

**Making and learning music in Wales:  
a conversation with young people, May-June 2020**

**Reflections from Anna Arrieta, Youth Cymru –  
the facilitator for the sessions**

***Were there any findings in the report that you felt were particularly important for Anthem and Youth Music to consider ?***

From reading the key findings I would like to highlight the element around early years and initial experiences with music being vital to the young people's engagement with musical activity later on in life. Across the sessions young people continued to confirm that their experiences in school, youth work, and with their families were a massive influence to them. From my own experience I had lots of opportunities in school- Summer and Winter concerts where I was able to perform, constant access to music rooms, being part of choirs and ensembles, and great role models for teachers . Many young people in the sessions also agreed that they were offered these opportunities in their early years however through key findings we can see that majority of young people wanted more opportunities in their area along with improved music provisions in schools such as more instruments being on offer, better quality music lessons, and schools valuing music more as a subject. From my own experience as much as we were encouraged to play music in school, music was never offered as a career option. E.g. when we went to open days and careers fairs there were never music related stalls or organisations. I think it is vital to improve the music provisions in schools as we have found across the consultation sessions that schools have provided opportunities to many young people but to some young people they have presented barriers. For example, a few young people said that they were unable to learn the instrument they wanted to learn. Others said the way they learn wasn't taken into account e.g. some wanted to learn more music theory and others wanted to do more practical work. The consultation has proved for me that ensemble work and performances are a vital part of musicians development, and those who are unable to access this in their local area lack a sense of community and engagement with music. For these young people, intervention is needed in schools and online so that they are able to grow and develop with the encouragement and support that they need.

A very small minority of young people stated that they are considering music as a future career choice. I think the reason for this was because there is a stigma around careers in the creative industry, especially when you are younger. I think it's important that we address the stigma around going into creative careers as I feel that young people are scared of admitting this out of fear of judgement from others.

A big learning theme that came out of the consultations was that the majority of young people spoke about their experience of performance or lack of. Young people stated that performing gave them a sense of achievement, many of them either having performed in the past and thoroughly enjoyed it or wanting to one day get the chance to perform. I think performance opportunities are an invaluable way to learn, develop, and grow as a musician.

Financial barriers didn't seem to be a massive issue for majority of the young people who took part in the sessions, however this could be based on the demographic of young people that came to the sessions. I think it is important to reflect on the fact that a large amount of young people in Wales will find financial issues a massive barrier to engaging with music.

***Was there anything that you felt the report missed that young people seem to feel quite strongly about, or that was important for specific groups ?***

I think it is important to highlight that there was not a lot of young people creating music and putting their music out there on streaming platforms such as Itunes, Spotify, Youtube, etc. When I asked for young people to share the links to their socials and listen to each other's music only a minority took part in this which showed me that young people were creating music but not putting it out there. It would be interesting to look into this further and see what the barriers are which are stopping young people putting their music online.

Another thing that I don't think was highlighted enough in the report was the amount of times that young people mentioned the influence that other artists have on them, for example listening to people from the

same background as them or a similar area who have thrived and become very successful musicians pushes them and motivates them to follow their dreams. It was later mentioned in the report that some young people said it would be beneficial for musicians and other professionals to chat to them and give them advice on how to get into the industry.

When looking at the demographic data we can see that there was clearly a majority white representation. I think it's important that this is addressed in the report as to why the majority of young people who took part in the sessions were white and how this may affect the outcomes and learning from the consultations. It would be very interesting to learn from the perspective of young people of different ethnic backgrounds if they experienced different treatment in school or were pushed down certain avenues around their culture, or if in fact they were not given the opportunity to explore different cultural genres at all.

Other than these points I would say the report fully captured every aspect of the consultation, is very well structured, and covers all bases. The direct quotes from young people are extremely relevant and well utilised.

***What would your personal key recommendations be for Anthem and Youth Music?***

To go back to my previous point, I found in school that music was one of the most ethnically diverse and inclusive subjects that I studied. Saying that, there still wasn't massive amounts of room and space to explore a lot of different genres. This was brought up in certain elements of the consultation where young people stated that they felt judged for engaging in certain genres. I found this very interesting as my Latin American culture plays a massive part in my music, and I was only able to explore this through the influence of my family. I would have loved the opportunity to be able to learn about this in school. Even if there was a research project where as a student you are given the opportunity to take some time and look into a genre of your choice, I think this would be extremely beneficial for lots of different young people from different backgrounds and cultures.

I think it is important to split my recommendations into two parts. Firstly, the embedding and improvement of music services within schools e.g. Valuing the subject more across the board, encouraging conversations around careers in music, providing more instrumental lessons and a wider choice of instruments. This would be highly beneficial for those that are unable to attend a community group, extracurricular activity, or youth clubs where they are able to develop their musicianship skills. Secondly, based on the stage I am at with my music personally (20 years old, writing my own music, recording/producing, and putting it out on streaming platforms), I would love the opportunity to have one to one mentoring packages not solely based online but with mentors that can give advice on topics such as getting into the industry, record labels, branding, rights for music, and legal guidance which is personalised to my specific journey.

I think it is vital that every opportunity that comes out of this consultation has a focus on inclusion and creating a safe space. When speaking to young people with learning needs there was a focus on enabling all young people to be able to access music. I think that further consultation and work would be needed with experts in this field to look at how all music services and opportunities will be accessible to all young people, no matter their background, situation, or life experience.

The final point I will highlight is that I think it is extremely important that this funding does not underestimate the role of freelance musicians, and youth workers who have a passion for music, and use this to engage young people and be positive role models to them. I would not be doing music if it wasn't for my family members, teachers, and youth workers who inspired me and encouraged me throughout my early years. This is a common theme throughout the report and it is important to note that having the right people in those positions, musicians, industry specialists and practitioners, is what improves the musical experiences of young people.

As a Youth Worker and young musician, I have thoroughly enjoyed facilitating the consultations and sharing experiences with young people across Wales on this topic. Thank you.

Anna Arrieta