Quality Framework (QF) - Online Sessions

Contents

Why have we created a new version of the Quality Framework for online sessions?

Youth Music's Quality Framework is flexible and can be used for any kind of music making project. However, the criteria might look different in different kinds of sessions.

Since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, many organisations have moved their music sessions online. The easing of lockdown restrictions means that many are now recommencing face-to-face delivery. But it's likely that many organisations will continue to offer a blended approach of online sessions alongside in-person activity.

This version of the Quality Framework aims to support organisations and music leaders working online by highlighting best practice and additional considerations when working digitally.

This version of the Quality Framework was developed in partnership with:

- Awards for Young Musicians
- Brighter Sound
- Bristol Beacon
- Midlands Arts Centre
- Musinc

Quality Framework criteria summary

The tables below summarise all of the criteria that should be considered when running a music-making session. The rest of the guidance will provide further information on how to apply these criteria to digital environments.

Part 1: Organisational responsibilities criteria summary

Health and safety of all	Contracting and support for music leaders
H1 Appropriate Health and Safety policies and procedures are in place. H2 A Safeguarding and Child Protection policy is in place to protect the welfare of young people and staff (including conducting Disclosure and Barring Service checks).	C1 Contracts include time for structured reflection and evaluation activities with key staff or volunteers involved in planning and delivery. C2 Contracts include clear expectations around music leader planning, including short, medium and long-term planning. Plans should be flexible and adaptable. C3 Roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the planning and delivery of sessions are clearly outlined. C4 Organisations support the emotional wellbeing of staff with regular catch-up/supervision sessions C5 Organisations seek to support music leaders' training and development needs.
Young people's pastoral and progression needs	Planning and evaluation
PP1 Appropriate pastoral support is provided for young people. PP2 When participants are referred by another organisation, information is	PE1 Programmes are planned to ensure that duration of contact time and frequency of engagement are sufficient to achieve the intended outcomes.

requested to inform planning and communication (for example about musical ability and experience, pastoral needs, special educational needs and/or disabilities). PP3 Organisations enable music leaders to develop up-to-date knowledge of progression routes, so that young people can be signposted to relevant opportunities beyond the programme.	PE2 Evaluation activities are devised and scheduled before delivery commences. PE3 Organisations ensure that evaluation activities are carried out as planned.

Part 2: Session criteria summary

Young people centred	Music leader practice
Y1 Music-making reflects the young people's interests, with recognition of their existing musical identities. Y2 Young people experience equality of engagement and no participant is discriminated against. Their views are integral to the session. Y3 The young people's musical, personal and social development are monitored, and achievements are celebrated and valued. Young people are supported by music leaders to set their own goals and targets. Y4 Young people receive clear feedback on their work, identifying next steps for individual improvement. Young people are encouraged to participate in this process through structured peer and self-reflection. Comparison to others is only made where appropriate. Y5 The music leader and/or project staff identify the need for any additional pastoral or other support, and seek to provide or signpost to this.	M1 The music leader has relevant musical competence, and is both an able practitioner and positive role model. M2 The music leader has a clear intention and has planned the session accordingly, while retaining room for flexibility. M3 The music leader plans sessions that enable young people to make progress and nurtures their understanding of what it means to be a musician. M4 The music leader regularly checks young people's understanding. They reflect on their own practice: activities are reviewed and adapted over the course of the session according to how the young people respond. M5 All project staff are actively engaged with activities. Music leaders and other project staff communicate before, during and/or after the session and collaborate in planning activities. Roles and responsibilities are clear to all involved.
Session content	Environment
S1 Activities are engaging, inspiring and purposeful. They are clearly explained and/or demonstrated to the young people. S2 Ownership of session content is shared between the music leader and young	E1 There is a suitable ratio of young people to music leaders (and other project staff where required). E2 Consideration has been given to the physical space, with available resources

people. Participants contribute to decision-making and have the opportunity to take on leadership roles where appropriate.

S3 Young people are supported to create and make their own music, and broaden their musical horizons over time.

S4 Activities are designed and delivered in a manner that is accessible to all and tailored to each individual whenever possible, taking account of their starting points and aspirations. Group dynamics and pace of learning have been considered.

being best used to make it accessible and appropriate for the target group.

E3 There are sufficient materials and equipment to support the activities.

Part 1: Organisational responsibilities criteria

Health and safety of all

H1 Appropriate Health and Safety policies and procedures are in place.

Risk assessments should be bespoke to online activity. Considerations should include the types of activities being undertaken in homes and if the physical space is safe.

> Example: An online session involves lots of movement. Staff raise this with participants before the activity begins and make sure that their space is clear.

H2 A Safeguarding and Child Protection policy is in place to protect the welfare of young people and staff (including conducting Disclosure and Barring Service checks).

Please see this [blog post on safeguarding considerations when moving work online](#).

NYMAZ have developed a range of [resources to support organisations with online safeguarding.](#)

Contracting and support for music leaders

C1 Contracts include time for structured reflection and evaluation activities with key staff or volunteers involved in planning and delivery.

In an online setting staff often lose the opportunity to discuss ideas and reflect during set-up or pack down, so extra time might be needed in contracts for both planning and reflection.

Extra time may be needed for the following:
- Contingency planning for connectivity issues.
- Work between sessions to bring together music created by participants.
- Uploading music and resources into sharable formats and websites to make the materials accessible outside of sessions.
- Creating additional resources and approaches that may not have been required when delivering face-to-face. For example, developing accessible approaches to technology.

C2 Contracts include clear expectations around music leader planning, including short, medium and long-term planning. Plans should be flexible and adaptable.

C3 Roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the planning and delivery of sessions are clearly outlined.

Online sessions often require a 'host' to administer the session and fulfil safeguarding responsibilities. This ensures that the music leader can focus on the music activity.

The host's role includes management of the learning environment, for example waiting rooms, breakout rooms, and monitoring the chat function. Sessions may also require an additional music leader to monitor participants' engagement and spot when someone might be having technical difficulties.

Organisations should consider sharing guidelines on project staff's roles and responsibilities with parents and guardians. This can help prevent unrealistic demands being placed on music leaders' time, which can sometimes be a consequence of moving sessions online.

C4 Organisations support the emotional wellbeing of staff with regular catch-up/supervision sessions

Organisations should be mindful of the potential for increased isolation due to home working. Facilitators should be encouraged to maintain a healthy work-life balance and organisations should consider creating mechanisms for flagging any issues.

Staff should also be supported to take time away from a screen by:
- planning shorter sessions
- encouraging regular breaks
- avoiding back-to-back sessions.

Example: Music leaders complete reflective diaries after each session which includes the question: "Is there anything that you would like to share with us related to how the session made you feel?" These are checked weekly, so any issues can be supported quickly.

C5 Organisations seek to support music leaders' training and development needs.

Music leaders need training in how to use online learning tools and video conferencing platforms. It shouldn't be assumed that the practitioner will have this knowledge. Online delivery tools are continually developing, so any training or support should not be a one-off.

Music leaders will also need training in how to transfer their facilitation skills to an online environment.

Example: Setting up a team Facebook page or WhatsApp group enables practitioners to share new hints and tips as they go. This will also help to keep track of the team's learning needs for future training.

Young people's pastoral and progression needs

PP1 Appropriate pastoral support is provided for young people.

Good communication in advance of a session can support young people to access opportunities without worries or stress. This should include the option of providing walk throughs of how to use the platforms with parents/carers and participants.

Organisations should also make sure that there are enough staff in online sessions to monitor participants and check in with those who might need support.

PP2 When participants are referred by another organisation, information is requested to inform planning and communication (for example about musical ability and experience, pastoral needs, special educational needs and/or disabilities).

This should include information on the participant's technical setup, previous experience online and their instruments and/or musical equipment at home.

PP3 Organisations enable music leaders to develop up-to-date knowledge of progression routes, so that young people can be signposted to relevant opportunities beyond the programme.

Working online removes geographical limits, so there may be a wider range of progression opportunities.

Planning and evaluation

PE1 Programmes are planned to ensure that duration of contact time and frequency of engagement are sufficient to achieve the intended outcomes.

Some outcomes may take longer to achieve than when working face-to-face.

Example: A music leader wants to capture musical progression in group performance skills. When delivering in person, they may have been able to observe this throughout a session. When working online, the music leader may need to record each young person's part separately and arrange into a musical performance to monitor their progress.

PE2 Evaluation activities are devised and scheduled before delivery commences.

PE3 Organisations ensure that evaluation activities are carried out as planned.

Part 2: Session criteria

Young people centred

Y1 Music-making reflects the young people's interests, with recognition of their existing musical identities.

Online delivery allows a unique opportunity for young people to share their musical interests and tastes with ease.

> Example: A music leader sets up a group playlist where young people can share and listen to each other's favourite tracks. The group enjoys researching and preparing songs to share outside of session time.

Y2 Young people experience equality of engagement and no participant is discriminated against. Their views are integral to the session.

Young people should be able to access activities in multiple ways (e.g. via text, audio, video and through a third person). This means that it's easier for all participants to be heard and included in the session. Organisations should also be aware of internet access issues and any lack of suitable digital devices when planning sessions.

> Example: A session takes place where one participant has a laptop and audio interface to record, another has a laptop that runs really slowly, and another has a smart phone. The music leader plans broad activities based on creative input rather than technology. Activity includes lyric writing, singing (individually), songwriting in small groups and responding to creative challenges that do not require any equipment. This ensures the young people are not excluded based on their equipment or internet connection.

Establishing a clear, agreed way of communicating can support all voices to be heard in a session.

> Example: A group agrees to mute everyone during discussion with the speaker being the only person unmuted. Participants then wave their hand to come in next. This allows for clarity of audio and also prevents individuals being spoken over.

Y3 The young people's musical, personal and social development are monitored, and achievements are celebrated and valued. Young people are supported by music leaders to set their own goals and targets.

There are more ways to share young people's achievements online than has previously been possible in face-to-face sessions.

Example: Virtual Open Mic sessions - those who are anxious to perform live have can submit pre-recorded performances. These can be celebrated and given equal time slots to the 'live online' performances.

Y4 Young people receive clear feedback on their work, identifying next steps for individual improvement. Young people are encouraged to participate in this process through structured peer and self-reflection. Comparison to others is only made where appropriate.

Many online platforms have in-built features that can encourage peer and self-reflection. For example, participants can use polling features, the group chat and white boards to offer feedback on each other's work and reflect on their own progress.

Y5 The music leader and/or project staff identify the need for any additional pastoral or other support, and seek to provide or signpost to this.

Music leader practice

M1 The music leader has relevant musical competence, and is both an able practitioner and positive role model.

M2 The music leader has a clear intention and has planned the session accordingly, while retaining room for flexibility.

Music leaders may need to carry out more detailed sessions plans for online activity to allow them to respond flexibly.

> Example: A music leader plans an online singing workshop. In case there are connectivity issues, they plan for an additional option of the music leader becoming the singer and taking direction from the young people via the chat function, putting the participants in the producer role.

Music leaders should consider reducing the amount of session content planned to allow time for non-musical activity which would happen naturally in a face-to-face setting.

> Example: A music leader plans social time and icebreakers into online sessions, reducing the amount of musical activity. This includes conversations about music and about other interests. Whilst the time spent creating music is reduced, the quality of the session increases as young people have more ownership over the space, which otherwise may feel artificial.

M3 The music leader plans sessions that enable young people to make progress and nurtures their understanding of what it means to be a musician.

M4 The music leader regularly checks young people's understanding. They reflect on their own practice: activities are reviewed and adapted over the course of the session according to how the young people respond.

Music leaders may need to allow for more short breaks and check-ins to monitor participants' understanding of the session content.

> Example: In an online session, a music leader is not able to assess the progress of the whole group's understanding of pulse and rhythm simultaneously within a group clapping game. The

music leader plans additional time to monitor each individual's understanding separately, through call and response, 1-to-1s or solo play throughs.

M5 All project staff are actively engaged with activities. Music leaders and other project staff communicate before, during and/or after the session and collaborate in planning activities. Roles and responsibilities are clear to all involved.

This might include parents and carers at home, who often play a crucial role in supporting with technology. Many organisations' safeguarding policies will require parents to be in attendance, so it makes sense to get them more actively involved in the session.

Session content

S1 Activities are engaging, inspiring and purposeful. They are clearly explained and/or demonstrated to the young people.

Music leaders should consider the pace of learning and be aware that certain activities may take longer to complete when working online.

Just because a session is online, activities don't all have to be screen-based. A variety of activities can help to increase engagement.

> Example: During an online session, the group all turn their cameras off and mute their microphones. They then go and spend five minutes finding a few percussive sounds from household items to bring back to the group.

S2 Ownership of session content is shared between the music leader and young people. Participants contribute to decision-making and have the opportunity to take on leadership roles where appropriate.

Music leaders may need to spend more time on group dynamics and personal development at the beginning of projects to help young people to feel comfortable in sharing their views. Facilitators should not be disheartened if this takes longer to achieve than in face-to-face sessions.

> Example: A music leader finds that it takes a few sessions for a young person to appear on video in sessions, and others in the group choose not to do this throughout the project. They ensure that everyone in the group can engage in a way that they feel comfortable, and plan activities the young people can take part in via chat or microphone. For example, they give a participant remote control of their computer with Ableton, allowing the young person to create music without appearing on camera or communicating verbally. The young person is able to actively engage and take ownership of the session content.

S3 Young people are supported to create and make their own music, and broaden their musical horizons over time.

S4 Activities are designed and delivered in a manner that is accessible to all and tailored to each individual whenever possible, taking account of their starting points and aspirations. Group dynamics and pace of learning have been considered.

Accessibility should be considered in advance of sessions. Ways of supporting this might include:
- producing easy read materials
- posting relevant items to participants
- spotlighting screens to zoom in on detail or on makaton signing
- explaining built-in accessibility features such as closed captioning.

For further ideas on how to ensure that online music delivery is accessible to all, see [Drake Music's resource](#).

Environment

E1 There is a suitable ratio of young people to music leaders (and other project staff where required).

Organisations and music leaders should be mindful that participant group size may vary when working online.

> Example: A songwriting project involving 25 participants when delivered in person could not maintain the same quality of engagement online because of the issues around communicating in large groups. Instead, the music leaders found that working in breakout rooms with a ratio of no more than 1:4 allowed room for each young person's voice to be heard.

E2 Consideration has been given to the physical space, with available resources being best used to make it accessible and appropriate for the target group.

Organisations should offer parents, carers and participants clear advice in advance on the physical space that is used to take part in online sessions. Ensuring that this space is safe can also form part of a group activity at the start of a session, for example using part of the warm up to tidy up the space around us.

Consideration of the virtual environment should be considered here too, for example using background music so that participants enter a relaxing environment rather than awkward silence. Music leader backgrounds can also be dressed, or virtual backgrounds used to transport the space. Ensuring that everyone selects an appropriate background should also be considered in safeguarding policies.

Youth Music grantholders can gain free access to [Charanga's VIP Studio Sessions](#), an online learning and music production platform.

E3 There are sufficient materials and equipment to support the activities.

Though online sessions may not require a full room set up, music leaders should include sufficient set up time before every session. If budget allows you may need to deliver or post equipment directly to participants.

Example: Tech sessions are held prior to delivery, including checks that everyone can:
- access the session from the link provided
- turn on/off mute and cameras
- change their names.

They also allow music leaders to test functionality, such as:
- audio sharing
- video sharing
- remote control between computers
- linking to online programmes
- screen sharing safely
- use of breakout rooms, etc.

Organisations should also consider setting up a Digital Inclusion Log to keep track of participants who have dropped out of online sessions and follow up to support them to re-engage. For example, the Family Fund provide grants to support Disabled children and young people to access equipment and devices.