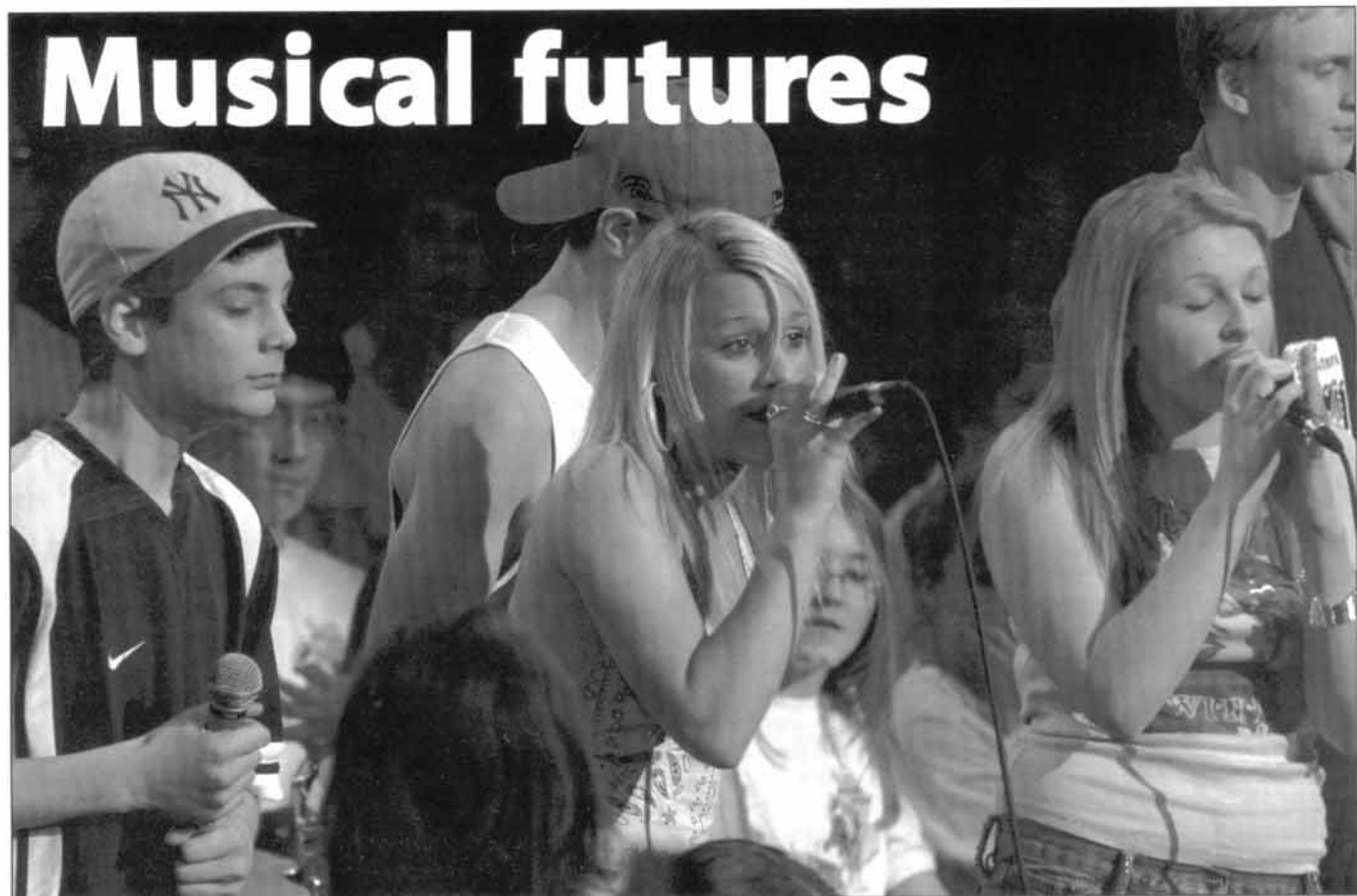


## work exposed

The government's *Wider opportunities* scheme aims to create a musical nation of primary school children. But what happens when they all turn 11? **ANITA HOLFORD** reports on a pilot progression route



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# Musical futures

**T**he government's *Wider opportunities* pledge (that all primary school pupils will have the chance to learn a musical instrument "over time"; see *Sounding Board Spring 04*) can only be a good thing. Until, as a result, thousands of children leave primary school all pumped up to do their music work in creative, collaborative ways – and come bumping into the realities of music-making at secondary school level.

That's the situation that *Musical futures*, an ambitious £2 million project funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, hopes to address. According to the publicity, it's taking a "radical approach to the question of why music education in schools often fails to excite young people." It's being touted as the "biggest knowledge-gathering exercise in music education", and is hoping, ultimately, to create a music entitlement for all 11 to 19 year olds in England "wherever and however they want to be involved in music."

That "wherever and however" implies that there's more to this work than just another schools' project. *Musical futures* says that the formal and informal education sectors don't work together often enough and that the result is often an "incoherent and confusing set of specialisms" that may not reflect young people's

Something to sing about: young people in Hertfordshire will be able to bring their own music-learning skills into the classroom

changing tastes, ambitions and learning styles.

The only options left for many young people are to either turn away from music, or to find their own ways of doing it (from bands to karaoke) without any adult intervention. Which is fine, until they face barriers or get blocked in their musical development and don't have anywhere to turn.

*Musical futures* is therefore basing its approach on the conviction that music education should grow out of young people's expressed interests. It is using three two-year pathfinder projects, currently in their planning and development stage, to investigate what's happening; experiment with ways of addressing the problems; and encourage classroom teachers, instrumental tutors, community musicians, mentors and others to work together and share knowledge and good practice. There will also be a national delivery strand involving research, advocacy and networking with organisations such as Youth Music and London's Guildhall School of Music.

The work of the pathfinders (see box overleaf) may all sound a bit familiar – what community music project nowadays doesn't



Members of the Brassery playing at Music Junction, the first of a series of events which is being managed and developed by young people. The event, held at a local night club, brought together young people, music leaders and musicians working in a range of genres, from DJs to string ensembles

set out to encourage partnerships and sharing of good practice, from a starting point of participants' needs? But the *Musical futures* organisers believe there are a number of factors which make the project strikingly different from what's gone before.

Perhaps the most innovative aspect of the project are the investigations into what happens when young people make the music they want to without the intervention of adults, and how that could influence music education in schools and other settings. The concept of the learner shaping and driving their own learning may not be new to community music, but in schools it's radical. And this project takes things even further.

"We suspect that kids operating in that environment are hitting barriers," explains Jo Richardson, project manager of the Leeds pathfinder. "We know there are certain skills they are going to have to acquire if they're going to progress, so we're trying to find out how they get around barriers at the moment, and then use our knowledge to work out how we can set up interventions they can tap into to help them progress."

*Musical futures* recognises that the really exciting work happens when you let young people get on with it. It's neither a safe nor a straightforward project, as Richardson acknowledges, but sticking to the tried and tested was never the point. "Our research brief is tough: how do you design and test interventions without taking away the ownership for young people? But if you're talking about integrating every child into a music entitlement, you're honour-bound to investigate all of those kids that don't get involved with music in schools."

In Hertfordshire the risk is particularly acute for teachers, who are devoting a year's worth of music lessons to a completely new approach. In Nottinghamshire, young people are being given responsibility for a large part of the project and the budget – a heady experience, and not just for the participants.

And of course there's always the possibility that the target groups won't respond, or not in the ways expected. It's for all these reasons that performance is not output driven (unusual for almost any arts project these days) and that there are relatively few young people – around 100 to 300 – involved in each pathfinder. Rather than a raft of performance indicators and outcomes, the legacy of *Musical futures* will be structures and models of practice that are transferable and replicable.

"The aim is to have some practical toolkit that will be able to

be used in other music services. How we disseminate the knowledge and create working models that can be used and replicated or taken forward in individual ways is very important to all the pathfinders," explains Hertfordshire project manager Abigail Walmsley.

This emphasis on sharing what's learned and embedding it into the day to day reality of schools, LEAs, and wider practice, is something that in the past perhaps many projects have aimed for but rarely achieved. Dave Price, overall project leader for Paul Hamlyn, says in this case he's spent as much time working on the advocacy, knowledge management and communications as he has on project management. "We want to ensure we can build active networks so people can see what goes on and get very practical advice on how they can get this set up. If all we have at the end is a report, we will have failed. We have to think of this as a result which will build and draw people in."

The ultimate aim is for these models to enable more young people to participate in music for longer and with more enjoyment than they could have done without them. Sustained progression is the next challenge, Price believes, and the project intends eventually to provide progression routes for young people. "We're trying to create pathways which enable people to move in and out – which recognise that people's desires and motivations change

## links and web resources

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## Notes on the pathfinders

### Leeds

Investigating ways of supporting young people whose musical education is taking place in the "third environment". (New language for today's music education: the first environment is music making in a formal schools-type setting; the second is in the voluntary sector but within an adult-led context or set curriculum; and the third environment is without any adult intervention.) Includes:

- an online resource offering advice on works-in-progress, on-line tutorials, skills-sharing opportunities and expert sessions. The other two pathfinders will be linked in to this resource
- face-to-face help from a range of practitioners and other young people
- a series of practical sessions, modules and an accreditation structure (Progression in Musical Skills, being developed by Leeds College of Music) to find out how these musicians can develop technical and theoretical skills, and have them acknowledged in a way that's not off-putting to them
- steering group of Leeds Education's ArtForms department, Leeds College of Music, city council Lifelong Leisure and Learning Department, and Synergy TV.

### Hertfordshire

Action research into what happens when the techniques that young pop musicians use to learn music outside school are brought into the classroom. Led by Lucy Green (author of the ground-breaking *How popular musicians learn*) and aiming to find out if this approach could break down young people's preconceptions about music in the classroom and motivate them to continue at GCSE level. Key points:

- a pilot project in four schools funded by Esmee Fairbairn and an induction day for teachers has already taken place
- based on the idea that pop musicians often learn orally, pupils will form "friendship groups", learning a track from a favourite CD. Teachers (and, later, other professional musicians) will be on hand to give advice, but the initial laissez faire approach is designed to research how young people choose to learn
- at a later stage the project will develop according to young people's needs and interest and may bring in a range of other partners. Teachers will be encouraged to carry forward the project drawing on informal learning processes in a way that suits their needs
- Hertfordshire Music Service and the Institute of Education at the University of London are leading the process.

### Nottingham

Following consultation with young people in and out of schools in the city and county in areas where educational achievement and self-esteem are low, this project will give them the opportunity to shape and run activities and will make links between existing informal and formal provision. There are three main strands:

- *Music junction* gives students control of budgets and the brief to set up and manage their own activities. A launch and consultation day has been held, and a student focus group has been set up to develop future activities
- *Out of hours musical pathways* creates opportunities for students to initiate projects in and out of school and to work with professional musicians
- *Teacher training* a new approach, building on the experiences gained throughout *Musical futures* to help trainee teachers develop new and more flexible skills
- Consortium members include Nottingham city council, LEA and music service; the county culture and community department; Confetti School of Recording Technology; Lakeside Arts Centre; Nottingham Creative Partnership; The Hallé; Nottingham Trent University; Eastern Orchestral Board; ViVA orchestra.

over time," explains Price. "At the moment there's a series of parallel lines – we need to allow those intersections to happen, and not make value judgements about them."

The project has just two more years to gather the evidence it needs, and to make the work – or the working methods – sustainable. "It's not about trying to change schools, but to get everyone involved in music education to conceive of it in a different way," says Price.

The report from Sound Sense's *Towards a youth music makers network* (see *Sounding Board* Winter 04) envisaged a partnership in which community musicians, youth services, music services and classroom teachers would all be part of a single support and development network for young people's music making. *Musical*

*futures* sees a similar vision, with the different methods working together to give some coherence to young people choosing music routes. "What's really exciting about doing this project at this time is that there's now a desire to informalise music education right across the board," says Price. "The landmark achievement of the community music movement over the last 15 years is that people get it, and understand its attraction to young people. The impact has hit home with key people from the minister on."

"People are now starting to see this as a holistic approach," he continues. "I would like to think that in ten years' time we're not describing participation in that informal/formal continuum; rather, community music practice will be recognised as a good way of working in any context."