

Southampton Centre for Music Education and Social Justice (CMESJ)

Annual Report 2024 – 2025

Director:
Dr Erin Johnson-Williams

Deputy Director:
Dr Chi Ying Lam

Associate Directors:
Dr Helen Dromey
Dr Heather Mease
Prof Benjamin Oliver
Dr Amy Williamson

Student Representatives:

Undergraduate: Megan Harrison (BA Music, Year 3)

Postgraduate Taught: Maria Martins (MMus Music Education),
Emily Macklow (MMus Composition)

Postgraduate Research: Yifan Liu (PhD, Year 1)

Alumni Representative: Oliver Picken (2024 Graduate)

Introduction

Launched on 16 October 2023, the Southampton Centre for Music Education and Social Justice (CMESJ) has experienced a dynamic and productive first two years. Our activities have adhered closely to our core aims and objectives, which include advancing research, public engagement, and training in music education and social justice. In 2024 we won the prestigious opportunity to host the AHRC Hub for Public Engagement with Music Research. We have also continued running our annual music education policy conference; further developed our 'virtual knowledge exchange' symposium with international Higher Education partners; expanded our community engagement networks; and written a range of ambitious research funding proposals.

Key Achievements

1. CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

A new second-year undergraduate module, Music Education and Social Justice, is now running and will become compulsory for all second-year Music undergraduates from 2026-2027. The module is supported by an active and ongoing local placement component, connecting students with a wide range of community organisations.

We have reviewed and updated programme and module learning outcomes in line with social justice-informed principles, as part of the Periodic Academic Review (PAR) process for both Taught Postgraduate and Taught Undergraduate provision. In collaboration with Associate Director and Admissions Tutor Amy Williamson, we have begun reviewing undergraduate admissions processes to ensure they reflect our commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in music education.

We continue to recruit and mentor a cohort of PhD students whose research engages with various dimensions of music education and social justice. New incoming applicant Mahaliah Edwards was awarded the Innovation and Social Impact Scholarship, while Callie Langley received a Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarship through the Interdisciplinary Resilience Studies programme to support her research related to community music.

2. RESEARCH / KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS (ALL)

In 2024, CMESJ was awarded £620,931 to run the AHRC Hub for Public Engagement with Music Research. Led by Erin Johnson-Williams, Benjamin Oliver and Lisa Tregale, this project has been immensely successful. From October–December 2024, the Hub team launched a Call for Spoke projects focused on public engagement, music and social justice, and facilitated a Networking Events tour across Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. 83 Expressions of Interest were received for Hub funding. Four Spoke projects have just been launched. You can read about these projects on the AHRC Hub website.

For the 2025–26 academic year, Department of Music colleagues Chiying Lam, Gre, Hettie Malcolmson and David Bretherton will join the Hub team as Spoke project mentors.

The Hub's Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation professional Caz Creagh will also develop an extensive Evaluation Report in dialogue with the projects that we fund. Importantly, working on the Hub has involved extensive collaboration with colleagues from the Public Engagement Research Unit (Ben Littlefield, Jess Spurrell) and Public Policy Southampton (Joseph Owen).



Caz Creagh, Erin Johnson-Williams and Ben Oliver at the Scottish Music Centre in Glasgow as part of the AHRC Hub launch tour

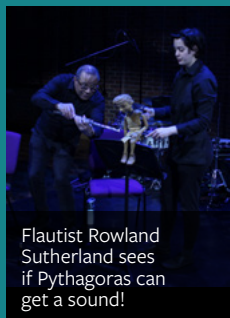
2024/25 Public & Community Engagement Development Fund- Harmonies of Home– A Community Song Bank Project

Co-led by Chi Ying Lam and the University sanctuary coordinator Claire Giles, this project builds on our ongoing collaboration with the University Sanctuary Team. With the support of Turner Sims, Cross Culture Hub, CLEAR, and Welsh National Opera, it aims to collect, preserve, share, and celebrate songs from the Southampton community. By promoting cultural exchange and inclusion, the project empowers under-represented musicians to share their musical traditions and take on leadership roles within the initiative.



Local musician Mehdi led and performed at the "Harmonies of Song" singalong workshop.

As part of the programme, three singalong workshops were held on June 20th, followed by a celebration concert on July 10th held in Turner Sims. The project also includes workshops with schools and adults with additional learning needs, featuring a participatory composition work led by Uri Agnon. Participating students also performed at the Refugee Week celebration on June 21st in the city centre. The collected songs will be transcribed into scores and made available on the Centre's website in September 2025 for public use.



Flautist Rowland Sutherland sees if Pythagoras can get a sound!



Pythagoras with puppeteers Edie Edmundson and Bori Mezo

Pythagoras' Toolkit: UK Staging & Digital Workshop Toolkit Development

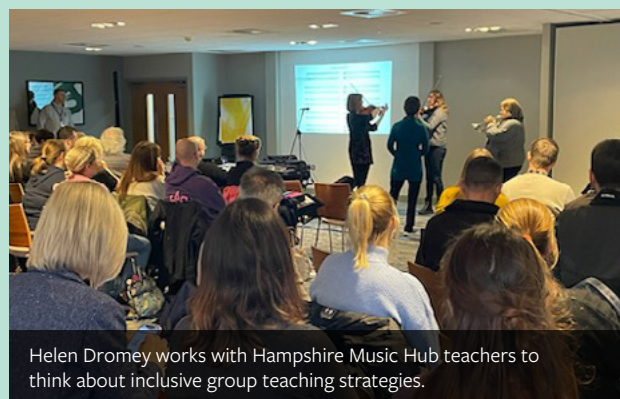
With support from the AHRC IAA and the UoS Impact Fund Ben Oliver and Chi Ying Lam have, since February 2025, been working to extend the impact of Pythagoras' Toolkit, a theatrical work co-created by Ben and director Rachel Warr. The research embodies innovative practice-led methodologies to educate children about musical concepts and conducting.

Building upon successful performances in Montreal this phase facilitated the UK premiere at Turner Sims in March 2025, reaching more than 600 people. The team is now developing a toolkit for workshops that empower children to develop musical expertise and assert their independence through making and operating puppets. Workshop ideas have been 'roadtested' in a series of school workshops in Southampton, led by the researchers and our UG and PGT students. The new toolkit, aimed at professional practitioners and educators, will be published on the Centre website in September 2025 and shared through education and community music networks.

CPD for practitioners

Helen Dromey led CPD workshops with over 150 Hampshire Music Hub teachers, focusing on developing more inclusive approaches to instrumental pedagogy. The sessions fostered valuable discussions and hands-on participation, further strengthening our ongoing collaboration with Hampshire Music Hub. Helen has also worked with Milton Keynes Music Co-operative and will be collaborating with Southampton and Isle of Wight Music Hubs in the coming academic year.

On 24th April 2025, we supported a CPD Day where our PGT and PGR music education students joined Hampshire Music Hub teachers. This provided a wonderful opportunity for our students to sit alongside practitioners and exchange ideas, enriching their professional development.



Helen Dromey works with Hampshire Music Hub teachers to think about inclusive group teaching strategies.

Event Highlights

CMESJ Supports EDI and Black History Month Events

Working with Music's EDI lead Gre, During Black History Month 2024, the Centre for Music Education and Social Justice (CMESJ) supported a series of events celebrating Black culture, history, and inclusion.

- On October 8th, Samantha Ege presented her book *South Side Impresarios*, which highlights the significant contributions of Black women to Chicago's classical music community between the world wars. Her talk shed light on how these women overcame systemic racism and sexism to build enduring musical institutions and networks.
- On October 25th, Kwame Phillips, Senior Lecturer in Media Practices at Winchester School of Art, led a mixer featuring a DJ set. His work centres on resilience, race, and social justice through sensory media, offering a dynamic and reflective event for attendees.
- On October 11th: Screening of the documentary *Getting It Back: The Story of Cymande*. This film tells the story of Cymande, a British funk band, and explores their cultural impact and musical legacy.
- On November 22nd: In collaboration with Public Policy | Southampton (PPS), we held the *Misogyny in Music Study Day*, as a follow-up to our roundtable discussion from last year.

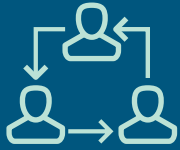
All events were hosted in the Music Common Space and included opportunities for community engagement and refreshments. CMESJ's support emphasized the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion within music education and social justice.

Student-led Event

The CMESJ student-led series featured "Sing Thing!"—a vibrant group singing event celebrating International Women's Day. Led by student representative Emily Macklow and Associate Director Heather Mease, the event emphasized empowerment and community through music, with no prior music reading required. On June 13th, the "Vibe" open mic event in collaboration with the Turner Sims Concert Hall, organized by student representative Maria Martins, brought together Southampton's music community for an inspiring afternoon. Producer and sound engineer Andrea Resino from SOCo shared her passion for inclusivity and social justice in music, followed by an interactive Q&A and a collaborative jam session. Both events offered music, connection, and refreshments, fostering creativity and solidarity within the local music scene. On July 2nd, student representative Yifan Liu led a teaching-sharing lab that brought together students from undergraduate to postgraduate taught and research programmes to explore teaching pedagogy and discuss what social justice means in this educational context.

Future Strategy for 2025-2026

Looking ahead, CMESJ will continue to priorities the following strategic areas:



BUILDING KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE CAPACITIES AND NETWORKS

Delivering on funded projects and seeking to maximize their potential for meaningful change due to raising awareness of social justice research; developing pathways to policy impact and dissemination of research findings, including away days for brainstorming around legacy and impact for the AHRC Hub; continuing to attract PhD and early career scholars to work with CMESJ; and offering focused training and support (i.e., by developing an ECC-focused cohort and representation through ECC reps).



DEVELOPING INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATIONS

Extending existing relationships (i.e., applications to interdisciplinary funding bids, and continuing to forge relationships within the University of Southampton with social justice research in other faculties, such as Law and Education).



SECURING STRONGER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Working with our central marketing team to develop targeted strategies for our web presence; broaden our reach through establishing an annual / termly newsletter; and continuing foster an international 'virtual knowledge exchange' with universities across the world on an annual / termly basis.



Find out more

<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/research/institutes-centres/centre-for-music-education-social-justice>



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