

# Ten Insights in to Music Partnership Projects

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## INSIGHT ONE

Music is a great way into partnership activity.

Our initial suspicion in putting this project together was that music partnerships were particularly easy to get off the ground, largely due to musicians' instinct to perform, and the likelihood that Directors of Music are going to care very much about spreading the benefits of music over as wide an area as possible.

We found this to be true. Music lends itself unusually well to simple outreach projects, like that described by Ed Yeo in the [Music in the Community](#) case study. All it takes is a great instrumentalist, a band with more chutzpah than quality or a single Visiting Music Teacher with a little spare time – and a performance in a local school can generally be fixed up in little more than a phone call.

Furthermore, music is clearly an area where the independent sector and the state sector complement each other. Even the smallest prep school often has outstanding musicianship, and, if it could only see it as such, can be a centre of excellence in a local community. The absence is one of vision, rather than one of capacity. On the other hand, beyond the outstanding regional music hubs, often small state sector schools, especially primary schools, find it difficult to expose their children to musical opportunities of any kind, especially to music of the very highest quality. Match the two, in a combination that recognises local need, and we are on fertile ground.

## INSIGHT TWO

The more complex the partnership, the more complex the possible project: but you need to have done the simple projects to get on to the complex ones.

As above, the simplest projects represent an entry point to partnership activity. What is really exciting, though, is the way in which those projects can be scaled up.

The most complex projects, like [Romany Wood](#), [Noye's Fludde](#) or [Wassail!](#), are all backed by highly complex partnerships, bound together by more than just willpower. The advent of Multi Academy Trusts in the state sector has created a sophistication in the relationships between schools that is most conducive to outstanding, partnership-based music projects. The involvement of Oakham School in [Noye's Fludde](#) shows how an independent school can contribute, providing expertise without any of the somewhat frightening demands for accountability that sometimes emerge from government.

The independent sector, indeed, is not geared to replicate the complexity which is evident in the state sector if it is to aspire to the very best music projects. The very best MATs, such as the David Ross Education Trust ([Noye's Fludde](#)), are creating systems whereby numerous schools can aspire to shared goals, and can allocate the resources where they need to in order to make great things happen. The strength of independent

schools has always lain in their independence. However, music projects stake a claim for collaboration.

Nonetheless, complexity does have its drawbacks as well as its benefits. We explore a couple of the difficulties faced by the **Noye's Fludde** project, either where too many hands get embroiled in the project, or where project partners find themselves competing with each other for publicity.



**INSIGHT THREE**

Simple projects are about the epiphanic moment. Complex projects take that moment and do something extraordinary with it.

When analysing the outcomes of music projects, it is clear that the same point about complexity arises. Music is unusual in terms of school life through the emphasis that it places on the epiphanic moment, which is where a student, possibly from a disadvantaged background, is exposed to quality music for the very first time – whether this moment comes from singing in a choir, listening to opera or participating, possibly with an easier part, in an orchestra.

As Martin Leigh puts it, “There are moments in life which put you on a different course.” Simon Toyne writes much the same thing, “High quality art can change people.”

The great thing about this epiphanic moment is that it is easy to measure. Just take a baseline of the children in the project using a questionnaire like that provided by Ann Wright in the **Young Leader Programme**, and demonstrate progress by counting the number of children who have had a new experience.

As your project becomes more complex, though, more complicated measurement mechanisms also become possible. Dale Chambers’ project, **The String Scheme**, which started with an epiphanic focus, has tracked the number of children who have participated and who have gone on to take up an instrument, and to an increasingly high level. The best projects are going to act as a magnet, to get children into music, and also as a bridge, to connect those children with wider music partnerships and opportunities.

Schools do, though, need to be aware of the fine line between subsidy and partnership. We felt that there were some projects where partnership work was simply replacing some activity that should have been taking place anyway within the target school. In this case, the relationship becomes a sponsorship rather than a partnership.



**INSIGHT FOUR**

Music is an agent of school improvement.

A school with music is a better community than one without. This provides a very specific yardstick to use in music projects (which does not apply in other areas). There is not a single school which has an outstanding music department that is not itself outstanding.

Quality music projects can lead to outstanding outcomes elsewhere in the curriculum. DRET measured one school whose investment in Music, through becoming a Singing School, helped its English and Maths SATs results rise from 28% to 72% in just one year.



**INSIGHT FIVE**

Lobby for dedicated partnership time within your school.

Two of the music projects represented here benefited enormously from dedicated time during the week that could be devoted to partnership activity. Both King Edward’s School (**Romany Wood**) and KCS Wimbledon (**Partnership Choir & Production**) dedicate their Friday afternoons every week to non-sporting co-curricular activities. Every child in the school is therefore free at the same time – and, crucially, this is a time where local schools are in session. This enables complex projects such as the Partnership Choir & Production or Romany Wood to find their home, without the inordinate complexity of finding a slot during the week where the same pupils can elect to be free.



**INSIGHT SIX**

Start with choral music – and think about the repertoire.

In terms of starting out with a partnership project, choral music works outstandingly well – any child, whatever their musical hinterland, can participate meaningfully.

Furthermore, a choral event also enables the benefits of a music project to be shared widely throughout a community. The best projects will think about the parents as well as the children. The **Romany Wood** project included a budget which enabled parents to be brought in from Small Heath, Shard End and Chelmsley Wood to watch their children perform at Birmingham Symphony Hall. While the impact of this is difficult to measure, its value would seem to be self-evident.

That said, there are certain pieces of repertoire that work particularly well with partnership projects. We hope to assemble such a list, which will be posted on the SchoolsTogether website ([www.schoolstogether.org](http://www.schoolstogether.org)) for all to access. As **Wassail!** shows, one sometimes needs to think carefully about music from one religious tradition in a multifaith context – although the **Noye’s Fludde** experience shows the pervasive magic of some religious music in the right context, in energising some pupils to “ask for hymn-singing in Assembly.”

There’s no reason, though, why a project can’t also serve to create repertoire. **Wassail!** tells of the United Learning experience of building up new repertoire from composer Alexander L’Estrange. Even better, this process can involve the children as agents, as pilots and as connoisseurs.



**INSIGHT SEVEN**

Don’t see impact assessment as an afterthought, but weave it in to your project from the word go.

Small-scale partnership projects, musical and otherwise, often forgo impact assessment: it is seen as red tape, bureaucracy or needless faff. However, it matters. If we are going to build constituencies of support for partnership projects, whether in government, in the media or in our own senior leadership teams and boards of governors, then we need to show that these projects are more than window-dressing, and that they have a genuine impact on the pupils who participate.

Often, those involved in music projects, such as Catherine Barker at United Learning, have expertise in this anyway, as it is usually a requirement of the funders of larger, more complex music projects that impact assessment should be done – and, moreover, that it should take up to 10% of the budget. To your average partnership co-ordinator, this emphasis seems unbelievable – and yet it is really important in proving to school leaderships, sceptical publics and politicians that these projects are of real value.



But it doesn't have to be difficult. Partnership co-ordinators can use some of the tools referred to in this volume, such as questionnaires, permission slips and other proformas, all of which we hope to assemble on the Schools Together website, along with resources on surveymonkey or Microsoft Forms – to make impact evaluation easy. Even qualitative data, collected in the right way, can be used to create word clouds, which take little time but paint a powerful picture. You'll find an example in the **Romany Wood** case study. It's just so important to make time for this. That said, adapt the questionnaire to your own purposes: be very clear about what you are trying to test or find out.

Your projects should have clear objectives and success criteria, and you should demonstrate your reflectiveness in setting these and using them in a continuous process of self-improvement.

One of the most difficult aspects of partnership work, particularly that which seeks to address disadvantaged children, is that impact assessment needs to be contextual. Children who are harder to reach should count for more – and, again, more complex projects can incorporate this from the word go in their schemata for impact assessment.

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There are lots of stakeholders in music education. Schools are only part of a vibrant musical commonwealth.

#### INSIGHT EIGHT

ISSPs are only part of the spectrum of possible partnerships. Tie your partnership design to the local musical context.

In particular, music partnerships must work with Music Mark and the Music Education Council. There is a lot of analysis out there that you can take advantage of in targeting and assessing your project. Why not identify a ward with a very low level of music participation and show that you've done something about it? Or build a long-term element into your 'epiphanic' project so that you can track how many children have taken up instruments as part of that initial experience?

If you are lucky enough to have a major venue in your backyard, that can be a real plus, as they often tend to have outreach programmes themselves, often with a specific schools focus. As Martin Leigh puts it in **Romany Wood**, the 'jaw-dropping' nature of performing in Birmingham's Symphony Hall in front of 1,500 supporters turns a good experience into a stellar one. Even if not, your local independent school might act as your nearest jaw-dropping venue – a school orchestra can perform Holst's *The Planets*, so you don't need to go into London to do it.

All local hubs have specific local issues – the independent school needs to link into these and be ready to offer help. Some of the most successful ISSPs are those that work within a defined geographical area, and bring a number of independent schools together with a number of state schools. This can also help solve the problem outlined above – that independent schools are often better at working with state schools than with each other.

Indeed, the partnerships developed here can have all sorts of contingent benefits. There is a lot of expertise within local music hubs – for example in the appraisal and/or professional review of Visiting Music Teachers – that can be shared through effective partnership.

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## INSIGHT NINE

### Don't forget the fundraising.

Lots of people feel passionate about music. Current parents of a school are a major constituency, as outlined in **The String Scheme**. It is always possible to raise money for projects, especially when you build from the ground up.

Further to Insight Seven, you must remember that evaluation enables fundraising. The event is going to be the culmination of a given project. Objectives need to be stipulated and monitored as you go along, in order to create a strong perception of success.

Videos and interviews are really valuable in communicating success, as the **Wassail!** and **Partnership Choir & Production** projects have found. A videographer for an afternoon only costs £600. It might help if there is space on the Schools Together website for video, or at least for YouTube links.



## INSIGHT TEN

### Good relationships are crucial: and a wider outreach strategy is needed.

Some complaints from across the sector tell of open arms being proffered by independent schools, and rejected by state schools. This harks back to a 1980s narrative of a cold war between the sectors. This is outdated: in a world where free schools and academies dominate the state-maintained landscape, we are seeing the emergence of a reciprocal narrative stressing the development of an educational commonwealth.

In some places, distrust and lack of understanding does exist, needing to be broken down. Often, the person leading a music project is in a good place to do this, by talking musician to musician. **The String Scheme** tells how Dale Chambers voluntarily taught a Dalcroze / Kodaly course to build trust and develop relationships in Guildford. It can help to operate within a wider outreach strategy. Certainly, successful projects should breed other successful projects, whether in science or sport, drama or debating.

It is welcome that increasing number of schools are appointing partnership co-ordinators at SLT level. This person has the clout to be able to make projects coherent within and between schools – and, increasingly, should have the expertise to apply consistent impact assessment and communications frameworks across different projects. Equally, this person will be able to put plans in place to challenge the most common problems facing partnership projects: a lack of succession planning, the common need to script Memoranda of Understanding and the deployment of various strategies for getting reluctant partners involved.

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Taken from the publication:

**ALL TOGETHER NOW...**

How to set up outstanding music partnerships between schools

An introduction to eight case studies from cross-sector partnerships

To view the case studies, or the full publication,  
please visit: [schoolstogether.org/publications/](https://schoolstogether.org/publications/)



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