

RESHAPE MUSIC:

A REPORT EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF
DISABLED MUSICIANS IN EDUCATION AND BEYOND.

OCTOBER 2020



**YOUTH
MUSIC**

Cover photo: co-researcher Jess performing on stage.

“WE’RE PASSIONATE ABOUT THIS BECAUSE IT AFFECTS US PERSONALLY - AND WE’RE NOT JUST SAYING IT TO BE MOODY OR DIFFICULT, BUT BECAUSE IT NEEDS TO CHANGE.”

JESS, CO-RESEARCHER

INTRODUCTIONS

FROM THE CO-RESEARCHERS

We are Disabled musicians. We're all at different stages of our careers, following different paths. Jess works as an advisor to a technology firm developing new instruments. Charlotte plays with BSO Resound and has lectured about accessible and inclusive practice at Bristol University. Oliver has performed all over the world with the British Paraorchestra. Hunter's a drummer studying music at university. Holli's a harpist who has just completed her A-Levels and hopes to attend a conservatoire next year. Leo plays bodhran and banjo with several national orchestras and ensembles. John teaches drums, plays with two bands and loves engineering using his own PA. Georgina plays the French horn and has performed at the BBC School Proms.

Some of the obstacles we've faced in our education and careers would be familiar to all musicians: finding tutors who support our ambitions, getting our music out there, breaking into the industry, balancing a number of different roles.

We've also had to handle additional challenges. Being viewed as the "naughty autistic person" at school. Low expectations and misunderstanding from teachers. Performance venues and stages which are literally inaccessible. Nervousness from music shop assistants when they see a white cane. Prohibitive costs for adapted equipment. Being Disabled hasn't caused most of these issues: instead, it's the way society is set up, and the ways people respond to us which creates barriers. But there are days when being Disabled means we simply can't do what we want to do, and we need others to understand this.

So many issues could be solved, or at least reduced, with increased awareness, knowledge and communication. If music educators knew how to better identify access barriers and felt more confident exploring creative solutions. If music retailers were armed with information about funding support and the wide range of instruments available. If venues understood what's needed to become truly accessible. These things need to change to open up a world of choice and opportunity for Disabled musicians.

It's important that Disabled musicians were co-researchers on this report, because it gives us all a voice – our involvement means that this report actually shows where the issues are and where things need to change. As co-researchers, we came together in online workshops to discuss the research findings, and the experiences of the Disabled music makers really resonated with our own experiences. It was reassuring to realise that these challenges are familiar to so many of us – "it's not just me"! It's proof of what we deal with every day. Yet it was frustrating too, as things haven't changed much since we were making music at school.

We've included our recommendations for how music educators and retailers

can make real, practical change. Inclusion benefits everyone: not only Disabled musicians, but anyone playing or performing music.

We believe this report is essential reading for musicians and anyone involved in the music industries and education. If you aren't Disabled, we hope that it will help you to understand more about what it takes for us to break through in music, and to be more accommodating to our needs. We encourage you to ask questions, to think differently, to spread the word, to take action, and to create change in both the short and long term.

And for other Disabled musicians reading this report: we hope it inspires you to speak out and to keep advocating for change. We want to hear about your experiences, your successes, your struggles, your music: tell us about them on Twitter or Instagram using the hashtag #ReshapeMusic.

Charlotte, Georgina, Holli, Hunter, Jess, John, Leo and Oliver

FROM BLAINE HARRISON, MYSTERY JETS

The conversation surrounding inclusivity is without a doubt one of the most important ones of our time, and much like the many other corners of social justice, it too often suffers from becoming rapidly politicised.

We're living in an era where our core human values are undergoing close re-examination and radical reform on a global level. Whether it be it on matters of institutional racism and sexism, trans-representation, ageism or healthcare, the fight for equal opportunity is playing out across both the corporate world and society at large.

What has always set the arts apart is its rare and unique ability to bring people together. As with a play or a painting, a piece of music can speak in a language which anyone can understand, and ultimately belongs to the people. But access to opportunity is often a different story. Giant leaps in tech over the past 25 years have given artists new tools and instruments to realise their creative potential, but how many of these instruments are designed with possible adaptations in mind, and how easy are they to try out?

My own entrance into music was via the drums at a young age - but lacking adequate muscle control over my lower body, I found myself drawn to synthesisers and guitars instead. Had I grown up around the technology available today, my story may have been somewhat different.

What sets this report apart is that it has been led by the people most affected by the conversation around inclusion in the arts - young people with a lived experience of disability themselves, and I consider the findings to be of great interest. Both to anyone looking to carve out a path in music, and equally those on the sidelines, looking for new ways in which that landscape could be improved for the bright lights of tomorrow.

FROM MATT GRIFFITHS, YOUTH MUSIC CEO

While there has been some progress, particularly over the last five years, *Reshape Music* illustrates in very stark terms that the views, lived experience and expertise of Disabled people are still absent in the planning and delivery of music education and music-making. As a result, policies, programmes and infrastructure are often developed in a way that excludes their involvement and participation. This is discriminatory and particularly alarming knowing that there are 13.3 million Disabled people in the UK equating to 21% of the total population.

COVID-19 has brought these inequalities into sharp focus with Disabled people being disproportionately affected, facing further barriers to accessing services and being at higher risk of contracting the virus. At Youth Music, thanks to the support of the National Lottery and Arts Council England, we will continue to strive for a more equitable and just music education system, and at the same time, take our own organisational actions to drive change.

These include increasing representation of Disabled people in our team and on the board, allocating specific resources to ensure that Disabled children and young people can access music education and music-making, and working with experts with lived experience of disability to shape our programmes and practices.

FROM DR JO THOMAS, MEMBER OF THE TAKE IT AWAY CONSORTIUM

I am a composer and a musician. I mainly write electronic music. I have BMus, MMus from Bangor, University of Wales; and a PhD in Electroacoustic music composition from City University, London. I have won international awards for my work in music and I am aware of my achievements in music. I identify as Disabled, having limited use of my right hand, controlled epilepsy and being mobility impaired. I now work as a self-employed freelance musician and composer. I do not feel that my music is Disabled, nor my performances.

I write and present electronic/electro-acoustic music, and I work on multichannel systems and architectural spaces. As a composer and musician working with systems of speakers, I create music which is not solely connected to physical performance. My music explores spaces of nature, electricity and flux and rapid change. I have explored alternative ways of publishing, choosing not to go through traditional formats.

I sit on the board of Sound and Music as a composer and Vice-Chair. I am a Director of the [Ivors Academy](#) and I lead their disability working group. When sitting on these boards I am in a position of decision-making and influence in music in the UK.

This report originated from surveys produced by the Take it away Consortium: a partnership between [Creative United](#) and [Take It Away](#), [Drake Music](#), [Music for Youth](#), [The OHMI Trust](#), [Open Up Music](#), and [Youth Music](#). These organisations are all committed to supporting Disabled musicians. As a member of the Consortium, I have been involved in the interviewing and decision-making around the team. Adaptive instruments are interesting to me as an artist as they occupy many platforms, physical and virtual. I have commissioned instruments, and helped to design prototypes and equipment for adaptive instruments.

The Consortium wanted to find out more information about people's access to music facilities in education, retail and general music environments. This report looks at how Disabled people are choosing their instruments, finding teachers, and at their experiences in music in both formal music education and informal groups.

We put together a team which included eight co-researchers who were Disabled musicians. This report is led by the responses of those co-researchers.

The information collected from the surveys indicates deep imbalances, structural ableism and systemic inequalities within music environments that Disabled people have access to in the UK. The co-researchers have been extremely professional and generous in this project. They have interpreted the information through sharing their own experiences of music, their work in music groups, composing and being creators in music. They have shared their love of music, their willingness to go to explore and search for suitable instruments to play. They have shared the difficult experiences, barriers which are personal to them. They have found those barriers in music exams, institutions, lack of informal group work, under-estimation of musical abilities, inaccessibility of spaces, venues, shops and organisations. They have also shared how they have found their solutions, and how one person's interpretation of a barrier is not necessarily the same for another person.

Disclosing disability is a personal thing. Throughout my time in music I have chosen to disclose disability depending on how I feel at the time, who I'm working with, how important it is for them to know, how much I trust the working space. Sometimes I have chosen not to disclose. I think this has been due to a creative need to remain at a distance from other people's assumptions. Other people's assumptions come through strongly in this research: there are significant gaps between how the Disabled musicians see a situation and how educators and retailers see it. Finding this information is very positive and can be drawn on to make meaningful change.

My education has helped me grow in music, explore horizons and innovate. I have met people through my studies who I have grown with professionally throughout my life, and I know that the professional opportunities that I have gained working in international studios will always be close to me. Qualifications have been important to me: they have given me choice in my life and confidence. In this report, graded music examinations are highlighted as being a barrier. Co-researcher Oliver explains that he has been unable to take formal graded exams because he plays the harmonica. Is this a missed opportunity for Oliver to acquire a music qualification which could benefit his choices in life in the future? Could the graded system change to be more inclusive, so that Disabled musicians can be examined on adaptive instruments or instruments of their choice?

I feel that this report brings out a need for adaptive instruments to be widely available. It emphasises the need for more choice at every level. In exams, in teaching, in support, in equipment. Choice is a catalyst for creativity.

The results of the survey show that currently, practising music as a Disabled musician is extremely difficult with multiple barriers. This report offers a view of music environments and disability which is not pleasant: a view which shows misunderstanding, assumption, discrimination lack of empathy and compassion. It is hard reading as it shows a world of limitations, but it also shows need. In the midst of COVID recovery, promoting the rights of Disabled musicians should be a priority for music in the UK.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH AND WHY WAS IT UNDERTAKEN?

This research explores the experiences and perceptions of music-makers, music educators and music retailers about music opportunities for Disabled people.

Disabled people's needs are poorly understood when it comes to music-making and music education. Disabled people make up over a fifth of the population and yet they are hugely under-represented in the music industry and in music education. The research aimed to gather a national dataset that could be used to inform policy to help reshape this imbalance.

The data was gathered by the Take it away Consortium, a partnership of organisations working together to support Disabled musicians. Funding from the National Lottery via Arts Council England enabled Youth Music to carry out this work.

The research findings are based on the results of three surveys that were distributed to different respondents: music makers (of all ages), music educators (specialists and non-specialists, across all settings), and music retailers (small to large and including both general and specialist outlets). Researcher Sarah Mawby led a series of sessions to interpret the findings with a team of eight co-researchers who are all Disabled musicians. Their interpretation forms the basis of this report.

WHAT BARRIERS DO DISABLED PEOPLE EXPERIENCE WHEN IT COMES TO MAKING MUSIC?

FINDING THE RIGHT INSTRUMENT

The choice of instrument Disabled people learn is often dictated by their disability. Very few people reported that they were playing an instrument with an adapted feature. While a range of adaptations and accessible instruments exist to open up access to instrumental playing, there is a lack of knowledge about them. Very few parents and retailers would know where to source one.

Just over one quarter of Music Education Hub respondents reported that their Hub held specialist equipment or adapted instruments for Disabled children. Very few Disabled young people are participating in extra-curricular ensembles run by Music Education Hubs, limiting their ability to practice and progress. Progression is further compounded by many accessible instruments not being included in traditional graded exams.

PURCHASING AN INSTRUMENT

The majority of Disabled people who responded to the survey owned their own instruments. Many Disabled music-makers felt that music shops were generally accessible, however there is a lack of confidence and knowledge amongst music retailers when it comes to serving Disabled customers.

SOURCING FUNDING

There is a lack of knowledge among parents, educators and music retailers about sources of funding to support Disabled people to make music. Funding application processes and eligibility criteria can make funding schemes inaccessible.

ACCESSING MUSIC LESSONS

Despite 80% of educators feeling confident adapting their practice to meet a range of needs, one quarter of music makers stated that their music lessons were not generally accessible. Just under half had found a teacher who met their learning needs. This suggests a need for teachers to be trained in inclusive practices, and greater inclusion of Disabled people in designing and delivering such training.

Most parents were not familiar with their local Music Education Hub and less than half of music retailers felt confident signposting Disabled customers to teachers who could meet their learning needs.

PRACTICING AND DEVELOPING SKILLS

Most Disabled musicians are making music at home or at school. Their participation in public music groups (such as orchestras or choirs) is very low, and less than one quarter are making music informally. Almost half reported access limitations when they were practicing an instrument to develop their skills. Fewer access limitations were reported when it came to playing for pleasure.

PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

Almost one third of music makers felt there were no suitable performance opportunities available to them and almost half had experienced a moderate or severe limitation in accessing instrumental performance opportunities in the last 12 months. The co-researchers stressed the need for performance opportunities to be appropriate to people's musical aspirations. The inaccessibility of venues is a major barrier limiting participation.

GENERAL BARRIERS TO ACCESS

When asked about barriers to access for Disabled people, the views of music makers were often very different to the views of music educators. This suggests that music educators may not fully understand the lived experience of their Disabled students.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US AND WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

Disabled people face significant barriers at every stage of the journey to becoming a musician. They are underrepresented in the education, amateur and professional spheres of our music industries. Their needs are often poorly understood and their lived experience is not being drawn on to open up access and make things more inclusive.

There are exclusionary barriers that prevent access to tuition, group playing, performance opportunities, music exams, and funding. These barriers can hinder musical progression at any career stage. We found involvement in music groups, both formal and informal, to be very low, meaning that Disabled people may also be missing out on the social benefits of playing with others. There are many Disabled people making a career from music, but their voices and experiences are often unheard.

At the end of the report, we have set out a series of recommendations directed to funders, educators, retailers, and all in the music industries. The recommendations are designed to achieve:

- Improved access and choice for Disabled musicians.
- Increased representation of Disabled people in the paid workforce and positions informing policy and practice.
- Increased knowledge and skills among the workforce to better support Disabled musicians.

Barriers to participation and progression are not insurmountable. They require positive action, and for people to work together. Crucially, the lived experience of Disabled people needs to be at the heart of any solution.

MEET THE RESEARCH TEAM

SARAH MAWBY



Sarah is an independent research and evaluation consultant. She has a PhD in music education and music psychology from the University of Leeds and has been researching in the field of music, education and disability for over 10 years. An ally to the disability rights movement, Sarah is also the director of Crippling the Muse – a community of Disabled and non-Disabled musicians, researchers, practitioners and activists who aim to share their experiences and campaign

for increased representation of Disabled people across the arts sector. You can find Sarah on Twitter [@sarahlmawby](https://twitter.com/sarahlmawby)

CHARLOTTE BOTT



Charlotte is a professional musician who has worked in many contexts. She has been a music leader and mentor to Disabled students attending special needs schools as well as a musician in the British Paraorchestra. Currently, she performs with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in an ensemble called Resound. She also co-runs an Arts Award programme in an SEN/D school. Charlotte plays the LinnStrument, an expressive electronic instrument with 200

notepads that respond to three dimensions of finger-movement. You can find out more about the LinnStrument here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=px0ld-fVD9M>

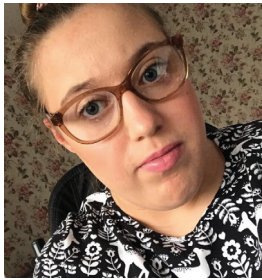
OLIVER CROSS



Oliver is a musician, photographer, filmmaker, and composer. Since the age of 17, he has been playing harmonica professionally with the British Paraorchestra and he also plays with the National Open Youth Orchestra. His recent compositional outputs include a commission for the Barbican's [Subject to Change: New Horizons](#) programme on the theme of #NotGoingOut during the Coronavirus pandemic, and a show with the Goldfield Ensemble which

is based on folk songs and his own family history. As a Drake Music Associate Musician, Oliver has led inclusive music education workshops in many locations across the country. You can find out more about Oliver's work here: <https://olivercross.smugmug.com/> and you can follow Oliver on Twitter [@PhotoOliC](https://twitter.com/PhotoOliC)

JESSICA FISHER



Jess's musical journey began in 2015 when Inspire Youth Arts came into her school to teach her class how to play music from iPads. This resulted in the creation of an ensemble called the Able Orchestra. Jess performed with the orchestra at the BBC Ten Pieces Proms at the Royal Albert Hall in 2016. After this, her love for music really blossomed and, with the help of a music company called Digit Music she was able to start exploring her love of music through a device

they invented called Control one (an adaptive wheelchair controller that make music making more accessible). She then went on to create her own pieces of music and has performed them at events such as BBC Introducing and now works for Digit Music.

LEO LONG



Leo is a folk musician who plays bodhran and banjo in various ensembles and orchestras. He is diagnosed with severe speech and language disorder and ASD. Earlier this year, Leo was selected to create a new piece of artistic work as part of a programme called [Subject to Change: New Horizons](#) at the Barbican Centre in London. In addition to his music, Leo works as a volunteer ranger at South Down National Park. He also models with a modelling agency and enjoys playing sport

- in particular, open water swimming and aquathlon. Through his own experience, Leo is keen to change the music industry to make it more Disabled-people-friendly and an easier place to work.

HOLLI PANDIT



Holli has just finished her A levels in Music, Chemistry and French at Watford Grammar School for Girls. Next year she hopes to go to a Conservatoire to study towards a BMus qualification with harp as her principal instrument. She has been at Junior Guildhall for two years and will stay for her gap year. She was diagnosed with Asperger's when she was 11 but started playing harp when she was 9. In 2016 she played at [Autism's Got Talent](#) - an event organised by Anna

Kennedy and her team. She also played in their show in 2019. She has been playing in the [National Open Youth Orchestra](#) (NOYO) since September 2019 and has really enjoyed playing contemporary music with them. In her spare time, you might find Holli reading fiction or music books. You can find Holli on LinkedIn here: [Holli Pandit](#)

JOHN RAMM



John is a totally blind drummer, percussionist, singer, guitarist, and sound engineer. He has taught drums privately on a one-to-one basis for many years. He plays with two bands and for his local church. He also enjoys playing and singing at open mic events and folk clubs in his local area. John is just as at home behind his Midas mixing desk and loves to make bands sound fantastic for their audiences.

GEORGINA SPRAY



Georgina started playing the tenor horn when she was 7 and moved onto the French horn when she was 12. She has played in the Lincolnshire Music Service for a number of years. Most notably, she has toured to Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Spain and Germany and performed in the BBC School Proms at the Royal Albert Hall with the Lincolnshire Youth Symphony/Wind Orchestra. She has just graduated from the University of Huddersfield with a BMus

(Hons) degree and is now actively seeking to start her career in music, focusing on music and disability. One of her favourite things in the world is rehearsing with the [London Centre of the National Open Youth Orchestra](#) (NOYO), run by Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning. Georgina is also a newly elected young ambassador for the National Autistic Society.

HUNTER STILES



Hunter is a student at Falmouth University in Cornwall, where he is currently working towards qualifications to teach students labelled as having special educational needs. Originally from Glasgow in Scotland, he has spent most of his life campaigning for equality for Disabled people. As a drummer, Hunter has taught samba to members of a youth group and provided free drum kit lessons to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. After completing

his undergraduate degree, Hunter is keen to carry out additional research and ultimately complete a PhD which focuses on the impact of music in healthcare.

YOUTH MUSIC

Youth Music is a national charity supporting young people's lives in music. Equality, diversity and inclusion drive our vision and mission. We want to equalise access to music: we focus on those who would otherwise miss out because of who they are, where they live, or what they're going through.

We work with children and young people aged 0-25, using the power of music to support musical, personal and social development. As a funder, we invest in around 300 projects each year, reaching more than 80,000 young people and over 4,000 people in the workforce.

We campaign alongside young people to drive change in the music industries and education, making it more inclusive, diverse and creative.

Youth Music is funded thanks to the National Lottery via Arts Council England, players of People's Postcode Lottery, and support from donors, partners and fundraisers. Find out more: www.youthmusic.org.uk

THE TAKE IT AWAY CONSORTIUM

The Consortium is a partnership between [Creative United](#) and [Take It Away](#), [Drake Music](#), [Music for Youth](#), [The OHMI Trust](#), [Open Up Music](#), and [Youth Music](#). Formed in 2018, the partnership aims to:

- Improve collective understanding of the potential demand for adapted and specialist musical instruments for use by aspiring and professional musicians of all kinds and, in particular, Disabled children and adults across the UK.
- Enable existing prototype adaptations (from OHMI, Open Up Music, DM Labs and other sources) to be taken further into small-scale batch production for wider distribution and use.
- Enable the development of bespoke new accessible musical instruments to meet the needs of an individual, and the documentation and sharing of designs in the open source model.
- Explore ways to develop and train a workforce that has the knowledge and skills to introduce and demonstrate adaptive instruments located in 'centres of music retail excellence' around the UK.
- Provide financial assistance to families and individuals that need access to these types of instruments by providing a combination of grants and loans to ensure equality of access for all.
- Raise the profile of music making by Disabled children and adults, increasing awareness of the opportunities and sources of support available to enable more people to access music.

Take it away Consortium representatives and contributors for the period 2018-2020 have included: Mary-Alice Stack, Angela Suh, Sophie Ogunyemi, Mhairi Grant, Tim Yates, Carien Meijer, Gawain Hewitt, Richard Llewellyn, Jo Thomas, Holly McBride, Barry Farrimond, Carol Reid, Nick Wilsdon, Judith Webster, Rachel Wolffsohn.





Photo: Dr Jo Thomas (right)

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

CONTEXT

Shortly after forming in 2018, the Take it away Consortium came together to discuss how they could best work collectively to meet their aims. It quickly became apparent that very little evidence existed to demonstrate the demand for adapted instruments amongst D/deaf and Disabled musicians in the UK. It also was unclear how confident the music retail and music education sectors felt when it came to meeting the needs of Disabled musicians.

To better understand the needs of Disabled musicians, the Consortium decided to launch a major national research project. The project sought to capture a detailed, national picture of Disabled people's experiences of music-making. In particular, it aimed to find out how Disabled people access music education and what the main barriers to access might be.

This research was made possible by funding from the National Lottery and Arts Council England.

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH IMPORTANT?

No data of this nature previously existed. This is especially alarming when you consider that there are 13.3 million Disabled people in the UK – that's 21% of the population. 8% of children, 18% of working age adults and 44% of state pension age adults are Disabled.

It is deeply concerning that Disabled people's needs are so poorly understood when it comes to music-making and music education. Disabled people make up over a fifth of the population and yet they are hugely under-represented in the music industry², music education sector³ and cultural life in general.⁴

According to recent data from Arts Council England, Disabled people make up just over 5% of the workforce in music National Portfolio Organisations (organisations that receive regular core funding from Arts Council England). One in five people are Disabled, yet they only make up one in 20 people in the publicly-funded music workforce. This must change.

To bring about such change, music education and music industry organisations need to work with D/deaf and Disabled people to better understand their needs and experiences. This research is an important first step in gathering this information on a national scale.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH

This report originated from surveys produced by the Take it away Consortium. All organisations involved are committed to supporting Disabled musicians. However, Disabled people are critically under-represented in the workforce, and within the Consortium members. Moreover, Disabled people were under-represented in the survey design at the outset, and the impact of this on the research is undeniable.

As a result, we added an additional step into the research process. We put out a brief to find a research team to help present and interpret the findings. We required that this research team had lived experience of disability. And we had to call for proposals twice, because the first time round, we didn't reach people who had that experience.

The process we've been through since the research team came on board has been fascinating. Working in partnership in this way has resulted in a richer and more accurate piece of research. When the co-researchers came on board, for example, they pointed out ways in which they would have phrased questions differently, or changed the focus of the surveys.

“I think the survey, for people with learning disabilities, it might have been a bit difficult to access. I think Disabled people should've been included from the start, it might have helped.”

– Georgina, co-researcher

Highlighting power imbalances in research, and in music organisations, is crucial. With hindsight, we should have committed to including more lived experience in the research design from the outset.

The Take it away partners now have to consider the implications of the research findings and recommendations for the Consortium's aims and objectives. The Consortium should work to address the gaps and barriers outlined by the co-research team.

NOTES ON THE DATA

The number of people responding to our surveys wasn't a large enough sample size for us to be able to say that the findings are representative of the wider population. The findings of this research therefore only account for the experiences of our survey respondents.

Responses to our survey are also subject to self-selection bias. Self-selection bias happens when individuals select themselves into a group (i.e. by deciding whether to participate in a survey). The characteristics of those who choose to complete a survey may not be representative of the entire population. Therefore, it's important for readers of this research not to take the figures out of context.

It is also important to note that data collection took place before the COVID-19 measures were announced. This means that when participants talk about the limitations they've experienced 'within the last 12 months', these experiences do not cover the lockdown period.

THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

This research is informed by the Social Model of Disability. The Social Model was developed by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in 1975 and is a way of reframing how disability is perceived and understood.⁶

For a long time, disability has been viewed as an individual tragedy that a Disabled person needs to overcome in order to participate in society. This viewpoint, known as the Medical Model of Disability, sees the Disabled person as a 'problem' to be solved with therapy, medication and special education etc. With the Medical Model, the focus is on what a person cannot do or what is 'wrong' with them. It is the person that needs to be fixed or cured in order to participate in society.

The Social Model challenges this idea. Developed by, for and with Disabled people, it flips the medical model on its head. With the Social Model, disability isn't something a person has, it's something that society *does*.

A common illustration of this is that "it is not the inability to walk which disables someone, but the steps into the building"⁷. And it's not just buildings that are the problem. People who are different to a perceived 'norm' face stigma and discrimination. Political, health and education systems are all structured in a way that prevent some people from reaching their full potential. These societal factors are the things that *disable* people.

The Social Model doesn't deny that health conditions or bodily differences affect people's lives. It simply argues that these differences only become barriers when society is built in a way that excludes people with physical, sensory or neurological differences from participating. Removing disabling barriers creates a better, more inclusive society for everyone.

You can find out more about the Social Model of Disability by watching this short video from Shape Arts: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24KE__OCKMw

Inclusion London also provide an excellent overview of the Social Model in a variety of different formats (including BSL and Easy Read) on their website. You can find their Social Model factsheets here: <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/disability-in-london/social-model/the-social-model-of-disability-and-the-cultural-model-of-deafness/>

LANGUAGE

The language Disabled people use to describe themselves is a personal choice, and preference varies from individual to individual.

Youth Music's communications policy is that when writing about an individual, we will use whichever terms they choose to describe themselves (for example, each co-researcher has written their own biography). However, when writing about Disabled musicians in general, we have to make a decision for consistency.

At present, Youth Music's chosen term is Disabled people, with a capital 'D'.

The capital letter highlights the unique and collective sense of identity many Disabled people share.

We have chosen this over people-first language like 'musicians with disabilities'. This is because the Social Model means that often people are *dis*-abled by society, not that a disability is something they *have*.

Youth Music's communications team discussed preferred terms with a number of the co-researchers, who were in favour of this term. Although not all use the term Disabled people themselves, they supported the thinking behind Youth Music's choice.

When appropriate Youth Music will also use the term D/deaf and Disabled people. However, although the research survey for this report was answered by some D/deaf respondents, the sample size wasn't large enough for us to consider the findings separately.

SURVEY DESIGN

To find out more about Disabled people's access to music making, three surveys were designed. Each survey aimed to gather the views and experiences of a different group of people: music makers (191 respondents aged 1 to 80 with abilities ranging from beginner to professional musician), music educators (176 respondents, specialists and non-specialists working in a range of settings), and music retailers (29 respondents, although eight didn't fully complete the survey).

There were three possible routes through the music makers' survey. Questions were worded slightly differently depending on whether participants were responding on behalf of their own experience (104 respondents), the experiences of a child or young person they cared for (74), or the experiences of an adult they cared for (13).

The surveys were designed by staff at Creative United with additional input from the wider Consortium. Data collection took place between 5 September 2018 and 31 January 2019.

ANALYSIS

Data analysis took place in June/July 2020, during the coronavirus lockdown. An independent researcher, Sarah Mawby, was recruited to carry out the analysis and this stage of the work was led by Youth Music.

At this point in the research, eight Disabled co-researchers joined the research team.

Once the data were analysed, the co-researchers were invited to attend an online workshop. The aim of the workshop was to discuss the findings and to begin to interpret the data as a team. In addition to talking about the findings and research methods, we discussed the strengths and limitations of the research and began to think about how the data should be written-up and shared so that it was accessible to all.

Jess, Hunter and Holli reflected on what the workshops meant to them:

I really enjoyed the workshops. I thought that they were a really good way to interpret the data. Much better than sending out a questionnaire. It was more personal. We were able to discuss things and get everyone's perspectives.

Hunter (co-researcher)

I agree with Hunter. Being able to talk and listen to each other was great. If we just did a questionnaire, our responses would just look the same as the data we've been reading. The workshops brought everything to life. We were able to say what we thought about the data and discuss how it relates to our own experiences.

Holli (co-researcher)

Doing the workshops proved why we needed to do the research in the first place. All of the co-researchers are different and we all make music in different ways, but we're all here for the same goal and that's to change things. It was great to come together and talk through things as a team.

Jess (co-researcher)

The collaborative process didn't stop at the workshops. During the write-up of this report Sarah and the Youth Music team kept in constant contact with the co-research team - sharing and requesting feedback on drafts of the report and troubleshooting different points of analysis. The co-researchers have also been involved in developing the communications strategy, making decisions on how the findings are presented and how they will be shared.

The result is a report that is led by Disabled people.

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Eighty per cent of Disabled music-makers and their parents/relatives/carers felt that their experience of music making (or the experience of the child, young person or adult they cared for) was positive.

I find music is important to me because it's given me ways to express myself, and it's also made me more independent... My favourite experiences so far have been playing in the National Open Youth Orchestra, because it's really given me a lot of opportunities, and it means that as an orchestra, we are showing the world that we also enjoy playing music as Disabled people.

I'd like to see more Disabled musicians playing with non-Disabled musicians, so that we can better feed off each other's strengths. I'd also want more Disabled musicians to speak out more about their barriers, and to show people that they can be role models too, so that we have more people to look up to as Disabled musicians.

Holli (co-researcher)

Yet Disabled people face barriers at every stage of the journey to becoming a musician. Some of these barriers intersect with those that non-Disabled people experience. These include financial barriers, lack of local opportunities, or not enough information about help and support available. However, some are unique to Disabled people and are made worse by the stigma and structural inequalities they face. These include logistical issues around accessing facilities and transport, as well as health conditions, illnesses or impairments.

In this section, we plot the journey to musicianship for Disabled musicians, outlining the barriers they face along the way.

What music education are young people entitled to at school?

Music is part of the National Curriculum in England and Wales, meaning that in theory, all children aged 5-14 are required to receive a music education at school. Most special schools follow the National Curriculum. However, the increasing number of academies have more flexibility over how they follow the curriculum: some will choose to offer more music, but some less. Youth Music's [Exchanging Notes report](#) explored the benefits of a curriculum which is more relevant to young people's interests.

In addition to music education provided by individual schools and teachers, many activities and services are provided by Music Education Hubs. Music Education Hubs are groups of organisations – such as local authorities, schools, other hubs, art organisations,

community or voluntary organisations – working together to create joined-up music education provision, and respond to local need. They are funded by the Department for Education via Arts Council England.

Music Education Hubs are required to provide the following core and extension roles:

Core roles

- Ensure that every child aged 5 to 18 has the opportunity to learn a musical instrument (other than voice) through whole-class ensemble teaching programmes for ideally a year (but for a minimum of a term) of weekly tuition on the same instrument.
- Provide opportunities to play in ensembles and to perform from an early stage.
- Ensure that clear progression routes are available and affordable to all young people.
- Develop a singing strategy to ensure that every pupil sings regularly and that choirs and other vocal ensembles are available in the area.

Extension roles

- Offer continuing professional development to school staff, particularly in supporting schools to deliver music in the curriculum.
- Provide an instrument loan service, with discounts or free provision for those on low incomes.
- Provide access to large-scale and/or high-quality music experiences for pupils, working with professional musicians and/or venues. This may include undertaking work to publicise the opportunities available to schools, parents/carers and students.



Photo by Victoria Wai: Nadine Shah (right) working with musician Ruth as part of Generator's We Create residency, Newcastle.

FINDING THE RIGHT INSTRUMENT

The first step on the journey to becoming a musician is finding the right instrument. However, for Disabled musicians, this decision is often not as simple as choosing the instrument you like the sound of most, or the one your musical idol plays.

Over half (57%) of the music makers responding to our survey said that the choice of instrument they could learn to play was dictated by their disability. Yet 72% said that they could learn to play their first choice of instrument.

This suggests that Disabled musicians tend to choose instruments that they know they can play (i.e. without any form of adaptation):

Disabled musicians are often forced into choosing an instrument because it works for them, not necessarily because it is what they want to play.

John (co-researcher)

This finding was supported by the fact that relatively few music makers were playing an instrument with an adapted feature. Only 16% of the musicians responding to our survey played an instrument with an adapted stand or feature. 58% of music makers said that the instrument they played did not have an adaptation. 27% said that their instrument did not currently have an adapted feature, but they could benefit from one.

There is a considerable knowledge gap when it comes to knowing what adaptations and accessible instruments are available.

When it comes to instrument adaptations, a lot of the time we don't know about them. It's as simple as that. We don't know whether there is something different that can be done.

Hunter (co-researcher)

Only 25% of the Disabled music makers, parents, relatives and carers who responded to our survey knew where to source an adapted instrument if they needed one.

I've found it difficult to find information on how it would be possible for my child to play the violin. The limb centre and music shop were very helpful in advising me but, ultimately, I had to turn to YouTube to find videos of others in the same situation.

Participant responding on behalf of a Disabled child

In addition, 63% of music retailers responding to our survey were unaware of any specialist products or adapted instruments that have been developed to make music more accessible for Disabled people. Only 38% knew how and where to source an adapted instrument if a customer needed one.

Music educators felt more confident when it came to sourcing adapted instruments for their students. Just over half (55%) of the music educators who responded to our survey felt that they knew where to source an adapted musical instrument if a student needed one. However, more than a quarter (28%) did not.

Of the 122 music educators responding on behalf of Music Education Hubs, only 27% said that their Hub held any specialist equipment or adapted instruments for Disabled children as part of their instrument loan service. Those who did offer specialist equipment mentioned that they held the following resources:

- Soundbeam/Beamz equipment
- iPads
- Skoogs
- Clarion
- Adaptations for specific instruments
- Switches
- One-handed musical instruments
- Adapted sheet music (such as Figure Notes/Braille)

The small number of Music Education Hubs offering specialist or adapted equipment further limits Disabled people's choices:

Disabled people need to be able to try out different instruments and different genres of music like folk, jazz and pop, and also try out different ensembles in music. It's really important.

Leo (co-researcher)

The variation in awareness of adaptive instruments across the respondents is revealing. There is work to be done in raising the profile of what is available. The Take it away Consortium have published a [Guide to Buying Adaptive Musical Instruments](#) which aims to bridge this knowledge gap.⁸ This publication is an important resource for those wanting to find out more about what's out there.

Attitudes about what makes an 'instrument' vs an 'adaptation' vary (see our 'pause for thought' below). One of the music retailers (an instrument maker and music tech specialist) responding to our survey explained:

There is sometimes a dim view on specially adapted musical instruments. Our all-accessible electronic instrument is not considered a 'real'

instrument or 'traditional' instrument, which is a real shame. Popular music at the moment is nearly exclusively electronic, and our instrument allows anyone to play, record and perform. There's a serious need for re-education in this area.

Music retailer

These perceptions affect the musical opportunities that are available for Disabled people. For example, many accessible instruments are not included in traditional graded examinations. This makes it difficult for those playing non-traditional instruments to gain recognised qualifications in playing and performing.

There is a lot of emphasis on grades and grading. When I started learning the harmonica, one of the first things that struck me was there are no grades for the harmonica. Which sort of fed back into my education at sixth form because they definitely did measure ability by grades, so that was one of the big hurdles. If you're using an accessible instrument, a lot of the time that's the first instrument of its type that's been made, so there won't have been the background to put a grading system on. Certainly in mainstream musical education that's a huge barrier to overcome.

Oliver (co researcher)

The co-research team felt that it was time that we did away with misconceptions about accessible instruments or adaptations being 'just' for Disabled musicians:

I think when children are quite young and their teachers tell them about instruments, they should include other instruments, not just the 'traditional' ones. If everyone were broader in their thinking about what an instrument might be, it might stop this unnecessary categorisation of what's a 'proper' instrument and what's an 'adaptation'.

Holli (co-researcher)

I agree with Holli. We need to get rid of this idea that 'this is what's available for Disabled people'. Personally, I think that if these instruments were seen to be playable by everyone (which they are) it would make music a lot more fun.

Jess (co-researcher)

In changing these perceptions, co-researchers felt that greater creative opportunities would be established for all musicians.

What do we mean by ‘adaptation’?

It is interesting to see how people are interpreting the phrase ‘specialist equipment or adapted instrument’. The co-research team felt that including electronic instruments (such as Skoogs and Clarions) within this definition was perhaps inaccurate:

Describing something like the Clarion as an adapted instrument is slightly flawed. It’s universal. It can be played by anyone. So it’s not really a piece of specialist equipment.

Charlotte (co-researcher)

While specific adaptations for traditional instruments and sheet music might be better understood as ‘adaptations’, instruments such as the Skoog, Clarion, Soundbeam etc. are, in fact, instruments in their own right. They’re not just accessible instruments for Disabled musicians – anyone should have an opportunity to learn how to play them.

An adaptation can also mean taking something that you use every day (such as the joystick of a motorised wheelchair) and turning it into something you can make music with:

For me ‘adaptation’ means taking something that you wouldn’t expect to be a musical instrument and turning it into one. Whereas, for other people, it might be that they need adapted buttons to help them play the clarinet, or something to help them hold their instrument.

Jess (co-researcher)

PURCHASING AN INSTRUMENT

When asked how students were accessing their instruments, 60% of music educators reported that students owned their own instruments. 59% said that students accessed their instruments in sessions organised by the school, Music Education Hub or music organisation and that students were unable to take these home. 58% of music educators reported that students accessed their instrument via a long-term-loan scheme where students were able to take their instrument home with them.

With so many Disabled people purchasing their own instruments, the accessibility of music shops is of the utmost importance.

KEY STATS

- 59% of music makers felt that music shops were generally accessible to them
- 22% of music makers felt that music shops were inaccessible to them
- 62% of music retailers felt that their premises were fully accessible to Disabled customers
- 24% of music retailers felt that their premises were not fully accessible to Disabled customers
- 22% of music educators felt that music shops were accessible to their students
- 42% of music educators felt that music shops were inaccessible to their students
- 76% of music retailers were part of the Take it away scheme¹

Most (69%) music retailers had supplied an instrument or music equipment for use by a Disabled musician less than 10 times in the last 12 months. The median number of times a retailer had supplied an instrument or music equipment for use by a Disabled person was six. This tells us that, although retailers are serving Disabled customers, to their knowledge they do so infrequently. Due to the hidden nature of some impairments, it is also likely that retailers may not know if they are serving a Disabled customer. In addition, most music retailers (55%) chose not to answer this question (or stopped completing the survey before they got to it).

28% of music retailers responding to our survey dropped out before they had finished answering all the questions. 63% of those who dropped out did so at the first disability-specific question:

Are you aware of any specialist products or adapted instruments that have been developed to make music more accessible for Disabled people?

It is impossible to know for certain why so many music retailers dropped out of the survey at this point. However, the co-research team said that these findings reflected their experiences of visiting music shops:

¹Take it away provide interest-free loans for musical instruments, equipment and tuition. For more information about the Take it away scheme, visit: <https://takeitaway.org.uk/>

In shops, I often have a short period where staff have to get over the fact that someone has just walked in with a white cane. Thankfully, it doesn't usually take long for most people to realise that you're not from another planet.

John (co-researcher)

I've visited music shops before where people have literally freaked out because I was in a wheelchair.

Charlotte (co-researcher)

Many members of the co-research team had experienced an initial lack of confidence and/or experience from music retail staff when it came to serving Disabled customers. They felt that the survey drop-out rate could be related to this.

None of the music retailers reported selling instruments with adaptive features. However, only two music retailers responded to this question, so it is difficult to draw any conclusions or make inferences about this. Perceptions about what constitutes an 'adaptation' and what constitutes an 'instrument' may have also fed into this (see 'What do we mean by 'adaptation'?', above).

Most (69%) music retailers felt that their staff were all equally confident when serving Disabled customers. However, only 24% felt confident demonstrating adapted musical instruments.

Music retailers were on the fence about whether they needed extra training in meeting the needs of Disabled customers. 52% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement 'I/my team would benefit from some training in this area'.

We didn't ask music makers any questions about their experiences of purchasing an instrument. However, the co-research team shared some of their experiences:

For me, the accessibility of music shops depends entirely on the sort of music store I'm trying to access. If I go to a traditional music store, a lot of them are in older buildings with cramped layouts. I never want to move about too much for fear of hitting ridiculously expensive instruments. If I go to a shop for electronic music, synths and tech, I feel like there is more space. It's more open, like a car showroom. For me that's generally more accessible.

Oliver (co-researcher)

I think for me, it's that word 'accessible' and what people view as accessible. Previously, when I've tried to go into some music shops, their idea of what's accessible is to just stick a blue sticker on the door and add the tiniest ramp. I think there needs to be more input from Disabled people to decide what 'accessible' is – the more input we can have, the better.

Jess (co-researcher)

For me, music stores are always accessible because I don't have any physical access needs. I do find that my instrument dictates how I buy things though. I play the harp and buying sheet music for the harp is quite obscure. I tend to get my music and my strings online and they just appear at my door.

Holli (co-researcher)

I don't have physical access requirements, but, because I have autism, I have lots of sensory problems. This can mean that busy shops with lots of noise can be really difficult for me to access (like when lots of different people are trying out instruments at the same time).

Georgina (co-researcher)

Music retailers would benefit from consulting with Disabled customers on a regular basis, and there are many straightforward steps that could open up access to more musicians: for example the introduction of 'quiet hours'. This is not a box-ticking exercise, but an ongoing dialogue that needs to be held between retailers and their Disabled customers. It is essential that retailers develop a joined-up approach to regularly reviewing and improving their accessibility, both online and in store.

SOURCING FUNDING

61% of Disabled music makers and their parents/carers did not know where to find sources of funding to support them/the person they care for with music making.

Only 40% of music educators were confidently able to signpost sources of funding to support their students with music making, and only 36% felt that they were confidently able to signpost sources of funding specifically for Disabled music makers.

Music retailers were split when it came to their ability to signpost to funding. 38% of music retailers felt that they were unable to signpost customers to sources of funding to support their music making, and 38% felt that they were able to. The same percentage (38%) felt that they could not signpost sources of funding specifically for Disabled music makers. Only 24% of music retailers felt that they could signpost sources of funding specifically for Disabled music makers.

There is a considerable knowledge gap when it comes to knowing where to access funding to support Disabled people's music making. Our co-researchers explained that, usually, finding out about funding is all about 'who you know'. This resonates with findings in Youth Music's [Blueprint for the Future](#) research, which identified that not only were the majority of young people are unaware of funding opportunities, but also that this was experienced more significantly for those facing additional barriers. If you have access to a knowledgeable teacher or are able to talk to other Disabled musicians, then you're much more likely to know where to find financial support. However, if you are not 'connected' you may be unaware of what's available.

We found that even if you do know where to go for funding, the application process can be inaccessible:

Funding and other opportunities need to be more user friendly. Each time I look at funding opportunities I feel that I can scarcely understand the terminology.

Participant responding on behalf of their own experience

Other participants noted that when they did find out about sources of funding, they didn't always meet the criteria:

Opportunities for adult beginners are limited generally, but much more so for adults with disabilities. Support and funding is generally geared towards children or skilled musicians.

Participant responding on behalf of their own experience

This highlights the importance of accessible application processes and varied funding opportunities for musicians of all ages and abilities.

Whenever I've applied for funding in the past, it's been through people I know in colleges and companies and not off my own back. I know that funding is out there but without the right people helping me, there's no way I'd be able to get that support. It would be great if there were a website where Disabled musicians could find funding sources and people who can support them with the application process. Having independence is really important. Disabled musicians need to be able to decide what to apply for and how they might spend that money, instead of just being given money from a third party who applied for funding themselves and then passes it on. That approach usually comes with loads of strings attached. There's just currently very little support for Disabled musicians to apply for funding independently. That needs to change.

Jess (co-researcher)

Where can you find sources of funding?

Attitude is Everything have published details of where musicians can source funding, and holds regular meetings with a dedicated Funders' Steering Group to help funders better understand the needs of disabled musicians <http://www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk/artists/funding>

ACCESSING MUSIC LESSONS

Most music makers (58%) felt that music lessons were generally accessible to them. However, a quarter (25%) felt that music lessons were not generally accessible to them.

Less than half (48%) of Disabled music makers responding to our survey said that they had been able to find a teacher who met their learning needs. 43% reported that they had experienced a severe or moderate limitation to taking part in a music lesson of any kind in the past 12 months.

I've never really found a teacher who understands my learning style. I play the LinnStrument and it seems to terrify teachers (although, truthfully, it's not that far off teaching the piano). I've only really had about 10 lessons from a music teacher. It's been impossible for me. I think there are lots of suitable teachers out there, I just think the way they're trained impacts their ability to teach all these different instruments. Most teachers can play the piano which means that they can then teach the Clarion, LinnStrument – all sorts of things – as a result of that. I think it's partly education and the way that teachers are taught that limits what instruments music teachers feel capable or 'qualified' to teach.



Photos from Accessible Arts and Media's IMPs project, York.

Charlotte (co-researcher)

Finding tutors who support our ambitions and help us to get our music out there is very important. I have met so many tutors from the beginning of my music career. I was struggling academically studying core subjects at school. But all my music tutors were very supportive and open minded to help with my music, including music theory - most of which I learned from ears. I also learned how to have harmony with non-Disabled musicians, which was a very big step for me as an autistic person. Music gave me such an opportunity to communicate to the world.

Leo (co-researcher)

80% of music educators said they felt confident adapting their teaching practice to meet a range of needs. However, less than half (48%) felt confident teaching music on adapted musical instruments.

Our survey findings suggest that there is little help for Disabled musicians who are unable to find a suitable teacher. Only 38% of music retailers felt that they were able to signpost Disabled customers to teachers who could meet their learning needs. In addition, 71% of parents/guardians/carers of Disabled children reported that they were not familiar with their child's local Music Education Hub.

Disabled musicians and those who support them often experience difficulty in finding a teacher who can meet their learning needs. If Disabled musicians are to have equal access to music lessons, this information needs to be more widely available. There also needs to be more teachers who have training in inclusive practice.

However, it's important that changes to teacher training programmes are done right. Disabled people need to be involved in the design and implementation of these changes. Hunter explained:

In terms of a different approach to education. I honestly think it comes down to training. I just don't think that people are as prepared as they could be for what they're actually going to encounter in the classroom. However, all this training needs to be Disabled-led from the outset. So, when the people who develop these training packages are coming up with the courses, they should be consulting a wide variety of Disabled people so that there's a host of different ideas and opinions that are coming across.

Hunter (co-researcher)

Involving Disabled people in the design and implementation of teacher training would be likely to lead to improvements for Disabled musicians. And it could improve the learning experience for non-Disabled musicians too.

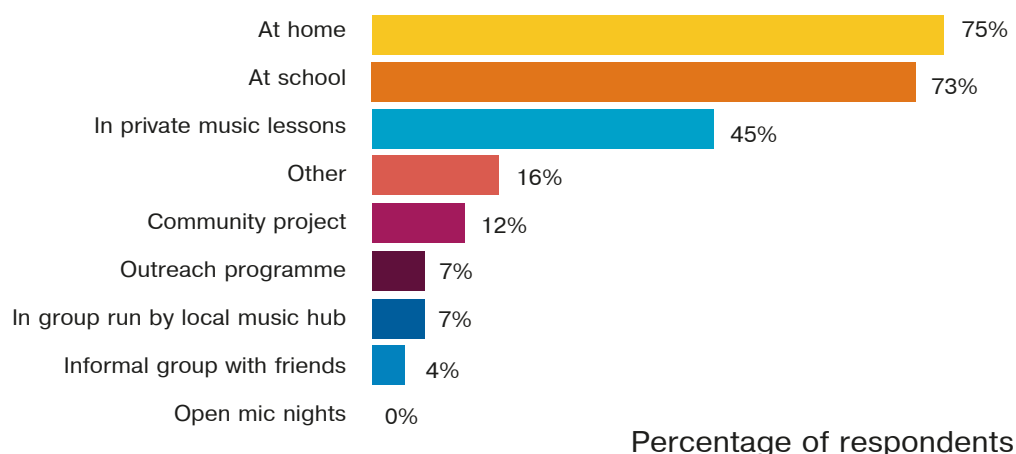
An inclusive approach to music education is one that inspires a more open and creative approach to teaching and learning, which can benefit everyone. It encourages discussions about learning styles and access requirements and explores creative ways of making learning accessible. Youth Music’s online community for people working in music education, the Youth Music Network, is a place for sharing advice, resources and training opportunities about making music more inclusive: <https://network.youthmusic.org.uk/>

PRACTICING AND DEVELOPING SKILLS

Most of the Disabled music makers responding to our survey made music at home (83% of the total survey sample).

When we broke the data down by survey type, we saw that this was also the case for Disabled children and young people aged 0-18, with 75% making music at home, closely followed by 73% making music at school.

Where Disabled children and young people’s music making takes place



But there is a significant gap between Disabled people making music at home and their participation in public music groups. Very few Disabled children and young people were making music in groups run by their local Music Education Hub (7%) or in informal groups with friends (4%).

Overall, only 23% of the music makers responding to our survey said that they made music in an informal group.

These figures suggest that accessible group music making opportunities for Disabled musicians are hard to find. The co-research team shared some of their experiences:

I have been playing in small orchestras since I first started learning the harp, but it took a while for me to figure out how I could progress in them. At first, I found it quite stressful because I didn't know what to do. So that was hard. It's taken me a few years to get more confident.

Holli (co-researcher)

I'm at a creative arts uni so I'm lucky in the sense that it's been easy for me to find ways of making music with other people. I have a wonderful course tutor who's great at providing opportunities for people to make music in a group. Outside of that, it can be quite difficult to make music with other people. Rehearsal spaces can be impossible to access. I also completely understand that, if people are finding it hard to find a tutor, they might not feel confident playing in a group with other people or finding that experience out for themselves. It takes a certain level of confidence to do that.

Hunter (co-researcher)

Formally, I've had some amazing opportunities to make music with other people. But, when it comes to making music informally, there just isn't that opportunity. There's not somewhere to go and do it. There's not people to support you physically if you need it. Something needs to change. There definitely need to be more opportunities for informal music making.

Jess (co-researcher)

While our co-researchers don't speak for all Disabled musicians, their experiences shed more light on this research finding. For some Disabled musicians, making music informally with friends and peers isn't as easy as just texting your mates and jamming in your garage (although some may well do this). Connecting and collaborating in this way requires confidence, forward-planning, and an accessible rehearsal space. Traditional, formal music-making opportunities - such as playing in the orchestra of your local Saturday music centre - can also be inaccessible. These are all things that music organisations, venues and ensemble leaders have the power to change.

The survey asked music makers if they had experienced any barriers in accessing four specific types of music making:

- Practising their instrument to develop skills
- Playing for their own pleasure
- Using a computer or other technology to create music
- Writing music (including writing song lyrics)

46% of music makers said that they had experienced either a severe or moderate access limitation when practising a musical instrument to develop skills in the past 12 months. 46% had experienced no limitation.

Most (57%) music makers responding to our survey said that they had experienced no access limitations when playing a musical instrument for their own pleasure. However, 36% had experienced either a severe or moderate access limitation.

38% of music makers had experienced no access limitations to using a computer or other technology to create music. 35% had experienced either a moderate or severe access limitation and 27% were not interested in this activity and/or felt the question was not applicable to them. 48% of music makers had never used a computer or other technology to make music.

45% of music makers had experienced no access limitations to writing music. 21% had experienced either a severe or moderate access limitation. 34% were not interested in this activity and/or felt the question was not applicable to them. 52% of music makers had never written music.

From my point of view what we ended up doing when I was in a specialist secondary school was go down the digital route, as it was easier than it was from the physical perspective. Teachers felt they could easily give me an iPad and use Garage Band rather than give you a guitar and expect you to play it without the adaptation. Easier to take it down a technological route than physical one.

Jess (co-researcher)

Technology has become an integral part of music making for many musicians, and it often provides features that can improve accessibility for many. But is important that this does not lead it to becoming the option that educators default to for Disabled musicians, limiting choice.

There is a need for adaptive instruments to integrated into day-to-day music education for everyone. But it's important that what's on offer for Disabled musicians is driven by their musical interests, rather than by what is assumed to be most accessible.

PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

78% of music educators felt that all their students had suitable opportunities to perform music to an audience if they wanted to.

However, only 51% of music makers felt that they had suitable opportunities to perform music to an audience if they wanted to, and 31% said that they did not have suitable performance opportunities.

The issue here may have something to do with what music makers and music educators deem to be 'suitable' opportunities:

I think music educators are more likely to say that they've provided students with opportunities to perform because how bad would it look if they didn't? They can use the excuse of "oh well, they've performed at our local talent shows" but is that really a 'suitable' performance opportunity? It's something in my personal life that I'm really tackling at the moment – something needs to change.

Jess (co-researcher)

The inaccessibility of performance venues also affects Disabled people's performance opportunities.

I think the biggest reason a lot of people haven't had the chance to perform is because they can't get on to the stage. Literally. There are barely any stages that have a ramp, and performance venues are notoriously inaccessible to Disabled performers.

Hunter (co-researcher)

A lot of the time, even if the stages used by schools or Music Education Hubs are accessible - and I mean 'accessible' in the loosest possible sense – they're still not going to provide you with an access worker, or any help to get through the rehearsals. They're not going to provide you with a place to sit if you get fatigued, and I've found they're often afraid of letting you perform if you're autistic. In fact, I'd performed on the other side of the planet [with the British Paraorchestra] before I'd performed in my own school.

Oliver (co-researcher)

Key stats

Of the music makers responding to our survey:

- 27% had never sung/performed to an audience or rehearsed for a performance
- 26% had never played an instrument to an audience or rehearsed for a performance
- 32% had not sung to an audience in the last 12 months
- 31% had not played an instrument to an audience within the last 12 months
- 36% had experienced either a moderate or severe limitation in accessing singing performance opportunities in the last 12 months
- 48% had experienced a moderate or severe limitation in accessing instrumental performance opportunities in the last 12 months.

There will be multiple reasons for these statistics and each Disabled person will face different barriers when it comes to accessing performance opportunities. Some Disabled people responding to our survey were experiencing regular performance opportunities: 22% said that they sing to an audience at least once a week and 24% said that they play an instrument to an audience at least once a week.

However, it is clear that Disabled people face unequal opportunities when it comes to performance. What a teacher deems to be 'suitable' may not be what a Disabled person feels is 'suitable'. It's important that teachers give students the opportunity to communicate their needs, and that they're prepared to accept differences in performance style or preference.

Performance spaces also need to be accessible for all performers. Ramps onto the stage, accessible back-stage areas - e.g. with Changing Place bathrooms, working lifts and dedicated spaces for rest and relaxation - are basic facilities that venues should be providing.

The stark contrast between the number of musicians who play at home versus the number who take part in formal or informal music groups and public performances suggests that many Disabled musicians aren't able to access the performance opportunities that they want. The data also paints a picture of an exclusionary music education system whereby the traditional progression routes of graded exams, ensemble playing and higher education are closed off. Yet we also found evidence of Disabled musicians operating at the highest levels - 38% percent of music maker respondents classed their musicianship level as 'advanced' or 'professional'. It's important that these success stories are understood and amplified to create greater visibility of Disabled people in music.

Attitude is Everything

[Attitude is Everything](#) is a disability-led charity and Arts Council England Sector Support Organisation that connects Deaf and disabled people with live music and event industries to improve access together.

Through their work:

- Deaf and disabled people lead the change
- Industry professionals learn from real-life experience and expertise
- Barriers are identified and removed
- Good practice is celebrated and rewarded
- More Deaf and disabled people play their part in live music and outdoor events

Their work is underpinned by lived experience shared by hundreds of mystery shoppers across the UK. Over 200 venues and festivals across the UK have been awarded via their Charter of Best Practice, an industry standard for live venue and event accessibility. Their [Next Stage initiative](#) champions access to the talent development pipeline for Deaf and disabled artists and recently announced [Beyond The Music](#) initiative works to break down barriers for volunteers and professionals in the music industry.

For more information about their work, visit www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk. You can also follow their work on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). Sign up to their mailing list [here](#).

We Shall Not be Removed

This campaign challenges and support the arts sector to be inclusive as it rebuilds after lockdown. How do we make a cultural sector which is more equal, accessible, intersectional and inclusive?

It's an open, creative and public discussion on what inclusion of Deaf, Neurodivergent and Disabled people in the cultural world really means in these new circumstances.

The campaign is explicit in promoting the lived experiences and work of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority Disabled artists, who will shape what this promotion of their work and experiences looks like.

It began with social media discussion in August 2020, using the hashtags [#WeShallNotBeRemoved](#), [#EndAbleism](#) and [#InclusiveRecovery](#)

BARRIERS TO ACCESS

We asked music makers and music educators whether the following were slight, moderate or severe access barriers to music making:

- Financial reasons
- Too busy/not enough time
- Lack of information
- No opportunities available
- A health condition, illness or impairment
- Disability-related reasons
- Lack of help or assistance
- Attitudes of other people
- Caring responsibilities
- Difficulty getting on a course/being refused a place
- Difficulty with transport
- Difficulty getting into buildings
- Difficulty using facilities

Music makers rated financial reasons and disability-related reasons as their most severe barriers to access. 67% of music makers said that financial reasons were a severe or moderate access barrier, and 65% said that disability-related reasons were a severe or moderate access barrier.

Whether a Disabled person experiences each of these situations as a slight, moderate or severe access barrier will depend on their unique situation. What is particularly interesting about our data is that, often, music educators' and music makers' views differed.

Music educators reported that financial reasons, difficulty with transport and lack of information were the most severe access barriers for their students. 89% said that financial reasons were a severe or moderate access barrier for their students. 66% said that lack of information was a severe or moderate access barrier for their students, and 69% said that difficulty with transport was a severe or moderate access barrier for their students.

Music educators were more likely than music makers to perceive being too busy, lacking information or opportunity, difficulty with transport, difficulty getting on a course, caring responsibilities, difficulty getting into buildings and difficulty accessing facilities as severe access barriers for the Disabled musicians they worked with.

Music makers were more likely than music educators to say that disability-related reasons or an illness, health condition or impairment were severe access barriers.

This suggests that music educators have potential to misunderstand the lived experience of their Disabled students. For example, music educators may be familiar with making logistical arrangements for Disabled musicians

they work with, like arranging transport, so would be more likely to see these as barriers. But Disabled people are used to managing logistical barriers as part of everyday life and may consider these to be part of 'disability-related reasons', or to be less important than barriers posed by illness, health conditions or impairments.

Who decides?

It is important to reflect upon who decided which barriers to ask about in the survey. These access categories were devised by the Take it away Consortium, rather than by Disabled people directly. Our co-researchers noted that this means that access needs that might be important to Disabled people such as communication and time (for example length of projects, inflexibility of deadlines) were missed from the survey.

Our co-researchers also felt that many of these barriers intersect and are not experienced as isolated issues. For example, for some of our co-researchers, disability-related reasons and attitudes of other people went hand-in-hand, as did difficulty getting into buildings and difficulty using facilities (generally if a building is inaccessible, so are their facilities).

This reflection reinforces the importance of ensuring that research like this is disability-led from the outset.

CONCLUSION

There are Disabled people all across the UK making music at the highest level, in every part of the music industry. Not only are many critically and financially successful, they are often forging their own paths through alternative and non-traditional routes. But their achievements and experiences tend to be under-valued and under-represented.

Disabled musicians are used to being creative and adaptable, finding ways around barriers. Aspiring musicians are determined find ways to pursue their goals. However, the reality is that Disabled people do face significant barriers at every stage of the journey to becoming a musician. Reduced access to tuition, performance opportunities, examinations, grades and funding hinder the progress of musical careers at every stage.

Youth Music's recent [Blueprint for the Future](#) report showed how the music industries could be transformed by breaking down barriers faced by many young people, and supporting untapped talent. This transformation needs to start right at the beginning of young musicians' journeys.

There is a lot of work to do to ensure that Disabled people can easily and affordably access music making opportunities. Communication is key. If young Disabled musicians were given more freedom and choice over their musical development, and if music educators and retailers took time to understand what it means to be truly accessible, then those first steps towards a career in music would be very different. But change must not stop there: venues, promoters, labels, studios, funders all have work to do to ensure the music industries of the future are improved. More diverse, more representative of the UK's population, and more creative. It is not enough to raise the profile of Disabled musicians – the rights of Disabled musicians are equal and **must be** accounted for.

This research is just the start of capturing a movement that has been present for years, and continues to grow. The aim of these research findings is to increase awareness – not only of the barriers Disabled musicians face, but also of their determination and successes. Most importantly, the co-researchers hope that it will empower other Disabled people to speak up about their experiences, to challenge the status quo, and to fight for change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from *Reshape Music* tell us that a number of changes are required to make music and music industry careers more accessible to Disabled people. Drawn up in consultation with the co-researchers, the Reshape Music recommendations are designed to achieve:

- Improved access and choice for Disabled musicians.
- Increased representation of Disabled people in the paid workforce and positions informing policy and practice.
- Increased knowledge and skills among the workforce to better support Disabled musicians.

The recommendations are as follows:

1. Music education and music industry organisations must increase the representation of Disabled people, with an action plan and timescales in place.
2. Recruitment should state explicitly where there is an underrepresentation of Disabled people, and opportunities should be targeted to reach Disabled people. This includes salaried, freelance and contracted positions, as well as voluntary roles.
3. Spaces need to be fully accessible for Disabled musicians, performers and audience members. This includes venues, education spaces and retail outlets. Organisations should routinely seek to understand and address the broad range of access barriers.
4. Music education and industry organisations should work closely with Disabled musicians to better understand the barriers they face to progress in their music and careers. They should involve Disabled people from the outset in all work that is designed to support them. This includes research, teacher training, curriculum development, access audits etc.
5. Specific budgets should be put in place at an equitable level to ensure Disabled people can fully participate in music education programmes.
6. The social model of disability should form the basis for music education approaches. Supportive environments should focus on broadening skills and experiences and not focus on what people “can’t” do.

7. Music Education Hubs should connect with Disabled people (and their parents, guardians or carers) in their local area to find out how they can be more accessible. Schools should support Disabled students to engage with Music Education Hubs.
8. Accessible instruments such as the Skoog and Clarion should be seen as instruments in their own right. Their use should be mainstreamed across all music education programmes as a way of opening up access to all students. Music Education Hubs should start to increase their stock of adapted instruments.
9. Funding application processes should be made more accessible through flexible deadlines, accessible language, multiple formats for all forms and written information, Easy Read guidelines, and 1-to-1 access support.
 - a. Disabled people should be involved in decision-making for funds targeted at Disabled musicians.
 - b. Access funds should be made available as part of application processes.

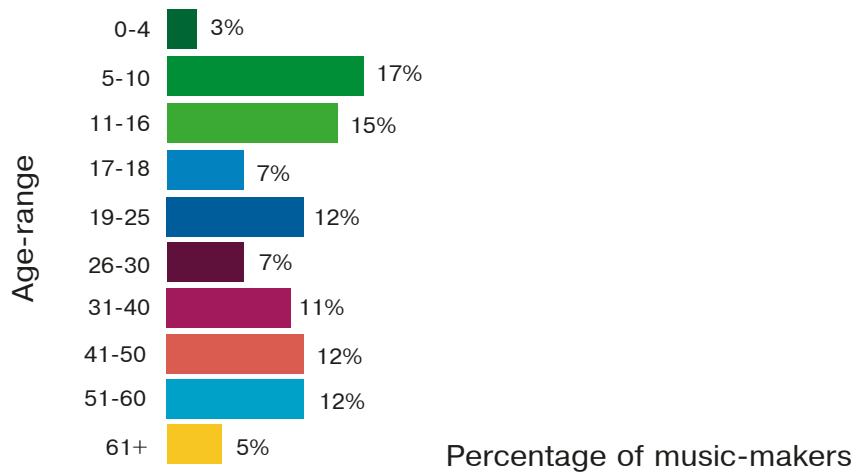


Photos (clockwise from top): DadaFest Liverpool by Brian Roberts, LSO London by Kevin Leighton, The OHMI Trust, LSO London by Kevin Leighton, LSO London by Kevin Leighton.

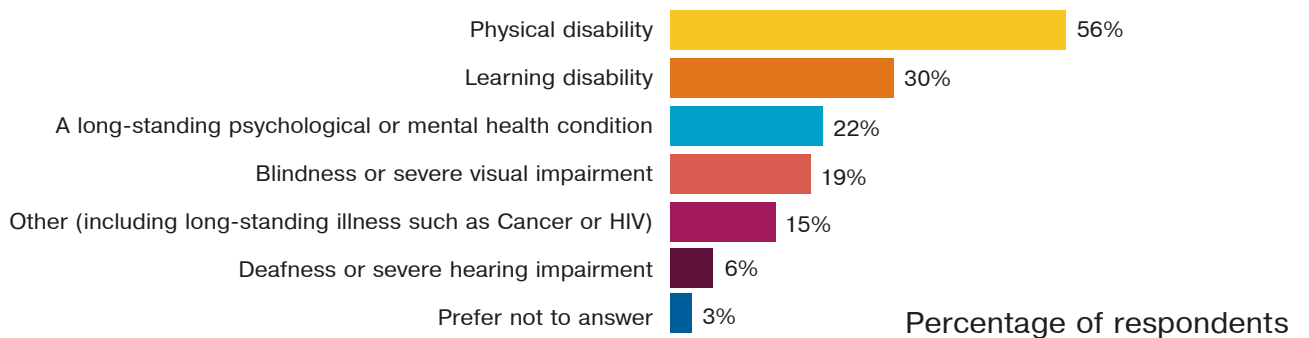
APPENDIX

MUSIC MAKERS

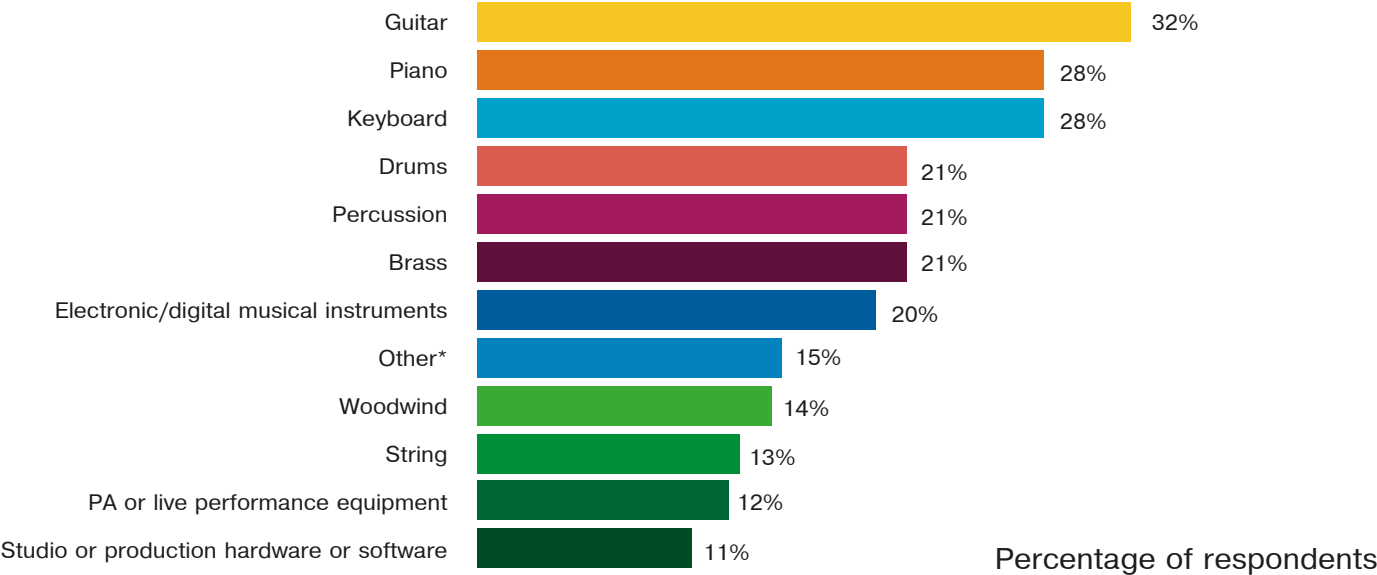
Age of music makers:



Nature of respondents' impairment(s):

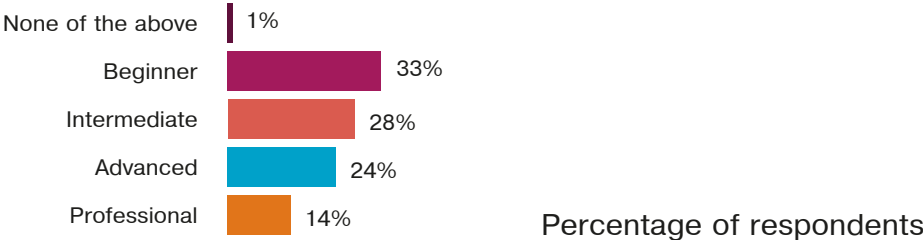


Instrument(s) used by respondents as part of their music-making activities:



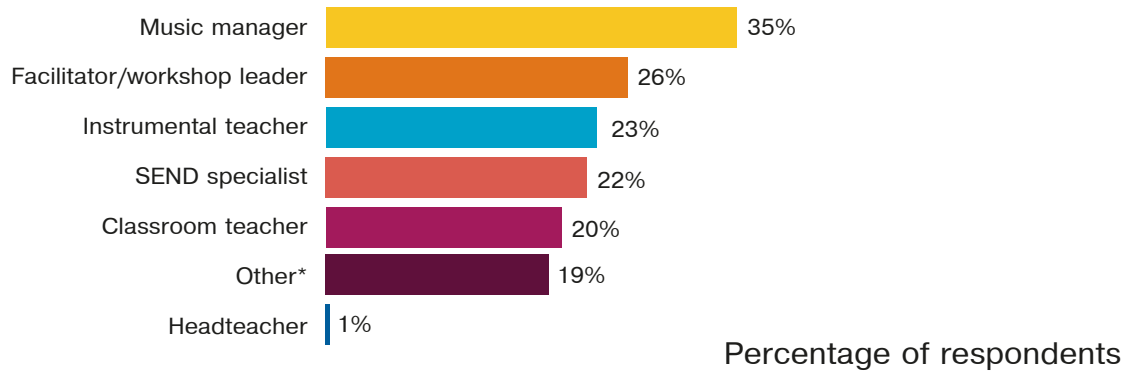
* Of those responding 'other': 39% said they sang and 29% said that they played the ukulele

Respondents' levels of musicianship:



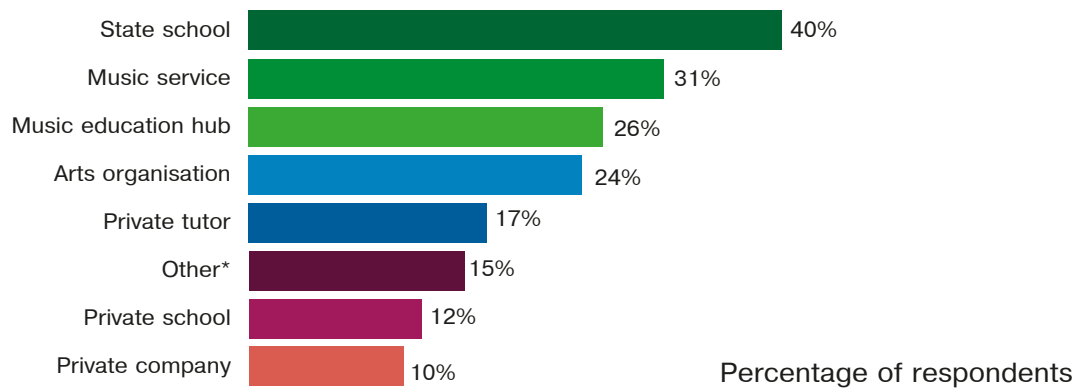
MUSIC EDUCATORS

Primary role in the music education sector:



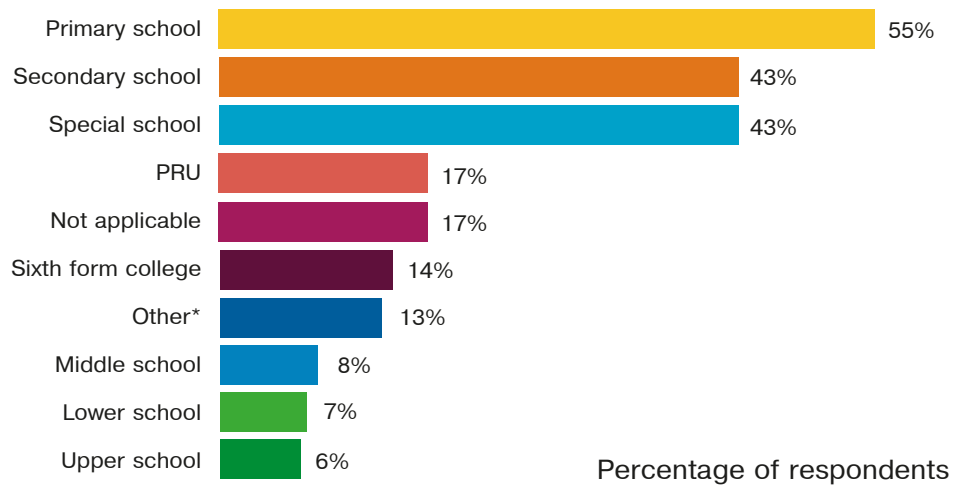
*Of those responding 'other': 15% said that they were a Music Therapist

Place of work:



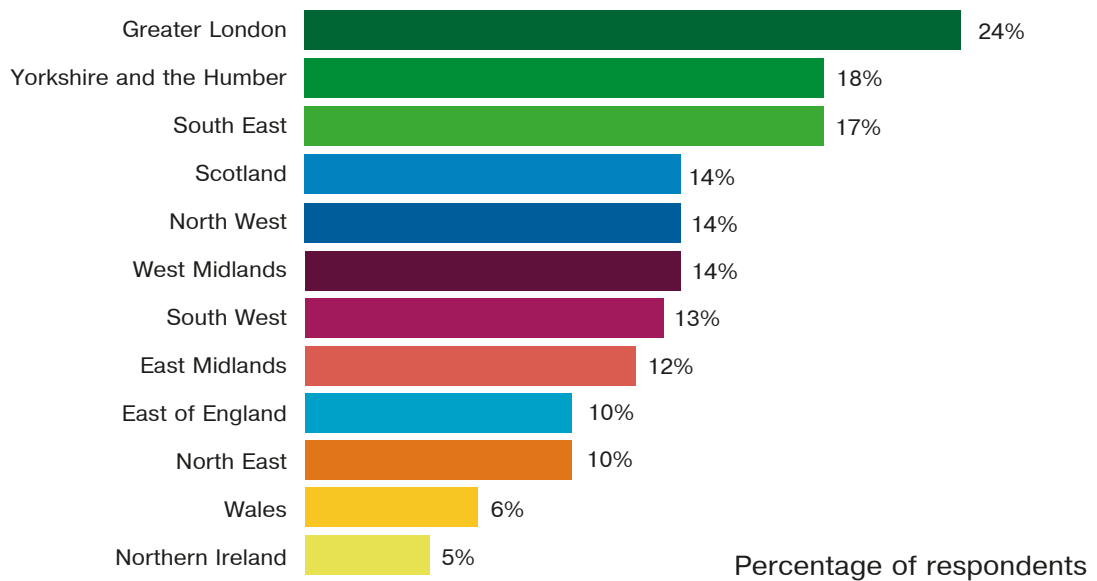
*Of those responding 'other': 15% said that they worked for/with a University and 42% said that they worked for/with charities

Type of school(s) worked for:

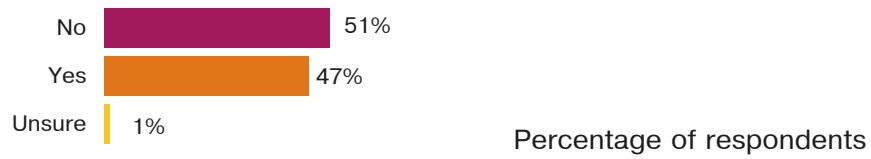


*Of those responding 'other': 22% said that they worked for/with Nursery settings and 13% said that they worked for/with Universities

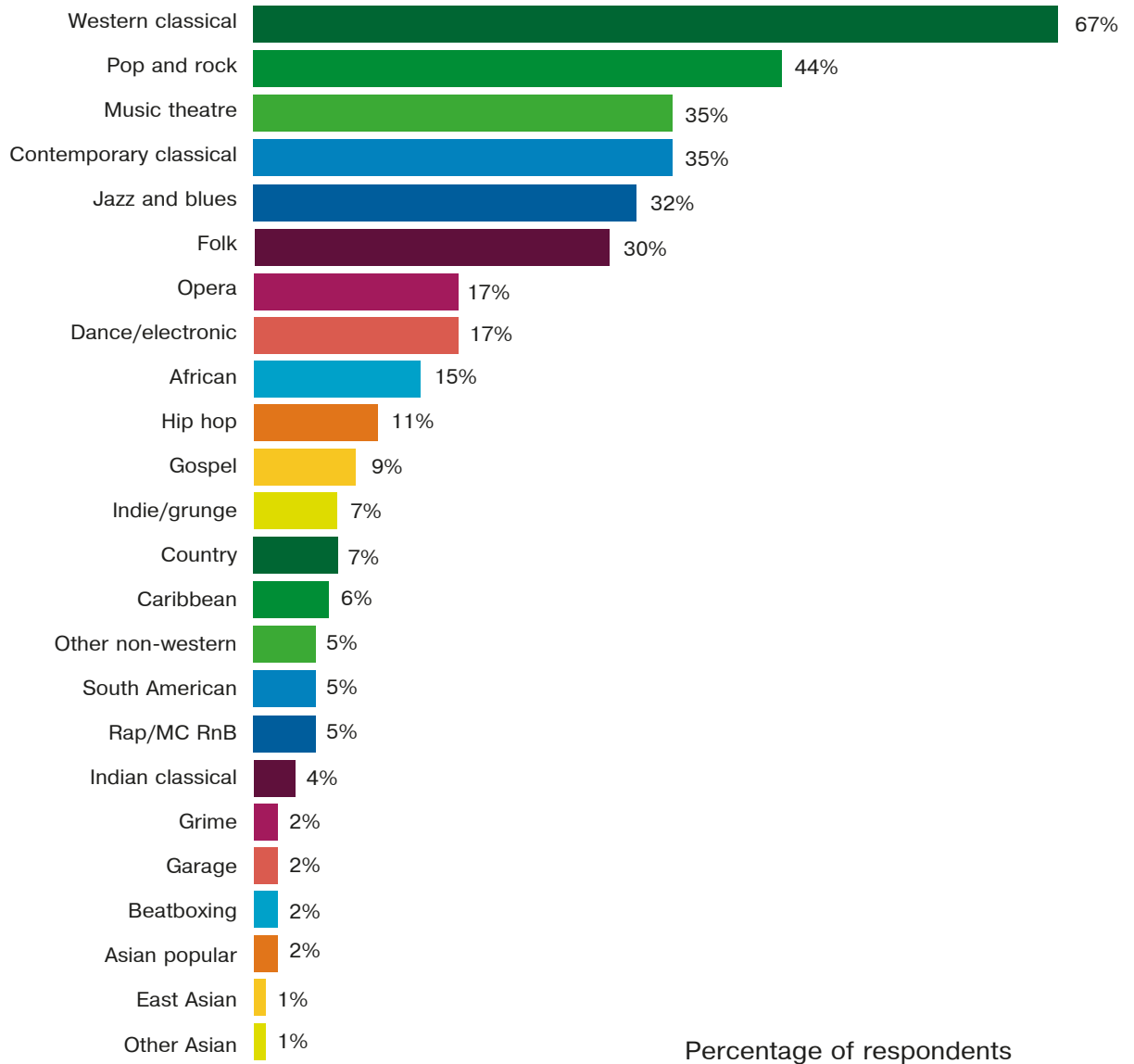
Regions worked in:



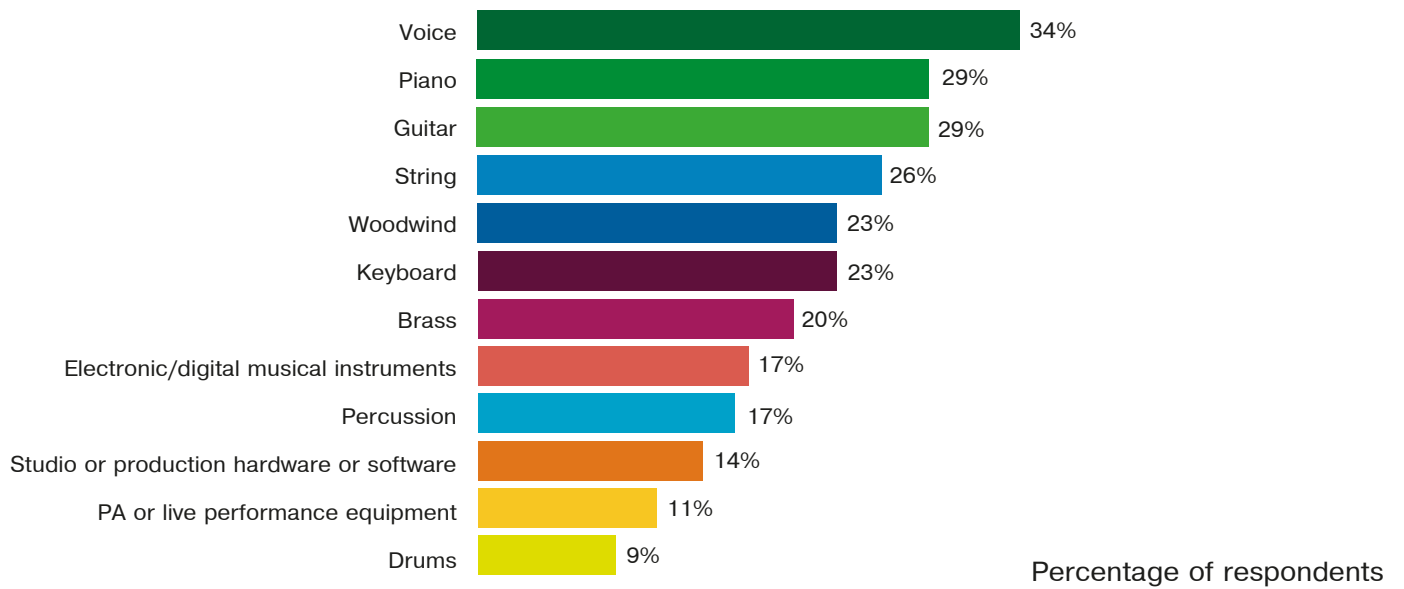
QTS status:



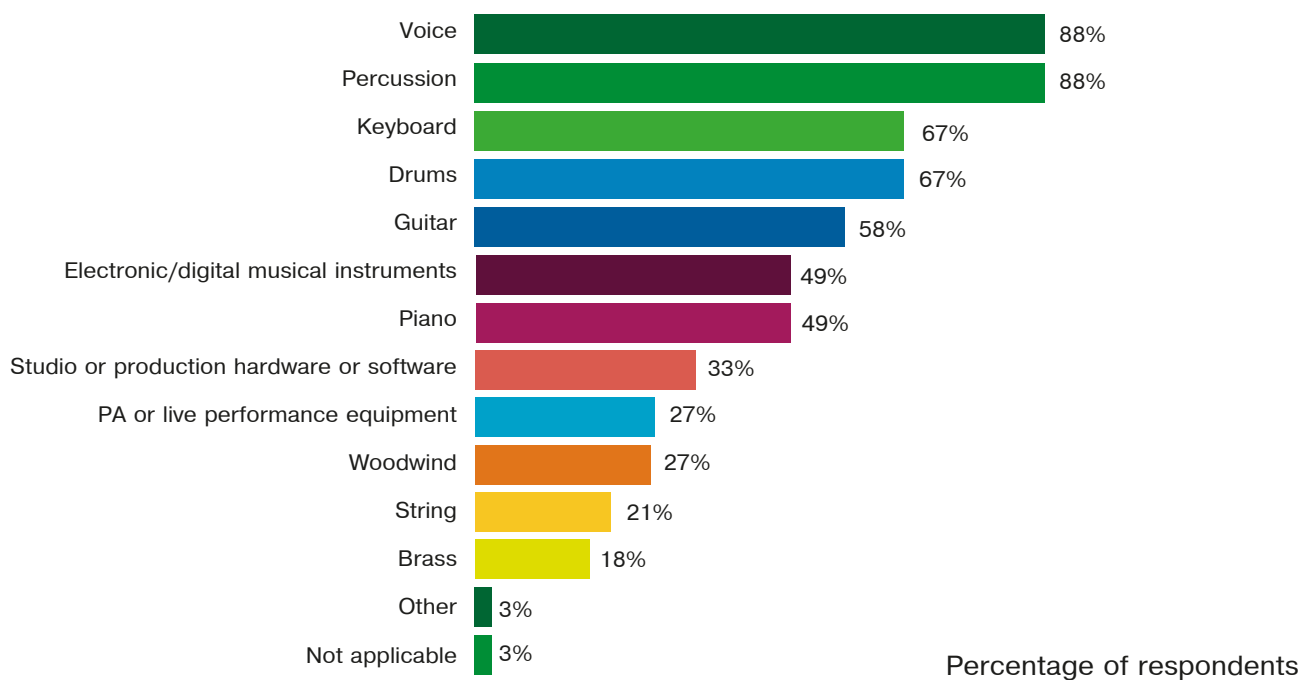
Genre specialism(s):



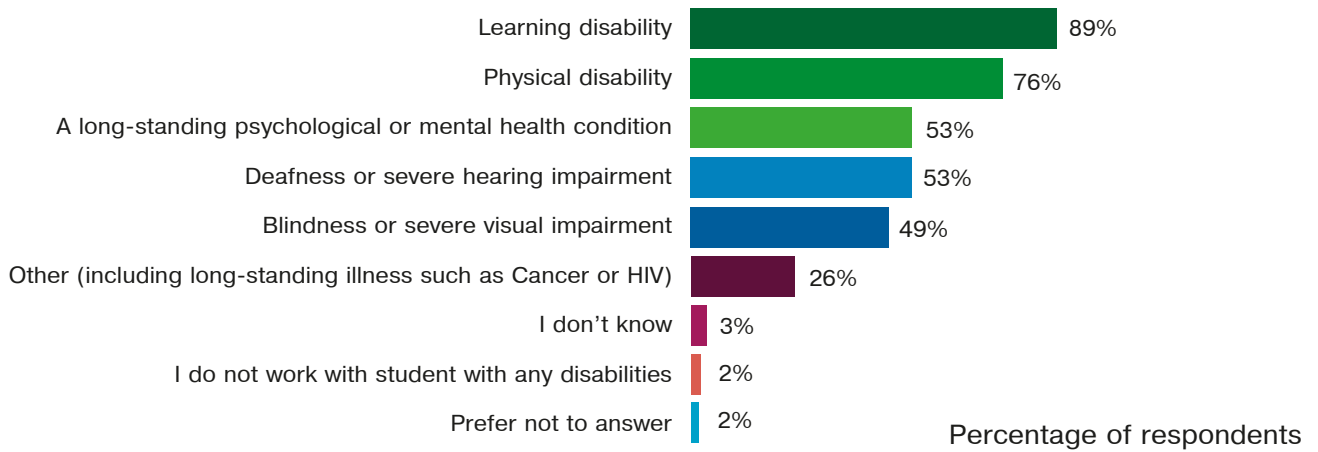
Instruments taught:



Instruments used in classroom teaching:

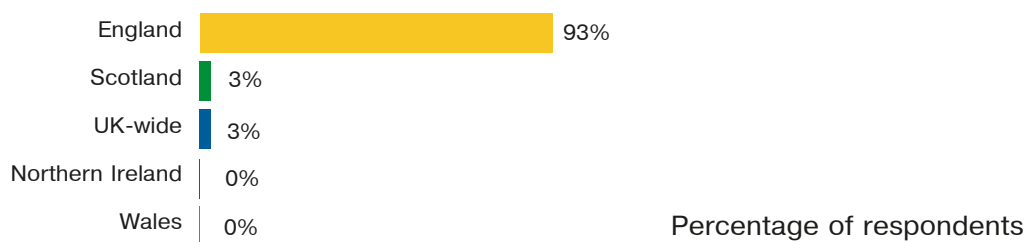


Percentage of music educators working with students with specific impairments:

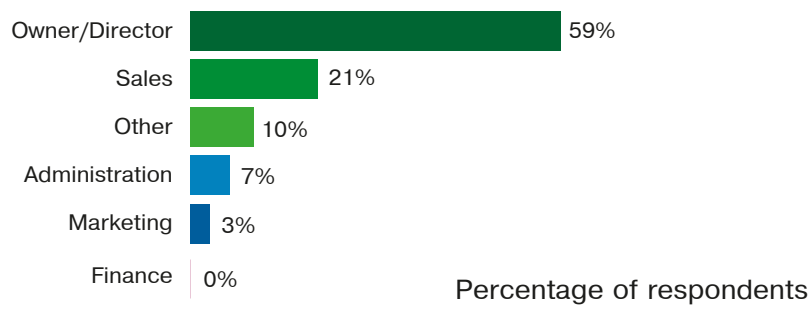


MUSIC RETAILERS

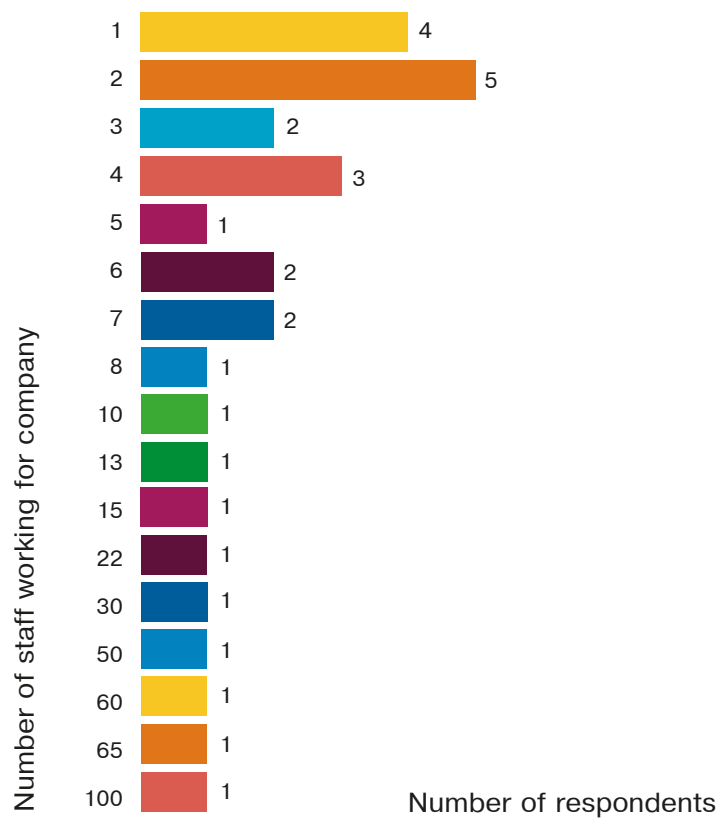
Main place of work:



Primary role in the organisation:



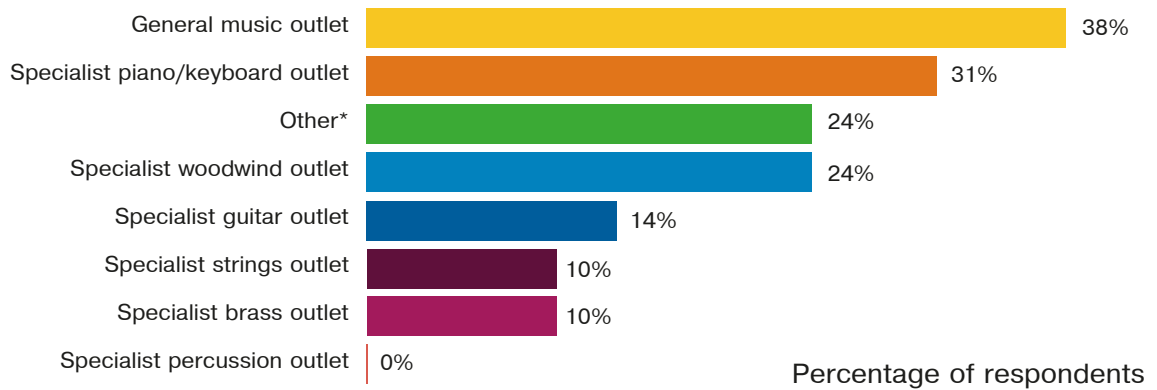
Number of staff working for the company:



Median number of employees:

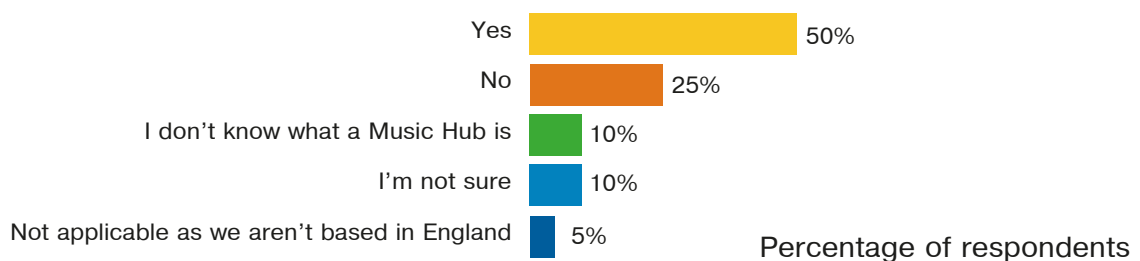


Type of retail business:



*Of those responding 'other': 57% said that they were an Instrument Maker; 43% said that they were a Music Tech specialist; 14% said that they sold records; 14% said that they sold electronic equipment (note: some people told us they specialised in more than one area, hence percentages not totalling 100)

Relationship with Music Education Hub:



REFERENCES

- ¹ Department for Work and Pensions (2019) [Family Resources Survey](#)
- ² Arts Council England (2018) [Making a Shift: Disability in the arts and cultural sector workforce in England](#)
- ³ Drake Music (2017) [Disabled People in the Music Education Workforce](#)
- ⁴ Arts Council England (2018) [Making a Shift: Disability in the arts and cultural sector workforce in England](#)
- ⁵ Arts Council England (2020) https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ACE_DiversityReport_Final_03032020_0.pdf
- ⁶ Michael Oliver (1990) [The Politics of Disablement](#)
- ⁷ Jenny Morris (1991, page:10) [Pride Against Prejudice: Transforming Attitudes to Disability](#)
- ⁸ Take it away (2020) [Guide to Buying Adaptive Musical Instruments](#)
- ⁹ Youth Music (2020) [Blueprint for the Future](#)
- ¹⁰ Attitude is Everything (2019) [Next Stage](#)

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