AoC Briefing: A Level Music in Colleges

The recent Birmingham City University report: ‘Geographical and social demographic trends of A Level music students’ raises serious concerns about access to A level music and highlights the uneven distribution of A Level music provision, the very small average size of A Level music groups and the correlation between the lowest numbers of entries and more socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

<http://researchonline.rcm.ac.uk/502/1/RCM%20RAM%20Report%20FINAL%20%20%28redacted%29180419.pdf> (April 2019).

This briefing adds to this analysis with 4 key points:

## Many young people do not have access to an A Level music provider

Over 60% of all A Level providers do not offer A Level music. There are 4 local authority areas with no A Level music entries at all (Knowsley, Middlesbrough, Thurrock and Tower Hamlets) and a further 9 local authority areas have 5 or fewer candidates within a single publicly funded provider.

## A Level music is very vulnerable and is most often taught in unviable groups.

813 publicly funded colleges and school sixth forms entered candidates for A Level Music in England in 2018. 660 of those (81%) had groups of 5 or fewer students, making the subject very vulnerable to closure in those smaller centres. In 49 local authority areas, all the available provision is unviable (ie: all providers have 5 or fewer candidates) and is therefore vulnerable.

1. **The largest A Level music providers are colleges, and colleges are more likely to have viable A Level music group sizes.**

All of the 10 largest A Level music centres are colleges, with an average cohort size of 26.8. Three quarters of the 30 A Level music centres entering more than 10 students were colleges with a wide geographical spread: Bolton, Brighton, Cambridgeshire, Camden, Cheshire, Cornwall, Devon, Dudley, Essex, Hampshire, Hereford, Kirklees, Lancashire, Manchester, Nottingham, Shropshire, Surrey, Wigan.

The 78 colleges offering A Level Music had an average cohort size of 9.5 and 60% of them entered 6 or more students. By comparison, the 735 schools offering A Level music had an average cohort size of 3.6 and only 14% of them entered 6 or more students.

1. **Any strategy to safeguard and develop A Level music provision in England should include colleges.**

Many colleges already have the critical mass, the facilities and the wider catchment area to be in a position to safeguard and develop the A Level Music offer in their area. The efficient and cost-effective way to guarantee that every young person who wishes to can access to A Level music within a reasonable travelling distance would be to designate an A Level music hub with a viable, attractive and vibrant offer in every area. Colleges would be well placed to host many such hubs.

A similar approach could be taken to safeguard other vulnerable A Level subjects, in performing arts and languages for example.

**Data source and interpretation:**

All data is derived from the DfE 2018 performance tables.

Average cohort sizes are approximations as all groups from 1-5 have their data suppressed and an assumption has been made that these ‘suppressed’ group sizes average 3 students per group.

Colleges are defined as incorporated FE and sixth form colleges and those 16-19 academy converters which were formerly incorporated sixth form colleges.

**About AoC**

The Association of Colleges (AoC) represents nearly 95% of the 251 colleges in England. Further education colleges are an essential part of England’s education system. Whether it’s through top-class technical education, basic skills or lifelong learning, colleges help people of all ages and backgrounds to make the most of their talents and ambitions. Rooted in local communities, they are crucial in driving social mobility and providing the skills to boost local and regional economies.

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