Equitable Music Education with True Cadence

Exploring music business, diversity and education in young people's music provisions

Jo Gibson, Emmanuel 'Manny Loveankh' Ebokosia, Zheng Chai & Ode Idoko
True Cadence and Institute for Social Justice, York St John University
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True Cadence

Est. 1841 YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY

Institute for Social Justice
York St John University

Jago Xyen
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Socials:

Executive Summary

This research project was a collaboration between York St John's Institute for Social Justice (ISJ) and music social enterprise True Cadence. It was supported by an ISJ Community Research Grant.

As a co-produced place-based project, we used a combination of qualitative and creative methods to:

1) map music activity and networks in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD),
2) ask young people what they think of music provisions in LBBD, and
3) consider True Cadence's organisational structure against its aims.

Key findings:

- **LBBD has a rich informal and grassroots music scene,** however this activity is not very visible online and is **under-resourced compared to other London boroughs**.
- **Limited music infrastructure and provisions for under 18s** is a cause for concern given LBBD has the highest proportion of under 16's in England and Wales, and children and young people (especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds and other marginalised groups) are less likely to be able to travel out of borough to access provisions.
- At the time of writing this report, **TC is the only music-specific social enterprise in LBBD**.
- Whilst there are several networks in operation in LBBD, there **is currently no music network**.
- **As a young and diverse borough, space for all musics in LBBD provisions is important.** However, as is the case nationally, music education is in decline with increasing inequities.
- **Young artists in East London** expressed their music passion, ambitions and enjoyment. They also expressed challenges they face in trying to make it in the industry including the cost-of-living crisis and experiences of isolation, sexism and ill mental health.
- **TC's governance model facilitates agile decision-making** and seeks to democratise power by involving young people in meaningful ways.

Recommendations:

MAPPING MUSIC ACTIVITY IN LBBD

More mapping is needed of LBBD music activity by those that live, study and work in the borough for better understanding on their terms.

SPACE FOR ALL MUSICS

Building on the incredible diversity of East London, there should be space for all musics within music provisions for young people. Young people should be active in deciding what music is made and enjoyed.

MORE MUSIC BUSINESS LEARNING PATHWAYS

To address the lack of music business study options available to under 18s, more varied and equitable music business learning pathways are needed.

NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

To increase opportunities for collaboration, learning and support, we propose developing an East London Music Network co-produced with diverse young people and open to all working with communities through music.

"To change the world you have to start with community,
so serving the community is the most important thing to me"

(Founder and CEO of True Cadence, 2023)

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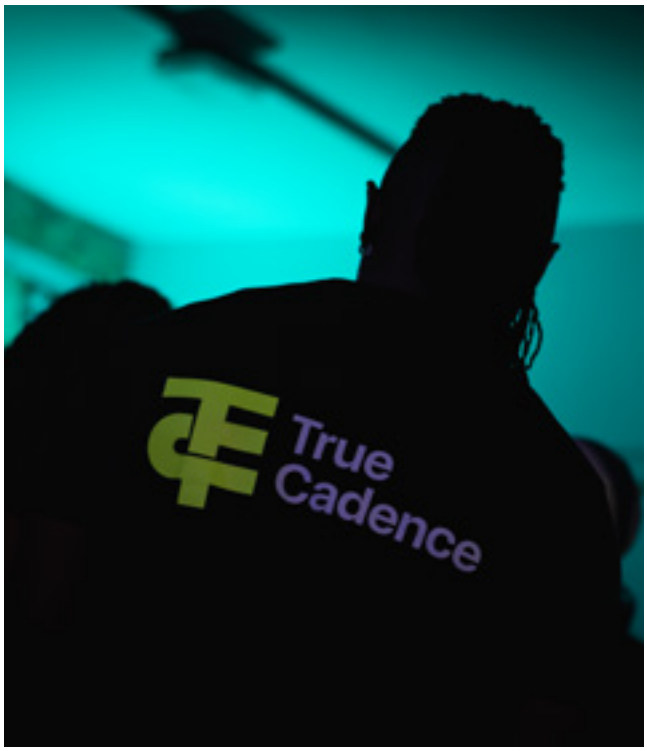
About True Cadence



True Cadence (TC) is a multi-award-winning music social enterprise based in Barking & Dagenham and serving across East London. As the home of grassroots music business education, TC works with upcoming artists and aspiring music industry professionals who wish to know how the music industry works. It provides tailored music workshops, mentorship, and a platform for young people to understand the business side of music while building the skills, confidence, and social network they need to become 'industry-ready'. TC's Vision is for every young person to express themselves creatively and have the opportunity to make it in the music industry.

Learn more about True Cadence via their website: https://truecadence.org

About York St John University's Institute for Social Justice

York St John University's Institute for Social Justice facilitates social justice research, projects and partnerships that help to pursue and promote a fairer society. It does this by developing collaborative research and practice that seeks to identify, expose and address some of the inequalities, injustices and challenges facing society today. At its core the Institute seeks to work *with* people, *with* partners and *with* communities in a manner that sees **participation**, **implementation** and **change** as vital parts of its mission.

Learn more about the Institute for Social Justice via their website: https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/research/institute-for-social-justice/

About the project

This research project was a collaboration between York St John's Institute for Social Justice (ISJ) and music social enterprise True Cadence. From October 2023 – July 2024 we worked together to learn about music activity and networks in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD). We wanted to find out what music provisions are available to young people in LBBD and how this compares to other East London boroughs. Most importantly, we wanted to learn what young people think of this. Alongside this, we looked at True Cadence's organisational structure and how it supports its aims.

The project was funded by an ISJ Community Research Grant. These grants support research partnerships between the university and community-led organisations in the voluntary, charity and social enterprise sector. Information about the grants can be found on this webpage: https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/research/institute-for-social-justice/community-research-grants/

The research team

Emmanuel 'Manny Loveankh' Ebokosia
True Cadence Founder and CEO
manny@truecadence.org

Dr Jo Gibson
YSJ Institute for Social Justice Research Fellow
j.gibson1@yorksj.ac.uk

Dr Zheng Chai
YSJ Lecturer in business management
z.chai@yorksj.ac.uk

Ode Idoko
True Cadence Programmes and Operations Manager

Methodology

True Cadence and YSJ's Institute for Social Justice worked together to explore music business, diversity and networks in East London's music ecology. This co-produced research used a combination of qualitative and creative methodologies.

To map music activity and networks in LBBD we:

- read reports about music and wider cultural activity within the borough,
- looked for registered voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations operating in East London via the Charity Commission for England and Wales and Companies House,
- undertook web and social media searches of LBBD music projects and organisations,
- held conversations with members of LBBD council, the LBBD music service, local arts organisations and venues, and
- held an event with an open invitation to young musicians, and to individuals and organisations working with young people through music in East London to check our findings.

To ask young people what they think of music in LBBD we:

- held a lyric writing workshop with children aged 8 – 13 years living in the borough, and
- invited True Cadence participants aged 18 – 25 years to share their perspectives by responding to a creative brief.

To learn about True Cadence's organisational structure and the extent to which it supports its aims we

- interviewed True Cadence management and board members, and
- held a focus group with True Cadence participants that had served on their youth board or had taken on other leadership roles, and True Cadence staff.

Across the activity, young people were presented with multiple modes to participate and were renumerated for their time. All participants were given the option for their report contributions to be anonymised or credited. Final decisions about whether a participant is acknowledged (and therefore identifiable) were taken in negotiation with the participant, alongside consideration of their safety.

Ethical approval was granted for the research by York St John's School of Arts Ethics Committee.

Key Findings

Mapping music activity and networks in Barking and Dagenham

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD) is amongst the highest Index of Multiple Deprivation in the country, with the highest score in London (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, 2022). LBBD is a diverse borough with the tenth highest global majority population in England, and the highest proportion of under 16's in England and Wales (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, 2024). As a young and diverse borough, what is available to young people – in terms of resource and activity, including where it is, how it operates, and young people's say – matters. To contribute to this, we sought to map music provisions available to young people in LBBD. We did this with the aim of better understanding the borough's position within East London's music ecology.

Through our discussions with young people, artists and organisations, a rich music scene was reported in the borough. People make and enjoy music in homes, places of worship, festivals, schools and other spaces. However, this activity is not very visible online. One reason for this could be because much of the activity operates at a grassroot level, another could be around capacity and coordination to make activities visible.

> *'There's music on almost every street corner in some parts of the borough. For example, where there are many churches, music features heavily. In that sense there is a lot of provision – but it's not formal'*
>
> (Erik Stein, Head of Participation, Opportunity and Wellbeing, Education Commissioning, LBBD Council)

Although a rich music scene was reported, previous mapping and reviews show LBBD as a 'cold spot' where 'little or no non-formal music provision is taking place, and where socio-economic disadvantage is highest' (Becko, 2012). In 2016 *Creative People and Places,* an Arts Council England funded project, reported:

> 'Barking and Dagenham has a lower than average level of engagement with the arts. Many local people often felt disconnected to the place because there was a sense that there was a lack of opportunities on offer in the borough' (2016, p.4).

In 2018 the Mayor of London created a map of London's music spaces for creating, performing, consuming and rehearsing music. (The map can be accessed via https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/first-map-to-cover-full-range-music-spaces). It showed LBBD as having less music infrastructure relative to other parts of London. As the map's accompanying text explains,

> Although many outer boroughs are working on new music infrastructure, several now appear to have no or very little local opportunity for new and emerging talent at all. The historic model of outer music venues growing talent, then feeding talent towards the centre has largely disappeared (Greater London Authority, 2019).

LBBD music infrastructure for children and young people is further limited. As a young participant at the lyric writing workshop held for this research explained;

> *'A lot of venues around here are 18+'*

Further to this, it is of note that LBBD did not feature at all in maps of London presented in the associated Mayor of London 2017 Making Progress Report. Anything east of mid-Newham was cut (literally by the positioning of the map on the page) from their map of grassroots venues trading in 2016, perhaps indicating that none were identified at the time. Or alternatively indicating that 'Barking and Dagenham is an outer London borough which is often regarded as a place that is on the margins, as neither Essex nor London' (Creative People and Places, 2016).

The issue of LBBD's locality as 'not being deep enough into London, or deep enough into Essex' (Event attendee, 2024) was raised by attendees at a Beats and Boroughs event we held as part of this research for musicians and music organisations working with young people in East London. At that event, LBBD's liminal position was attributed to challenges with obtaining funding. Funding challenges are likely to have contributed to the borough's previous identification as a 'cold spot' for non-formal music provision.

True Cadence participant Billy O'B agreed that as a young person, where you grow up is a big factor in what opportunities you can access. In a spoken word piece that he created for this research he explains;

> *I been staying on my grind I'm tryna work until I'm litty*
> *There ain't many opportunities outside a big city*

Billy, who lives outside of London, joined True Cadence through their online provision. Whilst he is speaking as someone living outside a 'big city', we suggest his words, alongside the discussion at our Beats and Boroughs event, shows that in addition to the scale of a city, **what part of the city you are in counts**. In short - the more central, the more opportunities.

Currently, LBBD is an Arts Council England Priority Place for their 2021 – 2024 delivery plan (2022). Recent years have seen several new initiatives in the borough including for example New Town Culture (2024), the Barking Artist Enterprise Zone (2022) and Eastbrook Studios (2024). However, whilst there has been growth in arts initiatives, this is mostly for artforms other than music.

LBBD music provisions: Programmes, projects, venues and events in operation between 2022 – 2024

Our mapping of music provisions incorporates programmes, projects, venues and events based in LBBD and operating between 2022 – 2024. It includes organisations that work directly with people through music (including music as an interdisciplinary offer), i.e. not wider services that support organisations or institutions more broadly.

Whilst a rich music scene was reported in LBBD through informal and grassroots music making and enjoyment, this activity was not very visible online. Therefore, alongside web searches, the table was produced through a collaborative effort drawing on local knowledge, networks and word of mouth.

A table of LBBD music provisions: Programmes, projects, venues and events in operation between 2022 – 2024

Name	Type of provision	Self-description	Music specific or interdisciplinary	Website
Barking Churches Music Academy	Instrumental tuition	Here at the BCMA, we believe that everyone should get the opportunity to pick up an instrument and have that chance to create music.	Music specific	https://bcmadiscovermusic.wixsite.com/bcma
Barking & Dagenham Music Education Hub	LBBD music service	The Community Music Service of Barking and Dagenham (CMS) is the lead organisation for the Barking and Dagenham Music Education Hub (MEH) and supports music-making in schools and the wider community.	Music specific	https://www.bandmusichub.co.uk/
Barking Enterprise Centre	Venue	Office space and meeting rooms that are right for you. The studio space can be used for the headline events [it is] soundproof and can be hired for recording music, photo shoots and much more.	Interdisciplinary	https://beccic.co.uk/our-spaces/
Barking Folk Festival	Festival run through LBBD council	FREE family festival with the best music and dance from around the world	Music specific	https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/barkingfolkfestival
Barking Music & Drama	Performing arts group	Barking Music and Drama warmly welcomes new members... If ever you long to burst into song, Yearn for the chance to get up and dance, As a matter of fact, if you want to act, Then pick up the phone and make yourself known.....	Interdisciplinary	https://www.dazalweb.com/bmad2022/
Bhatti Gospel Music & Christian Youth Ministry	Independent tutor	Music school in Dagenham	Music specific	https://cademy.io/bhatti-gospel-music-christian-youth-ministry
Box up crime	Music production facilities	Having experienced the huge loss of valued friends to gang violence and crime, Stephen was inspired to create an organisation that would address the social issues affecting young people vulnerable to crime, and provide viable and positive alternative futures.	Interdisciplinary	http://boxupcrime.org
Broadway Theatre	Venue	The Broadway in Barking town centre is a performing arts venue and theatre presenting live music, dance, drama, comedy, variety, children's shows and lots more. This light, modern, flexible venue draws audiences from the borough and from across east London and west Essex.	Interdisciplinary	https://www.thebroadwaybarking.com/sales/site/about/about-us

Factory 15 (MAKE IT)	Venue	Factory 15 is brought to you in partnership with our big sister MAKE IT London. Inspired by creative and cultural moments produced within their workspace sites, a multi-use bar, culture and events space was the perfect next step.	Interdisciplinary	https://www.factory15.co.uk
Food for the soul	Children's holiday activity and food programme	The Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programme is free to children and young people who live or go to school in Barking and Dagenham and are eligible for benefit-related free school meals, with paid places available for everyone.	Interdisciplinary	https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/children-young-people-and-families/events-and-activities-children/free-holiday-activities
Future Moulds	Youth service	FMC are a not for profit organisation, committed to delivering youth & community projects providing social and inclusive activities for young people and their communities, using a holistic approach.	Interdisciplinary	https://futuremc.org.uk
Future Youth Zone	Youth service	Evenings and weekends, 52 weeks a year, we are the place for 8-19-year-olds and up to 25 years old with additional needs in East London to make friends, try new things and start their fantastic future now.	Interdisciplinary	https://www.futureyouthzone.org/about-us/
Green Shoes Arts	Arts and wellbeing programmes	Green Shoes Arts delivers high quality arts projects for the community of Barking & Dagenham, enabling people of all ages and backgrounds to access and engage with a wide range of creative and artistic activities.	Interdisciplinary	https://www.greenshoesarts.com
ideate education	Youth mentoring, workshops and consultancy	Our work is all about empowering youth journeys, sparking creativity, crafting solutions, and building community.	Interdisciplinary	https://www.ideate-ed.com
John Smith House	Music studio sessions	John Smith House is a re-purposed council venue that has, since September 2021, been the home to several community groups doing great work to empower young people in the borough.	Interdisciplinary	https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/children-young-people-and-families/youth-services/john-smith-house
MAKE IT Barking	Venue	MAKE IT London are vibrant work and social space curators. Our hybrid hubs bring energy, enterprise and social value to underused buildings alongside a community of dynamic industries.	Interdisciplinary	https://www.makeitlondon.co.uk/barking
Millhouse social club	Venue	Live music on Saturday and Sunday nights	Interdisciplinary	https://www.millhousesocial.co.uk

New Town Culture	Project	Radio Ballads, Songs for Systems Change: A three year-long project with residents of Barking and Dagenham, social care staff, carers, cultural organisations and artists.	Interdisciplinary	https://www.newtownculture.org/projects/radio-ballads-artist-commission-with-adult-care-and-support-services-2022/
One Borough Festival	Festival run through LBBD council	Our biggest festival of the year is back and this time it's bringing the best from all your favourite festivals with it - so there will be classic cars from the Steam and Cider Fair, and tribute and rock 'n' roll entertainment from Roundhouse Music Festival all wrapped up in one big community fun day.	Interdisciplinary	https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/one-borough-festival
One Room Live	Creative Collective	An interdisciplinary art platform which has its centre in music. Music is a power to convene, connect and how all art forms come together to make a heightened experience of coming together. Listen to music. We've done festival live shows and recently just did something with Rnbrit UK, which platform R&B artist and we had international artists from Sweden come down and also a red soil and channel hosted a room that was around listening experience and listening party of music.	Interdisciplinary	https://www.oneroomlive.com
Roundhouse Barking	Venue	The Live at The Roundhouse Events Hall in Dagenham Essex was established in 1969 and was then known as the "Village Blues Club". Up until 1975 it was regarded as East London's foremost music venue, making legends of headlining acts including; Elton John, Led Zepplin, Fleetwood Mac, Deep Purple, T Rex, Queen, Status Quo, Pink Floyd, ELO, Genesis and many more.	Music specific	https://roundhousepuboffical.wixsite.com/roundhousedagenham/venue
Soul and Sound	Health and creativity programmes	At Soul and Sound CIC, we are passionate about empowering young people, families, and underserved communities through innovative programs that promote health, wellbeing, and creativity. Our mission is rooted in two transformative initiatives: Soul & Sound.	Interdisciplinary	https://www.soulandsound.com
The Boathouse Studios	Venue	A supportive hub for artists and creatives. The Boathouse Studios offers an inspiring environment for rehearsals, performances, meetings, and retreats.	Interdisciplinary	https://www.boathousebarkingstudios.com

True Cadence	Music business and industry programmes and workshops	True Cadence (TC) is a multi-award-winning music social enterprise based in Barking & Dagenham and serving across East London. As the home of grassroots music business education, TC works with upcoming artists and aspiring music industry professionals who wish to know how the music industry works. It provides tailored music workshops, mentorship, and a platform for young people to understand the business side of music while building the skills, confidence, and social network they need to become 'industry-ready'. TC's Vision is for every young person to express themselves creatively and have the opportunity to make it in the music industry.	Music specific	https://truecadence.org
UKON Careers	Youth service and carnival	UKON Careers, established in May 2014 as a Community Interest Company (C.I.C), began with a mission to provide empowering career guidance and motivational support for young people and the broader community	Interdisciplinary	https://ukoncareers.com

The table shows 6 music-specific offers in operation in LBBD between 2022-2024. These 6 are made up of programmes, projects, venues and events. This small number is reflective of:

1) the borough's diverse music scene being largely informal and of particular communities (for example music made and enjoyed through faith groups or in the home), and
2) previous reporting of LBBD as a 'cold spot', with 'lower than average engagement with the arts' and less arts infrastructure.

This however calls into question what counts as music provision, art and engagement and who decides? We suggest there is a need for more mapping by and with those in the borough to determine this.

As far as we can tell, True Cadence is the only music-specific social enterprise in LBBD. True Cadence is also distinct in its offer of music industry and business programmes for young people. Whilst there are a few music studios in the borough, one LBBD council employee explained, "There is a lack of personnel with production expertise to support young people to use them" (Martin Russell, Culture and Wellbeing Lead, Education, LBBD Council, 2024). Furthermore, many of the other music provisions in LBBD are discrete - taking place once annually, or once per school term for example - or are offered as part of venue events for over 18s. Regular and ongoing music provisions for young people outside of school settings, or free to access, are highly limited.

Finally, we recognise that our attempt to map music provisions in LBBD is inevitably partial. We therefore intend the table to be a living document. If you know of other music provisions active in the borough, you can add them via this Microsoft form: https://forms.office.com/e/X2SWLFdGkf

Learning about music business and industries: A gap in provision

As part of our mapping, we looked at music education more broadly. We did this because:

1) True Cadence (TC) provides music education through workshops and programmes, and
2) LBBD is a young borough; for many children and young people, school is a main point of access to music provisions.

From this we learned that TC is also in the minority when it comes to their music offer. TC work through a range of electronic and produced musics, including genres such as Hip Hop, Pop, R&B and others. A key aim of the organisation is to bring music industry level knowledge to the community. As TC CEO Manny explains:

> *'Young people may have access to studio time, but no one is really teaching them about the business side of the music industry. It's not something they have access to in schools, and rarely in college – and that's a problem. It can leave them open to power abuses in the industry, misrepresentation, or being cut out entirely' (2023).*

Whilst there are a growing number of higher education pathways to learning about music business, production and industries, there are little study options available to young people before that. Music in schools has traditionally focussed on music performance, composition, improvisation, listening (mainly aural and analytical skill development) and *some* music history – with little, if any, mention of music business. This remains the current statutory guidance for music curricular in England (Department for Education, 2021).

The National Plan for Music Education (NPME) confirms Manny's concern that options to study music business before university are highly limited. For example, in the 81-paged plan, 'music business' is mentioned once under a section titled 'Higher Education and Further Education' with regards to 'some students' focussing on 'specialist vocational training opportunities' (HM Government, 2022, p.68). Given that the plan celebrates the economic contribution of music and the importance of the music industry to the UK, limited pathways for young people to learn about and develop skills in music business is problematic.

To compound the issue, in recent years several sources have documented a decline in music education more broadly alongside growing inequities in England. In 2023, Ofsted itself reported that;

> *'There is a clear divide between children and young people whose families can afford to pay for music tuition and those who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This inequality of opportunity, highlighted at the time of our last subject report, persists.'*

This is an issue for Barking and Dagenham too, as a LBBD council employee explains;

> *'[B]eyond your whole class music tuition and peripatetic music, [formal music provisions in LBBD] kind of hit the most upwardly mobile families and young people of the borough' (Interviewee 2, 2024).*

An Independent Society of Musicians report goes as far as describing music as **'a subject in peril'** (2022). They evidence a decline in music education alongside increasing inequities with regards to who can participate. However, their substantial report does not make any reference to 'electronic', 'produced music' or 'music business'. This leads us to ask – **if music education is in decline and unequal, whose or what music education are we talking about?**

We call for more music business learning pathways available to young people prior to Higher Education that are varied and equitable.

Space for all musics: A cultural democracy perspective

What, or whose music is to be included in music provisions, and who decides, are important questions. Guided by the music that participating young people want to make and enjoy, TC's music offer often includes genres which have been marginalised through for example the policing and criminalisation of black musics (Fatsis 2021; Addo 2022; Hall et al 2023) or the privileging of Western musical epistemologies in music education (Hess, 2021).

From a cultural democracy perspective (Jeffers & Moriarty 2017; Kelly 2022), we take the view that **there should be space for all musics within music provisions for young people** and that young people should be active in deciding what music is made and enjoyed. From this perspective, all music can be valued. Writing for the Youth Music Network, recording artist Max Wheeler explains;

> *'Education needs to make the leap and accept that all forms of music are valuable, regardless of our own personal taste. Mozart may have more harmonic complexity than a Stormzy track (arguably in some cases), but Stormzy wins on complex syncopated rap flows and using language to interact with an international hip hop & grime fanbase. These are both important. One does not exclude the other' (2019).*

Speaking at our Beats and Boroughs event, music educator and publishing specialist Laura Erinle deepened the conversation. She explained that pigeonholing musicians to one genre is naïve because musicians can work across genres, rather than seeing them in competition.

> *'I think placing musics in a dichotomy is wrong. ... [Think of] the so-called greats in black music – they are intelligent crazy beautiful musicians. Many have a diverse music background, like my closest friend who is both classically trained and the best producer that I know' (2024).*

As a young and diverse borough, space for all musics is important in LBBD as Community Music Service Business Development Manager Lizzie Kitto explains,

> *'East London is incredible, the diversity we have, the passion that we have, the opportunities that we have. We have opportunities to make this a cultural hub – not through a movement away from classical music, but through a movement to allow people to do more digital and produced musics if that's what they want, and more opportunities outside of schools' (2024).*

Raps and rhymes – insights from young artists

Alongside mapping music provisions in LBBD, we wanted to find out what is important to young artists today for them and their music making. To do this we invited True Cadence (TC) participants to respond to a creative brief. The invitation was open to all TC participants and asked,

1) What's important to you – as a young person, as an aspiring artist?
2) What's needed for young artists right now?
3) What brings you to True Cadence? Why do you work with them?

Participating young people were told they could respond to any or all of the questions in any way – including not responding or doing something different.

Whilst each young person responded in a different way, there were some commonalities. This included expression of their music ambitions, personal experiences of marginalisation and structural and systemic barriers to becoming an artist today. We now share three examples.

Way by Jago Xyen

Jago Xyen's track *Way* gives insights into his experiences as a young artist 'tryna find my way'. He talks about the challenges of trying to make it as an artist without the support or belief of others on top of financial worries. As his lyrics explain,

Hard knock life when you're living with debt
Going to work cashing minimal cheques
Anxiety see me steaming from stress
Have you caught all my subliminals yet?
[...]
Trying my best but they see liabilities
Without my success and abilities
Jumping through hurdles I got the agility
But they treat me like a pity

Jago Xyen's message resonates with key issues of our time including negative portrayals of young black men on screen (Nwonka 2021), isolation, reduction in youth services (DCMS 2024) and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on young people (Youth Select Committee 2024). Jago talked about the track and his process of making it at the Beats and Boroughs event we held for this research. We quote him at length here to give space for Jago Xyen to share his perspective of the track's message and his experience of making it;

> *'[I was] Making something where it's a stand up track on its own, but when Jo and Manny use it in the research and stuff like [it draws focus on the challenges of] having to pay bills and having to work and not being able to be a full time artist, and wanting a team, but not having a team, and not knowing who to go to to be supported for music.*
>
> *And really feel[ing] like you have all this talent and potential, but not feeling like there is enough people who can back you and be with you and help you on your journey as an artist. It was a fun song to make. I feel that at the time I just wasn't writing, like I'd always write, but I hadn't sat down to write, so I thought to myself ok, I've got this brief – it's a creative challenge – let me write a song ... and yeah it was beautiful'* (2024).

Scan the QR code to listen to a clip of Way

Or visit this link:
http://bit.ly/3EqqfwE

Full of Cadence by Goodr3i

Goodr3i's track *Full of Cadence* gives insights into her experiences as a young artist and mum. She talks about additional demands that are placed on women and girls trying to make it in the industry as they are required to present in sexualised ways through their content. As her lyrics explain,

Man check out my steeze
Pimping my fit
Got a brand to keep up
Consistence is key

[...]

The industry is tricky
You ain't popping without attention yeah

Goodr3i is not alone in her message. Over the last two decades, misogyny and gender-based violence in the creative industries has hit the spotlight through movements such as Me Too (2006), UNESCO's work on gender equality, heritage and creativity (2014), and more recently in the UK, via a Women and Equalities Committee report; Misogyny in music (2024). Goodr3i talked about the track at the Beats and Boroughs event. She explained;

> *'[The] creative brief touched on what it is like for me in the industry ... As a female I felt like I had to present myself in a way that was quite seductive, or just not in a way that I felt like I am. I felt like I had to portray myself as someone that wanted to always party.*
>
> *[...] Then also there were opportunities that TikTok were bringing and having to always create content ... and like I am an artist, but I have other personal things – like I am a mum so it's not always possible to create music or even content to put out there' (2024).*

Scan the QR code to listen to Full of Cadence

Or visit this link:
https://bit.ly/4b1opP3

Therapy by Billy O'B

In Billy O'B 's spoken word piece *Therapy,* he gives insights into his experiences of ill mental health and ways in which making music has helped him. As his lyrics explain,

I'm writing music tryna better my health
All them things that I present of myself

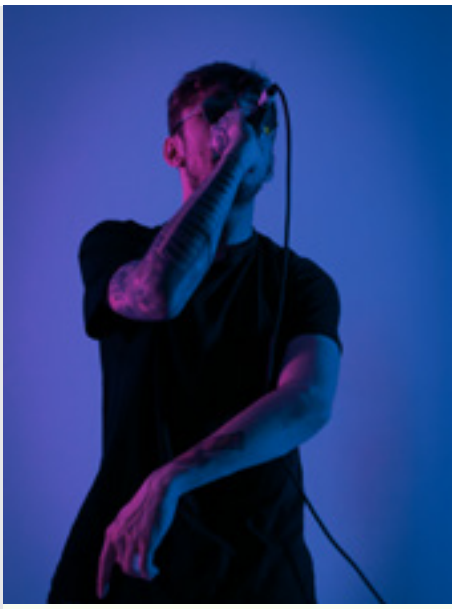
[...]

Put my pain on to a page instead of cutting with razor
Bottlin my feelings then I smash them on the paper
Give a glimpse at all the things that I'm debating day to day
Rip the page or face the case
Hit the road or pave the way
Run the game and make it pay,
Take a risk to play it safe

Billy O'B's message speaks to rising numbers of children and young people experiencing poor mental health. As Action for Children report, 'One in six children aged 5 – 16 are likely to have a mental health problem. This figure has gone up by 50% in the last three years' (2024). It also speaks to increasing understandings of the ways in which music can improve mental health (Perkins et al 2020). Billy O'B talked about the piece at the Beats and Boroughs event. He explained;

> *'This is a spoken word piece. I named it Therapy. It kind of just explains what music is [to me] and where it all started from.*
>
> *It's something that I don't normally do, like speaking, I guess that explicitly about something that's personal like ... that's kind of the stuff that I found harder. Like I can do rap gymnastics all day if I want to, but when you are actually talking about real stuff it's quite hard' (2024).*

The young people that took part in the creative brief saw it as a space to talk about 'real stuff' in ways they might not ordinarily. Alongside their ambitions as young artists, they spoke about challenges they experience. Whilst discussion of challenges isn't something that we asked for, it is resonant with issues discussed earlier in this report including decreasing and unequal music provisions and education, and a need for more varied and equitable music pathways for young people.



Scan the QR code to listen to Therapy

Or visit this link:
https://bit.ly/3WNLf6z

True Cadence's organisational structure: Bridging the gap between tokenism and genuine inclusivity

The third strand to the research included exploration of True Cadence's (TC) organisational structure and how it supports its aims. TC presents an interesting example of governance, particularly in how it integrates youth voice into its decision-making processes. It's governance model both facilitates agile decision-making and seeks to democratise power by involving young people in meaningful ways. Like many youth music organisations, youth voice and participation is pertinent to their work (see, for example, Sound Connections for youth voice and participation resources including their Youth Voice on Demand YouTube Channel: https://www.sound-connections.org.uk/resources/youth-voice-on-demand-youtube-channel/).

TC's governance structure is currently characterised by simplicity. It is relatively flat, with only three board members, including the CEO. Initially, it developed a governance structure that allowed youth representatives to sit on the voluntary board of directors. The establishment of a youth board is a strategic move to institutionalise youth participation. The intention is to create a structure where young people are not merely passive recipients of decisions but active contributors to the organization's strategic direction. This involves more than just providing feedback; it requires empowering youth to make decisions, lead projects, and have a say in the governance of the organization.

* *See appendix 1 for a table of TC's governance, including direct quotes from TC staff and participants to evidence claims.*

Beyond tokenism

The presence of a youth board does not necessarily demonstrate that TC is designing activities *with* beneficiaries rather than *for* them. Concern regarding the youth board being enacted tokenistically led to TC discontinuing the youth board. TC has implemented a youth-led participatory governance structure to ensure that youth voices are not only heard but also integrated into the decision-making process. In youth-led participatory governance, effectively integrating youth voices is crucial for inclusivity and responsiveness. TC exemplifies this approach by prioritising ongoing engagement and feedback mechanisms over traditional youth representative board meetings. For instance, TC regularly seeks input during and after programs, allowing youth to shape activities. A dedicated WhatsApp group further facilitates continuous dialogue for comments and suggestions. This fluid feedback system contrasts with potentially performative monthly board meetings, ensuring that youth perspectives actively influence decisions and organizational responsiveness at TC. With this approach, they aim to avoid tokenism and ensure that activities are genuinely beneficial to the intended recipients. Youth voice in decision-making processes enables the manager to respond accurately to beneficiary feedback for a co-produced commons. TC's governance model is undergoing a transformative process aimed at increasing youth participation and decentralising decision-making power. By establishing leadership training, TC is working to create a more inclusive and democratic governance structure to continue to evolve its commitment to empowering youth.

Towards youth leadership

TC's strategic vision for youth empowerment involves a multi-tiered approach to leadership development. They aim to provide tailored support and training for young people, equipping them with the skills necessary to take on leadership roles within TC. This approach is designed to ensure that youth board members are not only involved in governance but are also prepared to transition into more significant roles within the organization, potentially leading to positions on the main board of directors. By providing structured opportunities for youth to develop their leadership capabilities, TC is laying the groundwork for a more democratic and responsive organisational model. This model not only values the contributions of young people but also integrates their insights into the organization's strategic planning and execution processes. The ultimate goal for TC is to transition to a governance model where youth leadership is central. This means creating an environment where young people are not just participants but are driving the organization's agenda and decision-making.

Operating as a social enterprise: possibilities and limitations

Being a social enterprise is fundamental to the mission of TC as an organization designed to create a supportive community. Thus, its social purpose draws a very small amount of its trading income, with the rest from grants and donations. They need to face the pressure from the VBOD, beneficiaries, donors, market, and the community. It has invested in a robust hybrid structure, enabling its trading activities to align with its social mission. This has illuminated both challenges such as limitations on TC regarding what they can achieve in terms of impact and sustainability, and at the same time possibilities including collaboration as a necessity driving collective action.

Relationships for collection action: Developing a network

Throughout this research young people, TC staff and arts organisation leads and artists talked about the importance of working together for positive change.

'I'm looking to identify partners because we can do more together'

(Lizzie Kitto, LBBD Community Music Service, 2024)

'It's all about connecting with each other, because if there's something you're struggling with, someone else might have it on-lock'

(Manny Loveankh, TC, 2024)

'Collaboration is central to us. Working with people across backgrounds, ages and stages can get to deeper insights. There is a richness in diversity'

(Carole Pluckrose, The Boathouse Studios, 2024)

For many young people that participated in the research, meaningful relationships and a culture of trust underpinned positive experiences of working together.

'It's almost a second family that allows you to grow up doing what you love to do ... [At TC] the bonds always remain strong. It is not the same everywhere'

(TC participant, 2024)

'The team and the staff have just created a really good culture in terms of the essence of what TC is. And it gives perspective of what the ultimate goal is. So, I think everybody is really on the same page'

(TC Youth Board Member, 2024)

The potential of working together was demonstrated during the period we undertook this research as TC developed a consortium of arts organisations. This enabled them to collectively secure Heath Park Community Centre – TC's first dedicated space to run activity.

Working together can support sustainability. Jago Xyen commented on this eloquently in the lyrics for his track *Way* created for this research;

> *'When I get big let me book me a team*
> *Cos doing this solo has got me fatigued'*

Networks offer a sustainable structure for collaborative working. Whilst there are several networks in operation in LBBD, there is currently no music network. In the early stages of this research, we considered developing an LBBD music network to address this. However, during our East London Beats and Boroughs event, attendees from across East London said they felt siloed and would appreciate more spaces to come together. Therefore, we propose developing an East London Music Network. The network will be open to all working with communities through music. It will take the form of a mixed ecology with young people, artists, organisation leads and others welcome. With a commitment to space for all musics it will seek to support those working with marginalised and excluded music practices and with marginalised and excluded peoples.

Speaking at our Beats and Boroughs event, Youth Music's Sam Scott explained the importance of participation for networks to thrive;

> *'One of the things that is important about any partnership network is that for it to work you have to participate in it. Whether you are an organisation, or a young person, the way these kinds of networks really thrive is by having loads of different input points from loads of different people sharing skills, knowledge and ideas' (2024)*

If you would like to participate (including contributing to the development and direction of) the East London Music Network, please complete this form: https://bit.ly/3CKQsFF or email info@truecadence.org

Conclusions

LBBD has a rich informal and grassroots music scene. People make and enjoy music in homes, places of worship, festivals, schools and other spaces. However, this activity is not very visible online **and is under-resourced** compared to other parts of London. Whilst 2021 – 2024 saw several new arts initiatives in the borough, this was mostly for artforms other than music.

True Cadence is the only music-specific social enterprise currently in operation in the borough and is one of two organisations that offer free regular music provisions for young people. This limited resourcing is problematic for LBBD. This is because LBBD has the highest proportion of under 16's in England and Wales, and children and young people (especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds and other marginalised groups) are less likely to be able to travel out of borough to access provisions.

There are little to no music business study options available to young people prior to Higher Education. TC is rare in its offer of music business learning pathways to under 18s. Given the economic contribution of music and the importance of the music industry to the UK, increasing pathways for young people to learn about and develop skills in music business is vital.

Young artists in East London expressed their music passion, ambitions and enjoyment. They also expressed challenges they face as they try to access provisions and/or pursue music as a career. These include personal experiences of marginalisation and structural and systemic barriers to becoming an artist today such as;

- trying to make it as an artist without the support or belief of others,
- financial stress,
- experiences of isolation,
- not knowing who to go to for support with music,
- experiences of sexism and misogyny, and
- experiences of mental health problems.

TC's governance model is undergoing a transformative process aimed at increasing youth participation and decentralising decision-making power. By establishing leadership training, TC is working to create a more inclusive and democratic governance structure to continue to evolve its commitment to empowering youth.

Our Beats and Boroughs research dissemination and reflection event sold-out and included a diverse audience, most of which were under 25. Attendees reported feeling siloed and thanked us for the opportunity to connect and consider issues of equity and diversity in music education and industry. Event feedback suggests there is appetite for a network of this type.

Recommendations

Mapping music activity in LBBD

Whilst there is a rich informal and grassroots music scene in LBBD this is largely undocumented. We recommend mapping of music activity to be conducted by and with those in the borough for better understanding of LBBD music provisions and activity on the terms of those that live, study and work there.

More music business learning pathways

To address the lack of music business study options available to young people prior to Higher Education in England, we call for more music business learning pathways available to under 18s that are varied and equitable.

Space for all musics

Building on the incredible diversity of East London, there should be space for all musics within music provisions for young people. And young people should be active in deciding what music is made and enjoyed.

Network development

To increase opportunities for collaboration, learning and support, we propose developing an East London Music Network co-produced with diverse young people and open to all working with communities through music.

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Appendix 1: True Cadence Governance

Governance principles	Operationalization	Data excerpt
User Boundaries:	Open access	*'While we can't cater to everyone for everything, we do try to make sure there is something for everyone in some shape or form'. (Founder & CEO)* *"Every single person can get something from TC, it's not just one particular set of people, not one particular set of individuals, we wanted to cater to every single person". (Former Youth Board Member)*
Resource Boundaries:	To young people between 8 and 25 years old from under-resourced communities in B&D	*'We typically work with children and young people aged 8 to 25, though some of our programmes, such as Music Therapy, cater to all ages. We intentionally use the term "young people from under-resourced communities" rather than "underprivileged" or "disadvantaged" because these labels suggest inherent limitations. In reality, any disadvantage stems from a lack of resources, not their capabilities as individuals.' (Founder & CEO)*
Congruence with Local Conditions:	Addressing the needs of young people in under-resourced areas by providing access to music education and production facilities, particularly where B&D resources for produced music are lacking.	*'We've been able to tailor the provisions of music education through Cadence to fit the community's demands. So how do we ensure that the music education programs meet the local communities' needs by gaining the knowledge of the community and also from the residents of the community? We know the structure, the contents of the community and also what the youths of the Community are like, so we are able to tailor our programs to meet him.' (Current BOD)*
Provision:	Providing a platform to access the music industry	*'Music making is a muscle, if you don't practice it, you start to lose it. So just provide the platform where they can do that'.* *'We want to be able to give young people real power, and to do that we want to be able to basically you know like support them and train them to know how to wield that power, what is required of them legally if they want to join the official board, what is the commitment'. (Founder & CEO)*
Collective Choice Arrangement:	Ensuring that youth voices are heard is fundamental to fostering openness and inclusivity	*'Because we had youth board meetings quite often so there was a lot to have your own input' (Former Youth Board Member)* *'Our branding is a bit outdated and then he told me that he was thinking about doing it already, like before but I just felt like, soon after the change happed, so I felt like he listened..... It was in a boarding meeting, so I think like while working part time at TC I was giving a lot of suggestion to Manny. Usually I am quite straightforward so like if I thought something was working of something was not working, I would tell him' (Current Participant)*
Monitoring the Users:	A youth-led participatory governance structure continually monitors the activities that meet the correct beneficiaries.	*'They were able to convince me why the young people should take a lead in deciding what programme to involve and even what facilitators to facilitate each session. ...The process is always very freeing, democratic and consultative.'(Programmes and Operations Manager)* *'We're giving them the ability to kind of pick and help create the project that they want. So one of the projects that they were kind of able to organise... And ultimately we wanna get to a point where we don't have to do anything, everything is just youth-led. The whole point is to get TC to the point where they can pick, the certain things that they wanna do'.(Director)*
Monitoring the Resource:	A family urban atmosphere to monitor the activities associated with community engagement, which is collectively specified and codesigned by the beneficiaries.	*'I want to say that True Cadence never abandons those who have been part of True Cadence. True Cadence family. The bonds always remain strong. It is not the same everywhere.' (Former Participant)* *'We pretty much started off by talking about what everyone wanted to get out of the programme which I thought was quite useful So it felt like all the participants almost crafted the programme to be like quite unique, and the facilitator allowed that to kind of happen and sort of kind of change every week into sort of adapting to everyone's needs. So, I would say that is a good way that TC takes on suggestion, like in the moment – when the programmes are actually happening' (Former Board Member)* *'TC was the best thing that happened to me in my life. It's almost a second family that allows you to grow up doing what you love to do, like music. It wasn't just about making music and going home.' (Former Participant)*
Nested Enterprises:	Structure responsive to pressure from the VBOD, beneficiaries, donors, market, and the community	*'Capacity being a very important part of it because when suggestions come forward there are a number of things to look out for; the viability of it, the legal aspects of things and most importantly the financial implications'. (Founder & CEO)*

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