



Brass Bands
England



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

2030

CHALLENGE 2030:
WHERE ARE WE NOW?





**BANDING
SHOULD BE
OPEN TO ALL**

Challenge 2030: Where are we now?

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Summary

Challenge 2030 is Brass Bands England's vision to see our bands better reflect the communities they serve, and to champion Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA) across the whole of brass banding by the year 2030. We know this is a constantly evolving area — language, expectations, and social norms continue to shift rapidly. It can feel difficult to keep up, and sometimes it seems like you're always a step behind. But the key is to keep learning, keep asking questions, and most importantly, to keep the conversations going.

Over the past five years, Brass Bands England has undergone transformative change. With a larger team, more robust resources, and deeper expertise across staff and trustees, IDEA is no longer seen as an optional extra — it's now at the heart of how BBE works. This represents a significant cultural shift, and one that is only just beginning. The IDEA Working Group is committed to driving this work forward with care, energy, and long-term vision. We're building from a solid foundation, and the next five years present a real opportunity to embed lasting change.

IDEA is fundamentally about people — how we treat one another, how we respect and support each other. It isn't always easy, and the conversations can sometimes feel complex or challenging. But *Challenge 2030* is a bold and dynamic ambition, and it's inspiring real, meaningful change throughout our movement.

On a personal level, I know just how life-changing and empowering a truly inclusive band environment can be. I wouldn't be where I am today without the love, encouragement, and belief of my band family. But I also recognise that this isn't everyone's experience — particularly for people from underrepresented backgrounds or communities. **That's why this work matters. Because everyone deserves to feel welcome, heard, and valued in banding.**

I am proud to be stepping into this role at a time when the commitment to IDEA is stronger than ever. Building on the excellent work already undertaken by Brass Bands England, I'm excited to support and contribute to its continued growth. There is enormous potential to make a lasting impact, and I am passionate about helping to shape a brass banding culture where everyone feels welcome, valued, and able to thrive.



Saphran Ali

Chair of BBE's IDEA Working
Group and BBE Trustee
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Glossary

This area of work is littered with terminology, acronyms and assumptions - all of which change frequently! We've put together a glossary of terms we refer to throughout this report to help you understand and access the content as well as possible. We have a larger glossary of terms as part of our IDEA toolkit members resource.

Throughout the course of the last five years the language we used at Brass Bands England has changed. Previously we referred to EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) and we now use IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access) which we feel is more representative.

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Banding | We refer to 'banding' a lot throughout this report. We're referring to the overall sector here, rather than individuals or organisations. Whether you're a player, a librarian, a contest organiser or an avid audience member we're thinking of you in this umbrella term. |
| d/Deaf | The term d/Deaf is used to describe people who have hearing loss and identify as part of the Deaf community: deaf with a lower case d refers to the physical condition of having hearing loss, this may mean they don't always have a strong connection to the Deaf community and don't always use sign language. Deaf with a capital D refers to people who identify strongly with the Deaf community. |
| Demographic | Demographic data is information used to identify groups of people. This could include age, gender, race, occupation or disability status. In this context, demographic information is used to understand representation, and assess whether certain groups are underrepresented in a wider group of people. |
| Diversity | Diversity means that each individual is unique; understanding diversity means we recognise our individual differences. |
| Equity | Equity is the idea that people should be treated fairly based on their needs, and that imbalances should be recognised and adjusted for. For example, "a society based on equity and social justice". |
| Equality | Equality is the state of being equal, especially in status, rights and opportunity. |
| Inclusion | Inclusion is a basic right and its objective should be to embrace everyone regardless of individual differences. |
| Marginalised voices | Marginalised voices are the voices of people or groups who are excluded from society and are not given a place or active voice in the community. |
| Minority Groups | A minority group is a group of people that makes up less than half of a population and shares common characteristics, such as culture, religion, language, or a combination of these. |
| Music Education Hub | A Music Education Hub (MEH) is a partnership of local organisations that work together to provide high-quality music education for children and young people in England |
| Neurodiversity | The term neurodiversity is used to explain the concept that our brains all work differently. Neurodiversity celebrates the value that our different strengths can bring to the world. |
| Safeguarding | Safeguarding means protecting people's health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect. |
| SEND | Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) |
| Sexism | Sexism is prejudice or discrimination based on one's sex or gender. Sexism can affect anyone, but it primarily affects women and girls. It has been linked to stereotypes and gender roles, and may include the belief that one sex or gender is intrinsically superior to another. |
| Socio-Economic | Socio-economic status is a way of of describing people based on their education, income, and type of job. |
| Transgender | An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms including (but not limited to) transgender, transsexual, gender-fluid, non-binary, intersex and bi-gendered. |
| Youth Voice | Youth voice is the idea that young people have the right to be heard and involved in decisions that impact them. |



Roundtable

In July 2020 BBE hosted a roundtable discussion and invited individuals and organisations from a diverse cross-section of those less well-represented in banding. This is what we heard:

"Few women have corner seats"

"Banding is teamwork - youngsters can learn from older players and vice versa"

"Banding should be open to all"

"I think bands should be reflective of the community they work in"

"There is no one way that diversity should look - People should be comfortable and safe in the bandroom"

"Looking at the banding demographic at competitions it's not very diverse"

"Inclusion for players with disabilities at contests is generally completely below par"

"Everyone represents their band and the wider banding community both on and off stage, and as such is held accountable for unacceptable behaviour"

"Everything is better if you are inclusive - the music is better, the culture is better, the turn-out is better, the performances are better. If you have an inclusive environment where everyone is welcome, feels valued and important then you will get a stronger, healthier more exciting band"

"Many bands do not have inclusion and equality policies"

"As an older musician I have felt very privileged to learn from younger players"

"People should be comfortable and safe in the bandroom"

Our findings were that:

There is a general lack of understanding about equality, diversity and inclusion within banding. Education and awareness training is needed, alongside IDEA or EDI policies

IDEA activities should not be carried out as a tick-box exercise and those from minority groups should not be included for the sake of meeting IDEA requirements

Banding should reach out to other organisations who are well ahead in this field to see how they have approached the issue of diversity and inclusion and learn from them

Bands need to be reflective of the communities in which they are based and be proactive in encouraging inclusion

Anyone should be able to progress to any level within banding based on their merit alone

Role models from diverse groups are needed within banding and for audiences to see in order to attract the involvement of a more diverse group of people

Banter and low-level jokes targeted at minority groups should not be tolerated, with or without their presence. Others should speak out

There should be safe reporting routes along with stricter repercussions for unacceptable behaviour

Organisations and events need to accommodate those with mental and physical disabilities

Engagement should be made with youth to seek their views on the way forward

Banding should be more open-minded, and broaden its music and activities to make it more fun, enjoyable and appealing to a wider cross-section of people to attract them to join

Data

Brass Bands England do not have access to demographic data regarding the current make-up of bands, however we feel it is clear to see that members of bands, conductors, adjudicators, composers and those representing other banding organisations do not reflect the diversity of the society in which we live. As bands find it increasingly difficult to recruit members, they will need to draw members from all corners of society not only in order to survive, but to share the enjoyment and fulfilment that can be experienced through being involved with brass banding. The data shared in this report will relate to specific projects or programmes but we currently cannot reference that against the current demographics of banding as a sector.

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93%

of respondents of BBE's annual members survey identified as 'White British'

44%

were aged 61+

20%

identified as having a disability

Training and Resources

Since 2020, we have created a number of training opportunities and resources for members to support their inclusion goals including:

- Disability and Access Venue and Rehearsal Checklist
- Website Accessibility
- EDI Policy writing support
- Supporting D/deaf members of your band
- Inclusion Toolkit
- Disability confidence
- Music and Heritage
- Trans Awareness
- Neurodiversity Awareness

We have an ongoing commitment to build upon our range of inclusion focused support and programme based on requests from members.

1,000+

In the last year, we had over 1,000 views of members resources on IDEA-focused topics.*

150

Since 2020 150 individuals have attended training sessions on IDEA-focused topics.*

15%

In 2024, we partnered with St John Ambulance to provide a 15% discount for Mental Health First Aid Training for BBE Members

*We cover themes of IDEA in lots of our events, training and resources but these are sessions that are just on that theme i.e. a webinar on d/Deaf awareness.



**EVERYONE
REPRESENTS
THEIR BAND**

BandSafe

'We want to broaden the appeal of brass bands and be inclusive to both band members and audiences. Our Bandsafe training gives the opportunity for us to highlight to our members the importance of IDEA. Through small group discussions members are able to talk through imagined scenarios such as a band booking a venue which is inaccessible to one of their members to welcoming a new member who is neurodivergent. Our Toolkit includes a sample Code of Conduct which we encourage members to sign up to and promotes the importance of treating others with respect and dignity, acting without prejudice and avoiding inappropriate behaviour and language. I am regularly heartened by the participants on the training course who ask insightful questions in relation to IDEA and offer constructive suggestions on how to make banding more inclusive'

BBE's Safeguarding Manager Elizabeth Smith

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BBE's BandSafe Training launched in April 2019 as an in-person training course and since the COVID-19 Pandemic, is now an online training course. In 2024 **over 300 members** attended training to keep their safeguarding knowledge up to date.

In the 2024 Members survey safeguarding services, including BandSafe training, toolkit, advice and DBS checks were rated as **the most important service that BBE offers.**

Programmes and Initiatives

Over the last five years, inclusion has become a focus in programming with a number of artistic projects, funding initiatives and opportunities created to support and champion marginalised voices within the sector, and create positive action to support change. Here are just a handful of case studies and videos demonstrating Brass Bands England's inclusion-focused programming.



[The Brass Band Archive:](#)
[Opening access to young people in Huddersfield](#)



[AMP: Generators](#)



[Elevate: Brass Bands England's first Elevate Programme](#)

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[Youth Champs: an inclusive approach to contesting](#)



[Brass Band Project Fund:](#)
[Haverhill Silver Band](#)



[Brass Foundations: Building inclusive partnerships at Richmond Hill SEND school](#)

Brass Foundations

Brass Foundations is Brass Bands England's flagship education programme, bringing together musical partners to promote brass progression for young people in England. Brass Foundations is led by a team of Youth Development Brass Specialists who have years of collective experience and skills in performing, teaching and inspiring. They deliver activity in their local areas and further afield with our Music Education Hub, School and Band partners. The programme has been running since 2021 (in the midst of the pandemic), so the stats collected start from our first full academic year of uninterrupted activity.

Since September 2022:

59%

of projects provided CYP with 'opportunities to play a new brass instrument'

25%

of CYP participating in projects continued to play in ensembles due to involvement in a Brass Foundations project

73%

of projects resulted in CYP being 'happier and overall improved mood.'

30

Projects have been delivered in 30 different local education authorities from Wiltshire to Northumberland

**based on feedback received*

In 2023/2024 Academic year we:

- Delivered our first collaborative project with a community band and SEND school
- Created arrangements of Christmas music reflecting musical heritage of different European countries
- Children engaging with our programmes experience a number of challenging circumstances and barriers to music making including: physical disabilities, mental ill-health, traveller / roma-n communities, english as an additional language and looked after circumstances.
- Developed a new training programme for Future Leaders of youth bands
- Delivered workshops and engagement programmes to 3,901 children in England in addition to the 1,500 participants of the 2024 Youth Champs and Youth Fest.

Map of BF locations and Music Education Hub Partners





What are the barriers?

Our team told us the barriers they observe in encouraging more young people into banding:

“Some young people really struggle to visualise themselves in a brass band when they don’t see people like them represented right now”

“We assume every knows there are brass bands for them nearby, but actually lots of the general public just don’t know they exist, or don’t understand what they can offer. Wider community engagement is key”

“Often the music they hear played in public, like at a village fete, just doesn’t appeal to them and it reinforces that stereotype that bands are old fashioned. Once they’re in the band and playing, they learn to like and appreciate it, but when they’re starting out they want to hear and play music they know”

“Time and location can often be big barriers for parents. There are regularly clashes with after school clubs, sports, ongoing commitments for siblings and busy work schedules. If you’ve got to drive to a rehearsal, there’s time and resource associated with that”

“We need to look and sound like the most awesome, exciting and fun opportunity in the area! It is possible to do”

“Cost is a barrier for many people, but not for everyone. Sometimes the assumed cost is actually a bigger barrier than the actual cost! Parents see big shiny instruments, the cost of ongoing lessons, music and exams and that’s a worry. Outside of the banding community, very few people are aware than participation can be free or close to it”

Youth Voice

Since 2020, the amount of BBE’s work done with and for children and young people has increased dramatically and we felt that our governance should reflect that change.

In 2023/2024

27%

of BBE’s income was spent on youth projects.

We recruited 2 new trustees aged 25 and under and have an ongoing committed to always have 2 positions filled by trustees aged 30 and under. Our team has undergone Youth Voice training and youth voice is now included in our project evaluation and planning.

Our next step on this journey, is to engage young people in our programming. The 2025 Brass Band Conference will supported by our first paid intern, and programming led by our Youth Voice Working Group, a group of under 25’s who want to see a bright future for brass banding.

Women in Banding

In 2022, BBE carried out a survey to find out from women in the sector, how their identity and experiences as a woman impacted their experience being part of a band.

Although significant change has taken place in recent years there is still a long way to go. In particular in areas of leadership, conducting, adjudicating and composing representation of women is still noticeably low.

38%

felt that women have the same opportunities as men.

Many respondents highlighted friendships with other women as one of the positive highlights.

32%

reported they had experience sexual harrassment in some form.

45%

reported other kinds of bias against women.

Listen Here



Find out more about Women in Banding by listening to the Women in Banding Episode of [The Brass Band Podcast](#)

Inclusion at BBE

The importance of inclusion isn't just for the wider sector, over the last 5 years BBE has made significant changes to ensure that BBE is an inclusive employer, and we are making focused efforts to bring diverse talent to the team. We have introduced:

- Anonymised recruitment - identifying features are removed from all applications for shortlisting to address unconscious bias
- Disabled candidates who meet essential criteria for a role are guaranteed an interview
- We only ask for a certain level of education if we feel it is absolutely essential for the role
- Flexible working as standard - most staff work hybrid or completely remote and this allows us to recruit from across the country
- We are a Living Wage Employer and offer enhanced family leave
- We are continuing to recruit new board members that represent the diversity of the sector

In BBE's 2024 staff survey the **flexibility** and **supportive** culture of the organisation was consistently quoted as reasons why staff like working for BBE and why they would **recommend other to work for BBE.**

What now?

So, what are the barriers for members, and for Brass Bands England, to progress further?

Time and money.

Members surveyed pride themselves in the inclusivity of brass bands, in particular for those with socio-economic disadvantages, and rural isolation. Lots of members mention their 'door being open for everyone' or 'everyone is welcome', but communities not familiar with brass banding may not know that door is open for them. In a predominantly voluntary sector, time and money to spend on in-depth training on all aspects of IDEA may be unrealistic and the fast-paced change too hard to catch up with. In addition to this, changing attitudes takes time, just as the journey from a young beginner player picking up an instrument for the first time to taking a seat in a Senior band.

So, what now?

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We want to determine our priorities for the next five years of Challenge 2030, in recognition of the fact that we can't make change in all areas, but can in focused, defined areas. We want our members, and the wider sector to inform the change they want to see.

Join in the conversation. We'll be running a series of Members Meetups across 2025 to find out more about your experiences, challenges, positive stories and hopes for the future. It's an opportunity to take part in sector-changing discussions and network with like-minded people across the country.

Tell us your thoughts on social media by using the **#Challenge2030** hashtag.



#CHALLENGE2030



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