

Guidelines to promote quality and diversity in Pre-college Music Education

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Executive summary

The **AEC/YMTE Joint Working Group** was established to promote early musical talent and strengthen the relationship between Pre-College Music Education and Higher Music Education (HME). As part of the ARTEMIS project (2022-2025), the group investigated these relationships and developed guidelines to improve **quality, accessibility, and diversity** within music education.

Methodology:

The Working Group employed a comprehensive survey methodology, engaging 91 institutions across 19 countries, including Higher Music Education Institutions (HMEIs) and Pre-College institutions. The survey gathered data on admission processes, institutional collaboration, curriculum structures, teacher profiles, and the use of digital tools. By targeting both levels of education, the study aimed to identify systemic challenges, highlight good practices, and provide actionable recommendations to improve the transition between Pre-College and Higher Music Education (HME).

Recommendations:

Based on a questionnaire and an analysis of existing practices, the group has developed guidelines to enhance institutional collaboration, improve access to music education, promoting equal opportunities for all. These guidelines aim to align the efforts of Pre-College institutions and HMEIs, integrate digital strategies, and promote a cohesive framework for advancing music education across Europe.

Final Considerations:

The ARTEMIS project emphasises the need for continued innovation in music education, addressing **inclusion, diversity, and curriculum adaptation** to meet evolving societal needs. By adhering to these guidelines, the music education ecosystem can strengthen collaboration, enhance access for diverse talents, and ensure the sustainability of music education in Europe.

Introduction

The AEC / YMTE Joint Working Group was established with the wish to promote musical talent from an early age on. [YMTE](#) and [AEC](#) are European umbrella organisations representing the interests of HMEIs (AEC) and Pre-College music education (YMTE) at European and international level.

As part of the Creative Europe Network project ARTEMIS (Empowering Artists as Makers in Society 2022-2025) the AEC / YMTE Joint Working Group was assigned with the task to investigate the relationship between HME and the Pre-college level and based on a mapping of the field prepare guidelines to promote quality and diversity in Pre-college Education.

The Working Group decided to include the transition from Pre-college music education to HME in the task, so that guidelines are presented that can be implemented at both Pre-college level and HME level. Some of the identified challenges can only be solved through cooperation between the two levels. Although the majority of the working group members have backgrounds in classical music, the recommendations and guidelines are intentionally broad and relates more to structural challenges than to genre-specific needs.

These guidelines can be seen as a continuation and reinforcement of the recommendations that a working group prepared under the ERASMUS project Polifonia. Since the end of the Polifonia project music life has experienced further challenges in form of a covid-19 crisis as well as consequences following a rapid digital transformation, increasing political tensions and climate changes, leading to a need for music education to also focus on **well-being, diversity, equality and inclusion.**

It is necessary for the music education ecosystem to continue to strengthen its bonds and offer a strong and barrier-free path to high-level musical practice. This includes integrating new perspectives on accessibility. Although improvements were implemented following the Polifonia recommendations, the mapping and new perspectives leave several tasks yet to be accomplished.

A definition of pre-college music education

The term pre-college music education is understood differently across Europe. In this document, pre-college music education defines a stage of education that provides specialised musical training to a level appropriate for entrance into higher music education.

While in higher music education, a student is expected to accomplish her/his studies once s/he decides to enrol in a particular study programme, this does not necessarily apply to pupils in pre-college music education programmes. Pupils' preferences might then change and they might opt for studies in a different field of interest.

Pre-college music education is characterised by the aim and capacity to bring pupils to an advanced artistic level and can take place in a variety of settings: in independent specialised schools, in junior departments of higher music education institutions, as preparatory classes in music schools, or in privately organised contexts.

Strong pre-college level music education is a vital condition for a high-quality musical landscape. It is a means for the development of creative, personal and interpersonal skills, in addition to enabling social cohesion for young people in general, not only for those having the ambition to enter the music profession.

These guidelines can be seen as a continuation and reinforcement of the recommendations that a working group prepared under the ERASMUS project Polifonia.

General conclusions from Polifonia I report (2007)

1. Common experiences in music education as well as scientific research clearly indicate that music training should be started at an early age, especially for those wanting to become professional musicians. Further research needs to be done on the specific needs of the various music genres.
2. Music education is to be perceived as a continuum; it is therefore difficult to pinpoint the exact beginning of professional studies and to conceptualise the different phases of education. Nevertheless, pre-college music education is a specific phase in musical education and needs to be recognised as such.
3. A well-structured pre-college education leads to a higher professional standard in higher music education, and as a result, to higher quality in the music profession.
4. Students are better prepared for higher music education when there is a well-structured and continuous curriculum or system with close connections between pre-college level institutions or systems, general education institutions and higher music education institutions.
5. The current procedures for admission to the higher music education level are not yet consciously related to or compatible with the use of learning outcomes in the 1st (Bachelor)

and 2nd cycle (Master), which are increasingly being used in higher music education institutions all over Europe.

6. Music education at the pre-college level can also be of great value to young people without the ambition to become professional musicians, as it helps young people to develop the participation in and the understanding of culture and the music and arts, develops creative, personal and interpersonal skills that can be essential transferable skills for workers in a knowledge-based society, and provides social cohesion and intercultural understanding, which is essential for a Europe built on cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

Mapping

Methodology

A comprehensive survey was conducted and distributed throughout the networks of the AEC and YMTE targeting HMEIs as well as Pre-college institutions. The latter includes both independent institutions as well as junior departments integrated within a HMEI.

We received responses from 91 institutions in 19 countries with a distribution between 54% HMEI and 46% Pre-college institutions.

Unfortunately, it was noted that some larger HMEIs did not respond to the survey. This leaves some uncertainty as to whether the survey is representative of the entire Higher Music Education Area. However, the working group continues to believe that the challenges identified in the survey will also apply to a significant proportion of the larger HMEIs.

The survey instrument was divided into two separate sections, one for HMEIs and one for Pre-College institutions.

The first section addressed all parameters in relation to the admission procedures and entrance examinations at HMEI such as the possibility to visit the institution before the exam, the content of the exams, the use of interviews, video recordings, the legal requirements, age limits, members of the admission panels etc. Further, information was sought on the criteria for the final admission, assignment of teachers, the level of information about the applicants, entrance examination and/or enrolment fees, financial support, boarding facilities and finally, the use of new technologies.

The second section targeted the Pre-college schools and addressed the same areas as the first section. In addition, information was sought on the content of the study programmes, the background of the teachers, any collaboration with professional music organisations such as orchestras, festivals etc, possibilities for (international) exchange and the proportion of students who progress to higher education. Finally, the Pre-college schools were asked about their use of new technologies.

Main findings related to Higher Music Education Institutions

In the following section, the working group has extracted the main findings of the study that point to good practices or to barriers to the development of quality and diversity among music students. The complete questionnaire can be found in Annex A. All answers to the questionnaire can be found in Annex B

Relation between HMEIs and Pre-college programme:

- Of the HMEIs that do not have their own pre-college programme, 54% collaborate with pre-college schools or other providers of pre-college music education.
- Of the HMEIs that do not have their own pre-college programme and do not collaborate with pre-college schools or other providers of pre-college music education, only 28% consider providing such programme in the future.

Before the entrance exam:

- Almost all HMEIs provide the possibility for potential students to establish contact with the institution before the entrance exam.
- Only 17% of HMEI recognise a successful completion of a pre-college programme as equivalent to the entrance exam.

The admission procedure:

- Almost $\frac{2}{3}$ of the HMEIs interview the applicants as part of the entrance exam.
- 40% of the HMEIs offer online entrance exams.
- 20% of the admission panels include an external examiner.
- 15% of HMEIs do not include music theory in the entrance exam.
- 72% of the HMEIs charge a fee for the entrance exam (between €20-100).
- 85% of the HMEIs take the applicant's request for a specific teacher into consideration.
- A little more than half of the HMEIs report that teacher availability is a factor when offering a study place
- 81% of the HMEIs charge enrolment fee (very large variety depending on programme, country of origin, age, family income etc.)

General conditions:

- 66% of the HMEIs offer some kind of scholarship to students.
- 40% of the HMEIs have policies in place for diversity/inclusion

Main findings related to Pre-college institutions

Before the entrance exam:

- 93% of the institutions offer possibilities to connect with the institution before the entrance exam.

The admission procedure:

- 66% of the institutions interview the candidates.
- 10% of the admission panels include an external examiner
- 18% of the institutions charge a fee for the entrance exam (between €30-75).
- 13% of the institutions ask for references before admitting applicants

- 88% of the institutions take the applicant's request for a specific teacher into consideration.
- 49% of the institutions charge enrolment fee (very large variety depending on programme, age, etc.)
- 65% of the institutions offer some kind of scholarship to students.
- 85% of the institutions admit foreign students

After the entrance exam:

- 93% of the students have the opportunity to present themselves to an audience inside or outside the school
- 71% of the institutions have formal cooperation with the professional music scene

General conditions:

- Several schools do not have statistics on the number of students being admitted to HME
- 25% of the institutions have statistics on students progressing to a professional career as a performing artist
- 45% of the institutions offer international exchange to students (partly for individual students and partly for larger projects).
- 53% of the institutions offer teacher mobility/exchange on an international level.

Results - Use of technology (both HMEIs and PC institutions)

- 92% of the institutions use technology for educational purposes.
- 84% of the institutions are equipped with one or more multimedia desks
- 65% of the institutions use online content that is produced by teachers
- 67% of the institutions provide distance learning
- 19% of the institutions receive specific funding for digital equipment

Conclusions

Based on the questionnaire, the working group observes significant differences among pre-college institutions across Europe in terms of their objectives, structure, student profiles, and enrolment numbers.

Despite these differences, the underlying goal remains the same: to emphasise the importance of high-quality music education for the future. A strong music education system unites countries that excel in for example PISA examinations. Such systems not only nurture future musicians but also cultivates achievers who contribute meaningfully to society. Furthermore, the growing value of creativity in the workplace underscores the essential role of arts education in shaping a dynamic and innovative workforce.

Therefore, the working group finds that specific standards in several areas could contribute to improving student access and strengthening the strategic position of pre-college schools or Junior Departments as central preparatory institutions for higher music education.

Additionally, there is room for improvement within HME itself. Specifically, this includes initiatives to reduce barriers between pre-college programs and first-cycle studies, a more systematic gathering of data on applicants, and adopting policies that ensure **diversity and inclusion**.

Finally, the working group notes that many of the conclusions and recommendations presented in the Polifonia report on pre-college institutions from 2007 are still relevant and should therefore be addressed based on the greatly changed conditions that apply to music education in 2025.

Recommendations and Guidelines

Based on the conclusions drawn, the Joint AEC/YMTE Working Group proposes the following recommendations for the sector:

For Higher Music Education Institutions (HMEIs):

1. **Promote Openness and Transparency:**
 - Provide clear and accessible information to potential applicants through consultations and open days.
2. **Foster Collaboration with Pre-College Institutions:**
 - Establish dedicated Junior Departments or formal partnerships with Pre-College programs.
3. **Streamline Transitions:**
 - Develop a framework to recognise the completion of Pre-College programs as equivalent to entrance exams or parts thereof.
4. **Enhance Data Monitoring:**
 - Gather detailed insights into applicants' backgrounds to track and support developments in the musical ecosystem.
 - Increase knowledge of graduate outcomes to ensure ongoing quality enhancement.
5. **Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:**
 - Implement robust policies for diversity, equity, and inclusion while expanding the availability of scholarships to support underrepresented groups.

For Pre-College Institutions/Junior Departments:

1. **Establish Formal Collaborations:**
 - Partner with one or more HMEIs to ensure seamless progression for students.
2. **Develop Strategic Profiles:**
 - Define clear objectives for target groups, learning outcomes, and teaching strategies while implementing robust procedures for data collection and quality improvement.
3. **Monitor Ecosystem Developments:**
 - Collect data on applicants' backgrounds to better understand and respond to regional and national trends.

4. **Provide Performance Opportunities:**
 - Guarantee that all students have the chance to perform publicly, fostering confidence and practical experience.
5. **Promote Inclusion, Diversity and Accessibility:**
 - Expand scholarship opportunities to increase inclusivity and support for students from diverse backgrounds.

These recommendations aim to strengthen collaboration between institutions, improve the transition for students, and foster a more inclusive and effective music education ecosystem.

Use of Technology in Music Education

The integration of digital tools for music creation, teaching, communication, and administration is an essential and rapidly evolving aspect of modern music education. While many institutions have embraced digitalization to varying degrees, the availability of dedicated budgets for technological advancements remains limited.

Recommendations for all Institutions:

1. **Develop and Implement a Digital Strategy:**
 - Institutions should prioritize creating a comprehensive digital strategy that aligns with their overall goals. This strategy should address both pedagogical and administrative needs.
2. **Allocate Resources for Digitalization:**
 - Ensure adequate funding and resources to support the adoption and integration of digital tools for education and operations.
3. **Embrace Continuous Evaluation:**
 - Regularly assess and refine digital strategies to adapt to emerging technologies and evolving institutional needs.
4. **Promote Effective Use of Digital Tools:**
 - Leverage digital tools to enhance learning, teaching, and communication while streamlining administrative processes.

By adopting these practices, institutions can maximize the benefits of digitalization, ensuring it supports their mission and fosters innovation in music education.

Final considerations

In times when support for arts and culture is under pressure, it is crucial that the sector itself makes an effort to ensure continued access to music education and performances. The ARTEMIS project aims, among other things, to further develop and innovate music education, from the scope and responsibility of institutions to learning and teaching and curriculum design, as well as to shape and implement fair, inclusive, diverse and gender-equal music education.

By complying with these guidelines, the music education ecosystem can increase collaboration, facilitate the path for musical talent from diverse backgrounds, and better monitor progress as a prerequisite for continuous curriculum adaptation.

The Joint AEC / YMTE Working Group

- Mattias LUNDQVIST, [Barratt Due Musikk institutt](#), Oslo, Norway
- Alf Richard KRAGGERUD, [Barratt Due Musikk institutt](#), Oslo, Norway
- Minna-Maria PESONEN, [East Helsinki Music Institute Music](#), Helsinki, Finland
- Mario ZECHER, [Eberhard-Ludwigs-Gymnasium](#), Stuttgart, Germany
- Balázs KECSKÉS, [Franz Liszt Academy of Music](#), Budapest, Hungary
- Ross LYNESS, [Royal Irish Academy of Music](#), Dublin, Ireland
- Lucia DI CECCA, [Conservatorio Statale di Musica Santa Cecilia](#), Rome, Italy
- Stefan GIES, AEC Chief Executive ((WG Chair and Coordinator, until January 2024)
- Finn SCHUMACKER, AEC Executive Director (WG Chair and Coordinator, from February 2024)

Annexes - bibliography

Annex A: Questionnaire with answers

Annex B: Pre-college Music Education in Europe (Polifonia 2007)