

STRATEGIC INVESTMENT FUND FOR MUSIC SECTOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE LIVERPOOL CITY REGION:

IMPLEMENTATION, OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a comprehensive evaluation of the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Music Industry Development Programme, focusing on the impact of funding derived from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) Strategic Investment Fund (SIF). The programme was administered by the Music Office, operating within Liverpool City Council (LCC) and was initiated in 2020, with all funds allocated by the close of 2025. The analysis examines the programme's foundational context, its administrative and operational execution, and critically assesses its outputs and

outcomes against the predefined objectives of the LCRCA Grant Fund Agreement (GFA). Furthermore, it integrates perspectives and feedback from various funding recipients, documenting how funds were applied and their effectiveness in fostering business development and expansion. The report concludes by offering critical observations regarding the programme's influence on music business growth, survival rates, and its geographical and demographic reach across the city region, culminating in a series of recommendations for the future strategic planning of the region's music sector.

Table 1: Agreed GFA Project Targets across Phases 1 & 2 against Delivered Outputs

Agreed Major GFA Project Targets	Delivered Output Summaries
Music Industry Covid 19 Support Fund.	Delivered in summer 2020.
Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) business support – no of employers engaged 182.	218 formal IAG engagements. Estimated 400 enterprises in receipt of public consultation advice.
25 apprenticeships positions created as a direct result of the intervention.	52 paid longer-term traineeships delivered.
120 school pupils' work placement positions delivered.	30 longer-term work placements delivered by LCR-based partners and small businesses.
3,000 individuals engaged in careers advice and support.	Careers advice delivery to over 3,200 school pupils and young people.
40 export support and 40 business support awards.	Delivered finance for 88 distinct businesses, including 11 export support awards.
New / improved floorspace.	Refurbishment of 75 Argyle Street into Future Yard venue.

This evaluation has employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. Data sources included project records, monitoring data from the Liverpool UNESCO City of Music Office, case studies, an online survey of 49 fund recipients, and 21 interviews with stakeholders and beneficiaries.

PROGRAMME AIMS

- To provide dedicated support for musicians and creative businesses
- Encourage formal business planning and skills training uptake.
- Improve specialist careers advice and employment pathway awareness,
- Offer entrepreneurs access to small investment funding for development opportunities.

To achieve these aims, its objectives were focused on three core streams of delivery:

1. Skills development (partnering locally to deliver enhanced school career guidance, role-specific training, and industry work placements)
2. Talent development (expanding existing and creating new programmes to support artists and professionals)
3. Music ecosystem growth (establishing a central support hub to attract investment, boost exports, and provide match-funded business growth grants).

MAIN FINDINGS

1

OVERACHIEVED OBJECTIVES

The programme exceeded most of its objectives' targets. It did so despite significant delivery challenges. These were achieved through the Music Board and Music Office adopting an agile approach to respond to and address sector needs, providing vital support through crisis and recovery phases.

2

ENHANCED MUSIC CITY PROFILE

It solidified Liverpool City Region's reputation as a 'Music City' by demonstrating a thriving music ecosystem, attracting significant inward investment. The programme's achievements directly underpinned the Liverpool City Region's successful £6.75 million 'MusicFutures' bid to become a UKRI Creative Cluster.

3

SKILLS & TALENT DEVELOPMENT

New strategic initiatives (e.g., Future Yard's Sound Check) have expanded the LCR's training and career advice offer for young people looking at prospective careers in the music sector. The success of these 'home grown' programmes, coupled with successful national organisations pilot projects in the LCR (e.g., PRS Foundation Momentum), have showcased regional leadership and subsequently been trialled and rolled out in other regions, which continue to elevate the region's profile.

4

ADVANCED SOCIAL INCLUSION AND DISTRIBUTION

Ring-fenced funding and EDI-focused decision-making ensured underrepresented groups accessed opportunities. The programme nurtured skills for musicians and practitioners, demonstrating their use as tools for inclusion. Targeted initiatives, including the Black Music Action Group and informed funding support for Black-led organisations and creators, actively advanced equity within the sector. Targeted programmes (e.g., New Noise, Positive Impact,) opened pathways for social mobility through music careers. Funding was strategically distributed beyond Liverpool's core (e.g., projects in St Helens, Wirral, workshops in other boroughs) to maximise wider economic benefits. 86% of funded businesses sustained or expanded operations, creating new jobs and partnerships.

5

DEMONSTRATED THE VALUE OF MUSIC SECTOR INVESTMENT

The programme clearly demonstrated that investment in the music sector yields substantial returns, fostering economic growth (exemplified by the scalability of involved companies and a high business survival rate, with all funded enterprises remaining operational), strengthening the region's brand and placemaking capabilities, and delivering significant social and cultural impact by nurturing skills, addressing deprivation, and advancing equity within the sector.

From survey and interview responses, it was clear that participants framed their enterprises as being involved in economic activities within the creative industries, as opposed to arts projects. Key outcomes for funding recipients were seen in expansion of new business partnerships (51%) and employment or paid opportunities (45%). It is evidenced that the LCR music economy represents a cluster that makes a significant contribution towards one of the "8 growth-driving sectors" that constitute the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

1

BUILD ON THIS PROGRAMME'S SUCCESS

It is recommended that future programmes implement improved longitudinal reporting processes. Such mechanisms are vital to better demonstrate long-term growth and sustained impact over time, providing more robust, data-driven evidence for future creative industries support, policy refinements, and strategic decision-making.

2

MAINTAIN SECTOR-SPECIFIC STRATEGIC INVESTMENT

The UK Government's focus on creative industries in its Industrial Strategy presents an opportunity for the region to mirror this with continued sector investment where feasible (e.g. Regional Growth Fund). This would demonstrably reinforce the region's commitment to creative industries and align its strategy with national economic policy. It is important to recognise that the recently awarded £6.75 million 'MusicFutures' programme, while a significant achievement and a valuable research and development focused extension, is not a replacement for ongoing investment in the music sector. Sustained and predictable funding is necessary to build upon the strong foundation already established by the SIF programme and to maintain the current momentum of growth and innovation within the LCR's music sector.

3

PROACTIVELY TARGET GROWTH

To further accelerate sector growth, it is recommended to proactively target growth funding through planned, local sector knowledge-led interventions. This approach leverages the established expertise of the LCR Music Board and Music Office to identify and support high-potential businesses and innovative initiatives, ensuring that investment is directed where it can yield the most significant and timely impact, fostering continued expansion and resilience within the music ecosystem.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
PROGRAMME AIMS	3
MAIN FINDINGS	4
MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS	4
01 INTRODUCTION	7
1.1 METHODOLOGY	8
02 THE BACKGROUND TO THE MUSIC INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME	9
2.1 DEVELOPING A MUSIC STRATEGY AND SETTING UP A MUSIC OFFICE AND BOARD	10
2.2 ALLOCATION OF £2 MILLION STRATEGIC INVESTMENT FUND	10
03 PROGRAMME DESIGN SUMMARY	11
3.1 PROGRAMME LOGIC MODEL AND AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	12
3.2 PROGRAMME DELIVERY STRATEGY:	12
04 MUSIC OFFICE MANAGEMENT AND PROGRAMME DELIVERY	13
4.1 PROGRAMME GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE	14
4.2 DELIVERY CHALLENGES REQUIRING FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS ACROSS THE PROGRAMME	14
4.3 ADAPTATIONS TO PHASED DELIVERY PLANS AND SUMMARY OF PHASE 1	15
4.4 EMERGENCY MUSIC FUND	15
4.5 LIVERPOOL CITY COUNCIL UNDER UK GOVERNMENT COMMISSION	15
4.6 RAPID RESPONSE TO SECTOR NEEDS – BLACK LIVES MATTER	15
4.7 REVIEW OF THE FUND MANAGEMENT, DECISION-MAKING AND PROCESSES	16
ASSESSMENT OF DELIVERY EFFICIENCY (USE OF RESOURCES, TIMELINESS, VALUE-FOR-MONEY)	16
FUND RECIPIENT'S EXPERIENCE OF THE PROGRAMME'S APPLICATION PROCESS AND MANAGEMENT	17
05 PROJECT EXPENDITURE	19
OVERALL FUND DISTRIBUTION	21
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SPEND ANALYSIS	21
TALENT DEVELOPMENT SPEND ANALYSIS	22
MUSIC ECOLOGY FUNDING SPEND ANALYSIS	22
06 PROJECT OUTPUTS	23
6.2 DELIVERED OUTPUTS PHASE 2	25
6.3 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: MUSIC HUBS, TRAINEESHIPS, AND MASTERCLASSES	27
MUSIC EDUCATION HUB PROVISIONS	27
ADJUSTMENT TO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT APPRENTICESHIPS PLAN	27
EXPANSION OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES	28
SOUND CHECK AT FUTURE YARD	28
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OUTPUT TAKEAWAYS	30
6.4 TALENT DEVELOPMENT	30
LIMF ACADEMY	30
PIXEV	31
TROUT	31
KING HANNAH	31
PROPELLER AND NEW NOISE AT FUTURE YARD	31
OTHER TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES	32
TALENT DEVELOPMENT OUTPUT TAKEAWAYS	32

6.5 MUSIC ECOSYSTEM AND BUSINESS GROWTH SUPPORT	32
MAPPING THE ECOSYSTEM	33
CAPITAL INVESTMENT – FUTURE YARD	33
BUSINESS SUPPORT AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT	33
GROWTH FUNDING	34
RECORDING AND PROMO SUPPORT	35
6.6 EXPORT SUPPORT	36
BUSINESS GROWTH OUTPUT TAKEAWAYS	37
<hr/>	
07 IMPACT OUTCOMES	38
7.1 DELIVERED ON ITS TARGET OUTPUTS	39
7.2 MAINTAINED A FOCUS ON DEMOGRAPHIC EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION	39
7.3 MADE EFFORTS TO DISTRIBUTE FUNDING AND ACTIVITY ACROSS THE LCR	39
7.4 EXPANDED STRATEGICALLY VALUABLE COLLABORATIONS	39
7.5 MADE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO LONG-TERM BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY	40
7.6 DEMONSTRATED THE MUSIC SECTOR'S SCALE AND ECONOMIC VALUE TO REGIONAL GOVERNMENT	40
7.7 DELIVERED POSITIVE IMPACTS ON BUSINESS SURVIVAL RATES AND INWARD INVESTMENT	40
7.8 SUPPORTED EMERGENT MUSIC BUSINESSES AND INITIATED GROWTH INNOVATION PROJECTS	40
7.9 DEMONSTRATED VALUE FOR MONEY ACHIEVED LINKED TO LOCAL SPEND	41
7.10 SUCCESSFUL DELIVERY WAS CRUCIAL TO LCR BEING AWARDED CREATIVE CLUSTER FUNDING FOR MUSICFUTURES	41
<hr/>	
08 CHALLENGES AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT	42
8.1 PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES	43
8.2 CLOSER OVERSIGHT OF MUSIC HUB COLLABORATIONS WAS NEEDED	43
8.3 MORE STRUCTURED IAG EXPERT SESSIONS MAY HAVE IMPROVED OUTREACH	43
8.4 EXPORT SUPPORT STRATEGIES REQUIRE RETHINKING POST-BREXIT	43
<hr/>	
09 THE IMPACT OF STRATEGIC INVESTMENT FUNDING AND FUTURE OF LIVERPOOL CITY REGION MUSIC INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES	44
9.1 PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS	45
9.2 ALIGNMENT WITH THE MUSIC BOARD'S AND THE COMBINED AUTHORITY'S GOALS	45
SKILLS AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT	45
SOCIAL INCLUSION	45
CREATIVE INDUSTRY GROWTH AND REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION	45
9.3 THE VALUE DELIVERED BY THE MUSIC SECTOR	45
ECONOMIC GROWTH	45
BRAND AND PLACEMAKING	45
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT	45
9.4 OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS	46
NATIONAL POLICY ALIGNMENT	46
LIVERPOOL CITY REGION AS A PIONEER	46
9.5 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	46
9.6 REFLECTION	46
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	47
WITH THANKS TO	47
SPECIAL THANKS TO	47
<hr/>	
10 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	47
<hr/>	
11 APPENDIX I	48
<hr/>	
12 REFERENCES	49



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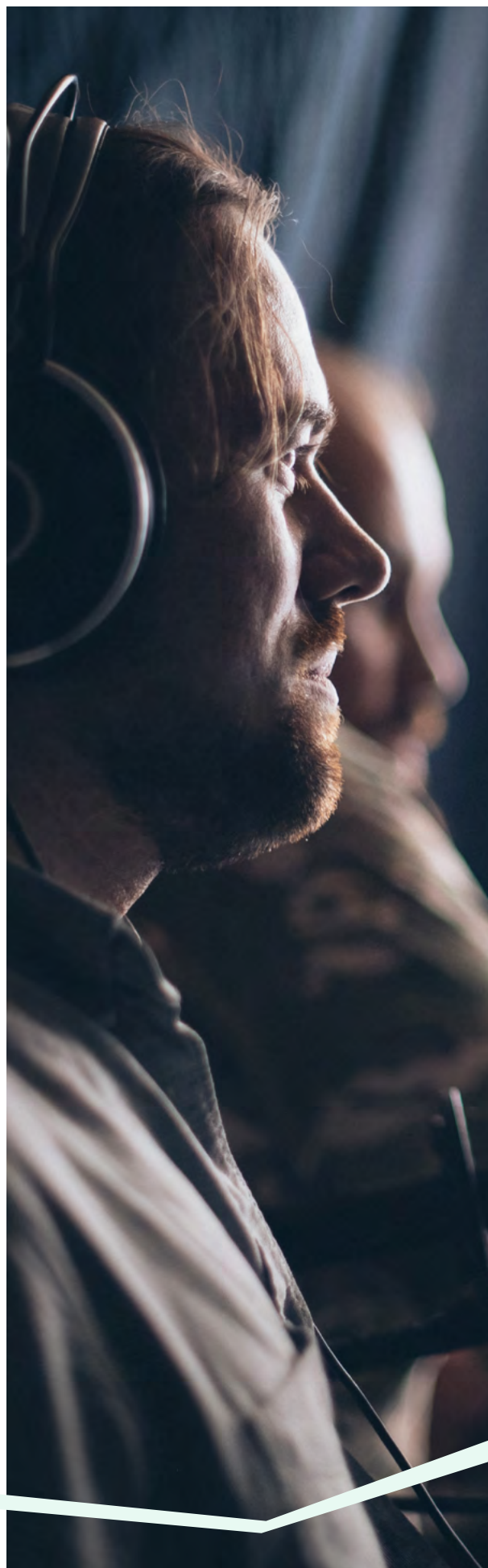
INTRODUCTION

This report examines the impact of the funding provided from Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) Strategic Investment Fund (SIF), administered by Liverpool City Council (LCC) for the purpose of implementing a Liverpool City Region Music Industry Development Programme. The programme began in 2020, and all funds were allocated by the end of 2025.

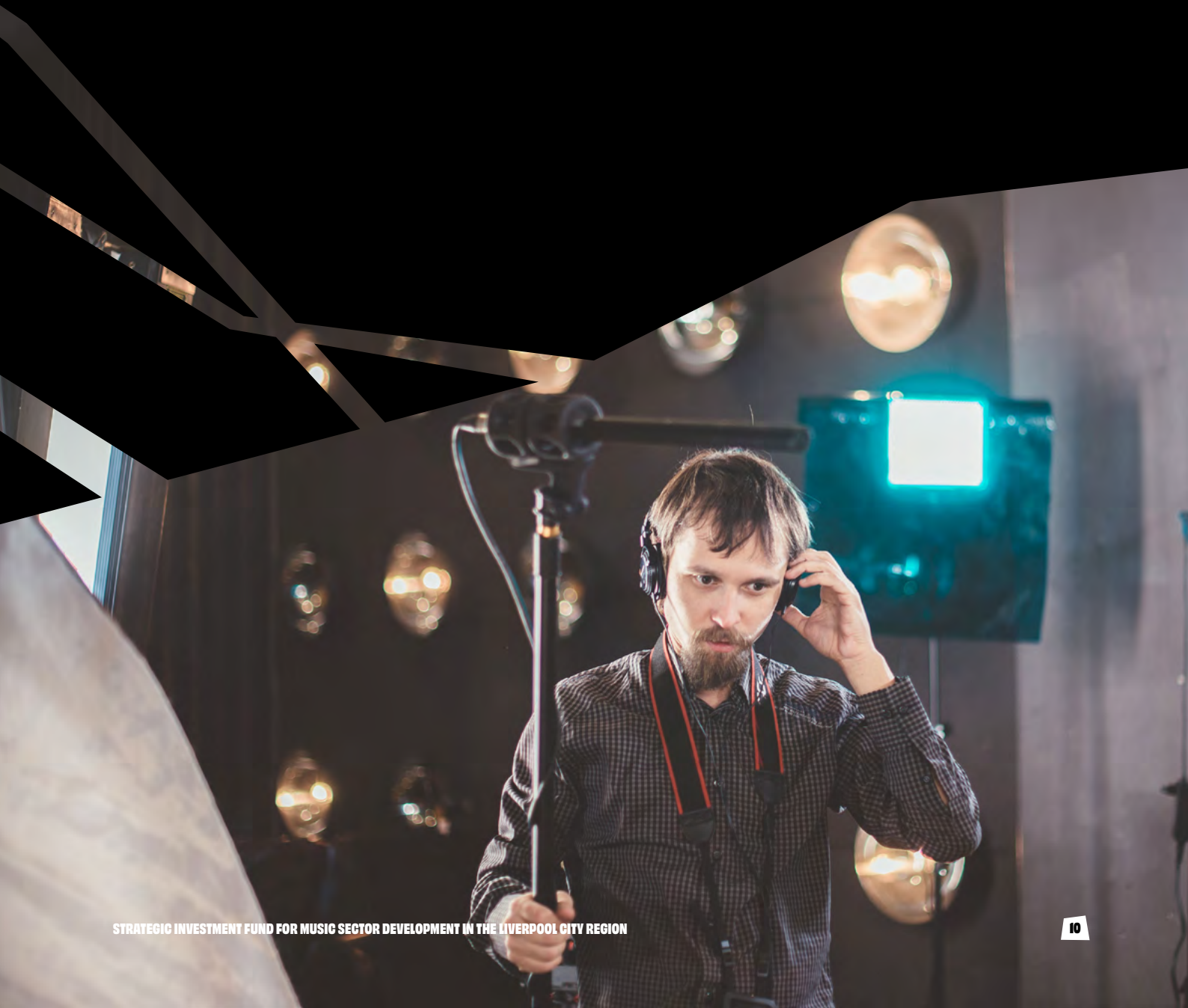
This report follows from and builds on the findings of an internal Mid-Term Review¹ and outlines the key findings from independent research carried out by the University of Liverpool researchers. This report broadly examines the impacts of the funding following an outline of the contextual backdrop of the business case for the programme's initiation; a review of its administrative and operational delivery; an assessment of the programme's outputs and outcomes relative to the Grant Fund Agreement (GFA) objectives; and takes into account the perspectives and feedback received from funding recipients and expansively documents their application of funds and their effectiveness in business development and expansion. The report concludes with key insights related to the programme's impacts on music business growth, survival rates, its geographic and demographic distribution across the city region, and proposes several recommendations for the region's music sector future planning.

1.1 METHODOLOGY

The report draws from a range of data sources which includes the inventory of approved projects and investment disbursement; project monitoring data collected by Liverpool UNESCO City of Music Office; case study reports authored by select delivery partners; an online survey of 49 fund recipients; and 21 face-to-face interviews with the programme administrator (the Head of UNESCO City of Music), select delivery partners and beneficiaries. These data have been analysed using a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques including statistical and thematic analysis². Detail on the methods are found in Appendix 1.



02 THE BACKGROUND TO THE MUSIC INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME



Liverpool being awarded UNESCO City of Music status in 2015³, in recognition of the city's longstanding reputation as a centre for live entertainment with a rich legacy of exporting musical talent across the globe, can be viewed as an initiation point of a process in which the city, and ultimately the broader region, embraced its musical ecosystem, not only as a place where culture happens, but as a potentially thriving cluster of creative musical industry.

2.1 DEVELOPING A MUSIC STRATEGY AND SETTING UP A MUSIC OFFICE AND BOARD

Initial meetings around the city's bid for UNESCO status, mark the start of an assembling of factors which have coalesced into a defined strategy and identity for the city region. That bid brought together CEOs of major players in the city's music sector such as the [Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra](#), super-club [Cream](#), [Sound City](#) music festival, and representatives from education and Liverpool City Council, many of whom remained involved in the bid steering group. A City Council report into the economic and cultural sector impact of the Beatles heritage was published in 2016⁴, which drew attention to the nascent creative industry value within the city. [Culture Liverpool](#), a department of the City Council, commissioned a further report to map the scale and contribution of the music sector to the city region's economy and cultural offering: 'Developing a Liverpool City of Music Strategy' authored by [BOP Consulting](#), published in early 2018.⁵ The report valued the turnover of the core music sector at over £100M. The Live music sector was valued at over £48M per annum, a significance reflected in the [Liverpool Live Music Survey](#) report also released in 2018⁶. Later that year, a UK Music report demonstrated an annual music tourism spend of £135M in the Liverpool City Region (LCR)⁷. Concurrently, local music listings magazine Bido Lito! led a series of public consultations culminating in the publishing of a challenge document titled 'Liverpool, Music City?'⁸ which outlined the range of challenges facing musicians and music businesses across the LCR, and highlighted the sector's appetite to work in conjunction with Liverpool City Council and the Combined Authority to tackle the issues raised, which broadly aligned with those identified in BOP Consulting's report.

The confluence of the insight delivered by this range of reports, and their series of recommendations, culminated in the establishment of an industry-led [Liverpool City Region Music Board](#), to develop strategies and oversee the quality and coordination of music sector initiatives; and the setting up of a Liverpool Music Office to function as a conduit for connections between the music industry actors, investors, and local government across the region.

The Liverpool City Region Music Board (LCRMB), currently chaired by Jon Collins, CEO of the UK's live music advocacy organisation [LIVE](#), was formed in 2019 under terms agreed by the Combined Authority. The Music Board published its own strategy and action plan building

on recommendations from the preceding reports, with input from public consultations involving artists, venues, businesses, and educational bodies.

Two of LCRMB's strategy goals, namely ensuring the long-term growth of the local music industry; and connecting music and education to boost participation and talent development across all communities, were developed alongside findings from BOP Consulting's strategy document to form a bid for sector financing from the Combined Authority's Strategic Investment Fund. The foundations of the business case were managed by the Music Board in conjunction with LCC's Culture Liverpool. The specifics of this bid were detailed in a further document, 'Liverpool Music Industry Sector Development Plan',⁹ also authored by BOP Consulting, published in January 2020.

The music strategy rests upon an understanding that the LCR suffers a 'brain drain' of musical talent and skilled practitioners to cities such as London and Manchester which have a greater concentration of music businesses. Lack of specialist support, career pathway advice and underutilisation of apprenticeship initiatives were identified as key hinderances for music industry employers, leading to skills shortages. To address these deficiencies and arrest the flight of talent, the plan proposed a combined programme, financially underpinned by SIF, employer co-investment, match funding financing and in-kind support from public and industry bodies. The plan was consequently built around three 'pillars for growth': Skills development, Talent development, and Music ecosystem growth.

2.2 ALLOCATION OF £2 MILLION STRATEGIC INVESTMENT FUND

The Combined Authority approved a £2m allocation of SIF funding as a contribution towards a wider £5.2m programme based upon the provisions outlined in the 'Liverpool Music Industry Sector Development Plan'. The primary aspiration of these financial interventions was to increase the size and effectiveness of the Liverpool City Region's music sector and to develop a UK music cluster outside of London. The SIF was approved in early 2020 with the Grant Funding Agreement fully signed in June 2021. The timing of the initial agreement just before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns added complexity to the administration of the funds, which is detailed in section 4.



03 PROGRAMME DESIGN SUMMARY

3.1 PROGRAMME LOGIC MODEL AND AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The logic model¹⁰ for the Music Industry Sector Development Plan was based upon a series of inputs including:

- The **evidence base need**, established in the Developing a Liverpool City of Music Strategy (2018) document's priorities, recognition of skills gaps and shortages as explained in section 2.1 above and the need to drive sector growth in the LCR.
- A **market failure review** which recognised the absence of a single contact point for sector specific support; lack of specialist careers advice; and deficit in apprenticeship uptake.

These formed the basis of the programme's aims and the range of proposed activities which were to:

- Provide a dedicated, specialist resource to support musicians, music, and other creative businesses.
- Encourage music businesses to develop formal plans and take advantage of the benefits of apprenticeships and wider skills training.
- Improve specialist careers advice and awareness of pathways to employment.
- Provide music entrepreneurs with access to small amounts of investment funding to allow them to exploit business development opportunities.

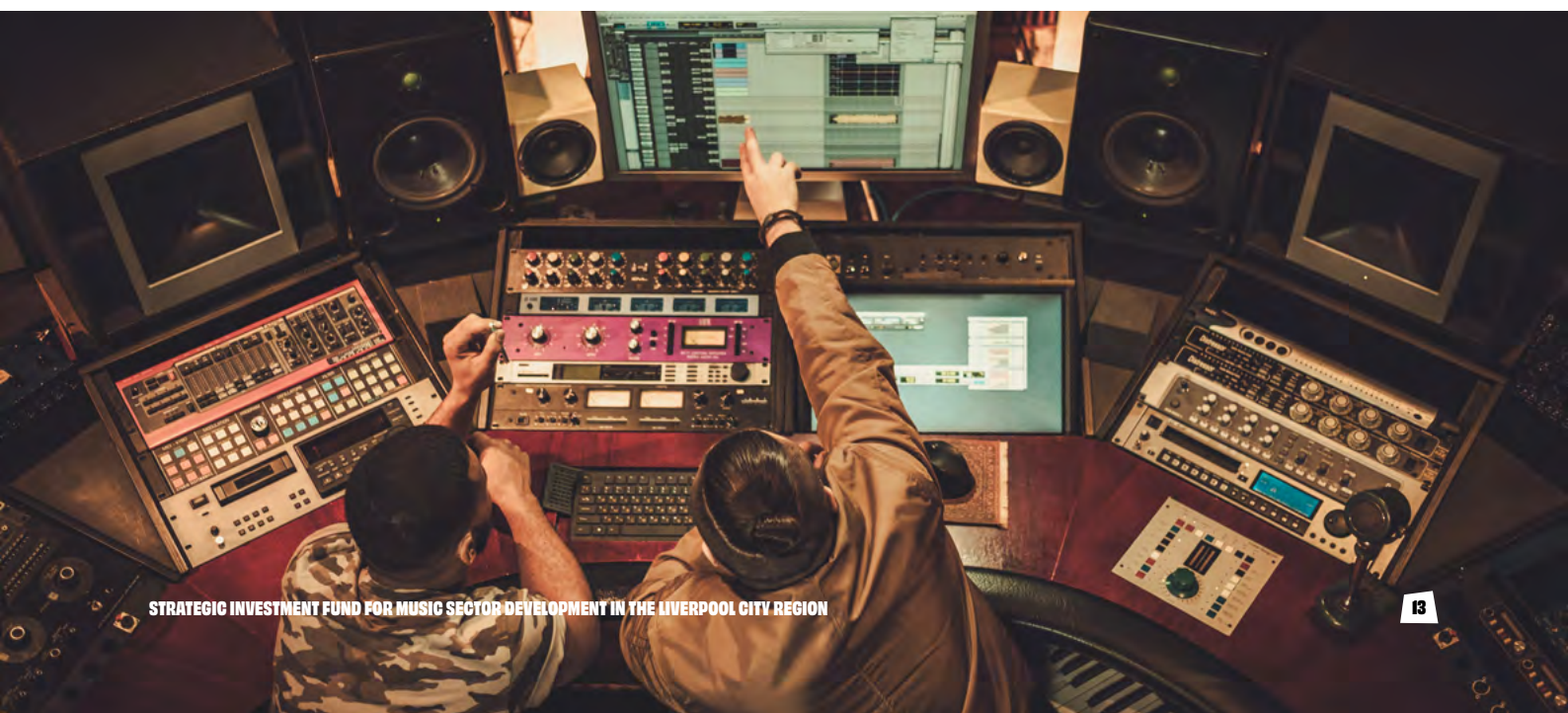
3.2 PROGRAMME DELIVERY STRATEGY:

To facilitate these, three core streams of delivery were devised reflecting those outlined in BOP's 2020 Plan:

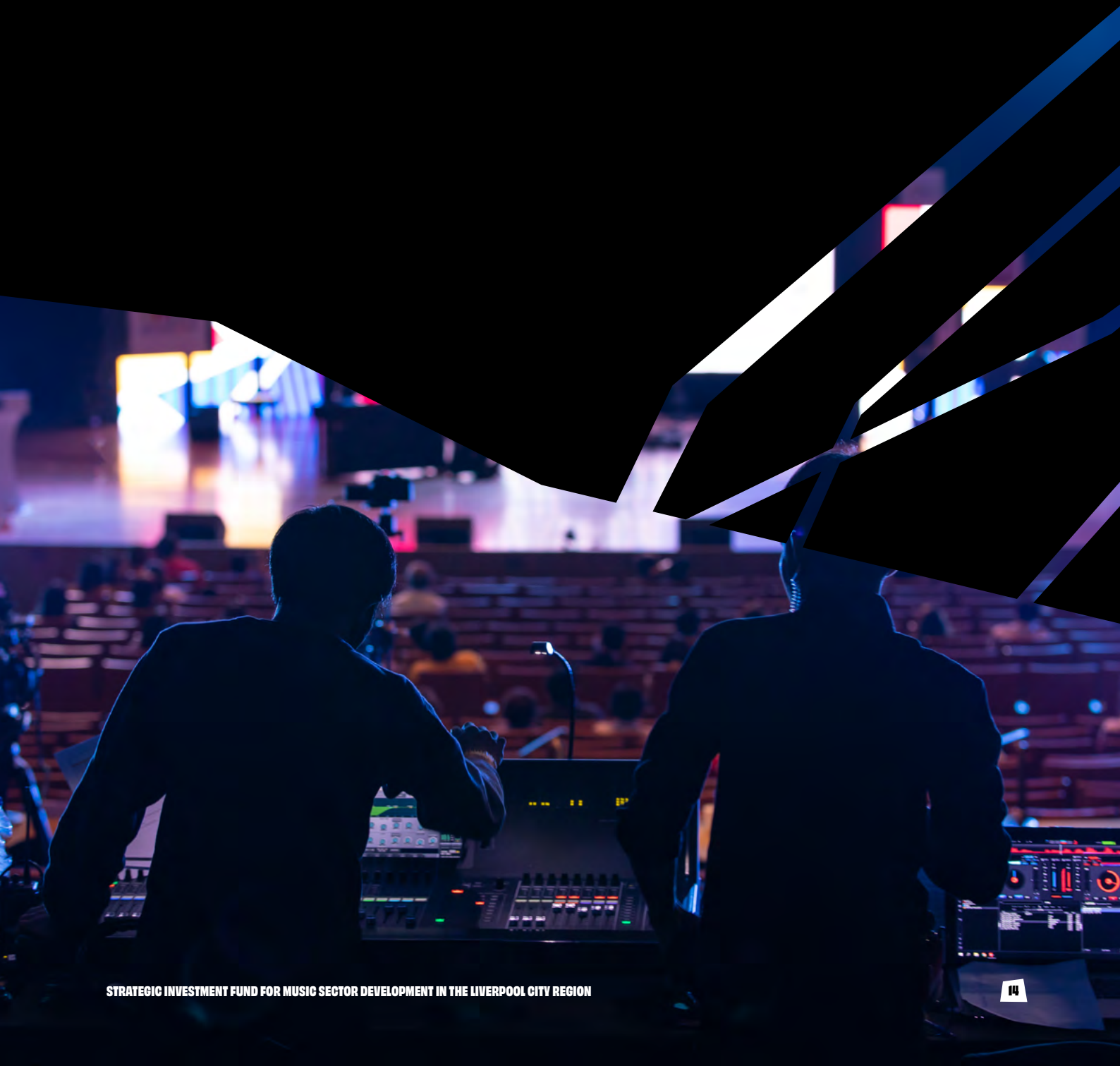
Skills development – engagement with predominately LCR-based delivery partners to deliver enhanced career guidance in schools, role specific training sessions, and work placements focused on pathways into music industry roles.

Talent development – expansion of existing regional and national level programs, and development of new programmes to support artists' and music professionals' growth.

Music ecosystem growth – strengthening the music sector offer through the provision of a central hub for specialised support services to attract inward investment, boost exports through international events, and award small match-funded business growth investments.



04 MUSIC OFFICE MANAGEMENT AND PROGRAMME DELIVERY



BOP Consulting evaluated different management approaches for the Music Industry Sector Development Plan. It was agreed that the Music Office would act as the main access point for specialised music industry support and administration of the Music Industry Development Programme. This would include providing tailored business diagnostics and offering bespoke assistance where necessary. This approach of positioning the Music Office as a one-stop-shop aligned with the Combined Authority Growth Platform’s method of provisioning business advice.

4.1 PROGRAMME GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Liverpool UNESCO City of Music Office, once established, began operating within Liverpool City Council (LCC)’s framework. LCC were the designated accountable body for fund management and acted on behalf of decisions made by the Music Board, which held ultimate responsibility for the programme’s management and delivery. Financial reporting was conducted through quarterly claims, supplemented by monthly progress updates submitted to the Programme Management Office (PMO) at the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA).

In accordance with the Grant Funding Agreement (GFA), the Music Office established a dedicated steering group, functioning as a sub-group of the main Music Board. This group included representation from the Combined Authority (CA) and was actively involved in overseeing the management, and fund allocations arising from the bidding process. This group met regularly to provide strategic direction for programme delivery, review progress and ensure alignment with the GFA’s stipulated outputs. The group also established Delivery Partners Group to facilitate coordination among stakeholders and ensure transparency regarding each partner’s contributions, with a CA representative from the PMO in attendance to provide guidance on financial and output reporting.

It should be noted that Music Office’s remit was and remains broader than simply the management of the Strategic Investment Funds. The Office has responsibilities in maintaining the city’s [UNESCO City of Music](#) identity and maintaining connections with other cities/networks; the Office is responsible for advising music businesses and liaisons in relation to other Liverpool City Council departments, such as Transport or Licencing; the Office is directly consulted with in political lobbying and bidding processes such as the successful [Eurovision 2023](#) bid, the successful AHRC funded £6.75M [MusicFutures](#) programme; and ensures music is represented in other culture and creative industries bids such as the DCMS Regional Growth Fund.

4.2 DELIVERY CHALLENGES REQUIRING FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS ACROSS THE PROGRAMME

The funding was allocated in 2020. Immediately after this, a range of unforeseen challenges emerged that would directly affect the programme delivery. Most notable was the immediate and lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns and legislative restrictions which endured until July 2021. Additional factors with programme delivery ramifications included the music industry’s response to the Black Lives Matter movement which emerged in 2020 at a national and local level; the UK Government’s interventions and investigations into Liverpool City Council governance; and the implications of the UK’s prolonged withdrawal from the European Union, in particular how this affected touring artists and music export plans (addressed in section 6.6).

The following sections highlight the flexible approach undertaken by the Music Office in addressing challenges and adapting the programme management accordingly.

4.3 ADAPTATIONS TO PHASED DELIVERY PLANS AND SUMMARY OF PHASE 1

These circumstances modified the original proposed delivery plan in terms of allocation and funding release:

Table 2 Adaptations to phased delivery plans

Phase	Allocation	Planned Start Date	Allocation	Actual Start Date
Phase 1	£0.25m	Spring 2020	£0.4m	April 2020
Phase 2	£1.75m	Winter 2020	£1.6m	September 2022

With specific regards to Phase 2, what was to be a £1.75m funded programme spread across 3 years, was refactored such that the allocation and spending of £1.6m was condensed into an 18-month delivery timeframe, with certain change control requests to account for select extensions, the final revision determined programme completion by December 2025, with financial completion March 2026.

4.4 EMERGENCY MUSIC FUND

Due to the onset of COVID-19 within days of the approval of the SIF award, the Music Board and the Music Office proposed a reallocation of some of the agreed Phase 1 funding to be used as an emergency fund for businesses most severely impacted by the UK's national lockdowns¹¹. These funds had to be accessed rapidly, most notably by the live music sector – as no music performances could take place, impacting musicians, event technical staff and all music venues which were shut for 16 months. This proposal was agreed by the Combined Authority and LCC and interim arrangements were implemented. A £150k Emergency Music Fund was established through a separate agreement, leaving £100k for Phase 1. Similarly, £85k capital funding for music venue *Future Yard* was released independently to avoid further delays (see section 6.5 for outputs and ROI on this investment during the course of the programme). This reduced Year 1 funding to £15k, necessitating a £150k extension that brought Phase 1's revised total budget to £400k.

The majority of the £165k allocation was strategically deployed across three priority areas including specialist careers guidance for teachers, talent development programmes and ecosystem development including business support, website development, sector mapping and programme administration.

The £150k Emergency Music Fund, administered through the Music Office and overseen by the LCR Music Board, provided 52 local music businesses with investments up to £5k each. An independent evaluation by the Combined Authority's Evidence, Intelligence and Research department is detailed in the 'Music Support Fund Evaluation Survey results March 2021' report, which outlined the following key findings:

- 100% of recipients were at risk of closure when applying, and all had experienced significant income loss.
- Funds were primarily used for essential costs (rent/mortgage) and business adaptations.
- 98% reported the fund helped address COVID-19 challenges and 96% agreed it helped sustain their business

- All recipients remained operational by December 2020, and all expressed their satisfaction with the application process.
- The intervention proved critical during Tier 2 restrictions, with all funded businesses maintaining operations despite varying degrees of commercial viability.

4.5 LIVERPOOL CITY COUNCIL UNDER UK GOVERNMENT COMMISSION

In June 2021, following a critical independent inspection report that identified significant organisational failures, the UK Government deployed commissioners to evaluate Liverpool City Council. By August of the same year, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities advised the central government to assume direct control over the council's financial management, governance structures, and recruitment processes¹².

The uncertainty generated by this process resulted in bureaucratic hurdles and delays in the release of the second phase of funds which hindered Liverpool Music Industry Sector Development Plan delivery. The level of scrutiny applied to both local government's spending and value added at this time led to a temporary suspension of the programme's momentum, and consequently, it wasn't until September 2022 the LCRMB was able to officially announce the approval of Phase 2's £1.6m of investments from the Strategic Innovation Fund.¹³

4.6 RAPID RESPONSE TO SECTOR NEEDS – BLACK LIVES MATTER

The global Black Lives Matter protests of June 2020, sparked large-scale demonstrations across multiple UK cities, including Liverpool, prompting reactions from national and local government bodies. In response to these protests and reflecting the concerns and demands of the local sector to support the Black Lives Matter movement, the LCR Music Board reaffirmed its already stated commitment to diversity and inclusion by publishing a Black Lives Matter Manifesto.¹⁴ This document outlined the Board's pledge to recognise the historical and ongoing contributions of Black individuals to the local music

industry. Additionally, it set out measures to enhance support for Black music professionals and Black-led organisations, ensuring their meaningful integration into the music and cultural ecosystem of the Liverpool City Region.

Further initiatives from the Music Board included the setting up of a [Black Music Action Group \(BMAG\)](#) subgroup in November 2021¹⁵ to further the Manifesto's aims, and the commissioning of a University of Liverpool research project to focus on "the challenges and need of Black music creatives and industry professionals, as well as those specialising in Black music based in the Liverpool City Region." This research culminated in the [ReMap report](#)¹⁶. The Manifesto had included provisions to review funding strategies and consider ring-fencing SIF resources pending preliminary recommendations from the University of Liverpool research.

Two of the recommendations from the ReMap report which were acted on prior to its official publication launch were to:

- Target and secure higher-level funding specifically aimed at elevating the profiles of LCR-based Black artists and industry professionals.
- Allocate a portion of the Strategic Investment Fund Training and Development budget toward devising and delivering a professional network scheme for emerging LCR-Black music creators and industry professionals.

Whilst the initial Music Board Strategy and Action Plan recognised the need to develop talent "from all communities across the city region", and the business case for the Liverpool Music Industry Sector Development Plan included a diversity and equal opportunities statement (p. 32), the strength of feeling precipitated by the Black Lives Matter movement in the UK, functioned as a mandate for the Music Board to take a more explicit stance within its funding strategy.

To reflect this, and to address recommendations arising from the preliminary ReMap report findings, a ring-fenced specific Black Music Action Group funding stream was established. This amounted to 24% of investment funding awarded to businesses and organisations. Section 5 of this report provides more detail on project expenditure.

4.7 REVIEW OF THE FUND MANAGEMENT, DECISION-MAKING AND PROCESSES

The Music Office was established in 2019. Following SIF allocation, it functioned as the mechanism to manage the programme's delivery. It provided coordination for partners running the Skills and Talent Development activity programme streams, and the management of investment fund applications. An allocation of SIF finance accommodated the salary of Kevin McManus, Head of UNESCO City of Music. McManus has over 28 years' experience working in creative industry business growth and over 40 years of industry level involvement in the LCR music sector. During Phase 2 of the programme, a second council staff member was allocated and funded to work on

programme administration, and a contract was awarded to LCR based consultant, HDMC to handle all marketing and communications requirements for Phase 2 delivery.¹⁷

Delivery partners for Phase 1's Skills Development and Talent Development streams were largely identified in advance of the programme's commencement, though each was required to apply through the formal process. These included from the LCR, Educational Music Hubs, LIMF Academy, and national level organisations such as PRS Foundation. These organisations all operate on a not-for-profit basis. Their delivery is detailed in Section 6.

The Music Ecosystem Growth programme strand was delivered by the Music Office, operating as a dedicated one-stop-shop, offering specialist resource to support musicians, music and other creative businesses.

Through the activities of the Music Board, the Music Office advertised the availability of both the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) service offer, and investment fund availability largely in Phase 2 of the programme. These included six well attended 'Let the Music Play' roadshow consultation events¹⁸ held in each of the LCR boroughs (part funded by Arts Council England Cultural Compact grant allocation), and some 'Sound Success Sessions' where businesses received one-on-one advice, responding to identified need for comprehensive support from the earlier consultations. Support sessions were delivered by the Music Office or matched to the most suitable board member(s)/industry professionals to tailor advice to specific needs. Guidance covered areas including venue-related issues, marketing and PR strategies, legal and licensing matters, and business diagnostics, aimed to facilitate growth, or help develop formal business plans.

"Sometimes it was just saying, I can see what your problem is. I've found someone who can help you solve it. That might involve allocating some [investment] money to help to buy that help, or it might just involve advising them."

[HEAD OF UNESCO CITY OF MUSIC]

ASSESSMENT OF DELIVERY EFFICIENCY (USE OF RESOURCES, TIMELINESS, VALUE-FOR-MONEY)

The importance of utilising specialist sector knowledge from the Music Board and Liverpool City Council as an accountable body was outlined in BOP's 2020 plan (p.10, p47-48). It is clear these principles were adopted and put into practice during the programme delivery. Both delivery partners and funding beneficiaries reported positively on the successful use of these available resources, and the programme's ability to respond with the timeliness required for a dynamically evolving industry sector such as music.

Given the significant critiques of creative industry funding application processes in the UK, it was vital this programme delivered on its aim to make this a smooth process. The complexity of funding applications has been shown to create an excessive bureaucratic burden,

particularly disadvantaging smaller businesses.¹⁹ This has been acknowledged by major funding bodies such as the Arts Council²⁰. The lengthy and resource-intensive nature of application processes additionally act as structural barriers to diversity within the creative sector.²¹ Survey respondents feedback on application process was 100% positive and interview participants were keen to identify this aspect of the programme.

“The funding scheme was very simple to follow, and the application process felt very accessible. I personally struggle to write applications to a high degree, but the experience I had applying for this fund made me feel very at ease and comfortable. The scheme doesn’t feel unattainable as long as you can deliver on what you promise. Some funds seem incredibly difficult to apply for, with numerous hoops to jump through”

SURVEY RESPONDENT

Cognisant of these issues, the programme adopted a ‘light-touch’ approach to the application process, whilst retaining the necessary responsibility checks for compliance with public fund management.

“I think to be honest, the people who run this are experts in the music industry. The fact they know the game helps in so many different ways. It’s funding but also advice.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT

All funding decisions were made with input from Music Board members to ensure accountability. The establishment of a dedicated steering group facilitated a process in which applicants would enter an informal triage with Music Board members without industry conflicts of interest – such as those involved in academic or heritage sectors – to identify their needs and/or assess funding bids.

Applications were graded on a series of question prompts on five key eligibility checks:

- **Suitability** (Based on the available information is the candidate/organisation suitable for support e.g. background in sector, good links into community, credibility?)
- **Quality of programme** (does the programme/delivery agency have a track record in this field, links into industry etc? / Will it support beneficiaries to grow their career?)
- **Value for money** (how much is requested, what match funding is being contributed from other sources, output delivered etc)

- **Programme Fit** (does it fit within what we are trying to achieve with overall strategy during this phase? Could it be replicated with other businesses within the sector?)
- **Beneficiaries** (is there a clear plan for the beneficiaries? Will this help support people into industry? Are next steps clear, or mechanisms in place for those looking to progress further? Are we convinced the programme will help further their career in the sector?)

FUND RECIPIENT’S EXPERIENCE OF THE PROGRAMME’S APPLICATION PROCESS AND MANAGEMENT

Feedback from fund beneficiaries and delivery partners on the application process was 100% positive. All highlighted the support available, and the transparency of the process. Many recognised the Music Office’s requirement to balance responsible management of public funds with the needs of music sector creative businesses.

“Pleasantly surprising. Very fluid. [McManus] can explain things very transparently... understands the creative principles incredibly well, the recording industry and the parameters around that, and the timelines that things take.”

AL GROVES, MOTOR MUSEUM

“I suspect if you don’t have that sort of support as an artist, [the application process] is a lot more difficult because of course... the money is public money. They can’t just throw it out the door without justification and measurement. The justification reports were all perfectly reasonable.”

ADRIAN BELL, BLU FIRE

“I’m good at making records, you know, I’m not good at doing application forms. So, the easier that they can make it for things to happen the better. And to be fair, they made it really easy for me. I felt really assisted. You could tell that the support was there to do it. I’ve had a few conversations with [other funding organisations], and I haven’t felt that from them.”

MIKE CAVE, MIXER & MASTERING ENGINEER

For McManus, and Music Board members who devised the application process, their sector experience guided them to ensure applications were accessible to those with a lack of experience or comfort with arduous forms, and the review process was both robust in allocation justification and swift in response to reflect sector needs.

“Stuff I’ve learned over 20 years is that this kind of funding is not something where businesses should be waiting six months for an answer, particularly for small amounts. If you’ve got a release coming out in two months, they need to know quickly. And even the bigger businesses in this sector, need to be very agile and move quickly.”

KEVIN MCMANUS, HEAD OF UNESCO CITY OF MUSIC

Skills and Talent Development deliver partner organisations were also receptive to the process enabling them to make use of existing systems they employ for selection and reporting.

“From our perspective it’s felt fairly light touch... we can all quite obviously see that it’s having the impact that we wanted it to have... “What I’ve liked is that we’ve got a lot of processes in place ourselves and we can use them. So, we’re not having to reinvent the way we evaluate projects and report in different ways because we’ve already got the evaluation reports that we use at PRS Foundation.”

JOE FRANKLAND, PRS FOUNDATION





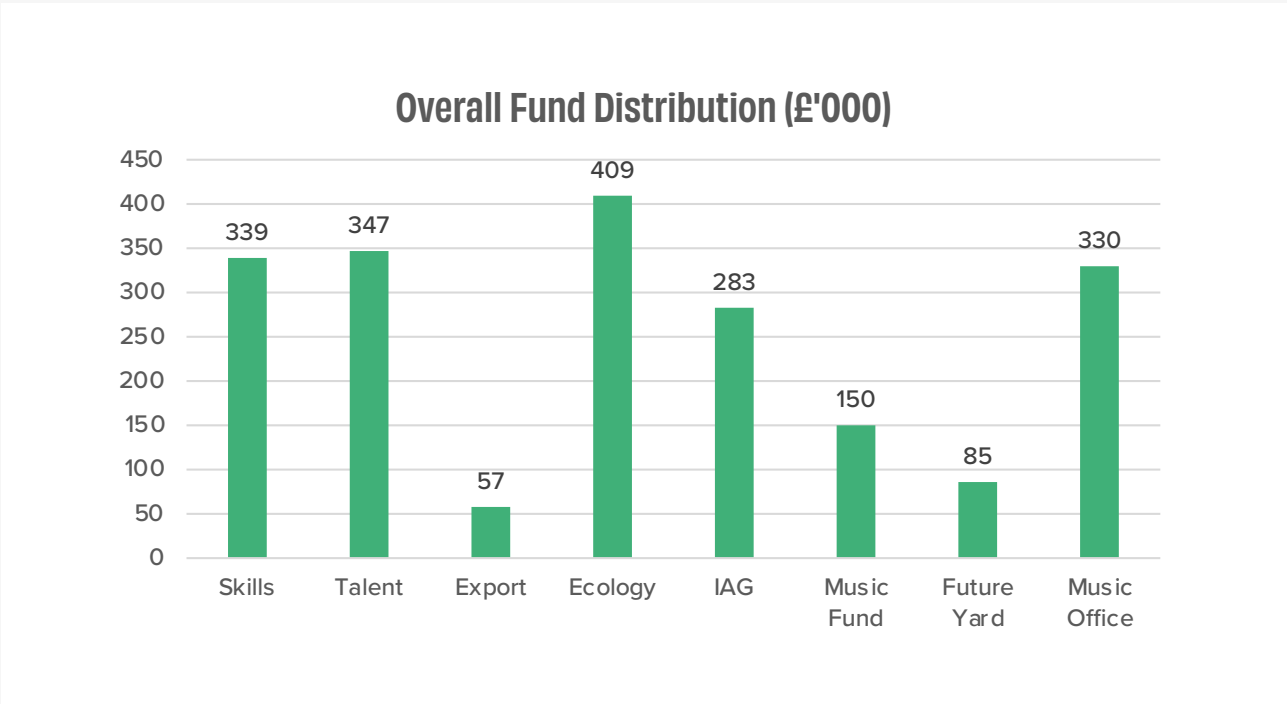
05 PROJECT EXPENDITURE

Table 3: Music Industry Development Programme Expenditure

	Projected SIF (£'000)	Projected by stream totals	Expenditure Phase 1 (£'000)	Expenditure Phase 2 (£'000)	Actual SIF (£'000)	Actual stream spend totals
Skills Development		650				339
Apprenticeships – wage subsidy	444					
Traineeships and Placements				125	125	
Training costs - digital vouchers						
Specialist Information, Advice and Guidance for careers teachers	176		54	130	184	
Industry careers event	30			30	30	
Talent Development		250				347
Sound check	60		18	40	58	
PRS Foundation	120		29	85	114	
LIMF Academy	70		20	25	45	
Other Talent Programmes				130	130	
Ecosystem Development		470				701
Liverpool UNESCO City of Music Office	230		44	186	230	
Specialist IAG (music office)	300			283	283	
Inward investment promotion	100			57	57	
Business development investments	285		150	409	559	
Capital development (Future Yard venue)	85		85		85	
Music Office websites and communications	60			60	60	
Sector mapping	20			20	20	
Monitoring and evaluation	20			20	20	
Total funding (£)	2000	1370	400	1600	2000	1387

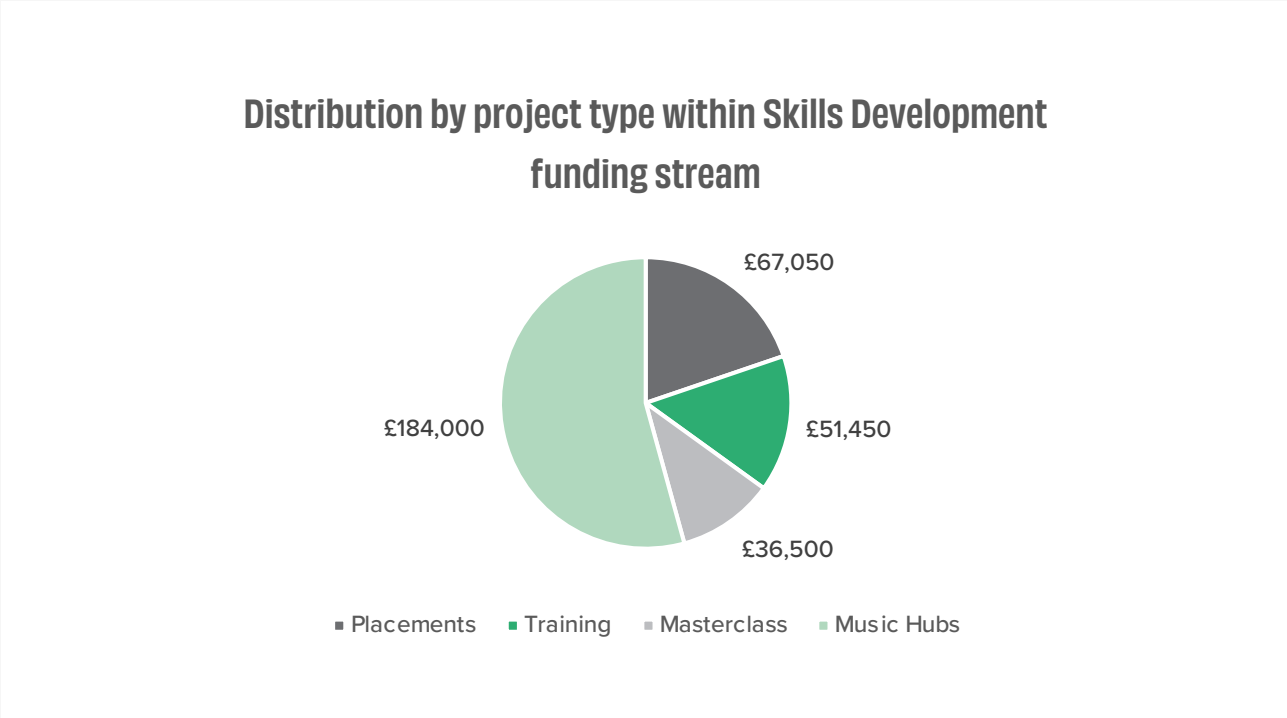
OVERALL FUND DISTRIBUTION

The bar-chart view here demonstrates fund spending broken down into the major constituent types. Music Office costs (salaries, monitoring and reporting, website and sector mapping), makes up 16.5% of overall spend, with core delivery distributed between skills and talent development; Ecology and IAG; which closely reflects the original proposal.



SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SPEND ANALYSIS

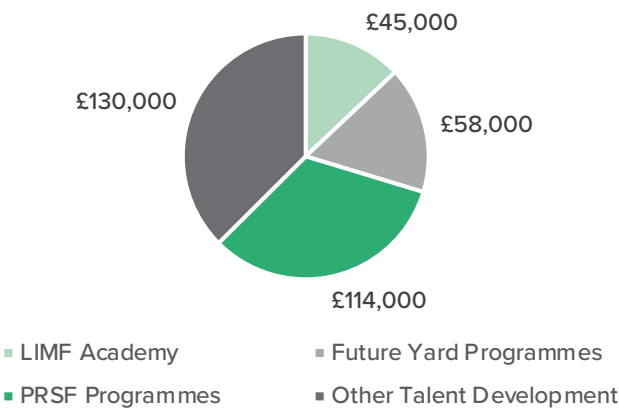
This pie-chart view illustrates that around half of the allocated funds were spent in Music Education Hubs careers development delivery, with the remaining funds broadly evenly distributed between placements, delivering training or specific masterclass.



TALENT DEVELOPMENT SPEND ANALYSIS

Within the talent development stream, the major delivery partners were the national-level PRS Foundation – their Accelerator and Momentum programmes accounted for approximately a third of spending; the variety of programmes fulfilled by Future Yard amounted to a further third; and the remaining funds were broadly distributed evenly between LIMF Academy and miscellaneous provisioners.

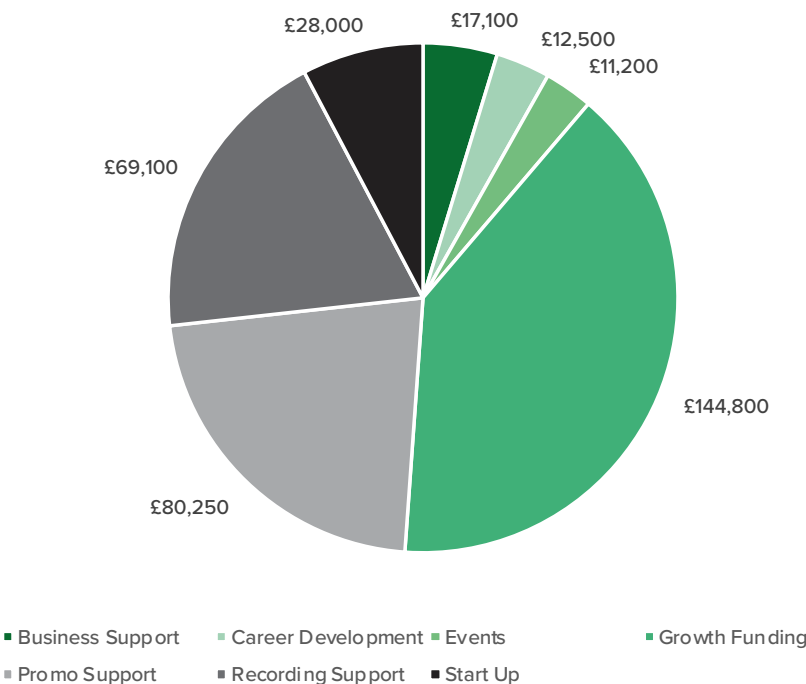
Distribution by delivery partner with Talent Development funding stream



MUSIC ECOLOGY FUNDING SPEND ANALYSIS

Music ecology fund distribution was focused on Growth Funding; Promo Support and Recording Support, which collectively accounted for more than 75% of the spending within this stream.

Distribution by project type within Music Ecology funding stream





06 PROJECT OUTPUTS

6.1 DELIVERED OUTPUTS PHASE 1

Table 4: Phase 1 Delivered Outputs

Output Indicators	Agreed Project Activities	Delivered Output
Individuals engaged in careers advice and support	500 individuals (KS4, 14+) Design and produce online advice packs around careers in music, including digital skills development opportunities Target 10 schools in the most deprived areas of LCR, work with 15 specialist teachers and aiming to deliver specialist careers advice	500 individuals engaged from across 10+ schools The Music Education Hubs alliance reported that all outputs were met. Online advice packs were produced and distributed to music teachers and schools across the LCR.
Individuals engaged in Talent development	PRS Foundation programme:	All pilot phase PRSF outputs achieved prior to December 2021. A showcase event took place at Sound City Oct 21. 2 x outreach events at Sound City and Black Lives Matter launched in Oct/Nov 2021. In Phase One, PPL Momentum Music Fund and PPL Momentum Accelerator Strands supported 9 people through this partnership (2 x Momentum artists, 2 x Accelerator artists, 5 x Accelerator Industry Professionals); £38,500 was awarded to Liverpool City Region based artists.
	LIMF Academy programme:	LIMF outputs achieved prior to December 2021 10 artists recruited, receiving mentoring, professional development.
	Future Yard programme (Sound Check).	Future Yard/Sound Check – 16 outputs delivered in 2021-22. 20 businesses recruited – to receive business support and access to Future Yard network
	One 'Beacon' daylong workshop for 50+ young artists	Beacon online workshop took place in 2021.
New / improved floorspace	64.5 sqm refurbished educational and commercial floorspace	Refurbishment of 75 Argyle Street into Future Yard venue. Achieved and completed on time. Future Yard exceeded initial project plan expectation to take out a lease on the building. Further external funding was raised enabling purchase and full ownership of the building. This is now a community music hub comprising: 350-capacity live venue, café, 400- capacity garden; and 5 music studio/project spaces.
Businesses receiving specialist IAG	30 Businesses receiving specialist IAG	Achieved via Music Office by end of December 2021. Project Manager offered IAG to businesses since April 2020, plus select public events consultations.
Development of a website	Website to be developed by the Recipient's in-house comms team	Website completed and fully operational https://www.lcrmusicboard.co.uk and @LCRMusicBoard
Establishment of a self-sustaining financial model for Music Office	Formal proposal to be submitted to the CA within 12 months of project start date.	Self-sustaining financial model for Music Office proposals delivered to LCRCA Investment Panel in 2021.
Music Industry Covid 19 Support Fund	Establishment and administration of the fund to support 40 micro businesses and SMEs and production of an impact report.	Delivered in summer 2020 Full impact report delivered in early 2021. 52 businesses supported by the fund.

6.2 DELIVERED OUTPUTS PHASE 2

Table 5: Phase 2 Delivered Outputs

Output Indicators	Agreed GFA Project Targets	Delivered Output
Impact of business support	IAG – no of employers engaged 152	<p>88 businesses received direct IAG support during successful fund application processes.</p> <p>Over 100 advice session requests to the Music Office.</p> <p>Approximately two Music Office response follow up meetings/calls/business diagnostic sessions with employers per week across 18 months of Phase two delivery.</p> <p>Delivery of six Let the Music play public consultation events (one in each LCR borough) with approximately 50 attendees present at each. Informal IAG sessions at these events delivered by Music Office representative and members of the Music Board.</p> <p>Various industry advice public consultations held between 2022 and 2024 including Supporting Grassroots Music Fund training session (100 attendees), Black Music Action Group ReMap launch (60 attendees).</p> <p>At least 188 formal IAG engagements delivered with an estimated 400 enterprises in receipt of public consultation advice.</p>
Apprenticeships	Apprenticeships positions created as a direct result of the intervention. Target is 25	<p>Apprenticeships were decided as unworkable for music businesses during Phase 2, hence with LCRC agreement, a decision was taken to pivot to traineeships, based upon the Kickstarter model (see section 6.2).</p> <p>52 paid traineeships were delivered.</p>
Work placement positions delivered	<p>120</p> <p>60 pupils year 1</p> <p>60 pupils year 2</p>	<p>The original plan involved placements from schools being delivered through LCR Music Education Hubs, managed by St Helens Council. However, due to schools' reluctance to send pupils on placements post-COVID-19, Phase 2 delivery was adapted to deliver Industry Days and Sound City Festival volunteering by school pupils (detailed below and in section 6.2). Longer term industry placements and traineeships replaced these targets.</p> <p>Approximately 30 placements were delivered by other LCR-based partners and small businesses.</p>

Output Indicators	Agreed GFA Project Targets	Delivered Output
Individuals engaged in careers advice and support	2,500 – working with LCR Music Education Hubs and specialist music IT and careers teachers. Target 30 schools in the most deprived areas of the City Region,	<p>Careers advice and delivery targets achieved and exceeded. LCR Music Education Hubs continuing to use online advice packs around careers in music. Estimated that the targeted number of pupils has been reached between 2022-2024.</p> <p>Careers advice delivery to over 2,700 young people:</p> <p>Liverpool Philharmonic Music Industry Careers Fest. Now established as an annual event every February. SIF support covered 2024 and 2025²² editions with over 1,300 attendees in total across both events. The 2025 event is now co-sponsored by LCR, national and international organisations and businesses including Spotify and Universal Music.</p> <p>Music Careers Day Southport 2023. Over 100 students from high schools in Sefton attended. Delivered by the Music Board²³.</p> <p>Over 250 Propeller programme attendees had access to 38 workshops and 233 mentor sessions delivered by LCR business Future Yard.²⁴</p> <p>126 young people accessed Future Yard's Sound Check programme developing event production skills.</p> <p>Future Yard's Beacon Artist Development Conference events in 2023 were funded and were attended by 206 participants across 3 events.</p> <p>92 teenagers completed 'Teaching the Musicians of Tomorrow' music making skills course as part of New Noise programme at Future Yard.</p> <p>'Sharpen Your Axe' industry advice sessions delivered by LCR business 'Finding the Music Inside' to 154 participants (emerging and established artists, LIPA students, and LIMF Academy affiliates).</p> <p>Young Entrepreneurs Programme 36-week delivery by LCR business Sound City to 25 attendees (16–24-year-olds)</p> <p>60 pupils (6-12 years) engaged on LCR business Positive Impact – an 8-month accredited Summer Holiday Music Project and an Autumn/Spring After School and Saturday Music Project</p> <p>350 pupils attended Sound City Industry Days delivered in collaboration with St Helens Council and LCR Music Education Hubs in across LCR boroughs.</p> <p>Numerous smaller training and masterclass events delivered under the Skills Development stream of the programme.</p>
Businesses receiving specialist IAG	112 (includes 30 from Phase 1)	Delivered and included within the IAG provision of 'Impact of business support' section above.
Businesses access finance for business and export growth	40 export support 40 business support awards	<p>Delivered finance for 88 distinct businesses.</p> <p>Breakdown: 11 in receipt of export support; and 77 business growth awards.</p> <p>See section 6.6 for detail, and circumstantial post-Brexit constraints surrounding export support.</p>

6.3 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: MUSIC HUBS, TRAINEESHIPS, AND MASTERCLASSES

The skills development stream as laid out in the by BOP plan²⁵ and signed into the GFA, was formed in 2019-20 and focused on two core areas:

- Developing inspirational programmes within council and music hub education provision and other local partners such as Liverpool Philharmonic to provide careers advice and placements.
- Growing apprenticeship opportunities.

MUSIC EDUCATION HUB PROVISIONS

During Phase 1, Music Education Hubs (MEHs) worked with specialist teachers to design and produce specialist careers advice packs including digital skills development opportunities children from KS4 (age 14+). These initially targeted 40 schools in the most deprived areas of the City Region and engaged 500 pupils across 10+ schools over the UK's COVID-19 lockdowns and immediately after. These packs are still in use, and the MEHs estimated that the targeted number of pupils had been reached by the end of 2024.

However, the pandemic severely hindered school-based work placements during Phase 2 due to schools' focus on catching up on lost studies, restrictions on pupils leaving school, and heightened safeguarding concerns regarding the targeted 120 pupil placements. In response, MEHs and St Helens Council (who were responsible for delivering this aspect of the programme), adapted the original project scope to involve [Sound City](#) who delivered 'Industry Days' across the boroughs. These provided 350 young people with events industry knowledge, and highlighted pathways to gain practical experience in running, crewing, and performing at events.

ADJUSTMENT TO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT APPRENTICESHIPS PLAN

The original GFA plan targeted 25 apprenticeships to be supported by SIF, with matched contributions from the employing businesses and potentially the Apprenticeship Levy. Phase 1's relatively small initial funding, coupled with the uncertainty surrounding the receipt of the

remaining £1.6m earmarked for Phase 2, hindered initiation of delivery against the original apprenticeship targets. Following discussions with the Music Board and subsequent agreement from the Combined Authority, it was ultimately decided that the outcome target be amended to be exclusively traineeships. Traineeships are typically shorter and focused exclusively on workplace-based learning, lacking the formal classroom-based element of apprenticeship programmes.

The rationale for this strategic shift in fund allocation was that this was considered the most practical approach given the following contextual factors:

1. The music sector was badly affected by the pandemic, significantly reducing the likelihood of businesses having the financial capacity to commit to longer-term apprenticeships during a period of extreme financial uncertainty.
2. Existing apprenticeship frameworks, particularly their classroom-based components, lacked support from the music industry businesses who felt these programmes were not sufficiently relevant to their specific needs.
3. The national Kickstarter traineeship programme (6-month placements for individuals in receipt of state benefits) had proved successful. Many music businesses had utilised this model, leading to a consensus that a similar traineeship approach was a more viable and attractive model for the sector.

Consequently, traineeship placements were facilitated through LCR-based music businesses including, [24 Kitchen Street](#), [Big Cookie](#), [Ditto Music](#), [Future Yard](#), [Kempston Street Studios](#), [Sentric Music](#), and others. A number of these offered 12-month traineeships. In total 52 paid traineeships were delivered across Phase 2.

An example of one placement described in the case study of a beneficiary, involved the innovative skills development collaboration called "Next Gen Music Boss" – a collaboration between former Music Board member Yaw Owusu's ['Nothin' But The Music'](#) organisation and [Merseyside Youth Association](#) (MYA). The project supported 12 young people on an intensive training programme, with 3 successful candidates progressing to funded traineeship placements.

DITTO MUSIC TRAINEESHIP – CASE STUDY

Harry Swift initially attended MYA after “being dragged there” by their mother in late 2022 following struggles with post-school direction and mental health difficulties. With one-to-one peer mentoring and free counselling, Harry reported significant positive outcomes, especially when involved in The Noise Project music programme, which proved transformative, helping him discover “the passion in music I never knew I had”

This progressed to the intensive 10-week “Next Gen Music Boss” and through Yaw’s contacts, Harry and other participants were introduced and connected directly with diverse music industry professionals. They also contributed to a PR campaign for a local artist, Koj. Harry cites MYA’s Talent Match’s support as

instrumental in securing a Traineeship at Ditto Music distribution company. Following 6 months Harry was offered a full-time position as a Junior Content Manager role. Harry emphatically stated that the programme “literally changed my life,” citing improved mental health, a clear career path, and parental relief,

“the difference is literally night and day... [my mum] is just made-up that I’m actually like, healthy mentally and physically, I’m making a living, and I have a path in front of me now for once”

Harry also actively returns to MYA, sharing their experience and industry knowledge, and demonstrating a sustainable role model for new participants.

EXPANSION OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

The Music Office and Board’s agile approach to utilising and balancing SIF allocations within the available timeframe, whilst responding to sector needs led to further adjustments to the GFA for “Individuals engaged in careers advice and support” target.

SOUND CHECK AT FUTURE YARD

Future Yard, the music venue in Birkenhead, in receipt of capital funding in Phase 1 resides within the juncture of the neighbourhood wards of Birkenhead and Tranmere, Bidston and St James and Rock Ferry. This area is amongst the highest percentile in the UK’s Indices of Multiple Deprivations. Having firmly established itself as a music venue by commencement of Phase 2, an application was made and approved to expand some of the SIF backed projects piloted in Phase 1²⁶. These now form what is effectively an overarching talent/skills pipeline for young people from 0 years up to 18 and beyond. This curriculum includes [Sound Check](#) which provides free access training for ages 16+ about the variety of job roles and skills necessary for live music industry careers. Given the precarious post-COVID-19 situation the live sector found itself in, with skilled staffing shortages arising from individuals leaving the sector during the 16-month cessation of live events, the need for a programme such as Sound Check was highly relevant to industry needs. Many graduates from Sound Check have progressed on to further studies and/or FTE positions in local and national event businesses²⁷. A further benefit of this programme has been its feed into Future Yard’s organisational structure and longer-term sustainability. During 2023-24, 126 participants in the scheme worked on 464 live shows.

“For me, the most pleasing thing about Sound Check has been the fact that it has helped us to shape a very unique, internal culture within the organisation. All our internal event production, sound engineers, event managers, box office, lighting team, have all come through the subject programme and are employed staff.”

CRAIG PENNINGTON, CEO AT FUTURE YARD

The success of SIF injected initiation of the Sound Check programme can be seen in its expansion into a fully accredited course. Working in association with Wirral Council and LCRCA, Future Yard have now accessed additional funding from Magenta Living (housing association) and partnered with the Learning Foundry, a Department of Education accredited skills provider who can further develop the programme’s rigour, include Ofsted inspections, and develop further skills funding opportunities²⁸.

Mentoring sessions at Sound Check (and Propeller described in section 6.4) were delivered by 23 different local music sector practitioners who were paid for their services, gaining valuable skills themselves in programme delivery.

Beyond the 126 young people who accessed Future Yard’s Sound Check, SIF funds were allocated to a range of skills development days, master class sessions and courses, and industry placements across the LCR boroughs. Many of these are listed in the table in section 6.1, with over 2,700 beneficiaries in total.

These include a partnership with the University of Liverpool that enabled students to take part in 12-week placements with major music industry employers such as [AdLib](#), Ditto Music, Sentric Music and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic.

SENTRIC MUSIC PLACEMENT – CASE STUDY

Jose Esquivel, is an overseas student on the University of Liverpool's MA in Music Industry Studies, who selected the university specifically because "it has links to the community, to the industry." This connection proved vital, when Jose was offered a 12-week placement with Sentric Music (funded by SIF Skills Development stream). Taken on as an intern Copyright Assistant, Jose was engaged in researching Latin American markets to support Sentric Music's expansion plans. The placement has resulted in a full-time job offer, with Jose expanding their knowledge of performance rights organisations in the 'live claims' team, and also undertaking data analysis and SQL training with Sentric Music's IT team. Jose felt the university acted as a confidence-building 'sponsor':

"[it] was crucial for me to have this [placement] opportunity... what it did for me was to open that door with Sentric... It's tough to have these opportunities." Describing their post MA plans prior to the job offer, Jose would have considered relocation, "I would probably move wherever I find a job."

Given the scarcity of music publishing companies outside of London, this placement has ensured the skills developed on the placement and in the MA have been retained in the LCR.

Other forms of skills development covered within the Phase 2 programme included masterclasses or lecture series delivered by experienced sector practitioners as demonstrated in the following case studies:

SHARPEN YOUR AXE MASTERCLASSES – CASE STUDY

The 'Sharpen Your Axe' masterclass series and Music Management sessions were delivered by local Music Career Coach Basil Reynolds' organisation Finding the Music Inside. These took place at Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA) and successfully engaged 154 participants. The masterclasses aimed to empower artists with essential skills like emotional resilience and audience engagement, covering topics such as growth mindset development, brand awareness, and unique selling propositions. The Music Management sessions focused on equipping prospective managers

with skills to handle industry challenges including artist development and mental well-being. A total of 140 participants attended the masterclasses, and 14 attended the management sessions. Participants on both programmes gave positive feedback that they had helped enhance their professional and personal growth within Liverpool's music scene. Future plans for Finding the Music Inside involve expanding the programme delivering workshops on wellbeing and securing sustainable funding.

LOFT MASTERING MASTERCLASSES – CASE STUDY

LCR based mastering production company Loft Mastering were funded for a two-part project. In the first, renowned mix and mastering engineer Mike Cave delivered a series of masterclass sessions for LCR-based participants, moving beyond his usual one-off guest lectures.

"The idea was to set up 30 sessions for 10 students, so they'd all get some group sessions and one-on-one sessions and help them get their studios in better workflow."

He split participants into two tailored groups: five emerging artists and five more technical studio producers. Mike observed clear value in upskilling from both masterclass groups, observing "light bulb moments that appear on people's faces," concluding with confidence that "those ten people have now upped their game."

The value of in-person learning is crucial in the recording sector:

"a lot of it is ear training... unless you're in the room with someone actually doing it, you can't train your ear... what you can learn in an hour with someone... in a room is invaluable. You can't do it on YouTube... that's just not how it works... This is why a lot of people are delivering substandard productions."

"The whole point of it was to upskill people in the city... If people like myself don't share those skills, it's just going to become a dying art basically. We're already starting to see the benefits in the music that those ten people are delivering now. It is just a much better standard."

Mike expressed excitement about opportunities to continue masterclass delivery through other potential funded avenues, envisioning building "a really, really serious community of talent" in the LCR.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OUTPUT TAKEAWAYS

Whilst circumstances at the commencement of Phase 2 dictated that the original plans outlined in the GFA be modified (with agreement), the programme considerably exceeded initial targets. Over 2,700 young people received skills development training, with many engaged on traineeship placements to hone skills in a music sector workplace environment. A total £339k was invested from the SIF total allocation across both Phases to skills development, equating to ~£125 per participant. Without comprehensive longitudinal reporting on each young person's progression, it is not possible to provide in-depth statistical analysis of outcomes. What is known is that numerous part- and full-time jobs have been created. Over 50 FTE LCR based jobs have, over the course of the funding, been generated through Future Yard's projects alone.²⁹ Other local employers such as [Ditto Music](#), Future Yard, and Sentric Music have taken trainees on to full-time positions following successful completion of traineeships, demonstrating the value and applicability of the Kickstarter model within this sector.

6.4 TALENT DEVELOPMENT

The Sector Development Plan proposed that a significant aspect of the proposition be focused on Talent Development activities to provide, "specialist information, advice and guidance for artists and music businesses in all genres of music and across the supply chain, from start-up to breakthrough."³⁰

These programmes were initiated as pilots during Phase 1 with three core providers. LIMF Academy and PRS Foundation, who both had proven records of successfully delivering talent development guidance within the LCR, were supplemented with Future Yard's embryonic programmes. Phase 2 targets within the GFA focused on the provision of placements and business IAG support, which were met and exceeded as outlined in the table in section 6.1.

LIMF ACADEMY

Founded by head of and former Music Board member Yaw Owusu, in partnership with Culture Liverpool, [LIMF Academy](#) is an award-winning programme that develops and nurtures emerging music creators in the LCR. It aims to provide tangible opportunities and realistic pathways to help young artists integrate into the UK music industry and build sustainable careers, enhancing LCR's reputation as a music city. Using LIMF's existing model enabled the expansion of the annual Academy cohort to increase from six to ten participants for two years spanning Phases 1 and 2. LIMF Academy provided these artists aged 16-25 exclusive access to activities and music sector insider knowledge across a 12-month programme.

Headline figures from a detailed impact study report on 10 years of LIMF Academy demonstrate the significance of the program's achievements in progressing the careers of LCR-based Academy alumni. Key music industry

success metrics from Spotify³¹ – 'Monthly Plays Average' and 'Popularity Index' both demonstrate "a substantial positive correlation between participation in the LIMF Academy and an artist's reach and popularity. LIMF alumni artists, on average have approximately 9 times more monthly listeners (19,771 vs. 2,104), and a higher popularity index (11.52 vs. 6.67) than unsuccessful academy applicants in respective cohort years.³²

Table 6: Key LIMF Academy alumni industry achievements

79.7%	are maintaining a career in the music industry
39.1%	gained professional representation (agent/manager)
100%	recorded original material in a professional studio
24.6%	signed record label/label services/distribution and marketing deals

Acknowledged as one of the UK's leading development platforms in the UK by key talent focused organisations such as PRS Foundation, the value derived from additional places enabled by SIF investment is demonstrated by several artists from these cohorts (2020-2022) achieving significant national acclaim, in particular [Hannah Morgan](#) and [Ni Maxine](#).

Harry Doyle, Liverpool City Council's Cabinet Member for Culture, Health and Wellbeing described LIMF's activity and profile as follows

"What the Academy offers is truly exceptional – access to top-tier industry guidance, unique performance opportunities and a network that's essential for breaking into the music world. It's this kind of support that helps our local talent not just survive but thrive on both the national and international stages."
Harry Doyle³³

PRS FOUNDATION (PRSF) MOMENTUM AND ACCELERATOR PROGRAMMES

The PRSF's 'PPL Momentum Music Fund' provides UK artists and bands needing career advancement with investments between £5k and £15k. Inspired by Canadian music sector funding model FACTOR³⁴, it targets musicians reaching a critical breakthrough stage providing support for recording, touring, and marketing to supplement industry investment. Within the context of the SIF Music Plan, PRSF applied for matched finance and then ring-fenced funds specifically to LCR applicants. Delivery was delegated to PRSF, whose proven application and management processes acted as a conduit for funding wrap around support for LCR music talent. In addition, since 2019 PRSF have piloted their Momentum Accelerator scheme in the LCR that targets talented music creators and industry professionals operating outside London to addresses gaps in regional support, including funding shortages, infrastructure, knowledge, and industry access. These investments are often smaller than the Momentum Music Fund. A significant advantage of being able to use

both PRSF Momentum and Accelerator programmes for LCR talent development delivery lies in PRSF's national-level recognition as a career progression pathway, having funded numerous Mercury Prize winners and contemporary household names including Little Simz, Wolf Alice, Sam Fender, and LCR's [Låpsley](#).

Across Phases 1 and 2, a total of 15 artists and 15 music professionals received PRSF funding.

"For the individual artists at least, it's been really helping them to make their projects as effective as possible and then to sustain that career... we're seeing similar things with most of those professionals we've funded in the 3-4 year periods are still making careers in music."

JOE FRANKLAND, PRS FOUNDATION

PRS FOUNDATION TALENT DEVELOPMENT – CASE STUDIES

PIXEY

LCR raised multi-instrumentalist, and producer Pixey was a recipient of Accelerator funding, applying for support towards live performance and recording. Outcomes have included increased Radio1 airplay and inclusion on Spotify editorials, BBC Radio 1 Future Artists show, and festival appearances including Leeds/Reading 2023, and BBC Radio 1 Weekender 2025.

"The PRS Foundation was so important for me to be able to excel in breaking through as a female artist and producer."

TROUT

Grunge/electronic Liverpool based band Trout received an Accelerator award, with specific goals of playing shows in London, and joining tours as a support act. These goals were achieved alongside significant uplift of recording's streaming, playing at The Great Escape 2024 festival and London showcase, and radio and print media coverage.

"PRS Foundation's support enabled me to pursue live goals for the project, where there otherwise would have been financial barriers. This has had a significant impact on [the project's] development"

KING HANNAH

Liverpool duo King Hannah were awarded Accelerator funds to assist their aims to record a second album and increase physical sales and digital units. Outcomes have included doubling of monthly Spotify listeners, chart entry for physical sales across multiple European territories, huge increase in international radio play and are embarking on 40-date European and 18-date US tours in 2025.

"Without PRS we would not have been able to fund our crucial second album... imperative to us growing as a band and scaling the heights we know we can achieve"

PROPELLER AND NEW NOISE AT FUTURE YARD

A further area of talent development funded by the programme included the initial pilot (in Phase 1) and the expansion (in Phase 2) of [Propeller](#). Hosted and delivered by Future Yard, the Propeller offer involves free access for local independent artists to a mentorship programme, studio sessions, workshops, professional mentors and dedicated music career development planning advice. Across both Phases over 250 Propeller programme attendees accessed 38 workshops and 233 mentor sessions. As a demonstration of the integrated approach adopted by the Music Office and the Music Board, several artists supported by Propeller went on to access PPL Momentum Accelerator funds and other talent development programmes beyond the LCR.³⁵ Propeller has also expanded to encompass a conference called [Beacon](#), trialled in Phase 1 as an online event, before 3 events attended by over 200 local young creators in 2023 which provided information and inspiration from industry experts, financed through the SIF programme. The success of these events has led to Future Yard being able to independently host Beacon in 2025.

Future Yard report that 9 FTE positions have been created and filled through Sound Check and Propeller delivery.

Another talent development scheme initiated at Future Yard, funded by the SIF programme is the [New Noise Music Centre](#), aimed at 11–16-year-olds, which allows young people to try out and develop skills across a range of instruments, genres and music-making techniques.

"It's essentially that kind of first step into music making. The whole notion is that we're creating a talent pipeline which is targeted as much as possible to the local community and the local neighbourhood."

CRAIG PENNINGTON, FUTURE YARD

In total, 92 teenagers have completed 'Teaching the Musicians of Tomorrow' music making skills course as part of New Noise programme.

"It has really built my confidence, and it has helped me through tough times. It helps me learn how to express myself through music."

NEW NOISE PARTICIPANT³⁶

OTHER TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

Further projects financed through SIF have ranged significantly in scale. Small (sub £5k) investments served both as business continuity investments for embryonic programmes such as Capeesh – a music youth project oriented towards developing young people’s confidence and self-esteem through encouraging their musical interests and aspirations; and Queensway – a DJ community for female, non-binary, LGBTQIA+ artists, delivering DJ Workshops covering technical skills, practice and performance opportunities and industry know-how including wellbeing. In both cases, securing investment funding enabled the provision of talent development services which benefited participating individuals, but has also provided scaffolding for these small-scale operations at what is often a precarious stage of business development.

Artists starting out on career journeys, likewise, face precarity in relation to their enthusiasm to sign deals with recording companies, which could be at the expense of their retaining a degree of control over their intellectual property. An innovative initiative to develop the region’s talent and address this concern was again delivered by Loft Mastering, in the second part of their funded project:

BMAG ARTISTS MIXING AND MASTERING – CASE STUDY

The Black Music Action Group identified a significant need among promising emerging global majority artists in the LCR, who were ready to release music but lacked the necessary finances to produce high-quality recordings. Mixing and Mastering Engineer Mike Cave devised a programme to create ten high-quality singles for global majority artists, providing a crucial starting point allowing these artists to launch their careers without prematurely signing away valuable ownership rights.

“It was pretty obvious there was some amazing talent that just needed that leg up. My role was to focus on stuff that’s not quite established or ready to go. For the two artists that went to majors... I think that was the whole plan all along. That’s exactly what we wanted. We wanted them to be able to have that infrastructure they’d get from a major, but control of, and ownership of their own music”

MIKE CAVE, MIXER & MASTERING ENGINEER

The initiative successfully achieved this core objective, enabling all participating artists to release music while maintaining copyright control, with several securing licensing deals with major labels on more beneficial terms. These included Koj and Remée who were both signed by Interval Records (EMI).

TALENT DEVELOPMENT OUTPUT TAKEAWAYS

As with the Skills Development programme, circumstantial adjustments were made in the allocation of GFA targets to ensure talent development funding was focused on provision of careers advice and support. The programme effectively engaged music artists and professionals as incubator businesses, delivering specialist IAG from both LCR and external industry professionals, often in conjunction with intervention funding. Many of the artists advised and supported through these schemes have since played on BBC Radio, appearing at UK music festivals and signing recording contracts; a vindication of the funds’ use to stimulate sustainable talent growth.

A key outcome emerging from the talent development stream has been the establishment and consolidation of programmes within the LCR that act as a working examples of music career pathway schemes. Future Yard’s age group-specific progression from New Noise to Propeller to Beacon, offers a clear model that could be adopted in other LCR boroughs. Likewise, PRSF Momentum Accelerator projects have proved so successful in their LCR implementation, these have been rolled out by PRSF in other regions such as the Tees Valley Combined Authority³⁷.

6.5 MUSIC ECOSYSTEM AND BUSINESS GROWTH SUPPORT

The primary objective of the programme was the economic development of the LCR music sector. It was therefore essential for both existing and new businesses to thrive so that individuals who received skills training and talent development would have opportunities within the LCR upon completing these programmes. This involved ensuring for example, that there were labels ready to sign artists, studios to work within, recording facilities and venues available to perform in, and provide jobs for technical staff. These efforts were vital to fostering a robust music ecosystem, which in turn, creates further opportunities for those currently acquiring new skills.

This stream of the programme was focused around establishing the Music Office as a key point of contact that could support businesses either through investment funds, or by connecting them with the appropriate individuals who could help advance their business. This support ranged from aiding brand-new startups, to assisting established businesses that could benefit from small investments that enable them to achieve goals they otherwise could not undertake.

“I have worked in the creative sector for 25 years now, and I know how an investment like five grand can be the difference between surviving – and then going on to be massively successful – or folding.”

KEVIN MCMANUS, HEAD OF UNESCO CITY OF MUSIC

The award allocation within the business growth stream of the programme was broadly divided between eight types of funded support, as outlined in section 5. Given the diverse range of business types and scales present in the LCR's music sector, summarisations with some case study examples are provided here.

MAPPING THE ECOSYSTEM

In addition to SIF finance being used to establish and promote the Music Office within Phase 1; work was commissioned in Phase 2 to contract University of Liverpool researchers to undertake a mapping of the LCR Music Sector. Building on the implementation of a digital [LCR Live Music Venues Map](#), launched in early 2022³⁸, the [Full Music Sector Map](#) was the culmination of comprehensive data gathering fieldwork cataloguing ~1,500 active LCR music sector related businesses/enterprises. This mapping enables the Music Office the ability to present reliable data for informed local governance decision-making. As the map identifies industry clusters and focus areas this allows for targeted business investment activities in the future.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT – FUTURE YARD

Prior to the initiation of Phase 1, Future Yard CIC was established to realise a Birkenhead-based physical hub facility for music industry development outside Liverpool city centre³⁹ and to reimagine the role of a live venue within a local community. The CIC's early securing of a 20-year lease was crucial to justify significant capital investment in the premises. This enabled Future Yard to access an initial £85,000 SIF capital works investment during Phase 1 which transformed a derelict nightclub into a habitable community music venue, and financed fundamental renovations including construction of fire exits, installation of fire doors, a functioning fire alarm system, and the installation of rigging points for the PA system – all of which were vital to establish the venue's basic viability.

Without this investment, the venue may have operated at a significantly reduced capacity and programmed limited events, but broader initiatives such as Propeller or Sound Check programmes would not have been feasible. The SIF investment therefore provided the essential foundation for the hub's full operational scope.

As outlined in the mid-term review,⁴⁰ a significant unexpected benefit emerged from this initial groundwork. Renovations funded by the SIF investment enhanced the property's value and positioned Future Yard to successfully attract a £350,000 social investment from NESTA's Arts & Culture Impact Fund to purchase the premises outright in 2021.

Critically, the relatively modest £85,000 SIF investment has acted as a catalyst that facilitated the venue's operational viability, enabled the subsequent property purchase, and secured long-term stability. Within five years, this initial investment has directly leveraged approximately £2.4 million worth of further funding into the project and the local area, marking a very significant return on the initial SIF investment. The building asset now provides Future Yard with a strong foundation to approach Arts Council England and Birkenhead Town Deal for future capital funds to increase the venue's capacity significantly which would add a further asset to the borough and region.

BUSINESS SUPPORT AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

At the other end of the scale, eleven artist and micro enterprises received match funded SIF ecosystem business support and career development investments. These relatively small sums, usually below £5,000 in value, were awarded following an applicant's development of business plans, and were subject to the same rigorous 'organisational-needs- analysis' decision-making process and Music Board member's reviews as outlined in section 4.7.

Support ranged from supporting specific recording releases, small-scale promotional and content management work, development of promoter activity from under-represented communities to working on projects with global partners. Each business funding acted as a small but significant injection of capital which enabled projects to progress where otherwise they would not have progressed at all; would have moved at a much slower pace; or would have been reduced in scale, as described in some of these quotes from survey respondents:

"It has helped to raise my profile as a music industry professional and artist."

"Funding helped us increase capacity in the rehearsal rooms."

"With the funding I recorded and released a 4 track EP."

"The therapeutic coaching I delivered resulted in increased confidence and enhanced wellbeing for emerging creators and professionals."

"It allowed for an expansion on social media through being able to hire an established videographer to capture worthwhile Live and promotional footage."

MICHAEL ALDAG SOLO ARTIST – CASE STUDY

Michael Aldag, is a LIMF Academy graduate and LCR-based singer-songwriter, who has previously utilised local industry expertise. After being signed, then dropped by a label, Michael felt “like the rug had been pulled in many ways”, causing him to question whether he could continue a music career. The Music Office advice prompted Aldag to apply for growth funding.

“this funding was just pivotal, not only financially and you know in the real world but also for my confidence and for my belief in a career, in music.”

The matched-investment financed the recording and release of new music with an overseas producer, building on a prior songwriting retreat connection, emphasising the value of skills development in building

network connections. This collaboration led to a joint venture agreement. Aldag highlighted the value:

“I was able to create 15 plus tracks with that money, whereas I know of instances... creating a single-track with a cost more than I was awarded, so it’s good value for money.”

The funding established Aldag as an independent artist, retaining creative control. The accompanying Music Office advice resulted in his use of LCR distributor Ditto, and his subsequent career progression has seen him play at the 2024 Leeds/Reading festivals, and leveraged this business growth funding to support a successful application to PRS Foundation, aiding aims for longer-term career sustainability.

GROWTH FUNDING

The term ecosystem increasingly finds use as a metaphorical means to describe the diversity and varied scale of business models operating across what can seem like very different marketplaces within the broad music sector. Despite the multiplicity present within the range of applications for ‘growing the music ecosystem’ funding stream of the SIF programme, a characteristic common to many of these micro enterprises’ is that their business plans focus on the development of mechanisms that provide opportunities for other LCR-based artists and music practitioners growth; as seen in the following selection of examples:

Table 7: Examples of Growth Funding projects and outcomes

Name	Project	Outcomes
<u>Queensway</u>	Community organisation for female, non-binary LGBTQIA+ DJ artists sought funding to develop workshop series.	Integrated training programme developed skills, industry knowledge, wellbeing alongside ‘gig’ practice opportunities for 13 artists, and led to unexpected establishment of a physical studio training space.
<u>Capeesh</u>	Weekly evening music focused ‘youth club’ that enables young people develop future musical aspirations through collaborations and 1-2-1 sessions.	Funds enabled the organisation to provide performance opportunities for attendees, developing the young people’s overall confidence and self-esteem.
<u>Motor Museum</u>	Established LCR studio producer invested in developing exploratory relationship building with specific targeted artists, formalising ‘R&D’ music production projects that are outside of normal comfort zone.	Led to two recording projects, one with an LCR-based artist, the other involved bringing an artist into the region’s recording ecosystem. Expected return on match funded investment anticipated to lead to 4-5 times multiplier.
<u>The Narrative</u>	Monthly songwriters showcase and music industry networking events encouraging collaboration between LCR’s creative for the people ‘behind the scenes’ including producers, songwriters, venue, studio and rehearsal space staff.	Funded performer/speaker fees which generated larger audiences, social media presence and awareness, developing a sustainable and equitable model, with plans to roll out to other LCR boroughs.
<u>MusicSeen</u>	Online interactive directory, cataloguing LCR-based musicians leading to broader ecosystem visibility.	The investment enabled website redesign, back-end development, and improved data management. Acquisition of new plug-ins are leading to the development of integrated LCR events and artists listings.

RECORDING AND PROMO SUPPORT

Sixteen artists applied for match funds to produce higher quality recordings and/or independently release new music. A similar figure of 19 music creators, artist managers, and other SME music businesses applied for funds to support promotion and marketing activities. The following case study outlines how strategic use of promotional funding has developed a sustainable income stream and led to increased exposure:

KEYSIDE – DEVELOPING THE ARTIST AS A BUSINESS CASE STUDY

LCR-based Blu Fire – an entertainment and design-led consultancy – recognise that early artist careers are financially precarious, requiring years of effort before income materialisation, even with the apparent ‘success’ of listening statistics. They represent Bootle band Keyside, whose four members, ‘are all mid-20s, committed to their art’, but must make significant financial and ‘standard career path’ sacrifices to pursue commercial success as musicians. Recognising their potential at the start of a long journey, Blu-Fire sought to accelerate income generation through strategic use of match-funded growth investment to support Keyside’s promotion. By first using funds for professional photography, and working with a local artist to create a visual identity, Blu Fire were then able to use the remaining funds to develop both merchandise designs and set up a website platform which has enabled online merchandise sales.

“Merchandise is one of my two primary streams of income for the artist, and that’s actually proved an enormous help. Merchandise income makes a significant contribution to keeping the band on the road. It pays for rehearsal rooms, a van, petrol, B&Bs...”

Blu-Fire investment in Keyside’s visual identity and social media presence has boosted key metrics that influence promoter bookings. They developed a strategic package to accelerate opportunities for the band, described as ‘four working-class musicians holding flexible minimum-wage jobs to accommodate touring’. Blu-Fire noted that without support, the career journey would take considerably longer, risking abandonment for ‘a proper job.’ Following funding, Keyside have established a merchandise revenue stream, achieved national BBC radio coverage, completed sell-out UK tours, and performed at Radio One’s Big Weekend.

A further example of instigating creative business growth through investment in promotional activities is seen in the case of LCR digital startup, Big Cookie:

BIG COOKIE START UP – CASE STUDY

Big Cookie are an innovative direct-to-fan service agency specialised in partnering with artist management, labels, and artists. They seek to develop artist-owned channels, including fan communities; and nurture direct artist-fan relationships within them. In contrast to reliance on social media ‘top-funnel marketing’ and ‘algorithmically driven playlisting’, Big Cookie seek to avoid ‘cold’ engagement through mailing/sms list management. CEO Aaron Bogucki who is experienced in the recording sector and recently moved to the LCR after being made redundant,

applied for match-funding to help develop Big Cookie from its start-up business phase. Big Cookie have exemplified cross-programme stream utilisation of SIF for business growth – from branding and design work for pitch-decks; developing skills through placement of a technology development engineering student; to exporting ‘tech IP’ ideas from the LCR at South by Southwest as a panellist. Aaron cites the funding and IAG as having opened doors to other networks in the city; unlocked opportunities that engaged Big Cookie’s first clients, and “shortened the runway” to growth.

6.6 EXPORT SUPPORT

The original Music Industry Development proposal outlined in the 2020 BOP report (p. 17) earmarked a 5% of SIF to support artists entering international markets – predominately through tours; music businesses growing their export offers; and for the Music Office and other bodies to represent the LCR music industry at international events to promote inward investment promotion outcomes. This ‘Businesses access finance for business and export growth’ remained a core target in the 2021 signed GFA. However, much of the rationale behind these proposals and targets did not consider the imminent implications of Brexit on touring. This was critical as in 2019 the EU was the UK’s largest live music market, four times larger than its second largest market, the US. The ongoing negative impacts of the UK - EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement for UK artists touring in EU countries is a nationwide issue, too extensive and complex to cover within the scope of this report and remains subject to continued political lobbying with the central government conducted by music industry advocacy groups such as LIVE and UK Music⁴¹. A recent Musicians Union survey

underlined the core issue with 59% of respondents stating that “touring the EU was no longer financially viable.”⁴² Issues identified within the export aspect of this programme have been instrumental in efforts to establish a multi-region Northern Music Export Office proposal (see also 8.4).⁴³ Consequently, the target of providing 40 LCR businesses export support was not achieved in Phase 2, in large due to a lack of credible plans being proposed by touring artists or their managers. Recognising this post-Brexit business reality facing LCR music sector artists and enterprises led to the Music Office allocating more ‘business support awards’ (detailed in the previous section), which enabled meeting the overall target of providing growth support to 80 businesses.

In total only 11 businesses were successful in applying for export support. These awards included provision for LCR representation at prestigious international music industry events such as SXSW in the USA, Amsterdam Dance Event and Reeperbahn in Hamburg, and presentation of research directly related to the LCR music sector mapping at Hannover’s International Music Business Study Days. Nine artist tours were also match funded covering the UK, Europe and USA.

RED RUM CLUB US TOUR – CASE STUDY

Sefton-based band Red Rum Club undertook two North American tours in support of LCR act The Wombats, using match funding from sources including the BPI’s Music Export Growth Scheme and their Liverpool-based label Modern Sky, which supplemented SIF investment. These funds contributed to day-to-day transport costs, accommodation and subsistence:

“the costs of touring a six-piece band across the whole of America is phenomenal... nothing’s getting cheaper... it’s no surprise that very, very, very few bands from the UK actually break America anymore.”

GEORGE WILSON, CO-MANAGER RED RUM CLUB

Persevering despite these financial challenges has reaped rewards for the band with the securing of a US licensing deal with New York record label Avenue A being a welcome unexpected outcome from the tour.

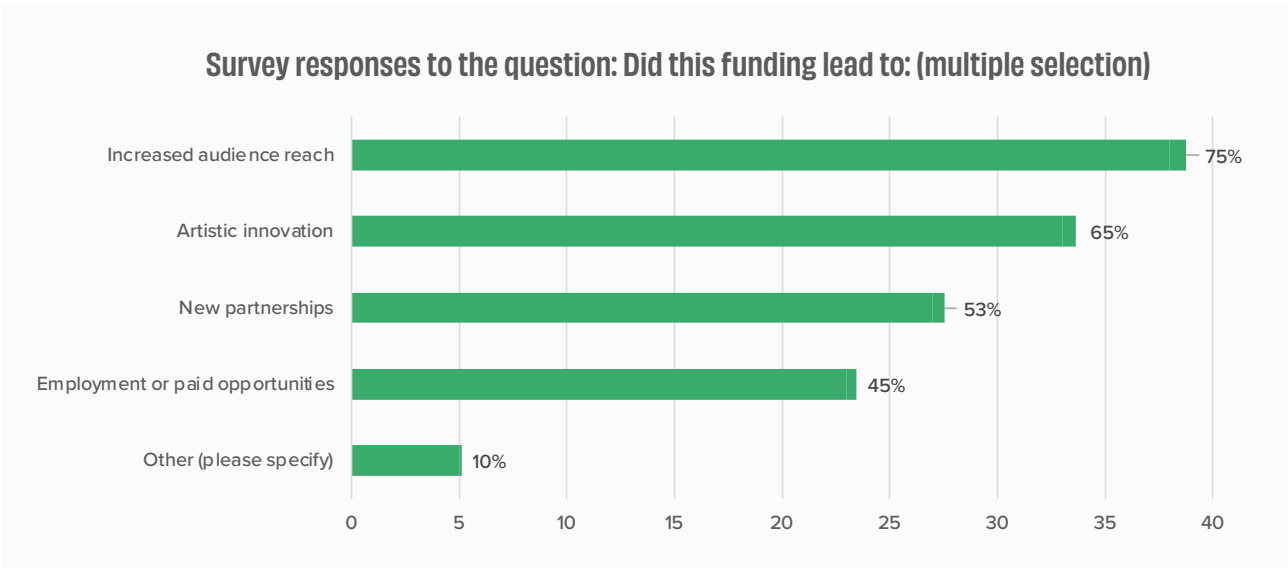
Analysing their post-tour data has demonstrated the band now has a 25% North American audience share (up from 10%), increased merchandise sales, and strong social media traction in USA and Mexico. Reflecting on the collaborative nature [of funding support], George emphasised:

“the combination effect... for Liverpool City Region-based organisations in achieving the label deal... has just shown what you can get from it, and for the next tour, in autumn, the band are going to be a much stronger position because they’re going to have a lot more finance support behind that tour [from the US label].”

BUSINESS GROWTH OUTPUT TAKEAWAYS

The combination of sector specific advice; development of, and feedback on business plan applications; and consequent small investments in promising companies is seen to have boosted growth across a range of areas as demonstrated in these survey results:

The evaluation of the programme’s outputs has been analysed and synthesised into the following key impacts:



07 **IMPACT OUTCOMES**



7.1 DELIVERED ON ITS TARGET OUTPUTS

The programme was delivered across a timeframe punctuated by significant unprecedented disruptions – the global COVID-19 pandemic, and Liverpool City Council being placed under commission. Despite these factors, and sector specific adaptations (the switch from apprenticeships to traineeships and placements), the programme delivered, and in most cases exceeded, against target outputs (see 6.1). The only planned area where delivery did not meet agreed targets was that of export as described in 6.6.

A key aspect of the programme was that it was driven by the needs of the music sector. The Music Board functioned as a barometer for key sector issues and concerns, and through the integrated approach with the Music Office, were able to adapt the programme according to circumstances. Prominent examples being post-pandemic adaptations to change delivery programmes dictated by schools; the inappropriateness of apprenticeships to a post-pandemic music sector, and the lack of time to set these up; and the sector demands to respond to Black Lives Matter.

Considering the situational circumstances, the programme's core impacts were the provision of short-term resilience assistance – the COVID-19 Music Support Fund during Phase 1 – to longer term recovery and growth awards in Phase 2. The business survival rate and relative ongoing growth and strength of the region's music sector has evidenced this.

7.2 MAINTAINED A FOCUS ON DEMOGRAPHIC EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The adoption of the findings of the Music Board's Black Music Action Group manifesto, alongside the use of the ReMap report's recommendations to guide decision making in Phase 2 of the programme exemplifies the programme delivery's commitment to EDI. The impact of ring-fencing a funding pool and taking this into consideration during investment allocation has ensured significant representation from LCR's black artists and music business practitioners reflected in funded projects and fund beneficiaries.

Likewise, the Music Education Hub's programmes of engagement with schools in areas of multiple deprivations during Phase 1, and the work of Future Yard's New Noise, Sound Check and Propeller schemes including subsidised and free-to-access spaces for participants from the CH41/42 wards, have each delivered opportunities and advice for young people from more challenging circumstances to recognise that careers in the music and creative sectors are accessible and viable.

Furthermore, there is evidence in documented grading assessments of investment fund applications that projects aimed at supporting or elevating underrepresented groups in the region received due consideration within this process, with many awarded support investments.

7.3 MADE EFFORTS TO DISTRIBUTE FUNDING AND ACTIVITY ACROSS THE LCR

The programme consistently situated programmes outside of the Liverpool city borough, in acknowledgement of its pre-existing relative concentration of music businesses and training opportunities. Assigning St Helens Music Hubs to co-ordinate schools-based deliverables in the skills development stream, and the piloting of Birkenhead's Future Yard as a music venue learning resource for young people were demonstrative of an entire region approach. The Music Board's 'Let the Music Play' consultations touring each borough functioned both as informal IAG sessions and further advertisements for SIF business growth opportunities to non-city-centre music sector enterprises.

7.4 EXPANDED STRATEGICALLY VALUABLE COLLABORATIONS

The SIF Music Fund Programme made strategic use of the LCR Music Board's sector knowledge and experience to maximise this funding opportunity by collaborating with delivery partners with proven track records, such as Generator and PRS Foundation. These organisations are on record in stating that in terms of a functioning Music Board; Music Office; and delivery of talent and skills development projects, the LCR is years ahead of other regions for creative industries support. This is reflected in the nationally recognised body, PRS Foundation, piloting projects successfully in the LCR before rolling out in other regions.

"This would not have happened were it not for opportunity to set up this model and trial in Liverpool supported by SIF investment"

JOE FRANKLAND, CEO, PRS FOUNDATION

Such has been the impact of the programme in this respect that LCR based practitioners are now involved in PRSF. For example, [Yaw Owusu](#) leads the pioneering initiative 'Power Up' for Black music creators and executives. [Grace Goodwin](#), was a beneficiary of a SIF funded talent development programme delivered by LCR-based Remi Harris Consulting. This 'Music Leaders Network' was focused on mid-career women in music aiming to improve confidence and effectiveness. Grace is now a Trustee for PRS Foundation. Such representations on national level boards point to the programme's impact in positioning the LCR as a significant creative centre outside of London.

Further evidence of the strength of evolving partnerships is evidenced through several SIF recipients with long-standing industry experience who initiated new projects are now themselves Music Board members.⁴⁴

7.5 MADE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO LONG-TERM BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY

When asked, to what extent the funding contributed to the long-term sustainability of their work or organisation, 80% of survey respondents reported that it was very important, with 38% describing it as 'fundamental'. Rather than this being simply a reflection of survival, 86% of respondents said that they had been able to continue or build upon the work enabled by this funding.

With less investment particularly from the commercial sector for talent development, micro-enterprises and SMEs in the creative sector increasingly rely upon funding schemes in their start up and/or expansion phases. Even the modest investments offered by the programme have significant long-term impacts. Frequently being able to demonstrate successful fund application and management contributes positively to future funding application outcomes. As many of those interviewed for this report described, the programme generated a reciprocal benefit 'network effect', where IAG signposted applicants to alternative or extension funding schemes.

A fundamental impact described by many fund beneficiaries was that the support facilitated the space to developing income models. At scale, the capital and start-up funding of music industry skills and development schemes at Future Yard have within a short time evolved from pilot projects to Department of Education accredited education training provision. At the level of start-ups, and artist development, smaller sums have been crucial to help establish business models that work operationally without running up a debt.

7.6 DEMONSTRATED THE MUSIC SECTOR'S SCALE AND ECONOMIC VALUE TO REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

As stated in the introduction, the SIF plan has emerged from a long music policy journey who's aim has been to acknowledge the contribution the music sector makes to the regional economy and demonstrate what can be achieved with investment to amplify the emergent strengths within music businesses as part of the wider creative sector. Feedback from fund recipients indicate the growth mindset present within the sector, acknowledging that 76% would have made some progress without funding, but all of these would either be smaller in scale or progress much slower. The impact of the funding for 88 LCR music enterprises has been to scale up and accelerate most projects, and kickstart those that would not have begun were it not for the awards.

Whilst comprehensive financial outcome statistics are not available for this programme, a music sector economic impact report, aligned to the sector mapping undertaken in this programme will be published in the latter half of 2025. However, what can be drawn from the survey of funding recipients showed that new partnerships (51%) and employment or paid opportunities (45%) were key outcomes. All interviewees framed their activities within

the context of their enterprise being an economic activity, as opposed to an arts project. This is a significant counter to the narrow 'cultural perspective' activities related to music are frequently viewed through. The LCR music economy represents a cluster that makes a significant contribution towards one of the "8 growth-driving sectors" that constitute the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy.⁴⁵

The programme, through its engagement with the various sector networks, and its mapping of over 1,500 businesses and organisations engaged in music industry activities in the LCR has laid the foundation for the Music Board and the Combined Authority to develop sector analysis evolving into key business intelligence on this aspect of the creative economy.

7.7 DELIVERED POSITIVE IMPACTS ON BUSINESS SURVIVAL RATES AND INWARD INVESTMENT

At the time of writing, all the businesses and enterprises funded by the Music Support Fund in Phase 1 of the programme, and all businesses receiving Business Support Growth funding in Phase 2, remain operational. Two funded business are in the process of moving their location due to circumstances beyond their control. All businesses remain headquartered in the LCR.

One of the original impact targets of 2020's Liverpool Music Industry Sector Development Plan was to attract "New Inward Investment – 4 new businesses attracted to LCR:". Whilst it is impossible to state a direct correlation to the SIF programme's activities, the siting of two new Liverpool city centre music venues; [Rough Trade](#), and [Boxpark](#); in addition to renowned artist development company, [30 Century Management](#), relocating to the region; and the establishment of an [Institute of Contemporary Music Performance](#) campus, all point to an upward trajectory of the city region's profile as a site for developing creative industry business.

7.8 SUPPORTED EMERGENT MUSIC BUSINESSES AND INITIATED GROWTH INNOVATION PROJECTS

There are numerous examples across the wide and diverse range of funded projects that evidence business model innovation or novel approaches to market access, several of which feature as case studies in this report. Future Yard's piloting of Sound Check (event and venue skills training) stands out as an example of the impact of innovation from the LCR. Future Yard have now exported this model to other venues in the North West including The Ferret⁴⁶ (Preston), Band on the Wall (Manchester) and The Met (Bury).

7.9 DEMONSTRATED VALUE FOR MONEY ACHIEVED LINKED TO LOCAL SPEND

The impact of investments and IAG on SME resilience and growth, and for delivery partners involved in skills and talent development programmes has been unanimously described in positive terms by fund beneficiaries. This was an expected finding. Whilst 31% of survey respondents reported that they had to adjust the scope of their projects due to funding limitations, the predominant theme from these responses was that their aspirations for funds were higher than that available to be allocated, and that costs had risen considerably during this period (subsequent to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and ‘cost-of-living-crisis’).

Comprehensive economic data is not available to determine precise return-on-investment figures across the entire programme. This is also characteristic of the music sector more generally, where GVA estimates tend to be used.

Using the estimated increase in GVA attributable to SIF investment as outlined by models set out in BOP Consulting’s 2020 ‘Liverpool Music Industry Sector Development Plan’,⁴⁷ the change based upon projected and actual spend can be demonstrated as follows:

Table 8: Revised GVA Estimates Based on Actual Expenditures

Activity	Original Spend (£k)	Original GVA (£m)	Actual Spend (£k)	Revised GVA (£m)
Skills Development	650	3.10	339	1.62
Talent Development	250	0.40	347	0.56
Ecosystem Development	470	1.60	701	2.39
Total	1,370	5.10	1,387	4.57

Whilst there is an overall decrease in estimated GVA, the change is significantly positive in both talent and ecosystem development, where net gains are based upon turnover, compared to skills development estimates which are more approximated.

7.10 SUCCESSFUL DELIVERY WAS CRUCIAL TO LCR BEING AWARDED CREATIVE CLUSTER FUNDING FOR MUSICFUTURES

Arguably the most significant impact of the SIF Music Industry Development Plan was that its successful delivery paved the way for an even greater value of music focused investment. The Liverpool City Region was awarded £6.75 million in late 2024 for ‘MusicFutures’ – a University of Liverpool led 5-year programme to position the LCR as a new UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Creative Cluster for the music sector. This funding aims to establish the region as a global centre for music research, development, and innovation. Networks established through the Music Board’ activities and coordination of the SIF programme were instrumental in landing this funding. Both Project Co-Director Mat Flynn, and Kevin McManus state that this funding would not have been awarded were it not for the delivery success of the Music Industry Development Plan, and its sector mapping output which demonstrates the already emergent creative cluster within the region.

“The Liverpool City Region has a long and proud history as one of the world’s most iconic places for music... this new funding will build on that legacy. MusicFutures will elevate our cultural status on the global stage, create jobs, nurture creativity, and drive economic growth across the region.”

STEVE ROTHERAM, MAYOR OF THE LIVERPOOL CITY REGION



08 CHALLENGES AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

8.1 PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

As discussed in several places in this report, the COVID-19 pandemic and delays to signing the GFA process were significant challenges to the programme delivery. Whilst the adoption of a specialist business diagnosis and brokerage model with a single 'front door' was apt for the music sector, and the newly formed Music Board provided extensive support, there was a significant burden placed on the Head of UNESCO City of Music as the sole administrator of funds, especially during Phase 1. Earlier administrative support would have been beneficial to address capacity constraints. It is worth noting that this was not reflected as an observation by applicants or beneficiaries, but from the delivery reflections from the Head of UNESCO City of Music and select Music Board members.

8.2 CLOSER OVERSIGHT OF MUSIC HUB COLLABORATIONS WAS NEEDED

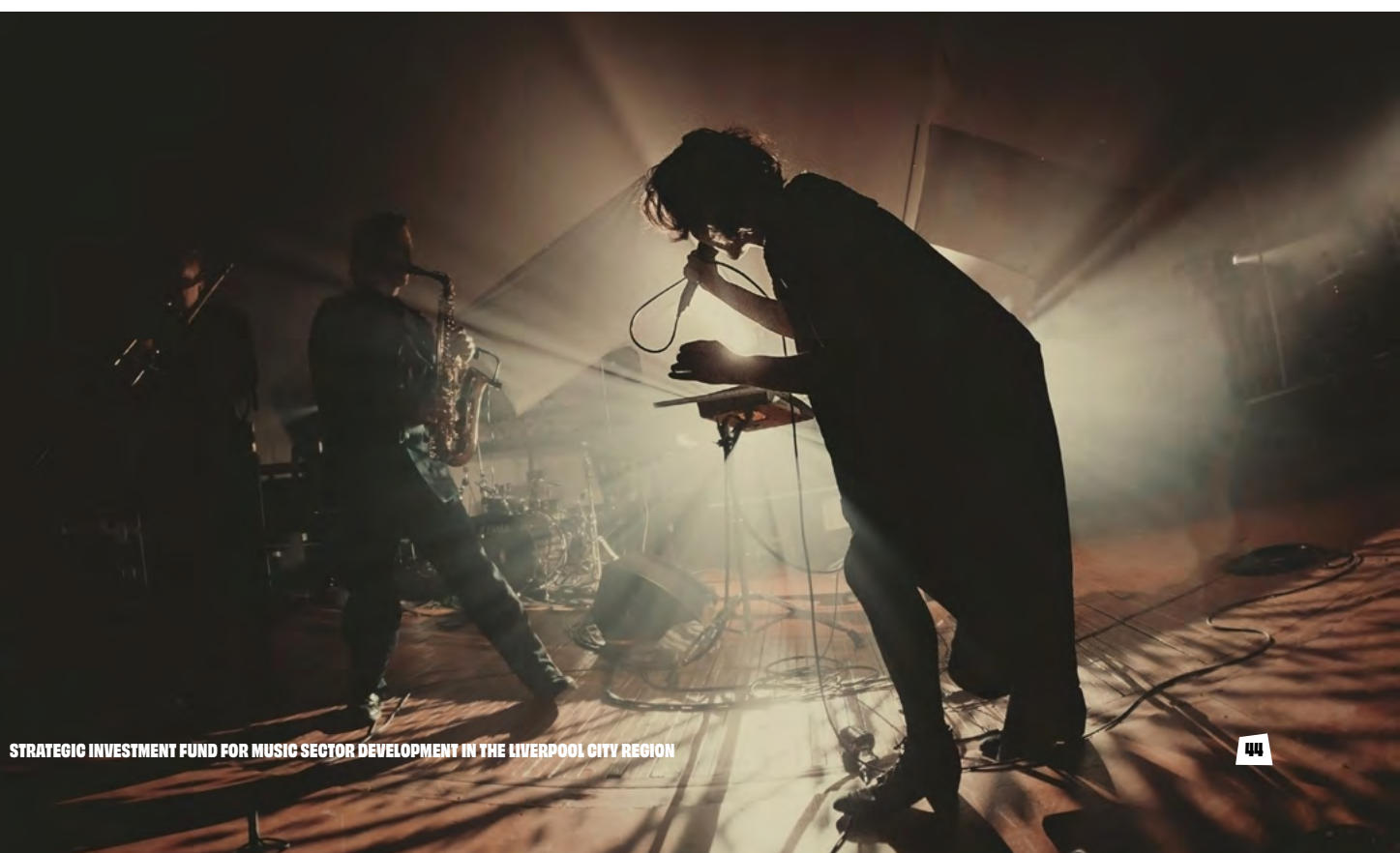
Music Education Hubs original delivery plans for music careers advice sessions were circumstantially impacted by schools experiencing a multiplicity of complex post-pandemic issues. Careers and outreach programmes were deprioritised as described in section 6.3. At this point in time the Music Board membership was more heavily weighted towards experience in Higher Education and were thus less equipped to strategize alternative careers advice provisions. Having direct Music Board representation from Primary and Secondary level education would have been beneficial in this regard. It is noteworthy that the Music Board has appointed the Strategic Lead from Sound! Music Hub in an observer role in 2025.

8.3 MORE STRUCTURED IAG EXPERT SESSIONS MAY HAVE IMPROVED OUTREACH

The Let the Music Play consultations held across the boroughs were a successful use of Music Board sector expertise and helped cement post-pandemic sector connectivity, as highlighted in the mid-term review. However, this initiative would have benefited from sustained follow up sessions, perhaps adopting a model of 'Constituency Surgeries'. There were aspirations to run such schemes under the Sound Success banner as mobile diagnostic sessions. However, these were not realised fully.

8.4 EXPORT SUPPORT STRATEGIES REQUIRE RETHINKING POST-BREXIT

As detailed in section 6.6, the realities of touring as an export strategy for artists – in the EU post-Brexit, and in the USA post-increased border restrictions is a national-level problem. Beyond national level political lobbying, attempts to address these difficulties from lessons learnt in this programme's delivery are now guiding future LCR trade delegations and representations, and more broadly informing the multi region Northern Music Export Office proposal.⁴⁸



09

THE IMPACT OF STRATEGIC INVESTMENT FUNDING AND FUTURE OF LIVERPOOL CITY REGION MUSIC INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES



The Strategic Investment Funded (SIF) Liverpool City Region Music Industry Development Plan has delivered transformative results, exceeding expectations despite unprecedented challenges. Through targeted investment, strategic partnerships, and a sector-led approach, the programme has reinforced the region's reputation as a leading creative cluster and a music city of national significance – providing a strong case for continued investment.

9.1 PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Overdelivered on objectives**, with nearly all targets met or surpassed—except export growth, where external factors limited progress.
- **Dynamic sector led adaptations**, shifting from apprenticeships to traineeships, responding to sector needs through the Music Board, and supporting businesses through crisis and recovery.
- **Laid the foundational groundwork for MusicFutures**, with the programme's success directly contributing to the Liverpool City Region's successful £6.75 million bid as a UKRI Creative Cluster.
- **Solidified the Music City profile**, through demonstration of a thriving ecosystem and attracting inward investment.

9.2 ALIGNMENT WITH THE MUSIC BOARD'S AND THE COMBINED AUTHORITY'S GOALS

The programme's outputs directly supported key strategic priorities:

SKILLS AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT

- Initiatives like Future Yard's Sound Check and the Music Education Hub's schools' programmes have expanded training and career advice opportunities.
- PRS Foundation's pilot projects in the LCR, later rolled out to other regions demonstrated the region's leadership in talent development.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

- Ring-fenced funding and EDI-focused decision-making ensured underrepresented groups accessed opportunities.
- Programmes like New Noise, Propeller, Positive Impact and the Music Education Hub's outreach have opened pathways for underrepresented groups, proving that music can be a powerful tool for social mobility.

CREATIVE INDUSTRY GROWTH AND REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION

- Funding was deliberately distributed beyond Liverpool's core, with projects in St Helens, Wirral, and workshops in other boroughs targeting wider economic benefits.
- 86% of funded businesses sustained or expanded their work, with many creating new jobs and partnerships.

9.3 THE VALUE DELIVERED BY THE MUSIC SECTOR

The programme proved that, with investment, the music sector delivers substantial returns:

ECONOMIC GROWTH

- Companies like AdLib, Ditto Music, Future Yard, and Sentric Music, who were involved in placement schemes have exemplified the LCR music sector's growth and scalability.
- The fund facilitated resilience, fostering a high business survival rate that has underscored its effectiveness, with all funded enterprises remaining operational.

BRAND AND PLACEMAKING

- The LCR's reputation as a music hub has been strengthened, attracting major venues and institutions.
- Partnership collaboration with bodies such as PRS Foundation continue to elevate the region's profile within the national sector.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT

- Nurturing skills and talents as musicians and sector practitioner role demonstrated how these can be adopted as tools for inclusion, with targeted programmes addressing deprivation and underrepresentation.
- Initiatives such as the Black Music Action Group and informed funding support for Black-led organisations and creators has advanced equity in the sector.

9.4 OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Liverpool City Region is now positioned at the forefront of music sector initiatives (outside of London), but maintaining this lead requires sustained commitment:

NATIONAL POLICY ALIGNMENT

- The UK Government's focus on creative industries in its Industrial Strategy presents an opportunity – the region should where feasible mirror this with continued sector investment.

LIVERPOOL CITY REGION AS A PIONEER

- Other regions are adopting LCR's models, which speaks to the region's growing prominence.
- The programme's legacy is evident in the landmark £6.75 million MusicFutures research and development funding. This programme, to be administered by the University of Liverpool alongside Liverpool John Moores University, positions the Liverpool City Region as a UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Creative Cluster for music. This award would not have been possible without evidence of the region's music sector's engagement with the SIF programme's proven track record. However, whilst MusicFutures will contribute to creative industry innovation in the region, is not a replacement for sustained sector investment, rather it is an extension of it.

9.5 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Build on this programme's success** – apply lessons learned, with improved impact longitudinal reporting mechanisms to better demonstrate growth.
2. **Ensure funding remains consistent** – MusicFutures, as an R&D focused programme, is not a replacement for strategic, sector-specific investment.
3. **Target growth funding proactively** – accelerate growth through planned, local sector knowledge-led interventions.

9.6 REFLECTION

The Liverpool City Region's music sector stands at a pivotal moment. The SIF programme has proven that strategic investment in music yields economic, cultural, and social dividends. The foundations laid by the SIF programme have positioned it as a national leader, however, the challenge now is to sustain this momentum. With the right investment and policy support, the region can solidify its status as a global music innovation hub that not only drives economic growth but also fosters inclusive and sustainable creative industries. The success of this programme is as a blueprint for future investment to accelerate sector growth.



10

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Richard Anderson is a Research and Innovation Associate for MusicFutures, working with the University of Liverpool, Music Department, a Researcher with the Institute of Popular Music, and is also the data lead for the Live Music Mapping Project, an international live and full music sector mapping project. His research has focused on underground dance music scenes, music venues' socio geographies and gentrification, and the impacts of COVID-19 on the music sector.

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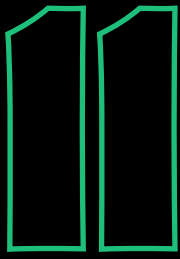
All those who generously gave up their time to take part in interviews, and those who responded to the online survey.

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APPENDIX 1

This report has made use of a thematic analysis of 21 face-to-face in-person or online interviews with 15 beneficiaries (e.g., artists, SMEs, training participants) and 4 delivery partners and an online survey.

Details of the thematic analysis process for the 21 interviews: Participants were selected to cover strategic delivery partners and programme administrators, and a range of beneficiaries who had engagement with skills and talent development programmes, as well as small businesses in receipt of investment awards. The interviews were conducted with participants informed consent under a University of Liverpool approved ethics clearance. Interviews were semi-structured, on average lasted 30 minutes and were audio recorded, and then transcribed. The transcriptions were analysed using Nvivo software using a thematic analysis coding method⁴⁹. Significant themes were identified and drawn together to form an understanding of the outcomes and impacts of the programme. Select interviews were used as the basis

for case studies in the report. All participants named in the report, have given consent for their anonymity to be waived and have approved any direct quotations used.

The online survey received 49 responses from funding award beneficiaries using contact details supplied by the Music Office. The survey was not distributed to trainees, people on placements, school children etc. Statistical data from the survey platform (Jisc) has informed the findings and select commentary from free text questions has been used. Respondent demographics are listed below.

All secondary data sources are referenced in the end notes, and have been used to provide background context, identify data sourcing, and highlight historical reference points.

In addition, records from the Music Office, including reporting spreadsheets, application evaluation forms and email communications between the funding body and applicants have been analysed and informed findings and statistical analysis.

12

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