



ABRSM Diversity and Inclusion Plan

Progress Update 3 - August 2021

This is our third regular update designed to report back on ABRSM's progress in promoting greater diversity and inclusion across the following five key areas of our operations and organisation:

1. Active commissioning

1.1 Half of the 18 new Exam Pieces commissioned for the woodwind syllabus published this summer were by Black, Brown, and Indigenous People of Colour (BBIPOC)* composers. They include two for flute, four for clarinet and four for saxophone. Two of the pieces (11%) were by a composer with sensory impairments.

1.2 Continuing to actively work with existing partners including Commonwealth Resounds, Music Mark, Sound and Music and Royal Philharmonic Society to raise awareness of new diverse repertoire and to integrate our new commissioning programmes into their work. Work since previous update has included a day-long session where ABRSM staff and freelancers worked with ten of Commonwealth Resounds' young composers. The ten, from a range of backgrounds in the UK, Eastern Europe and Australia, learned about writing to commissioning briefs and completed a trial commission exercise. Some of ABRSM's composer mentees joined the session as observers. We plan to repeat the programme with Commonwealth Resounds and explore opportunities to run similar sessions with other organisations, including PercWorks.

1.3 Established partnerships with membership organisations, The Ivors Academy, Britten Pears Arts and Musicians Union, in order to reach other new composers who might be interested in commissions.

1.4 Planning a follow-up workshop in partnership with The Ivors Academy after staging successful inaugural 'Writing for Music Education' event for 100 composers as part of

fundamental commitment towards open-source guides and de-mystifying composition for music education.

1.5 Ensured that almost a third of pieces/arrangements on 'Nikki Iles and Friends' jazz piano albums published this spring were by composers/arrangers from BBIPOC composers.

2. Transforming syllabuses

2.1 Published new Woodwind syllabus for 2022 with significantly increased proportion of pieces by BBIPOC and female composers in new woodwind syllabus as follows:

- 5% of Flute syllabus (up from less than 1% in 2018) is by BBIPOC musicians and 16% by female composers (previously 8%);
- 5% of Clarinet syllabus (up from less than 1% in 2018) is by BBIPOC composers and 10% (from 4% in 2018) by female composers;
- 5% of Oboe syllabus by BBIPOC composers (up from 0.4%) and 12% by female composers (4% increase);
- Almost a fifth of the new Saxophone syllabuses feature compositions by female composers and up to 8% of pieces are by BBIPOC composers (an increase from 0% in 2018);
- 10% of the Bassoon syllabus is by female composers (up from 6%) and eight pieces (3%) are by BBIPOC composers (up from 0.4% in 2018).
- 3% of both the Treble and Descant Recorder syllabuses feature work by BBIPOC composers (up from around 0.6%) and there are significant increases in the number of pieces by women.

2.2 New woodwind syllabus published this summer features 87 pieces by 39 BBIPOC composers, including YolanDa Brown, Errollyn Wallen and Duke Ellington.

2.3 Considered in the region of 5,000 pieces by composers (including those from previously underrepresented backgrounds) as part of an internal review and standardisation process to verify suitability as examination material, grade level and list positions. Process led to new contacts with composers from under-represented backgrounds and some publishers new to ABRSM.

2.4 Continued to meet with The Ivors Academy to receive advice and share plans. This has included advice around specific repertoire.

2.5 Worked closely with composers from underrepresented groups to contribute additional compositions for use as digital publications. Work resulted in two new pieces/arrangements by BBIPOC composers for oboe, one for bassoon and three for each recorder syllabus.

3. Mentorship and development programme for composers

3.1 As above, delivered successful Writing for Music Education workshop with 100 participants with a further 100 on waiting list for the repeat event in the Autumn.

3.2 Successfully launched inaugural composer mentoring scheme in spring 2021 with six early career composers (below) identified through new partnership with The Ivors Academy.



Composers, left to right: Kemal Yusuf, Su Ting Han, Shruthi Rajasekar, Andrew Chen, James B. Wilson, Kristina Arakelyan.

The six have so far received a basic overview of ABRSM activity, exams and new developments, and individual tutorials with Sarah Watts and Andy Grappy. Sarah is a composer, teacher, educator, mentor and is the artistic director of the National Youth Music Camps and Andy is one of the UK's finest Tuba players and performs regularly with The London Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony, Abdullah Ibrahim, Jazz Jamaica and many others. He is also Head of STAX Southwark Music Service. Composers on the scheme have also been taken through the syllabus development cycle, introduced to ABRSM's publishing department and commissioning and copyright processes and received a first compositional task for Piano at Grade 1 level, feedback to be supplied by Alan Bullard. Alan's music is widely performed in the UK and abroad, and broadcast on TV and radio. As well as music for a wide range of ensembles and soloists, he has written much educational music, including both the *Joining the Dots* sight-reading series and the *Scale Explorer* series for ABRSM. He is also an ABRSM examiner.

The programme, to be repeated annually, will run to the winter with the six meeting ABRSM's International Representatives from the USA, India, Spain and South Africa and composers Lloyd Coleman, Althea Talbot-Howard, Bongani Ndodana-Breen (all published as part of 2022 Woodwind Syllabus).

Other planned activities include: meeting and hearing Nikki Iles exploring her recent ABRSM publications *Nikki Iles and Friends*; the chance to watch practical exams unfold in the exam room; and opportunities to connect with the RPS composer programme, with ABRSM mentees to attend RPS composition sessions and vice versa.

4. Developing partnerships and advocacy

4.1 Continuing to harness the power of sponsorship relationships with National Youth Jazz Orchestra, National Youth Orchestra, National Youth Choir of Great Britain, National Open Youth Orchestra, and a range of local/grass roots initiatives to set specific Diversity and Inclusion targets covering numbers of participants, range of voices and good practice dissemination.

4.2 Actively referencing Diversity and Inclusion impacts and implications within all conversations with Arts Council England and DfE.

4.3 Actively promoted latest diversity efforts, specifically composer mentor scheme and diversified woodwind syllabus through media coverage on significant sector platforms, Arts Professional and Classical Music during late spring/summer 2021.

4.4 Planning initial meeting in September of colleagues from major music education publishers to explore and agree common approaches to diversity issues in publishing.

4.5 Evolving partnership with National Open Youth Orchestra to explore assessment options, micro-credentials and ensemble performance assessments. Currently discussing opportunities for staff to learn more from NOYO on the Clarion and organising an opportunity to assess a Clarion cohort of 30 students in the Autumn.

4.6 Developing existing relationship with Drake Music Scotland to understand accessible assessment options through a pilot exercise to understand more about the use of the Figurenotes accessible route to learning notation in ABRSM exams. We are also in early stages of discovering opportunities to develop new routes to assessment with OpenUp Music.

5. Transforming the organisation

5.1 Working towards Diversity and Inclusion review of ABRSM governance. This is continuing but progress made with appointment of a new chair of ABRSM's Audit & Risk Committee.

We have revised the remit of our Music Education Advisory Committee (MEAC) to include a greater focus on Diversity & Inclusion. The membership of this group is also being refreshed and details will follow in our next update.

5.2 Survey to be launched in Autumn to understand diversity within ABRSM examiner panel as part of commitment supported by Musicians Union to explore greater diversity in recruitment.

5.3 Established cross-organisational Diversity & Inclusion Resource Group, with 20 regular members meeting monthly. Group chaired by ABRSM executive director, features updates and discussion on diversity and inclusion progress and enjoys very high levels of engagement. Themes for discussion in recent months have included:

- Accessibility to our exam offer – including a discussion around Figurenotes and the Clarion – an award-winning, accessible musical instrument that can be played independently with any part of the body, including the eyes
- Next generation composers – including an opportunity to listen to the music and engage with the intention of the composer mentor programme

Each meeting also includes an overview and discussion around recent and relevant publications and research and an overview of any changes to relevant internal processes. Future meetings will also see guest speakers invited to meet with the group to share their own lived experiences, perspectives and professional expertise.

5.4 Continuing 'Diversity and Inclusion' as standing agenda item on both monthly staff meetings and weekly SMT meeting as an important opportunity to embed D&I across the organisation.

5.5 Inspired a genuine culture change within the organisation within short space of time, with new sense of collaboration and ownership of work to make ABRSM more diverse. This has resulted in staff preferring to take a broader view which sees ABRSM's diversity agenda simply in terms of championing fairness across and beyond the organisation.

*Our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is about making sure that ABRSM reflects the work of people who have been traditionally underrepresented in what we do. Whilst, we are keen to work with others to develop a single, fixed, measurable and appropriate description of our progress, we recognise that our current terminology shares the fluidity and variety of description that currently characterises much of the broader diversity debate.