



Higher Rhythm Ltd

Access and Participation Statement – Academic Year 2019/2020

Our Organisation and Our Work

Higher Rhythm is a Doncaster based not for profit organisation established in 2001, providing opportunities in the music, radio and creative industries. We run recording studio, a community radio station, a record label and promote music industry events, providing accessible programmes for people to participate in real-industry, real world based activities as learners and volunteers.

Our mission is: to raise aspiration and develop new opportunity by providing music, media and creative experiences, that nurture participation from people from a wide range of ages and backgrounds; offering professional development, training and support for individuals and organisations, and promoting inclusion for people and communities least engaged.

Essentially, one of our primary functions as an organisation is to promote access and participation for learners who may not thrive in mainstream learning environments.

Within our company objects it is explicitly stated that we will: *provide our services in a way that nurtures co-operation between people from a wide range of ages, ethnic, cultural and economic backgrounds.* This means that we are fundamentally bound to assure that our work is built upon diversity, and diversity remains central to the dynamic that drives our work forward, aligning with our vision for equality and creating an offer which reflects and celebrates the diversity of our local area and wider society.

At this point in time, our intention is to offer a single, Higher Education level course, starting academic year 2019-20, this being the HND In Music Technology (for which we have already received centre and qualification sign off to deliver from the awarding body, Pearson). This single course focus, however, does not reduce our focus on quality, our responsibility to our students or our legal compliance in any way, and we will approach our H.E. delivery with the due care and diligence required to achieve our goal of being an outstanding provider, competing favourably against similar programmes delivered by any other H.E. provider, regardless of scale.

Why We Focus on Access and Participation

Doncaster ranks 39th most deprived of 354 local authorities (National Indices of Deprivation) with 11 of 21 wards amongst the top 10% most deprived in England. Central Doncaster, where our main facility is based, is Doncaster's most deprived ward containing neighbourhoods within the top 3% most deprived. Over 40% of Doncaster's Super Output Areas (SOA's) are in the most deprived, with 5 SOA's in the worst 2% nationally. ACORN ratings demonstrate 59% of local people are from social grade C2, D, E and 33% are economically inactive.

As organisation, we are ever mindful of the barriers to accessing the industries we focus on as an organisation, particularly for people from less affluent areas where aspiration is lower, and we proactively work to find solutions to negate these barriers wherever we can in order to maintain diverse and wide inclusion in our services. Through providing a full path through tasters, short courses, FE and HE we aim to give local people and many of the non-traditional learners who have historically been participants in our activities, the opportunity to achieve the same results as people pursuing creative industry careers in other areas of the country, therefore negating the barrier of 'place', and access to resources, needed to achieve this.

We operate the following core values to continually guide our work:

SOCIAL – we exist exclusively for a social purpose

QUALITY – we strive to be a leader within our sector

INNOVATION – we constantly review practice to find new and better ways

SUPPORT – we provide our services primarily for those with greatest identified need

INTEGRITY – we are committed to building trust and maintaining an excellent reputation

Our Performance

Through recording and monitoring student backgrounds, current statistics evidence that 12% of participants across our full range of services are from BAME backgrounds (compared to 8% local / borough average), 19% have identified as having a disability, and 93% are from social grade C2, D, E, with 87% being from within the top 10% most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, nationally.

We continually record and monitor data around student backgrounds and take action wherever needed to assure that we continue to include people from the lower, least engaged, social groupings in percentages at or above local representation, to address traditional lower rates of inclusion of people from disadvantaged socio-economic settings and people from BAME backgrounds.

Currently, 93% of learners across our full range of services progress onto higher-level, programmes following their initial engagement activity, and 98% of learners engaged in courses successfully attain their chosen accreditation / qualification.

Our Ambitions and Strategy

How We Will Meet the National Priorities for Access and Participation

Access

Higher Rhythm has a particular expertise and is mission led in engaging people from disadvantaged social groups in our services, and currently, people from the top 10% most deprived wards nationally currently make up 87% of our service users. To achieve this, we focus on offering a widely accessible, supportive, community-based learning experience to nurture inclusion of people have not, and potentially would not, thrive in a more mainstream / college learning environment, and, providing need-responsive learning opportunities for adults which are flexibility structured to accommodate their, often more complex, life-responsibilities and commitments. A key non-core / non-routine activity involved is achieving this inclusion, is delivering our activities in specific geographically and economically isolated neighbourhoods where people are less likely to travel to the urban centre where we are based.

In order to support access and increase entry rates to Higher Education for people from these groups, we will continue to invest resources in the existing successful mechanisms which drive recruitment, allowing us to perform above local area representations in recruitment for our HE provision, as we have across our full range of services for more than 17 years. We will commit and evidence a minimum £12,000 each year towards delivering the above activities, and will also operate a hardship fund, totalling £3000 for each year group, which qualifying learners, demonstrating hardship, can access. We will monitor and benchmark performance in this area on an on-going basis to assure that we continue to reduce the participation gaps for people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds and that we can contribute towards reversing the decline in higher education by mature students from under-represented groups.

Success

Higher Rhythm routinely and regularly engages 12% from BAME groups and 19% people with disabilities in our full range of services. Historically or currently, there is no difference in our retention or attainment rates for people from these groups, compared to people across our full range of services, as we focus on providing fully inclusive learning settings, designed to accommodate individuals' specific needs with equity, underpinned by an organisation-wide culture that actively and openly reinforces the creative case for diversity, celebrating 'creative richness' as something accomplished by embracing widely diverse and varied, cultural influences.

Through combining our organisation's extensive expertise and understanding of local area and community needs with this inclusive environment where all learners can thrive, we will continue to assure attainment rates for all of our learners match national benchmarks and that retention and attainment of people from underrepresented groups and people with disabilities, equal this. We will invest and evidence a minimum of £10,000 per year on activities and resources that uphold and reinforce our fully inclusive organisational culture and commit to monitor and benchmark this, also assuring that inclusion rates for the above groups continue to match or surpass local representation rates.

Progression

Higher Rhythm quantifies its success as a learning provider ultimately using the metric of the destinations that learners move onto after being engaged in our own services, with employment or further studies being routinely monitored. Within our H.E. provision we will work to negate any differences in the progression rates and destinations between students from BAME groups and disabilities, and any other student. Internally, we will continue to set an example through our own organisational practice, as currently, our board is 40% BAME, our delivery team is 20% BAME and we are led by a disabled CEO.

We will invest and evidence a minimum of £5,000 per year on activities and resources that uphold and reinforce our fully inclusive organisational culture and openly reinforce the inclusion of BAME and disabled people within our organisation and services.

Our Overall Ambition

Higher Rhythm believes that beyond the legal and moral duty of assuring equality of access and opportunity, there is a valuable case for diversity, particularly within cultural and creative settings, where the creative case for diversity is that art and creativity is enhanced and richer, when a more diverse range of influences contribute toward it. The national priorities for access and participation align directly with our own objects and mission as an organisation and we aim to achieve inclusion rates for the following groups, which surpass local representation rates:

Those living in areas of low, H.E. participation, household income, or socio economic status: 60%

Students from BAME backgrounds: 9%

Mature students: 8%

Data on inclusion of people from protected characteristics groups is gathered continually via our routine administrative processes, and is relayed to the Senior Manager for reviewing performance, who reports to the board to assure that targets are being met as regards proportionate representation within our learner community. Some of the people who access our activities have multiple protected characteristics, such as coming from a lower social group, and being from a BAME background, or living in a deprived neighbourhood and having a disability. We recognise that this can lead to greater disadvantage and present as greater underrepresentation of these people in our learner population. We will also continue to monitor inclusion of these people in our courses in order to provide more robust data, and highlight any need for future investment in engaging learners with these characteristics if underrepresentation is evidenced.

As a community rooted learning provider we also work in partnership with different organisations that possess specialisms in working with people with protected characteristics. We work with Doncaster Pride as an event sponsor, and have a strategic partnership with a leading music organisation in Leeds, who both engage and work with people from the LGBTQ community, and we regularly support people from these groups through several of our learning / professional development projects. Through continuing to incorporate this best practice as we develop our HE provision, we will also aim to engage representative numbers within our HE provision and will collect appropriate data wherever it is disclosed to us.

Why we are committed to equality and diversity

We aim to actively promote equality of opportunity for all and strive to create an environment in which academic goals may be pursued without fear or intimidation.

Staff Responsibilities

The Senior Manager has responsibility for developing equality and diversity strategies, policies and procedures and to ensure that they are effectively implemented with 'reasonable adjustment' being applied wherever necessary, and for delivering any change initiatives needed.

How We Have Involved Students in Developing Our Approach to Access and Participation

Our full range of services has been designed bottom-up, with the direct input of and continual feedback from the very people they benefit and we will also continue to uphold this best practice approach as one of our key values as an organisation as a Higher Education provider. The single, Higher Education route which will launch academic year 2019/2020 (a HND in Music Technology / Production) has been designed specifically as the progression from our organisation delivering, demand led, accredited learning in the same subject area for over 17 years, including Study Programmes / National Diplomas for the past 5 years, and continually receiving feedback from learners as part of this work via structured milestones in courses, and through conducting specific surveys.

In a survey conducted previous to gaining approval to deliver our intended HND, 92% of learners surveyed indicated their preference to study H.E within Higher Rhythm rather than elsewhere. 87% of these learners were from neighbourhoods within the top 10% most deprived nationally and 12% were BAME community members.

Our levels of engagement of people from protected characteristic groups across our full range of services surpass the relevant local representations, evidencing that our work successfully nurtures broad inclusivity, and we are further assured that adding this new, higher level of learning delivered, is the appropriate as, it has been entirely demand-led, and 93% of learners across our full range of services progress onto higher level, programmes following their first level of engagement, with 98% of all learners attaining their chosen accreditation / qualification.

Our Activities and Support for Students

Our H.E. offer (which is just one Music Industry based HND programme) has been founded on the principal that currently, a paper qualification carries little value with most potential employers in the music industry. A recording studio, a record label, a venue or a staging company, do not recruit based on who has a piece of paper saying they have passed a course. Instead, typical potential employers in the music industry simply need the confidence that someone can 'do the job' and so generally choose candidates with experience who have evidenced they can do the job. Also, when you take into consideration that people employed in the music industries generally have a mix of different jobs and incomes, what students really need from a course are simply the skills to do the job (or range of jobs) and it is this which they are ultimately investing in. A course certificate should therefore be a 'CV' and not just a proof of passing a qualification.

Rather than spending several years studying, then qualifying and having to spend several more years gathering real industry experience, we have therefore structured our HND to deliver both outcomes at the same time. Every area of learning has an authentic product and has aspects which take place in real industry settings, meaning that once that unit / area of learning has been completed, the student has real world experience in that area and can therefore do the job. Beyond this, we also aim that through our students connecting with real industry as part of their course, they will develop the 'professional network' (the vital element of successfully finding work in most creative industries) that they will need to be able to get work as soon as, if not before, graduating.

Higher Rhythm will make all arrangements for the above real industry professional development experiences and there will be no additional charge for these activities. We will also actively support all fresh graduates in pathways towards paid work, drawing on our substantial regional and national network in our wider role as a key music industry development organisation, to sign-post (and where appropriate, recommend) our students for roles we are routinely made aware of via our networks. Through only taking on 12 learners in each year group of our programme, we can keep a focus on quality and developing this real industry connection the course is based on, to benefit and offer a potential advantage for our graduating students.

As well as an ambition that 100% of our students will finishing and pass their HND, it is also our ambition that 100% of these students will be work-ready for their chosen industry sector on graduating.

As well as providing free access to the real-world professional industry settings which elements of the course will take place at, we will also actively develop relationships with equipment and software manufacturers to seek direct, educational discounts for students wishing to make purchases. We already have several of these relationships in place, but aim to add further relationships on a continued basis as well as responding to student requests for specific equipment from manufacturers which students may identify, in order to obtain trade and educational discounts for our students using our status as a music industry based learning provider.

Within our learning programmes, the individual is involved as much as practicably possible, in the process of assessing their own progress, allowing them to reflect on and monitor their own development / journey, and we will continue this successful, learner-centred model in our H.E. programming.

In achieving the above, we will stay focussed and committed to our aims under Access, Success and Participation, outlined earlier in this document, to assure that place, background, socio-economic status, ethnicity or ability are negated as barriers to achievement and will also operate an annual hardship fund (amounting to £3000 per year group) for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, which can be accessed in times of crisis.

We will evaluate success in achieving the above, and our commitments under Access, Success and Participation regularly, as we have routinely evaluated our full range of services over 17 years, and will quantify the success of our programme based on the number of graduates securing paid work after graduating.

Equalities and diversity

We meet the Equality Act 2010 and have robust policies and procedures to ensure we comply with, but more importantly, exceed the requirements of this act, creating an organisation where equity for all, is embraced as a core value, and we openly celebrate the diversity of our learner community as a fundamental element of our organisational culture. This culture is something which extends through staff, volunteers and learner communities, and each participant is introduced to our values of equality at their relevant induction stage into our organisation, to highlight the expectations we have of all participants in helping us uphold these values and culture.

Review and Publication

This Access and Participation Statement will be updated in line with organisation-wide policy review each year, this process being managed as part of the ISO 9001 quality mark, which we uphold as an organisation.