



BIRMINGHAM CITY  
University

# SOUND AND MUSIC GO COMPOSE PROJECT 2020

RESEARCH REPORT

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July 2021



Sound and Music



University of  
HUDDERSFIELD

IN MEMORY OF LUCY HALE WHO GAVE SO MUCH TO THE GO  
COMPOSE PROJECT.

## INTRODUCTION

Since its inception as a partnership project between Sound and Music and sound Scotland, Go Compose has developed to be a national network of workshops, programmes and events giving young people opportunities to make and showcase their own music and learn from professionals. Aimed at young people who would like to try composing, or who know they enjoy it and would like to learn more, we work with everyone from music education hubs to festivals across the UK to offer opportunities.

In this iteration of Go Compose, generously funded by Youth Music, Sound and Music focused on composing for and by young people who face additional barriers to engagement including disabling barriers, not being in education, employment or training (NEET) and being a girl in a music technology environment. Activity was delivered by three wonderful partners, Community Music, Drake Music and University of Huddersfield (working with Yorkshire Sound Women Network).

Over the space of 2 years, we were able to establish excellent relationships with our partners and the young people involved and, thanks to the work of Birmingham Music Education Research Group who independently evaluated the programme, identify areas of good practice that are essential to the delivery of engaging, meaningful composing activity with young people.

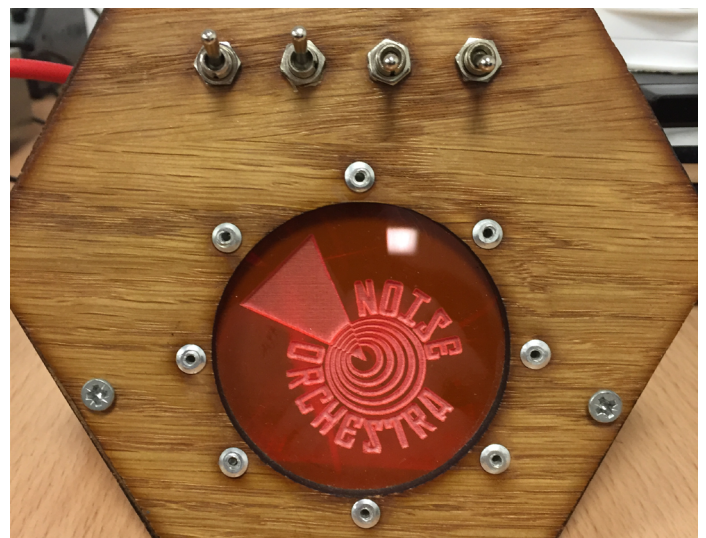
At the same time that Go Compose ran, Sound and Music undertook a major survey of music educators to examine how young people are supported - or not - to compose and create their own music. The findings of this survey were published in October 2019 in the #CanCompose report and identified many barriers to young people learning to compose, proposed the changes necessary and recommendations as to how these changes can be achieved.

Whilst #CanCompose examined the barriers facing all young people wishing to compose music, we must remember that those involved in Go Compose faced additional barriers, meaning that they were likely to be starting from an even greater place of disadvantage than the young people supported by the majority of those responding to the #CanCompose survey. The #CanCompose outcomes are therefore doubly relevant for those young people facing additional barriers:

1. There should be more opportunities for young people to compose in and out of school
2. Opportunities for young people to compose should be more relevant and diverse
3. There should be improved training, support and resources for educators, music education hubs and schools
4. There should be improved progression pathways through better networks and signposting
5. More value should be placed on composing

This Go Compose report shows how all five of these outcomes can be addressed through setting up musical activities that specifically support young people facing the greatest barriers to learning to compose. This is an important area of work, and Sound and Music, as the national organisation that supports and champions the creation of new music, is committed to working with educators, the music education sector, and policy makers to continue the work of Go Compose and make these outcomes a reality, placing the needs of those who face the most barriers at the heart of our work.

Judith Robinson, Head of Education, Sound and Music, June 2021



NB: Within this report, the terms "composing", "composition" and "composer" refer to creating all forms of music regardless of style or genre (including digital production and improvisation).



## WHY DO WE NEED A REPORT ON COMPOSING?

Composing is something young people do in and beyond the curriculum in schools: in young people's homes, bedrooms, garages and many other places too. It's been in the curriculum in schools since at least 1992 and has been examined as part of music since 1988. However, despite this background, it's fair to say that composing has not enjoyed the same status as performing and it lacks the established progression routes (such as graded exams) which exist for playing. This is a shame, because provision for young people which provides them with a chance to develop creative processes, such as composition, is important and has long been recognised (Eason et al., 2009; OECD, 2019).

Go Compose was a two year project run by the organisation Sound and Music, the national charity for new music in the UK, with funding from Youth Music. It aimed to work with young people from a variety of challenging circumstances and to foster an interest in composing music. Researchers from the Birmingham Music Education Research Group (BMERG) based at Birmingham City University were asked by Sound and Music to research work done during the Go Compose project. Go Compose offered an opportunity for both Sound and Music and BMERG to better understand the difference that composing can make to young people.

Go Compose can also be placed alongside Sound and Music's major survey of music educators, Can Compose, that examines how young people are being supported (or not) to compose and create their own music.

**"I WANT TO STAY AT GO  
COMPOSE FOREVER...  
I WANT TO LIVE HERE"**

**(Go Compose participant)**

It should be noted that, within this report, the terms "composing", "composition" and "composer" all refer to creating all forms of music regardless of style or genre (including digital production and improvisation).





## PROJECT 1: YORKSHIRE SOUND WOMEN NETWORK/ UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD

Organised in partnership between the department of Music and Drama at the University of Huddersfield, and Yorkshire Sound Women Network, this project focused on offering a series of music technology workshops for girls, and young women.

**During 2018, there were workshops on:**



Indian classical  
music

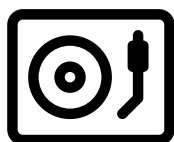


Recording and  
remixing

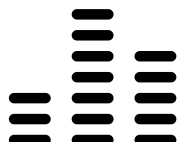


Using a Digital Audio  
Workstation (DAW)

**During 2019 there were workshops on:**



DJ-ing



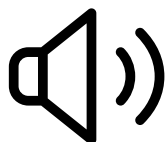
Electronic India



Making electronic  
music



Sound design for  
media



Found sounds



Making music with  
light and electronics

## PROJECT 2: DRAKE MUSIC, LIVERPOOL

Organised by Drake Music, a national music organisation which works with disabled young people, this project focused on offering opportunities for young people to find their composing voice and develop their musicianship.

### During 2018-19, workshops focused on:

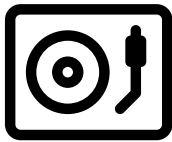


Music Leader support to enable a small group of young people to compose their own music

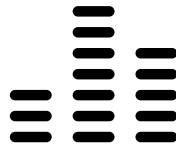


Preparation for a showcase of this music at a concert at a special school

### During 2019-20, workshops focused on:



Provision to enable composing for an all-female group of young people who identify on the autistic spectrum



Preparation for a showcase of this music at a 'breaking the silence' event for Armistice Day at Manchester's Imperial War Museum

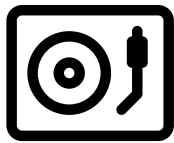




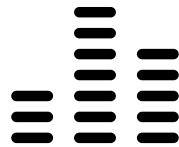
## PROJECT 3: COMMUNITY MUSIC, LONDON

Organised by Community Music, this project focused on offering opportunities for young people not in education, employment or training, partnering with Pupil Referral Units or Alternative Provision organisations to compose.

**During 2018-20, workshops focused on:**



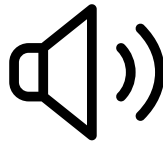
A 10-week course on music production



How to use a Digital Audio Workstation

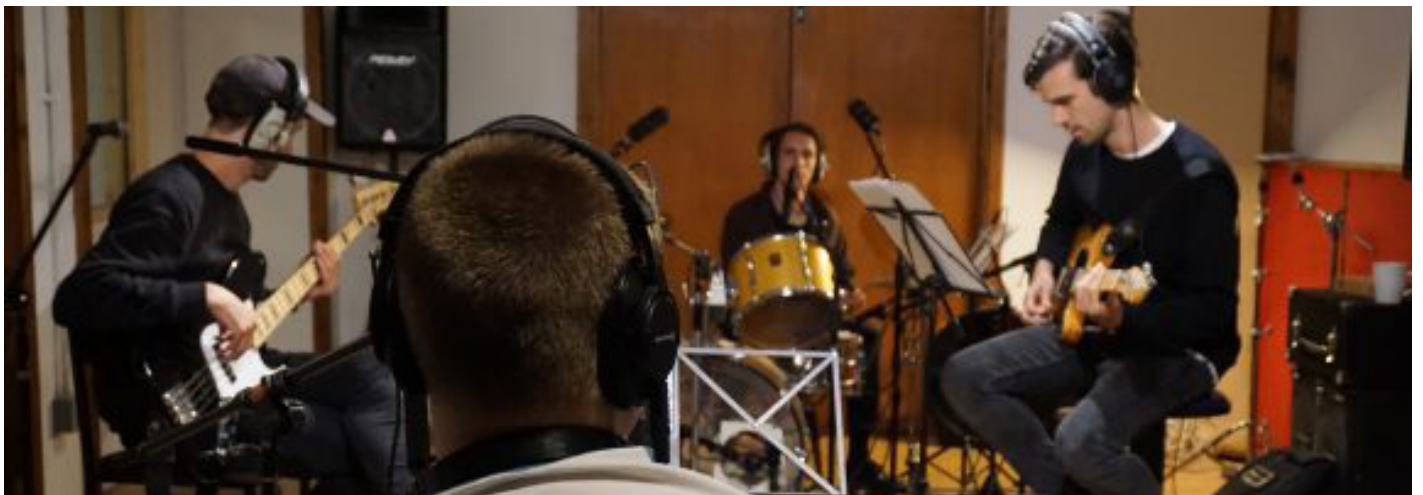


Creating music by singing and rapping



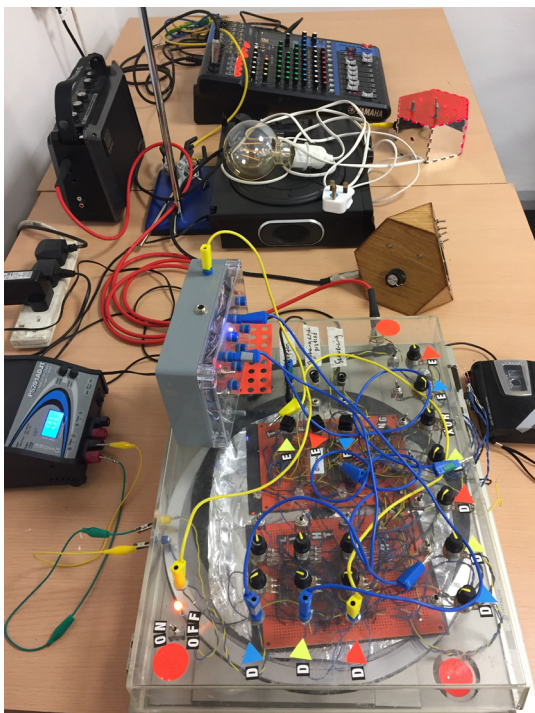
Extension evening classes to enable achievement in qualifications

(Award scheme Development and Accreditation Network and Arts Award)



Each workshop session in these locations were facilitated by Music Leaders, who led the projects and worked with the young people who were participating in composing. Apprentice composers were also attached to most of the projects, where they fulfilled different roles: supporting the young people, giving composing feedback, or helping with technical issues.

Project	Project Year	Number of sessions	Type of sessions
Yorkshire Sound Women Network / University of Huddersfield	1	3	Weekend workshops
Yorkshire Sound Women Network / University of Huddersfield	2	6	Summer workshops
Drake Music	1	11	Monthly Saturday workshops
Drake Music	2	11	Monthly Saturday workshops
Community Music	1	46	Weekly course
Community Music	2	58	Weekly course, followed by evening classes



## RESEARCH STRAND

The research methodology adopted Kirkpatrick's 4-stage model (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006), looking at how project participants reacted, changed, behaved differently and thought about the final results of the projects.

The research was mixed methods and took the form of online surveys for organisations and project leaders, discussions with music leaders and young people during site visits and observations of sessions. Analysis of surveys and interviews was conducted using techniques that looked for thematic strands following close study of the data. Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the Health, Education, and Life Sciences faculty ethics committee at Birmingham City University in accordance with the British Educational Research Association's (2018) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research.

Data Collection Type	Huddersfield	Drake Music	Community Music	TOTAL
Interview	72 minutes	73 minutes	74 minutes	219 minutes
Student Focus Groups	90 minutes	23 minutes	99 minutes	212 minutes
Observation	7 sessions	5 sessions	5 sessions	17 sessions

**“PROGRESS IS BEING CREATIVE IN A CREATIVE ENVIRONMENT... AN EXPLOSION OF CREATIVITY.”**

**(Music Leader)**

It was during the final stages of the research that the Covid-19 pandemic caused a shutdown of activity in England. This was accompanied by the lockdown, and subsequent furloughing of many of those involved in music and the arts. However, we feel that this has not had too detrimental an effect on the overall report and its findings, as most of the project sessions had taken place before this happened.



## WHAT DID GO COMPOSE REVEAL ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE IN FACILITATING COMPOSING?

Facilitating composing is always a challenge, but across the different projects for Go Compose, the research team identified some successful common approaches in the work of the project's Music Leaders. These included:

### **Enabling ownership of the music the young people composed**

The emphasis on enabling ownership is a tribute to the skills and engagement of the Music Leaders, who were demonstrably fostering and facilitating composing ownership in the young people engaging with the projects.

### **Including the young people's musical choices in listening activities**

By including young people's musical listening choices, Music Leaders were able to foster musical development, and move on to new aspects of learning.

**"FROM HERMIT CRABS TO STARFISH...AT THE BEGINNING THEY'LL BE REALLY QUIET AND BY THE END THEY'LL BE EXPRESSING THEMSELVES."**

**(Music Leader)**

### **Affirming, listening to and encouraging the young people as they composed their music**

To see this being done in the Go Compose projects was good, as it affirms young people as composers in their own right. Listening and encouraging were positive aspects of the professional demeanour of the Music Leaders involved in this work.

### **Enabling the young people to engage**

In non-compulsory settings like the ones in which the Go Compose projects were operating, there is, unlike in schools, no requirement on participants to attend. This creates an onus on the Music Leaders to ensure engagement, in order to facilitate re-attendance, which in turn will hopefully lead to progression. This was the case in all the Go Compose projects.

**"THE PROJECT HAS BEEN AN INCREDIBLE JOURNEY FOR MYSELF, ACCOMPANYING THE YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH THEIR OWN PROCESS OF COMPOSING AND SEEING THEM GROW IN CONFIDENCE HAS BEEN A REAL PRIVILEGE"**

**(Music Leader)**

## WHAT DID GO COMPOSE REVEAL ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE IN FACILITATING COMPOSING?

### **Fostering inclusive practices which included everyone**

In the Go Compose projects there was an emphasis placed on including everyone, and this was often observed in practice too.

### **Separating composing from performing**

Knowing about, and being able to separate composing from performing is an important aspect of working with young people, so that all composing does not become preparation for a performance.

### **Treating composing as a significant musical moment**

In Go Compose young people's first steps in composition were valued and celebrated.

### **Enabling a 'buzz' from performing opportunities**

The 'buzz' that live performance experiences generated, especially when held in a prestigious venue, was an important experience for all involved.

### **Encouraging personal and group responses in composing**

The nurturing and encouragement of the personal voice is important when working with young composers and this was a recurrent feature of Go Compose.

### **Drawing on composing that happened between sessions as well as in them**

For some young people their composing imagination was fired up, and they were composing in between sessions as well as during them.

### **Other benefits**

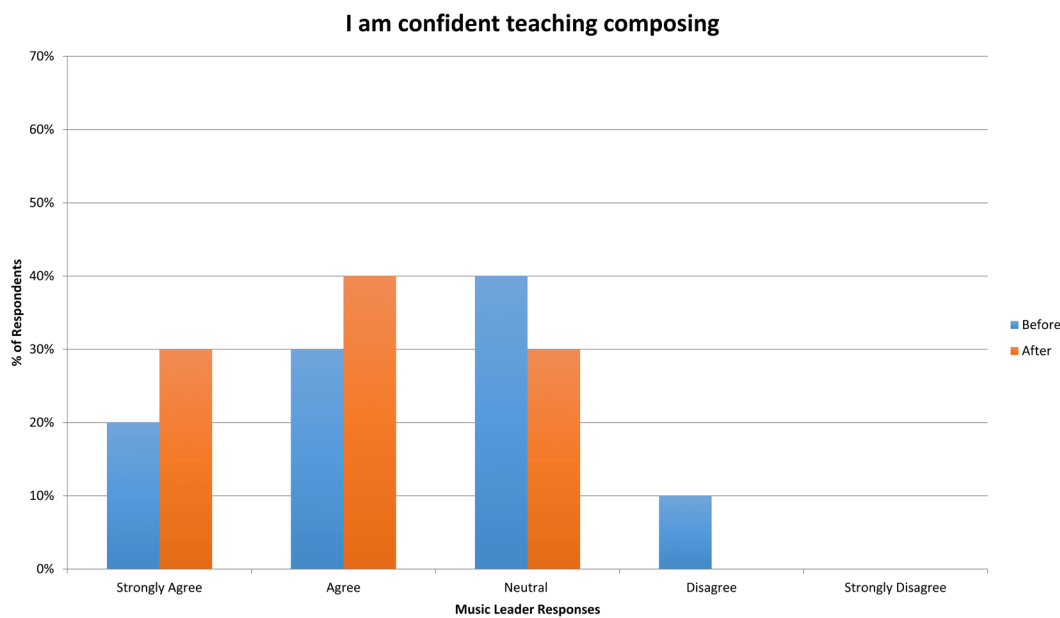
There were also other benefits for the young people as well as direct musical developments:

- Young people's quality of life improved
- Peer-support: young people nurtured and helped each other during sessions
- Go Compose enabled collaboration amongst young people
- Sessions established an environment of trust



# WHAT KEY THINGS CAN WE LEARN FROM GO COMPOSE?

## Findings to celebrate:



Music Leader Survey responses: Before and After Go Compose

### **Composing entails a number of approaches**

Composing in the twenty-first century is not, and should not just be a paper-and-pencil exercise, but instead can involve group and cooperative activity, using technology, and a broad range of styles and genres.

### **Composing is active**

Composing in Go Compose was treated as an activity which was not only about thinking about musical possibilities, but was also about realising composing ideas. This approach, where music was made as well as imagined, was an integral part of composing approaches which young people explored during the project.

### **Music Leaders both need and value opportunities for professional development and skills sharing**

A day of skills sharing between Music Leaders from all 3 projects was not part of the original project design, but was suggested by one of the participating organisations. The day proved to be one of the highlights of Go Compose, generating a great deal of positive exchange of information, skills and approaches. Future iterations of Go Compose would benefit from more of this kind of activity.

### **Through Go Compose Music Leaders' confidence in facilitating composing grew**

At the outset of the project, Music Leaders were under-confident or uncertain about their ability to facilitate young people in composing. By the end of Go Compose Music Leaders were both confident in teaching composing and in helping young people to develop their musical ideas.

# WHAT KEY THINGS CAN WE LEARN FROM GO COMPOSE?

## Findings to guide future practice:

### Composing projects need a specialised approach

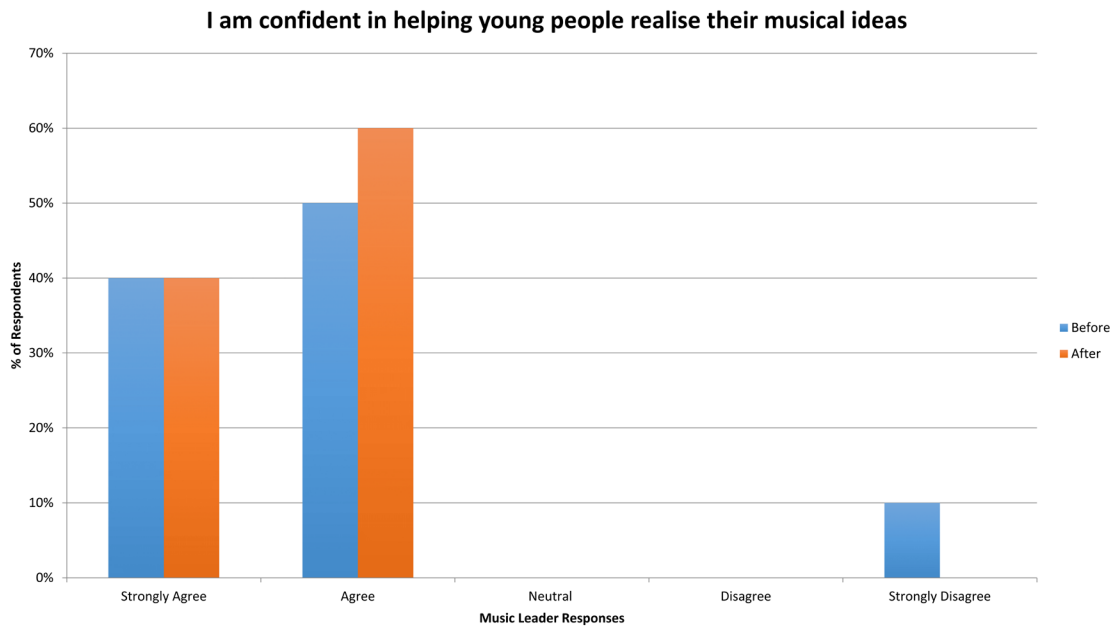
Sometimes it was not always clear to Music Leaders how composing activity differed from performing only projects. This can make it challenging for Music Leaders to realise the aims of composing work with young people.

### Many young participants didn't have opportunities to keep composing

Sadly for many of the young participants, however good the various Go Compose projects were, there was little or nothing for them to go on to afterwards. More funding is therefore needed for composing work with young people.

### Training to lead composing is not widespread

It would be helpful for music organisations, music leaders, and for school teachers, and peripatetic music teachers too, were training to be more widely available to develop ideas for leading composing. The Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL) that Sound and Music already offer should be extended and developed further.



Music Leader Survey responses: Before and After Go Compose

## WHAT KEY THINGS CAN WE LEARN FROM GO COMPOSE?

### **The effect of performances on the composing process**

Whilst it is important to spotlight and showcase young people's creative achievements, project organisers should carefully consider the impact a high-profile performance may have on the composing process.

### **The role of Music Education Hubs in supporting composing is not clear**

At the time of this research, as a result of National Plan for Music Education priorities, music education hubs do not necessarily seem to be involved in composing provision in any widespread or joined-up fashion. This requires a change of emphasis in the next National Plan.

"I GUESS THE FINAL THING IS THAT EACH ONE OF THESE YOUNG COMPOSERS NOW HAS A REAL SENSE OF OWNERSHIP OF THEIR MUSIC."

(Music Leader)

### **Composing needs more emphasis in music education generally**

Although composing is part of the National Curriculum and is significant in classroom music for Key Stages 4 and 5, there is much less emphasis given to resourcing it than to performing. This would benefit from being addressed nationally.





## THE STORY OF AN APPRENTICE COMPOSER

One of the musicians who worked on the project was a disabled composer who held a masters in composition from the Royal Northern College of Music and had worked with a variety of national organisations (National Orchestra for All, Royal Philharmonic Society, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra). They had never worked with young people prior to Go Compose and described the project as one which had opened up new avenues.

The composer communicated via a tablet and worked with a communications support worker and described communication as “a bit more complicated.” However, these challenges did not prove to be barriers and they led sessions on composing during Go Compose, which included approaches to graphic scores and aleatoric music.

In their responses to interviews and surveys, the composer stated that they did not know what to expect prior to the project, and that they had been able to give feedback on composing and had worked closely with the other music leaders. Their descriptions of Go Compose demonstrated the transformative nature of all they achieved: “When I started, I could never have done what I did today”. The legacy of the project for them, was not to “write this kind of work off, because it is a possibility and I’ve really enjoyed it.”

The apprentice composer discovered how much they enjoyed working with young people as a direct result of Go Compose and found that their confidence grew following involvement. After their work with the project, they had established what they described as a “network” with other music leaders and begun to apply for collaborative composing projects that they “previously would have avoided.”

## WHAT DO WE RECOMMEND?

To enable more young people to participate in composing projects and to more fully equip music leaders for such work, we would like to recommend the following ideas:

### **Give Music Leaders time to develop their ideas about musical learning**

Composing will be better facilitated if Music Leaders are involved with more than single sessions, but work over a series of weeks or months to support the young people who are composing. Building in time for Music Leaders to discover what young people have already done in composing is also needed, and composing work should grow from this starting point.

### **Invest in composing training**

Experience of musicianship alone is not enough to facilitate young people in their composing and Music Leaders need the opportunity for their own professional development. Training for music organisations, music leaders, and probably for school teachers, and peripatetic music teachers would also be a good thing. Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL) for leading activities, and appropriate composing pedagogies would be a good focus here. There is likely to be a role for Music Education Hubs in this.

**“I WOULD LOVE TO DO MORE PROJECTS LIKE THIS, IT WAS HUGELY REWARDING, ENJOYABLE AND INSPIRING.**

**(Music Leader)**

### **Build on legacies**

Music education projects leave some kind of legacy for all involved. Opportunities should be sought to identify projects which are approaching completion across the sector and to enable young people to bridge into new composing experiences, where this is something they would like to continue to do.



## WHAT DO WE RECOMMEND?

### **Resource Music Technology more effectively**

More resourcing composing projects with music technology is required. This is an area where some form of joined-up national and regional overview is likely to be helpful.

### **Place a greater emphasis on composing in music education**

Composing is a part of the National Curriculum, and is significant in music in Key Stage 4 (14-16 year olds) and Key Stage 5 (16-18 year olds) too. At present less emphasis is given to composing provision than is the case for musical performing. This would benefit from being addressed nationally in a joined-up fashion.

### **Think about composing differently**

It should not be the case that music organisations take advantage of funding calls for specific projects to reinforce and finance what they would normally expect to be doing anyway. Core funding is hard to obtain, but even so there needs to be understanding and cascading of specific project information to music leaders and workers by music organisations' leadership teams.

### **Make composing a core role for Music Education Hubs**

At the time of this research, as a result of National Plan for Music Education priorities, music education hubs do not necessarily need to be involved in composing provision in any widespread or joined-up fashion. This is not the fault of the hubs, many of whom would want to be involved in doing this, and already are involved in this way. Making composing a core role for Music Education Hubs requires a change of emphasis in the next National Plan.

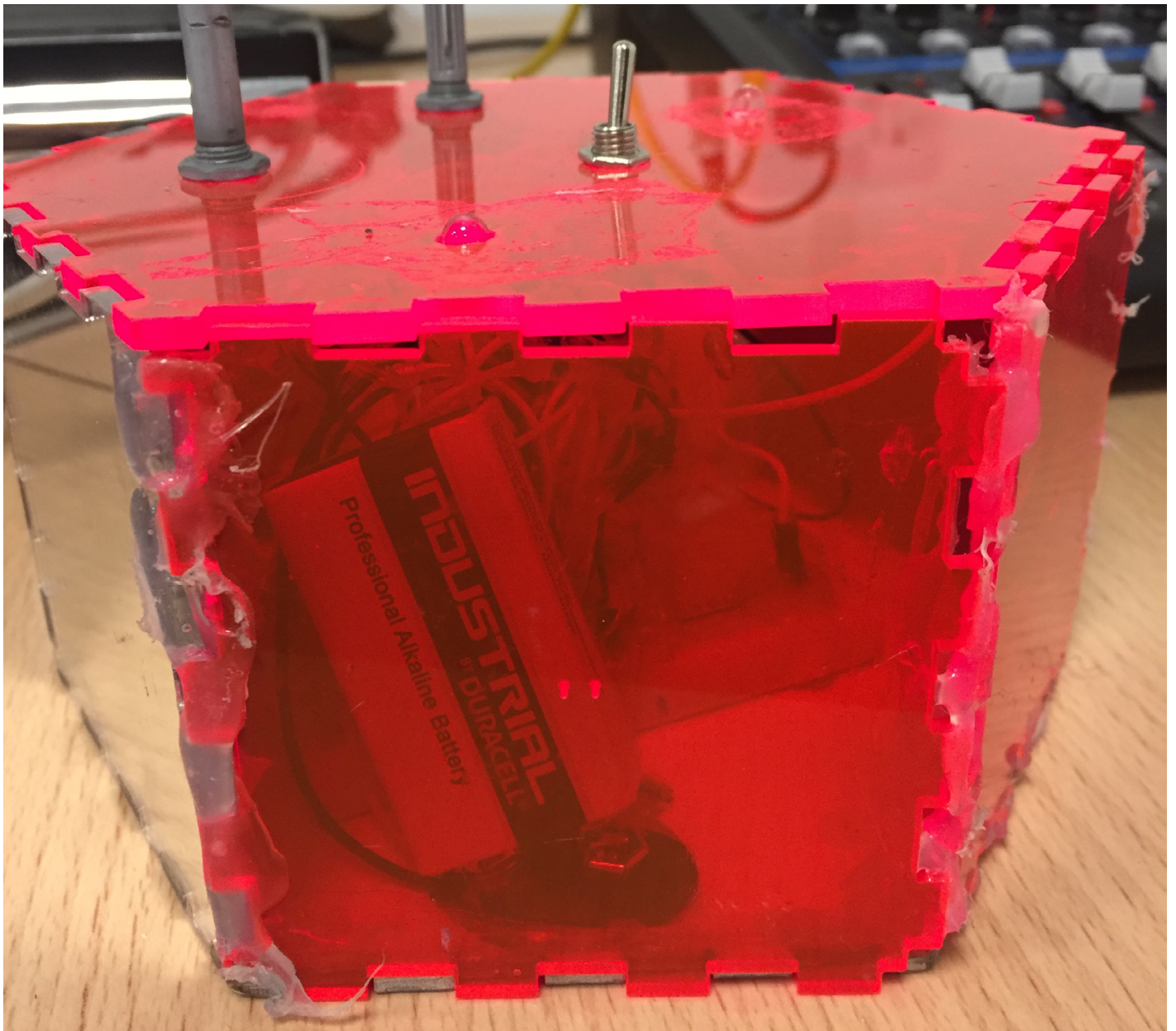
### **Make progression routes clearer in composing**

Whilst progression routes for young performers are clearly mapped out on a local, regional, and national basis, the same is not true for composing and young composers. Despite sterling work being done by many recent reports and research, this is still an area in need of attention, which would benefit from more joined-up thinking and provision.



## WHY DOES THIS REPORT MATTER?

In the Go Compose projects, the young people faced a variety of types and forms of challenge. They overcame these barriers to express themselves in composing, which is a truly creative act. Aspiring composers should not have to embark on their creative journey alone. The provision for young people to have a chance to develop composing is therefore an important one. It is the aspiration of this report to bring this need into the public arena and to encourage policymakers, schools and music organisations to do all they can to facilitate composing for young people. This report concludes with the story of one young person and the difference composing has made to them through Go Compose.



## THE STORY OF AN APPRENTICE COMPOSER

At the outset of Go Compose, for this young composer, who was selectively non-verbal, their parent was the only person with whom they used their voice to communicate. Go Compose was part of their journey of social and musical development.

The young person began to collaborate with the music leaders in significant ways to realise musical ideas. This included accompanying music leaders, for instance on the guitar, whilst they improvised. The young composer also collaborated using music technology, composing and producing tracks and using these with live music-making in Go Compose sessions.

This young person began to MC over the tracks they had composed and which also formed an important part of live performing experiences for all involved in the project. Go Compose was part of their musical development in establishing their music studio at home, collaborating with others and performing in other venues. Without doubt, this was one of the most significant outcomes of Go Compose, leaving a tangible legacy and showing the difference that music can make.

## AND FINALLY...

The Birmingham Music Education Research Group would like to offer its thanks to Sound and Music for funding this Go Compose project and associated research.

Birmingham Music Education Research Group would also like to extend its gratitude to the music organisations, music leaders, young people, and their parents and carers, for allowing us the privilege to observe and be part of this powerful learning experience.



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# DAY 1 - FOUND SOUNDS

Delia  
Derbyshire  
↳ lampshade!

MIDI  
vs  
audio

Sampling  
↑ speed  
← rate  
pitch shift  
reverse  
loops

STRUCTURE  
INTRO  
↓  
BUILD UP → VERSE-CHORUS  
↓  
VARIATION  
↓  
DROP  
↓  
BUILD UP  
↓  
OUTRO

Loops  
beats  
tune/melody  
atmos

Frequency  
Lo → HI

Quantisation  
↳ helps put music in time

Fx  
ECHO  
+ REVERB

## Go Compose Report 2020

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