



BIRMINGHAM CITY  
University

# AHRC MUSIC AND DISABILITY NETWORKING GRANT

**Provocation 4: Beyond Access –  
Creating Meaningful Inclusion in  
Music Education**

**Date:** Sunday 16 March 2025

**Location:** OHMI Conference,  
Birmingham City University

**Panellists:** Professor Jennie Henley,  
Emeritus Professor Martin Fautley,  
Dr Deborah Amend

**Chair:** Dr Victoria Kinsella

This panel discussion was part of the wider OHMI Conference, which is dedicated to research, practice and innovation in Music and Physical Disability. This panel brought together three leading voices in music education Professor Jennie Henley (Royal Northern College of Music), Emeritus Professor Martin Fautley (Birmingham City University), and Dr Deborah Amend (Northern Kentucky University) for a thought-provoking panel conversation about what it means to move beyond access and towards meaningful inclusion in music education.

The discussion explored long-standing barriers within both the English and American music education systems, from ableist structures such as assessment practices and rehearsal spaces, to the ways in which cultural capital shapes who is seen as 'musical' in schools. Fautley unpacked how music curricula often privilege certain genres and practices, reinforcing narrow definitions of value and success. The panel also reflected on institutional challenges surrounding the perceived opposition between inclusion and excellence, with Henley inviting the audience to reconsider how inclusive education can also be a space of high standards, creativity, and rigour.

Amend brought a dual lens to the conversation both as a researcher and as a parent emphasising the urgent need for comprehensive teacher training and greater collaboration between music and special education professionals. She shared how applying Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles has helped reframe inclusive practice as something proactive and embedded, rather than reactive or an add-on. Her reflections highlighted the importance of equipping teachers with the skills, tools, and confidence to move beyond tokenistic inclusion.

The panellists also explored the persistence of deficit models in music education, where disabled students are expected to fit into existing systems. They interrogated structural constraints, such as funding inequities, rigid progression routes, and siloed educational structures that continue to exclude. Throughout the discussion, panellists shared concrete examples of what has worked in their own contexts, alongside honest reflections on the challenges that remain. Ultimately, the session was a call to action that as a collective we should centre disabled voices, to question long-held assumptions, and to build a music education system that is inclusive from the ground up.



## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

1. Whose knowledge, voices, and musical identities are currently centred in our music education systems and whose are still missing or marginalised?
2. What would it take to move from inclusion as an accommodation to inclusion as a foundational principle in music education?
3. How can we challenge our own assumptions about excellence, progression, and value in music learning and who benefits when we do?

To listen to the panel discussion please follow this link:

[AHRC Panel Discussion 16 March 2025.](#)



## REFERENCES

Kinsella, V. Wolffsohn, R. and Mc Pherson, A. (2025) AHRC Music and Disability Networking Grant: Provocation 4. Birmingham City University

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to the panellists for sharing their thoughts, experiences and research.