



ABRSM Diversity and Inclusion Plan

Progress Update 4 – February 2022

This is our fourth 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

ABRSM's most recent work on active commissioning and syllabus transformation has focused on development of the 2023&2024 Piano Syllabus. It has involved:

- 1.1 Focusing active commissioning over the period since the last update (August 2021) on maintaining and building on representation of female composers achieved in the 2021&2022 syllabus and, similarly, achieving significant increase in representation of composers included under the BBIPOC definition.
- 1.2 Process underway to finalise piano syllabus and pieces chosen for Piano Exam Pieces (PEPs). We hope that commissions will include work by up to two of the composers who took part in the inaugural ABRSM Composer Mentorship Programme.
- 1.3 Continuing to work in partnership with other organisations to raise awareness of composing opportunities, for example, running a workshop with Royal Philharmonic Society and their composer cohort to introduce them to 'writing for music education' (see [Current Composers – Royal Philharmonic Society](#)).
- 1.4 Our active commissioning work on the new ABRSM woodwind syllabus published last year has attracted positive recognition from key sector voices. Commissioned composer Althea Talbot-Howard: "ABRSM has now taken action by seeking out music of both artistic and pedagogical merit by a range of composers, some of whom are of African descent. I hope that everyone will be able to see the value in this exercise, and to celebrate the work that has been put in on the woodwind syllabus over the last year."

2. Transforming syllabuses

- 2.1** The 2023&2024 piano syllabus will contain significantly more pieces by female and BBIPOC composers than the previous 2021&2022 syllabus. The latter had 61 pieces by female composers and 6 by BBIPOC composers. The new 2023&2024 syllabus will have a minimum of 78 pieces by women composers and 27 by BBIPOC composers. This means that more than a quarter of piano syllabus pieces are by female composers and/or BBIPOC composers. These figures are likely to increase once PEPs commissions are confirmed.
- 2.2** 107 (66%) of the added pieces have not appeared on an ABRSM piano syllabus before. The average number of added pieces per grade that are 'returners' is 7 (out of 18).
- 2.3** The list of 75 female and BBIPOC composers featured on the 2023&2024 syllabus includes 31 composers who are appearing on an ABRSM Piano syllabus for the first time – 18 female, 16 BBIPOC.
- 2.4** Arrangements for piano syllabus Grade 2 include a piece by Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745–1799), the earliest-known composer of African descent. Grade 3 also includes a new arrangement of The Entertainer – the first time Scott Joplin has appeared on an ABRSM piano syllabus. The syllabus also includes pieces by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Nathaniel Dett, Nkeiru Okoye, Florence Price, Joshua Uzoigwe and Andre Bangambula Vindu.
- 2.5** PEPs to now include newly affordable, quality editions of pieces by female (and BBIPOC) composers that were previously no longer in print, hard to get hold of, or just very expensive. These include two by Louise Farrenc (1804–1875) and pieces by Florence Price (1887–1953), Elizabetta de Gambarini (1731–1765) and Bernadette Marmion (b. 1938).
- 2.6** The new piano syllabus retains traditional tunes from countries as diverse as Ghana, Jamaica and North America, but now includes additions from China, Korea and Malaysia.
- 2.7** Syllabus additions also include pieces by composers of Asian heritage as well as work by Argentinian composers, Piazzolla and Guastavino.

3. Mentorship and development programme for composers

- 3.1** Completed successful pilot of ABRSM's inaugural Composer Mentor programme in December 2021. The pilot played a part in the musical journeys of six young composers: Andrew Chen, Shruthi Rajasekar, Su Ting Han, Kemal Yusuf, Kristina Arakelyan and James B. Wilson. The six, all from under represented backgrounds, completed a range of work during the programme and wrote music at different grades for piano, saxophone and various brass instruments. They were also commissioned to write music for ABRSM partner organisations like the National Children's Orchestra, worked with Britten Pears Arts, and attracted the attention of Judith Weir - Master of the Queen's Music. ABRSM looks forward to featuring their music in future publications and to staying in touch. [See here for interviews with the six.](#)
- 3.2** Now evaluating content of the mentor programme before recruiting the next cohort of six composers later in the year – working in partnership again with the Ivors Academy as

well as with colleagues in the Royal Schools and new partners in the Musicians' Union and Black Lives in Music.

3.3 Broadening out the Mentor programme this year by also piloting a series of roadshows. The roadshows involve ABRSM travelling the country to deliver workshops which help GCSE and A level music students, music services and students in further and higher education deepen their own understanding of the principles of writing for Music Education.

4. Developing partnerships and advocacy

4.1 Continuing to ensure that diversity and inclusion at the centre of all partnership agreements. Recent examples include agreements with the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain, National Youth Jazz Orchestra, London Music Fund, Music Mark, Royal Philharmonic Society, National Open Youth Orchestra. This strand of work has involved making sure that our partners have appropriate diversity and inclusion plans and exploring other ways in which our partnerships can encourage greater diversity (our support for the National Youth Orchestra's Inspire programme, which provides orchestral opportunities for musicians who are underrepresented in the sector, is one example of this happening.).

4.2 Continuing work with colleagues from major music education publishers and the Music Publishers' Association to explore and agree common approaches to diversity issues in publishing. Work will ultimately result in the production of shared guidelines for music publishers to follow.

4.3 Further developing relationship with the National Open Youth Orchestra. It has already resulted in ABRSM workshops to explore and demonstrate the Clarion and visits to schools will take place in March. The Clarion is an electronic instrument which can be played by movement of the eyes and has been developed specifically for use by musicians with particular disability.

4.4 Progressing pilot exercise with Drake Music Scotland to understand more about the use of the Figurenotes – the Finnish education tool which supports learners with additional support needs to learn to read music.

4.5 Helped composer from under represented background (Althea Talbot-Howard) secure regular national platform to present her perspective on music.

5. Transforming the organisation

5.1 Recruited the following new independent members from a wide range of backgrounds and interests to the Music Education Advisory Committee: Natasha Baldwin – Universal Music Publishing Group; Barry Farrimond M.B.E – National Open Youth Orchestra; Rylan Gleave – independent composer; Paul Harris – established international educationalist; Gabriel Lee – Singaporean violinist and teacher; Tim Plyming – Open University; Orphy Robinson M.B.E – jazz musician, The Ivors Academy; Jimmy Rotheram – Primary School Music Leader and Adviser; Simon Toyne – Executive Director of Music (DRET), Past President, Music Teachers' Association; Matt Wingfield – e-Assessment Association. MEAC advises on how to ensure ABRSM remains relevant and contemporary to the music community.

5.2 Diversified the Board of ABRSM Trustees by recruiting key new members. See [ABRSM: Structure and key staff](#)

5.3 Conducted survey of ABRSM examiners as part of our commitment to achieving greater diversity and inclusion. This will lead to creation of small locally-based teams of examiners in key countries in which we operate. We are also now starting to work with partners including Black Lives in Music and the Musician's Union to recruit and train cohorts of examiners from under represented backgrounds.

5.4 Continuing regular monthly meetings of cross-organisational Diversity & Inclusion Resource Group – established last year. Group chaired by ABRSM executive director, features updates and discussion on diversity and inclusion progress and enjoys high levels of engagement, with 20 staff attending each meeting. Recent guest speakers invited to meet with the group to share their own lived experiences, perspectives and professional expertise have included: Orphy Robinson; Lloyd Coleman, Kristina Arakelyan, and Masruba Tasnim, from ENEI (the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion).

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

5.6 Exploring how we can now broaden our definition of diversity and inclusion to encompass access issues such as financial inclusion.

Note: This update is based on a definition of diversity which encompasses a range of under-represented groups but which is particularly aligned with the BBIPOC definition (Black, Brown and Indigenous People of Colour BBIPOC). As indicated in 5.6, our work so far is part of a greater journey which will, in the future, focus on diversity and inclusion of all kinds.