



INFLUENCING  
SUPPORTING &  
CONNECTING

## Music Mark North West Conference

04/09/2018

### Welcome Address by Music Mark CEO, Bridget Whyte

I am very excited to be with you at the start of a packed day of presentations, CPD, discussion and networking.

It seems like only a few months ago that Music Mark held its North West Conference in a rather unusual hotel off the M6 in Lancashire, but here we are at the start of another academic year ready to learn and share with colleagues from across the North West – and this year a few from further afield too!

Today we are being hosted by the Royal Northern College of Music, it's a key partner with a number of the hubs here in the North West and we are grateful for them letting us use this great building. There are – according to their website – 330 teachers and over 880 pupils who study here each year, so no matter how much music we collectively make during the workshops today, its going to be a relatively quiet day for the conservatoire! In just a few weeks' time however I would think that every practice room, studio and classroom will be in use as dedicated young musicians begin another academic year.

All of these young people will have a story to tell about how they got started learning their instrument of choice – the inspirational teacher; the moment when they discovered the thrill of performing, and I expect that most, if not all, of the ones who grew up here in England will talk about the Music Service they were a part of. And actually it's likely that quite a few of the RNCM's students will have grown up here in the North West, and so will have been inspired by *you* as they started their music learning journey!

At our Music Mark Summer Summit in London two months ago, one of the case studies given in the breakout discussion about progression was about James. Having started learning the violin in a Whole Class project at his primary school, he moved into group tuition and joined an ensemble. Subsequently he had the opportunity to be part of project at Chethams School of Music and met Nina Bernstein. By 2017/18 he was leader of the Halle Youth Orchestra, and in two weeks' time he'll be starting his studies here at the RNCM.

The news over the past few weeks, as the exam results have been published, has made for depressing reading – the analysis of how fewer and fewer young people are studying GCSE and A-Level music (and indeed all the arts subjects) can only be worrying for conservatories and universities across the country. However, as we start another year, let's remember that the argument for the importance of music and the creative subjects is gaining traction.

In March Ofsted appointed a new HMI for Visual and Performing Arts – a positive step after a number of years without an arts subject specialist inspector. Susan Aykin was introduced to me back

in early June and came to our Summer Summit. Following this up I booked a 1-2-1 meeting with her for last week to get an update on how Amanda Spielman's speeches stressing the importance of a 'broad and balanced curriculum' were going to be backed up by action. Before that meeting however, two weeks ago, I was with the head of Sunderland Music Service and she told me of two schools who had been in touch with her to ask for help in developing their music education offer. When she asked them why they were seeking help they both explained that during a recent Ofsted visit they had been questioned about the music opportunities offered to pupils and were aware that they had side-lined the subject!

So, when Susan and I met last Thursday she and I talked more about the speeches and discussions of the Summer Summit and the news from Sunderland and I was encouraged to learn that Ofsted is developing a new inspection framework which will focus on addressing the patchy provision of the National Curriculum. The Framework is being developed through research visits etc, and Susan confirmed that it is likely that the two schools in Sunderland were being questioned about their curriculum because they were part of these visits. I feel certain therefore that Ofsted will be an ally as we continue to campaign not only for the importance of Music Education Hubs, but also for schools to do their part for children to receive a high quality music education in and outside the classroom.

I plan to meet with Susan regularly over the coming year as I know it is vital for Music Mark to keep in touch with this influential body just as much as it is for us to continue to have regular meetings with the DfE and Arts Council.

However, as I said in my speech last year, to say anything meaningful to any of these stakeholders we need to be able to tell them not only the facts – both the current challenges and future opportunities of music education, but also communicate inspirational stories which will bring the facts to life. One of the key voices I am keen to hear and represent as I campaign on behalf of you and your colleagues, is that of the beneficiaries or customers of the music education you provide – the children and young people like James.

Now whilst, when talking about Music Education, we might not go so far as to say that the customer is always right (indeed I accept now that whilst I, at 14, wanted to endlessly play through my favourite pieces, my peripatetic teacher father was right when he said that long notes and scales was what I should be practicing to progress as a bassoonist), listening to children and young people is vital if we are provide an engaging and inspiring music education for them.

In November Youth Voice will be the theme of our annual conference in Warwickshire and hopefully many of you will be able to join us for that. How do we ensure that their voice is heard, they can feel their views are respected and they can be involved in shaping their learning? I am looking forward to the sessions we have programmed which will be curated and/or run by young people including sessions featuring representatives from the youth board in Lancashire and young people involved in Brighter Sound's programmes here in Manchester.

But back to today though, I am excited to hear from many of you about the work you are doing, yes, to learning about the challenges you face, but also finding out about your passion and commitment, of the great work you are doing which will ensure that the practice rooms, studios and classrooms of this conservatoire (and others) will continue to ring with music in years to come.

I hope you have a great day and thank you.

Bridget