

Online Learning Development: Advice from Cambridgeshire Music and NYMAZ

The positives of having online teaching options can include:

- Flexible ways for students to access learning, including vulnerable and rurally isolated young people
- Quality assurance for families seeking independent learning opportunities at this time, in a market where quality of supply is very variable
- Enabling staff at this time to provide ongoing work with benefit to their own (if self-employed) and the organisation's financial bottom line
- Protecting staff wellbeing by providing flexibility to adjust delivery times to fit around caring responsibilities
- Less travel resulting in reduced carbon emissions and mileage cost savings
- Potential other opportunities to provide support for curriculum, ensembles and other creative and cultural work to a wide audience.

There are a number of key things though that need to be considered in the set-up of this type of activity, some of which may be difficult to do at speed if approvals within governance structures and integration with other policies are needed. At the current time, when priorities will be naturally focused on other areas, this may make it difficult to implement change rapidly as protocols may need to be followed in relation to some or all of the following:

- **Safeguarding** – the provision of lessons online needs to have careful safeguarding policies in place. Although there are many live video platforms that can potentially be used from a person in any location, unless there are additional monitoring controls it may be difficult to provide a safe environment that prevents the potential of misuse or abuse to the same level as, for example, passing observation of a school based lesson. There is some best practice in terms of policies and approaches as a result of recent development work and these include sessions being recorded and stored, risk assessments for locations, mechanisms that hide background of rooms and clear policies for managing concerns that are agreed to by staff and families. The attached policy that was developed by Cambridgeshire Music shows you the level of care that is needed to achieve sign off by safeguarding experts in a local authority, for example. If that level of security cannot be provided then one option is to provide these types of online learning opportunities from a base such as a music centre where the same levels of passing observation as in a school can be created for monitoring purposes.
- **GDPR** – the development of a secure system that involves any recording of sessions will make such activities liable for GDPR review, which will likely include a Data Protection Impact Assessment. Within a local authority this may take time, and depending on the platform being used it may or may not be possible to get agreement, particularly in relation to storage by platforms that might be outside the UK in the Brexit transition period. Privacy statements will need to be updated to reflect any additional working that impacts on data that is collected.

- **Procurement** – extra approval processes may be needed when procuring a cloud service (e.g. a Cloud Service Evaluation), particularly from within a local authority. Again this may take time to navigate necessary permissions so it is useful to develop your own understanding of what is needed to make this process as efficient as possible.
- **Equipment** – it is possible to deliver good quality teaching with just a laptop with built-in microphone and camera, but additional equipment can improve the user experience.

Live Video Platforms

There are many options for platforms and there may be a number of factors that you need to consider in working out which will suit you best and be permitted under the above. Things you will want to consider are:

- Ease of use – the user interface for both student and tutor varies considerably between platforms
- Data security – is data transfer encrypted?
- Stability of the platform itself, particularly if under high load at the current time.
- Audio and visual quality and lag – this is clearly particularly important for teaching purposes
- Bandwidth requirements – some will require more than others for both the provider and user end. Again higher usage now is expected so it may not always be possible in all cases for connections to operate sufficiently well for activities to be successful.
- Back up and storage – not all platforms may be able to put in place the controls, recording and support services required to enable business functionality on this scale.

Pedagogy and Training

Like other changes in music education, a novel way of doing things that have been traditionally face to face for many decades can be unsettling for some staff. Although it is perfectly possible to deliver good quality pedagogy using online learning, there may be some resistance and an awareness of the adjustments needed to do this successfully is important. Some services have taken an approach to have a number of remote sessions followed by a gathering of participants for creative activities, ensemble, musicianship and technical checks to take place, sometimes termed “blended learning”. There are different ways of managing the natural concerns about technical challenges and these should be considered. Training and ongoing support, both technical related to platforms and pedagogical will be needed to achieve the best quality.

Risk Management

In recent days, a number of schools have also indicated a move to online provision – there are some interesting issues arising out of this especially where encouraging visiting staff who are not part of organisations to use platforms such as Skype with no indications of the Safeguarding and Data issues being managed. There may be a role for services and hubs to highlight the potential dangers of speedy roll out of continuity methods particularly with regard to these areas of risk, in case a bigger problem down the line is created as a result. There is also a risk of making systems such as this work and then schools and families wanting them to continue afterwards rather than return to established ways of working. This will need to be considered by services if a potential concern within current relationships with schools.

Sector Support

The following services have been doing a variety of online activities for some time and are carrying out a role of sector support as part of the national Connect project:

NYMAZ
Cambridgeshire Music