



Learn your stripes:
Lianne La Havas holds court
at a BIMM event

LEARN BABY LEARN

The music industry is changing faster than ever, but **education** remains a bedrock of the business. In a special report, *Music Week* gathers the great and the good of the sector to chew over its biggest issues...

— BY BEN HOMEWOOD —

In a newsflash: the music industry needs to talk about education.

The message from the sector is coming loud and clear and, as *Music Week's* latest special report finds, the music industry must listen, and listen with interest.

“Music education is in a perilous state,” says David Barnard, education official at The Musicians’ Union. He’s not one to mince his words.

“Despite Government rhetoric about funding and model curriculums, our research has shown that the provision of a quality music education is very patchy and that children from poorer backgrounds are not getting the same access to music as their wealthier peers,” Barnard continues. “The headline figures show that children from families with an annual income of under £28,000 are half as likely to learn an instrument compared to those from families with an income of more than £28,000.”

Harry Leckstein, managing director at Tileyard Education – which offers a variety of music MA programmes at a London complex that houses 1,200 music professionals – is similarly forthright on the subject.

“It’s critical that we maintain the highest possible standards of education,” he says. “Especially at a time where



our government and local authorities are ignoring the proven statistics that arts, culture and creative industries contribute more to the national economy than agriculture, are cutting funding for arts projects and reducing music education provision in schools.”

As reported by *Music Week* in March this year, a new BPI study found a 21% decrease in state school music provision over the past five years, and the leading voices in the education sector say the problem doesn’t end there. Far from it.

Kwabena Oduro Ayim, COO of music platform Mixtape Madness, which has helped artists including Headie One and Unknown T share their music and specialises in educating up-and-coming talent in all aspects of the industry, says that accessibility is a key issue.

“Education providers need to make sure they are providing accessible resources so that all those who need and seek education are able to gain access to it,” he says.

“People need to look at those who may come from less privileged backgrounds and ask themselves, ‘Is there anything stopping someone like that from accessing what I have on offer?’ If the answer is yes, something must be changed until everyone is able to have equal access. If it’s not clear what exactly needs to be changed, then work needs to be done out to find out.”

Alongside worries surrounding the provision of music education, there are concerns over whether the industry is doing enough to focus on the issues at hand.

Kevin Nixon co-founded BIMM, now a beacon of the business, alongside Sarah Clayman in 2001, and has since relocated to America, where he is now the president and co-founder of the Detroit Institute of Music Education (DIME). Nixon is battling to ensure that the music executives of today are laying the foundations for future generations to excel.

“The biggest problem is that no one in the industry talks about education”

KEVIN NIXON
DIME GROUP

“The biggest problem is that no one in the industry talks about music education,” he begins.

“No one from the UK industry took any notice of BIMM until The Kooks broke through from our Brighton college in 2006. After that we helped many students reach the top including Tom Odell, George Ezra and James Bay before we sold up to start DIME.”

Regrettably, Nixon believes, the picture has hardly changed in the intervening years.

“It’s still the same story, the industry feels it’s someone else’s job to educate, yet our colleges are full of music industry people who are now brilliant teachers,” he says.

Nixon’s vision for good music industry education begins with “responsibility and absence of prejudice”.

His ideal would require changes at the very top of the business, too.

“Good music education [needs] all three major labels investing in it and developing music education divisions that sit alongside A&R, marketing and promotion,” he says. “It [needs to] value itself beyond charitable donations like The BRIT School – within this cash-rich subscriptions era the sector should not need to beg for money, rely on tax-payers and government handouts for proper modern music education.”

Nixon’s words are strong, and he’s not finished yet, calling for: “recognition that success in modern music can be planned, devised, calculated, researched and executed alongside any other career or start-up business”.

“Hardly anyone inside the music business has any interest in these things,” he finishes.

With recent alumni ranging from Octavian, Jade Bird and Freya Ridings to Rex Orange County, Loyle Carner and Black Midi, the Croydon-based BRIT School is fully focused on the talent pipeline.

Principal Stuart Worden spots a troublesome trend.



School of rock: Music students at DIME

“There is a worrying trend of reduced music provision and curriculum time in schools and a restriction to access to music education to learn, listen and perform,” he says.

“This leads to concerns about the talent pipeline, and connected to that is the practical issue of the increase in class sizes in secondary schools. There is a danger that the focus on skill and bespoke training will decrease.”

Mel Thornton at BIMM shares Worden’s concerns, and is keen to highlight her organisation’s work with schools.

“Supporting the talent pipeline and ensuring children in schools are aware of the opportunities presented by the music industry is one of the biggest talking points,” says Thornton. “We should all be aware of the work UK Music are doing to raise awareness of this issue.”

Next month, BIMM will be out in force at The Great Escape in Brighton, where the education conference will aim to tackle the issues facing the sector.

“We’re there not only to speak but to listen and learn,” she says. “Each year, BIMM presents over 400 workshops in schools, feedback is always great because kids don’t know about the range of careers involved in music. We need to think about the technology kids are using now and think how we can use this to capture their creativity.”

Clearly, the sector is striving to improve, and its different departments are building up some serious strength.

Music punches above its weight,” says Ken Foreman, programme leader of the music business degree course at the Institute of Contemporary Music Performance (ICMP) in North London. To maintain its industry value per capita, Foreman says, the music business must “ensure an ongoing and high quality pipeline of talent”.

ICMP’s part in this quest revolves around the recognition that students benefit from being equipped with an entrepreneurial outlook and skills that enable them to operate in different areas of the business.

“Music educators should prioritise helping students to develop the right mindset to recognise, embrace and manage innovation and change,” Foreman says.

“This is not meant to be a superficial quest for the next big thing, but a sophisticated understanding of the factors that stimulate change and shape consumer behaviour.”

Foreman, like many in the business, is considering the question of whether technology and machine learning can overtake the traditional idea of an ear and love for music.

“Supporting the talent pipeline and ensuring children know about opportunities in music is key”

MEL THORNTON
BIMM

“Our strategic viewpoint is that a symbiosis of both tech and creative minds will deliver the optimum results for the industry, in terms of growth and innovation, without ignoring the fundamental purpose of the industry, which is to make commercially viable music that people find entertaining,” he says.

Entertainment is high on the agenda at leading music accountancy firm CC Young, too. Founder and director Colin Young says the best preparation for aspiring accountants revolves around learning and live gigs.

“A good accountant should be legislatively compliant, financially stringent and, as John Cleese would attest, boring,” he says. “In the creative chaos of the music industry, our obligation is to ensure our clients adhere to financial discipline. That means pay the manager their management commission and pay HMRC the tax.”

According to Young, music business accountants need “technical excellence”.

“That is, three years of formal accounting and tax training with success in the exam hall every six months,” he explains. “This is a difficult road when the trainee also has to hold down the day job of rustling through purchase invoices to keep the taxable profits down. The twist is the application of technical rigour and discipline to a creative and chaotic music industry.”

Over at Tileyard, where 50% of its most recent MA music business graduates have already found employment in music, Leckstein emphasises the value in learning how to be comfortable within an ever-modernising industry.

“We try to hold up a window to how our part of the industry works – how commercial songwriters, producers, artists and entrepreneurs surf the global independent music industry wave,” says Leckstein. “Tileyard residents are largely mixed media creatives who work across multiple creative sectors. We seek to show our students how to reach this goal by putting them in the room with these practitioners on a daily basis.”

At Mixtape Madness, which has partnered with charities including youth social enterprise the 4Front Project, the Roundhouse Charity and the Youth Violence Commission, CEO Eddie Agyeman is promoting the breadth of opportunity in the industry.

“The idea that the only roles in the music industry are those of singer, rapper or producer needs to be dispelled,” he says. “There are other roles, like A&R, marketing and engineer, so if your talent isn’t the music itself, there are ways you can still be involved.”

Through initiatives such as its MM Talks project,



The kids are alright: BRIT School students in action

Mixtape Madness will continue to fight for young people interested in music, determined to improve accessibility.

“The music industry can be quite ruthless, and in order to ensure that your art is created and appreciated to its full potential education is key at all stages,” says CTO Kingsley Okyere. “If we want to get to a place where artists are not being hindered by anything other than talent, as it should be, then the education needs to be made more accessible to all.”

As technology continues to open doors and the industry is encouraged towards a progressive future, there’s a weighty argument supporting the idea that this is a key era for the business, and it’s not lost on the education sector.

“It is an exciting time to be connected to both the music industry and music education,” says BRIT School principal Worden. “Young people are becoming fearless in their output and this fluidity in their tastes and influences is thrilling to be around, if we can harness it and make it fly.”

DIME’s Nixon says we’re “at the early stages of what can be a golden era and that can include how we help the next generation, but we have to be aware and take care of it.”

Nixon believes the “refloating of the global musical economy” presents a chance to “bring music to what used to be the third world”, and DIME is pushing to add to its international remit, which already includes China.

Looking towards the future, Barnard says The Musicians’ Union will continue to “work tirelessly” to support music education. “The future success of our music industry requires a broad balance of musical skills, knowledge and experience, an understanding of business and technology, creativity and entrepreneurship,” he says.

“A world-class music education requires the synergy of three key elements: a quality music experience in schools, working in harmony with music hubs for instrumental teaching and ensemble experiences and a qualified, employed and motivated workforce.”

Mel Thornton at BIMM sounds a positive note in conclusion, citing UK Music research that says that the creative industries are growing at twice the rate of the wider economy and are now worth £92 billion to Britain.

“It’s essential to maintain the highest possible standards of education to inspire the next generation of music makers and artist teams to think big, be creative and enterprising,” she says.

“The music industry is never going to stop evolving. The next generation of music executives need to be lifelong learners so they keep changing as their roles develop. Educators should be helping students to constantly adapt. Keep asking questions and keep an open mind...”

“Future music industry success requires a balance of skills, business understanding and creativity”

DAVID BARNARD
THE MUSICIANS’ UNION

School rules, OK

The education sector on its biggest challenges...



David Barnard
Education official, The Musicians’ Union
“The continued decline of music in schools. Resolving this issue requires the Government to be honest about the impact of its policies and open to reform. This requires a new modern national curriculum, proper funding, commitment to teaching training, the inclusion of music and the other arts within the curriculum and an inspection process that embraces music.”



Ken Foreman
Associate dean/programme leader BA (Hons) music business & entrepreneurship, ICMP
“It’s widely understood that music in schools is under threat as a result of various policy and funding decisions. Fewer young people have opportunities to engage in music at an early age, and this will clearly have a long-term effect on the talent pool if it is not reversed. For our graduates, it is about making sure they transition into a job in the industry as they finish their degree.”



Kwabena Oduro Ayim
COO, Mixtape Madness
“The biggest challenge facing the sector is making sure it operates at the same pace as the music industry so that educators are always relevant. The challenge of catering to everyone as the music industry expands is tough, too.”



Harry Leckstein
Managing director, Tileyard Education
“Surviving the impact of an inevitable reduction in European and international students to the UK as a result of Brexit and its disappointingly populist wake. However, our industry boasts a number of excellent industry bodies and associations that continually voice our concerns to the highest levels and widest audiences, to welcome students from all countries to come and study music in the UK in all its fascinating, dynamic and exciting formats.”



Kevin Nixon
President and co-founder, DIME Group
“Academic equality, acceptance and recognition. Too many fail to recognise brilliance. It’s a daily struggle to get through to the brainwashed about what can happen if you take modern music education seriously.”



Mel Thornton
Head of careers & employability, BIMM
“The speed with which the music industry is changing means that that the curriculum needs to evolve too. The answer is constant dialogue not just within music, but the wider creative industries. There’s more crossover now than ever. Graduates must be flexible and see the opportunities change presents.”



Stuart Worden
Principal, The BRIT School
“Access. Where are the places young people are being encouraged to learn music? Why has it become marginalised in so many educational institutions when its impact is so significant? With less funding available in schools to run a music curriculum, who will we see being encouraged to make music and how can we impress its value upon the decision-makers?”



Colin Young
Founder & CEO, CC Young
“How do we as the business managers and accountants to the artist bring value to the table? The challenge is a rapid streaming evolution. Our challenge is to stay agile and relevant.”