



Connect: Resound New Contexts Evaluation summary report

Exploring online music learning in challenging
circumstances



Introduction

Connect: Resound is a groundbreaking digital programme developed by NYMAZ since a successful pilot in 2014. Connect: Resound is about delivering real time individual and group instrumental lessons and other music activities online (also referred to as 'Synchronous Online Learning' or SOL). A priority of Connect: Resound is to increase access to music education and instigate opportunities in 'cold spots' where through location or circumstance people are prevented from taking part in music. NYMAZ has approached this by working in partnership with Music Education Hubs and arts organisations to embed online approaches in their delivery of music services and activities for children and young people.

The initial driver for Connect: Resound was the challenge facing rural Music Education Hubs trying to reach schools and pupils in more isolated and out-of-reach areas. The approach proved to be an effective way of working in these contexts and, as a result, NYMAZ Hub partners expressed an interest in exploring the potential of real time online music tuition in other contexts where children may be facing different challenging circumstances and barriers to access. This led to the creation of a new strand of work called Connect: Resound New Contexts.

NYMAZ commissioned Sound Connections as external evaluator for Connect: Resound New Contexts in March 2018. This report is the summary version of the complete end-of-project report and has been produced in order to share the key findings and recommendations more widely. The lead author of the report is Jennifer Raven, Deputy Director, Sound Connections, who led the New Contexts research.

NYMAZ is a founding member of the [Alliance for a Musically Inclusive England](#) - a movement for change throughout music education. It is a growing network of organisations working together to promote equity in music education and to support others to do the same through advocacy, CPD, resources, and strategic alliances.

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1 About the New Contexts projects

Connect: Resound New Contexts ran from January 2018 to July 2019 with four projects being delivered in different areas of the country (Croydon, East Sussex, Somerset and Surrey). Each project set out to work with young people facing different challenging circumstances.

Croydon

Project lead organisation: Croydon Music and Arts, lead partner in Croydon Music Education Hub.

Purpose of New Contexts project: to test Synchronous Online Learning Environments (SOL) with young people who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to access music education. At application stage they specified Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), home schooling, hospital schools, Looked After Children and children not attending school (largely because of mental health difficulties) as potential contexts.

How their project developed: they began by testing SOL with Year 9 students in a mainstream school who had opted for music GCSE but had not had the chance to learn an instrument. Online teaching took the form of 1-to-1 and small-group clarinet lessons with the students in a classroom or practice room at school and the teacher based at the Croydon Music and Arts office. They were connected via Zoom on laptops.

Croydon Music and Arts also contacted Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) about a prospective project and hope to expand delivery to a PRU in due course.

Overall the set-up process took longer, with lessons beginning in summer term 2019, because the Croydon Music and Arts team went through a very thorough preparation and research process to learn how best to use the equipment and establish the instruments most conducive to online learning.

East Sussex

Project lead organisation: East Sussex Music, lead partner in East Sussex Music Education Hub

Purpose of New Contexts project: to deepen and extend action research they had already begun in relation to rural isolation.

How their project developed: in spring term 2018 they tested out home brass tuition with four students. This took the form of 1-to-1 brass lessons with students at home (with support from parents) and the teacher also at home. Teacher and students were connected via a secure virtual e-learning system - Learn-Smart software - on laptops.

Following on from this they were due to deliver further activity as part of New Contexts and had identified three opportunities:

- *Early Years:* delivering activities and training online as part of a blended approach of face-to-face work with online activities and performance broadcasts within settings.
- *Whole Class Ensemble Teaching:* whole class ensemble lessons broadcast to 2 - 3 schools at the same time.
- *Isolated children and young people:* receiving tuition at home or in hospital, via the Virtual Schools Partnership.

Activity was delayed in East Sussex, which largely stemmed from wider challenges across the Hub, with its future under threat due to a local authority funding review in 2018 and staffing changes.

Somerset

Project lead organisations: Take Art (a partner in Somerset Music Education Hub) in collaboration with Actiontrack, a studio-based youth music charity.

Purpose of New Contexts project: to trial SOL with young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) as one part of a larger project funded by Youth Music.

How their project developed: similar to Croydon, the set-up process took longer than anticipated. By June 2019 they had begun trialling SOL in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) with Actiontrack staff effectively acting as remote support teachers for class lessons facilitated by the PRU music teacher. The Actiontrack tutor was based at the Actiontrack studio and connected to the school via Skype with video and audio transmitted using the classroom's Interactive Whiteboard.

CASE STUDY: WORKING WITH PUPIL REFERRAL UNITS

The New Contexts work in Somerset has so far focused on SOL in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), and Croydon Music and Arts have also pursued opportunities to deliver online learning in a PRU.

In both places, establishing positive contact with a PRU has been a challenge. In **Somerset**, just one setting responded - as a result of the teacher being particularly proactive and extremely keen for external projects and support.

In **Croydon** it has been a challenge to establish contact and build relationships at all. The difficulties with making contact are not directly related to Connect: Resound, rather it is a reflection of the challenging context for settings like PRUs. With this in mind it is important to consider the time it takes to establish contact and build relationships when planning timelines for new projects. Once contact has been established, it has been important to work in a responsive way and co-produce the plan with the PRU, so activity is based upon the needs of students and setting staff.

At the time of writing, two sessions had happened in the Somerset PRU and Actiontrack staff reported that the technology was effective and reliable – Skype worked well and the large classroom Interactive Whiteboard was an ideal interface. The sessions involved group guitar but they are hoping to develop it into an 'online jam' between students at the PRU and Actiontrack staff.

One potential challenge identified by Actiontrack is that any equipment used and based at the school is at risk of being damaged and needs to be stored securely in between sessions. The teacher has also suggested that the needs and levels of engagement of each cohort vary greatly, so a method that works with one group could change significantly with the arrival of new students. This means that developing a portfolio of activities and approaches that can be used as part of a blended learning approach is particularly important.

The Croydon team has consulted with a community music practitioner who has experience of working in PRUs and alternative provision. He expressed some reservations about online learning because he believes that key to successful engagement with PRU students is building strong, trusting relationships in-person. Further exploration of this hypothesis is needed.

Surrey

Project lead organisation: Surrey Arts, lead partner of Surrey Music Education Hub.

Purpose of New Contexts project: to deliver one term of lessons with newly arrived and vulnerable foreign nationals in an FE college.

How their project developed: Surrey was able to deliver their work as originally planned along with testing SOL in two other contexts. The activity they delivered was:

- 1-to-1 instrumental (saxophone, guitar, violin, drums and keyboard), vocal and music production lessons with students in a classroom or hall at college and the teacher based at the Surrey Arts studio or at home. Connected via Zoom and Soundtrap on laptops.
- 1-to-1 instrumental (saxophone and keyboard) lessons with students at home (in foster care) with the teacher based at the Surrey Arts studio. Connected via Skype on laptops.
- Small group saxophone lessons with students in a school classroom or practice room with the teacher based at the Surrey Arts studio. Connected via Google Hangouts on laptops.

CASE STUDY: SURREY ARTS

Taken from Surrey Arts' Connect: Resound summary evaluation report written by Abi D'Amore who Surrey Arts commissioned as freelance project manager.

[Student] had expressed an interest in learning the saxophone following a taster session provided by Surrey Arts. Through the series of ten online learning sessions on saxophone, he learnt a number of notes, learnt how to put the instrument together, and five songs. Both [student] and [foster carer] felt this was a beneficial experience.

The challenge of transporting him and the other children in [foster carer]'s care even just a few minutes down the road immediately prohibits engaging with many organised music learning/participation activities. Due to his needs it is critical that [foster carer] remains within easy distance of him, therefore a one-to-one instrumental lesson in a room would require her presence constantly, which is a challenge when there are other children to consider. However, with digital distance learning he could access music learning, and [foster carer] was present but without it disrupting the rest of the family.

His focus and concentration was better than [foster carer] expected, and she put this down to him working through a screen for a short period of time. *"Normally he is wanting to hug people and tell them things, show them things. If a tutor came to the house the chances are he wouldn't concentrate on learning the instrument that much, he would concentrate more on social interactions. This way the distance was of direct benefit, and enabled him to progress musically."*

At the end of the academic year he won an award for the most improved child in his year, based on English and Maths data. While the digital distance learning lessons were one of many interventions to support him, [foster carer] feels that the experience has definitely contributed to his overall ability to pay attention and concentrate.

2 Impact

The evaluation was based upon a simple Theory of Change, which outlined outcomes for SOL students, teachers, Music Education Hubs and NYMAZ. Alongside the outcomes were a series of 'process questions', which helped to explore how well the programme was working.

As the projects are still in the early stages of their genesis and have so far involved a very small number of young people, it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions. There are however some fascinating indications of what the outcomes and benefits can be, and how Connect: Resound can remove barriers to access for young people facing challenging circumstances in their lives.

Outcomes for young people

Personal outcomes

- In two projects levels of engagement were high throughout, which came as a surprise to teachers and carers: *"The engagement of the pupils was great and they really wanted to be part of it."*
- In one of these projects, the high levels of engagement meant that there were also no behavioural issues reported. Students also seemed to be more focused and concentrated when learning via a screen. *"I was amazed by their focus and concentration – not something we always see."*
- One teacher commented that a student was more focused because there were no other people in the room:
"Levels of commitment, concentration and focus are astounding. Very different to usual class behaviour. Something around being on screen, and

seeing yourself on screen that mean your own actions are being reflected back to you. There are not other people to distract you.” New Contexts partner organisation lead

- For some students there is a feeling of comfort and safety in using technology because they associate the experience of live online communication with speaking to friends and family via technology such as Skype. For example, asylum seekers communicating with friends and family in their country of origin.

“It’s really useful for young people who don’t want to come into institutions, find the screen-based learning more comfortable [or] can’t travel.” New Contexts partner organisation lead

- Some students appear to have responded better to interacting via a screen rather than in-person, though one teacher has suggested that the students’ sense of ease and comfort could also be down to them being in an informal home setting.
- Across two projects, the physical separation between student and teacher meant that some students developed greater independence because they had to rely upon themselves to make adjustments and corrections instead of depending upon a teacher.
- In one project, there was a noticeable increase in confidence.

There were three potential benefits identified by New Contexts teachers and staff that are yet to be robustly evidenced:

- One New Contexts project has hypothesised that SOL will have a positive impact on students with anxiety as they will be able to learn at home or in a space they feel comfortable and safe in. They are hoping to work with one such young person in due course. *“You need a geographical access point and psychological access point – this gives someone a way to engage without having to go somewhere, meet someone new in person etc.”*

There is some evidence of the benefits for people with anxiety from NYMAZ’s own use of online mentoring: *“We have an Ambassador who has anxiety – she likes having something she can dip in and out of so she doesn’t always need to be in the room.”*

- A safeguarding expert who provided advice and guidance as part of Connect: Resound suggests that SOL supports students to develop digital literacy and skills, and helps them become familiar with positive, safe use of technology and online learning.
- Online learning can potentially support young people who are in transition – the flexibility SOL allows provides a musical offer that can transition with them across different contexts provided they have consistent access to appropriate technology.

Social outcomes

- There is evidence of students developing social skills through collaborating with peers and helping one another.
- For students learning the English language, SOL has helped develop language and communication skills and has provided an opportunity for interaction with a wider range of English speakers.

Musical outcomes

- Levels of musical progress have varied across projects, though for both projects that were able to provide data about musical progress, students, parents/carers and teachers reported that some progress was made. In one project students perceived that their ability to make music, sing and listen to music increased markedly. It has also helped students develop aural learning skills through being more reliant upon learning by ear.
- Being able to see themselves on the screen has helped students to physically observe their own progress, and get instant feedback about how they are doing.

Removing barriers

Information from Surrey Arts and NYMAZ's own use of online learning identifies how SOL has removed barriers to participation, including:

- Due to that fact that SOL uses a medium that young people are comfortable and familiar with, and lessons happened in a familiar space, psychological barriers to participation were removed to some extent.
- The digital element placed a natural distance between teachers and students, which for some vulnerable young people created a safer and more comfortable space.
- NYMAZ has worked with participants on the autism spectrum who have asked for online involvement either because they cannot physically get to a venue or they are nervous about meeting people in person for the first time.
- As noted earlier, SOL can enable young people with anxiety to engage with activities as it removes the pressure of being in social situations.
- In one case it enabled young people to extend their musical skills through group learning and instrument learning, neither of which would have been possible face-to-face in this context.

Advantages for teachers

Where teachers have embraced new approaches and pedagogy, and overcome technological challenges, they have enjoyed a variety of benefits including:

- More flexibility in the working day.
"The convenience of online teaching is something that would appeal to many. Being able to do it in the comfort and safety of your own home or in a school. This is the way that the world is moving. Most people do communicate via some sort of social, online and online medium." New Contexts tutor
- Lessons haven't had to be cancelled because of weather conditions.
- It has prompted teachers to reflect on their teaching methods.
"They used it as reflective practice and their teaching quality improved." Connect: Resound (non-New Contexts) partner organisation lead

“For me it is always good to do something completely different. Makes you question your methods. This will definitely impact my other work.” New Contexts tutor

- A new national community of practice has been formed, which is providing stimulation and inspiration for the teachers involved.
- Teachers are able to work further afield, expand their teaching portfolio and share expertise more widely through teaching beyond their home county.

Outcomes for Music Education Hubs and other delivery organisations

The New Contexts projects have been relatively small pieces of action research, which means there is very little evidence of wider organisational change.

Nonetheless there are indications of the following impact:

- It is challenging Hubs to adapt to more digitally-focused teaching methods, preparing them for a more digitised future.
- New Contexts has begun to enable Hubs to provide music tuition to students who would not otherwise be able to access Hub activities.

Outcomes for NYMAZ

Through interviews with the NYMAZ team, it is clear that Connect: Resound has influenced other aspects of the NYMAZ programme, for example the introduction of one-to-one online meetings with NYMAZ Ambassadors and a programme of live performance broadcasts.

Whilst the majority of members of the core team have not worked directly on Connect: Resound they have all learnt from it and feel it is relevant to their roles. They are also all very supportive of Connect: Resound and have a very positive and flexible mind-set when it comes to embracing new technology and

overcoming challenges – this makes them strong advocates for the work and enables SOL to become embedded across the organisation.

“The more we as a team see the benefits, the more it helps us to embed it across the work we do.” NYMAZ staff member

Members of the team feel they are better equipped to deliver SOL having gained hands-on experience of online platforms and had the opportunity to learn directly from the digital project manager’s expertise.

“The team’s skills have increased. We have shadowed the team for live performances – how to set up, how to make sure we’re on the correct channels, how to make sure sound is working well etc.” NYMAZ staff member

3 Key ingredients

SOL requires a different approach to more traditional teaching methods and set-ups. Through the evaluation process we have started to identify a number of things that have helped SOL to be most effective and positive:

Project management

- Evidence suggests that a **longer set-up period** of at least 6 to 12 months is needed for preparatory work, which includes fostering staff buy-in, training staff, testing equipment, ensuring appropriate safeguarding policy and procedure is in place and recruiting settings/participants.
- Contracting an external **project manager** has helped get things off the ground and provide impetus at the start. The most effective staffing structure, at least for the set-up and testing phase, has comprised a Hub manager overseeing the project and coordinating equipment; a freelance project manager coordinating and evaluating the work; a member of staff at the setting; and a team of tutors able to respond to different needs and interests of students. In this instance, the ideal scenario involved the member of setting staff being present in lessons (at the student end) to support with pastoral needs.

- **Lesson length** has been an important consideration. Whilst there has been no obvious optimum length, it is advisable to work with teachers and students to determine lesson length. We know from one project that students felt a 20-minute lesson was long enough looking at the screen but that teachers felt it wasn't quite long enough to cover all material as things such as setting up instruments took a bit longer with no support teacher in the room to help.

Pastoral and 'in the room' support

- In most situations, it has been invaluable to have **support staff in the room** with students. Working with children facing challenging circumstances who often have complex and disrupted lives makes pastoral support particularly important. In one New Context, having an adult was found to be critical for tuning; support with language/communication; technology set-up and troubleshooting.

Mind-set and attitude

- All staff involved need to be **open-minded and flexible**, with a solutions-oriented mind-set.

"Take Art and Actiontrack are open-minded, innovative and ready; NYMAZ bring a huge volume of expertise. It's a really clear partnership and mutually beneficial sharing." Meeting observation notes

- It is helpful to view SOL as **one part of a multi-faceted toolkit** of teaching techniques and approaches; it is one way in which to broaden what is on offer and add an extra dimension to the learner experience.
- Each delivery organisation needs someone who is a **dynamic advocate**; some people will be sceptical or resistant, so a proactive approach to making the case for SOL, and sharing evidence and practice, is valuable.

"We had an ex-colleague on board who became a champion and it would not have worked without him."

- Teachers who have tried SOL suggest that the best way to learn is by doing it and by using a process of **trial and error**.

Technology

- All teachers need a **comprehensive introduction to the technology and equipment set-up**. They also benefit from access to someone who can support and troubleshoot. Even teachers considered to be savvy with music technology can be unfamiliar with the equipment used for New Contexts and need time and training to become confident.
- There are some issues beyond anyone's control such as latency caused by bandwidth – these issues need to be acknowledged and adapted to whilst also **recognising that they will likely change over time as technology advances**.
- It is important to **research any technological restrictions** in SOL locations at the earliest stage in project planning (for example, are there firewalls that prevent particular applications being used?), so that suitable solutions are found from the start.
- Teaching via **Soundtrap** (an online music studio that allows you to collaborate online) has been successful with minimal or no latency. A major benefit of Soundtrap is that it can be accessed from any computer, phone or tablet at any time. This provides important continuity for people who do not own expensive computers, iPads and audio software. Another benefit is that the teacher and student can work simultaneously on the same track.
- **Zoom** has been a particularly effective platform for SOL – in one project, where three different platforms were trialled, Zoom was found to be most stable, intuitive to use and had the best safeguarding features. It also enables lessons to be recorded, so students can refer back to them at a later date.
- Since the start of New Contexts, Roland has released new hardware onto the market - Roland VH-1D Portable Compact HD Video Switcher - which NYMAZ and UCan Play believe provides more **flexibility for using multiple cameras and microphone inputs** on a budget.
- Sound quality can be problematic but investing in **high quality speakers** has been an effective solution.
- Getting **camera angles** right is important and needs to be factored into how lessons are planned and delivered.

- One project was interested in the feasibility of teaching young people who would be using their own mobile phone with a facility such as Facetime or Facebook Messenger. In a test situation amongst staff they found **Facebook Messenger** to be effective but they were concerned about the safeguarding implications.
- New Contexts partners have been interested to learn more about the **cheapest possible options**. NYMAZ and UCan Play have developed a series of cheap but effective example set-ups.

Pedagogy

- The most successful use of SOL has included an opportunity for **teacher and student to meet in-person**. Ideally this happens at the start, so that instrument set-up and the very basics of technique are taught in-person. Building rapport is a different process to more traditional settings, which is helped by being able to meet the student in person at least once.
- There are **different considerations depending on the instrument** you are teaching, which results in different nuances to the teaching pedagogy.
- **Body language** needs consideration both in terms of how teachers present themselves and use body language to explain things, and what they can learn about a student from their body language.
- **Communication needs extra clarity** because energy, tone of voice and gestures don't come across so clearly. Teachers have found the need to slow their pace of teaching and communication, and have thought carefully about how to explain things by focusing on the basics.
- **Mirroring is challenging** and any activity that requires demonstrating hand positions needs careful consideration.
- Pedagogy needs to **focus on being as musical as possible** with the vast majority of time spent playing rather than giving spoken instruction.

“Showing is really necessary. Too much talking becomes confusing. Teachers have to get used to giving very clear verbal and visual instructions particularly for students with limited English but probably also for others.”
Project visit observation notes

- Due to latency, clapping rhythms or playing together isn't possible. This has resulted in teachers using more **call and response, copying, musical modelling and backing tracks**.
- Some people have found the different style of teaching and pedagogy very tiring as it requires so much focus, at least to begin with. This needs factoring into planning, for example, by including sufficient breaks between lessons.

Selecting instruments

In Croydon, the team gave considerable thought to the instruments most conducive to online teaching. They concluded that:

- The **keyboard** is very well-suited because it requires minimal set-up with no concerns around instrument assembly or tuning.
- With **brass instruments**, similarly there is little concern around set-up though with the trombone there may be some issues with the teacher seeing the student's slide positions depending on how the camera is angled and whether or not the whole instrument fits within the screen.
- The greatest complexities identified were with **wind instruments**, for example reed positioning can require help from a teacher and the reed is easily damaged. The research concluded that in order to teach the clarinet online, it is likely that a whole lesson would need to be dedicated to instrument set-up, which could prove to be de-motivating for some students. With a flute explaining embouchure and producing a sound is more complicated.

In Surrey one of the most interesting and popular options was learning **music production** via Soundtrap. It responded to a popular student request for opportunities to develop music production skills, and meant that the challenges of learning live/acoustic instruments online were avoided.

Overall, it has been important to give teachers the time and support to understand the pedagogical implications of teaching their instrument.

Resources

- SOL has challenged teachers to be more **varied and creative** in their use of resources.
- Resources that teachers have found effective include **backing tracks and visual aids** that they can hold up to the screen.
- More advance preparation is required as **resources can't easily be shared spontaneously** during a lesson. Being able to upload in advance a range of resources, such as backing tracks and chord charts that students can access ahead of the lesson, is beneficial.
- Guides on **pedagogy and approach, technology and safeguarding** have provided considerable clarity for new project staff.

Teaching environment

Online teacher Grant Golding has shared ideas about how to prepare and create an environment most conducive to a positive experience. His full recommendations can be found in his guide, '*Techniques of Teaching*'* but they include:

- Considerations about **what to wear** – for example avoiding clothing with 'busy' or bright patterns.
- **Setting up the room** – for example avoiding a window behind you as movement outside can be a major distraction.
- **Sound and movement** – for example the microphone can be very sensitive, so avoid background noise like jewellery catching on your instrument.

* To access the full guide and webinar, please join the NYMAZ Remote Music Learning Network and look in the Members' Area. Membership is FREE and is designed to support and connect professionals with an interest in online music education. For more information, visit: <https://www.nymaz.org.uk/for-professionals/remote>

Training

- NYMAZ's **training webinars** have been very well received. In particular the webinar about safeguarding was a notable success with 100% of feedback respondents saying that their knowledge and understanding of safeguarding when teaching online improved a little or a lot.
- **Resources written by expert practitioners** providing advice and guidance about different aspects of SOL have been an easy and effective way of sharing tips and solutions.
- **Teacher-to-teacher mentoring** has provided a valuable opportunity for people to share practice more informally.

Partners

- Having **NYMAZ as an expert advisory organisation** has been essential. In particular, delivery partners have benefited from NYMAZ acting as a sounding board and mentor.
- Involving a partner or practitioners who are experienced with **non-formal styles of teaching** and facilitation is beneficial.
- In order to work effectively with children and young people facing challenging circumstances, a **multi-agency approach** is important.
- The project has greater gravity because it involves a **national collective of organisations**.

Leadership

- For faster progress to be made, SOL needs to be a **priority for senior leaders** and be part of **organisation-wide strategy**.
- Investment in digital technology needs to be prioritised:
"The potential is huge, but our ambitions are bigger than our resources."
Connect: Resound (non-New Contexts) partner organisation senior leader
- One of the best examples of governance has been in Somerset where the New Contexts work is part of a larger project, for which there is a steering group that includes the Hub lead organisation and other Hub partners – this

ensures New Contexts is part of strategic planning and benefits from input from a range of people.

4 Conclusions

Overall, whilst there have been challenges getting New Contexts off the ground, and it has been necessary to dedicate significantly more time to set-up, training and testing, organisations delivering the projects are very positive about the future of SOL and are committed to ongoing learning and development. There is a collective will to persevere, in the knowledge that technology is rapidly developing and many of the issues faced in 2019 will be solved by advances in technology in future. People are keenly aware that the current challenges with existing technology should not stop organisations pursuing and embedding SOL.

“With this short project we have proved the viability of the digital distance learning approach. It is always worth pioneering new approaches to learning and this is a great project for Surrey Arts to be involved with in this technological time.” New Contexts tutor

"I am in a fortunate position to be in a role dedicated to technology. SMT are very forward thinking and I like to promote risk, be a leader, and say "let's try it". Tech is getting more embedded into education and we want to be leaders." Connect: Resound (non-New Contexts) partner organisation project lead

Some of the over-arching themes from the findings are:

Children and young people

Connect: Resound New Contexts has evolved differently to the original expectation, with the focus of the work needing to be on set-up, technology testing and workforce development. More funding specifically for testing and embedding is needed before outcomes for children and young people can be measured.

Nonetheless, there is anecdotal evidence of benefits of SOL specific to learners who are facing challenging circumstances. Generally, young people find learning online is very natural as they are used to interacting and learning using digital technology.

Teacher training and support

Overall, teachers have developed skills and confidence through New Contexts and it has been a fertile ground for professional development. For many it has been an intense learning curve because it requires an adapted pedagogy and a mind-set shift in most cases.

A supportive community of practice, within which there is a willingness to share challenges and solutions as much as successes, has provided an important support system for teachers and managers embarking on this new way of working.

Webinars hosted by NYMAZ have been very successful, and have resulted in teachers and project managers developing knowledge and confidence.

Whilst project lead staff are committed and optimistic, some of the teaching staff involved in delivering Connect: Resound New Contexts are sceptical. Training and support for teaching staff must remain a priority in future iterations of the project.

NYMAZ's development

Connect: Resound is a well-established facet of NYMAZ's programme. NYMAZ has earned a strong reputation as a sector-leader in online learning, and the NYMAZ team is respected for its expertise and commitment. Connect: Resound delivery partners feel well-supported, and find a sense of security in being part of a network. In particular, some are very apprehensive about aspects of SOL such as safeguarding and feel safe in the knowledge that NYMAZ is there to provide advice and support.

SOL will require ongoing action research in order to develop practice and make the case to a variety of stakeholders – NYMAZ is well-placed to continue leading this effort.

Uses of SOL

There is a wide range of contexts that SOL can be used for and many that are yet to be fully tested. Beyond instrumental lessons, it has been exciting to see how Connect: Resound has sown seeds for SOL to be used for mentoring and pastoral support; Whole Class Ensemble Teaching; online jams; webinars, training and resource-sharing; and broadcasts of performances.

Overall, the experiences of Connect: Resound projects suggest SOL is most effective as part of a blended learning approach.

“A blended model is one that works – it's commonly thought to be the best approach.” NYMAZ Trustee

Hardware and software

People are still experimenting with hardware and software options, and there is no one set-up that has proven effective across multiple settings although Zoom stands out as a preferred platform within New Contexts.

Because the optimum set-up is dependent upon the circumstances of each setting, providing information about a spectrum of hardware and software empowers people to explore the best option for their context. There is interest in learning more about working with the most basic of set-ups, including via platforms such as Facetime.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding for online tuition is a major consideration that requires dedicated expertise and planning time. It is important though not only to consider the challenges of safeguarding in a new environment but also to consider the opportunities, which include helping children and young people to build digital resilience. For example, staying safe and maintaining wellbeing online.

A foster carer also identified some of the potential safeguarding benefits:

“From a purely safeguarding point of view, I’m able to monitor closely without having to be 100% in the room. There is more chance of [student] feeling he had a full on relationship with an adult tutor if they were regularly in a room together each week, which obviously this is unlikely to happen but there are more chances in that situation for someone to exploit that connection.”

5 Recommendations

The potential with SOL is to add a new dimension to a blended learning approach, giving teachers new tools to complement their existing methods. With an appetite for SOL amongst organisations across the country, and a community of practice forming, NYMAZ should continue to play the lead role in driving forward SOL.

NYMAZ has established itself as a leading organisation in digital learning, particularly with the unique focus on working with young people in challenging circumstances; whilst huge strides have been taken through NYMAZ’s leadership

since 2014, there is still much more to explore and develop in partnership with organisations across the UK.

The recommendations from this evaluation report are:

Research

- Different challenging circumstances and barriers vary greatly, so selecting specific contexts to research and test across multiple locations would be beneficial. From what we have learned through the evaluation, it would be exciting to see further research into online learning in PRUs and with Looked After Children.
- Invest in action research specifically focused on a programme of blended learning.
- Work with Hubs and other delivery partners to identify specific research questions related to technological challenges, for example how best to work with and overcome latency.
- Croydon's exploration into the suitability of different instruments has provided an excellent foundation of information and warrants further development.
- Continue testing and being open to a range of equipment, software and set-ups.
- Continue testing online mentoring as another use for SOL.
- Online learning in Early Years has been referenced but not yet tested. Given NYMAZ's expertise in Early Years, there is potential for a new strand of activity.
- For future action research, ensure delivery partners have a minimum of 2 years' funding to allow for longer than anticipated set-up times.

Advocacy

- Create a NYMAZ-led advocacy strategy aimed at organisations, particularly Music Education Hubs, about the future of SOL; why and how SOL will

become increasingly viable and important; and what organisations can do now to prepare themselves for the future.

- Seek more opportunities to share ongoing learning from Connect: Resound at music education conferences and events to increase profile and build a wider understanding of SOL.
- Continue to work with proactive, early adopters and support them to be ambassadors and champions amongst the Music Education Hub network.
- Consider establishing an Alliance for a Musically Inclusive England (AMIE) working group about online learning in challenging circumstances, led and facilitated by NYMAZ.

Training and workforce development

- Continue to commission and publish guidance relating to SOL practice and pedagogy.
- Continue to host webinars open to anyone interested in learning about SOL.
- Facilitate opportunities for peer mentoring across the Connect: Resound network.
- Scope opportunities for sharing SOL practice and pedagogy within existing music education training programmes, so that knowledge and understanding of SOL becomes more common place and accepted amongst the workforce, for example the Certificate for Music Educators (CME) and conservatoire undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

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