

ARTICLE

Time for change? Recurrent barriers to music education

Jennie Henley^{1*}  and David Barton² 

¹Royal Northern College of Music, 124 Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9RD and ²18, Scotch Orchard, Lichfield, Staffordshire, WS13 6BZ

*Corresponding author. Email: jennie.henley@rncm.ac.uk

Abstract

This article reports findings from a study that sought to identify barriers to music and music education in the UK. Emerging from empirical research involving $n = 723$ participants and clarified by an evidence base of over 10,000 research participants, the key findings presented in this paper relate to *pupil and participant voice and involvement*, *location* as a sub-theme of *diversity and inclusion*, *collaboration* and *transition points*. The research is contextualised by twenty years of policy initiatives seeking to address barriers to music learning. The article provides an overview of the research study before presenting the rich data that emerged within each theme reported. Research participant voice is used as much as possible to enable the reader to consider, reflect and interpret the data in a way that is meaningful for their own context. The paper concludes by asking why after 20 years of policy initiatives, research and evaluation the same barriers still exist and, as we emerge from the pandemic, suggests that this research provides a compelling case that now is the time for change.

Keywords: Inequality; pupil and participant voice; location ; collaboration; transition; Whole-Class Ensemble Teaching (WCET)

Introduction

Twenty years ago, in 2002, the first *Wider Opportunities* programmes were piloted in England. Designed to address inequalities in provision and barriers to music learning, these programmes sought to:

- ‘provide significant music activities, incorporating instrumental tuition for pupils through whole-class teaching
- target ‘first timers’
- foster and develop collaboration between the formal and informal music education sectors in and beyond schools
- offer musical choices to pupils
- embrace a broad range of diverse cultures
- provide appropriate training for music leaders and teachers
- encourage family involvement
- link to the National Curriculum
- ensure rigorous monitoring and evaluation to inform future practice’

(Davies & Stephens, 2004)

Shortly before the global pandemic struck, a special issue of the *British Journal for Music Education* took stock of whole-class instrumental tuition (WCET) to reflect on WCET as a pedagogical approach and the learnings that can be taken forward into other forms of music teaching. Hallam (2019) provided an analysis of the contributing factors that make WCET successful, and the research was contextualised by the policy and evaluation trajectory of the original pilot

programmes. Hallam tells us that the evaluations carried out between 2004 and 2010 were positive, demonstrating that there had been progress against the aims of the programme. However, she points out that, despite these positive evaluation reports, 10 years after their inception, Ofsted reported that progression beyond these initial programmes was limited (Ofsted, 2012).

The challenges of transition between stages of learning were well known in 2012. In fact, the 2001 white paper that prompted the development of WCET programmes was an attempt to address issues with progression in the transition between Primary and Secondary school (Department for Education and Skills, 2001). This was also not a new issue for music education. Kokotsaki (2017) demonstrates that the challenges of moving from Primary to Secondary school have been discussed widely since the early 1980s and Wright (2002) shows how the introduction of GCSE qualifications in England, with the first exams being taken in 1988, was a policy attempt to enable more young people to engage in music learning, amongst other subjects, beyond the age of 14. However, what the Ofsted report of 2012 showed is that the advent of WCET programmes brought a new challenge in transition: that from initial whole-class instrumental learning to the next stages of learning.

The creation of Music Education Hubs in 2012, 10 years after the introduction of WCET and in response to the National Plan for Music Education (DfE, 2011), was a policy initiative to (in part) actively address issues of transition and progression through collaborative working and the geographical inequities of music education provision. Notably, the aims of the initial wider opportunities pilot programmes – as stated above – run through the 2011 National Plan for Music Education, implying that despite the positive outcomes reported in evaluations, the aims of the initiative were still live challenges for music education.

The 10 years following the National Plan for Music Education tell a similar story (Fautley & Daubney, 2019). In 2014, a report outlined how progression routes in music education were not clearly defined (ABRSM, 2014). In 2015, a report showed that progression beyond WCET programmes was still limited (Sharp, 2015). The year 2017 saw the publication of a report showing that, as Fautley and Daubney (2019) highlight, although evaluation reports had been widely disseminated, the insights from those reports had not been well embedded (Zeserson & Welch, 2017). By the time the pandemic hit in 2020, there were still considerable challenges and inequalities in music learning (ABRSM, 2021).

Needless to say, the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on music in UK schools has been devastating (Underhill, 2020), and the fragility of music-making and music learning is very clear (Fautley, 2020). The pandemic has brought into sharp focus issues of equality (Daubney & Fautley, 2020) and as music education rebuilds, now is the time to ask serious questions about how far we wish to return to the pre-pandemic status quo.

This article presents new empirical research, carried out prior to the pandemic that underpins the fact that after 20 years of policy initiatives aiming to address inequalities, the barriers to music education that young people experience have not altered. As we emerge from the pandemic with new hope and new ways of working (Daubney & Fautley, 2020), it is time to take a deep look at these experiences, acknowledge the recurrence of the barriers and consider whether we need to do something different.

The music commission

The Music Commission¹ was launched in 2017 to explore how progress in music making and learning can be sustained. Conducted over 18 months, the inquiry brought together a panel of experts, including performers, academics and educators, to interrogate research, evidence and insights from across the musical landscape. A Research Reference Group comprising leading academics in the fields of music education, creativity and general education supported the commission, providing both a steer and a peer review mechanism for the research programme that

informed the commission's work. The research programme was supervised by the first author (Henley) and carried out by a team of researchers, including the second author (Barton). The aim of the research programme was to support the Music Commission panel's discussions and underpin recommendations, thoroughly grounding the Music Commission Report in the most pertinent recent research.

The research included a study exploring barriers to music and music education, implemented over a 6-month period, including the design phase, ethical approval process, piloting, data collection and analysis. This study involved three strands:

- *Field notes*: From the point of launching the Music Commission, informal conversations were recorded and collated to explore the field, identify stakeholders and steer the direction of the research programme and development of research questions. Twelve months' worth of field notes were analysed and themes drawn out to identify the parameters of the study. Leading to;
- *Empirical work*: New empirical data were collected via a survey and targeted focus groups, producing collaborative statements. The total number of useable survey responses was $n = 513$, including 36 responses from young people and 110 responses from parents, and the total number of participants in the collaborative statements is a minimum of $n = 203$ collected via 29 focus groups. Ten of these focus groups involved young people, with four involving primary aged children. The cross-over potential between the two data sets in the empirical work was acknowledged, and a breakdown of roles of research participants to show the spread across the sector was provided. The purpose of the empirical work was to provide a snapshot from the field as to current ideas surrounding progression in relation to mechanisms for progression, as identified in the field notes. These were People, Places, Pathways and Points in time. Research participants were asked to reflect on the opportunities and barriers available to them or their learner in relation to the four identified mechanisms for progression.
- *Rapid evidence review*: 'A Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) aims to provide an informed conclusion on the volume and characteristics of an evidence base together with a synthesis of what that evidence indicates following a critical appraisal of that evidence' (Collins et al., 2015). The scope of the rapid evidence review is important to note. The total number of participants in the research studies reviewed is a minimum of $n = 10,104$. This number is a minimum as many studies did not specify the exact number of participants. The purpose of this strand of research was to explore recent literature (published within the 5 years prior to the study), draw out issues related to progression and to cross reference the empirical work with a larger sample of research studies.

The three research strands were cross-referenced and analysed. First, the field notes were used to design the survey, focus groups and to provide the parameters for the rapid evidence review. Once closed, the survey was analysed at a surface level via word frequency queries. Then, an inductive analysis of the survey was carried out and themes were cross-referenced with the collaborative statements produced by the focus groups. Participant codes were assigned to the data: P1-P531 for survey participants and FG1-FG29 for focus groups. The rapid evidence review was carried out in parallel to the inductive analysis. Once the inductive analysis and rapid evidence review were completed, a deductive analysis was carried out to apply the themes that emerged from the empirical work to the larger body of evidence. We found that the empirical work and rapid evidence review were in agreement with each other in relation to the emerging themes, thus the themes emerging from the smaller empirical sample reflected the larger evidence base.

One key theme stood out as having significant implications for progression in music learning:

- *Pupil and participant voice and involvement*

Six further key themes were identified:

- *Diversity and inclusion*
- *Value*
- *Teacher education and CPD*
- *Collaboration*
- *Transition points*
- *Resourcing (time/staffing etc.)*

Finally, one theme ran throughout all above themes: *Funding*

All of these themes are interlinked, and natural cross-over occurred in the data. The key findings reported in this article are *pupil and participant voice and involvement*, *location* as a sub-theme of *diversity and inclusion*, *collaboration* and *transition points*. Further articles are being prepared to report findings across the other themes.

Pupil and participant voice and involvement

It became clear from the analysis of the data that there is a need for greater pupil and participant involvement in decision and policy-making at all levels of music education. As one young participant said, ‘You need to start listening to young people – and stop decisions being made by adults who think they know best’ (FG12). This is reflected in other previous research which also found that there was a need for young people to be consulted and involved in the decision-making process (Wired4Music, 2015).

Others felt that policy was generally formulated on a top-down basis, and that those who ultimately participate in the opportunities available have the least voice in the decision-making process. For example, P19 wrote that ‘politicians and those making national music education decisions need to think from the ground up, i.e. from the perspective of the children, not imposing commercial, political priorities’.

Overall, there was a sense that the children and young people themselves needed to be afforded a ‘voice’ at all levels. For example, P12, believes ‘it’s essential for . . . [students’] voices to be heard about what type of music making they want to explore’. Similarly, P250 writes that ‘Youth Voice will be key across all of this to understand motivations and preferred ways of learning and progressing’. Likewise, P489 responded, saying:

‘Young people need to be listened to much more. They must be given much more agency to set their own musical goals and make their own musical choices, with input from a diverse range of individuals and organisations across music’.

It was recognised wholeheartedly, that given opportunity to have a greater input, children and young people had much of significant value to contribute. As P216 says, there is a need to:

‘Start a national discussion about the benefits of a musical education . . . The parents and schools need to understand what it has to offer. That it’s not elite. The kids get it. The adults don’t’.

It was also felt that the opportunities provided to children and young people, whether they be through schools or outside of schools, needed to cater to their specific interests and meet individual needs. In some cases, this referred to the teaching itself. For example, P140 suggests that ‘Children get switched off quickly if the teaching doesn’t meet their needs, interests or

preferences'. Similarly, on a more general note, P250 indicates that there is a lack of music-making opportunities which 'appeal to the interests of children and young people'. It was recognised that conflict can often arise due to differing musical tastes. P129 states 'there is often a conflict between the styles in which teachers are comfortable and those potential learners are interested in, resulting in inauthentic teaching, and unenthusiastic learning'. Indeed, previous research suggests that valuing children and young people's musical preferences, even if not liking them, was fundamental in encouraging a more open approach to both music teaching and learning (McQueen, Hallam, & Creech, 2018).

Other respondents felt that music educators needed to adopt a 'learner-centred' approach, P140 saying 'find out about your learner – what do they like, who are they, what else are they involved in? Allow them to be involved in dialogue in the education process so that it is co-constructed'. Carter (2016) argues that progression needs to be tailored to individual needs, and similarly, it has been noted that there is a need for Music Education Hubs to meet the needs of all of the young people within their local area (Hallam, 2018). It has been suggested elsewhere that activities which are largely teacher-directed make it hard for children and young people to engage in music-making post-compulsory education (Pitts & Robinson, 2016), and that increased pupil independence can lead to more effective learning (Andrews, 2013). However, although understandings of the need for children and young people to be agents in their own learning are widely accepted, implementing this requires a fundamental shift in thinking and educational practice (Barton, 2020).

It was suggested that a dialogue between stakeholders had the potential to enrich a participant's experience of any opportunity available, P391 saying that a situation was needed 'where the student's aims and aspirations are reached by mutual agreement with the teacher'. That said, others recognised the need for children and young people to be exposed to musical opportunities which they, themselves, may not have considered.

Overall, it's clear from those responses received directly from the children and young people themselves that they have much of value to contribute to the ongoing debate. They feel that top-down decision-making negatively impacts their opportunities to progress. There is a sense that whilst the children and young people value many of the opportunities that they've been given, such opportunities, whilst well-meaning, are often misplaced. There was a strong sense that a greater dialogue with children and young people themselves, in other words, those who will ultimately participate, would be hugely beneficial to the music education sector at all levels. Ultimately, many felt that in order for children and young people to progress in music, their voices needed to be heard and valued. As Sandbrook (2014, 3) writes:

'what's often missing is having the right attitudes and behaviours to enable young musicians to progress: believing in their potential, finding out what they can do to support themselves and each other, letting them work out their own musical identities and destinations'.

Location

A significant number of responses highlighted the huge variation in the availability of opportunities based on location. To begin with, it was generally felt that there were considerable opportunities available to those living in London. For example, P2 states there is a 'Wealth of amateur music making in London' and P42 says 'There are also many courses and masterclasses available for amateur musicians (in Greater London)'. Similarly, P131 writes there is 'Tons in London. Everywhere', and P151 said:

'On the more amateur end, in London, there are certainly a huge range of amateur orchestras and choirs for people to perform in – with the opportunity to choose a group that is your level or a bit higher and which expands you musically and builds a good social group'.

It was also recognised that there was a greater availability of opportunities through which children and young people could progress in music, for example, P130 writes:

‘As a parent in London, I can see there are lots of opportunities for my children e.g. through Lewisham Music hub, Kinetika Bloco, Blackheath Halls community opera, peripatetic lessons at school, Junior Trinity, invitations to perform at Blackheath Conservatoire family concerts, NYJC, Ronnie Scott’s big band in a day . . .’

Likewise, FG27 reported similarly, although recognised that these opportunities were not always sustained:

‘I feel there are several opportunities in London, to progress if you’re just starting out, but barely any opportunities to develop as a more advanced music maker without having to pay high fees’.

It was, however, recognised that the availability of opportunities in London was variable depending on location. P355 reports:

‘It’s the outer areas of London in more need of support than the inner London areas. Poorer families have been shifted out here . . . I don’t think the schemes have caught up with these changes in demographics yet’.

Overall, it was certainly recognised that whilst there were often opportunities in urban areas, much more was available in big cities.

‘I grew up in a modest sized urban environment which had a reasonable number of opportunities. Having later moved to a very large city, there are many more options here. Relatives who live in a rural area find it much [harder] to access music making opportunities’. (P49)

Similarly, P65 writes there is ‘Not enough investment in local initiatives [you] need access to bigger cities to progress’.

It is, perhaps, no surprise that by comparison, many respondents lamented the lack of opportunities available in rural areas. P125 writes that such opportunities are ‘Very limited in a not very wealthy rural area’. Overall, the distances needed to be travelled beyond rural areas to access opportunities was often prohibitive. For example, P108 writes:

‘I live in Snowdonia and am learning the sax. Unfortunately, there are few opportunities as there are few teachers in the area that teach sax. In a rural area it is quite difficult. The closest opportunity for me is a 50-mile round trip to a local music school where I am taking lessons’.

They go on to say:

‘For me it is the distance I have to travel and no ensemble for woodwind or bands to join in the area, which would help me progress in music making. Slow internet speed is also a barrier as I am unable to take [online] lessons as we do not have super-fast fibre broadband and my broadband is too slow and drops out’.

Similarly, FG7 also cited similar difficulties with location and travelling distances, saying that a:

‘Limited pool of music leaders due to geographical remoteness/peninsula – leads to geographical or instrumental cold spots, lack of capacity for First Access, succession planning – need to attract new talent’

P70 highlights the lack of opportunities for progression in rural areas compared to those offered elsewhere, saying:

‘We used to live in a rural area, my daughter showed a talent for music, but this wasn’t supported locally because of her age. The nearest orchestra that could cater for her age was a 4 hour round trip which we did each month. This was the only music opportunity for her . . . In the urban area she could attend 4 suitable orchestras every week which she did on several instruments, and she auditioned and was accepted to a music school 3 years after moving to an area which provided her with more opportunity’.

One of the most significant factors in restricting people’s access to musical opportunities was transport, and this was not necessarily restricted to rural areas. In some cases, the lack of public transport was a problem, for example, P105 writes ‘if potential musicians have no encouragement from home, it can be difficult to even get to the venue especially if you do not have access to any public transport’.

It was recognised that it was often the case that opportunities had been centralised, for example, at county level, and that this in itself proved a barrier when it came to transport. For example, P141 found that because ensembles took place at county level it ‘makes it unattainable for many even just in terms of transport’. Similarly, P462 writes:

‘Unfortunately, transport can be a major barrier. Many of the students from the rural areas would have to travel 20 miles or more to access the music centres and no transport is supplied. This relies on parents to take them’.

Likewise, P20 writes:

‘In rural areas access to musical activities (e.g. county orchestras, bands, choirs etc) is impossible because these activities are confined to centralized music hubs. For example, in East Yorkshire – a very large county – any such participation depends upon being able to get to Beverley. This is impossible unless parents have the means (and the time) to provide transport’.

It was noted that due to cutbacks, some music centres which had previously laid on transport, were no longer able to do so, P276 saying:

‘The music centres used to provide transport, but after local council cutbacks, it was not possible to continue to offer this, so a child’s ability to take part in these important activities is therefore reliant on a parent’s access to a car’.

As FG24 found, when it came to transport difficulties:

‘these constantly get forgotten about, but are a huge problem for schools and Hubs working in areas with poor travel links, rural communities or other things which make travelling to school or other venues difficult unless the opportunity takes place in school during school hours or transport costs and logistics are covered’.

The problems relating to geographical barriers have previously been identified, and it is felt that the national strategy for music education has not necessarily been effective in overcoming these (Derbyshire, 2015).

Collaboration

There was a feeling, especially from the respondents to the survey, that effective collaboration, whether that might be between individuals and/or organisations, could aid progression in music education, and it was something valued by those across the sector. For example, P99 writes, 'I really value collaborative working & would love to be able to work more holistically with other music professionals'. That said, whilst many saw the benefits of such collaborations, these were not always as effective as they might be. It was also suggested that it's not always easy to know where to go in order to facilitate such collaborations, for example, the FG13 state:

'There is an opinion that the DfE do not know who to talk to about music education, and there needs to be a central point of contact for those seeking music education information, e.g. a Think Tank or Task Force. Music Mark represents Hubs, but there is no central body representing in and out of school provision, including curriculum offers'.

P12 recognised the positive benefits of music education hubs working with external organisations and individuals, saying:

'Where music hubs are working closely (as many do) with their hub partners, the opportunities for non-formal experiences are magnified both numerically & also in breadth of the musical 'diet'.

Likewise, FG2 recognised similar benefits, suggesting that 'Strong hub links with a diverse range of partners broaden and deepen the range of provision'. Despite the obvious benefits of collaborations and partnerships between hubs and other individuals and organisations, these were not always effective, and this was a potential barrier to progress in music education.

FG13 found that 'Engagement from Music Services ... has been variable. This is caused by a range of factors including Music Services being overstretched and having a lack of resources'. P19 felt that engaging effectively with hubs in their area was problematic as the hubs did 'not have appropriate pedagogical classroom practice expertise, nor offer appropriate CPD'. It has also been suggested that whilst individuals and organisations have attempted to engage with and collaborate with hubs and music services, this is not always effective. For example, P213 says they 'tried to set up a Birmingham Youth Folk Band but without support from the music service this was not fruitful'. P232 states that there should be a situation of 'all education bodies working together to provide a well-balanced music education'.

This includes Higher Education. Varvarigou, Creech, and Hallam (2014, 94–95) found that in primary schools:

'purposeful engagement in active music-making and opportunities for performances with professional musicians, as well as with their teachers and the conservatoire students, contributed to raising aspirations, greater enthusiasm for music and increased confidence in music'.

A number of survey respondents also highlighted the benefits of and need for greater partnership and collaboration between schools and higher education. P278 writes that:

'The Music Conservatoires do a very good job of musical outreach. They send their superb students into schools and often give good quality workshops for a small amount or even free.

Many of the children in the schools where I work have been inspired to take up a musical instrument based on these workshops’.

P92 suggests that universities should ‘Make music students at college go into junior schools to promote music as part of their degree’. P435 suggests similar, saying:

‘It may also be a good idea to get Music students from universities and colleges into schools to lead choirs, bands and orchestras. They could be paid for this and develop teaching skills; school students could benefit from their knowledge. There are plenty of people with the skills to teach music and plenty of children with the desire to learn. The two groups just need to be matched up better’.

A number of survey respondents highlighted the opportunities found through collaboration and partnership with professional musicians and ensembles, for example, FG25 highlights Ex Cathedra’s ‘Singing Playgrounds’ outreach project. Pitts (2014) found that such outreach projects involving professional musicians and ensembles can improve teacher confidence and show children that music-making is for everyone. As with the teachers in Pitts’ study, Henley (2021) found that there were emotional, social and creative benefits to such engagement.

It was clear that greater opportunities for collaboration between professionals and other individuals and agencies involved in delivering music education could be not only beneficial to pupils’ progress but also, as found by Clennon and Boehm (2014), to the wider community. P11 said ‘Why not develop a scheme of visiting musicians in schools to show students how wonderful music making is?’, whilst P186 suggested we should ‘Encourage all professional musicians and music making organisations to mentor and offer shadowing opportunities to developing musicians’.

Transition and progression points

Respondents to the survey, and members of the focus groups identified a number of points in time where transitions occurred for those progressing in music. The general feeling was that these transition points almost universally present learners with barriers to progressing further.

The transition point that was highlighted the most, both in the survey and the focus groups, was the progression from whole class instrumental tuition to either group or individual lessons. There were opposing views about the effectiveness of such programmes, P133 saying:

‘Wider Opps/First Access programmes also seem to have been demotivational – progression rates (anecdotally) seem to be very low after participation in such programmes, which in personal experience, have not been run very well, although very well-meaning. Such programmes (again, in my experience), have not provided a very engaging introduction to music making for primary-aged children, so most children think it is not for them’.

That said, it was also recognised that such programmes could provide a good starting point for learning music, P390 saying:

‘Through our whole class instrumental lessons in years 3 and 4 We can identify those students who might show particular skills and can direct them towards our peripatetic staff. We are working with our local university to find ways of opening up access to these lessons to those from difficult economic backgrounds in order to allow all children to benefit from musical tuition’.

Indeed, Garnett (2013) highlights the advantages of fostering musicianship from early childhood. However, the biggest area of concern was that of affordability and funding of tuition, whether that was in groups or individually once pupils had completed the programme. For example, P227 responded, saying that the:

‘Primary barrier to progress remains socio-economic; no matter how successfully the Whole-Class Ensemble Tuition (WCET) programme is [delivered] by music hubs, the inevitable barrier is the second term – when someone has to pay. These pupils know from the start they will not be able to continue’.

Similarly, P152 highlights the effectiveness of such programmes in identifying those children who may wish to progress further; however, they go on to say:

‘My second area of concern is for children who demonstrably do not [fulfil] their potential in music because of the structural lack of ambition. For example, I teach Y2 whole class recorder lessons. After two terms of weekly lessons, I can identify talented and hard-working children who would benefit from [group or individual] lessons on an instrument, but this is only available to children whose parents will pay’.

Likewise, P466 highlights the lack of funding beyond such programmes as a barrier to progress, saying that a:

‘Barrier exists from the ‘free’ whole class offering to parents having to pay for lessons and purchase/hire of instrument. Many parents are seeing the whole class tuition as their children accessing instrumental music but then do not want to continue with it, preferring to use family money for their children to try out other experiences’

Similarly, P301 calls for:

‘Support and funding to be put in place to allow the vast numbers of students who engage with music in the WCET/First Access model at primary schools the opportunities to be able to continue with their music making’.

As highlighted by P204, ‘progression beyond free whole class instrumental tuition at primary school isn’t affordable for a lot of families’. Previous research found that whilst the majority of children initially learn an instrument in schools, those who progress further, were more likely to learn privately or at specialist music schools (Shepperd, 2014).

Alongside the concerns over funding and affordability post-engagement in such programmes, concern was also expressed about the quality and effectiveness of these schemes, for example, P334 states that ‘Personally I am not a fan of whole class lessons – forcing children to learn an instrument not of their choosing at the same pace’. P410 highlights the potential problems which arise further down the line for children who’ve started learning an instrument through such whole-class programmes, and concern was expressed as to whether such programmes offer a good starting point for children to engage with music, for example, in their collaborative statement, FG24 stated that:

‘A poor experience of first access in WCET coupled with an expectation that few pupils will continue is leading to low continuation rates. Insufficient planning and funding is going into the continuation routes available to interested pupils’.

Overall, concern was expressed about a ‘lack of consistency in [schools] offering coherent musical progression post-WCET’ (FG2) and similarly, a lack of ‘follow up opportunities for them to

progress into consistently [supported] music learning is very patchy' (FG22). Previous research has highlighted the need for the opportunities offered through such First Access programmes to be sustained, and through doing this, music at Key Stage 2, age 7–11 years, and then Key Stage 3, age 11–14 years, and beyond, can be more effective (Hallam, Creech, & McQueen, 2018).

It was recognised that the progression from primary to secondary school, i.e. Key Stage 2 (KS2) to Key Stage 3 (KS3), or Year 6 to Year 7, often created a barrier to progression in music, for example, learners are required to hand back their instruments at the end of primary school (Creech, Saunders, & Welch, 2016). That said, the potential reasons cited for such barriers were mixed. P335 stated that 'There is a lot of focus on music in KS2 in primary schools but this is pointless [if] there is nothing offered in the secondary sector', yet P252 states the opposite, saying that 'Not enough time or effort is put into high quality provision at primary school. By secondary most kids have decided they'd rather do something else'. This highlights the very differing picture of provision across schools at all levels, although previous research has found that the degree to which children enjoyed music at primary school, compared to secondary school, declined (Kokotsaki, 2017).

FG24 highlighted the potential problems encountered at this transition point, saying:

'Primary music teachers have little to no confidence that pupils' music will be encouraged or continued when they move to secondary school. Cuts to arts budgets in secondary schools means it isn't a priority to focus on music. Or, the secondary teacher will start from scratch and not value the expertise they may arrive at the secondary school with. This picture is getting worse, with many stories of even talented musicians arriving at secondary school and stopping their involvement in music. Secondary schools are failing to cater for or support the talented and motivated pupils'.

P373 also picks up on the final couple of points, saying that in their experience:

'It is difficult to get our children who move to secondary school to continue their playing as the Academy is not very open to working with us or our local music service. Their music stays in house and our children who have moved there with fantastic skills give up their playing very early in Year 7'.

P12 suggests that the quality of the provision at Key Stage 3 is crucial if schools are to encourage pupils to study music further down the line:

'In the secondary sector there needs to be a sense of moving forward . . . if we want students to pursue music into KS4/5 we need to work towards that from KS3, building on prior learning from the primary sector – making sure the provision is suitable & captivating for every student, not just those who fit a certain profile'.

This point was similarly highlighted by Garnett (2013) who identified a fault line between music at Key Stage 3 (11 to 14-year-olds) and music at Key Stage 4 (leading to public examinations at 16 years old).

A couple of respondents highlighted two differing experiences of children moving between schools. P97 found that 'Local music hubs are great, whether these are at county level or within a school. Support for students moving between schools in an area by providing continuity of teaching can be a result of the support of hubs'. That said, as stated above, although it's recognised that there can be barriers to vertical movement between Key Stages and year groups, barriers can also exist when children move horizontally between schools, P163 saying:

‘When my daughter moved between state secondary schools, she didn’t join any music activities (or she didn’t even [mention] to any new friends that she played any instruments while she was at Grade 7–8 level), because she saw a classmate being bullied for taking a flute lesson’.

There was a strong feeling that routes of progression beyond compulsory education, especially for those who wished to keep learning or playing, but who were not studying music, were unclear. P474 suggests that ‘Progression routes available to adult leisure-time musicians are generally patchy and not well known about’. Similarly, P456 finds that as a freelance singing teacher they strive to encourage children to keep making music in adult hood but are ‘concerned if there will be anything available to them’. P8 writes that more needs to be done to facilitate this transition, saying we need:

‘Better signposting from music education hubs to community-based opportunities for young people after they’ve turned 19 and are no longer within the hub’s remit. Some (very few) young people will go on to conservatoires and music degrees, but what about progression routes for young people who don’t want to go on to become professional?’

P8 goes on to say that:

‘If the aim is to keep children playing beyond school age then we must also look to helping them make a transition between music school groups and adult groups. Too many think that they just have to ‘make it’ to Grade 8 then they can give up. I feel those students have been failed somewhere’.

The FG26 collaborative statement indicated that:

‘The group felt that progression for adults needs to be recognised as different from progression for children or young people. It’s not about following a linear path to a top-notch group, it’s about developing as a musician, as a person and as a group’.

Overall, P24 found that ‘Too much is geared towards children and young adults. Music education should be open to everyone throughout life, not just at the beginning of life’.

There was an overarching feeling that there was a need for much clearer progression routes in music. Although P7 stated that ‘in the UK [we] have a clear instrumental progression route based on repertoire’, this view was not generally shared, for example, P438 finds that there is no ‘clearly structured plan for progression’. P52 argues that ‘There need to be seamless pathways to access music education from before birth through to the very old’ going on to say, ‘There are too many ‘dropping-off’ points’. Similarly, P301 writes ‘We need a much more joined up approach if we want to see young people continue on their musical journey’. Previous research has also highlighted a lack of clarity when it comes to progression routes (Zesersen et al., 2014).

P322 suggests that there is a need to ‘establish a pathway that is clear’, going on to say:

‘If a child is keen on football, it’s possible to see more or less what is going to be required even if you aren’t particularly knowledgeable about it; if a child is musical and you aren’t it’s all totally baffling’.

This links with previous research by Pitts (2014, 143) who found there was a need for clearer progression routes into ‘continued, age-appropriate musical learning’.

Others felt that progression routes can be too rigid and based around exams and grades (FG22). P342 suggest that:

‘In an ideal world, the music education hub will contribute to this by supporting diverse pathways, signposting, supporting students with bursaries, giving esteem to all musical traditions and enabling progress to be ‘diagonal’ – a young musician might try classical before moving onto folk as a flautist, while still playing piano and writing songs outside any formal structure, for instance’.

FG2 sums up the overall feeling, saying:

‘There should be an integrated system of progression for instrumental and vocal learners, from WCET through small group tuition, cluster activities, music centres, opportunities through a wide range of partners’.

An ending with a starting point

The recommendations following this research study included the identification of areas where the current research can be used as a starting point to make meaningful change:

- Using and valuing pupil and participant voice, particularly in relation to developing a down-up approach to policy
- Addressing geographical cold spots, whether in rural areas with a large geographical spread or in urban areas where there is an uneven distribution of provision
- Collaboration between HE/conservatoires and schools/music organisations, particularly in terms of what students might be able to offer
- Developing meaningful mechanisms for transition from first access/whole class provision to the next stages of learning
- Facilitating progression from compulsory education to adulthood and exploring the sense within the data that if people are not studying music or doing it as a career, they fall outside the ‘system’

The final participant quote given above is poignant – there is ‘*a need for an integrated system of progression for instrumental and vocal learners*’. The themes arising in this research are not new, and the amount of agreement between this research and previous research and literature is striking. Despite 20 years of policy initiatives, research and evaluation to drive change, the same challenges are still experienced and the barriers to music education have not altered. We seem to have ended at the same point that we started and the question that we must ask ourselves is why.

Two key messages run through our data:

- Despite best efforts, even where music education provision is established, bridging the gap between initial learning experiences and more advanced study remains a challenge.
- Facilitating collaboration between providers, whether different types of providers or the same type of provider but in different locations, is extremely difficult.

These two, of course, are interlinked. Our initial thoughts on why this might be the case relate to tensions within the music education infrastructure. Funding structures and the competitive environment that music education operates in, both in and out of school, create an educational landscape that is fragmented and schools and organisations are protective of their own ‘patch’. This works against the principle that difference is essential for inclusive practice (Henley, 2015) – if we want diversity in music, then we need diversity in music education provision. A fiercely competitive environment leads to a ‘survival of the fittest’ situation where everyone needs their signature pedagogy to be the one that is the most successful and most widely adopted, but this stifles difference. Exacerbated by a lack of robust educational research-driven strategy and policy making to

drive meaningful change, cherry picking evaluation findings to suit funding proposals enables organisations to simply replicate what has gone before and put aside what needs changing – there is no necessity to take evaluation learnings forward. The risk is that we will just repeat the same cycle of the previous two decades and, in 10 years' time, we will find ourselves reflecting back on the previous 30 years and discover that we are once again ending at the same starting point.

Bell (2014) says that *'when a barrier is encountered, rather than focussing on what is 'wrong' with the individual, we should be accountable for what is wrong with the situation'* (p.344). Referring to the social model of disability, he suggests that we should interrogate the infrastructure surrounding those with disabilities to provide solutions. In short, rather than keep trying the same thing, we need to do things differently. As we are heading towards the next iteration of the National Plan for Music Education, 10 years after the first, we suggest that our research provides a compelling case that now is the time to interrogate the infrastructure surrounding those experiencing barriers to music education and now is the time for change.

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