

# ABRSM Diversity and Inclusion Plan

Progress Update - October 2020

## Overview

This summer, ABRSM has established a permanent initiative to champion the truly global language of music by reflecting greater diversity, in particular representation of Black and ethnically diverse composers, across its syllabuses, publications and the organisation's wider operations, and by embracing the very best of contemporary as well as classical music from around the world.

This Progress Update focuses specifically on actions to improve the diversity of ABRSM's syllabuses and publications, highlighting plans and specific targets to embed diversity across key ABRSM products, and the progress made in the first weeks of the Plan. In our commitment to diversity, we intend to be open and transparent, publishing our targets and progress towards them every quarter.

The Diversity and Inclusion Plan is based on a definition of diversity and inclusion which promotes opportunity for everyone regardless of disability, age, sexual orientation, gender, or ethnicity. Our definition of ethnicity is closely aligned with the BBPOC definition (Black, Brown, and Indigenous People of Colour) but goes further to reflect the range of nuanced definitions that exist across the 90 plus countries in which we operate.


## Transforming ABRSM and its Music

Some elements of ABRSM's journey towards greater inclusion and diversity are well under way and are already making transformative opportunities available to a range of underrepresented groups.

In seeking to widen the pool of music on which we can all draw, we encourage the careers of composers from countries around the world. Through our sponsorship programmes such as the Commonwealth International Composition Award and the International Sponsorship Fund we are providing targeted support to people to further their professional careers, and to groups and ensembles to become and remain an integral part of their home nation's musical landscape, inspiring others as they do. We work with the four Royal Schools of Music and other key sector stakeholders, both in the UK and around the world, to champion diversity and talent at all levels of musical achievement.

In 2018, we supported the Music Commission, which was specifically focused on ensuring that all young people, regardless of background, could access quality music education. In 2019 we launched the Elevate Programme, which invests in ten projects in the UK with the specific aim of finding new ways to inspire musical achievement among people facing barriers in accessing music education.

Against this background, we nevertheless understand that a key part of ABRSM, and how it is perceived, is through the music it publishes and includes within its syllabuses. And, whilst in the last two years we have dramatically increased the number of female composers in our publications and syllabuses, for example with a 400% increase in the number of pieces by women composers set on the piano syllabus between 2019 and 2021, we know we need to do far more to address the lack of Black and ethnically diverse representation in the music we publish. Our aim is to enrich the variety and depth of the repertoire available to our customers and we have publicly committed to doing so.



There are five areas for action within our Diversity and Inclusion Plan, each of which has the explicit goal of broadening the music we promote, commission, and publish to recognise the richness of diverse music and our global identity, to acknowledge cultural diversity, and composers from every section of society. These are:

- 1. An Active Commissioning Programme**
- 2. Transforming Syllabuses**
- 3. A Mentorship and Development Programme for Composers**
- 4. Developing Partnerships and Advocacy**
- 5. Transforming our Organisation.**

Our approach to achieving these goals will be both transparent and organic. The organic approach is important because it recognises that a genuinely embedded and lasting increase in diversity will only be achieved by developing and building on our relevant sector relationships and knowledge, and by doing this in a way which actively invites challenge and debate, including through providing regular progress reports.

## **1. Our Active Commissioning Programme**

We are currently identifying composers, arrangers and works that are new to us, our audiences and the world of music education so that we can increase the diversity and breadth of our repertoire by drawing on new sources of quality music from composers, and wider styles and influences.

Our Active Commissioning process involves a team of staff researching potentially suitable pieces and identifying institutions which are active in specifically uncovering work by underrepresented composers. We are actively seeking input from experts and organisations with knowledge of music by composers from underrepresented groups, including those from Black and ethnically diverse communities. We aim to formalise this support, creating an advisory group in the near future.

To make the process of composing for our syllabuses more transparent and accessible, we will develop clearer commissioning contracts and briefs, showing how we work with composers and arrangers, and by clarifying the steps and criteria needed for composers to write work that qualifies for our syllabuses.

In this the first year we are targeting 15 new composers, nine from Black and ethnically diverse communities for our woodwind syllabus who we, or our partners, have identified through curated lists. The first phase of this commissioning has commenced, and we have already identified and contacted new Black and ethnically diverse composers for clarinet, flute, and saxophone.

We are reaching out to skilled, experienced, and creative musicians with a fresh, distinctive, and inspiring musical voice, who are also attuned to the wants and needs of teachers, and of learners as they progress through the technical demands of an instrument as well as expanding their musical horizons and the richness of the musical choices within their reach.

As we progress our Active Commissioning Programme it is our aim that, each year, we will commission a minimum of 20 new compositions or arrangements from underrepresented composers that may qualify for inclusion on future syllabus lists.



## 2. Transforming Syllabuses

The music of ABRSM syllabuses is played around the world. Its influence and reach are significant, and we recognise that in several areas, it is not diverse enough. At ABRSM, we have a rolling process of syllabus updates and we plan to reform how decisions are made about what to include.

Of course, syllabuses rely on published music, which is why our Active Commissioning is focused on broadening the pool of published work available from living composers. However, we are also committed to broadening and diversifying the range of existing published music from which we select.

Through a combination of research, active commissioning, providing greater transparency for composers interested in writing educational music, working in partnership with individuals, publishers and organisations that can support us in this work, we will aim to create syllabuses which are more representative of the diverse communities we serve, and seek to inspire.

However, targets are important. Therefore, we are committing to a target that, when we commission new music for a syllabus update, 50% of those commissions will be sought from composers who are from BBIPOC backgrounds. In addition, each time we update our syllabuses, our target is that 20% of all syllabus content, including new commissions, arrangements, and existing works, will be written by composers who are from BBIPOC backgrounds.

To achieve these targets, we are setting up a new structure to support our advisory team with partnerships with individuals and organisations that can recommend and propose works that are diverse, especially in the cultures and traditions they represent. The creation of this structure is already well advanced and will have links across the formal advisory group being created to support our Active Commissioning programme.

The first of our rolling syllabus updates is *Singing for Musical Theatre, Grades 4 to 8*, in December 2020. Next is *Woodwind*, which is launched in summer 2021. Work on the next *Piano* syllabus will follow in 2021, with its launch in summer 2022, and we will ensure that each of these increase the number of works by underrepresented groups. We will be working to achieve these targets both through our Active Commissioning process, and by identifying appropriate work that already exists. Our team is already assembling databases of works previously unknown to us against which we can assess their technical levels for inclusion at different Grade levels. Both approaches will enable us to deliver the quality we need within the time available before publication.

Our new Performance Grades also represent an opportunity to promote music from diverse cultures and traditions. As we continue to broaden the diversity of music on the published syllabuses, we will be making available new work from underrepresented composers that can be performed by candidates. The fourth piece that candidates are to perform in this assessment will be their own choice, allowing selection from a wide range of sources, and to support this we will be finding, signposting, developing, and publishing new work.



### **3. Mentorship and Development Programme for Composers**

In November 2020, we are announcing a new mentoring and development scheme to support the careers and work of Black and ethnically diverse composers and other composers from underrepresented groups. Following an initial selection process, the scheme will get underway in January 2021 with the first cohort of 15-20 composers.

The Mentorship and Development Programme will focus on supporting composers on a pathway towards writing for music education, including those at the start of their careers, giving them the information and opportunities they need to write music for publication. For all composers, at any stage of their careers, our aim is to make the process of writing for music education, and our syllabuses, as transparent and accessible as possible. For this, we plan to publish a series of open source guides and support materials through the Programme.

The Mentorship and Development Programme will use a combination of workshops, a buddy system and networking opportunities with partners, to give composers specific experience and helpful guidance for successfully writing music that will be well-suited to educational purposes and potential selection onto exam syllabuses.

Mentors and mentees will focus on writing for Grades 1, 2 and 3 because we know that the art and craft of writing for early grades is particularly challenging. Networking will be a key aspect of the Programme and we will work closely with publishing interests in mind to ensure that great new, diverse talent can reach as many people as possible.

Once established, we propose to develop and expand our Mentorship and Development Programme so that it not only feeds into syllabus reviews but makes more diverse music more widely available to the world of music education. Our aim is that by 2030 there will be a minimum of 100 new composers from underrepresented groups who have been on the Programme, each with opportunities to write for music education, including writing for publication on ABRSM syllabuses.

### **4. Developing Partnerships and Advocacy**

We cannot achieve the real change required without help and we value our relationships with a wide range of organisations. In recent weeks, we have started working with sector partners who have real expertise and experience in promoting representation of Black and ethnically diverse composers and their work and who can help us on our journey. These include the Ivors Academy and the Musicians Union, organisations with specialist contacts, expertise, and the ability to give us the independent support and advice we need as we work towards greater diversity and representation of Black and ethnically diverse music and musicians.

ABRSM, along with the Royal Academy of Music, Royal College of Music, Royal Northern College of Music and, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, plays a leading advocacy role within the UK and beyond and will use its position of influence to promote greater diversity at all levels of the music education world, with policy makers, publishers, curriculum developers, teacher training agencies and more.

We will work with all our national partners; the National Youth Orchestra, the National Youth Jazz Orchestra, the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain, the National Open Youth Orchestra, and organisations such as Sing Up, the Royal Philharmonic Society, Music Mark, Sound Connections, British Paraorchestra, Music and the Deaf, Youth Music, the Music Teachers Association and London Music Fund to explore new ways of promoting and increasing diversity across music education in the UK.

We also plan to work with other music publishers, encouraging them to support access to more diverse music, by joining us in publishing a broader range of music.



## 5. Transforming our Organisation

We know that our commitment to diversity does not end with the music we publish and promote. It is also central to the way ABRSM as an organisation is run.

We have established our Diversity and Inclusion Group. This Group encourages members of staff from a range of backgrounds to contribute to our policy and actions across our business, both internally and externally. This autumn, we have already committed to providing diversity training for staff across organisation our to address barriers to inclusion.

We want to recruit diverse talent and be clear that our recruitment processes are fair and transparent. While our staff are generally representative of the diversity of the UK as a whole, we have not yet gone far enough, and it does not reflect the diversity of the area of London where our office is located. Our aim is that our staff will more closely reflect the diversity of the community in which we work which, according to the 2011 Census shows that while England as a whole comprised 14.7% BAME, the City of London was 20.4% and London as a whole was 40.3%.

In terms of governance, we recognise that there is much to do. As Governing Body positions become vacant, we will recruit with the aim of increasing the diversity at this level. However, as a key adviser to the Governing Body, we recognise that the Music Education Advisory Council (MEAC) can be an engine for change and we are reviewing its constitution to ensure that both its membership and terms of reference specifically prioritise diversity and drive our work in this area.

The freelance examiner body is not yet as representative as we would want it to be and while that has been changing in recent times, actions will be put in place to ensure the continued growth in the number of examiners from more diverse backgrounds. Over time, we intend to work towards examiners being more representative of the cultures in which they work. In the near future, we intend to change our recruitment process so that a diversity form is sent out to every applicant to better develop targets on diversity. The Chief Examiner's team has committed to set up an examiner workshop and focus group to explore ideas to improve diversity on the examiner team. They will also target recruitment to Black and ethnically diverse communities with a focus on musical assessment. They will explore organisations with a high intake of Black and ethnically diverse people so approaches can be made to offer the examining route as potential career path.

## Our Commitment to Diversity

Our Diversity and Inclusion Plan is a core, permanent commitment that will have a transformative impact on who we are and what we do, inspiring diversity in the next generation of teachers, leaders, and musicians.

A Diversity and Inclusion Progress Update will be published each quarter providing information on the development of syllabuses, publications, partnerships, and organisational transformation. In addition, every year, alongside our Annual Report and Accounts, we will publish a Diversity and Inclusion Statement that marks progress made and, importantly, sets out ambitions and plans for the coming year.

ABRSM is, above all, dedicated to inspiring musical achievement; achievement that is open to everyone and, in this way, alive to the ways in which people engage with music teaching and learning. We recognise that we need to change. We invite challenge and debate and we look forward to forging the constructive and transformative partnerships that ensure we support everyone to achieve their musical potential.