



Soundwaves Network SW

Shifting Policy and Changing

Understandings when Growing the Early

Years Music Workforce

An inquiry into Music Hub and Music Service leaders'
understandings and partnerships

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Acronyms

CME:EC – Certificate for Music Educators: Early Childhood

ECM - early childhood music

ECS – early childhood studies

ELG – early learning goal

EY – early years

EYFS – early years foundation stage

EYM – early years music

EYMP – early years music educator

KS1 – key stage 1

MEH – music education hubs, renamed Sept2024 as MH – music hubs

MS – music service

NC - national curriculum

NPME – national plan for music education

The report at a glance

This report begins by introducing Soundwave Network SW (SWNSW), an early year's music project and provides an overview of recent early years music and education policy, academic literature and the research methodology. The report ends by suggesting implications for Take Art Ltd and the music organisations' practices and policy.

The overarching research questions are:

1. What are leaders of music hubs and music services understandings of the early years sector, pedagogy and training?
2. What opportunities exist for music organisation personnel to collaborate with universities, further education colleges and other training providers?

Introducing Soundwaves Network SW

Take Art Ltd is an arts and cultural charity in south-west England. Since 2013 the early years (EY) team has designed and sourced funding for Soundwaves; a series of four early years music (EYM) education projects. Projects are funded by Youth Music; the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and contributions made by partners. The first project highlighted the necessity for workforce development of both the current EY¹ and EYM professionals. Thus, workforce development became key to Take Art's ambition to establish a high-quality early year's music infrastructure across SW England. To address this ambition each iteration of Soundwaves has expanded its reach across the region. The fourth version, SoundWaves Network SW (SWNSW) now connects eight music education hub (MEH) areas and continues to develop EY and EYM workforces.

SWNSW was initially funded for three-years. The project was extended to four years, as Youth Music awarded stability funding, during a period of grant reorganisation. Between 2021 and 2025, in partnership with the eight music education hubs (MEH) and two music services (MS), Take Art planned and implemented 15 projects. Each project placed two early years music educators (EYME), (a lead and emerging EYME) in an EY setting. The musicians worked with early years practitioners (EYP) to develop the musical environment and plan musical experiences for children. A range of EY settings took part in SWNSW, these included private and voluntary organisations, school nursery classes, and reception classes.

The standard framework for each project was:

- 10 half days of delivery by the Lead and Emerging EYME. The lead has successfully completed the Certificate for Music Educators: Early Childhood² (CME:EC),
- The emerging EYME is studying the CME:EC,
- The lead EYME mentors the emerging EYME,
- Introduction to SWNSW session for the EY teams,
- An opportunity for an EY practitioner (music champion) to reflect with EYME at the end of each session,

¹ The Early Years workforce comprises of practitioners that work with children 0 – 5 years. They are guided by the Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage (DfE, 2023)

² Early Childhood is the phase of children's lives between 0 – 8 years

- All EY practitioners invited to attend an on-line six session EYM continuous professional development (CPD),
- At the end of the project, EY practitioners (including the Music Champion) and EYME share their learning at an EYM event organised by Take Art.

Project structure was devised by Jane Parker as the Early Childhood Music Specialist who guided, mentored and trained others within the project.

One MEH, instead of placing musicians in settings, requested a series of EYME professional development workshops for local practitioners, and for Take Art to act as a consultant in the writing of the EYM strategy.

SWNSW offered bursaries to study the CME:EC at the Centre for Research in Early Childhood, Birmingham.

Overview of the recent changes in music education policy

In 2011 the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government published 'The Importance of Music: A National Plan for Music Education (NPME) (DfE and DMCS 2011). The vision of the plan was:

... to enable children from all backgrounds and every part of England to have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument; to make music with others; to learn to sing; and to have the opportunity to progress to the next level of excellence if they wish (DfE, 2011: 9).

From September 2012 it was the responsibility of the MEHs, to oversee the implementation of the NPME (DfE and DMCS 2011) in their locality. MEHs grew from local government music services and were expected to build on their predecessor's work.

This work primarily focused on children and young people 'aged five to eighteen, both in and out of school' (DfE and DCMS 2011: 9). This focus may imply the NPME overlooks music provision for the youngest children and those working with them in early years (EY) settings. However, whilst MEHs did not have to provide musical experiences for the youngest children, they could connect with those who were. It stated:

Many hubs will link with work in the early years, in some cases with hub partners drawing on funding from, for example, trusts, foundations or Youth Music that has recently launched a funding module supporting music in the early years (DfE and DMCS 2011: 10).

Whilst early years music provision is referenced in the first plan references were tentative. Therefore, to include provision for the youngest children required MEH personnel had to be committed to this phase of music education.

A Refreshed National Plan for Music Education

In 2020, the Conservative government refreshed the NPME. The title of the refreshed plan is, 'The power of music to change lives: a national plan for music education' (DfE, 2022a). This version extended the age range to include music provision for the youngest children,

stating, "we want to see music valued and celebrated in every early years setting and school" (DfE, 2022a: 5). Consequently, Music Education Hub (MEH) leads were required to develop MEH practitioners' skills and knowledge in ECME to support music provision for the youngest children.

Not only has the refreshed plan extended the remit to include the first phase of music education it also includes further and higher education (DfE, 2022a). Including the latter phases of education aims to 'strengthen the creative pipeline' (DfE, 2022a:6) by ensuring the future musicians and music professionals are trained and ready for work. The extension at both ends of the education system, now requires MEH personnel to link and work in partnership with practitioners 'from early years through to further and higher education and careers' (DfE, 2022a; 2). Partnership working is key to the plan.

Expanding music education hubs area

A change that happened during the roll out of SWNSW is that the geographical areas of the 116 MEH have been redrawn. Following a period of consultation was a bidding phase. During the bidding phase MEHs applied to be the lead organisation for one of the geographical areas. Next came the restructuring of the 116 MEHs to 43 MEHs. The 43 MEHs cover similar geographical areas as Teaching School Hubs, Multi Academy Trusts, Local Enterprise Partnerships, and Sport England's Active Partnerships (Arts Council England, 2024). It is believed that fewer and larger MEH localities will ensure consistent and rigorous planning for music education (Arts Council England, 2024). In September 2024, the 43 larger MEHs became operational.

A brief history of the early years sector

The changes discussed above require MEH personnel to understand the EY sector, pedagogy, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the training of EY practitioners. Although the early childhood education and care sector has long history which draws on the pioneers' philosophies, such as Fröbel (1782 – 1852), McMillan (1860 – 1931) and more, prior to 1996 there was little government strategic planning or funding for the sector. A dominant belief, in society, was the care and education of the youngest children was the responsibility of the family. This perspective started to shift in 1996 when the Conservative government introduced nursery education funding for four-year-old children. In 1997, when the Labour government was elected, early years education and care moved from the periphery to the centre of governments' policy making. This move was instigated by research findings which showed high quality early years education and care was key to improving children's educational and life outcomes. Regardless of which government has been in power since, funding for the care and education of the youngest children has been provided. Despite the significant financial investment in the sector, there has been no national coherent vision or strategic planning for early years education and care provision (Oppenheim and Archer, 2021). This has led to a diverse, under-valued and fragmented sector.

Currently, there is a reliance on the private sector to provide early years provision. The private sector provides (47%) of the provision, maintained nursery schools (20%), the voluntary sector (18%), and childminders (15%) (DfE 2019). School reception classes provide provision for most four-year-old children. Each type of provision has a different history, with

different beliefs and purposes guiding those working in the settings. The differences lead to various patterns of provision provided for children and their families. Some settings are open all day and all year round, while others are open term time only, which can be full time or part time.

The Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, established in 2007, outlines the requirements for those providing care and education for children from birth to five years old. Since the introduction, of the framework there have been several revisions. A notable change occurred in 2012 when the framework's purpose shifted from achieving the five Every Child Matters outcomes³ to ensuring children's readiness for school and Year 1 (Wickett, 2019). Readiness for school generally refers to the transition when children start the school reception class, and readiness for Year 1 refers to when children move from the reception class to Year 1. During the latter transition, children move from an environment guided by the EYFS (DfE, 2023) to one following the expectations of the Key Stage 1 National Curriculum (KS1 NC) (DfE, 2014).

At the end of the reception year children are expected to meet the developmental milestones laid out in the Early Learning Goals (ELG). Children's music-making has consistently been reflected in the ELGs. In the 2008 version of the EYFS, it stated that by the end of the reception year, children should:

- Express and communicate their ideas, thoughts, and feelings using a widening range of materials, suitable tools, imaginative and role-play, movement, designing and making, and a variety of songs and musical instruments.
- Recognize and explore how sounds can be changed, sing simple songs from memory, recognize repeated sounds and sound patterns, and match movements to music.
- Use their imagination in art and design, music, dance, imaginative and role-play, and stories (DCSF, 2008: 16).

Although slimmed down the current ELG for "Being Imaginative and Expressive", which replaced creative development in 2012, includes performing songs, rhymes, poems, and stories, and moving in time with music (DfE, 2023:15). Despite the original National Plan for Music Education (NPME) not explicitly including music provision for the youngest children, EY practitioners have been and are expected to plan and provide musical activities for them.

The Early Years workforce

The EYFS states 'the manager must hold an approved level 3 qualification or above and at least half of all other staff must hold at least an approved level 2 qualification' (DfE, 2023: 28). There is no requirement to have a graduate leading early years provision beyond state schools. Teachers working in English state nursery schools and school reception classes, under local authority control, must have a level 6 teacher training qualification. Table one,

³ The five Every Childhood Matters Outcomes are: Be Healthy, Stay Safe, Enjoy and Achieve, Make a Positive Contribution, and Achieve Economic Well-being

below, presents the level of qualification and title of role those working with children may have.

Level of qualification	Title of role
Level 2 (must have functional skills in English and maths)	Early Years practitioner
Level 3 (must have level 2 qualification in maths and English)	Early Years educator Manager of setting
Level 6 maths, English and science GCSE at grade C, and the teacher skills test).	School teacher (with QTS (Qualified Teacher Status)) Qualified teacher status (QTS) is required
	Early Years Professional Status. In 2013, replaced by the Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS). Although experts in the 0 - 5 age range is not recognised as QTS.

Table 1 level of qualification and the role in the setting

For those working beyond school sector, pay remains low and there is limited career progression. Despite significant investment, practitioners working with the youngest children continues to be undervalued and viewed as having lower status than school personnel working with older children (Oppenheim & Archer 2021: 19). This context has led to many practitioners leaving the sector creating a high turnover and a shortage of practitioners in the workforce.

Training to work with young children...

....as an early years practitioner

Prior to 2014 there had been a range of policy initiatives that created a framework for career and qualification progression for EY practitioners, but since government policy has stalled (Bonetti, 2020). To fill this gap a variety of awarding organisations oversee the qualifications for early years practitioners.

To add to the diversity and complexity of qualifications is how EY practitioners' train. Training can be completed whilst in employment or a mix of part-time work and study or full-time study.

Recently there has been a shift away from teacher training happening in universities. Level 6-degree apprenticeships enable trainee teachers to study whilst being employed as a teacher, (Gov.UK, 2024a):

Teaching school hubs are centres of excellence led by schools and multi-academy trusts. They offer teacher training and professional development for teachers and leaders at all stages of their career (Gov.UK, 2024b).

The new geographical MEHs cover the same reach as the teaching school hubs. The alignment of MEH and teaching school hubs would suggest it is the role of MEH personnel to support ‘the Teaching School Hub with specific music training provision where needed’ (DFE, 2020: 53). The support could be providing funding or music experts to train the trainee school workforce or provide professional development to teaching staff and EY practitioners.

Undergraduate and post-graduate students can also embark on an Early Childhood Studies degree. This is an academic degree that explores children’s lives from 0 to 8 years old. After completing their degree, students can progress onto various forms of postgraduate study, such as teaching, social work, occupational therapy, graduate schemes or careers.

....as an early years music practitioner

Like early years courses, there are a range of music courses, Level 2 to post-graduate, that are delivered in schools, Further Education colleges, Universities or Conservatoires. Often, early years music is viewed as a poor relation to other phases of music education which leads to it being overlooked in music courses (Wickett & Parker, 2024, Young 2021). To ensure the visibility of ECME and grow the EY music education workforce Dr Susan Young designed and delivered the Certificate for Music Educators: Early Childhood (CME:EC), at Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC). This programme, validated by Trinity College London, focuses on early childhood music and mirrors the Level 4 Certificate for Music Educators (Trinity CME) designed for music educators teaching older children and adults (Trinity College London 2024).

The research questions

As leaders of MEH and other music organisations adjust to the new geographical locations and the expectations of the NPME, this research explores leaders’ current understandings of the early years sector and partnerships with education and training providers⁴, by answering these research questions:

1. What are leaders of music education hubs and music services understandings of the early years sector, pedagogy and training?
2. What opportunities exist for music organisation personnel to collaborate with universities, further education colleges and other training providers?

Research methodology

To answer the research questions, qualitative data was generated through reflective discussions between organisation leads and early years music leads from seven MEH and one music service (MS). The researcher’s role was as ‘facilitator’, guiding the discussions with

⁴ When referring to education and training providers this includes universities, further education colleges, teaching schools hubs, School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) etc

questions (Bryman, 2012:504). The reflective discussions gave deeper insights into participants' understandings and experiences of early years music and collaborations with education and training providers. Participants and researcher met online via zoom, where discussions were recorded and transcribed. When time commitments did not enable facilitated discussions, interviews were conducted individually and one leader chose to answer the questions in writing.

After each interview, the transcript was shared with the participants giving them the opportunity to review, amend and agreed their transcript. The responses were analysed to identify common themes. These are discussed under the broader headings, 'Shifts to include early years music', 'Thorny issues and a bedrock of principles' and 'Two workforces early years and music'. How MEH and the MS work with education and training providers, was also collated into a table.

Participants

MEH and MS leaders, and EY leads are invested in the SWNSW programme. When agreeing to be involved in the programme, leaders were made aware that this research was a feature of it and that they would be invited to be participant.

Data was generated over a 17-month period as the programme was rolled out across the region. Table 2 below introduces the music organisations and personnel interviewed, the date they were interviewed and if the organisation was involved in the restructuring.

Organisation	Date interviewed	MEH/MS Leader	EY lead	Restructuring during SWNSW
MEH 1	August 2022	Yes Anne	Yes Jasmine	Yes
MEH 2	September 2022	Yes Hilary	Yes Elisabeth	Yes
Music service	October 2022	Yes Graham	Yes Eva	No
MEH 3	December 2022	Yes Thea	No	No
MEH 4	July 2023	Written response Luke	Yes Clare	Yes
MEH 5	August 2023	Yes Ceri	Yes (EY/education lead) Harper	Yes
MEH 6	January 2024	Yes (EY/community lead) Jackie	Yes (EY/education lead) Luci	Yes
MEH 7	January 2024	Yes Derek	No	Yes

Table 2: Introducing the Music Education Hubs and Music Service

Ethics

All ethical decisions were made in line with guidelines from the University of Plymouth Ethics and Integrity Committee. To maintain anonymity the MEHs are labelled numerically in the order they were interviewed, and pseudonyms were given to participants. Participants were provided with an information sheet, the questions, and a consent form a week before the zoom meeting. This gave them with an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the questions which worked towards “transparency”.

Shifts to include early years music

The tentative references to early years music education in the first NPME has led to Thea, Derek and Clare viewing this phase as,

...people having to be very clever about how they snuck early years in (Clare, EY lead MEH 4).

...a bit of a bolt on really, we did some training in conjunction with the Council early years team (Thea, Leader MEH 3).

We have an Infant School package which all infant schools get. If we do little live tours, the reception kids come in to hear the music as well (Derek, Leader MEH 7).

Thea's, Derek's and Clare's comments suggest, prior to the refreshed National Plan for Music, MEH leaders were aware of the early years sector and did identify opportunities and partnerships to provide EY music experiences for the sector. Thea partnered with the EY advisory team to plan and deliver training for EY practitioners and Derek welcomed the reception children to infant tour (infants are in KS1). However, Thea and Clare viewed these as 'a bit of a bolt on' or "snuck in' rather than embedded in their practices.

Whilst these MEHs did provide early years music provision they were not able to spend MEH funds on this phase of education, which may explain the belief of it being 'a bit of a bolt on' or "snuck in'. A shift in how funds can be spent in the refreshed Plan for Music (DfE 2022a) are welcomed by Luke,

.... gives us the green light to spend existing Hub funding on Early Years Music, which is something that we haven't been able to do previously. There is no additional funding for Early Years Music or anything else under the new plan (Luke Lead MEH 4).

Although there is a shift in how money can be spent, beliefs about how music provision for the youngest children is included persist. Derek still views EYM as being ‘...lumped on as part of the plan’ (Derek, Leader MEH 7). Ceri explains there is a ...

...whole system of academic discourse that sits behind the practices of EYM (Ceri, Leader MEH 5).

Ceri highlights the academic discourse that underpins early years music pedagogy. Instead of “lumping” early years music on to existing music practices becoming familiar with EYM

academic theory and philosophy will enable leaders to interpret policy (Ball and Bowe, 1992) and create music experiences which are relevant and meaningful for young children.

Changing understandings - music education for young children

MEHs personnel who were joining a Soundwaves programme for the first time explained they are being introduced to a new body of knowledge and practices.

I think it's a real eye opener. A lot of them struggled initially with child led learning because they couldn't quite get the head round about having to sit and observe for a little while, before interacting with the child (Derek, Leader MEH 7).

I qualified as a primary school teacher, my specialism was music, back in 2009. Part of that teacher training experience is working in reception classes. Since speaking to Jane, I've realised it was not the kind of music education that that she would have done. I've learned a lot about that (Harper EY/education lead MEH5).

Derek explained that being introduced to the knowledge and pedagogic practices of EYM has led to some musicians struggling when working with the youngest children. A change in the expectations of the adults' role can contribute to this struggle for musicians. Instead of instructing and delivering music knowledge and skills they are required to observe, listen and wait before interacting with the child/ren when fostering their musicality. Harper explains her understandings of music provision have changed since working with Jane. Despite being trained as a teacher specialising in music, her comments suggest EYM was overlooked during her teacher training.

The MEHs leads and early years music leads, who had been involved in earlier Soundwaves projects, had a clear understanding of EYM practices and the underpinning philosophies. Below Thea explains she has made a series of videos for those who want to learn about EYM. The philosophy and practices of young children's music are evident in her discussion.

I made a video series. It's not instructional, somebody just standing at the front and, and instructing them in in music theory. It's encouraging musicality and enabling them to explore music. Yeah enabling, I would say rather than instructional (Thea Lead MEH3).

Eva explains her learning during the CME: EC.

We delved deeply, when I did the CME, and really expanded my knowledge of the pedagogy (Eva, EY lead MS).

It takes something like the CME course which will actually flips your thinking. Now I think we're doing this all upside down. We need to be building up from the bottom (Jasmine EY lead MEH 1).

Jasmine's new insights provoked her to reconsider the current system and articulate her belief that early years music pedagogy should continue into compulsory school.

Partnering with Take Art to deliver SWNSW and studying the CME: EC course encourages MEH leaders and early years leaders to reconsider current approaches to teaching music.

This collaboration helps them understand the foundational philosophies of music education for young children. By changing their perspectives, early years musicians can better articulate the principles of EYM and develop music practices that align with these philosophies.

Moving beyond delivery to thinking strategically

As EY music leads for their organisations, Eva and Jasmine are establishing and developing a pool of EYM educators.

When we first started it was just me now Poppy and Helen are going through the CME route. Hopefully, next year we'll have three of us. (Jasmine EY lead MEH1).

When furloughed during covid we met every week on zoom. When everything opened again, we just carried on doing it. Although everyone is so busy everybody on the team still finds the time once a week to come drop in. It brilliant and I think yeah, people who do the training tend to be like minded and continually reflecting (Eva, EY lead MS).

The SWNSW model not only grows musicians, as educators and mentors but music leads also think strategically to embed and sustain EYM delivery across their organisations' region. A strategic decision for MEH1 is for music educators to complete the CME:EC, while the MS it has been to continue weekly zoom meetings, to foster a culture of reflection whilst developing the music educators EY music practices.

One MEH decided not to place musicians in settings. Instead, the leaders of the community and education arms of the organisation accessed strategic support as part of their SWNSW involvement,

I would see Take Art as a critical friend kind of role. They've been supporting us with some training. They have been a kind of advising us and guiding us around ongoing strategy regarding early years music (Jackie, EY/community lead, MEH6).

Rather than treating EYM it as an add-on, to authentically embed EYM into the music organisations, consideration of the EYM philosophies and body of literature, that Ceri refers to on page 12 is required. Additionally, strategic planning is necessary to expand the number of EYM educators and the systems that support the development of their EYM practice.

Thorny issues and a bedrock of philosophies

As referenced in the first NPME, Youth Music provided funding to grow music provision for the youngest children (DfE, 2011). Both Take Art and the MS accessed this funding to deliver early years music projects. Eva explains, her predecessor's aspiration,

Angela's [the previous EY lead for MS] aspirations was that wherever there are children under the age of five, there'll be an EYM presence (Eva EY lead MS).

Angela's aspiration for children zero – five to experience music education and Take Arts' ambition for high-quality early years music provision (Take Art, 2024) led them to source this funding to plan and implement music projects for the youngest children.

The funded projects draw on EYM philosophies and principles to guide the music practices. Jane shares a principle that underpins her practices aim to create,

authentic meaningful learning experiences where learners, both children and adults, are contributors in the learning process (Jane in Wickett & Parker 2024, 4).

From the very start we were doing things in a child led way and looking at the children's innate musicality (Eva EY lead MS).

Eva explains her practices are child-led and guided by the belief that the role of the adult is to listen and observe the child/ren to notice their musicality. Jane explains that both children and adults are co-constructing the learning process. Involving both the children and adults in this process is more likely to create meaningful music experiences for both.

Both organisations, Take Art and the MS, have a distinct EY arm as part of the provision that the organisation provides and are specialists in providing music experiences, that are underpinned by the philosophies of EYM, for the youngest children. Working in EY settings beyond the school setting, Eva explains she can draw on these philosophies and pedagogic practices but in the reception class she encounters challenges.

We have trouble sometimes not the preschools or nurseries but in reception classes. It's really hard going into reception classes where, they're teaching the children to go into year one, and that's the struggle we have (Eva EY lead MS)

MEH leaders are aware that in the reception class, it is difficult to appreciate and include children's musical experiences.

.. the reception teachers and heads need to know what experiences children have had before they arrive in the classrooms. That's a transition point. We talk about transition further up. But it's that transition point that I think crucial. (Hilary leader MEH 2)

...it's interesting. Foundation stage obviously goes to the end of reception. Everything's child led play discovery and then suddenly there is a shift in focus I think part of the problem is that the change to key stage one is too sudden. (Elizabeth EY lead MEH2).

Hilary refers to the institutional transition (Woodhead & Moss, 2007:8) when children move from an EY setting or home to the school reception class. She senses, as children move to the reception class their musical experiences beyond school are overlooked. The institutional transition is only one transition during the EYFS. Elizabeth and Eva refer to the second, the curriculum transition at the end of the reception class. During this transition children are moving from the reception class, which is guided by the play-based EYFS (DfE, 2023), to Year 1 which is structured by expectations of the KS1 NC. To ensure children are prepared for academic learning in Year 1 the reception year can be viewed as a year of preparation (Wickett, 2016). During the year children are introduced to the knowledge and teaching practices of KS1. The preparation of children for what is to come makes it difficult for EY musicians.

The seeping down of KS1 knowledge and practices into the reception class can explain the challenges Eva experiences and Hilary's observation that children's prior musical

experiences are overlooked. In this context young children's musical experiences, in the home and EY settings, are placed at the bottom of the pedagogical music hierarchy. This and the emphasis on preparing children for academic learning in the reception year, can lead to KS1 music practices dominating and silencing children's previous musical experiences and EYM.

Persistent understandings

MEH leaders and EY musicians suggest they have an insight into the complexities of the EY sector. Hilary's and Thea's comments are representative of their MEH and MS colleagues.

It's a huge patchwork quilt of different providers with different levels of expertise ranging from a very large nursery school-based nurseries ... to individuals that are childminders (Hilary leader MEH 2).

The early years sector has quite high turnover of staff in settings. I know they're very squeezed with budgets. They're probably struggling to be able to release people to attend training. They're probably more pressurised. I know a lot of their staff are the younger and are on the minimum wage (Thea Leader MEH 3).

To find out about the issues that local early years provision experience, Jasmine and Graham speak to EY colleagues.

Definitely with Sarah (EY advisor) we've got that link now. If there's anything music wise in the city, Sarah will drop me a line which is really nice, and I know that if I want to do something in the setting, she will be my go-to ask which setting I should work with? (Jasmine EY lead MEH1).

On our steering group we have Halcyon who is head of a nursery school, she is often talking about issues around recruitment (Graham lead MS).

MEH and MS personnel have access to local information about EY provision. Halcyon shares information about local providers when meeting with members of the MS steering group. Jasmine and Sarah have a relationship that enables each to source advice and information. MEH1 and MEH5 leads shared the same line manager at the early years lead in the Local Authority school improvement team. Having these links with EY leaders provides MEH and MS leaders insights and understandings that the local EY sector is experiencing. This information enables the services to respond to the needs of the local EY community when planning music provision.

Two workforces – early years and music

An aim of the Soundwaves Network SW is to develop a robust and high-quality early years music infrastructure across the region. Central to this aim is the development of the workforce. SWNSW highlights there are two workforces that require development; the early years workforce, those who work directly with children during the EYFS (0 – 5 years) and early years music workforce, educators who bring expertise in music education for young children.

The music programme SWNSW designed by Take Art, does afford workforce development for both sectors.

To grow EY practitioners' music understandings and practices the programme includes:

- Ten half days of delivery by the music practitioner,
- Introduction launch a CPD for all EY team members,
- An opportunity for an EY practitioner (music champion) to reflect with musicians at the end of the session,
- The settings' EY practitioners attend an on-line six-week CPD course,
- Attend a session at the end of the project to share their learning with practitioners and leaders interested in young early years music practices beyond the project.

To grow existing musicians' understandings and practices EYM the programme includes:

- 10 half days of delivery in an early years setting,
- The lead EYME mentors the emerging EYME,
- Emerging EYME embarking on the CME:EC,
- An opportunity for an emerging EYME to reflect with EY practitioners and lead EYME at the end of the session,
- Both musicians are mentored by SWNSW Early Years Music Lead when shadowing her during CPD events, sharing sessions at the end of each project.

SWNSW programme model of practice grows practitioners' understandings and music practices, from both workforces. Being placed in a setting and the CME:EC is key to expanding the pool of EYMEs in the MEH regions,

... the CME with CREC. That is your gold standard. The emerging practitioner than gets to work with me (Clare, EY lead MEH4).

Not only is the emerging EYME learning about EYM, but the lead EYME is developing their mentoring skills when supporting the emerging EYME, as well as EY practitioners. Clare describes the CME:EC as the gold standard. By completing the CME:EC the lead and the emerging EYME are likely to hold similar understandings and vocabulary guiding their practice. Consistency in practice will contribute to the robustness of the infrastructure, which is an aim of the programme.

[The future workforce](#)

The discussion above refers to the current EY practitioners and EYME workforce. Two SWNSW projects provided opportunities for students, the future workforce, to learn about EYM,

We did a Soundwaves project at the college nursery, some of the students doing the degree in early childhood, joined in our sessions. They were doing placements. I think they were doing a day a week the college nursery, and then they took the material to another nursery that they were working (Elizabeth, EY lead MEH2).

We work with the university early childhood studies degree students on placement, and Florence, the PHD (Music) student on an internship placement. Florence is now signed up on our books to do some SEND (Special Educational

Needs and Disabilities) work on the first access in schools' programme (Jasmine EY lead MEH1).

The work-based learning placements and student internship enabled undergraduate early childhood studies students and the PhD student to experience EYM. In both cases students moved to other settings. Elizabeth believed the students would draw on their placement learning when working in other settings. The PhD music student now works for the MEH and is likely to draw on her learning from Soundwaves. In both situations, as students share these practices with colleagues, it is likely EYM practices will seep into settings beyond Soundwaves.

Returning to Florence, a post-graduate music student, SWNSW was not part of her course but a student internship. Jasmine explained that Florence had told her,

.....she didn't even imagine kind of early years being a career path that she could go down. It was never mentioned anywhere in any kind of courses. She's right. I mean it wasn't when I was studying my music degree. (Jasmine EY Lead MEH1).

Florence experienced working with young children and music by serendipity, as an internship opportunity was advertised. Florence's and Jasmine's comments are reflected in the comments of other participants who studied music degrees. During their undergraduate or post-graduate music degrees participants did not learn about EYM.

MEH1 and MEH2 projects were the only projects that had planned links with their local education and training providers during SWNSW. However, Clare reminds us, trainees may have accessed SWNSW training.

There is a lot of CPD events that we do both online and in person, which obviously will be aimed at anybody who has an interest in EY music, so it could well be students are attending (Clare EY lead MEH4).

Students may be on placement or completing their qualification whilst working. Therefore, during the project, they may access the CPD on-line training, the sharing events and see the musicians working with the children and their colleagues. They may even join in. This suggests, that just like Florence's opportunity to learn about EYM, EY students' opportunities to learn about this phase of music education, is also by chance.

Eva explained she had tried to include training teacher students to experience EYM during their School Centred Initial Teacher training (SCITT).

We have delivered some SCITT training about three days. But they acknowledged that they didn't want too much emphasis on early years music because the teacher training was from age four up to 11 (Eva EY lead MS).

Eva's comments mirror Harper's reflection (on page 12) about the limited opportunities to learn about young children's musicality and music during her early years teacher training. This narrative continues, in the current SCITT programme, as there is a reluctance to give time and space in the training of teachers to learn about EYM. This is despite four-year-old children attending the reception class, which is the final year of the EYFS.

Existing collaborations roots to expand

Although Florence, Harper and other participants, who had trained in music, had not experienced EYM, as part of her music degree Derek believes EYM is a career opportunity for those leaving their education and training,

There are fantastic musicians coming out of conservatoires and music schools as well as the universities.brilliant young musicians coming out of their studies who are looking for work (Derek, lead MEH7).

Derek's comments about linking with a wide range of music institutions and courses are reflected in the refreshed NPME. It explains, 'Higher education (HE) and further education (FE) institutions are an important part of the overall music education landscape' (DfE, 2022a: 68). MEH and MS linking and partnering with education and training providers could raise the visibility of EYM in the courses that are provided.

In the latest version of the NPME it is explicit that MEH connect with education and training providers 'to ensure a strong talent pipeline into the global music industry' (DfE, 68). Most participants explained that they already have links with education and training providers. Following, in Table 3, is a list of the diverse ways music organisations have collaborated with these organisations.

Activity	Example
Work Based Learning placements	Students who were doing an early childhood course, joined in our sessions. They were doing placements. (Elisabeth, EY lead MEH2)
Knowledge Exchange Internships	We've got two micro internships from the university: one student is a sound engineer and the other a graphic artist. They're both working with us for the next six months to capture some sounds from the children to make a kind of display of vocalisations and how we use our music to explore children's vocalisations. We have fund from the university to pay the students. (Eva EY lead MS)
Input into Initial teacher training courses – PGCE, B.Ed. and SCITT	We have worked with various SCITT providers in recent years to support the music content of their teacher training. (Luke Lead MEH4)
Conferences	We have welcomed trainee teachers from Institute of Education to events like the south-west peninsula music education conference. (Luke Lead MEH4)
CPD for teachers (knowledge exchange)	We've done quite a lot of general teacher creative days with the arts university. (Derek lead MEH7)
Member of board	University lecturer is the hub chair. She runs the B.Ed. (Ann lead MEH1)
Research	A research project which centres around long-standing cultural diversity, the focus is the Gallic islands. (Derek, lead MEH7)
Contributing to curriculum content	We work with the university on 'an artistic project. It's produced three albums of music, working I guess, with around 40-50 students over the years. (Derek, lead MEH7)

Evaluation	The B.Ed. music lecturer is currently evaluating our 'Altogether now project.' (Ann lead MEH1)
Project work	We have a relationship with City College, and we're just about to take on two of their creative therapy students on to our arts and health projects. (Jackie EY/community lead MEH6)
Further study for MEH personnel	I'm involved directly as a PhD student looking at how site specific and compositional methods can look at an in an informed inclusive music education. (Graham Lead MS)
Career opportunities	Liam at the university runs the professional development programme' for music students and I've been engaging with him for 6 or 7 years now, finding opportunities for students to work (Ann lead MEH1)
Conference preparation	We held a conference with the university. Students helped on the day and they could sign up to be a delegate (Jasmine EY lead MEH1).

Table 3 An overview of existing collaborations and roots to expand

Education and training organisations can provide 'in kind' contributions. For instance; rooms for events, personnel attending/chairing board meetings. Eve highlights the possibilities for organisations to access funding from the universities for activities that support student career trajectory and enhances the organisation's EY music provision.

The above examples of how MEH and MS have linked with education providers contributes to the three areas of HE education work. These are:

- the curriculum (teaching and learning),
- knowledge exchange⁵
- research and innovation.

Work based learning, internships and similar opportunities share the aim of supporting students to identify and plan for their career. Further education colleges also provide extra-curricular activities. One college explains 'Enrichment activities are linked to career aspirations, engagement and well-being' (Truro and Penwith college website). These collaborations are fruitful partnerships to grow links and share their insights of EYM to students on EY, ECS and music courses.

Only the MS mentioned working with a teaching school. There was no other reference to teaching school hubs and multi-academy trusts for the training of the teaching workforce. This is not surprising as the new geographical locations only came into existence in September 2024. However, this is another partnership that is significant in ensuring the inclusion of early childhood music in school provision. Working in partnership with teaching school hubs, music organisation leads can ensure EYM is included in the teacher training

⁵ Knowledge exchange 'brings together academic staff, users of research and wider groups and communities to exchange ideas, evidence and expertise' (OfS, 2024).

curriculum and part of the staff development programme for EY teachers and practitioners after training.

It is worth holding in mind since the refreshed NPME (DfE, 2022a) and the restructuring of the MEHs a new Labour government has come to power. Labour is committed to launching 'a new National Music Education Network – a one-stop shop with information on courses and classes for parents, teachers and children' (Labour, 2024). This could lead to further shifts and changes to funding, requirements and partnerships.

Conclusion

This report began by outlining the significant changes happening in the music education landscape that the MEH leaders and personnel are adjusting to. During SWNSW the changes they have experienced include; the decrease in number MEH areas but expansion of each area reaches; the requirements of the recently published 'The power of music to change lives: A national plan for music education' (DfE, 2022a). The updated NPME has extended the remit of Music Education Hubs (MEH) to oversee music education provision, from the early years to further and higher education (DfE, 2022a). The focus on the latter phase of education is to ensure a clear trajectory for children and young people aspiring to careers in the music industry. Partnership working is viewed as key to fulfilling these requirements.

At this time of change Take Art commissioned this research to gain insights into MEH and MS leaders' understanding of early years music, the early years sector and current collaborations with the education and training sectors. Research participants had partnered with Take Art to deliver SWNSW in their localities. Data was generated through interviews to answer these research questions.

1. *What are leaders', of music organisations, understandings of the early years sector, pedagogy and training?*

MEH and MS personnel have a good understanding of the complexity of the EY sector, they are aware of the low status and the shortage of EY practitioners. Their understanding of the qualifications and routes to become an EY practitioner was less clear. However, leaders were aware that nursery school and school teachers have higher status and qualifications than practitioners working beyond schools. Leaders had contacts with EY leaders, such as Local Authority school education teams, to answer questions about the sector generally but also provide information about provision in their locality. This information was useful when planning early years music projects and when identifying which settings to invite to be part of the project.

Those who had taken part in earlier iterations of Soundwaves were confident in their knowledge of EY pedagogy and the EYFS (DfE, 2020). Embarking on the CME:EC contributed to EY musicians' understandings, as they had time to delve deeply into EY philosophies and practices, as well as learn about the EYFS (DfE, 2023). Being part of SWNSW enabled them to put their learning into practice. Those who were joining SWNSW for the first time were developing their understandings of music for the youngest children, the EYFS (DfE, 2023) and the philosophies that underpin pedagogy and music practice.

However, even the participants who were confident in providing EYM education, met challenges when providing EYM in the reception year. As children move closer to the curriculum transition, KS1 teaching tends to, dominate and marginalise the practices of EYM. The downward pressure and the seeping of expectations into the reception class has long been an issue in the English education system (Moss, 2016).

2. What opportunities exist for music organisation personnel to collaborate with universities, Further Education colleges and training providers?

MEH and MS personnel have, and do, collaborate with education and training colleagues. Some collaborations have lasted for many years and can be with organisations that are local or further afield. The activities that MEHs and MS have collaborated with education providers are varied. Further analysis of the activities highlights these aligned with the areas of universities' work; knowledge exchange, teaching and learning and research. There can be pockets of funding that MEH and MS can access; such as funding student interns. The aim of these activities is to enhance student employability, by contributing to the offer of MEH and MS.

This research highlights that EYM is generally not part of music degrees or included in EY or teacher training. Partnerships between music organisations and education/training providers will be key in raising the visibility and inclusion of EYM on these courses. The inclusion of EYM offers students who aspire to work with music and the youngest children, another career opportunity. The inclusion of EYM in teacher training will enable early years teachers to experience EY music practices. On completing their training, it is likely they will plan music practices underpinned by EY philosophies in the reception class. The philosophies and understandings may enable them to resist the pressures of KS1 music. Particularly when working with an EY musician.

Returning to the SWNSW programme. It is necessary to highlight that the programme structure is not only growing the future EYME but also the future EYM mentors. As EYME grow in confidence with their EYM practice and share these with the emerging EYME they are developing their mentoring skills. There was evidence that EYM leads were strategically planning ways to expand their organisations' EYM team. Developing mentoring skills and developing a strategic view is key to sustaining the EYM workforce.

Early years education and care and EYM can be viewed as the Cinderella of their respective sectors. The NPME requirement for MEH to include early years music experiences and work in partnership with training and education providers is an opportunity to raise the visibility of this phase of music education. Working in partnership with training and education organisations will work towards ensuring a sustainable ecosystem of music education provision and ensure the pipeline of the future EYM workforce to work in this sector.

Implications for practice

For Take Art EY are:

- continue to develop and expand the Soundwaves programme model of practice,
- consider how to include music and EY education and training providers (teaching schools, universities, further education colleges) in future projects,

- consider creating a sharing series for MEH leaders. The focus of this series would be for leaders to explore existing and potential partnerships with education and training providers to expand the future Early Years (EY) and Early Years Music (EYM) workforces,
- consider how to create a place for reception teachers and year 1 teachers to meet and explore the music curriculum transition,
- continue to advocate for CME:EC and consider making explicit an element of strategic leadership in the course content.

For Music Organisation leaders and EY leads are:

- continue to articulate their music organisation's vision for EYM and strategically plan for EYM,
- continue to partner with music organisations who specialise in early childhood/early years music, to deliver EYM,
- to contribute to EYM and EY courses by developing existing links with education and training organisations.

Together are:

- continue to advocate for ECM/EYM,
- maintain the visibility of EYM in the training of the future EY and music workforces,
- articulate a vision and principles that will guide music provision during the curriculum transition,
- keep abreast of government policy changes.

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