The heart of the school is missing

Music education in the COVID-19 crisis

DECEMBER 2020
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More information about this research is available in the separate Appendix on request.

Report by Dr Jodie Underhill, Research Associate
Executive summary

The ISM has produced this report to look at the impact COVID-19 has had on music in schools. The report includes findings from our survey of UK music teachers exploring their experiences during this time.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption to our education system and teachers are working incredibly hard in these challenging times, showing flexibility and professionalism and consistently adapting in order to provide opportunities for young people to make and create music.

In March 2020, schools across the UK and around the world closed to slow the spread of the virus. Many schools moved to remote learning and started using online resources where possible. However, many pupils lacked access to technology. Our survey found that music education, in some cases, only became available through instrumental lessons for those families who could afford them or had the technology in place for remote learning.

The focus then turned towards the full re-opening of schools and preparing for the new academic year. We welcomed all UK Governments’ commitment to maintaining a broad, balanced and meaningful curriculum in their guidance documents for the return to schools. Music is an integral part of the curriculum in each UK jurisdiction providing access to high quality music education in primary and secondary schools and opening up pathways for further study regardless of a pupil’s background or ability to pay. However, the inconsistencies in guidance for reopening schools across the four nations coupled with last minute updates gave music educators little time to interpret and make sense of the information.

Challenges emerged in the Autumn term regarding the implementation of Government guidance, school organisation and mitigating measures. Large numbers of pupils have needed to isolate due to the rising numbers of COVID-19 cases in schools. Different approaches by UK Governments, particularly in relation to summer exams in 2021, have caused concerns of further educational inequalities between pupils living in different regions or experiencing different levels of restrictions. In November 2020, Ofsted’s Chief Inspector suggested that exams in England could take place solely for core subjects with centre-assessed grades for other subjects, creating a hierarchy of qualifications and a devaluing of non-core subjects. Additional measures to support exam pupils in England were announced by the Secretary of State for Education on 3 December 2020 although full details will not be published until early 2021.

All aspects of music education are being impacted – curriculum entitlement, singing in schools, practical music making, extra-curricular activities, instrumental learning and examinations.

We are extremely concerned about the impact of COVID-19, particularly as music teaching has been singled out as problematic within both school and extra-curricular guidance. Following issues raised by a large number of teachers, we created a survey for primary, secondary and instrumental music teachers to share their experiences so that we could better understand the landscape.

Collated from over 1300 responses across the UK music teaching profession working in schools, our survey findings reveal the detrimental impact that COVID-19 is having on music education. All aspects of music education are being impacted – curriculum entitlement, singing in schools, practical music making, extra-curricular activities, instrumental learning and examinations. Our survey findings also suggest that music teachers’ health and well-being is being negatively affected by the changes they are experiencing in the delivery of classroom and extra-curricular music and the amount of support they have received from their schools.

The survey also highlights the inequalities in music education that have developed not only between pupils from different backgrounds but also between UK countries.

The late publication of safe music teaching guidance in England left schools struggling to implement mitigating measures ahead of schools returning and a lack of consistency in Government guidance across the UK has resulted in Scottish schools being particularly negatively affected. In Scotland, restrictions on singing and playing brass and wind instruments have meant that pupils learning these instruments have not been able to continue lessons in the same way that their peers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have. The absence of specific guidance for safe music teaching in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has also disadvantaged schools in these countries in terms of extra-curricular provision and instrumental learning.

Prior to COVID-19, music education across all four nations was already facing significant challenges.

However, this erosion of music education in our schools is part of a much longer trend. Prior to COVID-19, music education across all four nations was already facing significant challenges. Music Education: State of the Nation (2019) published by the ISM, the University of Sussex and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education, captured the crisis facing music education in England. The study found that Government policy had significantly negatively impacted music education through factors including the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) accountability measure and statutory English and maths tests in primary schools. Despite 18 recommendations outlined in the State of the Nation report, and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) calling on the Government to respond to them, to date none of them have been addressed or implemented.

UK-wide issues including lack of funding, widening gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students (particularly for instrumental tuition), falling teacher training and recruitment numbers and a continuing decrease in the uptake of music examination courses have also been identified in other important publications such as What’s Going On Now? in Scotland, Music Services Feasibility Study in Wales, and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland Music Strategy 2013-18 in Northern Ireland.

When considering the value music education plays in young people’s lives, there is genuine cause for alarm. Beyond the intrinsic value of studying music for its own sake, there is a plethora of evidence that studying music builds cultural knowledge, creative skills and improves children’s health, wellbeing and wider educational attainment. Music is central to the recovery curriculum, playing a vital role in schools helping their students to explore and express the varied emotions and challenges that they will have experienced during the pandemic, building stronger relationships and creating positive learning environments.

Whilst we are facing an unprecedented crisis in music education, COVID-19 also provides us with a pivotal moment for reflection and an opportunity to reset education policy. We have a potential opening in which to build a curriculum which puts young people’s needs first, championing creative learning in addition to science, technology, English and maths (STEM) and addressing the needs of young people in the post-COVID-19 world. It also offers the opportunity to revisit the nature and purpose of assessments to ensure young people are fully equipped for the future.

This report lays out recommendations for governments across all four nations to address the significant challenges facing music education both in the short term and moving forward into a post-COVID-19 world. First, all UK Governments must ensure that they demonstrate clear leadership through actively encouraging safe music teaching in schools and the wider community. Clear, timely and consistent guidance is also needed to ensure young people’s opportunities to make and create music are not disrupted or curtailed. Consistent approaches to exams and assessments for 2021 and 2022 must also be adopted, ensuring core subjects are not prioritised over other subjects and governments must guarantee that pupils sitting music assessments in summer 2021 are not disadvantaged by the pandemic and instead rewarded for their achievements.

Larger term, governments must commit to providing high quality music education for all pupils through National Plans for Music Education, address the continued narrowing of the curriculum and ensure music teacher training routes are properly funded. COVID-19 must not allow the further erosion of music education in the UK and could provide a pivotal moment of reset for education policy.
Music teachers are having to alter their day-to-day teaching by re-writing schemes of work, teaching in non-specialist classrooms and having to teach other subjects in place of music.

Of secondary music teachers report that they have re-written schemes of work due to COVID-19.

SOME PUPILS ARE NOT RECEIVING CURRICULUM MUSIC AS A DIRECT RESULT OF COVID-19

ALMOST 10% of primary and secondary schools are not teaching class music at all.

1/4 of English secondary school teachers say that pupils are not receiving classroom music throughout Key Stage 3 as a continuing result of the EBacc accountability measure.

Music teachers’ health and wellbeing are being negatively impacted through the changes they are experiencing in the delivery of classroom and extra-curricular music and the amount of support they are receiving from their schools.

43% of music teachers are required to move between non-specialist classrooms to teach some or all music this academic year.

SOME PUPILS ARE NOT RECEIVING CURRICULUM MUSIC AS A DIRECT RESULT OF COVID-19

Of primary schools 35% & of secondary schools 28% report a reduction in music provision as a direct result of the pandemic.

During the 2020/21 academic year, face-to-face instrumental lessons are not continuing in 35% & 28% of primary & secondary schools.

Singing, practical music making, extra-curricular activities and instrumental lessons are all being negatively affected.

Teachers report that extra-curricular activities are no longer taking place in 72% of primary schools & 66% of secondary schools.

Music provision is being reduced as a direct result of COVID-19.

68% of primary school teachers and 39% of secondary school teachers report a reduction in music provision as a direct result of the pandemic.

A full breakdown of the survey results is available on request from membership@ism.org.

The survey of UK music teachers was launched on Monday 7 September 2020 and ran until 5 October 2020. Within that time frame, 1307 responses were received by the ISM.

Headline findings
The heart of the school is missing: Music education in the COVID-19 crisis

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The Learning Directorate in Scotland should:

- Urgently revisit their singing, brass and wind guidance in light of further scientific studies, to allow all pupils to continue their instrumental learning.

The Department for Education and Skills in Wales should:

- Commit to a National Plan for Music Education and provide a publication date.

The Department of Education in Northern Ireland should:

- Address the barriers to access for further music study and career paths resulting from the decline of GCSE and A Level music uptake.

In addition, the DfE in England should:

- Reinstate bursaries for postgraduate music Initial Teacher Training/Education courses from 2021 onwards.
- Publish the refreshed National Plan for Music Education and model music curriculum as soon as possible.
- Ensure funding for Music Education Hubs is allocated from April 2021 onwards as a matter of urgency.
- Implement the 18 recommendations contained within the All-Party Parliamentary Group’s State of the Nation report (2019), including reforming the EBacc, which were supported by the DCMS Select Committee.

The recommendations of this report relate to the current situation in UK school music departments as a result of COVID-19, the continued decline of music in schools prior to the pandemic and the measures which need to be put in place to address them. Based on the findings of this report, the ISM calls for all four UK Governments to:

• Demonstrate clear leadership, through actively encouraging music teaching in schools and the wider community safely, in line with government guidance and using external resources available through #CanDoMusic.

• Provide clear, timely and consistent guidance to facilitate music teaching in schools and the wider community for the rest of the 2020/21 academic year and beyond to ensure young people’s opportunities to make and create music is not disrupted further.

• Adopt a consistent approach to exams and assessments for 2021 and 2022 ensuring that core subjects are not prioritised over other subjects creating an unnecessary hierarchy.

• Guarantee that pupils sitting music assessments in summer 2021 are rewarded for their achievements and that none are disadvantaged by the coronavirus pandemic.

Recommendations

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• Guarantee that pupils sitting music assessments in summer 2021 are rewarded for their achievements and that none are disadvantaged by the coronavirus pandemic.
Background

Music education before COVID-19

Music education in England

Music is a compulsory part of the curriculum across the UK. In England, state-funded schools follow the National Curriculum (NC) from ages 5-14 (Key Stages 1-3). Academies and Free Schools in England must also offer a broad and balanced curriculum, including music, but they do not have to follow the NC. In Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence (Er) applies to children aged 3-18 with music as part of the Expressive Arts curriculum area in the Broad General Education phase (ages 3-13/14). In the 2008 Curriculum for Wales, music is part of Creative Development in the Foundation stage (3-7 years old) and a stand-alone subject for Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 (7-14 years old). A new Curriculum for Wales Framework was published in January 2020 covering pupils aged 3-16 for implementation from September 2022. Music will become part of the Expressive Arts Area of Learning and Experience. The Northern Ireland Curriculum covers Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1-4 (ages 4-16). Music is a statutory part of The Arts curriculum until the age of 16. A new Curriculum for Wales Framework was published in January 2020 covering pupils aged 3-16 for implementation from September 2022. Music will become part of the Expressive Arts Area of Learning and Experience. The Northern Ireland Curriculum covers Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1-4 (ages 4-16). Music is a statutory part of The Arts curriculum until the age of 16. Although in England, Scotland and Wales music is not a compulsory examination subject, schools in Northern Ireland must offer access to at least one course that leads to a qualification in The Arts Area of Learning at age 16.

England

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education published the State of the Nation report in February 2019 which exposed the crisis facing music education in England. It was jointly authored by Dr Alison Daubney (University of Sussex), Gary Spruce (Birmingham City University) and the ISM. The report demonstrated that music education has been significantly negatively impacted by Government policy. The pressure of accountability measures for maths and English, especially in Year 6 (the final year of primary school) had a negative impact on curriculum music provision. More than 50 per cent of the responding schools were not meeting the curriculum requirements in Year 6, citing the pressure of statutory tests as a significant reason for this. These findings were supported by Ofsted observations. Opportunities to sing and the prevalence of singing in primary schools had also diminished since Government funding for the National Singing Programme ‘Sing Up’ was cut in 2011.

Increasingly, schools were moving towards arts subjects only being offered on a ‘carousel’, with music only offered for part of the academic year on a rotation with other subjects. Secondary school music provision also faced decline as a curriculum subject. Based on longitudinal research since 2012 from the University of Sussex and a range of other sources, the report found that music was no longer being taught across Key Stage 3 (pupils aged 11-14) in more than 50 per cent of state-funded secondary schools. Increasingly, schools were moving towards arts subjects only being offered on a ‘carousel’, with music only offered for part of the academic year on a rotation with other subjects such as dance, drama and art. However, in some schools there was no music provision at all or music was only taught on one day per week.

Teacher training figures from the Department for Education (DfE) show that only 82 per cent of the recruitment target for music teachers was reached in England for the 2019/20 academic year, representing the seventh consecutive year where Initial Teacher Training (ITT) recruitment targets for secondary subjects were missed. The number of music teachers recruited into teaching since 2010 has also declined by 53 per cent. On 13 October 2020, the DfE announced that training bursaries for arts, English and humanities subjects had been removed for 2021/22. As many prospective trainees will not be able afford to train without financial support, it is unlikely that future recruitment targets will be met and access to courses will be restricted only to those who can afford it.

The introduction of the English Baccalaureate in 2010 has contributed to the decline in music education. An accountability measure, not a stand-alone qualification, the EBacc excludes creative, artistic and technical subjects such as Music, Drama and Design and Technology. This disincentivises schools to offer Arts subjects if the focus on the EBacc is crucial for the school’s accountability. Many schools have moved to a two-year Key Stage 3 to enable pupils to cover the sheer amount of content in EBacc subjects, further eroding curriculum music. Research by Ofsted found that around half of schools had moved to a two-year Key Stage 3 model which had resulted in the marginalisation of practical and creative subjects. This has led to inequalities of opportunity for many pupils. In response to the issues highlighted across music education, the DfE commissioned a non-statutory ‘model music curriculum’ in 2019 but it is yet to materialise and there is no evidence to suggest that it will impact upon the systemic problems highlighted.

Figures from the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) show a continued decline in music entries for both GCSE and A Level over the past decade. Since 2010, there has been a 25 per cent decline in pupils taking GCSE music and a 43 per cent decline in those taking A Level music. This is despite the Minister for School Standards, Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, telling the Department for Education, Media and Sport (DCMS) Select Committee in December 2018 that the take-up of arts GCSEs had remained ‘broadly stable’ at around 44 per cent and that the Government, ‘… take music and the arts extremely seriously’. The DCMS Select Committee report, Changing Lives: the social impact of participation in culture and sport published in May 2019, criticised the downgrading of arts subjects in both English and Welsh schools, stating that they were ‘deeply concerned’ by the evidence presented to them and calling on Government to take action. The report states that:

‘We remain deeply concerned about the gap between the Government’s reassuring rhetoric and the evidence presented to us of the decline in music provision in state schools, for which the EBacc is blamed and which affects students from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds disproportionately. We commend, therefore, the work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education in pursuing these issues further and would welcome sight of the Government’s response to each of the 18 recommendations in its recent report Music Education: State of the Nation.’

Not adjusted for cohort size.
1. Schools should receive clear guidance that headline accountability measures must not erode the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum at Key Stage 3, and that a broad and balanced curriculum must be delivered across all schools at all Key Stages. Music and the arts are at the heart of a broad and balanced curriculum.

2. Music should be taught by a subject specialist teacher as part of the curriculum in all state schools for all pupils for at least one hour every week across all of a three-year Key Stage 3. All secondary schools should have at least one full time music teacher who exclusively teaches music.

3. The English Baccalaureate and Progress 8 accountability measures should be reviewed and reformed to provide a better education for our children. At the very least a sixth pillar should be added to the EBacc for the creative subjects, including music.

4. The Government should scrap the 2018 introduction of the ‘average points score’ measure for the EBacc.

5. The Government should broaden the National Curriculum by making individual creative subjects including music entitlement areas at Key Stage 4, replacing the broader entitlement area of ‘the arts’.

6. The Government should encourage all schools to embed a culture of singing via classroom teaching.

7. Ofsted and the Government should make it clear that delivering only the narrow curriculum prescribed by the EBacc will have an adverse impact on inspections and evaluations.

8. The new National Plan for Music Education must provide clarity as to the roles and responsibilities of schools and Hubs relating to the delivery of a music education for all pupils.

9. The revised National Plan for Music Education should address the quality, provision and access to music education for Early Years and SEND, and improve signposting of music education opportunities for 18 to 25-year-olds.

10. The metrics for measuring the work delivered in response to the NPME need to be revised to go beyond ‘levels of activity’ reported through the current narrow set of metrics. The quality of the work being delivered needs to be part of this evaluation work.

11. Ring-fenced funding for Hubs must be continued beyond 2020 at current levels or increased levels.

12. Ofsted must look for evidence of sustained and high-quality musical learning across the curriculum at all key stages, instead of focusing heavily on accountability measures imposed by the Government that have shown to be failing. They must be responsible for ensuring that a full and balanced curriculum is being delivered regularly in all schools.

13. Ofsted should reconsider their proposal contained in Education inspection framework 2019: inspecting the substance of education in connection with their approach to the EBacc. We urge them to drop their proposal that inspectors understand what schools are doing to prepare for the EBacc to be achieved, and they should take those preparations into consideration when evaluating the intent of the school’s curriculum.

14. Ensure that as per the Government policy directive in 2016, classroom teachers teach within their area of specialism and that this is respected.

15. Ensure that all teachers are supported to access regular and relevant high-quality subject-specific CPD, and improve the working conditions of the workforce.

16. Ensure that there is a sufficient number of properly qualified teachers coming through to support the delivery of music education in our schools and Hubs.

17. Secondary music should be treated as a shortage subject, and greater efforts and financial incentives applied to attract high-quality candidates onto ITE/ITT programmes.

18. The Government must ensure that primary teachers have access to high-quality, relevant and practical subject-specific learning opportunities relating to teaching the music curriculum through their training, NQT period and beyond. In line with other subjects, funded subject-knowledge enhancement courses should be developed and offered through partnerships with ITE providers in higher education.
Scotland
The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland carried out research into music education in Scotland between 2018 and 2019 and a report by the Music Education Partnership Group (MEPG) was subsequently published in February 2019 entitled What’s Going On Now?2 This was a follow up to research conducted in 2003.19 The report identified some perception of a devaluation of music compared to other subjects and a lack of specialist music teachers in primary schools. The numbers of primary school music teachers fell by 50 per cent from 98 in 2008 to 49 in 2019. Government figures from the October 2019 intake showed that targets for music trainees were missed by 37 per cent.20

Government figures for all trainee teachers in Wales in 2018/19 show that the overall number of secondary trainees was 44 per cent lower than target figures and 22 per cent lower for primary trainees. There were just 10 trainees for secondary music in this cohort representing 2% of all secondary trainees.21 The number of registered secondary music teachers fell from 424 in 2016 to 407 in 2020.22

Northern Ireland
The Arts Council of Northern Ireland Music Strategy 2013-2018 recognised the need to do more to ensure music provision was ‘equally distributed across the country and fully supported by the infrastructure’.26 The report identified a need for further research in terms of the quality of youth music activities, gaps in provision and further opportunities. As part of the music strategy, The Arts Council of Northern Ireland committed to advocating strongly for music education entitlement and professional development for teachers.

The numbers of students enrolled on ITT courses across all subjects decreased 4 per cent between 2014 and 2018. The actual number graduating decreased by 5 per cent in the same period.27 Figures from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment show that the uptake of GCSE music fell 19 per cent and by 46 per cent for A Level music between 2007 and 2020.28

Wales
The Welsh Government commissioned the Music services feasibility study published in January 2019, to identify and assess options for the future delivery of music services.29 The report identified a lack of consistency in the structure and governance of music education, the fee structure of Music Education Services, the cost of provision and the sustainability of the music workforce.

Inequalities in access to music provision were also identified with a postcode lottery for the cost of instrumental tuition. Inequalities in access to music provision were also identified with a postcode lottery for the cost of instrumental tuition. Some Local Authorities provided music tuition for free and where others charged, the fees varied widely. This widened the gap between those who could afford instrumental tuition and those who could not. The report also found that the demand for instrumental tuition in schools often outstripped the supply.

Unlike England, the uptake of music qualifications in Scotland between 2015 and 2020 has increased. Higher and Advanced Higher music saw larger increases of 15 per cent and 7 per cent respectively, with a slight increase of 0.2 per cent for National 5 music.30 However, the MEPG also found that music qualifications were insufficient in themselves to aid progression to some programmes at degree level.

Music education in the COVID-19 crisis DECEMBER 2020
Not adjusted for cohort size.
Impact of COVID-19 on music education

The findings of this survey demonstrate that COVID-19 is having a detrimental effect on music education, with 68% of primary school teachers and 39% of secondary school teachers stating that music provision is being reduced as a direct result of the pandemic.

For both primary and secondary schools, the negative impact was felt most in the devolved nations where governments have provided little or no guidance on music teaching and the return to schools.

School music provision

Singing, practical music making, extra-curricular activities and instrumental lessons had all been negatively affected.

For primary teachers, singing was the activity that had been affected the most whereas for secondary teachers it was extra-curricular activities. The wider, negative impact the removal of singing activities was having on younger children in other subjects, particularly counting songs in maths was frequently mentioned by primary school respondents.

How music provision in schools is being affected:

In addition to these activities, primary whole class instrumental lessons (also known as Whole Class Ensemble Teaching, Wider Opportunities or First Access) offered in 72% of primary respondents’ schools, had also been affected. These lessons usually involve whole classes of primary aged children learning to play an instrument, taught by specialist instrumental teachers often working alongside school staff. Just over half (53%) of responding primary schools were not undertaking whole class instrumental teaching: 46% in England and 83% in Scotland. This was partly due to the instruments on offer having restrictions placed on them (particularly brass instruments), and partly due to differing Local Authority approaches.

Quotes from primary teachers:

'It’s been decimated!...I now only work with two year groups for music... I am teaching maths and English interventions for the rest of the time...I’ve lost my studio which is now a staffroom...'

'We cannot sing and the children are hugely disappointed when they ask to sing and we tell them no.'

'Due to staggered breaks/lunch and the need to constantly wash hands, the amount of time spent on music has been reduced.'

'So hands off now [music teaching]. Distanced and using next to no equipment for worrying about cleaning it.'

'We can listen. Inventing is reduced significantly...Performing is dead.'

Quotes from Secondary teachers:

'...the heart of the school is missing'

'...not being able to install a love of music in the same way due to teaching in a normal classroom with less instruments.'

'...as a direct result of COVID-19 the content of music lessons is restricted, the efficacy of teaching has been reduced, the experience of music has been diminished.'

'Honestly, it’s impossible to state how devastating this will be in the long run for Music as a subject. There is no provision at all for instrumental lessons, ensemble projects, bigger inclusive performances or even classroom ensemble work. This will, of course, harm students emotionally and academically.'

Schools experiencing a reduction in music provision as a direct result of COVID-19 by country:
The negative impact was also felt particularly for exam years in secondary schools, especially where it was reported that some pupils had no access to specialist teaching rooms or equipment, and may not have had access to instruments to practice or technology for composition work at home.

Pupils sitting Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) exams were being further disadvantaged in Scotland, where restrictions remain in place for brass and wood playing and singing.

### Recovery Curricula

In response to school closures and the subsequent return of pupils, Professor Barry Carpenter developed the concept of a recovery curriculum which is intended to help the school community recover emotionally, while addressing the inevitable gaps in children’s learning.

The recovery curriculum aims to respond to the loss of routine, structure, friendship, opportunity and freedom experienced by children and young people during the pandemic. Many schools have adopted this model as a way of supporting their pupils as they returned to school.

- **47% of primary teachers** and **41% of secondary teachers** said that their schools had a recovery curriculum in place. However, of these only **31% of primary schools** and **37% of secondary schools** had recovery curricula in place which specifically included music. Whilst the figures for primary school recovery curricula were similar in England and Scotland (49% and 43% respectively), almost twice as many (34%) English recovery curricula included music than Scottish recovery curricula (18%). This reflects the differences in school guidance for music teaching between the two countries, where the restrictions in England were not as severe as Scotland.

One third (33%) of primary music teachers and one in four (41%) secondary music teachers thought that these changes to music teaching at their schools would last for the entire academic year. **49% of primary and 42% of secondary** were not sure how long they would last, adding not only to the uncertainty for exam years and curriculum planning but also concerns for the long-term well-being of staff and pupils.

For secondary schools, the number of respondents who said their school had a recovery curriculum was broadly in line with the number of respondents across all four countries who said that their recovery curriculum also specifically included music.

### Extra-curricular Music

Respondents to the survey reported that extra-curricular music activities were not continuing at all during the 2020/21 academic year in nearly three quarters (72%) of primary schools and two thirds (66%) of secondary schools. The responses from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland indicated that fewer extra-curricular activities were continuing compared to England. Responses from the teachers show that a lack of government guidance for providing safe continuation of ensembles, choirs and orchestras combined with restrictions on numbers and the need to reduce contacts across school year groups have contributed to the overall reduction in enrichment opportunities for pupils.

- **Lack of extra-curricular takes away a good deal of the enrichment we can provide to our high ability students. Particularly opportunities for PP 'pupil premium' students who cannot afford lessons.”**

- **'We are unable to run our extra-curricular activities of which we had many. We are also unable to offer rehearsal or out of lesson practice time in the department as we cannot maintain bubbles this way.'**

- **'Extra-curricular is gone and is the lifeblood of the department.'**

- **'Under our current extra-curricular schedule we will be able to offer extra-curricular opportunities to a maximum of 75 students each week, down from c.170 before lockdown.'**

- **'Extra-curricular offer is less due to staggered school timetable which means lunchtime rehearsals are not possible.'**
In addition to a reduction of extra-curricular music activities, 53% of primary schools and 63% of secondary schools who normally hold a festival concert or performance at the end of the first term would not be able to this year. Much of the content of these performances comes from extra-curricular activities, so there is a clear correlation between a lack of enrichment opportunities and far fewer concerts and performances taking place in the first term of the 2020/21 academic year.

### Instrumental lessons

99% of instrumental teachers working in schools reported that teaching had changed for them for 2020/21. Primary and secondary class teachers reported that 35% of primary instrumental lessons and 28% of secondary instrumental lessons were not continuing in this academic year. Where restrictions still existed for certain instruments, some lessons contained no practical music making at all.

*Only woodwind and brass ‘consultations’, no instruments being played when tutors visit the school.*

*We have been told to discuss their pre-recorded singing which the pupils find off-putting and awkward.*

*They [pupils] need instant feedback and guidance on their vocal pieces in order to build confidence and control in their voices and performance. It’s almost impossible to do this if they record and send it to me.*

...we are in school but only able to talk / discuss in lessons. Pupils are recording their work at home and sending it to me or bringing it in to listen to and discuss.*

*...instrumental lessons have taken a massive hit. In some year groups over 50% stopped playing instruments over lockdown.*

Even when instrumental teachers had reported a return to face-to-face teaching (33%) or a mix of face-to-face and online teaching (26%) these changes were rarely described as a positive experience. There were issues with recruitment and retention of pupils, reduction of income, managing timetables, observing restrictions, implementing mitigating measures and getting to grips with technology.

*...more difficult to recruit new pupils as I can’t do demonstrations, more difficult to help beginners as I can’t go near them... fewer people able to afford lessons.*

*Virtual instrumental instruction is going on through video link in the evenings and as such several pupils have quit as they cannot do this.*

*No year 7 intake on instrumental lessons at all. Many who did have lessons in other year groups have stopped as they do not want online lessons at home.*

*Numbers of students have massively reduced. School leavers not being replaced yet by new students. I think parents are nervous.*

In primary schools, the percentage of Scottish respondents who reported that face-to-face instrumental lessons were not taking place was almost twice that of English respondents. In secondary schools, the responses showed less variance.

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**Schools not holding a festive concert or performance:**

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<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
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<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>51%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>93%</td>
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<td>Scotland</td>
<td>61%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<td>62%</td>
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</table>
Despite school guidance allowing visiting instrumental teaching to resume, 10% of instrumental teachers were currently not teaching at all. Most respondents reported that this was due to school restrictions, although a small minority had been furloughed.

Where instrumental teachers had returned to face-to-face teaching, a range of mitigating measures have been employed to safely deliver lessons. These included the use of larger teaching rooms, reduced group numbers, wearing face coverings and using screens between teachers and pupils. The findings from the survey suggest that schools are interpreting and applying the guidance in many different ways but are also being hampered by the facilities available to them, with only around a quarter of respondents having the use of a larger teaching room.

### A broad and balanced curriculum?

The study found that 8% of primary schools and 9% of secondary schools had removed classroom music completely for some or all year groups as a result of COVID-19, meaning that children up to the age of 14 were not able to have sustained access to music education as part of their entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum as well as reducing access to music as an exam option. Both primary and secondary schools in England accounted for the largest number of missing lessons.

Some respondents in primary schools cited lack of time in the school day, limited or no visiting whole class instrumental tutors or class organisation as reasons for this. In secondary schools, some respondents reported timetabling issues, staggered lunchtimes and lessons being replaced with numeracy and literacy.

### Quotes from primary teachers:

- ‘We are not teaching music at all.’
- ‘No music on the curriculum now.’
- ‘Specialist music only being delivered in years 3 and 4 due to super bubble groupings.’
- ‘Just trying to catch up on normal lessons they’ve missed is our priority.’
- ‘KS3 currently aren’t receiving any music lessons whatsoever.’
- ‘Year 8 have reduced curriculum time to accommodate staggered lunchtimes.’
- ‘Orchestra lessons (1 hour per week for KS3) are removed for literacy and numeracy.’
As a result of reduced music provision, some secondary teachers reported changes to their timetables for the 2020/21 academic year. 11% of teachers had had music lessons removed from their usual timetable as a result of COVID-19 and 8% of secondary teachers had been asked to teach other subjects in place of music this academic year.

The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) accountability measure and its damaging impact on music education has been a concern since its introduction in 2010. In recent years, there has been an increase in schools introducing a two-year Key Stage 3 (where Key Stages apply) to allow more teaching time for exam courses and reducing access to classroom music. 26% of English respondents to this survey indicated that their school did not provide classroom music in all three years of Key Stage 3 meaning that over a quarter of children were missing out on curriculum music lessons at some point during Year 7, Year 8 and/or Year 9. In Wales, the figure was lower at 17% and in Northern Ireland it was 0%.

22% of teachers said their Key Stage 3 pupils were not usually receiving weekly music lessons. Again, the figure was highest in England (33%), compared to Wales (8%) and Northern Ireland (0%). 38% of Key Stage 3 music lessons were on a rota or carousel system for some or all year groups. 100% of those were in English schools.

16% of secondary music teachers reported that they currently had no access at all to specialist music classrooms and 43% of music teachers were having to move between non-specialist classrooms to teach some or all music lessons this academic year. Just over a third (35%) of music classrooms or practice rooms had been repurposed for other subjects or uses. Practice rooms were most likely to be repurposed for medical use.

86% of secondary music teachers reported that they had had to re-write schemes of work due to COVID-19. In Wales and Northern Ireland, 100% of teachers had rewritten schemes of work, compared to 88% in Scotland and 85% in England. In addition to those teachers who have had no access to specialist music rooms, lessons have been re-written to remove practical work, singing, instrumental activities, group work and to accommodate lost learning and future remote education.

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However, responses to further questions in this survey also suggested that some of the issues raised in the State of the Nation have continued, leading to a further decline in music education.

The removal of curriculum music lessons was most prevalent in England, and although these responses related solely to COVID-19, they continue the worrying trend of a narrowing curriculum that has been observed previously by the ISM in its 2019 State of the Nation report.

Day-to-day impacts of COVID-19

As well as the effects of COVID-19 on curriculum and extra-curricular music, teachers reported further adverse impacts on their day-to-day teaching. Many schools have had to make changes to the way they organise classes and year groups by creating ‘bubbles’ or ‘contact groups’ in order to reduce the number of contacts and movement around the buildings, as well as to manage non-teaching time such as lunch breaks. For some teachers this has meant classes remaining static whilst the teacher travels between rooms, and for others being moved to a non-specialist teaching space. For others, it has meant re-writing schemes of work to accommodate these changes and, in some instances, fewer music lessons and teaching other subjects.

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Staff support and wellbeing

Music departments within schools are often small and so the support of colleagues and senior leaders is vital. Music teachers’ experience of senior leadership support in this study was predominantly positive with 69% of primary music teachers and 77% of secondary music teachers feeling supported by their Senior Leadership Teams (SLT).

Teachers in England felt most supported in both primary and secondary schools and accounted for around three quarters of responses to this question (73% positive in primary and 75% positive in secondary). This reflects the lowest reduction in music provision reported by English respondents and the more detailed music guidance issued by the DfE compared to other countries.

A small number of music teachers felt that although SLT were supportive they did not fully understand the guidance for and practicalities of delivering music lessons. These figures were broadly similar across all four nations. Unfortunately, 20% of primary and 15% of secondary teachers felt unsupported by SLT and had encountered negative experiences. More than twice as many Scottish primary teachers felt unsupported than English primary teachers (42% compared to 16%) and were most likely to respond that they had received no support at all.

Instrumental teachers felt the least supported by their schools with just over half (53%) feeling supported and just over a third (35%) feeling unsupported. Around two thirds of Welsh, Northern Irish and Scottish respondents felt supported, with slightly fewer English respondents agreeing with them. However, English instrumental teachers felt the least supported overall.

School-based music staff are more likely to be established members of their school communities and perhaps, therefore, easier to support than visiting teachers. This situation has been made worse by the restrictions placed on schools to limit the interactions between adults as well as the numbers of visitors. However, where instrumental teachers felt unsupported it was often as a result of lack of communication and uncertainty as to when and how they could return to teaching in person.

This situation has been made worse by the restrictions placed on schools to limit the interactions between adults as well as the numbers of visitors. We are particularly concerned about reports of teachers being asked to remove the NHS Track & Trace app by managers in order to prevent it triggering a period of quarantine and absence from work. However, where instrumental teachers felt unsupported... Teachers who felt supported said:

- ‘They have done a good job facilitating all of the changes. They have allowed me to use specialist spaces and equipment with examination groups...’
- ‘I have been provided with a Perspex screen, antiviral spray, wipes and gel, my own personal satchel with masks, wipes, gel and tissues and video on cleaning the piano in my room.’
- ‘They [SLT] have been brilliant. They have worked hard to provide peris with safe spaces to teach, have relocated instruments so students in non-specialist classrooms still get access to some practical work and have been supportive and encouraging throughout, they have made it clear how much music is valued.’
- ‘They have [SLT] have been written alternative schemes of work for when pupils are isolating at home.’
- ‘Written alternative schemes of work due to gaps of knowledge and possibly home learning if lockdown again.’

Teachers who had mixed experiences said:

- ‘Most [SLTs] keen to have music but don’t always understand the logistical difficulties of moving instruments around classrooms in this time.’
- ‘They [SLT] are keen for practical lessons to go ahead but lack understanding of how to do this safely.’
- ‘I am allowed to use my classroom for all lessons (cleaned down in between back to back different year groups) but I have to walk all classes around the fire door of my room. No students are allowed on the perimeter of the building and in through the fire door of my room. No students are allowed on corridors to avoid mixing of year groups. This can take 15-20 minutes of a 60-minute lesson.’
- ‘Music is included as a key part of our broad, rich curriculum, and is recognised as being beneficial in our return to school recovery curriculum, with many opportunities to include music sessions as children return to school.’
- ‘Our focus, especially this first term, is on children’s well-being and they [SLT] recognise the important role music has to play in this.’

Teachers who felt unsupported said:

- ‘Some have been great with meetings and consultations via Zoom, some have left the changes to very late in the summer holiday giving a lack of certainty others the communication has been non-existent and it’s as if COVID hadn’t happened.’
- ‘They are supportive in that we can still teach music, but have no idea how limiting non practical lessons are. There is a naïvety that we can carry instruments between classrooms (up to five times a day) and have offered no solutions to the issues we have.’
- ‘Requested that I could order more instruments three weeks before term started but they have still not arrived...We have 15 B&Q buckets to use as drums...’
- ‘They are more focused on the core subjects and STEM subjects and forget about the arts having equipment to clean, instruments to practice which we are told not to practice.’
- ‘Was just sent a whole school risk assessment with nothing specific for visiting music teachers. The school have not reached out to me.’
In addition to the findings in this report, there are ongoing concerns regarding examinations for 2021.

Following on from a disastrous summer 2020 exam series which saw cancellations and centre-assessed grades downgraded only to be reinstated after protests from pupils, parents and teachers, further inequality emerged as Governments announced conflicting plans for the summer 2021 examination series.

The Welsh Government announced on 10 November that GCSEs, AS and A Level exams would be cancelled for summer 2021 and replaced by externally set and marked assessments supervised by teachers in classroom settings. This followed an announcement on 7 October by the Scottish Government that National 5s would be cancelled for 2021 and replaced with teacher assessments and coursework. Higher and Advanced Higher exams are set to go ahead as planned, although their start date has been pushed back by two weeks. Proposed modifications from SQA published on 26 November 2020 suggest that ‘brass, woodwind and voice candidates, who are unable to be supported by face to face learning and teaching leading up to their assessment, might wish to consider the option of learning a different instrument.’ Exams in Northern Ireland will proceed as planned but with a later start date.

There have previously been concerns regarding English exams due to large numbers of pupils around the country having to isolate as a result of an increase in COVID-19 cases in schools. Amanda Spielman, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector (Ofsted), suggested in her evidence to the Parliamentary Education Committee on 10 November that exams in 2021 could take place for core subjects with centre-assessed grades for others. If implemented, this would lead to a further de-valuing of arts subjects which could cause irreparable damage to music departments already under threat from Government policy.

The Welsh National Plan for Music Education has not yet emerged, and the DfE have not provided publication dates for the refreshed plan or the model music curriculum. The refreshed plan was meant to level up musical opportunities for children of all backgrounds and it is clear from our report that this is needed now more than ever.

Responses collected from this survey suggested that music teachers’ health and well-being was being negatively affected by the changes they have experienced as they try to balance concerns around their own health with the needs of their pupils. Changes to the curriculum, timetables and pedagogy coupled with feelings of isolation and loneliness could have lasting mental and physical effects on the music workforce as the school year progresses and beyond the 2020/21 academic year.

‘...this could be a lonely year.’

‘As a teacher you constantly have to choose between teaching effectively or being selfish and protecting your health. It’s an impossible choice and I find myself risking my health out of guilt for the pupils’ situation more often than I should.’

‘I live with a vulnerable person and buses in our area are not distancing, nobody is wearing masks, seats are not cordoned off, and people are packed in, so I am walking to and from all of my schools – at least an hour each way each time.’

‘...as an extremely clinically vulnerable teacher who was shielding, my normal timetable of 22 large classes a week is horrendously terrifying in an unventilated room where aerosol build up could infect me.’

‘I have been completely abandoned.’

‘Being in schools one day each week, I often feel as though I’m bottom of the pile. Covid has reinforced that feeling.’

‘It’s really depressingly isolating.’

‘No support in the psychological effects of how drastically I have to change my teaching.’

‘I have been completely abandoned.’

‘the content and education assessment requirements for many of the EBacc subjects have not been changed. This has put pressure on schools to focus their available time on these ‘core’ subjects’
Rethinking education

The disruption to education that COVID-19 has caused could provide a much-needed pivotal moment of reset for education policy. Prior to the pandemic, there had been calls to scrap GCSEs with the Chair of the Education Select Committee, Robert Halfon MP, suggesting in February 2019 that they should be replaced by an holistic baccalaureate at age 18 which would incorporate academic and technical skills as well as personal development. A survey commissioned by the Edge Foundation suggested that parents in England and Wales supported this suggestion with 73 per cent of respondents saying that there was ‘too much emphasis on exam grades’ in secondary schools.

A coalition of independent schools, headteachers and other key figures, collectively known as Rethinking Assessment, along with the former Secretary of State for Education, Lord Kenneth Baker, called in Autumn 2020 for broader education assessment routes claiming that GCSEs were outdated, expensive and did not prepare children for today’s world of work.

More recently, the One Nation Caucus of Conservative MPs published a report on 9 October 2020 entitled ‘The Future of Education’ calling for the replacement of GCSEs with a Baccalaureate-type qualification at age 18 which could be either academic, technical or an apprenticeship. They also called for a review of standardised tests (SATS) for 11-year olds. The report argues that GCSE students miss out on roughly six months of wider learning opportunities because of the amount of time dedicated to revision and mock and actual exams. Flick Drummond, MP, co-author of the report, also raised concerns about the harmful impact of exam pressure on pupils’ mental health.

The ISM believes that education should be broad and balanced and equip children for the future in a world post-COVID-19, where there is increased automation. As Andreas Schleicher, the Director of Education and Skills at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) said in evidence to the Education Select Committee on 26 February 2020, ‘In the fourth industrial revolution, art may become more important than maths. We often talk about soft skills as being social and emotional skills, and hard skills as being science and maths, but it might be the opposite. The science and maths might become a lot softer in the future, where the relevance of knowledge evaporates very quickly, whereas the hard skills might be your curiosity, leadership, persistence and resilience.’

Footnotes


13. Ibid
22. https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/ written-questions/detail/2020-10/1915419
35. https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/ written-questions/detail/2020-10/1915419
The Incorporated Society of Musicians is the UK’s oldest professional representative body for musicians, set up in 1882 to promote the art of music and to protect the interests of all those working in the music sector. The ISM has over 10,500 members right across the U.K. We are one of two subject associations for music education and have many thousands of music teachers in the membership working in every conceivable setting including the classroom and music education hubs. The ISM provides the secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education which published the acclaimed State of the Nation report last year focusing on music education.

ism.org