



WISEAMP (Women in Sound Engineering and Music Production)

Phase 3 Evaluation Report

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the report

WISEAMP (Women in Sound Engineering and Music Production) is a training programme for women in the north-west of England, based at the School of Sound Recording (SSR) in Manchester and supported by the European Social Fund (ESF). An introduction to the WISEAMP training programme, an outline of its aims, and a full description of the evaluation and the evaluation methodology were provided in the first evaluation report (October 2006) and are therefore not repeated here.

Two reports have already been presented, detailing the findings from the evaluation of Phases 1 and 2 of the WISEAMP training. This report presents the findings of the evaluation of Phase 3.

1.2 Structure of the WISEAMP training

The WISEAMP training was set up in 2005. It consisted of three phases. Phases 1 and 2 were the main training programmes and Phase 3 was a set of supplementary activities.

The Phase 1 training ran for twenty-six weeks, from October 2005 to May 2006, on a part-time basis. It offered modules to thirty women in digital sound production, studio techniques and studio design.

The Phase 2 training ran for twenty-six weeks from May to October 2006 (also part-time), providing a similar training programme to an entirely different cohort of thirty women, offering modules in digital sound production, studio techniques, and synthesis and MIDI.

The Phase 3 training was the business-oriented component of the course, centred around a series of business sessions, a re-mixing demonstration, and an all-day live sound workshop given by various speakers and facilitators in November 2006. It was offered to participants from both cohorts who returned for sessions of their own choosing. These sessions were also advertised and made available to additional women who had not attended the main training course.

1.3 Evaluation of the Phase 3 training

A simple two-page semi-structured self-completion questionnaire was designed to be used at individual sessions in this phase of the training. The questionnaire contained a mixture of closed and open-ended questions. It was distributed to participants at each session. This resulted in forty-two responses. These forty-two responses represented

a total of twenty-four women, some of whom had also attended Phase 1 or Phase 2 sessions and some of whom had not attended any previous parts of the course.

All responses were analysed as a single set, rather than as data from individual sessions. This was because the forty-two respondents were spread across several different sessions, resulting in a variable (and usually very small) number of responses for each individual session. The evaluation did not therefore set out to isolate individual sessions but to analyse the total number of responses as a whole.

2. Executive summary

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 Main benefits

The sessions in Phase 3 were very successful and nearly all the respondents felt they had gained a great deal. The findings of the evaluation indicate that the main value of the sessions lay in the contact with practitioners from industry and the opportunity for hands-on practical experience. Key benefits included:

- Business or vocational advice, insight and information (including industry contacts)
- Technical knowledge or advice
- Hands-on experience
- Experience of speakers and hearing about life “behind the scenes”

2.1.2 Career development

Most respondents felt that the sessions had helped them in terms of career development. Almost half agreed that the sessions had helped them greatly; a further third felt that the sessions had helped them slightly.

2.1.3 Other gains

Many of the comments show that ideas or insights were gained into the realities of sound technology work and the industry. Participants particularly valued hearing about “different ways of thinking” and “trade tips” as a result of the talks. Many respondents from the practical sessions commented on the additional experience or technical knowledge they had gained. For others, the Phase 3 sessions helped either to crystallise their career plans or to divert their career focus in another direction.

Individual comments indicated the following additional benefits:

- Understanding how best to access opportunities in the industry
- Improved knowledge of local and regional opportunities
- Realisation that they were entering a tough profession but that with persistence and skill they could succeed
- Valuable technical tips and advice

2.1.4 Suggestions for improvement

There were some suggestions for ways in which the training could be improved and these are given in detail in sections 3.4.1 below. The main suggestions were:

- More breaks
- Additional content
- More information
- Links to potential contacts in the industry
- More visual aids
- More interactivity
- More concrete examples of work

There were also suggestions for some additional topics that participants would have liked to be included in the session:

- More about the composing and arranging parts of the business
- A walk-through of what is involved in the process of a project (unprocessed video, search for sound effects, etc.)
- Time for more examples and demos
- More information about work in the industry
- Handouts, especially for the more difficult material
- More time at the mixing desk

2.2 Meeting the objectives

2.2.1 Aims and objectives of Phase 3

The main objectives that Phase 3 aimed to address were based on the following recommendations in the REM report. (A full outline of the recommendations has been given in the first evaluation report.)

- Courses should incorporate information about self-employment, professional development, potential funding opportunities and networking.
- Given women's under-representation, organisations should offer various kinds of post-course support.

2.2.2 Meeting the Phase 3 objectives

As indicated above, Phase 3 aimed to incorporate information about self-employment, professional development, potential funding opportunities and networking. It also aimed to promote various kinds of post-course support. The findings of the evaluation indicate that most of these objectives were met by the Phase 3 training. Phase 3 did incorporate networking with industry contacts, and provided information related to career development and funding opportunities. Post-course support is also being offered.

2.2.3 Other recommendations in the REM report

The remaining objectives as outlined in the REM report have not been part of the activities of the WISEAMP training and do not therefore form part of the current evaluation. Further development in these areas is recommended and additional

funding to provide activities to undertake these areas of work would enable these additional networks and resources to be provided.

REM recommendations not yet addressed:

- Establish and fund a ‘women students’ network’ in order to promote peer mentoring. Participants could be invited to participate in efforts to recruit more women students.
- Establish a formal mentoring network, matching interested students with more established DJs and sound engineers. Encourage alumnae to become involved as mentors.
- Develop resource packs about funding opportunities, arts career advisory services (such as that run by Metier) and organisations that provide support and advice for new businesses in the creative and cultural industries (for example, Shell LiveWire).

3. Findings from the survey

3.1 Value of attending the sessions

Firstly, respondents at each session were asked whether the session was worth attending. Out of all forty-two respondents, forty (95%) answered “yes” and two answered “partly.” None of the respondents stated that the session had not been worth attending.

An analysis of the comments attached to this question showed that the main value of the sessions lay in the contact with practitioners from industry and the opportunity for hands-on practical experience.

The visits from practitioners in the industry gave the participants a sense of optimism as well as a look into the industry that was different from the participants’ other experiences. Respondents reported that the talks had given them a “glimpse” of the industry and that the speakers’ anecdotes had shown them life “behind the scenes.” In addition, the hands-on experience was valued in the more practical events.

3.2 Main benefits of the sessions

3.2.1 Single best aspects of the sessions

Respondents were also asked to state the single best thing they had gained from each session. These responses were diverse, reflecting the range of sessions on offer and the different backgrounds and needs of the respondents. However, some themes recurred and can be grouped broadly into four categories:

- Business or vocational advice, insight and information (including industry contacts)
- Technical knowledge or advice
- Hands-on experience
- Quality/ experience of speaker or module leader

To illustrate the comments represented by these categories, some direct quotations are given below under each heading.

3.2.2 Business or vocational advice, insight and information (including industry contacts)

Some of the comments related to gaining an understanding about how best to access opportunities in the industry:

The most useful thing I got from the session was understanding more about how to access the industry and the broad range of skills involved.

I feel the industry is much more accessible than I thought.

Other comments related to regional opportunities:

Information about music commissioning in the region.

Many respondents commented that the sessions had helped them realise that they were entering a tough profession but that with persistence and skill they could succeed:

It's a dog's life but you never have a dull moment and if you persist sufficiently you'll definitely get a break.

You have to be able to race against time and your own perfectionism to survive in this job.

It's all about the graft!

It's your communication skills and your persistence that will help you get the foot through the door and always keep getting work.

You need to be creative, bold and subjective!

3.2.3 Technical knowledge or advice

Participants valued the technical tips and advice they were given. Some comments were:

New ideas and tips on getting the best sound in a live recording environment.

Ideas to take away and try out methods on my own work.

Don't just look at the levels on the mixing desk, trust your ears!

3.2.4 Hands-on experience

The practical aspects were also highly valued:

Hands-on experience with really good gear.

Practice on actual kit and advice from people in the know.

3.2.5 Quality/ experience of speaker or module leader

The knowledge and enthusiasm of the speakers were also key factors:

Down to earth tutor; very knowledgeable.

Meeting someone with so much experience.

The lecturer had sincere enthusiasm for the subjects he was speaking about which made me enthusiastic about doing this work myself.

3.3 The sessions as an aid to career development

Respondents were asked if the sessions had helped them develop their careers in sound technology. As shown in the table below, most respondents felt that the sessions had helped them in career development (almost half agreed that the sessions had helped them greatly; a third felt that the sessions had helped them slightly). None of the respondents stated that a session had not been helpful.

Table 1: Helpful for career development

Response	No.	%
Yes, greatly	18	43
Yes, slightly	14	33
No, not at all	-	-
No reply	10	24
Total	42	100

Around half the respondents gave further details in response to this question. Many of the comments show that ideas or insights were gained into the realities of sound technology work and the industry. Participants found “different ways of thinking” and “trade tips” as a result of the talks. Many respondents from the practical sessions commented on the additional experience or technical knowledge they had gained. For others, these sessions helped either to crystallise their career plans or to divert their career focus in another direction.

3.4 Suggestions for improvement

3.4.1 Ways in which the training could be improved

When asked if there were any ways in which the session could be improved, nearly half of the respondents (43%) answered “no.” Less than a third (29%) made some suggestions for changes.

Table 2: Possibility of improvement

Response	No.	%
No	18	43
Yes	12	29
No reply	12	29
Total	42	100

Suggested improvements were varied. Some respondents suggested additional content to the session, including more information and links to potential contacts in the industry:

Contacts; further info; snippets of ideas of processes for mixes.

It would have been interesting to actually see exactly how the dub editing worked, i.e. pictures of the timeline, etc. A little more information.

Other suggestions related to the timing of the training at the outset and the need for more breaks:

Less delay at the start.

Maybe a 5 min break if it's 2 hours.

Maybe more clearly defined sessions and breaks.

Perhaps split into morning/ afternoon sessions with defined breaks.

Some participants would have liked smaller groups, more visual aids, props or PowerPoint, more interactivity and more concrete examples:

Visual aids; I find it hard just to listen sometimes; however it depends if appropriate to use PowerPoint or not.

Perhaps a smaller group size.

Maybe could have been a bit more interactive.

Concrete example of the work as a process.

One person would have liked a chair to sit on:

Found it physically difficult due to health – maybe a chair to sit on. Less standing?

There were also some very positive comments:

For the time available we couldn't have asked for more.

There was a perfect balance between talking and demonstration.

3.4.2 Additional topics which would be useful

Respondents were asked if there was anything that they had wanted from the sessions that they did not get. As shown in the table below, well over half the respondents (60%) were satisfied and said that there was nothing that they had wanted but did not get. Eight of the respondents (19%) said that there was something they would have liked and all of these stated what this was (see list below).

Table 3: Wanted but did not get

Response	No.	%
No	25	60
Yes	8	19
No reply	9	21
Total	42	100

The main topics that participants would like to have been included in the session were:

- More about the composing and arranging parts of the business
- A walk-through of what is involved in the process of a project (unprocessed video, search for sound effects, etc.)
- Time for more examples and demos
- More information about work in the industry
- Handouts, especially for the more difficult material
- More time at the mixing desk

3.5 Additional comments

Finally, respondents were invited to make additional comments. Here are some typical responses:

A highly entertaining and interesting speaker! Bring back for more!

Enjoyable evening, good to listen to new music.

Great talk, nice people.

I thought the speaker was very informative and I enjoyed the talk.

I'm really grateful to have been given the opportunity to take part in this workshop!

Really good. Really chuffed WISEAMP went to the effort of getting 3sixtymedia in.

Splendid day!

Very interesting once again and insightful tips and advice.

We need more things like this.