



**BIRMINGHAM CITY**  
Faculty of Health, Education  
and Life Sciences

# Music Teaching Provision in Primary Schools Key Findings 2019

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# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
Rationale.....	4
Executive Summary .....	5
Music Education in Schools .....	7
Defunding and De-valuing .....	8
Academies and the National Curriculum.....	10
Teacher Confidence .....	10
Initial Teacher Training.....	11
Continued Professional Development.....	12
Too Much Freedom.....	13
Methodology .....	15
The Participants.....	16
Data Analysis .....	19
Survey Findings .....	20
Confidence & Experience of Teaching Music .....	20
Support .....	26
Music Teaching Provision and Resources .....	27
Value of Music Education .....	30
Discussion on Confidence .....	33
Vignette One: Frankie - The Missed Opportunity .....	34
Vignette Two: Charlie – Requires Further Training .....	35
Vignette Three: Raj – Fighting Against The Tide.....	36
Vignette Four: Sam – Specialist vs. Generalist Music Teacher.....	36
Vignette Five: Jamie - Lacking Instrumental Abilities .....	37
Conclusion .....	38
Recommendations.....	39
References.....	41

## Introduction

This is a summary of research conducted in the academic year 2018/19 concerning trainee primary teachers' experiences of music education in their placement schools. The research consisted of an online survey aimed at students in the School of Education and Social Work (SoESW) at Birmingham City University (BCU), and respondents were enrolled on one of the following programmes:

- Primary Education with QTS BA (Hons) (N = 46)
- PGCE Primary and Early Years Education with QTS (N = 74<sup>1</sup>)
- PGCE Primary and Early Years Education with QTS, with Foundation Year (N = 3)
- PGCE Primary Education with Specialism in SEN with QTS (N = 3)

This gave a total respondent dataset of 126 usable responses, which were gathered across January–March 2019.

Students were invited to complete the survey on the basis that they had either started or completed school placements. School-based training is a key strand in Birmingham City University's teacher training programmes. The PGCE Primary and Early Years Education with QTS programme (a year-long programme) includes two school-based training modules, and the Primary Education with QTS BA (Hons) (a three-year programme) includes one school-based training module per year. All Primary Education with QTS BA (Hons) students who completed the survey were in their final year. A description of the 'School Based Training 1' module in the PGCE Primary and Early Years Education with QTS programme is provided in Box 1 for further context.

### Box 1: Overview of School Based Training 1 Module, PGCE Primary and Early Years Education with QTS

*Working in partnership with schools over a sustained period of time in school, this module, School Based Training 1, provides opportunities for you as a trainee teacher to meet the professional standards and expectations of teaching through practical experience. You will have the opportunity to work alongside experienced teachers and other education professionals to develop your knowledge, understanding and skill in the classroom and the wider school environment. Schools will undertake to provide trainees with a variety of opportunities to observe best practice which addresses the trainees' development needs. You will be able to implement theory and evidence-based understanding on an on-going and development basis into your teaching into the classroom. (Birmingham City University, online)*

<sup>1</sup> 18 respondents on the PGCE route were SCITT (School Centred Initial Teacher Training) trainees based in Haybridge, Worcester. This means that they followed the same modules as the other trainees, but that most of their programme was taught by teachers in Worcester.

## Rationale

In a meeting that took place in 2017 between the Birmingham Music Education Research Group (BMERG) based at BCU, officials from Arts Council England (ACE), and the Department for Education (DfE), concerns for music education in English primary schools were raised. DfE policy states that all local-authority-maintained schools should teach music (DfE, 2013). This has been echoed by Schools Standards Minister, Nick Gibb (Gibb, 2019):

*Having the opportunity to study and explore music isn't a privilege, it's a vital part of a broad and balanced curriculum – and that's why I'm determined that all pupils should have access to a world class music education...All pupils at least up to the age of 14 should study music in school. (Gibb, 2019)*

BMERG pointed out that despite music being a statutory subject in the National Curriculum, music was not being delivered in *all* primary schools in England, meaning some children were being denied the music education they were entitled to. This was also raised some years ago in an Ofsted report, which found 'wide differences in the quality and quantity of music education' in schools (2012: 4).

This research sought to better understand how schools are interpreting governmental music education policy by investigating the lived realities of trainee primary music teachers during their school placements. Therefore we devised the following research questions:

1. What are trainee teachers' experiences of music teaching in primary schools?
2. Are there differences in the scale and scope of music provision in primary schools?

## Executive Summary

This is an executive summary of a research report concerning trainee primary teachers' experiences of music education in their placement schools, conducted during the academic year 2018–19. The research consisted of an online survey, which was open to trainee primary teachers studying at Birmingham City University.

### **Key Finding A – Trainee teachers did not have equal opportunities to teach music**

- 59.5% of the trainees did not teach music during their placements
- Of the respondents that taught music, 29.2% of them only did so once during their placement

### **Key Finding B – Confidence in music teaching ability varied**

- Only 4.0% of the sample felt 'very confident' in their ability to teach music compared to 11.1% who felt 'not confident at all'
- Participants who did not feel confident were less likely to experience music teaching during their placements
- Many trainee teachers believed they needed to play a musical instrument to be able to teach classroom music effectively

### **Key Finding C – Instrumental teaching and learning was prioritised**

- Use of musical instruments was the most prominently noted musical activity in the placement schools (noted by 64.8% of participants), followed by performing and listening to music
- Composing, despite being on the national curriculum, was only mentioned by 15.1% of participants
- In many placements schools, music was taught by an external specialist instrumental teacher

### **Key Finding D – Primary teachers need more support with music teaching during and beyond their training to help them develop agency and their own music teaching practice**

- Only 19.8% of participants felt they were able to use the SoESW music education course material during their school placements.
  - Participants outlined how they were expected to follow their school's music scheme of work, such as Charanga, rather than develop their own schemes of work
- 80.0% of participants did not receive any support in teaching music from their placement school
- When external specialist teachers were brought in to teach music, this was commonly timetabled during the teachers' allocated planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time, meaning the trainee teachers did not even get a chance to try out their teaching in this subject, and could not continue to build on their music teaching abilities
- 36.0% of participants considered music to be an area they would like to teach more regularly and to take some responsibility for later in their teaching career, yet believed that they needed ongoing training and support in order to do so
- Only 15.1% of participants were aware music hubs existed

### **Key Finding E – Trainee teachers care about music education, but they are concerned about the status of music as a subject in primary schools**

- Participants had diverse musical backgrounds and identities, and many commented on their own passion for music and the important place it had in their lives, as well as the benefits of music education in young people's lives
- Participants experienced music as being increasingly sidelined and de-valued in schools due to competing priorities in favour of other, 'core', subjects (see below)

## Music Education in Schools

Music is a statutory part of the National Curriculum (NC) for England (DfE, 2013). The NC is structured into ‘core’ subjects English, maths and science, and ‘foundation’ subjects, which at primary school level cover: art and design; computing; design and technology; geography; history; music; physical education; and religious education. Primary school teachers are required to teach all of these subjects, providing a curriculum which is ‘balanced and broadly based’ (ibid., 5) for all children. Although music has been a part of the NC since 1992, the value and place of music and the arts in schools is undergoing debate, and recent policy changes have influenced how music is being taught in schools.

In 2011, Darren Henley conducted a review of music education in England commissioned by the Department for Education and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2011a). This seminal report revealed music provision in schools to be ‘patchy’ (p.5) and called for a ‘National Plan for Music Education’ (NPME) in music education to address the issues. The NPME, titled ‘The Importance of Music’, outlined a new proposal to bring music education away from the local authority music services, and centralise provision through the music education hubs from 2012. A central aim from the national plan, was to ensure:

*Children from all backgrounds and every part of England should have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument. (Henley, 2011b: 7)*

As a result, Music Education Hubs (MEHs)<sup>2</sup> were required to offer weekly whole-class ensemble teaching (WCET), also referred to as ‘First Access’ and ‘Wider Opportunities’, for a minimum of a term, but preferably a year.

### Box 2: From Music Education Hubs’ ‘core roles’ (ACE, online)

Ensure that every child aged five to 18 has the opportunity to learn a musical instrument (other than voice) through whole-class ensemble teaching programmes for ideally a year (but for a minimum of a term) of weekly tuition on the same instrument.

<sup>2</sup> Music Education Hubs are ‘groups of organisations – such as local authorities, schools, other hubs, art organisations, community or voluntary organisations – working together to create joined-up music education provision, respond to local need and fulfil the objectives of the Hub as set out in the National Plan for Music Education’ (ACE, online).



Research conducted by the BMERG team into WCET discovered that the majority of instrumental programmes followed this guideline of one year, although 32.6% of programmes lasted less than a year, and the most popular school year for a WCET programme was year 4 (Fautley et al., 2017). The age for learning a musical instrument was often the school's decision. The WCET model has become a central part of music education in English primary schools. The Government invested £75 million into hub activity (ACE, online) in 2019/20, of which WCET is a 'central pillar of funding' (Fautley et al., 2017), and this will increase to nearly £79 million in 2020/21 (ACE).

An important aspect to consider in the context of primary school teaching is illuminated by the following statement regarding the role of MEHs (Henley, 2011b: 10):

**Box 3: National Plan outline on how Music Education Hubs' will support schools**

*Hubs will augment and support music teaching in schools so that more children experience a combination of classroom teaching, instrumental and vocal tuition and input from professional musicians. Hubs will be able to deliver an offer to children that reaches beyond school boundaries and draws in the expertise of a range of education and arts partners, such as local orchestras, ensembles, charities and other music groups.*

The NPME statement above specifies that classroom teaching must continue to take place *alongside* the hub involvement. However, Fautley et al. (2017) discovered that the WCET model was being perceived by some schools as delivering the national curriculum, thus potentially replacing classroom music teaching led by the school teacher. In the 2017 WCET report, most respondents believed it was important for the classroom teacher to stay and participate during the lessons, however the report suggests that teachers may use the time allocated for WCET during their "PPA" time (planning, preparation and assessment). How primary teachers perceive the WCET programme in terms of the sole deliverer of the music curriculum, and if they are able to invest their own time to participate and support, may tell us is how music is valued within a school.

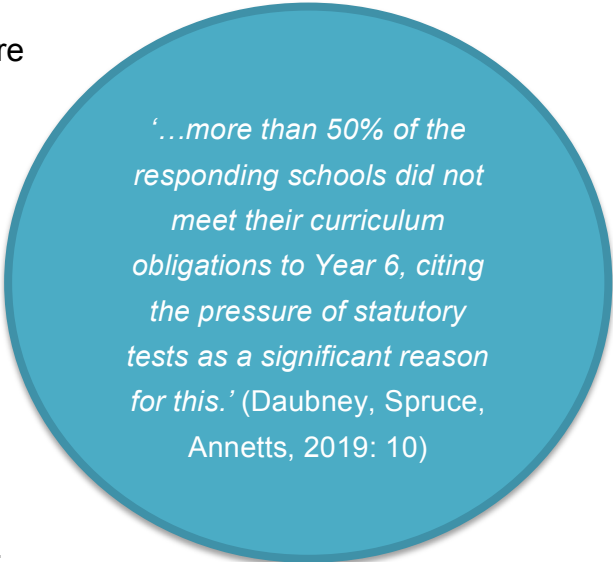
## Defunding and De-valuing

Although substantial funding has been provided for the WCET scheme, and music hub funding is secure until 2021, the value of music and the arts in schools has been contested in recent years. In 2014, the education secretary at the time, Nicky Morgan, publically undermined the educational and vocational value of the arts and humanities, instead promoting STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects (Paton, 2014). Back in 2011, Henley also predicted the devaluing of music education due to new school performance and accountability measures which exclude the arts, such as the EBacc (English Baccalaureate) (2011a). There has been an ongoing debate



into how the EBacc has negatively affected music in secondary schools (Ipsos MORI, 2012), with research highlighting a fall in the number of GCSE (Daubney and Mackrill, 2017) and A-level students (Collins and Cowgill, 2016; Whittaker et al., 2019), as well as reduced time for music at Key Stage 3 (Daubney and Mackrill, 2017; Daubney, Spruce, Annetts, 2019: 11). Even with this backdrop of research, the Department for Education has maintained that: ‘...the EBacc should not (and does not) squeeze out wider study’ (Gibb, 2016: 91).

Similarly, research has shown that many primary schools are under pressure for students to secure high grades in national examinations in maths and English in year 6, therefore time and funding is redirected into these areas, at the detriment to music education (ISM, 2018). The same report also highlighted significant cuts to funding in schools (ISM, 2018). The funding for the national ‘Sing Up’ programme, which received £10 million per annum from the government and had at one time had 94.1% of primary school signed up (Henley, 2011a), was cut in 2011.



*‘...more than 50% of the responding schools did not meet their curriculum obligations to Year 6, citing the pressure of statutory tests as a significant reason for this.’ (Daubney, Spruce, Annetts, 2019: 10)*

*Music Education Hubs are constantly being told to find alternative funding streams, while school funding is becoming a national concern and hitting the headlines weekly. (Savage and Barnard, 2019: 18)*

Much of what has been discussed highlights that although there has been a focus on instrumental music teaching in primary schools, often delivered by external providers, for example from the local music hub, there is concern that the National Curriculum for Music is ‘disappearing from our schools’ (ISM, 2018: 9). The 2019 Durham Commission on Creativity and Education has recently called for the diminishing of creative subjects in state schools to be viewed as a ‘serious concern’, believing that that it will harm those from disadvantaged backgrounds the most.

*Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and students attending state schools deserve rich and varied experiences of excellent arts and cultural education. (Durham Commission on Creativity and Education, 2019: 23)*

## Academies and the National Curriculum

As of 2018 nearly a third of publicly-funded schools in England were academies with 22% of primary and 68% of secondary schools (West & Wolfe, 2018: 4 in Kinsella et al., 2019) not maintained by local authorities. This has impacted many schools' relationship with the NC, which 'sets out the programmes of study and attainment targets for all subjects at all 4 key stages' (DfE, 2013), but only applies to local authority maintained schools. The reason for this is that centrally funded primary academies and free schools<sup>3</sup> are similarly required to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, but crucially they have 'more freedom to change how they run things and can follow a different curriculum' (UK Government, online). This means that in these types of schools the national curriculum is not statutory.

The autonomy afforded to academies has resulted in significant variations in music teaching as set out in the NC. A survey of 334 primary academies (DfE, 2014) showed that 35% were planning on following the national curriculum for music to "a great extent", whilst 7% were planning on following it "not at all". Given that 32% of primary schools are now academies or free schools, and reach '34% of all primary school pupils'<sup>4</sup> (DfE, 2019). This has implications for music education which need careful consideration. It is possible that schools which are avoiding the music curriculum altogether may not be providing any musical alternatives, and that not all children will have access to the music education they are entitled to.

It should also be noted that even in primary schools where the national curriculum is statutory, music provision is known to be patchy (APPG, 2019; Zeserson et al., 2014; DfE and DCMS, 2011). Altogether, and as this research reveals, this may be limiting trainee teachers' opportunities to teach music or even witness music teaching in their placement schools during a highly formative time in their teaching careers.

## Teacher Confidence

Another important aspect compounding the patchy provision of music education in primary schools is that many primary teachers lack confidence teaching music (Hallam et al., 2009; Holden and Button, 2006; Hennessy, 2000, 2017; Mills, 1989). This feeling is shared by trainee teachers and more established teachers, creating a cycle whereby 'student teachers worried about music do not learn to teach it because teachers with similar worries often do not teach it' (Mills, 1989: 125). This


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<sup>3</sup> Established under the Academies Act 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Data as of January 2019.

creates a skills and confidence deficit (Hennessy, 2017), and in lieu of models of practice (Daubney et al., 2019), trainee teachers may assume that it is normal not to teach music in their classrooms. Bhachu (2019) also found in her research with primary music teachers that music was often ‘othered’ and ‘viewed as an activity only certain people have access to’ (vii).

Another important aspect in relation to confidence is primary schools’ engagement with music education hubs and other external providers, which connect schools with specialist musicians who come into schools to lead initiatives such as hub-funded WCET and creative music education projects. Specialist music teachers can be hugely beneficial and can open up new musical pathways for learners and teachers. However, a lack of collaboration between teachers and specialist music teachers may lead to teachers feeling ‘redundant’ (Christophersen, 2015: 370) and detached from music making in schools, potentially downplaying their own musical skills and experiences. Further, hubs’ emphasis on learning musical instruments may perpetuate teachers’ beliefs that they need to be able to play an instrument to teach music, in turn perpetuating the divide between specialists and generalists (Hennessy, 2017), and notions of music as an elite discipline. This may partially explain why trainee teachers who play an instrument have been shown to feel more confident about teaching music than those who do not play an instrument (Hallam et al., 2009).



*‘All primary schools should have access to a specialist music teacher’. (Henley, 2011: 23)*

### Initial Teacher Training

Trainee teachers are given support and opportunities to develop their own music teaching practice during their initial teacher training (ITT) paths, thereby addressing issues around musical confidence and skills as early as possible (Henley, 2011a). However, the Henley review noted that the time allocated for this was insufficient (also Zeserson et al., 2014) and recommended a set amount of hours to ensure teachers would feel able and confident:

*The amount of time dedicated to music in most Initial Teacher Training courses is inadequate to create a workforce that is confident in its own ability to teach the subject in the classroom. It is recommended that a new minimum number of hours of ITT for*

*primary music teachers be spent on the delivery of Music Education.*  
(Henley, 2011a: 25)

A recent ISM report (2019) states that music teaching input for ‘those on a general postgraduate primary course...will be between two and eight hours in total’ (Daubney et al., 2019), so there is significant variation as to the level of support trainee teachers receive, and at best, this time is still limited. This may partially stem from music being a foundation subject, with ITT courses structured in a way which affords more time to core subjects.

### Continued Professional Development

Given the limited amount of time for music during ITT, continued professional development (CPD) in music is vital so that primary teachers can carry on building their confidence, knowledge and skills throughout their careers. Related to this, music education hubs are expected to fulfil particular roles (as shown in Box 3), including the extension role to: ‘Offer CPD to school staff, particularly in supporting schools to deliver music in the curriculum’ (ACE, online). This built on some of the initial guidance for hubs in the Henley review, which called for engagement with primary school teachers as early as possible:

*The leadership teams of Music Education Hubs should be mindful of the need to engage with newly qualified primary school teachers as part of their delivery strategies in their area.* (Henley, 2011a: 25)

However, this guidance has been difficult to fulfil in practice, and ‘most primary teachers do not access music CPD’ (APPG, 2019: 25, citing Zeserson et al., 2014). As part of a consultation on the second iteration of the NPME<sup>5</sup>, respondents shared that ‘schools don’t release teachers for Music CPD’ and ‘CPD didn’t really reach the teachers they wanted to reach’ (Music Mark, 2018: 6). Despite these challenges, the consultation continued to underline the importance of CPD, and recommended that ‘training primary teachers to teach music and/or delivering continuous CPD should be a core part of the [next] NPME’ (Music Mark, 2018: 5).

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<sup>5</sup> The original NPME set out a plan for music education in England from 2012 – 2020. A new NPME is expected in 2020.

## Too Much Freedom

The NC for music has, over time, become increasingly less specific and prescriptive. The current NC (DfE, 2013) for primary schools (see Box Two) is very short, and offers little by way of guidance. One on hand, this may mean that primary teachers have more freedom and autonomy in how they approach music in their classrooms, but on the other hand some may feel daunted by its relative vagueness, and feel in need of some more concrete starting points. As can be seen in box 4, the terms “great composer” and “best of the musical canon” are used within the music National Curriculum (2013). Some have been critical of this believing it to be ‘perpetuating the nonsensical idea of a musical hierarchy’ common within the Western Classical music (Daubney, 2017: 9). Similarly, in primary schools in Scotland, Bhachu (2019) identified how Western European Art Music is still very much viewed as the ‘ideal’ (p.218). If primary teachers infer from this that they ought to be experts in Western Classical music to teach the NC, this may lead to them feeling alienated towards the subject. In turn this may widen the gap between “specialists” and “generalists”.

The new ‘model music curriculum’ published in 2021, which aims to provide schools with ‘a sequenced and structured template curriculum’ (Gibb, 2019) signals a shift away from the relative freedom primary teachers have with the current NC for music. This has been a contentious development (TES, 2019) with questions raised over how representative the panel responsible for producing the model curriculum are of the music education workforce, and what is meant by a ‘knowledge rich’ lesson – an aim of the model curriculum (Gibb, 2019) - in the context of music education.

#### **Box 4: Music programmes of study: key stages 1 and 2 National curriculum in England, Department for Education (2012)**

##### **Purpose of study**

Music is a universal language that embodies one of the highest forms of creativity. A high quality music education should engage and inspire pupils to develop a love of music and their talent as musicians, and so increase their self-confidence, creativity and sense of achievement. As pupils progress, they should develop a critical engagement with music, allowing them to compose, and to listen with discrimination to the best in the musical canon.

##### **Aims**

The national curriculum for music aims to ensure that all pupils:

- perform, listen to, review and evaluate music across a range of historical periods, genres, styles and traditions, including the works of the great composers and musicians
- learn to sing and to use their voices, to create and compose music on their own and with others, have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument, use technology appropriately and have the opportunity to progress to the next level of musical excellence
- understand and explore how music is created, produced and communicated, including through the inter-related dimensions: pitch, duration, dynamics, tempo, timbre, texture, structure and appropriate musical notations.

##### **Subject content**

###### **Key stage 1**

Pupils should be taught to:

- use their voices expressively and creatively by singing songs and speaking chants and rhymes
- play tuned and untuned instruments musically
- listen with concentration and understanding to a range of high-quality live and recorded music
- experiment with, create, select and combine sounds using the inter-related dimensions of music.

###### **Key stage 2**

Pupils should be taught to sing and play musically with increasing confidence and control. They should develop an understanding of musical composition, organising and manipulating ideas within musical structures and reproducing sounds from aural memory.

Pupils should be taught to:

- play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression
- improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the inter-related dimensions of music
- listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
- use and understand staff and other musical notations
- appreciate and understand a wide range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians
- develop an understanding of the history of music.

## Methodology

Perspectives of classroom music teaching in primary schools were collected from BCU trainee primary teachers, drawing from a diverse range of primary school contexts. Participants were asked to share their experiences via an online survey hosted by Online Surveys. The survey data helped to identify 'beliefs and attitudes' (Creswell, 2009: 388) that were underpinned by the research questions (see page 4).

The survey was posted on the home page of the PGCE Primary and Early Years Moodle, BCU's intranet for students and course tutors for all students to part-take in the research. In addition, researchers liaised with programme leaders to identify suitable times to visit students during lectures to inform them about the purpose of the research. They were all invited to participate in the survey and given time during their lecture time to do so if they wished.

Surveying as a research tool has a long history in social science research (Robson, 2002; Punch, 2003), and is widespread (Gray, 2014), especially within educational research (Creswell, 2009). The choice to use online questionnaires offered a number of advantages for the context of this research project including: keeping costs low and being able to capture a snapshot of diverse experiences from a particular population during 'one point in time' (Creswell, 2009: 388). Knowing how time-poor trainee teachers commonly are, the survey aimed to be as short as possible, ensuring it could be completed quickly (Vaus, 2002) and easily (Robson, 2002; Cohen et al., 2018). Consequently the majority of the survey used closed questioning, although free text options were available allowing participants to expand on their answers if desired.

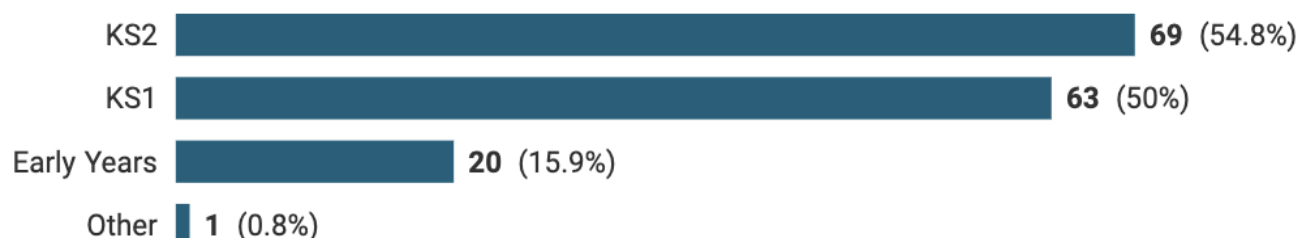
Although the use of online surveys has received criticism due to potentially excluding those without access to a computer or the internet, all university students have access to the internet and computer as part of the resources provided by the university. Classroom teachers are also expected to be computer literate. In addition, researchers provided access to the survey through the use of BCU iPads, allowing students without a laptop or smartphone to complete the survey in lecture time. There is also no way of knowing if what is answered in a survey is in fact true (Robson, 2002), thus creating issues concerning reliability and validity of data. We attempted to mitigate this by explaining the purpose of the research ensuring that students were aware that this was not part of their course assessments. The research was conducted by non-teaching staff, and consent and anonymity were emphasised throughout the study.



## The Participants

In order to comment on the quantity and variation of music provision in English primary schools, researchers adopted a convenience sampling approach meaning that participants were those ‘who happen to be available and accessible at the time’ (Cohen et al., 2018: 218). This sampling approach is common within real world research (Punch, 2009). In the context of this research, this happened to be BCU students who were working towards the completion of their teacher training degree courses during the academic year 2018/19. Although there are limitations of convenience sampling, BCU is a leading institution in the UK for undergraduate education (Guardian, 2019) and has a wide reach in terms of schools that students attend during their placements. This allowed researchers to gather data from a wide range of school types quickly and at low cost, allowing researchers to see the ‘bigger picture’ (Denscombe, 2010: 141), compared to adopting a case study approach, for example.

The survey was purposely launched in January 2019 so that participants could reflect on the music teaching they had observed whilst on their current or most recent school placement. Limited personal data were collected in order to observe the spread of experiences and teaching within the sample. The survey was completed by a total of 126 student teachers and reflected a spread of experience within early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, as shown below:



**Figure 1: Educational Level During School Placements**

Although the majority of participants’ placements were at KS1-2 level, some participants had been involved in teaching within early years and one participant had been in a special educational needs setting. Over half of the participants who completed the survey were studying on the PGCE Primary and Early Years course (58.7%), although the survey also had representation from the BA Primary Education with Qualified Teachers Status course (36.5%):



**Figure 2: Participants' Programme of Study**

The distribution of students across the programmes may be, in part, due to the lectures visited during data collection. To help promote the survey, researchers visited a range of lectures being taught which, in the case of the Primary Education with QTS BA (Hons) students, related to their opted subject specialisms. These were:

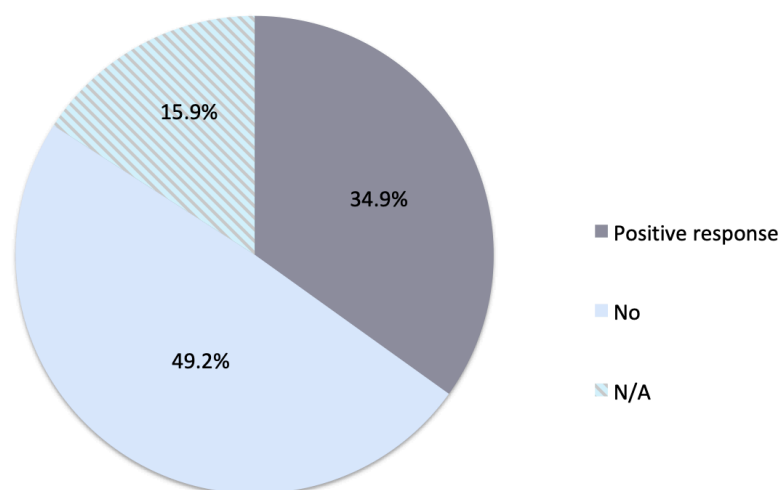
- Art and Design
- P.E
- Science
- Maths

As can be seen from the list above, not all subjects specialism were approached, therefore there may be a potential bias within some of the results due to the types of subjects students selected as their own specialism. It must be noted here that some students disclosed their disappointment at music not being available as one of the specialisms noted above. Students enrolled on the PGCE Primary and Early Years Education with QTS courses were visited during their Professional Studies and Leadership module.

We were also keen to explore if participants' own musical backgrounds influenced their experience of music teaching in primary schools. When asked '*Do you play a musical instruments or sing yourself?*' 49.2% of participants stated 'no', 15.9% of participants gave no response and 34.9% of participants provided a positive answer (see figure 3). Within the latter group, experience ranged from playing the piano to the recorder, from traditional orchestral instruments to rock and pop instruments such as guitar, drum kit, keyboard, and ukulele, as well DJing and MCing. Less common responses included the Chinese violin, harmonium, Javanese gamelan and early music instruments. This breadth of different musical backgrounds from the 44 participants is striking, although interestingly only 19 participants in this group admitted to singing. 6 participants in this

group shared that they had sung or played an instrument, but that this was in the past, often not since leaving school:

*I do not play a musical instrument currently. I used to play a violin in primary school* (Participant 3)



**Figure 3: Breakdown of participants in response to the question *Do you play a musical instruments or sing yourself?***

Alongside commenting on the instruments they have played, the survey asked participants to state what standard they had achieved. Answers to this questions ranged from ‘basic’ to more advanced instrumental abilities. How participants perceived and described their own musical ability is worthy of note; many commented on receiving more informal and non-formal learning routes, referring to being ‘self-taught’, partaking in ‘bedroom gigs’, or singing with their own ‘children in the car’. In contrast, other participants based their ability on more formal instrumental/vocal grading systems, such as examinations boards including ABRSM. Although not all participants believed they held strong musical abilities, some still commented on their love and enjoyment for music in general.

*I don’t play an instrument but music is a big part of my life* (Participant 2)

The ways in which participants perceived their own musical ability, and the effect this had on their teaching and confidence will be discussed later.

## Data Analysis

As this inquiry sought to investigate lived-experiences, perspectives, and beliefs from a wide range of trainee-teachers, a mixed methodology approach was used to analyse both qualitative and quantitative data. This approach allowed for multiple perspectives to be observed, allowing for both 'breadth and depth' (Johnson et al. 2007: 123) to be explored within the research. Thematic analysis was used to identify 'patterns' and 'themes' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 6) within the data. Coding took place through highlighting data sets and comparing and adding new codes as they emerged. These were then grouped and collated to find key themes to be discussed.

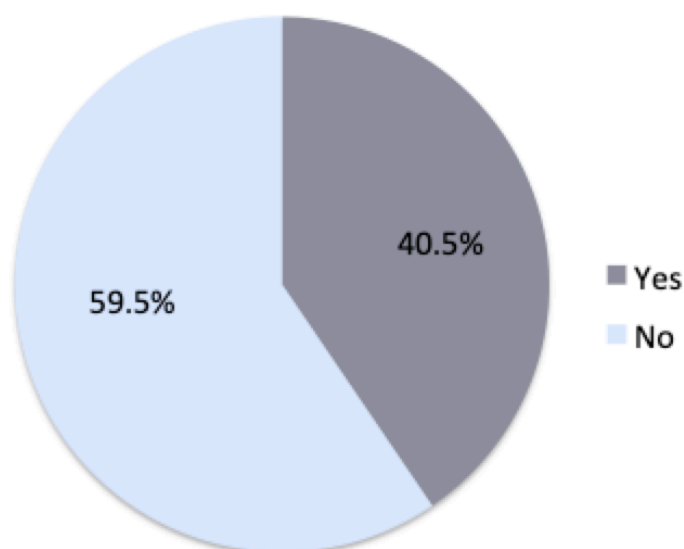
Quantitative data was viewed as a way to assess the extent of the issues raised within the research and was viewed as descriptive analysis indicating frequencies, rather than attempting to discover correlation and variables (Punch, 2014).

## Survey Findings

Considering music is a part of the national curriculum, we were interested to see how these student teachers felt about teaching music in the classroom and if they had been afforded the opportunity to practice this area of their teaching skills. Knowing that music as a curriculum subject is under threat, questions asked participants what, if any, musical activities they had witnessed in the schools as part of their placements, as collectively the participants will have accumulated an extensive range of experiences, in up to 126 different educational settings across the West Midlands during their placements. Finally we asked participants to reflect on the value of music education within schools.

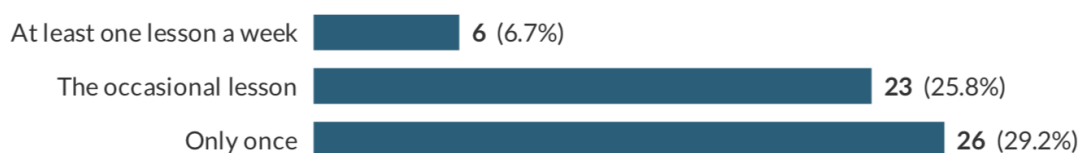
### Confidence & Experience of Teaching Music

The results from the survey data indicate how patchy and disparate a student teacher's experience is of music teaching during their placements. Although many (40.5%) participants were able to teach music during their placements, the majority (59.5%) did not experience music teaching in their placements:



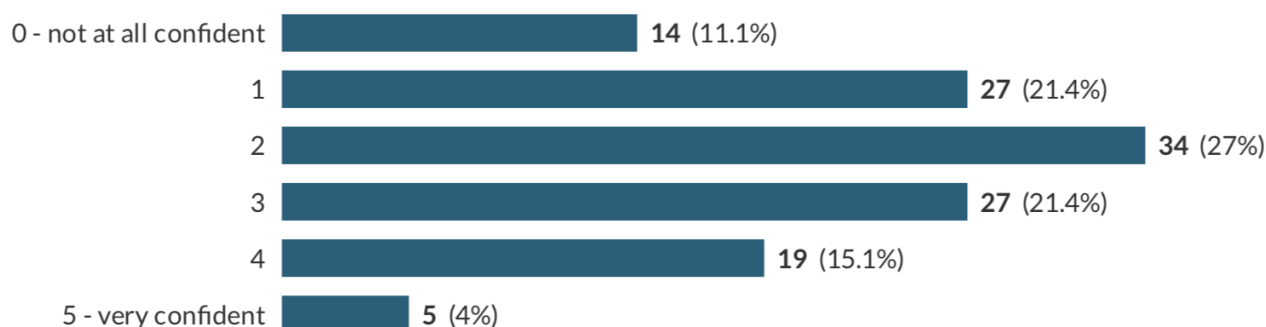
**Figure 4: Did you have the opportunity to teach music during placements?**

Even within the 40.5% of those that were able to teach music, this varied from regular teaching every week, to only once:



**Figure 5: Amount of music teaching during placements**

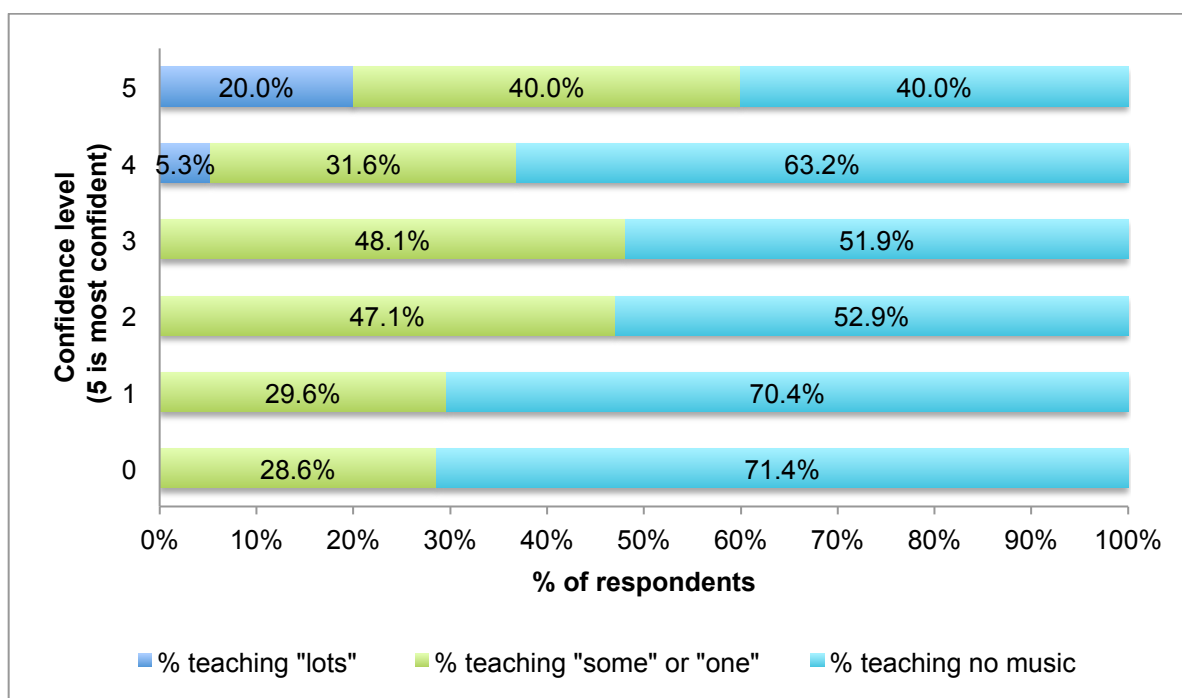
The confidence that participants felt in teaching music had a wide spread of answers:



**Figure 6: Confidence levels when teaching music**

If we take 0-2 to mean participants who felt 'unconfident', and 4-5 as those who felt 'confident' with their ability to teach music, the results are slightly skewed with 32.5% (11.1%+21.4%) feeling unconfident compared to only 19.1% (4%+15.1%) feeling confident. However, the majority of participants appeared to sit in the middle of this question.

In figure 7, below, data on participants' confidence levels (figure 6) is compared with the respective amounts of music taught whilst on placement (figure 5). Figure 7 plots participants' confidence levels teaching music on a scale of 0-5 (on the vertical axis) against percentages within each confidence ranking whom taught "lots", "some" or "one", and no music (on the horizontal axis). By doing this, we can observe a trend whereby teachers who lacked confidence (i.e. confidence levels 0 and 1) were less likely to teach music, whilst those who were more confident (i.e. confidence levels 2-5) were more likely to teach music.

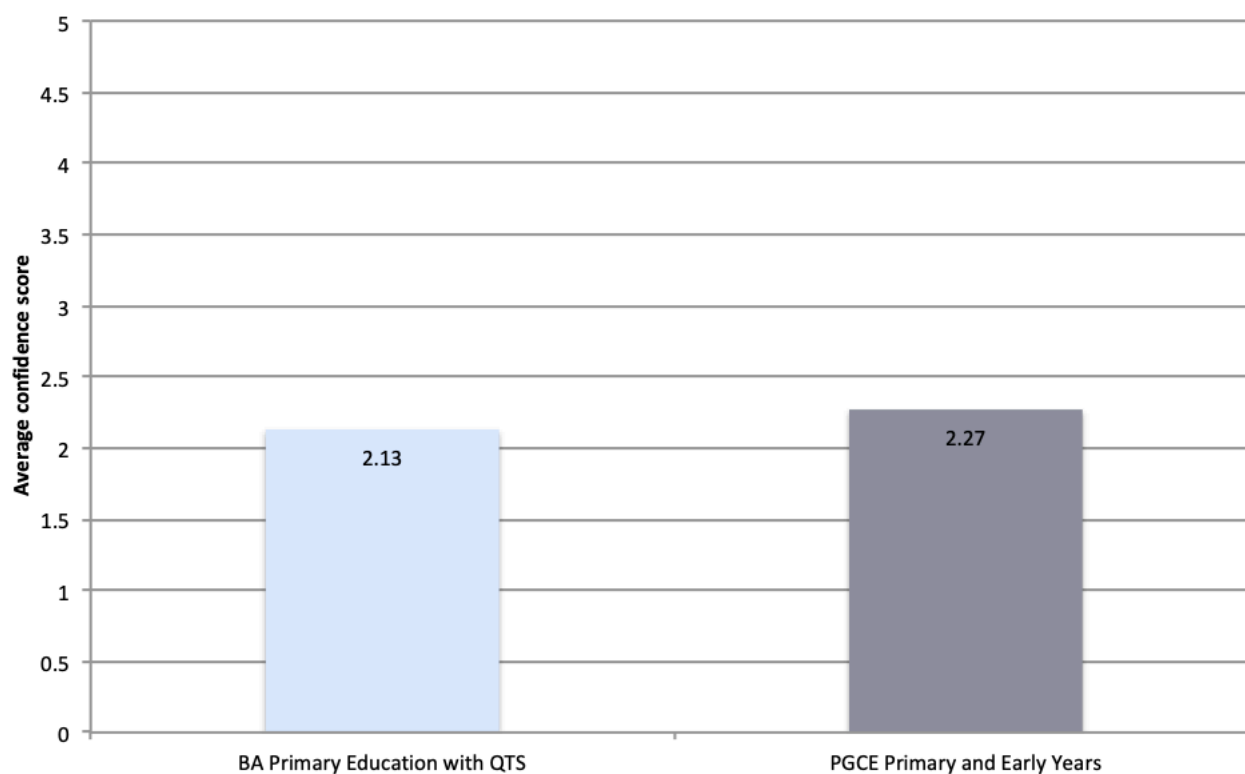


**Figure 7: Percentages of participants who taught 'lots', 'some' or 'no' music by confidence level.**

Interestingly 60.0% of 'very confident' (i.e. confidence level 5) students taught one or more music lessons during their placements, whereas 71.4% of 'not at all confident' participants taught 'no music'.

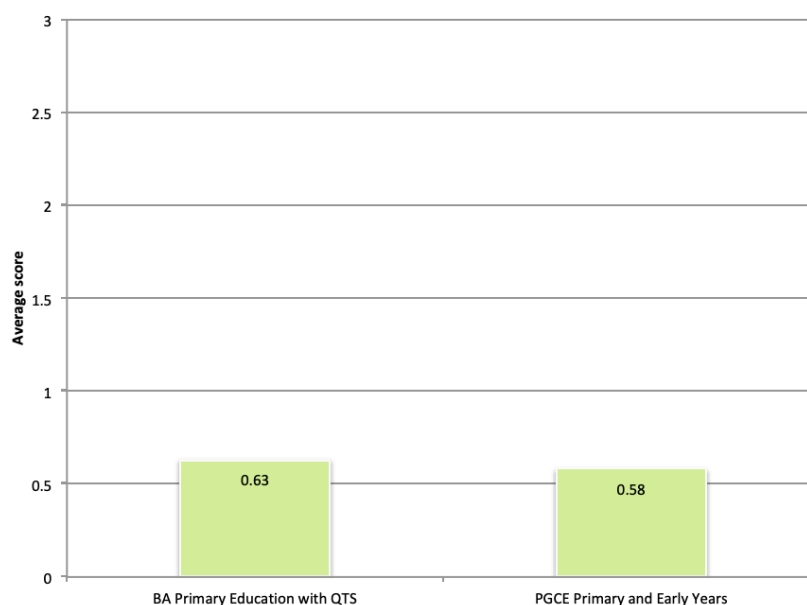
A comparison was also made between the different participants' confidence levels with their programme of study. As shown in figure 2, the main two qualification pathways were the 3-year BA Primary Education with QTS course (with 46 respondents), and 1-year postgraduate PGCE Primary and Early Years course (with 74 respondents). In order ascertain whether the length of degree course would have an effect on respondents' confidence levels, the average score for confidence levels (question 6 in the survey) between the two courses was calculated.





**Figure 8: Average confidence score from survey (0= “not confident at all”, 5= “very confident”)**

As can be seen from the graph above, overall the PGCE students feel slightly more confident on average than the BA Primary Education with QTS students however this difference is very small (0.14). By attributing values to the answers given to question 7 in the survey (where 0 is “non” and 3 is “lots”), we can compare the amount of music teaching participants took part in during their most recent placement:



**Figure 9: Average amount of teaching during last placement (0= "non", 3="lots")**

As can be observed, the BA students on the whole had more chance to teach music during their placements, but again the difference is very small indeed (0.05).

Many of the participants expressed a concern that their low confidence was due to their lack of musical knowledge. Interestingly it was often interpreted by participants that they needed to learn a musical instrument to be able to teach classroom music effectively:

*If I had more experience with musical instruments, and see it taught, I would not mind teaching it.*

*I need to learn how to play instruments before teaching it*

*I am not confident in my own ability to teach music because I have such a lack of music education myself and do not play an instrument.*

*I would like to try and have a go at teaching music however I don't know how to play any instruments and don't have a good singing voice*

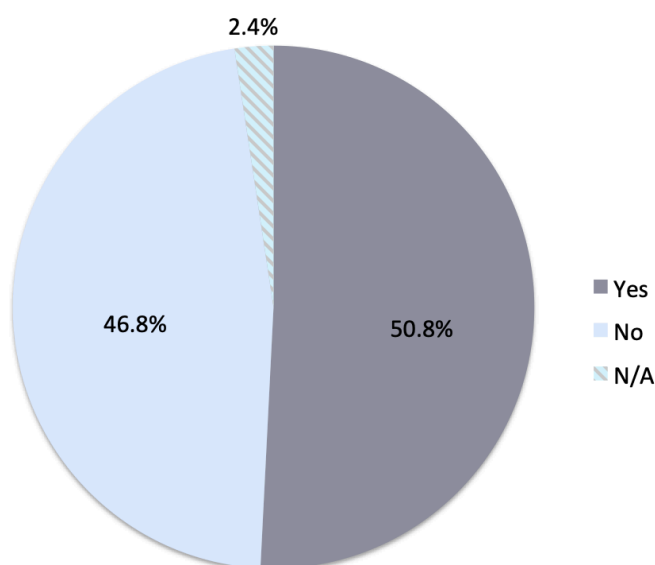
Comparing participants' confidence levels with the survey question 'do you play a musical instrument or sing yourself?' uncovered that:

- 79.2% of participants who felt more confident (with a self-rating of 4/5) play instruments or sing; and

- 81.3%<sup>6</sup> of participants who felt less confident (with a self-rating of 0-2) did not play instruments or sing.

This perception of music teaching in primary school as solely instrumental tuition is potentially concerning, not only because it effects how trainee teachers perceive their music teaching ability and self-confidence, but also when considering other areas of the curriculum and in ensuring all young people have regular access to classroom music making.

Interestingly when asked if they had taken part or led a musical activity during their placements, 11.0% more of the participants answered 'yes' (51.0%), compared to the 40.0% who answered 'no' for teaching music (figure 3):



**Figure 10: Opportunity to take part in/lead musical activities during placements**

Although 50.8% of participants did not formally teach music, some commented that they took part in:

- Singing assemblies
- Carol services and nativity play music
- Hymn practice
- Musical games

<sup>6</sup> This includes blank responses and the response 'N/A'.

- After-school club singing
- Choir

The majority of these activities listed above are based around singing. This discrepancy indicates that there was a perceived difference in the terminology between ‘teaching music’ and ‘taking part/leading’.

## Support

Considering the wide range of confidence levels shown above, it is important that student teachers receive support for their music teaching. However, results from this survey indicate that such support was often not in place.

Considering the wide range of confidence levels shown above, it is important for student teachers to receive support for their music teaching, however results from the survey indicate this was not the case. When asked if they received any support from the school in teaching music, participants overwhelmingly responded with ‘none’ (80.0%):



**Figure 11: Support offered for music teaching in school placements**

Those that did receive help commented on how they were supported, including:

- Training on the online music programme used
- Lesson planning and providing examples of previous lesson plans
- Offering additional support during lessons
- Help in choosing what instruments to use
- Discussions on previous music lessons and what to teach next
- To raise confidence

In addition, only 20 participants who had taught music during their placements felt they were able to use the course material taught during the music lectures at BCU:



**Figure 12: If you did teach music, were you able to draw on any ideas from music sessions here at SoESW?**

Of the 20 participants that did use the SoESW course material, the following activities were said to have been used:

**Table 1: SoESW course material used by trainee teachers during placements**

Making music practical and active
Singing together
Clapping, keeping a beat and rhythmic patterns
Body percussion
Making music with everyday items
Getting students to listen
Soundscapes
Structuring the lesson
Classroom set-up

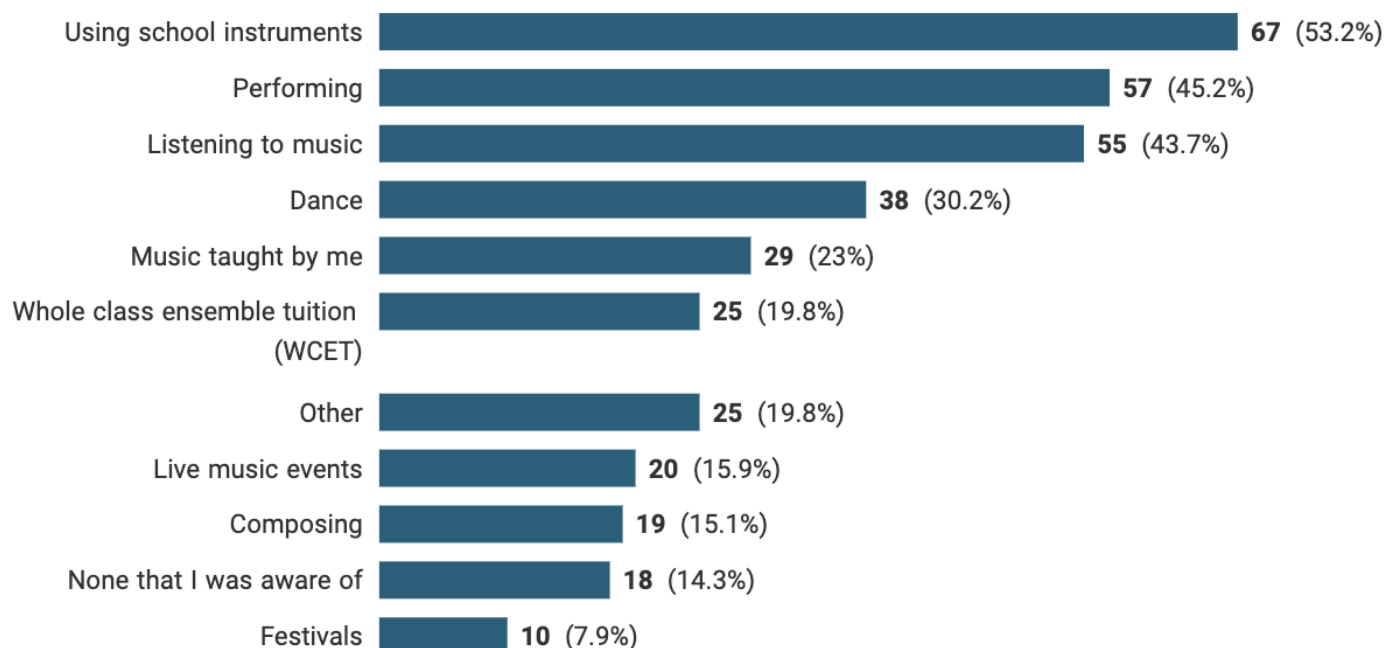
Participants also commented that they were sometimes required to ‘follow the programme’ set by the school rather than use the ideas presented in the SoESW sessions (see participant 3, below). This suggest that, in some cases, there was a lack of joined up partnership working between the placements schools and the university.

*‘Our music education in uni provided us with a range of skills that we could use in schools - however, schools were not interested in that and expected us to follow a programme’ (Participant 3)*

## Music Teaching Provision and Resources

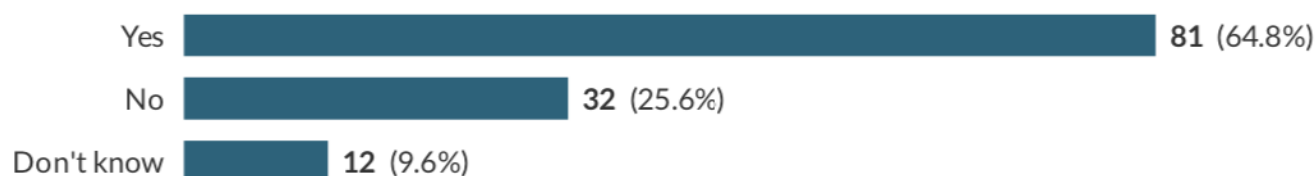
The participants in the study reflect a large number of schools, therefore in capturing their experience of music teaching, we are able to provide an audit of what types of musical activities are taking place within primary schools in the region. Even though the music national curriculum

advocates for performing, listening and composing, participants found that performing and using instruments were the most common musical activity, with composing only happening in 15.1% of the settings:



**Figure 13: What musical activities were you aware of during your placement?**

The majority of participants (64.8%) were aware of instruments available for use within the school:



**Figure 14: Instruments in the school**

These instruments included:

- Violin
- Piano
- Keyboards
- Percussion
- Brass
- Woodwind
- Guitars/Ukulele
- Ocarinas

Participants frequently commented how an external specialist music teacher often covered instrumental teaching, and that this encompassed all of the music teaching that the children received. Although many participants were aware of this taking place, few seemed to actively engage in the lessons, instead using the time for their 'planning, preparation and assessment' (PPA):

*The music teacher comes in to teach music to allow the class teachers to have PPA time/arrange parent meetings etc, therefore it is used almost as a 'filler'*

*For a lot of teachers it is normally the PPA cover subject and is not normally something a (BCU) student gets involved in*

Considering the apparent prevalence of these instrumental music lessons happening in primary schools, only 15.1% of participants were aware of the existence of music hubs:



**Figure 15: Awareness of music hub existence**

In addition, the majority of participants (89.5%) were unaware of music hub activity taking place within the school:



**Figure 16: Awareness of music hub activity in school**



The results from figure 14 and 15 are interesting given the prominence of instrumental teaching provision delivered by specialist music teachers. It may be that the trainee teachers were aware of activity taking place but unaware that it was music hub involvement. Nevertheless, the lack of knowledge around the existence of music hubs could mean they miss out on potential support, partnerships, and training in the future.

As technology within music teaching has become much more prevalent in recent years, we asked if participants had experienced using an online teaching programme (such as Charanga). 24.6% of participants were aware of music software packages being used to teach music in their schools:



**Figure 17: Awareness of school music software or technology-based music packages**

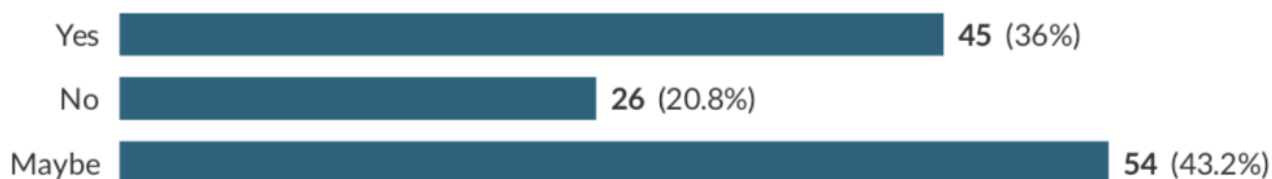
Although a range of programmes were mentioned, the most frequently cited programme was Charanga<sup>7</sup>, which interestingly some hubs count as ‘music hub support and activity’.

*‘Music was taught via a paid system – we just pressed a button on a screen’ (Participant 4)*

### Value of Music Education

Due to the changing socio-political and educational landscape and the apparent devaluing of the arts within the curriculum, the survey asked participants to comment on the perceived value of music education within schools. Although many of the student teachers did not get to experience music teaching on their placement, many felt it was an area they would like to teach more regularly and to take some responsibility for later in their teaching career:

<sup>7</sup> An online music curriculum scheme of work (<https://charanga.com/site/>)



**Figure 18: Would participants like to teach music regularly**

Within the optional free-text responses to this answer, 67 participants gave a rationale for their answer above. Some commented on their own enjoyment and personal passion for music:

*I enjoy music and have grown up with it. I understand how important it is*

*I have a passion for music and enjoy supporting the teaching of music*

*I love music and I think you can learn a lot through music*

*As someone with a close relationship with music from a young age, I am very passionate about the benefits music plays in developing children.*

*I enjoy music and it was a big part of my childhood, I think it's really important that children engage in music and the arts*

They also expressed their students' enjoyment of taking part in musical activities:

*The children seem to really engage and enjoy the lessons*

Other benefits of music education raised by participants included: increased confidence, self-expression, relaxing, supporting other areas of the curriculum, helping with mental and physical health, and developing creative thinking:

*Music is a great way for children to develop their confidence and express themselves.*

*I believe it allows children to come out of their shell and be more confident*

However, there were a number of barriers for many teachers in being able to promote the benefits of music education. As discussed earlier, one of the main concerns was confidence in teaching music. Many participants were eager to gain more experience of teaching music so that they could gain confidence:

*I am not really confident when teaching music but do enjoy it, therefore once I teach it more and gain more confidence then I would consider taking more responsibility for it*

*I would happily teach music if there was prior teaching that showed how to teach it.*

*I would like to build up some subject knowledge on music  
Unless I develop it through my CPD I would not feel confident*

*I believe if I had more training I would feel much more confident in teaching music  
I think teachers require further training in music to allow them to develop their confidence*

Yet due to school paying for an external instrumental teacher during their PPA, they felt they were unable to gain further experience:

*Often schools just bring in an outside practitioner to teach an instrument. I then don't develop my knowledge or experience and the lessons are very instrument specific and closed off*

They did not feel that training and developing their skills to be able to deliver music was valued by their school.

Another barrier raised was the lack of time for teaching music, and if it could be fit into the timetable it was often squeezed in and not prioritised:

*Time is tight!*

*It's one of the lessons they tend to do when they have a spare 30 minutes*

*Tend to be rushed and a 20-minute lesson on children playing instruments.*

Participants commented how music was often the first subject to be removed from the timetable if other time pressures emerged:

*Whenever another subject needed extended time music, art or PE were first chopped off the timetable.*

*It is not given much time in the curriculum. If there is something else going on in the school it is the first subject to not be taught in the timetable for that week.*

*It is still one of the first to be cut from the timetable if other problems arise*

*The [music] lesson time can be used to finish other activities*

*Although music was timetabled quite often it was squeezed out in favour of maths or English lessons that had over-run*

And there was a sense that music, in many schools, was not as valued, believing other 'core' subjects, such as maths and English, were prioritised over music and the arts:

*I think teaching of the arts isn't done enough. Schools are so focused on core subjects that they do not appear to value their impact.*

*No I do not think schools value music education. They place more value on core subjects rather than foundation. They care more about the grades children receive*

*I think they do value it but nowhere near as much as they value the other subjects such as maths and English*

*More priority is given to maths and English*

*Music is brushed aside because it's not a part of any tests like English, science and maths. I don't think the schools understand or can accommodate for music because of Ofsted and the curriculum*

Participants commented that how much time and value was placed on music depended on the school:

*Not all schools!! I'm lucky to be part of a school that highly valued music education and encourages it but I wish more schools saw its significance and importance*

*It varies across different schools*

*I've known some schools who are really passionate about music and others who don't give it any thought.*

This variation of value and time for music education suggests that music provision is still 'patchy' (Henley, 2011a; 2011b) even at the point of data collection.

## Discussion on Confidence

The above findings highlight participants' hugely differing experiences of music education whilst in their placement schools. Although some participants taught music, others did not teach music at all, nor witness any music teaching in their schools. Participants' self-confidence was equally variable, as was their perceptions of what constituted an effective music teacher. These three factors – the presence of music in school, confidence, and efficacy – are clearly interwoven, and it is confidence which is examined further in this section. To do this, we present five vignettes drawn from the answers of five individual participants with a diverse range of confidence levels, musical experiences, and attitudes to music education. Each participant's individual response has been

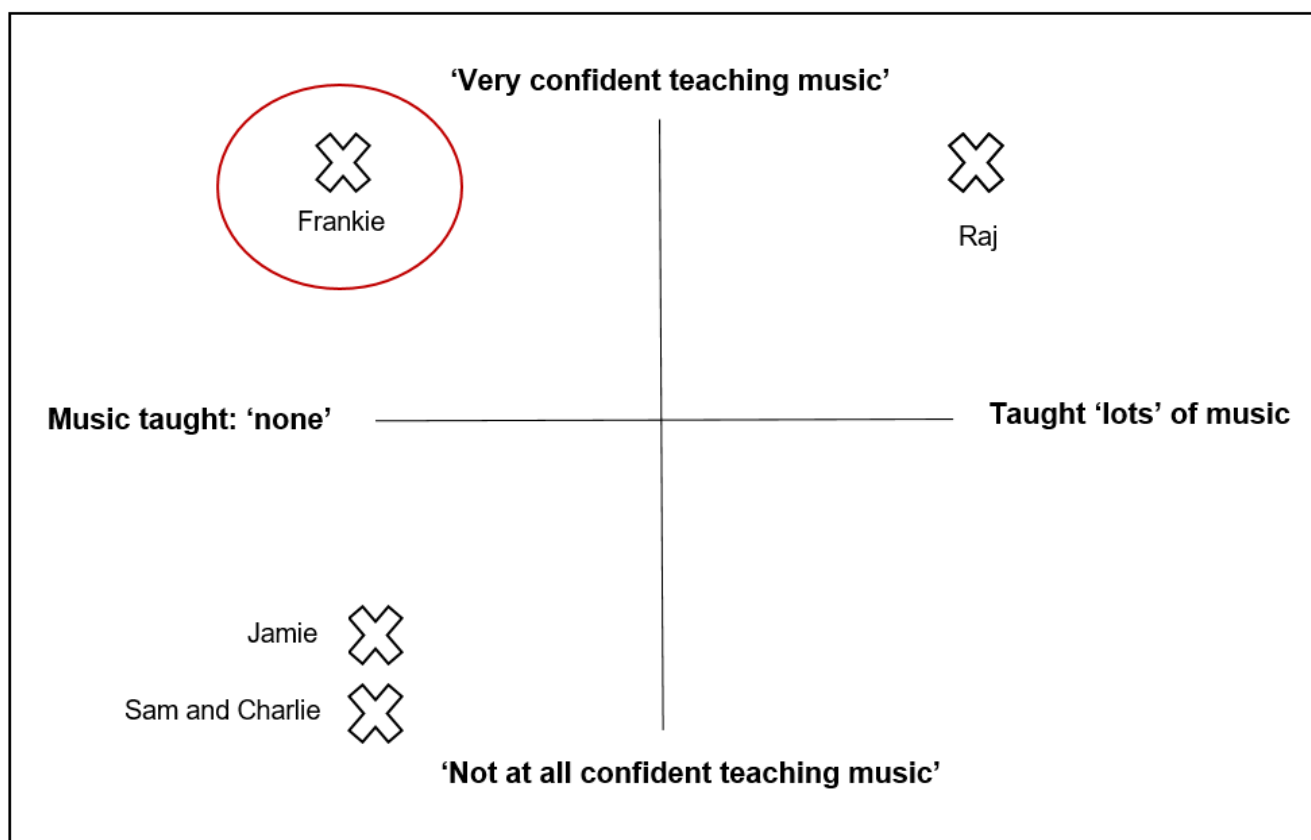
presented in figure 17, below, illustrating the extent to which there is a correlation between participants' confidence and the amount of music they taught during their placement.

### Vignette One: Frankie<sup>8</sup> - The Missed Opportunity

As shown in figure 7, a link was observed between participants who felt confident teaching music and had the opportunity to teach music during their school placement. However, there were outliers. One participant, Frankie - enrolled on the PGCE Primary and Early Years course, who sings and had studied piano and ABRSM music theory up to grade 3 - self-rated as "very confident" in teaching music. Yet in spite of this, they did not get the opportunity to teach music. Frankie's experience raises questions regarding how much agency trainee teachers have around developing their practice during school-based training. High self-confidence teaching music does not always guarantee participants will have the opportunity to teach it, which may stem from having to conform to a particular school culture, or from the pressures of dealing with competing priorities. This *missed opportunity* may leave Frankie unable to realise their potential and develop their music teaching skills during this highly formative time in their teaching career. Further, they may feel music is not valued within the education system. It would be unfortunate if this conclusion were to be reached; Frankie in fact did feel that their placement school valued music education.

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<sup>8</sup> All names have been changed for reasons of confidentiality.



**Figure 19: Mapping confidence against opportunity across the trainee teachers in the five vignettes.**

### Vignette Two: Charlie – Requires Further Training

In contrast to Frankie, Charlie - a BA Primary Education with QTS student - self-rated as “not at all confident” in teaching music stating that they did not have any musical experience in relation to playing an instrument or singing. Yet when asked if they would like to teach music regularly in the future, they stated “yes”. Charlie expanded on this expressing the need for further support:

*I think teachers require further training in music to allow them to develop their confidence*

This highlights a need for thorough music teacher training at primary level in order for those with very limited musical experiences to develop their skills, knowledge and confidence. As explored above, many participants advocated for the benefits of music education, but without adequate training many felt unable to provide the music education they wished to deliver. Charlie worried about the impact this would have on pupils, sharing that music education wasn’t valued in schools:

*I feel children who have a passion for music may never find their passion because it is not taught to its full potential*

One possible outcome of Charlie not developing confidence and skills during their training year is that they continue to avoid teaching music, thus continuing the cycle of under-confident music teachers (Mills, 1989); receiving training, or *not* receiving training, could both be critical incidents for Charlie.

### Vignette Three: Raj – Fighting Against The Tide

Raj, who was studying Primary Education with Specialism in SEN with QTS, self-rated as “very confident” teaching music, which was matched with significant enthusiasm: “music is a big part of my life.” Raj taught “lots” of music in their placement school (“at least one lesson a week”), and felt highly compelled to do so despite feeling that schools do not value music education:

*I don't think schools value music education as much, but I value music which is why I made it important for me to teach it as much and as best as possible.*

Raj was aware that their attitude to music was divergent to other views across their school, but taught music in spite of this. If the status and funding of music education in primary schools continues to decline, individuals like Raj, who are prepared to stand up for music education, will really matter. It is important that Raj continues to feel empowered to teach music and develop their own agency as they embark upon their teaching career.

### Vignette Four: Sam – Specialist vs. Generalist Music Teacher

BA Primary Education with QTS student, Sam, did not play a musical instrument or sing and self-rated as “not at all confident” teaching music. They did not teach music during their placement and believed that specialist music teachers had an important role to play in primary school music education:

*Currently we have a music specialist teacher - however if we weren't to have one, I don't think teachers have the knowledge or confidence to teach music because where would they get their knowledge from to be able to do so?*

To Sam, only specialists have the right amount of knowledge and confidence to teach music and removing specialists would create a significant knowledge gap in schools. In this regard, it is not surprising that Sam did not want music to be something they teach regularly (or, indeed, to take responsibility for later in their career). Working alongside specialist musicians in the classroom could present an opportunity for teachers such as Sam to build their own self-confidence and knowledge. However, many participants stated that typically this opportunity was not available due



to schools scheduling in PPA during instrumental tuition. More work needs to be done to facilitate this collaborative process between schools and music specialists.

### Vignette Five: Jamie - Lacking Instrumental Abilities

Jamie was a PGCE Primary and Early Years student during this research. Like Sam and many other participants in the study, Jamie felt low in confidence due to not having any instrumental experience:

*I do think music is important in education, however, I am not confident in my own ability to teach music because I have such a lack of music education myself and do not play an instrument. But I am willing to learn about it and have played instruments in my past*

While this participant is “willing to learn”, it is notable to hear that they felt less able to teach music because they do not play a musical instrument. As raised in this study, as well as by Fautley et al. (2019), many participants believe that classroom music equates to instrumental tuition. Jamie’s comments raise the issue of how best to communicate with trainees that playing a musical instrument is not a criteria for high quality music education in their classrooms. A clearer distinction between instrumental teaching taught by specialists, and classroom music, needs to be made so that initiatives such as WCET do not reinforce this view.

These five vignettes demonstrate how confidence can influence the extent to which music teaching takes place in the classroom. There are moments in all of these five case studies where BCU could have interjected through supporting the development of confidence and skills, as well as potentially diminishing some of the misconceptions surrounding music education in primary schools.

## Conclusion

This research sought to understand the lived realities from BCU primary and early years trainees during their school experience placements, to help investigate current music education provision in primary schools. Going back to the two main research questions:

1. What are trainee teachers' experiences of music teaching in primary schools?
2. Are there differences in the scale and scope of music provision in primary schools?

What can be observed is that music provision is varied both in terms of scale and scope. How music is taught can vary greatly, from schools providing WCET type models delivered by music specialists with little or no engagement from classroom teachers, to a greater focus on the use of online tools such as Charanga in order to support teachers in delivering the music NC. How much music teaching is taking place in the schools cannot be fully confirmed, due to participants only staying in one school for a short period of time, but what can be observed is the variation in how much schools appear to value music education.

Although we support DfE policy which values music as part of a general education, more work needs to be done to ensure that this is translated into sustained, frequent music provision in schools. This research highlights that policy alone is not enough to ensure a rich classroom musical experience for all young people. What is needed is a better understanding of how schools are interpreting education policy from central government on a local level in their everyday teaching and learning policies and practices. This policy-to-practice gap means that music lessons are not taking place with the degree of frequency, and breadth that both the national curriculum and national plan for music would recommend.

This research also highlights a number of important considerations for initial teacher training providers regarding how and what music pedagogy is being delivered to primary trainee teachers. It is apparent that many student-teachers come to primary music teaching with preconceptions and strong beliefs, leading to many feeling unable to offer anything of value musically to their own students. As raised by Hennessy (2000), confidence in music teaching is influenced by prior personal experience, university courses, as well as what they experience on their school placements. Teacher training courses can act as a critical incident whereby misconceptions can be broken down and student-teachers can feel empowered to teach music. Without this important intervention, the cycle (Mills, 1989) of teachers feeling unconfident, and therefore avoiding

teaching music, cannot be broken. A number of recommendations are given below both in terms of practice as well as implications for future inquiry into this under-researched area:

## Recommendations

- Assumptions about music teaching must be discussed and challenged during ITT:
  - Student-teachers must reflect on the role of instrumental teaching in light of the national curriculum and classroom music teaching
  - The importance of singing and composing in primary school music education should be emphasised
  - Student-teachers need more time to develop their confidence through practice or delivery, in order to change attitudes and self-belief
  - Drawing on recommendations by Spruce et al. (in press) for teacher professional development, ITT should support student-teachers to examine their own beliefs and values, as well as those of policy makers, which effect their everyday practice
- Despite continued music hub involvement, many participants were unaware of the existence of music hubs and therefore must be informed of their role
- BCU and other ITT providers must continue to advocate for music in schools, supporting and promoting local music teachers who are continuing to deliver good practice despite under funding or undervaluing
- There could be more opportunities for QTS providers and partner schools for knowledge exchange to help co-identify relevant, high quality, and up-to-date music education teaching practices and materials, thus ensuring students' experiences of music education in their university sessions and placement experiences are joined up
- Trainee primary teachers should have the option to specialise in all subjects, including music, during their university contact hours
- School leaders should be aware of the many barriers that teachers face when delivering school music, such as a lack of resources and time
- Although many participants talked passionately about the positive influence of music education on young people, they need to feel able to raise these arguments and outline relevant research and examples of good practice to support their claims when advocating for music to senior leaders

- Policy makers should be aware of the possibilities for different interpretations of the national curriculum, and thus ensure all schools are offering a rich musical experience for young people beyond learning to play a musical instrument
- Continual professional development (CPD) in music education is vital for developing both teachers' skills and confidence. This need to be signposted by ITT providers as well as supported by schools, and hubs as part of their extension role (ACE, online)
- Further in-depth research, through case study and interviews should be considered in order to explore this area in more detail
- A national survey should be conducted in order to obtain data across different regions to further identify policy-to-practice gaps

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