



# Approaching commissioners

**- lessons learned from Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, Somerset, North Somerset, and South Gloucestershire.**

**A briefing sheet from the Sound Splash Musical Inclusion programme.**

This is an excerpt from research commissioned by Bristol Music Trust and Bristol Music Education Partnership. The full report, Phase 2 'non-music organisations' research for Youth Music Musical Inclusion Programme, March 2013, by Anita Holford, included interviews with commissioners, and will be published on the Bristol Plays Music and Youth Music Network websites.

# 1. Background

This briefing sheet is the result of interviews with 14 organisations involved in the Sound Splash Musical Inclusion programme either as strategic partners, or delivery organisations. The conversations were about their work with children in challenging circumstances, and the lessons they had learned in approaching commissioners of services for children and young people in challenging circumstances, such as Looked After Children and those attending Pupil Referral Units.

The Sound Splash network, led by Bristol Music Trust (BMT) through Colston Hall Education, is a network of organisations working with (or wanting to work with) children in challenging circumstances (CCC). The network covers Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset and Somerset. They have come together through funding from Youth Music's, Musical Inclusion programme, to address gaps in music provision for CCC and to improve effective practice and outcomes for these young people (YP).

Those who took part in phone interviews were:

- **BRISTOL:** Siggie Patchitt, Programme Co-ordinator, **Colston Hall Education**; Rhiannon Jones, **Trinity**; James Hutchinson, Programme Director, **Creative Youth Network**; Andy Gleadhill, Head of **Bristol Arts & Music Service**; Simon Preston, **Hi Road Studios**; Darren 'Duppy Beatz' Lynch-Burton, Hi Road Studios; Sandra Manson, Youth Media Co-ordinator, **Knowle West Media Centre**; Troy Tanska, **Basement Studios**
- **BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET:** Louise Betts, Learning and Participation Manager, **Bath Festivals**; Rainer Dolz, Head of **Bath and North East Somerset Music Service/hub**
- **NORTH SOMERSET:** Stuart Wood, Director, **b-creative**
- **SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE:** Richard Jones, Head of **South Gloucestershire Music Service/hub**
- **CROSS COUNTY:** Anna McGregor, Programme Manager, **Drake**; Lerato Dunn, Education and Training, **SuperAct**;

The organisations are all at different stages in their levels of engagement with non-music organisations. Only one had gone through a formal commissioning process (Creative Youth Network); although one has successfully completed the process of becoming an approved provider on Bristol City Council's Framework for Alternative Education (Colston Hall Education/Bristol Music Trust). For most, the model is still to offer a service/project that they have already secured funding for, initially. Some (eg Trinity) work on a purely referral basis – ie they secure funding, and the organisations working with CCC refer young people (YP), for free.

# 2. Ways to raise awareness and get work

## Being clear about your values

**Be clear why you want to work with these young people** - does it meet your organisation's mission and values, and why do they need and want what you offer? Concentrate on what you're really good at and don't try to bend to meet funding requirements.

*"Our main model concentrates on meeting young people's needs, making sure that meets our organisational needs, and then demonstrating that's an effective way of working to people who will fund it..."*

**Be upfront about values and ethos** and discuss this – *"Sort out your values at the start"* - make sure there's shared understanding and shared values.

## Invest in networking and relationships

**Attending seminars, events, meeting** where the commissioners/partners are likely to be, meeting someone, getting contact details, following up.

**Embed your organisation in the community** – attend/get a place on youth forum boards, neighbourhood steering groups, [neighbourhood partnership](#) meetings, sector specific partnerships (eg adult care, older people, learning disabilities, [young people into work](#))– you can always ask to give a presentation at these. Go to school assemblies, have stalls at community events. Also wider, get onto city-wide and region-wide boards.

*“We go to strategic meetings, even if they may seem boring ... we’re part of Voscur, go to Children and Young People network meetings. I did outcomes training with Voscur which was about an organizational approach, not how to get funding, and it helps you genuinely understand what outcomes model is being applied.”*

**Develop relationships with grassroots workers** ... get a small project underway and then they influence up for more funding – this works best for some organisations, however ...

**Work can come through a number of layers** - sometimes through Heads of Service. For one organisation it’s driven by young people finding out about them, telling their friends and those who work with them.

**Having a strong relationship with one worker** through who you can secure work, and who can advocate for you is good, but a weakness when they move on.

**Attending training for practitioners working with C&YP** – even if it’s not completely in your remit - for networking, as well as to pick up skills and understanding. One person identified a need for these workers to up-skill in how they can best support musicians when they’re working side by side with YP.

**Use the contacts you already know in the local authority (LA)** – eg someone in one dept may well know exactly the right person for you to talk to in another. A starting point for Hub leaders in music services is to talk to your equivalent in the relevant departments (from ethnic minority and traveller service to school improvement to children and young people’s services). You don’t have to have a definite ‘ask’ or ‘offer’ – you could simply ask them to give you an overview of the CCC landscape within the council and outside it in the voluntary sector.

**Maintain the relationship** even if isn’t leading to anything yet, or after a project has ended – ie informal/personal approach - send information that might be of interest, results from evaluation, or more traditional marketing approach – eg including on newsletter list.

*“It’s taken a long time ... probably a year of lobbying and conversations with this social housing provider, to get a relatively small amount of money.”*

**A relationship may not lead to a contract**, but to other opportunities eg to work on a joint funding bid, and secure work through that route – although only one organisation mentioned this.

**There are a complex range of relationships that are termed partnerships – be sure you’re clear about the terms:**

*“[In this partnership it’s] an acknowledgement of common ground we share and a mutual demonstration of your understanding and professionalism in that area. Then a recognition of your mutual expertise and specialism and how that’s beneficial in terms of young people’s expressed needs, and a good fit to meet those with the other organisation. What doesn’t work is when organisations get together to apply for funding. That’s an expedient relationship to impress partners and get funding.”*

**Most importantly, get a real understanding of their needs, the outcomes they’re looking for** – read, research, find out, ask them. Eg for Alternative Education – look at PHSE curriculum and then frame your communications around those outcomes.

*“Our initial position with a housing association was, this is a worthwhile thing, would you like to support? They said, we’d like to, but we need things that will solve our issues and outcomes, so if you can prove you can deliver some of that we’ll take it seriously. You have to propose you can do something to solve the issues they face. It’s a business conversation, it’s not like a conversation with a funder.”*

**Hone what you offer around customers**

**Be flexible** – be prepared to demonstrate what you can do, eg offer a pilot, tailor something for their YP.

**Build plenty of time into your project for set up, relationship-building** – particularly if it's new territory for you.

**Being linked to an accreditation or qualification** is important – even if you and the grassroots workers in the organisations are more interested in the wider outcomes, as mentioned above. They will need to justify to those in charge of business/finance, or to Ofsted - and qualifications 'sell' your offer to these more strongly (eg in schools – Heads of Music say it's helpful to have accreditation eg Arts Award to sell to their SMT in securing money. Arts Award well thought of in Bristol schools). Schools and parents in particular are very interested in 'GCSE equivalency'.

## **Develop a range of communications and ways to demonstrate you can achieve outcomes**

**Marketing information needs to be clear in terms of what they're buying and what they'll get** – not just general information about the activities you **could** do, but what the package would look like, how much it would cost, what they would be buying for how long for what potential outcomes. Talk in their language and about their outcomes.

**Be very clear and upfront about finance** – frame your offer in terms of spend per young person – particularly for schools, alternative education, etc, as that's how budget holders are increasingly looking at this. Use tables showing cost per child, and differences according to group size (eg one child = £x, 2 =, 10 = etc). Schools may be comparing with what it would cost **them** to provide but they're not comparing like-for-like (eg costs outside the main budget, overheads etc) – for comparison, you may need to outline the 'actual' cost for a school to deliver in-house. See sample sheet at end.

**Use traditional marketing methods too** eg leaflets, websites, enews - include summary of what's on offer, what the outcomes are, and quotes from participants/ partners, links to evidence from other people if you don't have your own. Being able to send someone a DVD or link to a film on YouTube including YP's voice helps. Yet, you may find that some just want the facts ...

*"I asked them (schools, inclusion) what would be useful for them to see, and they said 'cost, how much per child, and accreditation equivalency –that's all, because that's the language Ofsted and parents understand.'"*

**Other face-to-face marketing methods are useful eg open days, taster sessions** – to attract YP and their workers (largely for referrals rather than funding but can be a starting point for relationships). Go where people already are, rather than setting up a separate event they have to get to.

**Portals for tenders** - make sure you're signed up to these, most tenders are huge but there are smaller ones - keep an eye on what's coming up – it will also help you to keep informed of what's going on/needs in your area.

**Demonstrating outcomes** – make it a central part of all your work. BMT partners are about to use a new system, SUBSTANCE; Creative Youth Network use FOCUS. SUBSTANCE tracks each individual YP, progress they're making, 'distance travelled etc'.

*"We've hard on worked on monitoring and really demonstrating the value of what we do [and it's paid off]. All of those who have contracts with Bristol Youth Links have contracts and outcomes targets, we need to be able to understand the outcomes they're looking for, and to show that, eg 'we can meet those Level 3 targets' – to talk their language. We evaluate every activity ... using a grid evaluation, it's built into cost of session, all team expect it and stay after each session to do it."*

**Being able to show high retention rates and pass rates stats** also important. Showing how music is effective in engagement of YP in a positive activity. Retention rate is a powerful selling point and arts/music can improve this probably more than other interventions.

**Do something with your data - present clear arguments.** Although ...

*“There’s definitely an understanding with everyone working with these young people: they get it, they know that any activity that engages young people is important in terms of their outcomes. It’s easy to convince them it’s worth doing. But **it’s the added-value in terms of what makes their SMT/finance/business manager say yes ... [eg] with schools convincing them that added accreditation is worthwhile and showing them a plan of what that means, how YP will be encouraged to reflect and evaluate on their own work – once you can talk to people on that level, they quickly see you are using the language they understand, it’s easier. We need to convince them it’s not just good, it’s really worthwhile because we can give them all that other stuff [beyond engagement] – achievement and progression.**”*

**Use national, international evidence to support your case:**

*“A lot of these organisations are not really aware of the proper impact of some of this work. They’re aware it’s a positive thing to do but beyond that, they’re not aware of the hard outcomes. It’s been helpful to point them in the direction of national evidence to strengthen the case, like Cultural Learning Alliance, Imagine Nation study, and others. I filtered it for them and did a digest at proposal stage ...”*

**Tell young people’s stories** – or better still, get them to (in person, or on video). Not only where they were ‘at’ at start of project, then where they are at end, distance travelled, but also the views of family, support workers, school. To give a real sense of the difference it makes in an individual’s life.

*“We publicise our success stories, talk about what YP have done, present case studies when necessary, and it’s very important to talk about the journey, and how success is measured in different ways for different YP. Make YP aware of and recognise their journey and then they talk about it too.”*

**Work closely with local community to evidence impact** of work. Eg find out from local police force, how much does antisocial behaviour and crime reduce when your events are on?

### 3. Getting and agreeing the work:

**Only one of the organisations interviewed has gone through a strict commissioning process** – most have been contracted to provide a service or project, often short term. So far, payment has been after an agreed number of sessions/outputs or a project end, rather than ‘payment by results’.

**Going in with a funded project first is the most common method** - getting an ‘in’ through delivering and funding a project – so they see the difference it can make, understand how you work, etc.

**A number of organisations (eg Trinity, Creative Youth Network, SuperAct) are working in this way through referrals** – ie they have a programme or project that they’ve already secured funding for, and are engaging with non-music orgs purely for referrals but not for funding.

**Going through the commissioning process or the process to be an approved provider (eg on the Alternative Education Framework) is very time-consuming but worth it** in terms of income and opportunities it opens up, but also having the info and experience for future commissions, and it’s a good kite mark.

**Recognise what’s achievable and what’s not and be clear to your partners what you can and can’t provide** – eg in terms of accreditation, Bristol Music Trust (BMT) found that they needed to assess YP half way through the project, and let commissioners know if some pupils won’t get the accreditation.

**Keep the dialogue open throughout** – build in time to talk regularly and discuss, question, reflect:

*“Don’t try to rush things through ... question the outcomes and explain the reasons why, and keep your planning as a working document. We do a planning form, it’s a working document, and we readdress it every other month. It’s a constant evaluation of your work, reflecting on your practice.”*

## 4. Challenges:

**Unlocking budgets** - lots of enthusiasm amongst non-music organisations working with CCC – happy to partner/refer if you come with funding in place - but unlocking their budgets is a challenge, getting them to see how their different funds could be used for music, to deliver the outcomes needed.

**Changing the habit of thinking in short term where music organisations are concerned** – people get used to this way of working - short term, one-off projects. A year is a ‘long-term project’ for many – but often as little as a half term. They may well re-contract, but rare to have a long-term strategic approach.

**Moving organisations on from this point ie once funding/subsidy runs out** – eg BMT/Colston Hall Education schools and alternative education work – after BMT funding has run out, one school has asked BMT/Colston Hall Education to have a pared-down involvement – provide approved musicians, and payments go through them, but low management costs, no kit, no evaluation. **Encouraging people to pay for referrals** - would be a next-step but only one of the organisations working in this way mentioned this as being considered.

**PRUs are now on the alternative education framework** in Bristol – they themselves are ‘providers’ and are hiring own musicians, more cheaply than going through BMT/Colston Hall Education (who are the only music providers on the framework). There has been no ‘middle process’ of developing their capacity to do this, developing the workforce, getting them connected to appropriate musicians.

**Finding time/budget to develop relationships, network, research needs and funding is time-consuming** – particularly for organisations who existing on project funding with no core funding. Also, when referrals dry up, you tend not to invest as much time in the relationship and it can also dry up.

**The work with these YP is time consuming** – needs to be tailored, needs to respond to changes eg YP not turning up, not engaging ... build in time for reflecting, adapting.

**The work with some of these YP is challenging and practitioners may want to know if your musicians are ‘up to it’**. You will need to describe the wider training and skills they may have (including behavior management), the approaches they may take and the effect that has, the impact music can have in behavior management..

**Progression routes for young people, after they’ve been involved with your work** – how do we identify and signpost?

**Long-term impact difficult to demonstrate** – how to measure long-term impact over time – not only limited (eg tracking studies) because these YP characteristically are difficult to track, chaotic lifestyles, wouldn’t keep in touch anyway, and even sharing information across partners is tricky.

**Tenders are too big for most music orgs** - and often not all can be delivered by a music organisation. It makes sense for this reason, and for wider benefits, to join up with other organisations to be able to bid. However, developing those relationships and building trust is time consuming and there’s no guarantee it will pay off – you may not get the tender

**Keeping in touch as a network informally** – one practitioner asked for a bi-monthly get together, coffee and chat, rotated around the city *“For young people’s sake, there’s less money, and less going on, it’s important that we stay in touch and help each other.”*

### A note on schools:

**BMT/Colston Hall Education see schools as being biggest potential because they are more responsible for outcomes for individual pupils needing alternative education** – they are increasingly deciding how much money to spend per student and what will work, not just a case of giving responsibility to the PRU

**Bristol schools have Heads of Inclusion, often the Assistant Head (Inclusion)** – only one of interviewees (BMT/Colston Hall Education) mentioned these as potential commissioners for alternative education, but they have found approaching some to be very fruitful. **Heads of Music** are the initial point of contact for smaller projects eg transition week, targeted workshops for specific groups of YP who are struggling in school.

**Alternative Education Framework for Bristol** – was critical for BMT/Colston Hall Education to go through the process of becoming an approved provider on this framework – all LA funded alt ed projects can only use organisations on this Framework. BMT/CH is the only music provider.

## Sample sales document for commissioners

(logo/branding removed)

# Different Class

## Colston Hall's Alternative Education Programme for KS3 & 4

*“I do a couple of things every week and to be honest this is the only thing I do that I look forward to”*



## Different Class Accreditation

Colston Hall's Alternative Education Programme, **Different Class**, is a term-based project for KS3&4 students at risk of exclusion. Using a Music-Based Mentoring approach, it aims to facilitate musical, personal and social development of young people at KS3&4 who are in challenging circumstances by re-engaging them with formal education, training, or employment through alternative musical activities.

*“I have seen a marked improvement in his emotional self; he is more resilient and resourceful, seeking answers to self-set questions and less prone to bouts of frustration. His social interactions dramatically improved as the sessions continued and are being sustained.”*

- Referral Agency Learning Mentor

The course is accredited through the National Open College Network (NOCN) at level 2 and successful completion will result in a level 2 Award\*. Courses can be extended to four terms, in order to raise the qualification to a Certificate.

The project aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- Improved attitude to learning and confidence in academic achievement
- Increased resilience, including in relation to emotional health and well-being
- Improved creative, expressive and musical ability

\*A 2-term course is required for the completion of an Award



## NOCN Units

### Term A:

Unit Title: Understanding the Use of Digital Sampling Techniques  
for Composing and Producing Music

Unit Level: Two

Credit Value: 6

GLH 48

NOCN Unit Code: LK1/2/QQ/009

QCDA Unit Reference Number: J/500/5154

### Term B:

Unit Title: Discovering Music

Level: Two

Credit Value: 3

GLH: 27

NOCN Unit Code: LF1/2/QQ/001

*QCDA Unit Reference Number: I/502/2021*

### Term C:

Unit Title: Using Acoustic Recording Techniques

Unit Level: Two

Credit Value: 6

GLH: 48

NOCN Unit Code: LK1/2/QQ/010

QCDA Unit Reference Number: R/500/5156

### Term D:

Unit Title: Composing Lyrics

Unit Level: Two

Unit Credit Value: 4

GLH: 30 NOCN

Unit Code: LF5/2/QQ/054

QCDA Unit Reference Number: Y/601/5777

### Or:

Unit Title: Sound and music production

Unit Level: Two

Unit Credit Value: 4

GLH: 30

NOCN Unit Code: LE4/2/QQ/135

QCDA Unit Reference Number: Y/602/2289

## Accreditation breakdown/Course cost

Course Length	OCN Units	QCF Credits	Qualification & Level	GCSE Equivalency	Number of Learners	Cost per Course	Cost per Session	Course Cost per Learner	Session Cost per Learner
1 term (6 x 2.5 hr sessions)	1	6	Nil	Nil	1	£xxx	£xxx	£xxx	£xxx
					2	£xxxx	£xxx	£xxx	£xx
					3			£xxx	£xx
					4			£xxx	£xx
					5	£xxxx	£xxx	£xxx	£xx
					6			£xxx	£xx
					7			£xxx	£xx
					8			£xxx	£xx
					9			£xxx	£xx
					10			£xxx	£xx
2 terms (12 x 2.5 hr sessions)	2	9	Level 2 Award	1 x C Grade	1	£xxxx	£xxx	£xxxx	£xxx
					2	£xxxx	£xxx	£xxxx	£xx
					3			£xxx	£xx
					4			£xxx	£xx
					5	£xxxx	£xxx	£xxx	£xx
					6			£xxx	£xx
					7			£xxx	£xx
					8			£xxx	£xx
					9			£xxx	£xx
					10			£xxx	£xx
3 terms (18 x 2.5 hr sessions)	3	15	Level 2 Award	1 x C Grade	1	£xxxx	£xxx	£xxxx	£xxx
					2	£xxxx	£xxx	£xxxx	£xx
					3			£xxxx	£xx
					4			£xxx	£xx
					5	£xxxx	£xxx	£xxx	£xx
					6			£xxx	£xx
					7			£xxx	£xx
					8			£xxx	£xx
					9			£xxx	£xx
					10			£xxx	£xx
4 terms (24 x 2.5 hr sessions)	4	18	Level 2 Certificate	1 x B Grade	1	£xxxx	£xxx	£xxxx	£xxx
					2	£xxxx	£xxx	£xxxx	£xx
					3			£xxxx	£xx
					4			£xxx	£xx
					5	£xxxx	£xxx	£xxx	£xx
					6			£xxxx	£xx
					7			£xxxx	£xx
					8			£xxx	£xx
					9			£xxx	£xx
					10			£xxx	£xx