

HLO Policy - Commissioning

To be successful in achieving its aims and objectives, the Birmingham Music Hub delivers a wide range of activities in conjunction with, or through, a number of carefully selected partner organisations. The partnership approach is fundamental to ensuring that the Hub Lead Organisation (HLO) is able to maximise the capacity and reach of Hub activities, alongside maximising the utilisation of the grant funding for the benefit of our local communities.

This policy outlines the procedures and principles by which the HLO will appoint and secure partners and services, under the oversight of the HLO Board. It ensures transparency, accountability and value for money in the commissioning process to support the delivery of the Hub's programme of activities.

Definitions

“HLO”	The Hub Lead Organisation for Birmingham is Services For Education (SFE). The point of contact for the HLO is Richard Mabbott, Head of Music Service.
“SFE Board”	The main Board of Trustees for SFE, who are responsible for and oversee SFE's role as ACE fund holder and the organisation's wider activities, including the SFE Music Services' traded and charitable work.
“HLO Board”	The independent Board that works with the HLO to monitor and oversee the Hub's programme of activity and allocation of funding in order to achieve the Hub's agreed objectives, in line with ACE funding requirements. The HLO Board is not a sub-committee of the SFE Board, although two SFE trustees will normally be members of the HLO Board (along with relevant members of SFE's Senior Leadership team) in order to ensure alignment of understanding and decision making between the two separate governing entities.
“Hub”	The Birmingham Music Education Hub
“Hub partner”	An organisation awarded a partnership agreement by the Hub for the delivery of one or more elements of the Hub programme of activities.
“SFE Music Service”	Services For Education's Music Service is one of the partner organisations delivering the Hub programme of activities. Hub activity delivered by SFE's Music Service is managed by one or more members of the Music Leadership Team, reporting in to the Head of Music Service.

Identifying partners

As an established Hub (since 2013), a number of partnership arrangements are already in place as at 1 September 2024. The existing arrangements will continue as previously agreed until such time as the current partnership agreement expires or comes up for review, subject to ongoing quality and performance monitoring. On expiry or review, the commissioning process set out below will apply to future renewals of partnership agreements.

Support for the Hub's strategic functions will be provided by Services For Education, as part of its role as HLO and fund holder. There is no requirement for these to be procured separately.

Reviewing and identifying opportunities for partnerships

On a [six] monthly cycle, normally in [April] and [October] each year, the HLO Board will review the requirements of the Hub's programme of activity and priorities in the coming [six to twelve] months. This review will consider and identify initiatives, activities or other opportunities to deliver the Hub's agreed SMART objectives and agree their relative urgency/priority for action in accordance with the latest needs analysis. The HLO will take appropriate steps to promote these initiatives, activities and opportunities to a range of suitable potential partner organisations and invite discussion from interested parties.

Suitable potential partners may already be known to the HLO and/or its partner organisations. In other cases, potential partners may be sourced through the Hub's wider network and/or encouraged to apply to the HLO to be considered to participate in, support or deliver these opportunities. Where appropriate, opportunities may be advertised through relevant channels to attract the widest and most diverse interest possible. When advertising for, selecting and appointing potential partner organisations, the HLO and the HLO Board will take every opportunity to ensure that good practice is followed regarding Diversity & Inclusion, in order to ensure that the Hub's membership, at all levels, is representative of the communities we serve and can appropriately meet its needs.

Potential partners will be provided with details of the initiative, activity or opportunity available, including the desired outcomes and delivery timescale. Potential partners will be asked to provide the HLO with a proposal setting out:

- how they would resource delivery of the initiative, activity or opportunity
- how it would be organised and delivered, and over what time period
- the associated costs, set out in a suitably detailed budget
- how the activity would be (a) quality assured during delivery and (b) its impact assessed on completion

Where several partners submit proposals for the same initiative or activity, the HLO will consider their respective suitability based on criteria such as: track record of previous delivery of activity for the Hub, specialism(s) that are required for the initiative or activity, and experience of working with the audience(s) the activity is intended to support.

Promoting partnership opportunities

The HLO will use its extensive and established professional and partner network to keep abreast of the musical activities taking place within Birmingham. Guided by the Hub's agreed strategic objectives for the coming year, and informed by the latest needs analysis, the HLO will take reasonable steps to extend its network and promote the opportunities for partnership with the Hub to maximise the reach and impact of the grant funding.

Reviewing and renewing partnerships

As part of the regular six-monthly review process, the HLO Board will review the impact that activity is having on the strategic objectives and assess the extent to which the activity is delivering a positive return on investment. Where it is identified that an activity is not having the desired impact, the HLO Board will request the HLO work with the partner organisation to take remedial action.

Where the review identifies gaps in delivery against the strategic objectives, the HLO Board will request that the HLO source and secure suitable partner organisations to close the identified gap to deliver the strategic aim(s).

This review will be taken into account as part of the decision making process for commissioning further work with that partner organisation in future years.

Commissioning process

The HLO is very conscious that the Hub is supporting a highly diverse, dynamic and vibrant city with strong cultural and ethnic roots, and therefore seeks to ensure that the commissioning process balances the need for structure and consistency with the ability to be responsive and adaptable in order to respond to the evolving needs of the communities we serve.

The HLO will take appropriate advice on establishing and adhering to good procurement practices, and will monitor developments in this area, in order to continuously improve the arrangements in support of maximising the utilisation of the grant funding to deliver the Hub's strategic objectives.

Activities and budget proposals

For each initiative, activity or opportunity identified to support the delivery of the Hub's programme of work, a suitably detailed proposal setting out how the activity will be delivered, resourced, funded and quality assured must be submitted to the HLO.

For significant projects (e.g. those with a value of over £25k pa) proposals should be submitted to the HLO by June 30th for projects that will be delivered between 1 September – 31 August (e.g. the next academic year).

Proposals for smaller projects will be accepted at any time.

Proposals received will be reviewed by the HLO and assessed for suitability against appropriate performance criteria, including but not limited to:

- It must be a recognised "entity" such as a registered charity, organisation or community group (e.g. not an individual)
- They must hold a UK bank account and their credentials can be verified
- There is a named lead contact (full name and job title), a correspondence address and contact information
- There is a clear schedule for delivery and detailed deliverables
- The cost proposal/budget must be viable
- Reporting arrangements are set out, covering the information required both during the delivery of the activity and on its completion. This would include data such as: number

of sessions delivered, number of attendees/participants, feedback received, confirmation of actual spend/income and overall impact achieved.

The HLO will scrutinise the proposals received and seek clarification on areas that may be unclear, in order to satisfy itself that the option presents good value for money, will be effective in meeting the specified goals/objectives and delivering the intended impact.

In the majority of cases, it is anticipated that proposals will include a request for funding by the HLO to deliver the activity but this may not always be the case. In some instances, funding may not be required, or funding may be available from a source other than the HLO's Arts Council England grant. In all cases, a proposal relating to the delivery of the activity, how it will be resourced and funded is required before the HLO can make a decision as to whether or not to commission the organisation to deliver the activity.

Proposals seeking funding support of £5k or more will be subject to close scrutiny and will require appropriate detail setting out what will be delivered. Proposals involving requests for funding below £5k are likely to be less detailed, but must also contain sufficient information and be of appropriate quality for the HLO to be confident in commissioning the work.

Where awarded, partnership agreements will contain references to the relevant additional conditions and standard terms and conditions of the funding agreement, noting the requirements relating to restricted funds and limitations on the use of funding.

When considering the proposals received, the HLO will make decisions as to the allocation of funding in line with the Hub's agreed strategic objectives alongside the priorities identified in the most recent needs analysis. The HLO recognises that it has a responsibility to ensure that the available funding is distributed as broadly as possible in order to maximise the opportunity the ACE funding provides for the benefit of local communities, whilst also ensuring that the funding needs to be targeted on areas and activities where it will offer the best value for money and provide maximum impact.

Through the monitoring process set out below, the HLO Board will keep the HLO decisions regarding the allocation of funding and the award of partnership agreements under review on a regular basis, satisfying itself that the distribution of funds follows due process, that the HLOs approach encourages active participation by all potential partner organisations and that the commissioned activities deliver the expected impact and contribute effectively to the achievement of the Hub's agreed strategic objectives.

Self-commissioning by HLO

Where it is identified that selected Hub programme activities might be best delivered by the HLO through SFE's Music Service (for example, Whole Class Instrumental Teaching), the Music Service will prepare a proposal setting out how this activity will be delivered in the coming academic year together with supporting budget and resourcing information.

The HLO Board will consider this proposal, seeking clarification regarding the content as appropriate from the Music Service Leadership Team, before approving the decision to commission the specified work from the Music Service.

When the HLO Board is considering such proposals, the SFE Head of Music Service may be present to answer questions by HLO Board members but will not participate in the decision-

making process as to whether to commission SFE Music Service to deliver the specified HLO programme activity.

Links to other HLO policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following HLO policy:

- Conflict of interest

Quality and performance monitoring

At intervals set out in the partnership agreement(s), the HLO will regularly monitor and review the delivery of the activity or service by the partner organisation and the return on the investment made. The findings of such quality assurance reviews will be reported back to the HLO Board to inform decision making about further activity that may be needed to deliver the Hub's SMART objectives and/or the commissioning of further activity with that partner organisation.

In due course, quality and performance monitoring will feed into and align with the ACE Impact Framework and associated guidance. In the meantime, it will incorporate a clear methodology appropriate to the complexity of the project/activities and will include at least the following:

- observation of delivery (by the HLO or member of HLO Board)
- feedback from the customer(s) and students involved in activity (qualitative and quantitative)
- evaluation of the activity by the partner organisation, together with any reflections/recommendations for future actions
- performance of the delivery in line with the agreed schedule (e.g. % of sessions run)
- breakdown of actual spend/income against funding provided

Where there is a concern over the quality of the activity being delivered, or the performance of the activity falls short of the standard expected, or concerns are raised regarding the conduct of employees of the partner organisation, the HLO will bring this to the attention of the partner organisation at the earliest opportunity so that remedial action can be taken. If the remedial action fails to address the concerns raised, the matter will be escalated to the HLO Board for consideration. If the concern so warrants, the HLO Board may request that the HLO bring the partnership agreement to an end before its natural expiry.

Hub Board's oversight

Approval of commissioning decisions

The HLO Board will oversee and scrutinise the HLO's decisions regarding the commissioning of partner organisations or SFE Music Service for the delivery of programme activities. This role will be discharged through the regular monitoring of the impact of the partner organisation's delivery on the Hub's strategic objectives and the value for money being achieved for that activity.

Where the partner organisation is in receipt of funding in excess of £25k per year, a commissioning sub-group of [4] HLO Board members will meet [three] times a year to review the appointment process and scrutinise performance of the partner organisation in more detail with the HLO and report their findings back to the full HLO Board to inform decision making.

Policy review

The Hub Board will monitor the application and effectiveness of this policy, normally in January annually.