



#CanCompose

National Music Educators' Survey:
Findings
October 2019

Sound and Music

www.soundandmusic.org



“This wide-ranging, concise and sympathetic report covers pathways to composition, but expresses much more, about the formative importance of music in everyone’s life. Despite well-documented concerns about music’s place in the school curriculum at the present time, the report somehow conveys optimism about the simple steps that are needed, and how they can be accomplished.”

Judith Weir CBE

Master of the Queen’s Music
Sound and Music Honorary Patron
September 2019



*Judith Weir speaks to students at the
Sound and Music Summer School
for young composers*

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Foreword

by Susanna Eastburn MBE, Chief Executive, Sound and Music



Susanna Eastburn MBE

Here in the UK we can be rightly proud of the astonishing range of new music that we produce. From Judith Weir to PJ Harvey, from Laura Mvula to Jonny Greenwood, from Stormzy to Anna Meredith, the ever-expanding breadth of sound and music created is driven by the imagination and skills of these ceaselessly innovative, talented composers and creators. These and all individuals who are creating new music in new ways are ensuring that it continues to evolve as an art form, surprising, delighting and entertaining us daily.

Sound and Music is a national charity that exists to support, champion and promote new music and the people who create it, right across the UK. We decided to undertake this survey because we were looking for insight into the national landscape for composing within music education, and we quickly realised that there was no data available, no overview, and no way of knowing what the current situation was – how much composition was being taught in the UK? How were educators being supported? What was the relationship with living composers? And how did educators feel about provision, support and their confidence in teaching composing and creative music making to young people?

Composing, along with performing and listening, is one of the core building blocks of a music education, recognised back in the very first National Curriculum for Music in 1992 and more recently in 2011 by Darren Henley in the very first of his recommendations in his DfE-commissioned review [Music Education in England](#)¹.

Yet at Sound and Music we were increasingly noticing its systemic absence and neglect, both through our own work with educators and young composers, but also in wider debate. I have personally lost count of the number of music education conferences, discussions, publications and policy documents where composing is barely mentioned, if at all.

This survey of music educators, and the work we have done to analyse and understand the important information and insights that our respondents shared with us, confirms that there are serious structural deficiencies in how young

“This matters because now, more than ever, the creative, problem-solving and collaborative capabilities that composing uniquely requires and develops are vital for the future”
Susanna Eastburn MBE

people are taught to create their own music. The roots of the problem are complex and interwoven, but point clearly and compellingly to the need for changes in **perceptions, provision, practice and policy.**

This matters because now, more than ever, the creative, problem-solving and collaborative capabilities that composing uniquely requires and develops are vital for the future and success of our nation. Both in terms of ensuring that we have a new generation of talented composers contributing to the future of our culture, but also because these skills are precisely those which our young people will need in order to thrive in and navigate an [increasingly complex, changing and automated world](#)².

Composing should be a core element of every child's music education - and 97% of our respondents agree.

Our survey and its findings are intended to support all of us engaged in music education to understand better - and work to address - the barriers that young people and educators face. It is a report that not only identifies urgent problems but also offers practical recommendations aimed at addressing them.

At Sound and Music we are committed to working with others to explore and address these challenges over the coming months. **Please work with us** to make things better for our young people, and help us ensure that these invaluable insights from educators are listened to and taken seriously not only by those of us in positions of influence and authority, but by national policy-makers.

We want to offer our heartfelt thanks to all those who gave up their time to complete our survey. The many pressures on educators are well documented and your generosity and honesty are deeply appreciated. To our knowledge this is the first survey in the UK ever to specifically focus on composing in music education, and the richness of the insights we are now able to share is down to your contribution.



Susanna Eastburn MBE, Chief Executive, Sound and Music
October 2019

A Note on Language

Within this report the term “composer” is used to describe anyone creating music regardless of style or genre. The term “composing” is used to cover all forms of music creation (including digital production and improvisation), and the term “young people” encompasses those aged 0-19.

When talking about those who completed the National Educators' Survey, we use “respondents” to mean all people completing the survey; “educators” to mean all respondents teaching music directly (regardless of context); “organisations” to mean respondents who are working in an administrative capacity in a music organisation, music education hub or similar role; “school teachers” to mean those teaching music curricula in schools; and “other teachers” to mean those music educators working in any context but not delivering curriculum music.

Introduction

Between October 2018 and February 2019, Sound and Music conducted a National Music Educators' Survey which invited professionals from across the music education sector to contribute their experiences and views. We received 551 responses from across the UK, from head teachers and chief executives of arts organisations to teachers and musicians working on the front line. Within the context of the many music education surveys published in recent months, **Sound and Music's survey was unique in that it focused specifically on creativity and composing**, which is at the heart of our vision and mission: an area often overlooked in discussions about music education, as this report evidences.

Through this national survey, we have been able to collect data which reveals a rich and nuanced picture of how young people are being supported, or not, to compose their own music. Whilst there is overwhelming agreement about the importance of composing as a central element of a young person's music education, there is also equally strong agreement that there are insufficient opportunities for young people to develop their compositional skills.

We have found that there are many barriers that need to be overcome if more young people are to be able to develop their knowledge and skills in composing their own music. These barriers are concerned with how young people are supported by educators and, more broadly, the music education sector - and point to the need for changes in **perceptions, provision, practice and policy**.

Our findings have identified **five main barriers** preventing young people's progression in composing, which are further detailed in this report.

The five barriers preventing young people's progression in composing:

- **Many young people lack the skills, knowledge and confidence to compose their own music**
- **There are concerns about the relevance of opportunities for young people**
- **Many educators lack support and training in how to teach composing**
- **There is limited, patchy and unequal access to resources and opportunities**
- **Composing as a core part of music education is undervalued**

From the findings presented in this report, we have drawn out **five outcomes** which have the potential to address the identified barriers, together with **21 recommendations** for educators, the music education sector and policy makers.

The five outcomes to address the barriers:

- **There should be more opportunities for young people to compose in and out of school**
- **Opportunities for young people to compose should be more relevant and diverse**
- **There should be improved provision of training, support and resources for educators, music education hubs and schools**
- **There should be improved progression pathways through better networks and signposting**
- **More value should be placed on composing**

As the national organisation that supports and champions the creation of new music, Sound and Music is committed to working with educators, the music education sector and policy makers to implement the recommendations and make these outcomes a reality.

We want to see a world where more young people have the opportunity, skills and confidence to create their own music; where their creativity and imagination can flourish; and where the composers of the future, key to the success of many of the UK's creative industries, are nurtured.

About Sound and Music

Sound and Music is the national organisation for new music in the UK.

Our mission is to maximise the opportunities for people to create and enjoy new music.

Our work includes composer and artist development, audience engagement and development, education, partnerships with a range of organisations, touring, information and advice and network building. We champion new music and the work of British composers and artists, and seek to ensure that they are at the heart of cultural life and enjoyed by many.

Sound and Music is a National Portfolio Organisation of Arts Council England.

Find out more at: www.soundandmusic.org

Contact us at: education@soundandmusic.org



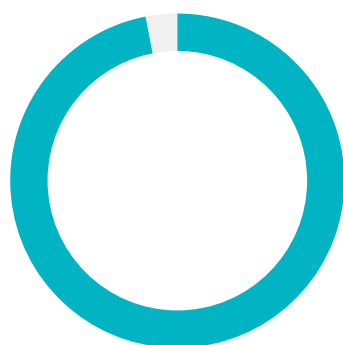
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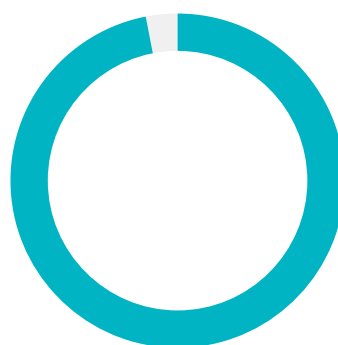
National Music Educators' Survey: Key Findings

1 There is overwhelming agreement about the importance of composing as a central element of a young person's music education

A striking finding from the survey was the near unanimous consensus amongst respondents regarding the value of composing as a central element of a young person's music education. **97%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that creating and composing music should be a core element of music education and **96%** agreed that creating and composing music enables children and young people to develop their identity and their wellbeing.



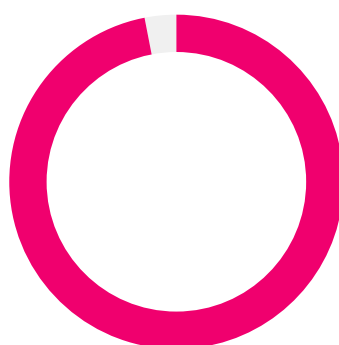
97% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that creating and composing music should be a core element of music education



96% of respondents agreed that creating and composing music enables children and young people to develop their identity and their wellbeing

2 There is also overwhelming agreement that there are insufficient opportunities for young people to compose their own music

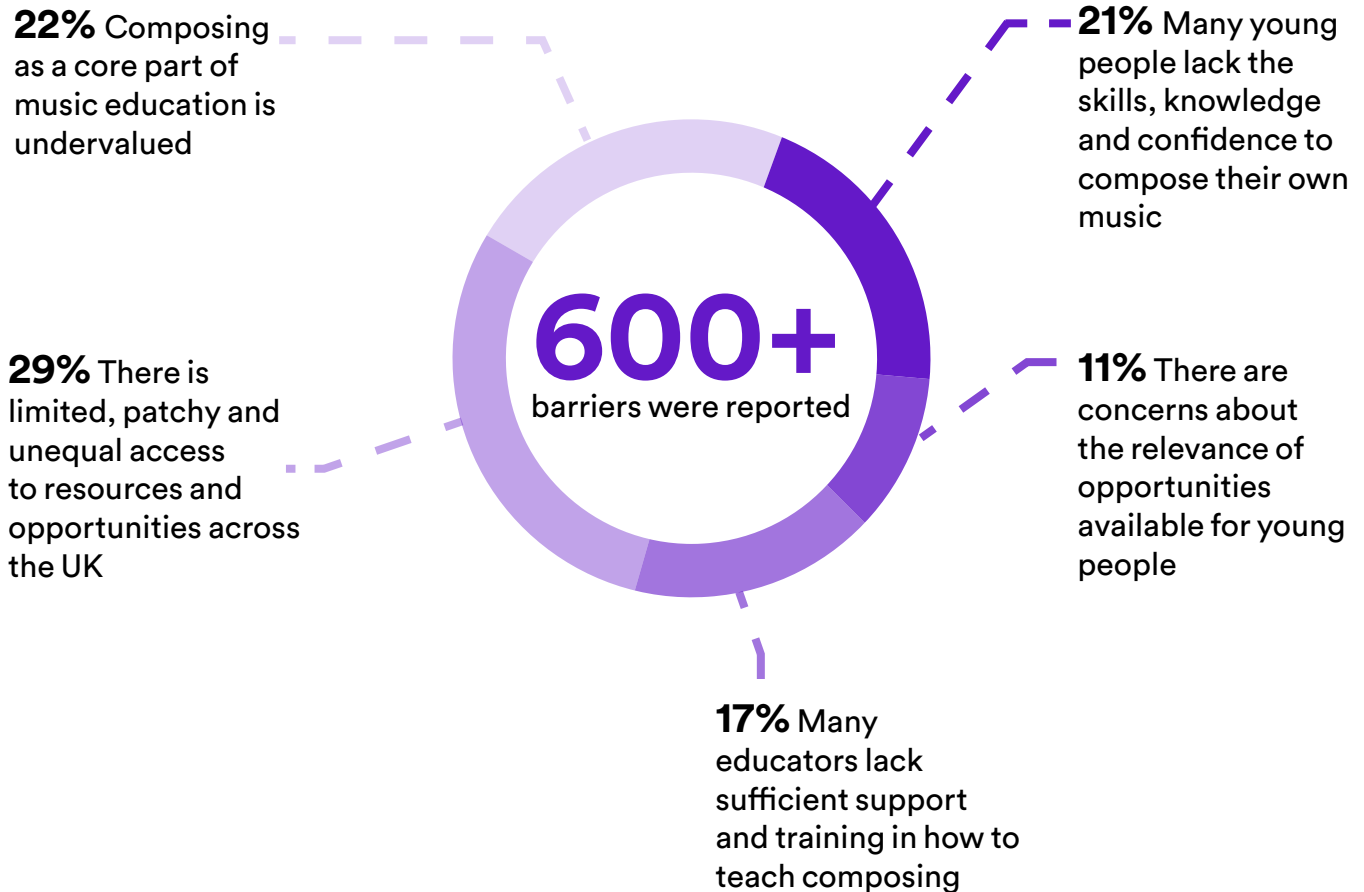
Despite such strong agreement on the importance of composing within music education, **97%** of respondents also agreed that there should be more opportunities for students to compose their own music. To do this, the barriers preventing young people realising their creative musical potential need to be examined and dismantled by the music education sector.



97% of respondents also agreed that there should be more opportunities for students to compose their own music

3 There are many barriers that need to be overcome if young people are to be able to develop their skills in composing their own music

We asked respondents “what barriers if any are there to young people learning composing” and over 600 barriers were reported. These were coded into 5 interdependent thematic categories which capture the major and repeating themes of the respondents’ answers, from which key insights were drawn:



Barrier 1: Many young people lack the skills, knowledge and confidence to compose their own music

- Young people start off being equally confident in composing and performing, but over time their confidence swings increasingly towards performing
- Many students lack confidence in themselves as composers and worry about being judged

Barrier 2: There are concerns about the relevance of opportunities available for young people

- Composing using staff notation is far more likely to be taught than composing using digital technologies, despite many educators reporting that Digital Audio Workstations engage young people more effectively
- Opportunities for young people to hear their own compositions performed live are extremely limited

Barrier 3: Many educators lack sufficient support and training in how to teach composing

- Teachers and educators are not accessing training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) focused on composing
- There are issues with how composing is assessed (and perceived to be assessed) in exams, which impact on how it is taught

Barrier 4: There is limited, patchy and unequal access to resources and opportunities across the UK

- Few music educators are supporting young people's progression through signposting other opportunities
- Educators need better resources to support young people to compose
- Opportunities to work with professional composers are few, despite nearly half of respondents saying that these experiences are what would most benefit young people's composing
- There are additional barriers preventing disabled young people from composing

Barrier 5: Composing as a core part of music education is undervalued

- Music as a curriculum subject is being deprioritised
- Schools increasingly rely on external music tuition to fulfil curriculum and examination requirements, which disproportionately affects composing
- Composing and creativity is undervalued
- Performing is prioritised over composing

Understanding the Barriers

In this section we go into more detail about the barriers that our respondents told us about, using the five identified headlines and drawing out key insights.



A student at the Sound and Music Summer School for young composers

Barrier 1: Many young people lack the skills, knowledge and confidence to compose their own music

Comments from respondents include:

“Lack of knowledge of the rudiments of music in order to create a meaningful composition”

“Lacking ability and conflicting perspectives of teachers (lack of cultural dialogue)”

“The subjective nature of it and not knowing how to begin the process”

“Anxiety, especially amongst students with a high level of proficiency in performance”

▲ Insight:

Young people start off being equally confident in composing and performing, but over time their confidence swings increasingly towards performing

KS2  63%

KS3  36%

KS4  33%

At KS2 63% of young people display ‘equal levels of confidence’ or ‘more confidence’ in composing compared to performing, however this rapidly falls during secondary education

In this survey, we asked music educators to assess their students’ confidence in composing and creative music-making in comparison to performing.

Our respondents told us that in the primary school stages of education (Key Stage 2), **63%** of children and young people display ‘equal levels of confidence’ or ‘more confidence’ in composing. However, at secondary age, music educators told us that the confidence pendulum dramatically swings to performing, with only **36%** of Key Stage 3 pupils having an equal level of confidence or more confidence in composing. This falls further for those doing GCSE, at which stage respondents working in schools told us that only **33%** of young people had equal or greater confidence in composing.

Similarly, when analysing the data on barriers preventing young people from composing, almost twice as many (**34%**) of those educators working with secondary-aged young people specified lack of confidence as a barrier, compared to those respondents who are working with young people of primary age, of whom **18%** cited lack of confidence as a barrier.

By the time young people reach the age of 16 and over, the confidence pendulum swings back a little as educators report a small increase in confidence in composing. However, the number of young people participating in music education in schools at this stage is a very small proportion of all young people; although we note with interest [Youth Music’s finding](#)³ that

“19% of young men aged 16 and 17 reported making music on a computer”, which suggests that there is a great deal of composing activity taking place that is not being directly supported by the music education sector. (In addition, it suggests that the gap between boys’ and girls’ making music on a computer needs deeper exploration, since only 9% of girls of this age group reported making music in this way.)

Furthermore, whilst we should celebrate the fact that the young people educated by our respondents display equal or higher levels of confidence in composing at KS2, we also know from other reports including [Music Education: State of the Nation](#)⁴ and [Birmingham Music Education Partnership Primary Survey](#)⁵ that composing in primary schools is a neglected and underserved area of the music curriculum, and that nationally this curriculum entitlement and corresponding confidence levels are patchy and inconsistent.

▲ Insight:

Many students lack confidence in themselves as composers and worry about being judged

As noted above, many educators reported students lacking self-belief in their composing abilities and this was often linked to the fear of “getting it wrong”, yet exploring ideas and learning through making mistakes is an essential part of the creative process. In other art forms, young people are encouraged to experiment and create, for example through painting pictures and writing poems.

It is understood by the education system that these are essential to learning about and engaging with these subjects, as well as being valuable forms of self-expression. Children’s highly imaginative paintings and art work are pinned to fridges everywhere in celebration of young people’s creativity. **We believe there needs to be a musical equivalent of this spirit of experimentation, encouragement and sharing if young people’s confidence as composers is to be raised.**



A workshop at the Sound and Music Summer School for young composers

“Pupils are afraid to ‘get it wrong’ and so less keen to explore ideas, particularly girls. They think the first response always has to be the correct response”
School teacher

This lack of confidence to experiment and make mistakes when learning to compose has its roots in a number of the issues we have identified throughout this survey.

As discussed in greater detail under barrier 3 below, many educators lack sufficient support and training in how to approach and teach composing, which in turn leads to a lack of confidence in how to support young people in their progress as composers.

This is compounded by another identified barrier discussed under barrier 5 below: **the systemic deprioritisation of composing compared to performing.**

“[There is] a belief that they have to 'know' everything/or something specific like 'harmony' before they can compose”
Other teacher

Particularly for educators who lack confidence in teaching composing, this can lead in many cases to the deprioritisation of experimentation as a key component in building young people’s confidence.

We will return to the theme of young people’s confidence as composers in the final section of our findings (barrier 5), when we discuss barriers of a structural nature and how they impact on young people’s composing.

Barrier 2: There are concerns about the relevance of opportunities available for young people to compose

Comments from respondents include:

“Lack of relevance to young people”

“GCSE focus on conventional notation”

“The idea that work needs to be graded/levelled”

“Exam boards not understanding how to assess creativity”

▲ Insight:

Composing using staff notation is far more likely to be taught than composing using digital technologies, despite many educators reporting that Digital Audio Workstations engage young people more effectively

We asked educators to share which approaches to composing they cover and to list which their students most engage with. The data shows that a variety of composing methods are being widely taught with traditional staff notation, non-traditional notation and improvising all featuring highly.

Digital forms of composing (including use of Digital Audio Workstation software, often referred to by the acronym DAW) are far less likely to be taught, with only **43%** of school teachers saying they introduced students to these approaches compared to **76%** reporting that they taught traditional staff notation.

“Kids also have a lot less opportunity to be creative in education than they used to and really respond well when they do. They can lack confidence though as they are more used to being given more prescriptive instructions”
School teacher

Despite this, DAW-based composing was listed as the second-highest method for student engagement at **34%** (after songwriting at **42%**). Student engagement is only one factor to consider when designing a curriculum. However, the disjunct between what is being taught and what young people are engaging with is impossible to ignore.

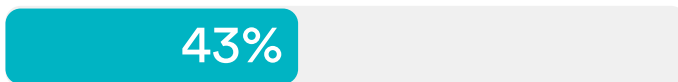
The above findings correlate with Youth Music's findings quoted in the previous section⁶ which showed a sharp rise in self-taught "bedroom musicians". Here, we see a situation where it seems highly likely that young people are turning to self-teaching, supported by an influx of online tutorials and videos, in order to satisfy a curiosity not being met within formal music education. The accessibility and relatively low cost of much of this also helps young people avoid many of the costs involved in a more traditional music education.

This insight poses some difficult questions for the music education sector regarding the current relevance and accessibility of the music education sector and of the music curriculum. Many of these questions are already being asked, for example in Youth Music's [Exchanging Notes](#) report⁷.

Which demographic of children and young people is the music education sector serving?

What skills and knowledge is it promoting and is it providing opportunities that reflect the increasing breadth of music and skills we see in the world of professional composers and music creators?

These questions are becoming increasingly important to address as technology plays an ever more dominant role within the creative music industries.



76% of school teachers reported teaching conventional notation whilst only 43% reported teaching with DAWs



Workshopping a new composition at the Sound and Music Summer School for young composers

Insight:

Opportunities for young people to hear their own compositions performed live are extremely limited

A key moment of learning for composers at any stage in their development is hearing what they have created performed live. Even within more traditional forms of composing, the data from the survey tells us that such learning opportunities available to young musicians across the UK are, at best, patchy.

“Students need people to play [their] compositions - not just computers”
Other teacher

One of the most important learning points in George Odam’s research project, Teaching Composing in Secondary Schools: The Creative Dream, is “Ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to share their work in class, in the public domain through concerts, events and opportunities inside and outside the school.”⁸

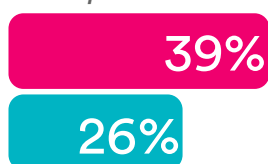
In this survey, **39%** of school teachers said their school performed young people’s pieces, but within music organisations including music education hubs, where **93%** of respondents reported frequently teaching composing, only **26%** also said that their organisation performed young people’s pieces.

Frequently teach composing



Of our respondents **94%** of school teachers and **93%** of those working for music organisations report frequently teaching composing

Offer performances of student pieces



However only **39%** of those school teachers offer performances of student pieces and the figure is even lower at **26%** for those working in music organisations

● School teachers ● Music organisations

Barrier 3: Many educators lack sufficient support and training in how to teach composing

Comments from respondents include:

“Lack of CPD opportunities for less experienced teachers to learn relevant skills”

“SEND. People lack confidence about how to approach this”

“Teachers not confident themselves/lack of subject knowledge”

“A lack of ambition in instrumental tuition approaches”

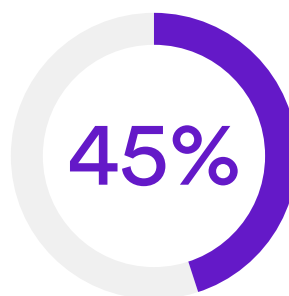
▲ Insight:

Teachers and educators are not accessing training and Continuing Professional Development focused on composing

Out of all the answers to the survey question “what barriers if any are there to young people learning composing”, **17%** of all replies related to educators lacking knowledge and confidence. With **only 41%** of respondents reporting that they had received composing-focused Continuing Professional Development (CPD) within the last 5 years, this is understandable.

This might also go some way to explain why a high number of educators (45%) list “CPD for themselves and colleagues” as the thing that would most benefit young people.

A lack of educators’ confidence, especially amongst those working in secondary schools, is well documented in the research literature. For example, Winters’ *The Challenges of Teaching Composing*⁹ found composing to be the “*least confidently supported and facilitated (and perhaps most misunderstood)*” aspect of school music teaching.



45% of educators list “CPD for themselves and colleagues” as the thing that would most benefit young people

▲ Insight:

There are issues with how composing is assessed (and perceived to be assessed) in exams, which impact on how it is taught

Educators’ confidence is further undermined by exam boards’ assessment methodologies, which are not always perceived to be reliable or transparent. This can impact on how teachers are teaching composing at GCSE and A Level, as documented in [How Composing Assessment in English Secondary Examinations Affects Teaching and Learning Practice](#).¹⁰

“Many teachers don’t feel confident teaching composition, particularly when exam boards have marked down compositions or been unclear about how composition will be marked. If teachers aren’t confident how can the students be?”
Other teacher



Composer Dr. Kirsty Devaney leading a teacher CPD Session as part of a Sound and Music facilitated event

Barrier 4: There is limited, patchy and unequal access to resources and opportunities across the UK

Comments from respondents include:

“Lack of music technology resources”

“Lack of access to opportunities”

“Developing a creative 'toolkit' for students to use within compositions”

“Lack of funding to enable composers to visit / have residencies in schools”

“They (young people) do not know where to go to learn”

“Schools and music hubs lack the resources and the direct funding to develop the full potential of this area.”

▲ Insight:

Few music educators are supporting young people’s progression through signposting other opportunities

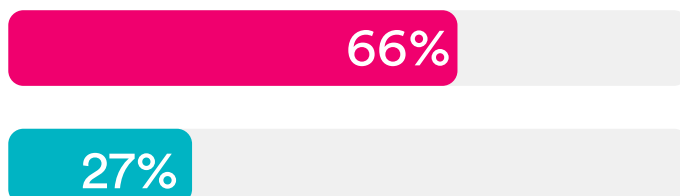
29% of respondents raised concerns around the limited, patchy and unequal access to resources and opportunities which they believed were preventing young people from composing their own music. This issue was the most frequently cited barrier preventing young people from composing more.

A common thread through many recent music education reports is the need for closer working relationships between all areas of the music education sector.

This is especially true for strengthening progression routes for young people’s composing skills. **66%** of school teachers in our survey reported that they work with their music education hub however with only **27%** of school teachers reporting that they signpost

students to external composing opportunities, it is not only young people who are unaware of the opportunities and resources available to them, but all too often educators as well.

Despite low levels of signposting amongst school teachers, when asked to name specific opportunities for young people to compose, respondents collectively listed over **250 unique programmes** and opportunities for young composers across the UK, ranging from those offered by junior conservatoire departments to rap clubs and encompassing activity delivered by schools, music education hubs and cultural organisations.



66% of school teachers reported that they work with their music education hub, but only 27% said that they signpost students to external opportunities

However, a majority of respondents (55%) could not give an example of other opportunities beyond what they were providing themselves.



55% of respondents could not give an example of other opportunities beyond what they were providing themselves

There is evidently a wealth of information which could and should be much more widely shared, in order to ensure that all educators are aware of the opportunities available to young people on a local, regional and national level. Navigating these opportunities will require stronger, more effective and open communication and collaboration between national organisations, music education hubs, schools and educators.

▲ Insight:

Educators need better resources to support young people to compose

When asked “what would most benefit young people to compose music?” 38% of those respondents directly involved in teaching music, and 45% of those respondents working for organisations, said that better teaching resources would help them support composing activity.

Responses coded to this category referred most frequently to: school facilities, equipment and space (34% of responses within this category), including the need for more technology and equipment; insufficient breakout spaces for group composing activity; and a lack of accessible instruments for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.



Students at the Sound and Music Summer School for young composers

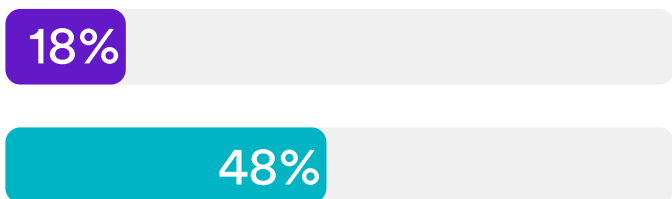
▲ Insight:

Opportunities to work with professional composers are few, despite nearly half of respondents saying that these experiences are what would most benefit young people's composing

The public (in general but young people in particular) have a limited understanding of what it means to “be a composer”. Joanna Glover’s Children Composing 4-14¹¹ describes how the profession is often viewed as being the exclusive preserve of western classical music, with commonly-held perceptions of composers as male, white and probably dead – all of which lead to feelings of cultural irrelevance.

Much of this can be attributed to the limited contact young people have with living composers working in the UK today, including the opportunity to have contact with composers from a range of backgrounds and across a breadth of genres.

Only **18%** of respondents who were school teachers reported that they offered the opportunity for young people to meet and work with a professional composer, despite **nearly half (48%)** of these respondents saying these experiences are what would most benefit young people's composing.



Providing young people with more opportunities to work alongside composers, and supporting composers in developing their skills as educators, are two important steps that educators feel the music education sector needs to take.

Only 18% of school teachers reported that they offered the opportunity for young people to meet and work with a professional composer, despite 48% saying these experiences are what would most benefit young people's composing

▲ Insight:

There are additional barriers preventing young disabled people from composing

A significant minority of responses within the Resources and Opportunities category of barriers relate to how music educators struggle to support young people who face disabling barriers to composing and creating music.

“Students gain a lot from composition and creative music-making, building their confidence in their musical ability and their musical experimentation on their first study.”

SEND School teacher

Whilst our data set for teachers working primarily in SEND (special educational needs and disability) schools is small, **38%** of responses from educators working in this context cited a lack of resources and opportunities as a barrier to young people in these schools being able to compose music.

There were also references to the perceptions of wider society that disabled young people are not capable of making “good” music. In addition, an assumption that composed music needs to be written down using staff notation (especially when working towards GCSE) creates further barriers for these young people.

Barrier 5: Composing as a core part of music education is undervalued

Comments from respondents include:

“Living composers and new music still not being prominent enough in the work of our performing organisations nationally”

“Lack of time in a packed curriculum”

“Attitudes among hubs and schools”

“Target driven education drives out arts subjects”

The second most frequently cited barrier preventing young people from composing relates directly to how composing is valued, both within the music education sector and more widely at a policy and societal level.

Within this category of barriers, the majority of comments related to the current overall challenges facing music education, but a significant minority of respondents gave us insight relating specifically to how composing is valued within music education.

▲ Insight:

Music as a curriculum subject is being deprioritised

The majority of responses in this category of barriers relate directly to the major challenges currently facing UK music and arts education more broadly. In total, **78%** of respondents in this category cited the deprioritisation of music as a curriculum subject or lack of time for music within the school curriculum as barriers to young people composing their own music.

The deprioritisation of music within the curriculum has been widely covered elsewhere including in [Music Education: State of the Nation](#)¹² and its impact on young people’s access to every aspect of music education has been well documented.



Music for Young Players: a Sound and Music project at Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival

▲ Insight:

Schools increasingly rely on external music tuition to fulfil curriculum and examination requirements, which disproportionately affects composing

This eroding of music as a curriculum subject and lack of time within school for music disproportionately impacts on young people's composing, however, as in secondary schools, teachers increasingly rely on young people learning musical instruments outside the classroom context in order to fulfil curriculum and examination requirements.

As outlined earlier in this report, the unequal and patchy access for young people to opportunities and resources across the UK means that learning composing is not an option for many young people beyond the classroom. What happens in school time is therefore doubly important in terms of enabling all young people to compose.

▲ Insight:

Composing and creativity are undervalued

11% of responses within this category of barriers stated that young people face additional challenges in terms of how composing and musical creativity are valued, both in the education system and more broadly in society, including social, cultural, financial challenges and parental lack of support and opportunities for composing by young people.

In the [Conclusion section of this report](#), we discuss the low profile of composing within national policy and cultural debate. If composing is not valued by government, educators and wider society, how can young people be supported to develop their skills as composers, to enjoy the wider benefits of musical and personal creativity and to reach their full potential? **And where will the composers of the future come from?**

▲ Insight:

Performing is prioritised over composing

Furthermore (and closely linked to the previous point) 10% of responses falling within this theme also highlighted the emphasis of performing over composing as a barrier and an issue.

This is not a new problem. As early as 1982, Joanna Glover was saying that “...*compositional abilities are too easily undermined when music education places value on performing at the expense of improvising and composing. This is the musical equivalent of teaching reading and listening but leaving out speaking and writing*”¹³. But it is compounded by the other barriers of the current context identified in this report.


This structural prioritisation of performing over composing in music education takes us back to the very beginning of this report, where we discussed the widening gap in young people's confidence between performing and composing.

Professor Martin Fautley has noted the following with regard to the current [National Plan for Music Education](#)¹⁴, which was published in November 2011 and covers the period until 2020: “**composing-related words occur in single-digit counts, listening likewise, whereas performing-related words are well into double-digits, while improvising and creativity warrant hardly a mention.**”¹⁵

We can conclude, unsurprisingly, that the emphasis on performing in our music education system has come at the expense of young people’s confidence to compose and create their own music – something we hope the new National Plan for Music Education will rectify.

As Gary Spruce has commented: “**The [2011-2020] National Plan for Music Education...privileges a relatively limited way of musical knowing**”¹⁶.

We believe there is an opportunity now to put that right.



“[there is a] lack of understanding/ appreciation of the benefits of creative music-making by decision-makers”

Arts organisation manager

Conclusion and Recommendations

This survey and analysis has brought home to us the reality that whilst there are many examples of good practice (which deserve wider sharing, as we say in [recommendation 16 below](#)), the barriers that young people face if they want to learn to create their own music are legion and point to a fundamental lack of any strategic approach or infrastructure.

Unlike playing an instrument or singing, where there are well-established, well-understood pathways and qualifications for young people, most of which have been in place for many years, there are no consistent progression routes for young composers. Teaching composing and creative music making is the area of the music curriculum where we know that teachers feel the least confident, yet training and support for educators is thin on the ground, and what activity there is tends to be fragmented, with educators having very limited knowledge of other opportunities because of limited signposting.

Perhaps the starkest finding of this report is that young people’s confidence falls dramatically away as they get older, despite evidence that younger children naturally enjoy composing and, when given the opportunity, are as confident in creating their own music as they are performing.

This matters now, more than ever, to ensure we have a new generation of talented composers contributing to and regenerating our culture, as well as giving young people the tools so they can thrive and navigate our increasingly complex, changing and automated world. Our creative future needs composers.

We have identified **five overarching outcomes** to guide the sector in addressing the issues, together with **21 recommendations** that have the potential to address, and in the longer term remove, these barriers.

The five outcomes are as follows:

- **There should be more opportunities for young people to compose in and out of school**
- **Opportunities for young people to compose should be more relevant and diverse**
- **There should be improved provision of training, support and resources for educators, music education hubs and schools**
- **There should be improved progression pathways through better networks and signposting**
- **More value should be placed on composing**

● **There should be more opportunities for young people to compose in and out of school**

97% of our survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there should be more opportunities for young people to compose and create their own music. These opportunities should be available both in and out of school contexts.

They should reflect a range of genres and using a variety of methods and approaches. Opportunities should be available to young people regardless of where they live.



A young composer working at a Go Compose course

Recommendations:

- 1. There should be a consistent range of opportunities, distributed around the country, for young people to compose their own music both in and out of school**
- 2. These opportunities should be led and structured so that young people can develop their skills as composers**
- 3. Young people's music should be routinely performed, showcased and championed in all contexts as appropriate for the music, including placing young people's music alongside that of inspiring role models**

Opportunities for young people to compose should be more relevant and diverse

Music educators know what kind of composing activities their students find most engaging (including composing using Digital Audio Workstations), but they are often not able to teach in these ways.

This is particularly relevant at the higher key stages in schools, when exam syllabuses often dictate the need for a written score, encouraging composing in pastiche styles and “composing by numbers”. There are also concerns in this regard about how creative composing skills are assessed by examiners.

Recommendations:

4. Young people should have opportunities to develop their composing skills and individual musical voices through composing in their preferred styles of music
5. Composing opportunities should offer access to appropriate resources including digital technology that reflects contemporary practices
6. Young people should be supported to compose music in a range of styles and using different approaches, in order to develop new skills and challenge their creative and social perceptions
7. Ofqual and exam boards should develop improved criteria to assess creative composing skills, and examiners should be better supported to develop their skills and confidence in understanding what makes for ‘good composing’

There should be improved training, support and resources for educators, music education hubs and schools

Schools are where children and young people’s entitlement to a music education takes place. The issues around whether or not that entitlement is delivered owing to the current situation of music provision in school has been powerfully advocated for in recent reports including [Music Education: State of the Nation](#)¹⁷ and we at Sound and Music share our colleagues’ concerns.

However, issues around the interpretation and delivery of the school curriculum do not help young people’s composing. As noted above, there is a profound mis-match between the composing activities that most engage young people, and the approaches that are often used in schools particularly in secondary education, where KS3 is often focused on preparing those pupils who want to continue to GCSE. **Since only 5% of pupils take GCSE music¹⁸, how does KS3 music serve the other 95%?**

Within schools, it has been known for some time that composing is the area of curriculum delivery where teachers are least confident.¹⁹ The most frequently cited means of removing the barriers to young people composing more was Continuing Professional Development.

We also know from other reports (for example the published evaluation²⁰ of the Teach Through Music programme) that teachers need support from their Senior Leadership Teams to enable them attend this training through allowing them time out of the classroom and financial support towards the cost of undertaking it.

If there is any area where music educators need support, this is it.

Recommendations:

- 8. Educators should be comfortable in supporting their students to compose in a range of styles and genres, including through the use of technology in a way that reflects contemporary practice**
- 9. Educators should have access to appropriate resources and training to explore a range of styles, methods and contemporary musical practices, including use of Digital Audio Workstations**
- 10. Resources for young people facing disabling barriers should be developed, including adapted technology and the sharing of good practice in order to ensure equality of access for all**
- 11. There should be better signposting to available training and resources for educators locally, regionally and nationally across the UK**
- 12. Continuing Professional Development should provide relevant, subject-specific training that enables educators to develop their classroom practice and confidence**
- 13. There should be more opportunities for young people to meet, work with and learn from professional composers, in all contexts**
- 14. Composers should be better supported to develop their skills as educators**

There should be improved progression pathways through better networks and signposting

Support for young people's composing should be provided by a joined-up network of organisations and professionals that includes schools, educators, music education hubs, composers, arts organisations and policy makers – analogous to how opportunities for young performers are structured.

Our survey revealed that there are a large number of opportunities for young composers; however, knowledge about them is highly fragmented and no one organisation or funding body has anything approaching an overview of them.



*Teachers at the Listen Imagine
Compose Away Day*

Opportunities for young composers need to be better known and understood by all stakeholders within the music education sector, so that young people can be signposted to them.

There is a role for music education hubs to address this at a local level; there may also be a role for a national organisation to bring together a more strategic overview of opportunities, as well as collating and disseminating them.

Recommendations:

15. There should be improved signposting of opportunities for young people between teachers, music education hubs and other stakeholders locally, regionally and nationally
16. A central hub of information, resources, examples of good practice and opportunities for young people should be developed to facilitate better awareness of and signposting to what is available. This will also serve to identify important gaps in provision.

More value should be placed on composing

It is often said that “what isn’t counted isn’t valued”.

No information on composing activity is currently requested in the annual return that music education hubs must submit to Arts Council England as a condition of the funding from the Department for Education.

The 2011 [National Plan for Music Education](#)²¹ has only one instance of the word “compose” or “composer”, compared with 54 instances of the word “perform” or “performer”.

It would appear that there is little value placed on composing as an integral part of music education by key funders and policy-makers for music education in England.

From this survey, we have seen that where teachers are teaching composing in primary schools, young people are (broadly speaking) equally confident as composers and performers of music. This good practice needs to be extended to benefit all children of early years and primary age and be used as a foundation for young people’s skill and confidence levels at later stages.

Although we have a National Curriculum for music in which composing is an integral part, 72% of all state secondary schools are academies or free schools and therefore free to develop their own music curricula which may or may not include composing music²².

The 2011 National Plan for Music Education has only one instance of the word “compose” or “composer”, compared with 54 instances of the word “perform” or “performer”
Sound and Music research

With so many respondents noting that music is being allocated less and less timetable space by schools, when educators both in schools and music education hubs have little to no obligation to make provisions for composing, and when official rhetoric all too often equates music education with learning to play an instrument or singing, national policy must be made fit for purpose in order to ensure that young people can achieve their full potential as composers.

Recommendations:

- 17. There should be a wider recognition and understanding at all levels, including at policy level, that composing and creating music is an integral part of every child's music education, with policies, data collection and funding to support that**
- 18. The needs of young people who compose should be recognised and supported by key policy documents such as the next National Plan for Music Education, the National Curriculum and the forthcoming Model Music Curriculum**
- 19. All early years settings and primary schools should employ or work with someone who is confident and competent in creative music-making within the school's music curriculum**
- 20. For schools where the National Curriculum does not apply, the role of composing as an integral part of music education should be recognised through other means including Ofsted inspection criteria**
- 21. The positive contribution of composing to young people's musical, social and educational development, and to their wellbeing, should be better understood including through the dissemination of relevant academic research**

This matters because now, more than ever, the creative, problem-solving and collaborative capabilities that composing uniquely requires and develops are vital for the future and success of our nation. Both in terms of ensuring that we have a new generation of talented composers contributing to the future of our culture and success of our nation, but also because these skills are precisely those which our young people will need in order to thrive in and navigate an increasingly complex, changing and automated world.

At Sound and Music, we are committed to working with others to explore and address these challenges over the coming months. Please work with us to make things better for our young people, and help us ensure that these invaluable insights from educators are listened to and taken seriously not only by those of us in positions of influence and authority, but by national policy-makers.

You can help increase the impact of this report and help us reach policy-makers by sharing our findings on social media and with friends and colleagues using the hashtag: #CanCompose

Email us at education@soundandmusic.org, and follow us [@soundandmusic](https://twitter.com/soundandmusic) to join the conversation and keep up to date on our latest work, as we continue to ensure there is an exciting, vibrant and accessible creative musical future for all young people

Full List of Recommendations

1. There should be a consistent range of opportunities, distributed around the country, for young people to compose their own music both in and out of school
2. These opportunities should be led and structured so that young people can develop their skills as composers
3. Young people's music should be routinely performed, showcased and championed in all contexts as appropriate for the music, including placing young people's music alongside that of inspiring role models
4. Young people should have opportunities to develop their composing skills and individual musical voices through composing in their preferred styles of music
5. Composing opportunities should offer access to appropriate resources including digital technology that reflects contemporary practices
6. Young people should be supported to compose music in a range of styles and using different approaches, in order to develop new skills and challenge their creative and social perceptions
7. Ofqual and exam boards should develop improved criteria to assess creative composing skills, and examiners should be better supported to develop their skills and confidence in understanding what makes for 'good composing'
8. Educators should be comfortable in supporting their students to compose in a range of styles and genres, including through the use of technology in a way that reflects contemporary practice
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17. There should be a wider recognition and understanding at all levels, including at policy level, that composing and creating music is an integral part of every child's music education, with policies, data collection and funding to support that
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21. The positive contribution of composing to young people's musical, social and educational development, and to their wellbeing, should be better understood including through the dissemination of relevant academic research

Thank You

The Sound and Music National Educators' Survey is a large undertaking that would not have been possible without the help and support of our partners.

In particular, we would like to thank:

- Professor Martin Fautley and his team of researchers at Birmingham City University for advice in drawing up the survey and interpreting some of the data;
- Partners who shared and promoted the survey including Arts Council England, Youth Music, the Musicians' Union and Music Mark.

Most of all we would like to thank all the respondents for taking the time to take part in this survey and for providing such essential insight.

Methodology and Demographics

Sound and Music's National Educators Survey was open between 1 November 2018 to 4 February 2019. **551** responses were collected via an open online survey hosted through SurveyMonkey. The survey was designed, produced and promoted by Sound and Music with advice gratefully received from Martin Fautley and his team at Birmingham City University.

The survey was promoted and shared via word of mouth, email and social media by Sound and Music and our partners.

Quantitative data

The demographic breakdown of respondents was as follows:

39% of respondents defined their gender as Male compared to **58%** Female and **2%** preferred not to say.



Whilst there is not comprehensive data in terms of the music education workforce we can compare our data with the wider teacher workforce across the UK.

In the 2017 Schools Workforce Census²³ the gender splits were as follows.

In primary schools the workforce was **14%** Male and **86%** Female. In Secondary schools the workforce was **36%** Male and **64%** Female.

Looking at respondents who are employed directly by a school **64%** worked at a secondary school, **30%** at a primary school, **2.9%** were peripatetic teachers and **1.2%** were teaching assistants.

The gender split among these respondents was **37%** Male and **62%** Female, very close to the national overall figures presented above.

Gender*	Primary Workforce	Secondary Workforce	Our Respondents directly employed by Schools
Men	14%	36%	37%
Women	86%	64%	62%

*data on other gender identities and those preferring not to say are not directly provided in the Schools Workforce Census

82% of respondents identified their ethnicity as White British. The figure reported for the UK schools workforce as a whole is **88.9%**.

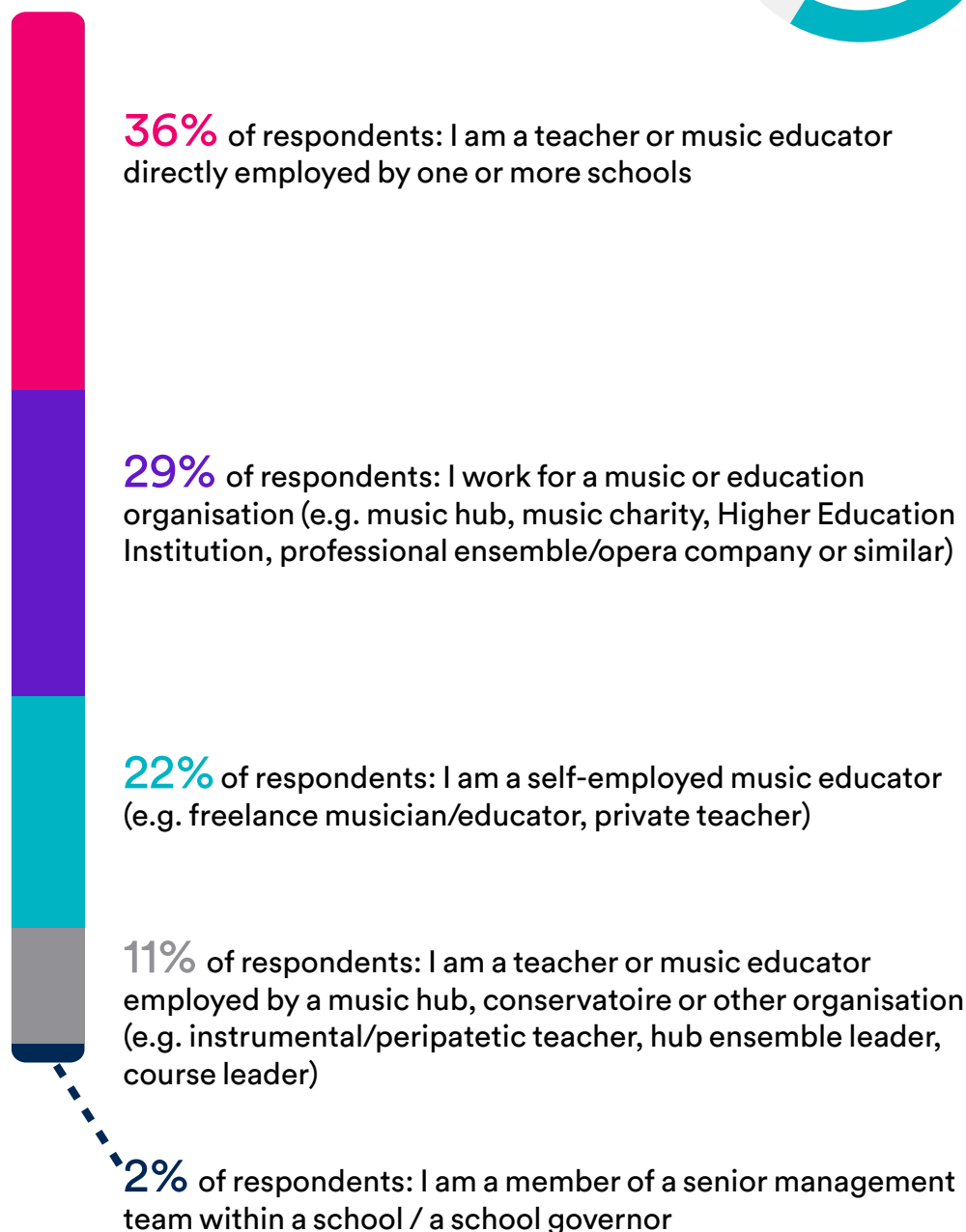
The age breakdown of respondents was a broad representation of working ages. Of those respondents who were teachers **59%** reported that they had been teaching for over 10 years.

Respondents to the National Music Educators Survey answered a question in order to be divided into 5 strands designed to represent key segments of music educators.

These strands were as follows:



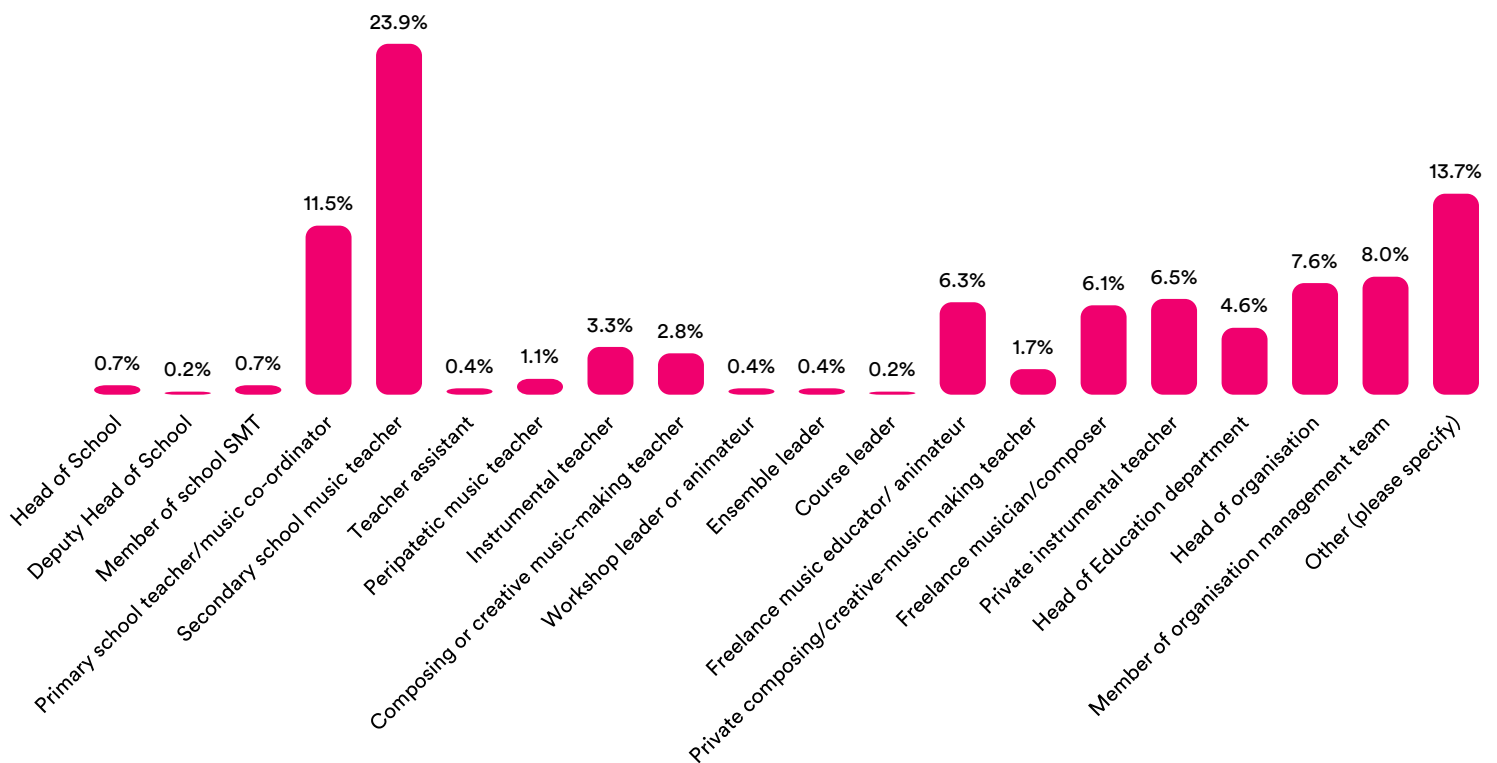
59% of respondents who were teachers reported that they had been teaching for over 10 years



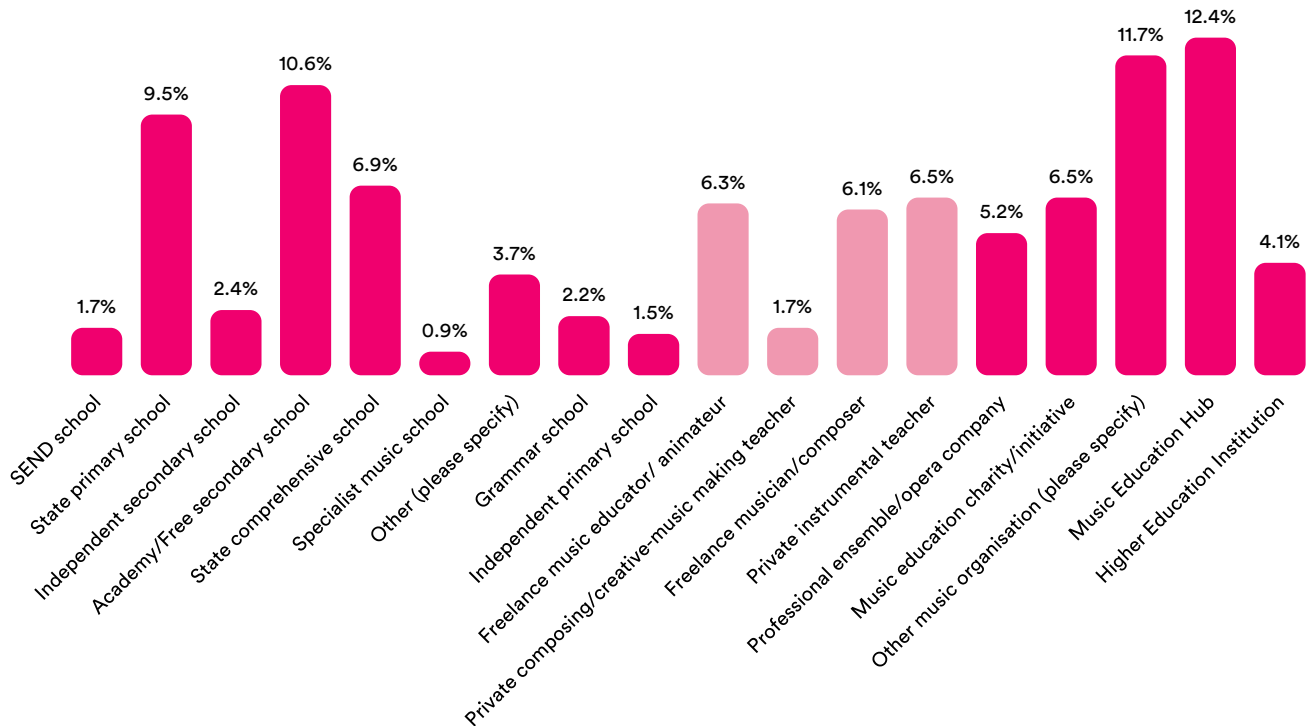
Respondents were asked to indicate which age ranges they worked with and were able to give multiple responses, giving the data below:

	0-5	5-7 (KS1)	7-11 (KS2)	11-14 (KS3)	14-16 (KS4)	16-18 (KS5)	18+
School Teacher	17%	30%	39%	69%	67%	53%	6%
Other Teacher	21%	36%	60%	60%	64%	57%	55%
Self-Employed	29%	64%	82%	71%	67%	66%	75%
Organisation	45%	66%	78%	81%	83%	85%	81%
Senior Management	36%	82%	91%	18%	18%	9%	0%

When asked for their job titles, respondents gave many replies; however secondary music teachers were the biggest single category of responses at **23.9%**.



An analysis of the contexts in which the respondents were working in gave us the following data. Respondents who described themselves as self-employed stated their job titles and are shown in lighter pink:



Qualitative data

One of our key questions was “what barriers if any are there to young people learning composing” to which respondents could provide up to three free text answers. The length of these replies varied from single words to long essays.

Over 600 barriers were reported in total. These replies were coded into five categories, which have given us the five headings of the “Understanding the Barriers” section of this report.

The two largest categories of barriers (*Composing as a core part of music education is undervalued* and *There is limited, patchy and unequal access to resources and opportunities across the UK*) were further sub-coded to provide more nuanced insight into these particular barriers.



Some of the themes from the barriers reported

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About Sound and Music

Sound and Music is the national organisation for new music in the UK.

Our mission is to maximise the opportunities for people to create and enjoy new music.

Our work includes composer and artist development, audience engagement and development, education, partnerships with a range of organisations, touring, information and advice and network building. We champion new music and the work of British composers and artists, and seek to ensure that they are at the heart of cultural life and enjoyed by many.

Sound and Music is a National Portfolio Organisation of Arts Council England.

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