

Strengthening Music in Society (SMS) project

Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union



Introducing the AEC Stakeholder Assembly on Power Relations

#Plenary Session

"Introducing the AEC Stakeholder Assembly On Power Relations: From systemic inequity to systemic change, presentation by Deborah Kelleher, AEC Vice-President and David-Emil Wickström, chair of the SMS Diversity working group"

Abstract:

It has come to light in the last decade that systemic power relations inequities are embedded also in most music education institutions. Naming these systemic issues is an important step towards addressing such inequities, operating at all levels of music education, so that we can work to address them in a way that promotes meaningful change. How can conservatoire stakeholders centre issues of power relations in their daily interactions, so that all members of our community may one day enjoy a safe and supportive learning- and working environment?

The AEC Stakeholder Assembly on Power Relations shall be an exercise in deliberative democracy, placing a cross section of our stakeholders at the heart of important power relations issues facing conservatoires. With the benefit of expert, impartial and factual advice roughly 100 Members (a Chairperson plus 99) will consider the topics below. Their conclusions will form the basis of reports and recommendations to be submitted to the members of the AEC. The Assembly shall commence in January 2020 and is expected to conclude in December 2022.

Key personnel:

The Chairperson of the AEC Stakeholder Assembly shall be decided in the coming months, based on stakeholder feedback.

An Expert Advisory Group will be established to assist with the work of the Assembly in terms of preparing information and advice. The members of the Expert Advisory Group shall include academics and practitioners across a number of specific fields of interest, depending on the subject being considered, as well as members of the SMS-Working groups.

An administrator shall be in place to support the Assembly in the efficient and effective discharge of its role and functions. In practice, the administrator will engage in planning and operational issues associated with the work programme.

The Assembly shall be chosen in early 2020 by anonymous questionnaire, taking account of age, gender, region, ethnicity, musical specialism, area of work or study and more.

Meetings shall take place in person where possible, linked to AEC meetings and platforms, and by electronic means.

Topics for the AEC Stakeholder Assembly on Power Relations:

What do we understand power relations to be in the conservatoire context?
....Recognising inherent power asymmetries; naming the inequities; looking for their basis in our processes and culture

How do these power relations influence the learning and working environment at the conservatories?
....what consequences do these have on recruitment, everyday interactions as well as assessment?

What can we do to re-balance power?
.....recommendations such as a set of principles, new teaching paradigms, student representation, teacher/staff education

Introducing the AEC Stakeholder Assembly on Power Relations

#Parallel Session

Power relations: Issues of equity and positionality, presented by Deborah Kelleher, AEC Vice-President and students, facilitated by David Emil Wickström, chair of the SMS working group 2 on Identity, Diversity and Inclusiveness"

Abstract:

This parallel session is connected with the AEC's recently launched Stakeholder Assembly on Power Relations. It will deal with the multiple facets of positionality - the context that creates our identity in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability status. In small groups we will use a case study to consider how these facets of identity may explicitly affect our audition policies, applicant profiles, the students in our classes and the curriculum taught, given our own positionalities and situatedness in the world.

The case study for the session is this:

What constitutes talent, or a high artistic standard in the contemporary world in relation to voice, guitar, percussion and keyboard? What are the ramifications of this in terms of recruitment, culture and curriculum development?

While access is one keyword in modern discourse the other one which is often mentioned when talking about diversity and higher music education is 'maintaining high artistic standards'. What do these 'high artistic standards' constitute? While seemingly universal we all have different, individual notions of these standards. Standards are context sensitive and discursive. They can be based on an agreed set of skills or they can be based around a perceived set of skills. Artistic standards often include a combination of craftswomanship / craftsmanship (technical/motoric skills) and artistic expression (interpretation, artistic vision). But what exactly are these parameters and who judges what is considered high or low?

Furthermore, are these the only relevant components that will guarantee the (prospective) students an artistic career within the music business? What about non-artistic skills like the ability to reflect on music's role in society and the ability to communicate with different audiences - in other words a cognitive / intellectual skill set? These notions not only differ between the genres (e.g. the

pop vs. rock discourse within Anglo-American popular music but also within the genre.

Different national or regional education traditions have different ideas on what constitutes artistic standards. In addition, each conservatory also has different visions when planning the admission exams meant to examine the applicants' skill set. What repertoire does the applicant have to prepare for their main instrument? Is a secondary instrument exam also required? Is there also a theory test? What skills does the music theory exam evaluate? Is there an essay requirement examining the cognitive skills? These questions are also linked to what role the development of individual artistic vision and creative music making in the education of future musician plays within the institution's degree programs. Ideally the admission exam clearly links to the degree programs visions. Finally, the discourse on what artistic standards constitutes has changed over time.

Moving further, culturally diverse institutions bring together a variety of worldviews, understandings, and working cultures. This is manifested in the everyday life of the conservatoire: from daily communication practices including a common spoken language, to practice habits, teaching methods and questions of hierarchy and power. At the same time opening up the conservatories for new forms of music also means questioning previous admissions standards. Does a DJane or DJ have to pass a music theory admissions exam if their primary instrument is a Digital-Audio-Workstation? Does a Bulgarian folk singer applying for a traditional music program have to master Western Art Music theory? Should the admissions exam in the latter case not focus on different, more relevant musical aspects. Related to this is how such a student body is integrated within the conservatory. What are the 'common languages' that a conservatory can draw on and what has to be established within the degree programs?