is a useful resource even if I were not going to apply for funding*' and 68% '*would recommend the Youth Music Network to other music education professionals*'. (Recommendation 21)

7. Final Questions

The survey concluded with two open questions. '*What do you think Youth Music should be doing to support excellent music making for all children and young people?*' and '*finally, you can use this space to provide any additional comments*'.[6]

What else could Youth Music do?

73 organisations responded to this question, the three main types of response were a) suggestions for additional activities which related to national strategy, b) relatively small suggestions for changes to the current activities of Youth Music and c) endorsement of Youth Music's current activities.

14% suggested that Youth Music should take steps to have more of a role in influencing national agendas.
  – *"Keep making the case for the value of music for all young people as a means of personal, social and emotional development. The National Music Plan and the proposed Music Educator Qualification are heavily weighted towards musical skills development - music offers young people so much more... Championing this aspect of music making should be Youth Music's unique selling point."*

Nearly half of those who suggested national activities mentioned Music Education Hubs, and the role Youth Music might play in supporting their work. (Recommendation 22)
  – *"I think you could maybe step in and support the Music Hubs to work effectively and understand what their role is."*

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[6] To ensure the intended meaning of the respondent is captured some relatively long quotes are included in this section.

- *"Connecting directly nationally with other major stakeholders in music and music education - DfES, Music Hubs, Bridge Orgs, Schools, NAME, DCMS and using those connections to the benefit of those delivering [Youth Music] programmes."*

The fact that within their responses, organisations made the link between their local practice and Youth Music's national position shows that Youth Music is recognised for its role as the bridge between those spheres. One respondent mentioned this link explicitly:

- *"The difficulty from ground level is how to reconcile the long term needs of young people with the inherent short term nature of the funding system and how to raise awareness of the success stories in the wider world… [A] top level campaign to ensure the real life case studies… are brought to life more clearly in the eyes of decision makers and people in a position to help extend and safeguard musical opportunities… I would suggest that such a push must come from Youth Music centrally as… organisations funded by Youth Music are not always politically well-connected."*

Linked to national suggestions were requests for greater local support, including more specific mapping of projects, support for music leaders to train and develop, brokering of relationships between projects to encourage "*cross-module collaboration*", one respondent said losing the Regional Executive Officer has led them to feel "*disconnected*", and there were requests for national and regional conferences *"so people can come together and learn from good practice, share ideas and network with like-minded organisations - in this climate we all need to pull together rather than existing or struggling independently."* (Recommendation 23)

Two respondents suggested alterations to the Youth Music Network (Recommendation 24):

- *"Your strategic objectives and your specific role within the sector… could perhaps be communicated better via… the Youth Music Network."*
- *"I think the [Youth Music] Network would work even better if engagement with it wasn't so proactive… I think perhaps if multiple new blogs, discussion topics… came direct to my inbox, I'd be far more likely to engage with them. I do receive the Newsletters… but again these are multi-facetted documents so you need to scan the whole thing to find the bits you want to read which (if you're a slow reader like me!) sometimes I don't do!"*

It was suggested that Youth Music needs to publicise the Youth Music Network more widely, and also to use resources to *"promote the work of grant holders using media other than the [Youth Music] Network".*

Youth Music's generic outcomes require that organisations have some activities that contribute to sharing effective practice[7], and three respondents suggested that we could do more to centrally spotlight excellent practice (Recommendation 25):

- *"Youth Music should be identifying excellent practice at all levels (strategic planning, delivery of music programmes, monitoring and evaluations of work, effective partnerships) and then helping the sector to find ways of sharing this practice and developing the skills of those individuals and organisations in need of development."*

Suggestions for alterations to the programme included:

- Youth Music to consider including an aspect of youth consultation in its work
- Protect Youth Music's focus on early years, *"we are often overlooked and not seen to be as important as primary and secondary - it's great that Youth Music has a specific focus"*

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[7] All Youth Music Grant holders are required to work towards the intended outcome *"To embed learning and effective practice in host and partner organisations and share practice beyond the project."*

- Work to ensure funding is awarded to large and small organisations
- Consider ways to provide on-going funding for organisations
- Work to fund a wide range of musics, especially less mainstream genres
- Make the assessment process more transparent
- Consider requiring that grant holders work together on evaluating their projects
- *"Champion and support volunteer projects as opposed to a focus on paid professionals"*
- And several respondents mentioned "supporting sustainable, long term projects that might already be in place and not just new projects and ideas"

And finally, review the application process and supporting documents bearing in mind that *"the documents are LONG. That ensures that only the most dedicated, literate [and] thorough… people commit to an application, but I suspect you're missing out on wonderful practitioners who don't do forms."* (Recommendation 2)

Three respondents suggested that Youth Music staff should make more visits to projects, "*to get first-hand experience of what they do*". This suggestion was often tinged with a feeling that 'other' organisations that have secured funding should be checked up on, to ensure the projects are being done well: *"[Youth Music should] look a little more deeply into the actual work that organisations carry out... perhaps more [spontaneous] spot checks [to] funded organisations*". (Recommendation 13)

5% of organisations explicitly made the suggestion of a small grants programme (which has also emerged from other sections of the findings) (Recommendation 2).
- *"I think you should have some smaller grants that can be used to pilot more ideas and then the successful ones can be scaled up via [the Youth Music Programme]."*
- *"Provide more support [for] the smaller amateur charitable communities"*
- *"Take into account that not all organisations have full time staff… [Tailor] the application process particularly for small existing projects with very limited resources."*

27% of respondents used this space to show their support for Youth Music's current activities
- *"I think they are doing an excellent job, and the hard work put into completing the form is worth every penny. Our children have benefited enormously from the support."*

with a further 4% stating that the main change they would like to see is an expansion of the current activities. (Recommendation 26)
- *"Continue in the work that you are doing and distribute as many resources as possible."*

Any additional comments

The response rate to this question was low (11 out of 117 – 9%), so below are all of the responses to allow for a proper consideration of respondents' views. For ease of analysis, they are grouped into three main themes: Application/Support, Small Grants Programme and 'Thanks'.

Application/Support

1. Are there any plans to enhance support for diverse groups who are clearly very under represented?

2. Can support be given to those applying for grants so that the best presentation is given?

3. I made contact with Youth Music as our Power Play funding was coming to an end and I needed someone to discuss the project with me and also explain how the new modules work and if we would be eligible for future funding with the main Youth Music grants. I have had no positive response and our funding runs out in three weeks and the project will end. I feel disappointed with the support of Youth Music.

4. Perhaps introducing a telephone interview stage may be a good way of filtering out organisations who 'look good on paper' but have no real depth of knowledge in subject areas... writing a good application is one thing, but having an appropriately wide knowledge base that will deliver the very best experience for young people, is another...

5. Successful stage one bids that fail at stage two should be allowed to be carried forward to the next stage two round as [they are] with other [funders'] two stage processes.

The suggestions made here support the 12% of respondents who suggested that more personalised support during application was the main change they would like to see made to the process.[8]

Small Grants Programme

1. We were very disappointed with being given the impression that we were close to getting to stage two on a number of occasions but never actually achieving this. I actually think we now use music less to work with our young people than before because other cultural activities [funders] have engaged with us better, i.e. sport and poetry. I would say more small grants (under £2,000) would share the resource and activities more widely and give you the chance to see who actually delivers.

2. While I think the work Youth Music does is incredibly valuable, we did find the process of applying arduous and disproportionate to the amounts we applied for. I think we would need to consider carefully whether we would apply again for any project that was seeking a grant of £20k or less, as the time spent can outweigh the grant received. We do find the contact [with Youth Music] fantastic though - the levels of understanding of the sector are exceptional.

Thanks

1. Just to say I love the new modular structure. I think it is far more appropriate to an organisation like [ours] who now has much better scope to deliver to our potential and reach more children in challenging circumstances because of being able to hold more that one Youth Music [module] at any one time. Thanks for your on-going support!

2. Provision of funding helped support early engagement with music and has enabled us to provide an ongoing source of 'singing sacks' to inspire young children.

3. The Youth Music focus on outcomes has been really useful in helping us to develop our longer term projects.

4. I think the Youth Music team is dynamic, responsive and helpful. I have been impressed with our Grants Officer, who is always on hand when we need her, and has made the effort to come and see the work in the flesh. [There has been] invaluable support for me using the network. Thank you very much.

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[8] See page 9

How 2013 compares to previous surveys

Previous surveys, undertaken in April 2010 and December 2011, were issued in order to assess the levels of satisfaction that applicants experienced in applying for and administrating a Youth Music grant.

The survey of 2010 went out to grant holders, past grantees and unsuccessful applicants from the different grant programmes Youth Music was operating at the time: MusicLeader, Open Programme, Power Play and YMAZ.

In 2011 the survey was sent to applicants for the newly launched Youth Music Programme only. Since their applications were under assessment at the time of the survey, respondents wouldn't have known about the outcome of their applications, so the survey focussed on the new application process only.

Just as in this survey, the questions of the 2010 survey revolved around experiences at various stages of the application process. Respondents were first asked a range of questions about the application process, the assessment process and their experience of holding a grant.

In the latest survey (2013) other topic were included as we wanted to know about the stakeholders' experience with the new Youth Music Network and Youth Music's work as an intelligent funder. Lastly, this most recent survey also encouraged feedback about the areas Youth Music is now funding asking respondents to make suggestions for the funding modules.

The findings of the 2013 survey appear more coherent as all respondents have had the same experience, having gone through the same process of the Youth Music Programme application and, if successful, the experience of holding an Youth Music Programme grant. While in previous surveys we have received a broadly positive response about our work, it wasn't possible to draw statistically significant conclusions because responses were too low from within the individual funding programmes. With this survey, the number of responses received gives Youth Music data from which trends can be identified, conclusions can be drawn and recommendations are being made.

Despite these differences between the 2013 survey and previous surveys, there have been some similarities in the survey's findings as well.

One recommendation from a previous survey was that individualised feedback should be implemented for unsuccessful applicants, rather than only standardised feedback. Individualised feedback was implemented, and in the 2013 survey many respondents raised issues with the feedback. This showed that individualised feedback was well received, but that further improvements are still needed in this area.

Another similarity arose in the request for less contradictory advice/feedback between different Youth Music staff or assessors. Clarity was requested again in the feedback provided by assessors, either between different funding stages or rounds.

Clarity was also requested in the previous survey around the outcomes approach, along with the rationale behind Youth Music's application and reporting requirements. In the 2013 survey it was found that some clarification was still needed around Youth Music's use of project evaluation information. That said, the 2013 survey found that a large number of

respondents have recognised Youth Music's national influence and are using Youth Music's publications in their work.

Visits and personalised contact were also cited as a valued service provided by us, this was raised again in the 2013 survey. Grant holders seem to feel that Youth Music staff would benefit from project visits because it gives a real insight to their work which sometimes is hard to express in reporting templates.

Recommendations

1. Explore ways to communicate Youth Music's staffing structure, including which staff members have responsibility for what tasks. Make the telephone number and general enquiry email prominent on the funding areas of the Youth Music Network.

2. Consider the introduction of a small grants programme.
Findings from across the survey support this recommendation. Given the support for the new funding structure, when considering how a small grants system may be implemented, Youth Music should be aware of creating multiple systems of securing funding from Youth Music, and ensure that the integrity of the programme as a whole is maintained. This cautionary note is supported by the finding explored in the comparison with previous surveys, that the coherency of the survey is far stronger where all grant-holders have a more similar experience of Youth Music.

3. Create a diagram or flow chart to communicate with applicants why the assessment process takes as long as it does, and describe the stages the application goes through.

4. Given that Youth Music does not have capacity to have increased local, 'on the ground' presence, Youth Music should consider ways to encourage regional or local peer support networks for applicants through existing infrastructure.

5. Review all applicant templates and submit them to extensive testing to reduce the incidence of applicants experiencing errors.

6. Produce an editable version (e.g. in Microsoft Word) of the application form that can be downloaded from the Youth Music Network.

7. Consider the six small scale suggestions made in relation to the application process (see page 10).

    a) *"Clearer guidance on what was required within the Risk Analysis form and Project delivery schedule (i.e. level of detail required)"*
    b) *"The log in for existing grant holders should be on the front web page."*
    c) *"Auto-responder emails received had errors in turn around dates, such as dates that had already passed"*
    d) *"[It would be good if] you could link your outcomes to indicators and to evidence yourself – e.g. upload a spread-sheet."*
    e) *"More information [available at stage one] about what would be required in stage 2"*
    f) *"Consider having "more grants rounds per year"*

8. While it is acknowledged that many funders do not offer individualised feedback, Youth Music should carry out a comprehensive review of the current process for generating feedback for unsuccessful applicants.

9. Further demonstrate and communicate the ways in which applicants' planning for a stage two application might feed into their wider project planning processes and therefore evaluation plan.

10. Explore ways of further communicating what happens to the data that Youth Music receives through grant holders' evaluation reports, along with suggestions for how to incorporate this evidence into project planning and execution.

11. Explore ways to address issues raised with the reporting technical processes raised on page 15.

12. Consider holding a national event focussed on evaluation: the findings of evaluation reports, allowing grant holders to read others' evaluation reports and evaluation report writing best practice.

13. Consider whether there is scope for Youth Music staff members to carry out increased project visits to officially form part of the following processes: a) Evaluation b) Assessment c) Grant Management.

14. Investigate further the scope for allowing more flexibility within module specific outcomes.

15. Continue to produce publications based on evaluation data as submitted by applicants.

16. Clarify Youth Music's current criteria in response to the three items relating to professional development of music leaders, definitions of 'challenging circumstances' and whether modules are open to children and young people who are not facing challenging circumstances (see page 17).

17. Investigate the potential for the development of new modules in the three areas of core funding, early years and progression (see page 17 and 18).

18. Investigate improving navigation of the Youth Music Network.

19. Consider ways to encourage users to more actively engage in others' content on the Youth Music Network. Consider making the star rating system more interactive or simplified. Consider making commenting easier.

20. Find ways to encourage users to make contact with other users of the Youth Music Network.

21. Continue to host evaluation reports and practice sharing items on the Youth Music Network.

22. Clarify Youth Music's role in supporting the work of Music Education Hubs.

23. Consider how to support additional resources at a regional or local level, for example accurate mapping of projects, brokering relationships between grant holders and facilitating regional meetings.

24. Consider the two suggestions for the Youth Music Network relating to communicating Youth Music's strategic objectives and setting up a process of email notifications (see page 20).

    a) *"Your strategic objectives and your specific role within the sector… could perhaps be communicated better via… the Youth Music Network."*
    b) *"I think the [Youth Music] Network would work even better if engagement with it wasn't so proactive… I think perhaps if multiple new blogs, discussion topics… came direct to my inbox, I'd be far more likely to engage with them. I do receive the Newsletters… but again these are multi-facetted documents so you need to scan the whole thing to find the bits you want to read which (if you're a slow reader like me!) sometimes I don't do!"*

25. Consider ways to further spotlight and disseminate excellent practice.

26. Consider diversifying Youth Music's own income to be able to expand its grant making capabilities.