GLASGOW CITY REGION

SUMMARY PAPER

Demonstrating the Social and Economic Value of Sistema Scotland's Big Noise Programme

Glasgow City Region Intelligence Hub

Working alongside partners at the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) and the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow City Region's Intelligence Hub contributed to the 2026 evaluation of the charity Sistema Scotland's Big Noise programme.

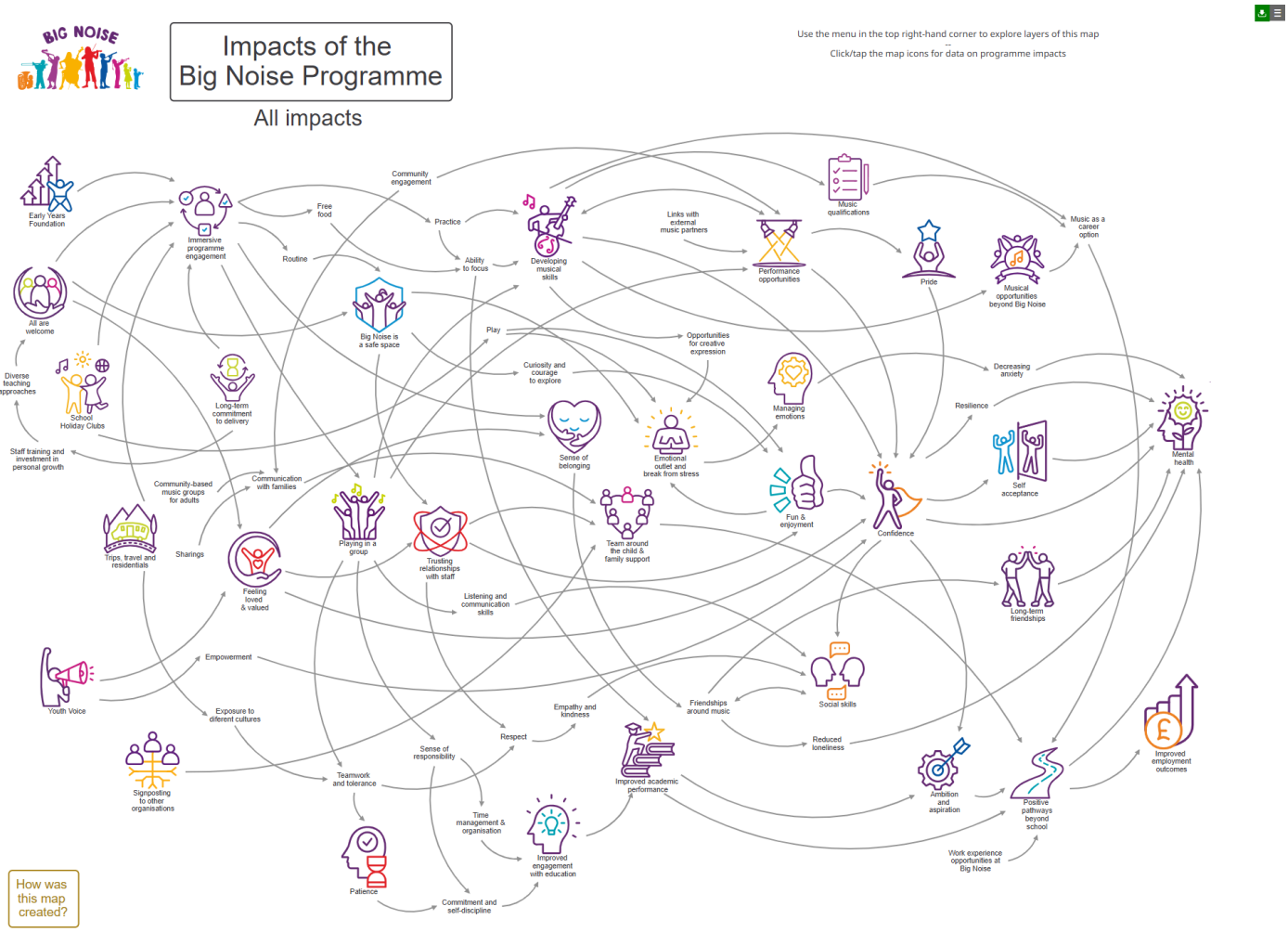
Based on the Venezuelan El Sistema model, Big Noise aims to use participation in an intensive, long-term symphony orchestra programme to foster a range of social and wellbeing benefits for the children and young people taking part. Big Noise was launched in the Raploch estate in Stirling in April 2008 and has since expanded to serve 3,600 children and young people in six areas across five cities, including Glasgow's Govanhill. Each of these areas face substantial socioeconomic challenges; 83% of the programme's participants live in the 30% most deprived areas in Scotland.

The Evaluation: 'Trust the Process'

Ongoing evaluation of Big Noise is essential; it is important to determine whether the programme is generating the kind of benefits outlined by Sistema, given its receipt of annual funding from the Scottish Government alongside charitable and philanthropic investment. Additionally, it allows for exploration not only of its outcomes, but also *how* the programme generates impact, helping to identify aspects of the programme to be improved or expanded on, and informing the development of similar interventions.

Since 2011, GCPH have led on the independent 'life course evaluation' of Big Noise. These evaluations have demonstrated the potential of the programme to catalyse long-term positive changes in the lives of those taking part. These changes have been found to stem from seven key mechanisms, including the development of long-term, high-quality relationships; collective and co-operative learning; and the intensity and immersion of the programme, with individuals often taking part across several years and, therefore, across several stages of childhood and adolescence.

The 2026 evaluation 'Trust the Process: Big Noise impact on participants, families and their wider communities' took a mixed-methods approach (prioritising qualitative evidence) to explore the impact of the programme on a wide range of outcomes across these three groups. Pathways to outcomes were visualised in an [interactive systems map], developed using qualitative insights from those taking part in the programme, as well as the Intelligence Hub's economic evaluation.



GCR Intelligence Hub's Economic Appraisal

While economic evaluation is a common part of work at the Intelligence Hub, previous evaluations have mostly explored the impact of investments in, for example, large-scale infrastructure projects. The evaluation of a programme for which success hinges primarily on delivering social and wellbeing benefits for its participants required adapting the existing Business Case Economic Model (BCEM), with this adaption drawing on UK Government HM Treasury Green Book guidance to ensure that the approach was robust. Economic benefits incorporated in the model included:

- avoidance of antisocial behaviour,
- utility from concert attendance (saving money on alternative entertainment costs, such as cinema tickets),
- estimates of benefit of participation in a school wellbeing/resilience programme,
- and volunteering benefits.

Using this approach, Big Noise Govanhill (2026) was found to generate a significant, positive return on investment. Calculated using figures for a five-year period, it was estimated that, for every £1 spent, the programme returns:

- **£3.25 of benefit to Glasgow**
- **£3.94 of benefit to the wider Glasgow City Region**
- **£5.99 of benefit for Scotland.**

Over a participant's lifetime, or 70 years, the gross value-added impact is estimated at around:

£60m to Glasgow, £73m to the City Region, and £111m nationally.

The calculations used to produce these estimates did not account for a range of other benefits – including to health or future earnings – which cannot be easily monetised without robust data, and so it likely that they underestimate the economic impact of the programme. It is important to note too that the appraisal cannot be compared to the previous appraisal due to differences in methodology. Further detail on the methods used are included in the appendices to the evaluation.

It is important to state that the production of an estimate of economic impact (highly sought by government and other funders) is not intended to suggest that Sistema is of greater benefit than smaller-scale, local, community-based organisations which may not share the same level of access to media, to government, and to evaluators, and who may struggle to gain the same material and symbolic support for their operations. What it does show, however, is the value not only to individuals but to wider society of well-run, well-resourced, longitudinal social programmes which place close and trusted relationships at their heart.

Launch event

The launch of the evaluation report was held at the Govanhill Neighbourhood Centre (the home of Big Noise Govanhill) on 17th June, attended by a range of representatives from organisations involved in the evaluation, those from Sistema Scotland who are involved in the management and delivery of Big Noise, and four young people from the Govanhill branch of Big Noise who provided a wonderful soundtrack to the event.

Finn Clasen represented the Intelligence Hub on a panel alongside Dr Lisa Garnham (University of Strathclyde), Chris Harkins (GCPH), Aileen Campbell (Audit Scotland), and Vicky Williams (CEO of Sistema Scotland). Attendees were praiseworthy both of the programme, and of the evaluation itself, with the Hub's economic appraisal being touted as an important component. There was interest from attendees regarding the potential for replicating such appraisals on other projects.

The full evaluation report is available at: https://www.gcph.co.uk/latest/publications/1341-trust-the-process-big-noise-impact-on-participants-families-and-their-wider-communities

Further details on the methodological approach are available at: https://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/000/003/992/Final_Additional_Information_Appendices__original.pdf?1780927633

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