

# Good practice guide to planning music in *myplace* centres

## Purpose

This guide will help you in planning and designing of your *myplace* music space. Young people's music-making takes many forms, from rock to samba and hip hop to classical. It may be that you will need more than one space to cater for these different interests. Please also see the related guide to running a music facility in *myplace* centres.

## The evidence base

**Teenagers and music is an instinctive match.** Many young people look to music lyrics as a source of reassurance and inspiration, and joining a band is a classic teen pastime. Youth Music in its 2006 Omnibus survey found nearly a third of 7-19 year olds are making music outside school provision, many without supervision. A recent report found 43% of young people who want to engage in music didn't because of the lack of facilities or huge costs. The lack of affordable, well-equipped rehearsal studios means many young musicians have nowhere to practice and poor access to professional equipment.

The Make Space Campaign run by 4Children found half of 11-18 year olds complaining of a lack of facilities said the most important element would be an informal space for arts and creative work. And two thirds of this group is interested in music-making.

## Transferable skills

**Making music has many transferable skills.**

By working with others in groups young people learn flexibility, teamwork, problem solving, innovation and risk taking. It can also elicit:

- a sense of pride and self-esteem;
- increase a young person's opportunities to gain enjoyment from music;
- commitment;
- reliability;
- responsibility;
- punctuality; and
- self-discipline.

Such outcomes are especially helpful for

young people who cannot progress at more academic school subjects or disaffected young people.

The Creative & Cultural Skills Council bridges the gap between industry, training and the government. It has found a culture of unpaid work experience dominates the creative and cultural industries. For employers, someone with relevant on-the-job experience is more valuable than an untested graduate. Gaining experience in a well run music space will prepare a young person for work in the creative and cultural industries.

## New technology

**Technology plays an important role in the lives of young people, with many making music on computers, on-line, using recording equipment to upload, remix, publish work, share music, listen to music, compose, perform, review and more.**

Existing music technology and innovations in console games may provide an entry point into music for young people, introducing transferable skills through, for example, music sampling and sequencing. Assistive Music Technology now provides previously unimagined access to and control over music for many young disabled musicians.

Future innovations may also make music-gaming more interactive relying on groups of musicians being able to play on the same game and the capacity to download or upload musical content on to the web. As advances in internet technology come about it may one day be possible to play simultaneously or "jam" with musicians from other parts of the world. This means, to future-proof spaces, they may need good quality technological interconnectivity inside and with the wider world. Important to this development is having

access to the expertise in using the equipment.

*What music-making tools are accessible to your group? Macs may be popular in professional studios, but PCs are much more prolific, so we use PC-based music technology that disadvantaged young people can get hold of easily to encourage them to continue their music-making in their spare time. Sonia Ramanah, StreetVibes Youth*

## Planning for music

### Audit

Your audit should aim to identify every music space in your borough or district. This may include contacting schools, youth centres, community spaces, commercial rehearsal and recording spaces, music shops, arts and music projects, music services, Youth Music Action Zones, council officers, venues and regional cultural development bodies. Although there may be sensitivities around supplying information, you should aim your audit to ask each respondent the following:

- Location
- Number of unit spaces
- Occupants and vacancies
- Occupants' area of work
- Occupants' tenure
- Management arrangements
- Facilities offered besides the space
- Information about the current condition of the spaces
- Access arrangements and conditions, including disability access
- Their music-making offer

As you carry out the audit you should try to understand the opinions and needs of those working in and running music spaces. These views will educate the way in which your programme will be delivered. It will also ensure you're not duplicating, but complementing their offer, perhaps identifying your specialism. It is important to remember you want to avoid threatening the delicate financial ecology of the local music sector and to find your place in it. You should incorporate the results of the audit into a database and develop this over time to signpost **myplace** participants to opportunities at other spaces.

It is likely partners may express an interest in working with you on aspects of the project. This will enable you to create a pool of people and organisations that have capacity and expertise. You may find your music space will be perceived as a hub, enabling musicians and arts organisations to interweave their work in to your new setting. You should encourage this.

The audit should result in an overall account of music spaces in your area and their significance. It should identify good practice and highlight where there is a need for further development and investment. It should also lead to an action plan to take forward responses to identified needs. It will lead to the development of a detailed brief for use in the further planning of your **myplace** centre. It may also help to identify the indicators that you may use to carry out standard assessments of the range and scale of benefits your music space may offer.

A music space needs to reflect the growing emphasis on extended services, co-location of services and community use. Therefore, the design of a music space needs to consider how it can respond to the needs of the community and the way people engage with music locally. For example, if there is a lack of affordable rehearsal space or recording studios in the area, can your space provide these facilities?

### Funding

There is a fairly long history of creating space for young bands to practice in youth centres and schools but they often fall into two extremes. They have either been badly equipped, poorly maintained with ineffective soundproofing. Or, they have been expensive recording studios that only trained staff can use thus limiting access. Making a music space sustainable means either being in a building where there is other general supervision already funded, or multiple rooms making staff supervision cost-effective.

The single biggest issue facing music space projects is usually financing the activity. If activity is to continue and flourish, you must consider new ways of financing development. Linking your project to the work of local authority officers such as those working in education and economic development will aid

your cause. Your project may meet the needs of others with an interest in young people's music such as third sector bodies.

You may wish to consider hiring your spaces to freelance music teachers, community music organizations and other music and arts providers. This may mean you need to carry out a risk assessment. Approaching public and lottery funders and trusts and foundations to support specific music projects in your music space could help with project costs. Most funders will only support projects and not ongoing costs. You will therefore need capacity to fundraise to deliver activity and build in your ongoing costs. These are all areas you should consider when putting your business plan together.

## Planning your space

**The types of activity will control the characteristics of each space such as their size, accessibility, fittings, soundproofing and fixed equipment.** Different music styles will also influence your choice of instruments and equipment and the skills of your workforce. When designing each of your spaces you should bear in mind a degree of flexibility in their use, for example, a performance space may double up as a social area or dance studio.

Music-making can be split into three areas - participation, production and performance. It is likely most of the time young people will want to take part in and produce music, so your design should reflect this. Designing your space based on the design and development of professional rehearsal, recording and music work spaces will help you to create the look and feel of a music studio.

Rehearsal spaces are crucial to the amplified music sector. However, the cost of hiring a commercial music space, such as a professional rehearsal room, is beyond what most teenagers can afford. Nonetheless they represent useful meeting places where young people can meet with far-reaching artistic, personal and social benefits. Some youth and community centres offer access to a space, some may even have a recording studio or music technology suite.

## Typical music spaces

**Providing a space is just the starting point: what matters is what people do in the shared spaces.** A creative environment needs good communication and interaction to allow people to share, copy, learn and adapt ideas quickly. In reality physical music facilities vary greatly, but typically music spaces have any number and combinations of the following:

- Rehearsal space
- Music technology suite
- Performance space
- Social areas
- Live room with guitar amplifiers, drum kit, microphones & PA
- Control room incorporating mixing desk, effects and playback system
- Drum room
- Smaller breakout spaces
- Storage area

You will need enough practice spaces for young people to work independently in groups of three to six participants with instruments and equipment. This may mean you will need multiple spaces. For example, The Forest of Dean Music Makers based in Gloucestershire has a building with four practice rooms and a control room. The largest two spaces each take about 15 people. As well as rehearsal and recording, they can also use the building for training, after-school clubs, holiday and weekend workshops, individual and small group lessons in vocals, guitars, drums and other instruments.

When planning to use space for music-making, it's important to understand your target market - are you working with gifted and talented, disadvantaged young people, early years? Our target group is disadvantaged young people, and we know that group activities are popular - for this group especially, music-making is a social activity, and a recording studio for four will just not work - *Sonia Ramanah, StreetVibes Youth*

## What different activities look like

**At a basic level your space will need to cater for young people's interest in urban/dance music and live bands.** These popular music styles will dictate the needs of

your space and its design. These two broad areas can break down into different activities each needing specific design features:

- Music technology and production
- DJ/ MCing
- Singing
- Performance skills
- Band workshops
- Sound engineering – live and studio engineering
- Music industry and media related skills

Urban artists, DJs or musicians involved in music technology or production do not pick up their musical skills in the same ways as musicians using instruments. Those involved in urban/dance styles are likely to be regularly exchanging opinions with peers where they informally learn creative and technical skills. Encounters are likely to be away from organised rehearsal or collective music-making activities.

Meanwhile instrumentalists are likely to employ both a separate and a group approach in complementary ways. The age at which a band forms is roughly between 12 and 15. The role of group jamming and songwriting are of great significance in developing popular instrumental skills. Jamming usually occurs based on agreement among band members on the chords, rhythms and structure of the music. Much songwriting occurs as a group activity where every member has a major creative role.

Building in a performance in front of peers in your music space or at a local gig at the end of your music project can provide motivation for participants to finish their songs and foster a sense of achievement.

### Consultation with young people

**Young people need to be centrally involved, above and beyond the active music-making.** You should welcome young people as co-workers with a real voice in decision-making. You should weave consultation with young people into the fabric of all your music work. This should involve you making young people aware of the opportunities available regionally, including mentoring, advice and guidance on the most

suitable musical pathway irrespective of location. Providing regularly a full range of taster workshops, led by various specialist music leaders, is a good way to show all the music-making choices enabling young people to make informed choices. Youth workers can provide leadership and set standards by their management of the spaces.

### Design principles

**You should base your music space design principles around a combination of ‘flexible’ and ‘fixed’.** Ideally, these spaces should be located close enough together for people to circulate with ease. Soundproofing is essential. You may be able to take advantage of the natural soundproofing offered by adapting basement rooms as rehearsal spaces and hope to recreate this feature in a new build. You should position any new build to project sound away from neighbouring buildings, including nearby housing. It would be useful to consult your architect or ask an acoustic design consultant to prepare a design specification for your individual requirements.

Even on a modest budget you should consider engaging a professional acoustic design consultant. Architects usually deal with soundproofing for speech and sometimes for industrial noise, but live music has different characteristics which they may not fully understand. Technical sound reduction specifications of standard commercial wall, floor, ceiling and door constructions do not account for frequencies produced by the low sounds of a bass drum and bass guitar which can be difficult to cut out.

The acoustic treatment of your music space is a different issue from soundproofing. Good acoustic treatment will control how well music will be absorbed or bounce around in your space. You should ensure the acoustics of your spaces are not too reverberant because this can be challenging for those with sensitive hearing or a hearing problem. A carpeted floor should be the minimum and some type of absorption and/or diffusion at best. Young people can pick at foam stuck to the walls and this is rarely a good solution in buildings used by young people.

The Building Schools for the Future initiative has done some work around music spaces. Key considerations for their design include a concept for using a music space and structuring it into four 'Zones'. Although this is untested, it nonetheless provides a useful

model from which to plan the design of your space whether it is a new build or a refurbishment. The work of the Musical Futures project emerges from existing in-school practices. The table below represents an amalgamation of both approaches.

<b>Zone 1 (flexible)</b>	Flexibility should be part of any discussion about space. The conceptual solution would be a single, large room divided by a network of soundproof retractable walls that you could work into any arrangement of smaller rooms. A more practical alternative would be a room large enough for group work with a series of four or five smaller 'break out' rooms leading from it. These rehearsal rooms will each require a PA sound system with microphone and stand, drum kit, guitar and bass guitars and amps, a networked computer and enough electrical sockets for all the equipment.
<b>Zone 2 (fixed)</b>	Some spaces will need to be 'fixed', for example a recording studio, social space or administration area. It may be best to place this 'fixed' zone at the core of the space so its functions can radiate into each of the flexible spaces leading from it. A fixed space may also include a percussion studio with an acoustic drum kit and enough room to store all percussion such as djembes and samba drums. A recording studio will need a control room with a mixing desk and a networked computer and a live room with the same equipment as a rehearsal room. A music technology/production suite could comprise from 2 to 20 music computers with sequencing software and a small MIDI keyboard, PA and mixing desk.
<b>Zone 3 (social)</b>	Social spaces with a central information point, comfortable seating, TV and video games area, informal performing area and possibly even a café, gives young people and staff a space in which they can interact. It could provide opportunities to produce income by promoting community use. There should be a noticeboard advertising musicians available and wanted.
<b>Zone 4 (storage)</b>	Your design should place storage spaces centrally, like a carousel, and therefore accessible from any room with minimum effort. Failing this, making sure as many boxes, flight cases or pieces of equipment as possible are on wheels would be critical. You should organise this area so young people and staff can pack up instruments and equipment quickly and methodically at the end of a session.

You should make simple recording and playback facilities available in every room where participants can listen to an instant playback as part of their session. All computers should ideally be networked allowing participants to save their work on the networked area, and return to mix their work using any of the other computers in the building. Having technology threaded through the space will appeal to young people with an interest in related activities such as media.

Heating and ventilation should not be secondary considerations, as heating and ventilation can be noisy, damaging to sensitive equipment, and unhealthy for occupants, especially in an environment in which acoustic considerations can result in windowless, enclosed spaces. You may need to think about when you will use the

ventilation and access to controlling it. You won't hear noisy fans over a loud rock band, but these may be too loud for more gentle and quiet uses.

Lack of natural light can be damaging to performance, mood and ambience. Advances in technology make the use of glass in soundproofed situations much more of a reality. You should try to avoid harsh fluorescent or strip lighting, which can make some spaces unusable for people sensitive to flickering bright lights. Ideally there should be various lighting arrangements and they should all be dimmable without causing sound systems, amplifiers and computers to buzz.

### Access

**Young people want an accessible central place that supports their work**

**unsupervised, where they can develop their own musical ideas.** The rehearsal room represents a significant role in enabling musicians to develop their own work independently. Speed of entrance and exit is clearly important. Doors need to be wide enough and easy to open when carrying for example a guitar amplifier. Positioning your main entrance so it's accessible from the street makes it easier to promote access by the community.

Personal safety, security and behaviour are important issues. Clear lines of visibility including liberal use of window space and wide corridors will allow overseeing of use and ease of access. It is also important the space is open when young people want to use it. You can achieve this by:

- Allowing participants to book a room through a central booking system
- Allowing music technology participants to use the facilities independently
- Clearly advertising projects and workshops
- Making rehearsal space available every night and at weekends
- Offering other arts activity

You will need to provide full physical disabled access to ensure disabled musicians are able to attend and immerse themselves in music.

## Do's and Don'ts

### DO

- Consider the types of activity you want happening in your music space and link this to the design of your space
- Consider using your spaces flexibly
- Involve and consult young people in developing all spaces
- Consider noise bleed between rooms
- Use spaces to encourage creative interaction
- Manage microphone and equipment booking
- Acoustically treat the rooms
- Employ an acoustic design consultant who can work with your architect
- Tell your music supplier you need equipment that will survive a lot of use

### DON'T

- Underestimate the growing number of young people wanting to use your space
- Underestimate the parking you will need close to your space
- Automatically think you need a recording studio
- Buy the best possible equipment, but rather the most robust
- Expect a drum kit to last long – expect to replace it yearly
- Think you can get away with not replacing instruments and equipment

## Links to other material and sources of support

As part of your audit here are some ideas of whom you might wish to contact for further support and advice.

### Local contacts

- Arts venues
- Third sector music organisations
- Music shops and retailers
- Local media (radio, TV)
- Local Authority Head of Children's Services
- Specialist performing arts and music secondary schools and colleges
- Higher & Further education institutions
- Local commercial recording and rehearsal studios
- Commercial and community training facilities

### Regional contacts

- Youth Music Action Zone
- Youth Music's Regional Executive Officer
- Arts Council England regional office

## Further Information

UK Music

[www.ukmusic.org](http://www.ukmusic.org)

Audio Support

[www.audiosupport.co.uk](http://www.audiosupport.co.uk)

Association of Professional Recording Studios

[www.aprs.co.uk](http://www.aprs.co.uk)

Music Industries Association

[www.mia.org.uk](http://www.mia.org.uk)

Music Education Council

[www.mec.org.uk](http://www.mec.org.uk)

Sound Sense

[www.soundsense.org](http://www.soundsense.org)

## Contact

This guide was written by Trevor Mason of Youth Music.

For further information or support on using music contact your regional lead advisor, e-mail us at: [myplacesupportteam@hallaitken.co.uk](mailto:myplacesupportteam@hallaitken.co.uk). Or call the support team helpline on 0161 212 1100.