



SUPPORTING AND
CHAMPIONING
LEISURE-TIME MUSIC

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT REVIEW – CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Compiled by Making Music, the UK association for leisure-time music groups, contact us at info@makingmusic.org.uk, attn. B Eifler or A Reeves

1) INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

For the first time in a generation, here is an open call for evidence, encouraging everyone to respond and help shape the education system for children and young people.

It is an opportunity not to be missed to have a say in the future of education: the content of the curriculum, how it is assessed and how schools and their success is measured and compared.

For years many of you have raised with us the spectre of future generations not having the opportunities to become music makers when they are in full-time education under the age of 18, and therefore missing out on the benefits they could gain from that both up to and beyond the age of 18, and beyond through an adult life-time of making music in a leisure-time music group, as so many of you have done.

The last two decades have seen an explosion of research on the benefits of music making and it is now well-documented that by singing or playing in a group with others individuals can benefit from a fitter healthier brain, better physical and mental health and well-being, better social connections, less loneliness and isolation, gaining more resilience for life.

Time now, perhaps, to share such insights with this review and suggest that therefore:

- music in a school setting, in and outside the classroom, helps prepare the next generation for life and work, emotionally, socially, academically (which is one of the ambitions for the outcomes from this review)
- in order to make those benefits available for all young people, whatever their socio-economic or cultural background or other challenges, e.g. autism or disability, music education needs to be available within schools as a right, as part of statutory education
- this will benefit not just budding music professionals, it will help level up opportunities for those starting life with challenges, and it will set all young people on a path of life-long music making, which can be carried on in one of the huge number of leisure time music making groups for adults operating in our country, enabling happier healthier lives.

It is not often you get an opportunity to have a say, so we believe it is most important that as many of you as possible respond to this. You do not have to have a direct connection to schools or young people in order to do so. The list below on who they would like to hear from literally includes 'members of the public'.

Please note too that you could submit different responses, perhaps one as a parent, another as a hobby musician, and a third as a teacher, if that happens to be you!

2) WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS PAPER TO HELP YOU RESPOND

The practicalities

This is where you find the review: <https://consult.education.gov.uk/curriculum-and-assessment-team/curriculum-and-assessment-review-call-for-evidence/consultation/subpage.2024-09-19.1061807458/>

This is more information about it: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/curriculum-and-assessment-review>

The Curriculum and Assessment Review applies to ENGLAND only.

Deadline 22 November

Responding to the review

This review has 54 questions. We have selected below the ones which we believe offer an opportunity to highlight the benefits of music in schools. **We hope that makes it easier for you to respond – and that is the most important thing.**

Under each question we picked we have added some text and relevant research which you may wish to use or which may help prompt your own thoughts.

The review panel is keen to hear examples and evidence, so be as specific as you can, e.g. about your own experience or that of your family/pupils/members of your music group.

In the online questionnaire, none of the questions are required, so you can skip to the ones you want to answer, if you are short of time or find the form overwhelming. You can also save what you have done and come back.

If you or your experience is more directly related to teaching or music teaching, you may instead or also wish to look at the [resource from the Independent Society of Musicians](#) created for their members.

3) Extracts from the general introductions to the questionnaire

From: Foreword by Chair of the panel:

... debates continue about the breadth and depth of the curriculum, and whether it meets young people's needs in terms of motivation and preparation for the future...

... The curriculum represents our society's collective investment in conferring our precious knowledge and skills for the younger generation, so that they in turn may flourish as individuals and as citizens that build our civil society and economy. It is right that we all have a say.

Professor Becky Francis CBE

From: Why does the Review matter?

Education is important for its own sake. But it also plays a critical role in supporting all young people to thrive throughout life and in building a stronger economy and a more equitable society.

Whilst the majority of pupils perform well in literacy and numeracy, these positive outcomes do not extend to all. Significant attainment gaps persist, notably for socioeconomically disadvantaged young people.

... Moreover, evidence shows many young people are struggling. For example, 21% of pupils and learners in years 7 to 13 reported low life satisfaction and almost a fifth of pupils were persistently absent in Autumn 2023. ...there is some evidence to suggest that the school curriculum offer can have an impact on student satisfaction and wellbeing.

... Every pupil, across all key stages, should have an experience of education that is both stimulating and enjoyable, and that provides them with the foundation and motivation to pursue lifelong learning.

To achieve these goals, we need to ensure that all young people have access to a rich and fulfilling curriculum... This call for evidence will help us to understand the wide range of views and evidence on the best way to achieve this.

From: Who is this call for evidence for?

This call for evidence is for anyone with an interest in curriculum and assessment from key stages 1-4 and 16-19 education in England [ages 5-19]. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Children and young people
- Parents and carers
- Teachers, lecturers, teaching assistants and the wider education workforce
- Senior leaders of schools, multi-academy trusts and colleges
- Further and higher education providers
- Sector organisations and unions
- Arms' Length Bodies
- Expert organisations, voluntary and community organisations and charities
- Researchers and education experts
- Subject associations
- Careers professionals
- Awarding organisations
- Employers and employer representative bodies
- Local authorities
- The wider public

4) The questions we have focussed on (purple – the questions and our bullet points and useful research suggestions; black text – from the review introductions to sections or questions)

Section 2: General views on curriculum, assessment, and qualifications pathways

11. What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways should be targeted for improvements to better support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

What should be improved?

- A) Curriculum: there is research to show that music as part of the curriculum at all key stages improves literacy and numeracy and learning habits as well as social skills and wellbeing below. However, this is not reflected in teaching time of music within the curriculum in year 10 and 11, for example, where it sits at 1% of teaching time
- Sue Hallam, Evangelos Himonides (2010). The power of music, An Exploration of the Evidence, especially chapters 2-8, 10-15
<https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0292>
 - Ahissar, M., Protopapas, A., Reid, M., & Merzenich, M. M. (2000). Auditory processing parallels reading abilities in adults. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences
 - Altenmüller, E., & Schlaug, G. (2012). Music, brain, and health: exploring biological foundations of music's health effects. Music, Health, and Wellbeing, 12–24
 - Corrigan, K. A., & Trainor, L. J. (2011). Associations between length of music training and reading skills in children. Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal
 - Dittinger, E., Chobert, J., Ziegler, J. C., & Besson, M. (2017). Fast brain plasticity during word learning in musically-trained children. Frontiers in human neuroscience
 - <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/how-music-primers-the-brain-for-learning/>
 - [Music Lessons Enhance IQ](#)

Section 3: Social justice and inclusion

The questions in this section invite responses on aspects of the curriculum and assessment system which we could build on, or improve, to support opportunity and success for all pupils and learners and particularly for socioeconomically disadvantaged young people. The Review will also consider ways in which changes to curriculum and assessment might support pupils with SEND, pupils who are otherwise vulnerable, and where there are specific gaps based on other characteristics.

12. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation (class ceilings) for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage?

Yes, there are barriers in terms of access to music teaching. There is not enough of it provided and/or it is prohibitively priced for some families which leaves those who can't afford to pay for it at a disadvantage –

- Child Poverty Action Group's '[Cost of the School Day](#)' report (2022): 'Pupils experiencing poverty in England are financially excluded from full participation in a wide range of school subjects and activities, including... music...'

- The cost of instrumental/vocal lessons is a barrier to entry: 71% of music teachers reported that the cost of lessons is a barrier for learners and 25% of children who have never played an instrument said this was because of the cost. (ABRSM '[Learning, playing and teaching in the UK in 2021](#)')
- Children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds need music provision to be in school to prevent being excluded from these kinds of activities: <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0246936#sec009>
- This means children and young people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds as they will thus miss out on the developmental, wellbeing and academic benefits that active participation in music would bring them.
 - Sue Hallam, Evangelos Himonides , The power of music, chapters 2-8, chapter 11, chapters 13-16 <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0292>
- In addition, these children and young people will also suffer significant repercussions for the rest of their lives: without an introduction to music whilst attending school, they will be unable to reap the benefits of making music as hobby musicians on their own or in leisure-time music groups (e.g. choirs, brass bands, amateur orchestras, etc.) throughout adulthood.
- The benefits of active music-making for adults are well documented in research, including on physical and mental health and wellbeing, ageing etc. – see the 18 benefits listed in UK Music's report The Power of Music here: <https://www.ukmusic.org/news/18-benefits-of-the-power-of-music/>
- Music therefore needs to be in the classroom, but also offered through additional opportunities in school, particularly vital for pupils experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage as their families will often be unable to support or pay for extracurricular activities outside school.

13. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation which may disproportionately impact pupils based on other characteristics (e.g. disability, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion or belief etc.)

Yes, there are barriers to music education and music learning for children and young people with disabilities, particularly physical impairments. See report from Youth Music <https://youthmusic.org.uk/reshape-music>

Some young people may also miss out on music in their lives altogether outside school depending on their religion – for instance in Islam there are [continuing debates](#) about the role of music.

BUT: Music has clear academic, cognitive development and wellbeing benefits for children and young people, and therefore should be available to all, regardless of their background, culture or disabilities.

- Sue Hallam, Evangelos Himonides (2010), The power of music, an exploration of the evidence <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0292>

14. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers in continuing to improve attainment, progress, access or participation for learners with SEND?

Yes, there are barriers.

Children and young people with disabilities, particularly physical impairments, are facing barriers to accessing music education in school. See report from Youth Music <https://youthmusic.org.uk/reshape-music>

As music has clear academic, cognitive development and wellbeing benefits for children and young people, this means children with SEN are missing out on these benefits.

- Sue Hallam Evangelos Himonides, 2010, The power of music, an exploration of the evidence <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0292>

15. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any enablers that support attainment, progress, access or participation for the groups listed above? [e.g. socioeconomically disadvantaged young people, pupils with SEND, pupils who are otherwise vulnerable, and young people with protected characteristics]

Enablers

- Music is a powerful enabler, supporting literacy and numeracy (<https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2019-34936-001.html>), social skills, cognitive development and more
- Sue Hallam, Evangelos Himonides, The power of music, in particular chapters 3, 4, 5 and 11 <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0292>
- It can be particularly helpful for children and young people with some neurodiversities including [dyslexia, autism and ADHD](#)
- [Music intervention alters brain activation and improves social communication skills in children with autism.](#)
- Jones Bartoli, Alice and Heaton, Pam F.. 2018. Learning a musical instrument can benefit a child with special educational needs. Psychomusicology: Music, Mind, and Brain, 28(2), pp. 71-81. ISSN 0275-3987 [Article]
- "music-based interventions have been shown to improve spelling in children with Dyslexia, and to increase social responsiveness in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder " (ASD; Finnigan & Starr, 2010; Kern & Aldridge, 2006; Overy, 2003) [Increasing social responsiveness in a child with autism: A comparison of music and non-music interventions.](#)

Section 4: Ensuring an excellent foundation in maths and English

20. How can we better support learners who do not achieve level 2 in English and maths by 16 to learn what they need to thrive as citizens in work and life? In particular, do we have the right qualifications at level 2 for these 16-19 learners (including the maths and English study requirement)?

Support for learners who do not achieve level 2 by 16

- Music has clear academic, cognitive development and wellbeing benefits for children and young people
- Sue Hallam, Evangelos Himonides, The power of music
<https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0292>
- Canadian study: [Higher levels of music engagement \(number of courses\) was related to higher exam scores on all subjects](#)
- <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/how-music-primers-the-brain-for-learning/>

It would therefore be logical to assume that music-making activities and music education could provide strong support for these learners and improve their outcomes.

Section 5: Curriculum and qualification content

The content of the national curriculum is set out in subject-specific “programmes of study”.

... Schools and teachers use the national curriculum, and specifications, to develop detailed school and class curricula that set out exactly what they will teach their pupils and learners and how they will do so.

... the Review seeks to ensure that the content of the curriculum and qualifications reflects the issues and diversities of our society and that all children and young people are represented and engaged.

... We also want to ensure that the curriculum and qualification pathways set up young people up with the best possible foundations to thrive in education and in wider life and work.

... Additionally, it will consider whether new knowledge should be built into curriculum subjects, or whether some should be developed outside the classroom through co-curricular or extra-curricular activities.

22. Are there particular curriculum or qualifications subjects* where: a) there is too much content; not enough content; or content is missing; b) the content is out-of-date; c) the content is unhelpfully sequenced (for example to support good curriculum design or pedagogy); d) there is a need for greater flexibility (for example to provide the space for teachers to develop and adapt content)? Please provide detail on specific key stages where appropriate. *This includes both qualifications where the government sets content nationally, and anywhere the content is currently set by awarding organisations.

Subject content

With reference to b), for the music curriculum greater attention needs to be given to diversify and update the content to ensure all children and young people are able to access and benefit from music education whatever their race, religion, disability, and cultural backgrounds.

This topic discussed in depth in this webinar:

<https://www.musicmark.org.uk/resources/diversification-in-music-education-why-it-matters-what-to-avoid-to-do-it-right/>

And powerfully illustrated in this poem by Professor Nate Holder:

<https://www.nateholdermusic.com/post/if-i-were-a-racist>

With reference to d), the music curriculum would need greater flexibility for teachers to adapt to the ethnicity, religions, cultural backgrounds and (dis)abilities of their pupils, which may depend on the community that they are teaching in (e.g. Scarborough versus Birmingham, rural Cumbria versus South London).

23. Are there particular changes that could be made to ensure the curriculum (including qualification content) is more diverse and representative of society?

Changes to ensure curriculum is more diverse and representative of society

- “In the music education curriculum, greater emphasis should be placed on other forms and genres of music other than Western European Art Music. Placing WEAM within a more accurate context i.e. that it is one form of music, not the only or dominant music form across the world can break down barriers for pupils from cultures from across the world, and show that the music making from all cultures is respected and valued. This can be done in an informed and respectful way e.g. not referring to 'African drumming' but instead understanding the specificity of where that drumming originated and teaching that context.” Reference: *Facilitating musical learning in Scottish Primary Schools: an interview-based study of generalist primary teachers', primary music specialists' and community music practitioners' views and experiences* | Dr Diljeet Kaur Bhachu (2019)
- Including music both in the regular curriculum up to 16 and offering extra-curricular music making opportunities within schools

Why?

In the 23/24 DCMS/Arts Council England [Participation Survey](#), 10% of respondents said that they had Written/ practised/ performed music in the last year. 5% said they had attended 'a choir or music group, orchestra or band, singing or music lesson'. It's a reasonable estimate then that almost 6 million adults in England make music regularly, and half of those (almost 3 million) do this in a group with other people (band, choir, orchestra etc).

All those participants are benefitting for their physical and mental health and wellbeing , social connectivity, development and maintenance of their cognitive functions etc.. BUT it is much harder for them to access such music-making and these benefits when starting from zero as an adult, as Making Music's [Adult Music Learning Manifesto 2020](#) outlines: there are significant barriers for new adult music makers.

But currently a lot of young people from non-White/non-British cultural, religious or ethnic backgrounds – around 15% UK wide, but around 35%, for example, in London, would not recognise or identify their musical background or interests in the current music curriculum and thus miss out either on a career in the hugely successful UK music sector or indeed miss out on the life-long benefits of making music with others once they leave school.

24. To what extent does the current curriculum (including qualification content) support students to positively engage with, be knowledgeable about, and respect, others? Are there elements that could be improved?

Respect for others

Making music with others, in an ensemble, band or choir develops team work, social connectivity and relies strongly on listening to and cooperating with others, starting from Early Years, as these two studies show:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03004430.2020.1781841> ;

<https://news.fiu.edu/2019/study-finds-ensemble-music-programs-positively-affect-students-character-competence>

Sue Hallam, Evangelos Himonides, The power of music, especially chapters 7 and 13

<https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0292>

25. In which ways does the current primary curriculum support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for life and further study, and what could we change to better support this?

Primary - skills and knowledge needed for life and further study

It is crucial that music education is embedded and integrated into the primary curriculum not as a 'nice to have' but as an essential, as it supports child neurological, cognitive and social development needed for learning, and helps improve many of the neurological blockers to children's learning which characterise e.g. autism, dyslexia, ADHD.

- <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/neuroscience/articles/10.3389/fnins.2016.00324/full>
- Sue Hallam, Evangelos Himonides, The power of music
<https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0292>

26. In which ways do the current secondary curriculum and qualification pathways support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work, and what could we change to better support this?

Secondary - skills and knowledge for life and further study

There has been a 19% decline in uptake of GCSE/Technical Awards in music since 2010. This has an impact on uptake of A-levels and further down the line on the talent pipeline for the hugely successful UK music sector and its financial significance for the UK.

But even more significantly, it is crucial that music education and extra-curricular music activities are an integral part of education at 11-16 for everyone, as only a small percentage of them will become professionals or work in the music industry, but all young people could benefit from life-long music-making in adult leisure-time music groups.

Music-making supports young people's neurological, cognitive and social skills development needed for learning and integrating into a classroom and into society, and helps improve many neurological blockers to their learning identified in, e.g. autism, dyslexia, ADHD.

- <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/neuroscience/articles/10.3389/fnins.2016.00324/full>
- Sue Hallam, Evangelos Himonidis, The power of music
<https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0292>

27. In which ways do the current qualification pathways and content at 16-19 support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work, and what could we change to better support this?

16-19 - skills and knowledge for life and further study

There has been a 43% decline in uptake of A-levels in music since 2010. This has an impact on the talent pipeline for the hugely successful UK music sector and its financial significance for the UK, as many schools now no longer offer a music A-level at all.

But even more significantly, it is crucial that extra-curricular music activities remain on offer to all sixth-form students and are encouraged, as only a small percentage of them will become professionals or work in the music industry, but all young people could benefit from life-long music-making in adult leisure-time music groups.

A seamless transition is therefore needed between school setting and post-education life after age 19; but this will not happen if music education opportunities stop at age 16.

In the 23/24 DCMS/Arts Council England [Participation Survey](#), 10% of respondents said that they had Written/ practised/ performed music in the last year. 5% said they had attended 'a choir or music group, orchestra or band, singing or music lesson'. It's a reasonable estimate then that almost 6 million adults in England make music regularly, and half of those (almost 3 million) do this in a group with other people (band, choir, orchestra etc).

Music-making, especially singing in a group, has also been found to improve stress levels by reducing stress hormone cortisol and increasing hormones serotonin (present in many anti-depressant pharmaceuticals) and oxytocin which help lift mood. This would seem particularly relevant at age 16-19 when young people are wrestling with stressful exams, decisions about their post-school life, and when we know there is a mental health crisis for young people in particular at the moment.

Music should therefore continue for all aged 16-19, whether or not they choose to study the subject for A-level or a technical qualification, in order to support young people's other academic studies and their mental health and well-being.

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

The Review seeks to promote a broad and balanced curriculum, ensuring all young people can access a rich range of subjects in appropriate depth, including creative subjects.

... All state-funded schools in England are already required to teach a broad and balanced curriculum and the national curriculum currently seeks to support schools to achieve this by providing specific requirements at each key stage. The Progress 8 performance measure incentivises a diversity of subjects at key stage 4. The national curriculum includes compulsory study of core and foundation subjects from key stages 1 to 4. At key stage 4, pupils have a statutory entitlement to study a subject within each of the following areas: the arts; design and technology; the humanities and modern foreign languages. As this is an entitlement and not compulsory, we are interested in understanding whether continued study of these subjects happens in practice.

At 16-19 there is no national curriculum, and courses are designed to support development and progression to either further study or employment. As part of their programmes, learners should also undertake employability, enrichment and pastoral activities e.g. work experience.

28. To what extent does the current primary curriculum support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?

primary - broad and balanced

It is crucial that music education is embedded and integrated into the primary curriculum not as a 'nice to have' but as an essential, as it supports child neurological development and social functioning and helps improve many blockers to children's learning, e.g. autism, dyslexia, ADHD.

- <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/neuroscience/articles/10.3389/fnins.2016.00324/full>
- Sue Hallam, Evangelos Himonides, The power of music
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29. To what extent do the current secondary curriculum and, qualifications pathways support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?

secondary - broad and balanced

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But even more significantly, it is crucial that music education and extra-curricular music activities are an integral part of education at 11-16 for everyone, as only a small percentage of them will become professionals or work in the music industry, but all young people could benefit from life-long music-making in adult leisure-time music groups.

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All those participants are benefitting for their physical and mental health and wellbeing , social connectivity, development and maintenance of their cognitive functions etc.. BUT it is much harder for them to access such music-making and these benefits when starting from zero as an adult, as Making Music's [Adult Music Learning Manifesto 2020](#) outlines: there are significant barriers for new adult music makers.

In a survey of Making Music members (music groups and hobby musicians), 48% of those playing/singing as adults had first learned to do so at school. If children are not given this opportunity at school, then the likelihood of them taking it up as an adult leisure activity are greatly reduced. Our members express their concern that the pipeline of participants from school to adult leisure time groups is reducing, meaning these people are not experiencing all the benefits taking part in this activity confers.

30. To what extent do the current qualifications pathways at 16-19 support learners to study a broad curriculum which gives them the right knowledge and skills to progress? Should anything change to better support this?

16-19 - broad and balanced

There has been a 43% decline in uptake of A-levels in music since 2010. This has an impact on the talent pipeline for the hugely successful UK music sector and its financial significance for the UK, as many schools now no longer offer a music A-level at all.

But even more significantly, it is crucial that extra-curricular music activities remain on offer to all sixth-form students and are encouraged, as only a small percentage of them will become professionals or work in the music industry, but all young people could benefit from life-long music-making in adult leisure-time music groups.

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31. To what extent do the current curriculum (at primary and secondary) and qualifications pathways (at secondary and 16-19) ensure that pupils and learners are able to develop creative skills and have access to creative subjects?

support for creative skills and access to creative subjects

Current assessment and accountability measures have forced schools to focus increasingly on Progress 8 and Ebacc subjects; these do not include creative subjects (including music) which have therefore struggled for attention and time and space.

This is significant not only for the talent pipeline of the hugely successful UK music industry but even more for the neurological and cognitive development of young people, their physical and mental well-being, their social skills and there other academic achievements.

Music-making has many benefits for young people, as Sue Hallam's ground-breaking research [The Power of Music](#) demonstrates.

Furthermore, we know that whilst only a small percentage of young people will become professional musicians, all of them could benefit from continuing to make music as a hobby in adulthood, benefitting their own wellbeing and that of their communities.

We know from the [DCMS Taking Part survey](#) that there are 6 million adult hobby musicians in England and at Making Music we know from our research for the [Adult Music Learning Manifesto](#) that it is harder for adults to engage with and benefit from active music making if they did not have the opportunity to do so whilst in an educational setting as under-18s.

In a survey of Making Music members (music groups and hobby musicians), 48% of those playing/singing as adults had first learned to do so at school. If children are not given this opportunity at school, then the likelihood of them taking it up as an adult leisure activity are greatly reduced. Our members express their concern that the pipeline of participants from school to adult leisure time groups is reducing, meaning these people are not experiencing all the benefits taking part in this activity confers.

Embedding music education in the classroom and outside it, but still within school, for all children and young people aged 5-19 will not just improve their academic outcomes, it will support their mental wellbeing and set them up for a life of better health outcomes as adults.

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

Our [analysis](#) has shown that while many subject areas are thriving and take-up is growing, take-up of some subjects has declined over time. Of course, this is not necessarily a problem: these changes may reflect policy directions or other social trends; or they may reflect changes in policy and accountability measures over time.

32. Do you have any explanations for the trends outlined in the analysis and/or suggestions to address any that might be of concern?

Explanations of trends or suggestions to address

As these data show, music take-up at GCSE and A-level has declined significantly since 2010. Whilst this has an impact on the talent pipeline for the hugely successful UK music industry, the most significant effect will be that there is a perception of less value and reduced importance of music as a subject and as an activity in a young person's life.

That has repercussions not just for their other academic achievements (which can be hugely boosted by active music-making, as this [Canadian study](#) demonstrates), but also for the rest of their lives, where making music as a hobby on their own or in leisure-time music groups would bring them lifelong benefits in terms of physical and mental well-being.

To revalue music as a subject and as an extra-curricular activity, it would be helpful to include it in the Progress 8 and/or Ebacc subjects, thus ensuring more teaching time and support for this subject in all schools.

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

41. Are there particular GCSE subjects where changes could be made to the qualification content and/or assessment that would be beneficial for pupils' learning?

changes to GCSE qualification content or assessment

The current music curriculum needs diversifying in terms of content and repertoire, to remove bias towards particular genres (classical is still favoured) and types of instruments or ensembles. It is, for instance, difficult to pass a GCSE with a traditional instrument, such as bagpipes, which is not an ensemble instrument.

In some cases, it may just be the language that needs updating – for instance ‘composing’ would immediately appeal to a more diverse range of young people if it was ‘music creation’ (which could/should include e.g. rapping, amplified band music, electronic music etc.).

Technology is also now very important for young people in their music-making and there should be a greater emphasis on this in the curriculum; this would also offer greater access to the subject for young people with SEND or a disability, particularly physical impairments.

See here Prof Nate Holder’s powerful poem on this subject:

<https://www.nateholdermusic.com/post/if-i-were-a-racist>

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

42. Are there ways in which we could support improvement in pupil progress and outcomes at key stage 3?

support pupil progress and outcomes at key stage 3

- Music has clear academic, cognitive development and wellbeing benefits for children and young people
- Sue Hallam, Evangelos Himonides. The power of music
<https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0292>
- <https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2019-34936-001.html>

It would therefore be logical to assume that music-making activities and music education could provide strong support for these learners and improve their outcomes.

43. Are there ways in which we could support pupils who do not meet the expected standard at key stage 2?

support pupils who do not meet expected standard at key stage 2

- Music has clear academic, cognitive development and wellbeing benefits for children and young people
- Sue Hallam, Evangelos Himonides. The power of music
<https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0292>
- It would therefore be logical to assume that music-making activities and music education could provide strong support for these learners and improve their outcomes.

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

Accountability

The Review acknowledges the importance of understanding how schools and colleges are performing, and that curriculum and assessment practices are inextricably linked to accountability and performance measures. The Review may therefore make recommendations on these arrangements; and offer commentary on the impact of

accountability on the curriculum and assessment system and how planned changes should interact with the system as a whole.

Accountability includes collecting and publishing [data on school and college performance](#), in order to hold schools and colleges to account for the service they provide; to inform their decision-making; to provide information on standards to policymakers and the wider public and to help parents make informed choices about their child's education. ...

The next questions in this section invite general views on the accountability system... and how it, potentially, might be adapted to better support system improvement and a broad and balanced curriculum.

44. To what extent, and in what ways, does the accountability system influence curriculum and assessment decisions in schools and colleges?

accountability system influence curriculum and assessment decisions

As the 19% decline in GCSE Music uptake and the 43% decline in A-level Music uptake indicate, not including subjects in the Progress 8 or Ebacc assessment measures means schools downgrade those subjects as illustrated in [this report](#) by the Cultural Learning Alliance.

This is alarming in the case of music, not just because of the threat to the talent pipeline of the hugely successful UK music industry, but for two other reasons:

1. the huge benefits making music (singing and playing) brings to children and young people in general: improving their academic outcomes, their social skills, empathy and teamworking, and their physical and mental wellbeing, and including such practical impacts as reducing absenteeism.
 - a. See Sue Hallam's research [The Power of Music](#).
 - b. Ahissar, M., Protopapas, A., Reid, M., & Merzenich, M. M. (2000). Auditory processing parallels reading abilities in adults. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.
 - c. Altenmüller, E., & Schlaug, G. (2012). Music, brain, and health: exploring biological foundations of music's health effects. *Music, Health, and Wellbeing*, 12–24.
 - d. Corrigan, K. A., & Trainor, L. J. (2011). Associations between length of music training and reading skills in children. *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*.
 - e. Dittinger, E., Chobert, J., Ziegler, J. C., & Besson, M. (2017). Fast brain plasticity during word learning in musically-trained children. *Frontiers in human neuroscience*.
 - f. Hallam, S. (2016, June). The impact of actively making music on the intellectual, social and personal development of children and young people: A summary. In *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy* (Vol. 16, No. 2).
 - g. <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/how-music-primers-the-brain-for-learning/>
 - h. A Population-Level Analysis of Associations Between School Music Participation and Academic Achievement <https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2019-34936-001.html>
 - i. Music reduces absenteeism - NAMM foundation - [filedownloadashx_58.pdf](#) ([finalsite.net](#)) Music and the Arts May Reduce Chronic Absenteeism: A Four-Year Study in New York City Public Schools

2. the huge benefits young people can reap throughout their lives if they receive a foundation in music making during their school time, either in the classroom or as school-based extra-curricular activities, by being a hobby musician either on their own or with leisure-time music groups, such as brass bands, ukulele groups, jazz big bands, rock or pop bands, steelpan groups, amateur orchestras, and choirs of all sizes and genres.
 - a. The benefits adult hobby musicians reap range from better physical and mental health and wellbeing to reduced dementia risk and better ageing, as well as social connection and reduction in loneliness.
 - i. Brain health – [Music in childhood boosts brains in later life | The University of Edinburgh](#) contributes to healthy cognitive aging.
 - ii. Loneliness – [How Can Music Engagement Address Loneliness? A Qualitative Study and Thematic Framework in the Context of Australia's COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdowns](#)
 - b. But Making Music's [Adult Music Learning Manifesto](#) shows that accessing these benefits is much harder for adults who never had a foundation in music at school
 - c. And this is what 739 individual adult hobby musicians responded on their own music learning background:
 - i. 48% first taught to play / sing at school
 - ii. 76% first learnt to play between ages of 6 and 12
 - iii. 80% can read music well, and 15% a little
 - iv. 55% had to be able to read music to join their group
 - v. 23% had sat exams / assessments at school level,
 - vi. 10% had sat exams / assessments up to further or higher ed level

46. Should there be any changes to the current accountability system in order to better support progress and incentivise inclusion for young people with SEND and/or from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds? If so, what should those changes be?

accountability system changes to support SEND or socio-economically disadvantaged

Everything that applies for all children and young people applies even more so for SEND children or those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

1. There is research that suggests that making music can improve the ability to communicate, concentrate and achieve for children and young people with autism, dyslexia or ADHD.

E.g.: [Neural Biomarkers for Dyslexia, ADHD, and ADD in the Auditory Cortex of Children](#): *...In children playing a musical instrument, after three and a half years of training the observed interhemispheric asynchronies were reduced by about 2/3, thus suggesting a strong beneficial influence of music experience on brain development.*

2. Research from the Child Poverty Action group suggests young people from disadvantaged backgrounds miss out, and given both the current lack of diversity in the music industry and the benefits all young people can derive from making music in school and for the rest of their lives, this is vital to their life opportunities: '[Cost of the School Day](#)' report from 2022 found that 'Pupils experiencing poverty in England are financially excluded from full participation in a wide range of school subjects and activities, including... music...'

3. The cost of instrumental/vocal lessons (these are usually charged for, even in school, and rarely even subsidised these days) is a barrier to entry: 71% of music teachers reported that the cost of lessons is a barrier for learners and 25% of children who have never played an instrument said this was because of the cost. (ABRSM [‘Learning, playing and teaching in the UK in 2021’](#))

Section 8: Qualification pathways 16-19

51. Are there additional skills, subjects, or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19 education, regardless of their chosen programmes and qualifications, to support them to be prepared for life and work?

skills, subjects or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19

If all students, regardless of whether they were focussing on music as one of their A-levels or technical qualifications, were to have music education either in the classroom or outside it but still within the school/FE college context, this would truly help to prepare them for life and work.

1. The skills required to make music, especially in a group with others, are exactly those that future employers will be looking for: listening, empathy, ability to work as a team, problem solving, leadership, social skills.
 - a. See Sue Hallam’s research [The Power of Music](#).
2. There is a mental health crisis, for children and young people as well as adults. Music making, at a hobby and leisure-time music group level, can literally make a difference physically and mentally to these challenges, as research proves, e.g., singing helps release serotonin (in many anti-depressant pharmaceuticals) and oxytocin (a ‘happy’ hormone). Therefore, making sure that young people have the skills and habit of music making in their educational setting, means they will be more resilient for their future lives and have tools to support their mental health challenges post-education.
3. Introducing young people to music in their educational setting will ensure that as adults they will have access to the many opportunities afforded by leisure-time music groups to make music throughout their lives - within their communities and at a low cost. Introducing young people to this accessible leisure activity ensures them a longer healthy life. We already do this for sport – but not for music which has as many benefits.

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

54. Do you have any further views on anything else associated with the Curriculum and Assessment Review not covered in the questions throughout the call for evidence?

Any further views

For this past generation, understandably, in an effort to improve schools’ performance and drive up attainment for young people, the focus of curriculum content and quality assessment has narrowly focussed on subjects which seemed the most relevant directly to young people’s future working lives.

But in the last 25 years we have learnt a lot more about music education and music making as positive influences on child brain development and learning ability, on their other academic achievements, on how those young people with parents able to support and pay

for music education have excelled above their peers, thus further disadvantaging those from challenging socio-economic backgrounds or ethnic, religious or cultural backgrounds which do not value music or for whom the current music curriculum is not accessible or appealing, or with SEND or disabilities who are not currently given enough access to active participation in music.

We have also learnt in the last quarter century that accelerating technological change, climate challenges and political upheaval in the world mean that the young people passing through the education system now need to be flexible, adaptable problem-solvers with excellent abilities to work with others, and with mental resilience to succeed in their post-18 lives and contribute to society and the economy.

It is therefore time now to widen the scope of the curriculum to include subjects such as music and other arts to equip young people more widely with the skills and resilience they need in life, rather than focussing on narrow skillsets which may be outdated by the time the ink dries on this review.

We also need to even up the opportunities and outcomes for all young people, including those with SEND, disabilities, from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and music can help here, too.

We therefore suggest that:

1. Music should be embedded and integrated in all learning programmes and curricula from age 5-19.
2. Music should be available outside the classroom, too, in all school, college or nursery settings for ages 5-19
3. Music could be used to help young people with particular challenges, which could be their socio-economic background or SEN or disabilities, to improve their learning readiness and their academic outcomes
4. The music curriculum needs to be diversified and teachers given more flexibility to adapt repertoire, music creation and genres taught to suit their local populations and their pupils' interests and backgrounds (e.g. culturally)