

Online Music Lessons

Action Research – Evaluation Findings

A study of the impact on young musicians, staff and other stakeholders of moving music lessons online during the COVID-19 pandemic



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Contents

Contents	2
Introduction	4
Key Findings	5
Summary Recommendations	6
Teaching Staff	6
Organisational	6
Parents	6
Young Musicians	6
Context	7
Technical	8
Google Hangouts	8
Safeguarding	9
Impact	10
Impact on Data	10
Data in context	11
Impact on Young Musicians	12
Impact on experience, knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence	12
Impact on Musical and Personal Progress	14
Impact on staff Knowledge, Understanding, Skills, Confidence, and Experience	18
Comments and examples	19
Impact on Parents and Guardians	21
Support and guidance	22
Comments and examples	22



Barriers, Enablers and Ongoing Challenges	24
Barriers	24
Enablers	28
Centralised communications and support	28
Additional allocation of staff time	28
Overcoming technical challenges	29
Adaptive practice	30
Overcoming Ongoing Challenges	31



Introduction

In compiling this report, I was overwhelmed by the extraordinary amount of effort, goodwill and energy that had been shown by our young musicians, their parents and teachers in exceptional circumstances.

To staff, your resilience is truly incredible. In teaching, we often talk about modelling, and usually, mean playing music for our students in a way that demonstrates excellence. But to me, this report shines a light on how you have gone further: modelling resilience to the young musicians you teach, demonstrating what huge challenges can be overcome when we approach them with a willingness to learn and adapt. I cannot include every thank you that came in the responses from our families, it would be many pages long, instead, accept just one on their behalf – thank you!

To parents and guardians, as this report shows, your existing skills and confidence have been vital in getting online music lessons taking place. But, beyond that, you have been on a learning journey of your own – developing new knowledge and understanding, as well as building on your skills and confidence, and this progress should not be lost or underplayed. It has not always been easy, or simple, but you have made it work. For many of you, this experience has brought you closer together as a family, making you more engaged in the musical lives of your children. On behalf of the young musicians you support – thank you!

To our young musicians, I am delighted that we have been able to provide you with music lessons at a time when so much else is being lost. You have shared how comforting it is to be connected with “normality”, with your music teachers, and with music as a place for creative self-expression. Your energy and passion have driven us all forward, wanting to allow you each to develop to the fullness of your potential – thank you!

We continue to learn together.

Matt Brombley
Development Manager



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Key Findings

1. Build on existing strengths

- a. Staff, parents and young musicians all have existing, transferable experiences, skills, knowledge and understanding that can be used and built upon to support new initiatives and formats
- b. Existing relationships, infrastructure and processes can be built upon and developed, even in challenging circumstances
- c. Facilitate and support the sharing of adapted good practice and learning experiences

2. Community is key

- a. Support is all around us – colleagues, family members
- b. This support supplements, but is not a replacement for clear and concise guidance
- c. Sharing emerging good practice, both formally and informally helps to support staff and families, and further opportunities to do this should be found

3. Simplicity enables speed

- a. Selecting a single platform allows for quicker training, support and troubleshooting
- b. Platform specific pre-existing skills are broadly low, and the transferable knowledge and understanding which accompanies these skills are quickly built upon
- c. Complicated technical setups do, sometimes, result in higher audio and video quality, but we have not gathered enough evidence to support the assertion that this improve learning outcomes for young musicians

4. Challenging circumstances are increased, but can also be reduced

- a. For children, young people and families already facing challenging circumstances, moving music lessons online has resulted in a reduction in their engagement – a deeper understanding of the causes of this reduction is needed, and both the adaption of existing strategies and the introduction of new strategies for engagement will be needed
- b. For those able to engage, learning music online has provided many improvements to wellbeing, including:
 - i. A comforting sense of connection to “normal life”
 - ii. Improved, transferable confidence
 - iii. Increased parental engagement

5. Exceptional circumstances lead to exceptional responses

- a. Across staff, parents and young musicians there is wide acknowledgment of the exceptional context in which this work takes place, and the willingness to undertake exceptional actions as a result
- b. However, there are some transferable principles that would apply beyond the current period:



- i. Parents and young musicians highly value regular music lessons, including developing a learning relationship with an individual teacher
- ii. Staff, parents, and young musicians may not have experience of specific technologies or activities, but are willing to use and build upon existing transferable skills, knowledge and understanding to achieve successful outcomes



Summary Recommendations

Teaching Staff

- Reflective practice is key to overcoming challenges
- Embrace wider community support, as well as centralised support
- Find new, digital tools, to fulfil common “real world” teaching tools, including:
 - Use of email
 - Use of “chat” functionality
 - Sending digital copies of music
 - Supporting synchronous learning with asynchronous resources

Organisational

- Successful online teaching requires additional work from teachers, this should be recognised in the time allocated for each lesson
- There are a wide range of technical possibilities and potential challenges – keeping setups simple can allow for systems to be established and used, that can later be refined and expanded in response to actual, rather than perceived, need
- Stakeholders value being asked to contribute to the evaluation of systems which they participate in

Parents

- Application of transferable digital and personal skills helps achieve success
- Support comes in many forms: make use of the centralised guidance and support available, as well as support from other members of the family and teaching staff
- Online lessons can provide an opportunity for parents to become more involved in the musical life of their children

Young Musicians

- Young musicians often have great solutions to technical and musical challenges and their contribution to the setting up of lessons is essential
- Make use of all the digital tools available to track and further your progress
- Ask questions, and tell your teacher what you need – they are learning too



Context

In March 2020, the UK experienced significant changes to social contact as a result of the COVID-19 viral pandemic.

From the start of March, schools began to impose restrictions on visiting staff, including music teachers,

From Friday 20 March, schools were closed, except to provide care for children of key workers and vulnerable children.

From Monday 23 March onward, Southampton Music Hub began to provide instrumental and vocal music lessons online, via video chat.

As of Monday 27 April, three term-time weeks after offering lessons, 462 young musicians had signed up for instrumental music lessons online.



Technical

Google Hangouts

Teachers, music hubs and others across the country have had to make quick decisions regarding the technologies and platforms they will use for online delivery, each responsive to their own unique needs and circumstances.

For Southampton Music Hub, selecting a platform, the priorities were:

1. Safeguarding children and staff
2. The ability to move quickly
3. The ability to equip and enable all members of the team

Google Hangouts was selected to meet these three aims, because:

- G Suite was the existing provider for music hub teaching staff email and shared document storage meaning that:
 - All teaching staff already had accounts, and could access through a web browser, as well as free Apps available for all major smartphones and tablets
 - Audit records for email and video communications were available
- Google Hangouts included important features for families and young musicians, being that it is:
 - Free to sign up and accessible through a web browser, as well as free apps available for all major smartphones and tablets
 - Accessibility features available, including closed captioning

When signing up for online music lessons, parents were required to provide an email address for use for the lessons, both for making the video calls, and sending additional resources. As part of the safeguarding policy, this was requested to be a parental email address, or, at least an email address to which the parent has access.



Safeguarding

Safeguarding children and young people is of the highest importance. Safeguarding guidance for online lessons was created to be an addition to the existing safeguarding policy.

1. Arrangements for the date and time of the lesson should be made between the parent/carer and the instrumental teacher only, not the student themselves.
2. The parent/carer must answer the video call at the start of the lesson. Parents/carers of older students, such as those in Year 12 or 13, will often ask the students themselves to make the arrangements for their instrumental lessons. We strongly advise against this, but should it be unavoidable, the teacher should comply strictly with the following guidance:
 - a. The teacher should ensure that they have explicit written consent from the parent/carer to make such arrangements directly with the student.
 - b. Communications should be kept to an absolute minimum; must only be made via email; and use only written communication.
 - c. The parent/carer must always be copied into the communication
3. There should be no direct communication of any kind between the teacher and the student outside of the lesson. Any necessary communication, aside from the lesson itself, should be made through the parent/carer.
4. The parent/carer should be in the same room as the student for at least some of the duration of the lesson and must be present in the home throughout.
5. The parent/carer may record the lesson, should the facility be available. As well as providing an additional safeguard for both student and teacher, this could also be useful for the student in reviewing the lesson.
6. Under no circumstances should the teacher take any recordings or still images of any part of the lesson.
7. The teacher should consider that, during the lesson, they have effectively turned the room from which they are conducting the lesson into an educational setting. The teacher should therefore dress and behave applicably and use appropriate language. The teacher should ensure that nothing inappropriate can be seen in the background by the student. Other people should not be in the room if it would not be appropriate for them to be in the same educational setting as the student e.g. it would not be appropriate for a non-DBS checked adult visitor to be in the room.
8. The teacher should stop the lesson if they feel that the setting/attire does not meet expectations. Similarly, parents/carers and students should feel confident and able to stop lessons if they feel the teacher is not meeting expectations or behaving appropriately i.e. suggesting lessons take place in a student's bedroom would be unacceptable.
9. The SMS office will hold details of all lessons that take place – along with teacher timetables and will be able to update schools with lessons that have taken place when they return to work.
10. The teacher should be aware that any safeguarding concerns or disclosures should be responded to and reported in the same way as they would if they had occurred in the school.
11. The parent/carer or any other person who has a safeguarding concern relating to the teacher, should report their concern to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO): LADO@southampton.gov.uk or 023 8091 5535 or contact Zoe Hunting as above.

The policy remains under review, with updates to be shared with teachers and parents as guidance changes.



Impact

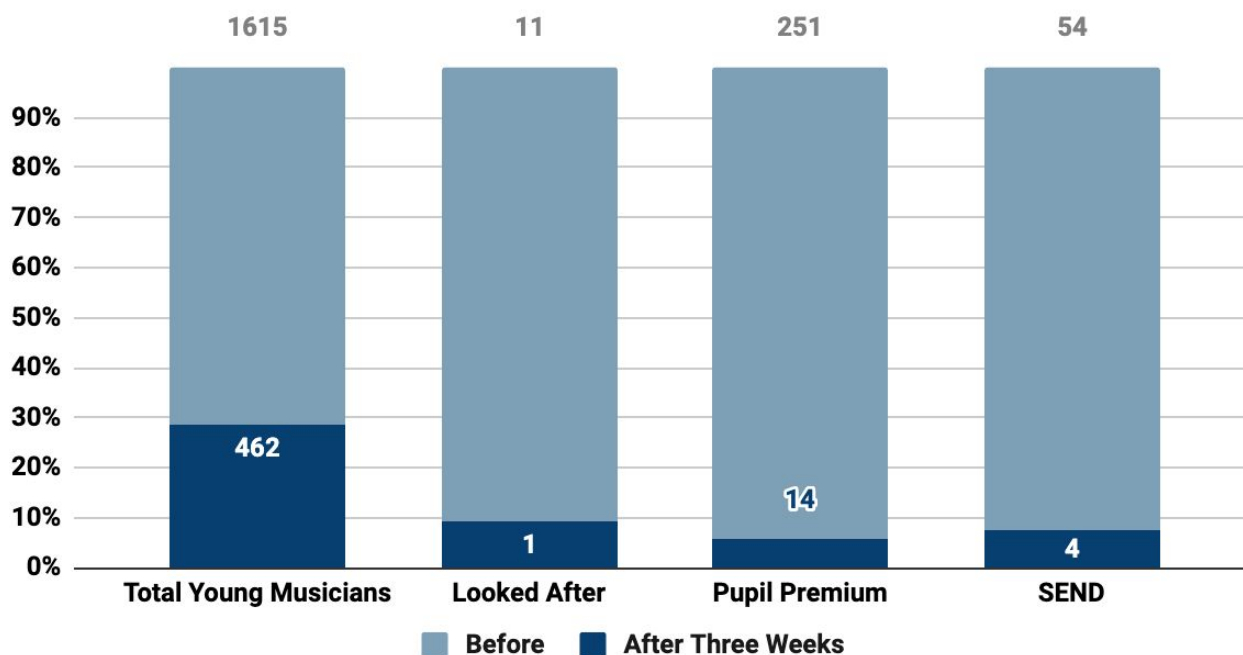
Impact on Data

After three weeks of offering music lessons online, a total of 462 of young musicians had signed up, representing 29% of those who had previously been having lessons.

The data also shows that transition to online learning for three identified groups for children facing challenging circumstances – Looked After Children, those eligible for pupil premium and those with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) – is significantly lower than for their peers.

Whilst this is challenging, it cannot be surprising. As families have shared, these have been challenging times for all, with social distancing and isolation creating additional barriers to overcome. These new challenges are compounded by pre-existing challenging circumstances.

	Before	Before %	After Three Weeks	After Three Weeks %	Transition %
Total Young Musicians	1615		462		29%
Looked After	11	1%	1	0.2%	9%
Pupil Premium	251	16%	14	3%	6%
SEND	54	3%	4	1%	7%



Data in context

The [Sutton Trust says](#)¹ only 23% of pupils are taking part in online school each day, with middle class pupils being more likely to (30% of these) over their working class peers (16%). In terms of receiving work back, that stands at 27% in the most advantaged state schools, and just 8% in the least advantaged state schools.

Newsnight reports from an, as yet unpublished study from the Education Endowment Foundation which finds that the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils has dropped by at least 10% in the period of school closure, so that the gains in the last ten years have been lost, and possibly significantly more so.

Development Strategy:

- Transition existing engagement and support models for children in challenging circumstances, including school and pupil premium funded lessons, to increase the numbers engaging in online music lessons
- Look to understand any additional support requirements these children and families may have, and look to meet these
- Explore alternative remote music-making and learning which could be effective in supporting the musical progress of young musicians less able to access one-to-one video lessons

¹ <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/>



Impact on Young Musicians

Young musicians were asked to self-report on the impact that taking part in instrumental music lessons online has had. 19 young musicians responded.

Impact on experience, knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence

Young musicians were asked to self-report on whether they had the knowledge, understanding, skills, confidence and experience they needed to teach music lessons online, with 1 being “strongly disagree”, and 5 being “strongly agree”.

% young musicians with previous experience of online music lessons	0%
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Whilst none of the young musicians who responded had previously taken part in online music lessons before, they reported some pre-existing skills and confidence in taking part in the lessons, and increased their knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence in the process of starting lessons.

	Before	After Three Weeks	Change
Knowledge and Understanding	2.4	4.7	2.3
Skills	3.3	4.7	1.3
Confidence	3.3	4.4	1.1
Overall	3.0	4.6	1.6



Young musicians were also asked to give feedback on whether the support and guidance they received was clear and helpful, with 1 being “strongly disagree”, and 5 being “strongly agree”. Whilst young musicians received the support they needed, often from parents, the expectations ahead of taking part could have been clearer.

Clear expectations and requirements	3.8
Received the support needed to be successful	4.6

Young musicians were sometimes surprised by the success of the experience.

“Before I maybe would have thought that online lessons would be very inefficient and that it wouldn’t be possible to work on tone or technique as well, and whilst it’s obviously much better in person, I’ve discovered that once you adapt to the change in sound over video call, it’s still possible to work on all these things provided the internet is running smoothly.”

– Young Musician, Violin

The process of learning online also led young musicians to reflect upon development of musical skills to support the difference of approach in learning.

“Can I have a lesson on reading music from the book because I struggle with that?”

– Young Musician, Piano

Also, the development of confidence in learning music online, has translated to other online communication.

“I have improved my confidence in talking to other people online.”

– Young Musician, Piano

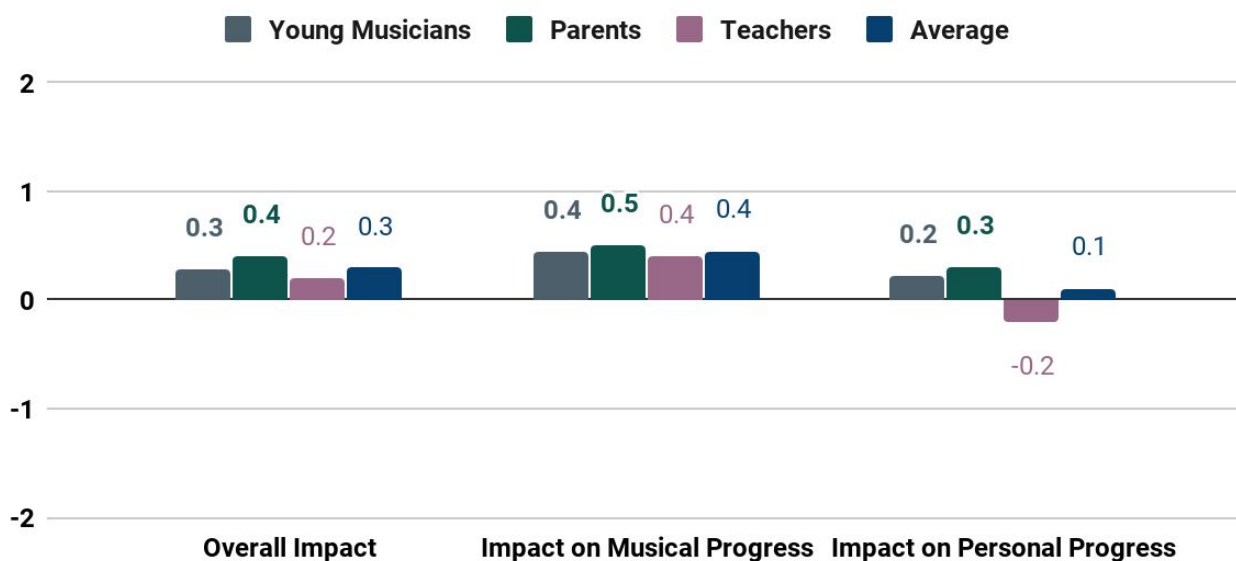


Impact on Musical and Personal Progress

Young musicians were asked to self-report on the impact that moving music lessons online had had upon them overall, as well as specifically on the musical and personal progress, with -2 meaning “much worse” and 2 being “much better”.

Parents and teachers were also asked to report on this for the young musicians they are supporting.

	Young Musicians	Parents	Teachers	Average
Overall Impact	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.3
Impact on Musical Progress	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.4
Impact on Personal Progress	0.2	0.3	-0.2	0.1



The young musicians who responded were keenly aware of the exceptional circumstances they found themselves in, and, first, valued the connection to a sense of “normality”.

“Being able to continue with music lessons during quarantine has been very beneficial because it's nice to feel like something is just carrying on as normal and I really enjoy my music lessons.”

– Young Musician, Clarinet



“Although online lessons are less convenient, I feel I still get the same out of them as lessons in person, and it's nice to be able to keep contact during isolation”

– Young Musician, Clarinet

Overall, Young Musicians recognised that the online music lessons allowed for progress to be made that would not have been possible if lessons had been cancelled.

“I would not be progressing as much without the lessons. I can ask my teacher questions and he can correct me, otherwise I could be learning 'bad habits' and then I would have to unlearn them.”

– Young Musician, Violin

“It is not better than actually being with my teacher but it is still very good. I would not be able to have the lessons without the online service. I would be repeating the same pieces and finding it difficult to progress.”

– Young Musician, Clarinet

Moving lessons online has also had some unexpected outcomes for young musicians, including increased confidence, and the opportunity for those previously learning in groups to have one-to-one lessons.

“It has built me up on confidence.”

– Young Musician, Violin

“I find it easier having 1:1 lessons.”

– Young Musician, Flute

These impacts were also recognised by teachers, who also recognised that there were longer term issues building up which could hinder progress in the future.

“As things stand, I would say that they are able to continue to progress at a broadly similar rate: I've managed to introduce totally new concepts quite successfully. The inability to produce a rounded performance is the main drawback. Tone is also an issue because the quality of sound is generally poor.”

– Music Teacher

“With pupils that play reed instruments we are going to have reed adjustment issues that need their teacher to be in the room adjusting it for them. In particular double reeds are VERY expensive and very easy to break in the hands of a parent/child.”

– Music Teacher



"The social aspect of learning an instrument is very important, this provides the basis for future ensembles; so without that social interaction between the teacher and pupil (in a one to one lesson) it may in the end slow down the musical development of the young students."

– Music Teacher

For parents, there were also unexpected outcomes, with many parents reporting an increased involvement in, and connection to, their child's musical life.

"It's really helped me connect with my children's music education. I have learnt quite a lot and even started trying to learn piano again as keen to accompany my daughter. I like talking to the teachers to say hello at the beginning of the session and I can listen to their lessons, which I can't do at school."

– Parent

Parents also recognized the positive impact on the wellbeing of their children.

"Our child gets input, support, someone outside the house asking him how he is – he has ASD, anxiety and OCD so this is significant. In some ways it is easier than school lessons where he found his time often got squeezed by students before/after."

– Parent

"Our son suffers anxiety and his guitar always helps this. So the lessons have helped distract the current situation."

– Parent

"Music is so important to my daughter and it is something that she likes to do independently. It is not as easy for her to relax and learn when she is aware that other people in the household can hear her."

– Parent

"Playing music has had a positive impact on the well being of my child. It's a nice break in the day enabling him to do something creative. Him being able to continue this online has been overwhelmingly positive."

– Parent

"It's been good for our well being because it makes us feel our home learning experience is being supported. Also, the teachers are just lovely, and really encouraging."

– Parent



“Online lessons definitely have a positive impact on our son's wellbeing. It is reassuring for him to regularly see one of his teachers.”

– Parent

“When the school and ensembles closed, having the continuing connection with the music teachers has made a huge difference – there's a little bit of business as usual amidst the uncertainty and change – they provide motivation and structure and are very much looked forward to!”

– Parent

Development Strategy:

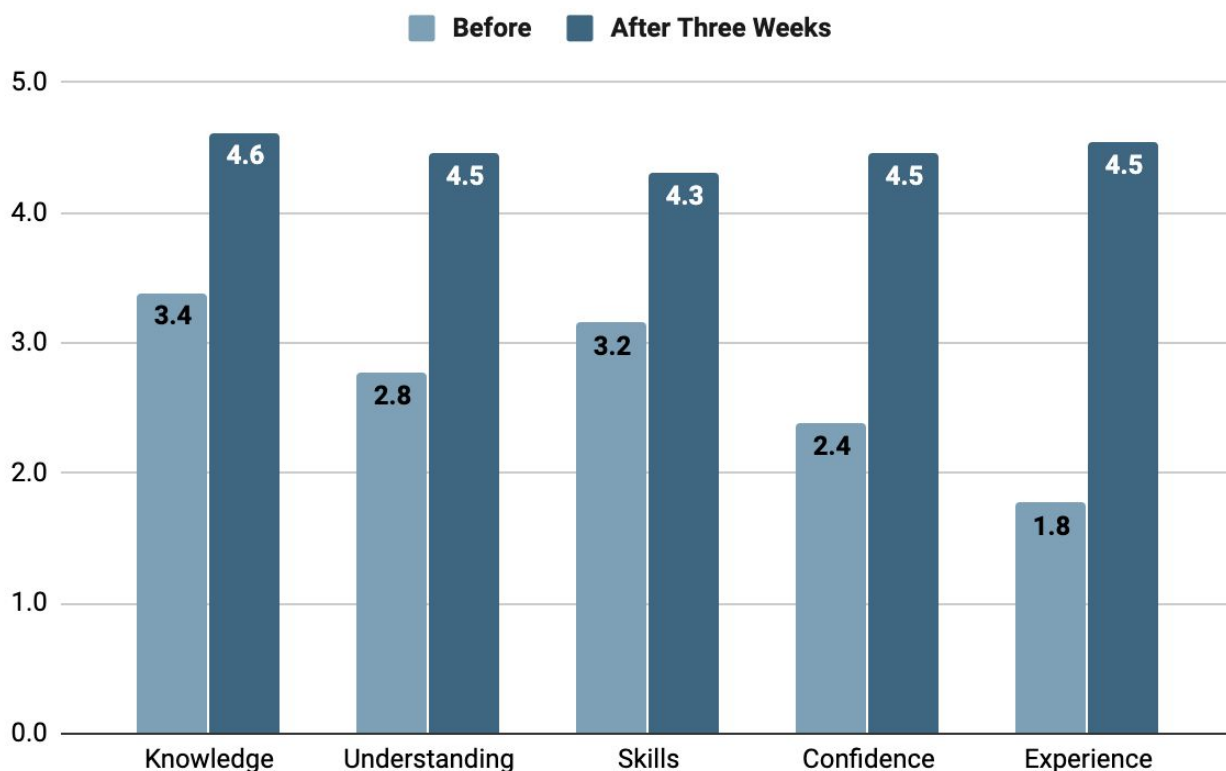
- Teaching staff should be supported to develop strategies which overcome the longer term challenges and barriers that learners face, particularly around instrument care
- Providing opportunities for the social aspects of music to be realised and developed should be part of a developing offer to young musicians.



Impact on staff Knowledge, Understanding, Skills, Confidence, and Experience

Staff were asked to self-report on whether they had the knowledge, understanding, skills, confidence and experience they needed to teach music lessons online, with 1 being “strongly disagree”, and 5 being “strongly agree”.

	Before	After Three Weeks	Change
Knowledge	3.4	4.6	1.2
Understanding	2.8	4.5	1.7
Skills	3.2	4.3	1.2
Confidence	2.4	4.5	2.1
Experience	1.8	4.5	2.8
Overall	2.7	4.5	1.8



Reflecting on the time before starting lessons, staff reported low levels of experience and confidence, with higher levels of knowledge and skills.



After three weeks there was a significant increase in staff confidence, experience and understanding with smaller increases in knowledge and skills where there were higher existing levels.

Comments and examples

Staff reported some small-scale examples of previous online teaching:

"I have taught one student over several months online as he was travelling with his parents"

– Christiane, Music Teacher

"I have been involved in remote recording projects, so playing for a camera is not unusual."

– John, Music Teacher

Staff shared how one of the biggest, most immediate, changes in their skills, confidence and experience was related to the technology itself, with support coming from colleagues and family:

"[There has been] a huge learning curve to manage the technology for connection with my pupils, and a massive amount of patience and private time (literally, hours!) online with another colleague, trying to experiment and ensure it worked before teaching an actual pupil. My own children were involved with sound checking for their instruments, and my partner was extremely helpful as technical support. I feel I was very fortunate to have support at home, compared to others who are isolated."

– Sarah, Music Teacher

"I have had to learn to use unfamiliar apps and sound technology. My family (elder son, physics student) has been invaluable! I have had to source new equipment quickly in order to perform my changed role and learn to use familiar technology in new ways."

– Debbie, Music Teacher

It was not just the technology itself, but the way that technology has an impact on teacher's approach to session content and structure:

"The key things for me have been getting set up both technically and in the right space at home. Then, really working out what works best with pupils as far as positioning within the lessons, and how to demonstrate things. There is a change of pace from face to face lessons but I've found with a few slight adjustments things work well."

– Music Teacher



"I am finding it interesting teaching with my main focus being my ears. The pictures are often blurry or not in sync with the sound. Sounds silly to say that a musician is relying on their ears....but it has brought that into focus for me."

– John, Music Teacher

Whilst technology was a challenge, staff shared how their reflective approach to teaching led to adapting their existing knowledge, understanding, skills and experiences to work when teaching music lessons online:

"I think every lesson brings new challenges and makes me think about how best to use technology to help me."

– Music Teacher

Whilst significant changes have taken place, staff also recognise that the changes are not fully complete, and, not fully positive:

"I now have a better understanding of online teaching but am not fully confident at this point."

– Music Teacher

"I have had to lower my expectations."

– Music Teacher

Development Strategy:

- Staff need time and space to continue to reflect, consolidate learning, and share this with colleagues and others. Whilst this report is the start of that process, over the coming months, time will be given to this as part of the continual professional development process.
- Given the significant additional skills, knowledge, understanding, confidence and experience gained by staff, it is possible for the teaching of music lessons online to remain a part of the offer to schools and families going forward.



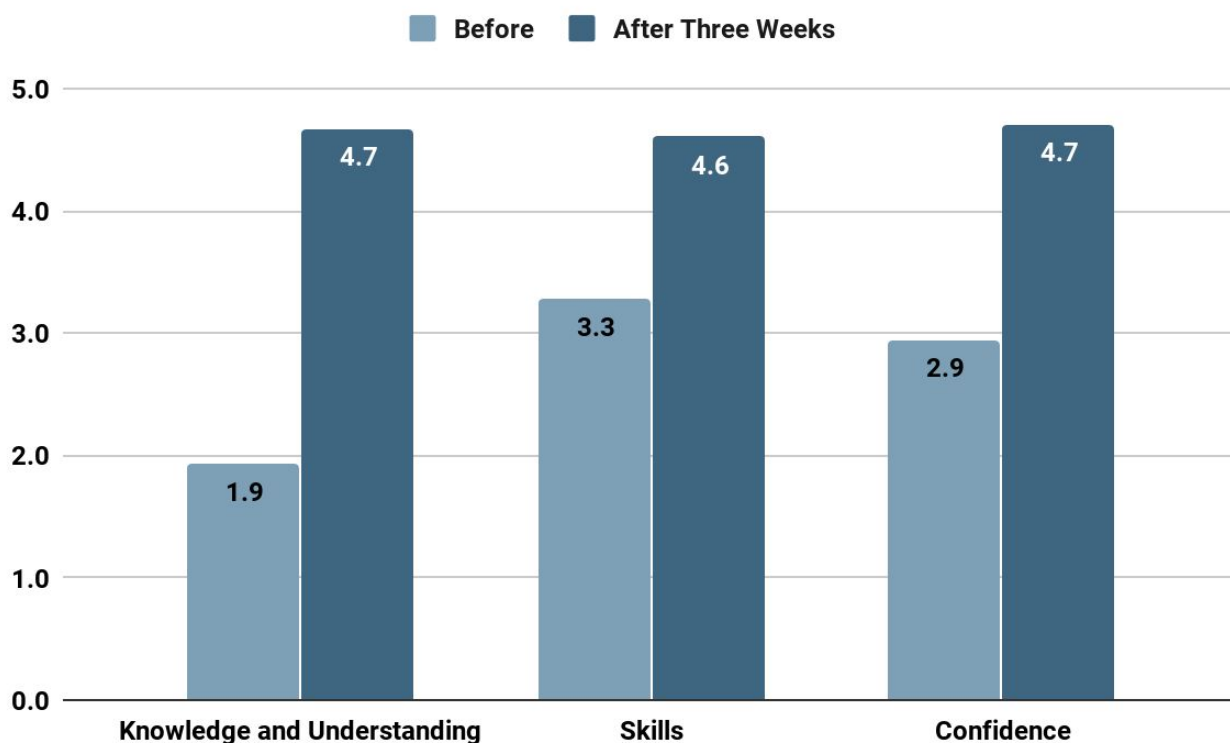
Impact on Parents and Guardians

Parents and Guardians were asked to self-report on whether they had previously experienced music lessons online. 55 parents responded.

% parents with previous experience of online music lessons	2%
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Parents were also asked to self-report on whether they had the knowledge, understanding, skills, and confidence they needed to support their child taking part in music lessons online, with 1 being “strongly disagree”, and 5 being “strongly agree”.

	Before	After Three Weeks	Change
Knowledge and Understanding	1.9	4.7	2.7
Skills	3.3	4.6	1.3
Confidence	2.9	4.7	1.8
Overall	2.7	4.7	1.9



Reflecting on the time before starting lessons, parents and guardians reported much lower levels of knowledge and understanding, with significant progress in this area after three weeks. There were also notable increases across their skills and confidence levels too.

Both the underlying skills and confidence of parents and guardians, but also the progress they made across all areas, is a significant contributing factor to the successful engagement of young musicians in online music lessons.

Support and guidance

Parents were also asked to give feedback on whether the support and guidance they received was clear and helpful, with 1 being “strongly disagree”, and 5 being “strongly agree”.

Clear expectations and requirements	4.4
Received the support needed to be successful	4.5

Comments and examples

The majority of parents found the email communications, and online form very clear, and were happy with the initial expectations and requirements.

“The emails sent to us explained precisely what we had to do. We followed the instructions and it has all worked.”

– Parent

And to many, they found that little support was needed.

“The process was so simple support wasn't really needed.”

– Parent

The speed of the process did lead to some parents having worries, however, teachers helped to calm and overcome these worries.

“It seemed a systematic approach was missing and it made me pretty worried that the online lessons would reflect that chaos. Luckily, the extremely proactive teacher had already done a lesson and it was clear he was extremely competent and passionate about teaching which is why we went ahead with it. ”

– Parent



And many parents showed great appreciation for the support received from teachers which accompanied the written communications. In particular, teachers' willingness to communicate through email in between lessons has been helpful to parents.

"Our teacher has been very helpful: keeping in touch by email and reminding us when the lessons are."

– Parent

"My child's teacher responded to an email I sent about something my child was unsure of in her practice and that helped her to understand what she was struggling with and continue with her practice. The teacher writes in the chat what she needs to write in her planner and she copies it down, which means she has the instructions she usually has from each lesson."

– Parent

Development Strategy:

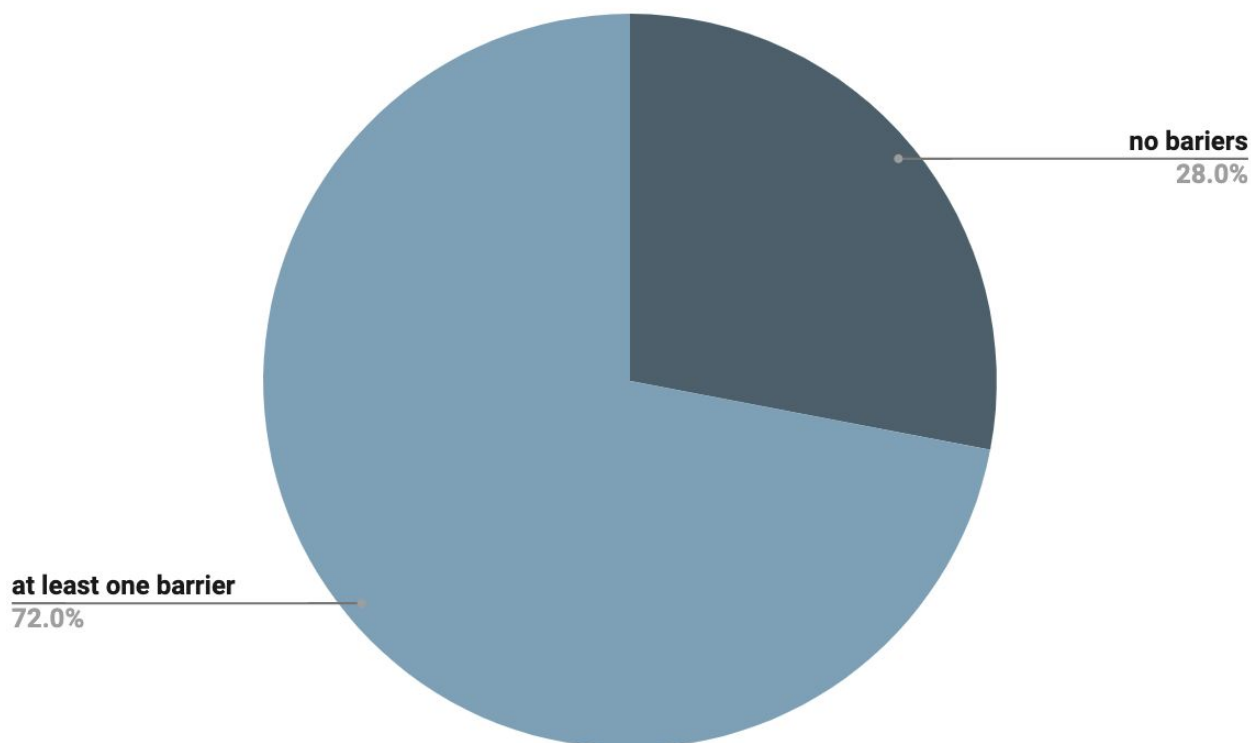
- Email between lessons, whilst valuable, can be an additional workload for teacher, developing increased use of the hangouts "chat" facility can help to make use of time in the lesson to share written communications



Barriers, Enablers and Ongoing Challenges

Barriers

Parents, Teachers and Young Musicians were asked to reflect on the barriers they had faced in setting up online music lessons. Of the families who responded, 28% reported no barriers, and 72% reported one or more barriers.



Understanding the barriers people face can be challenging, as issues are sometimes presented with an underlying cause “the internet connection is poor”, and sometimes, only a symptom or cause is known “I can't hear my teacher sometimes”.

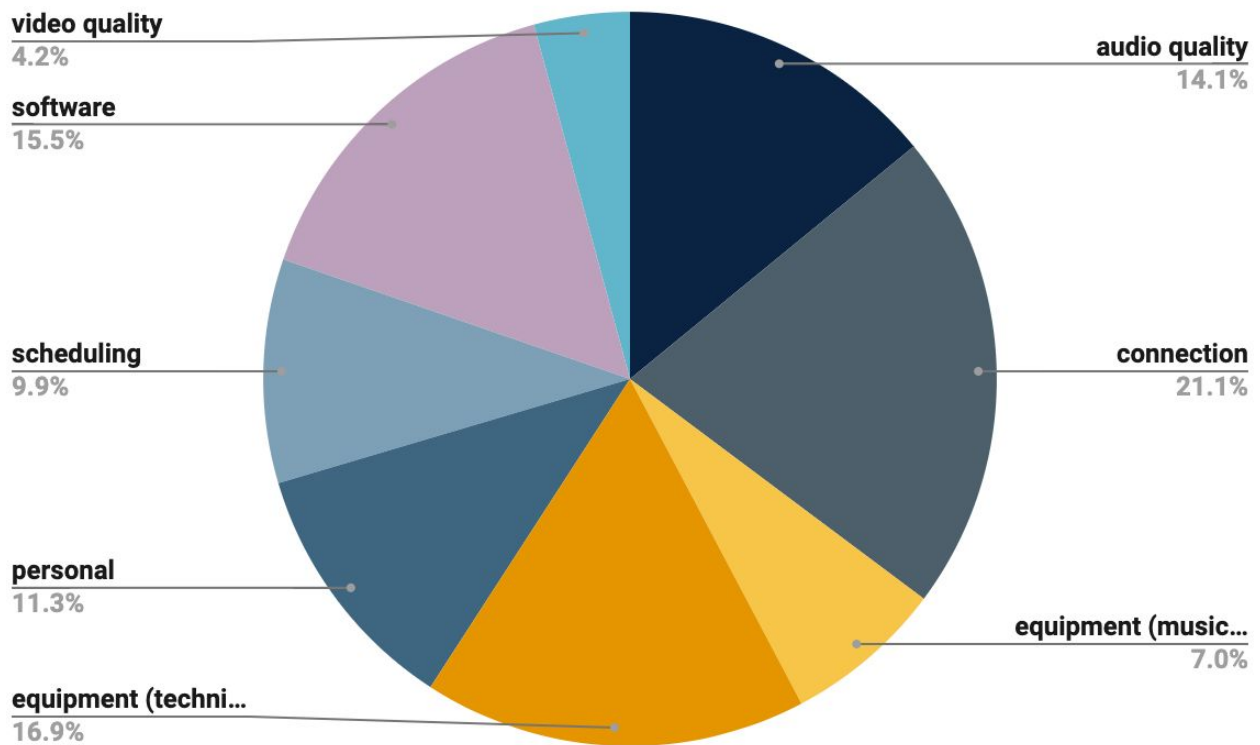
Technical challenges were a reoccurring barrier that parents, young musicians and their teachers faced.

79% of teachers, and 50% of families reported that technology has been a barrier in some way.

These technological barriers included:

- Bandwidth
- Video and audio quality
- Unfamiliarity with the platform
- Issues with availability and suitability of equipment





And whilst many families and teachers reported that many barriers and challenges had been resolved, issues around bandwidth and video/audio quality were ongoing challenges for nearly 20% of families (see [ongoing challenges](#)).

Digital challenges can present themselves as very practical barriers to learning.

“Sometimes the connection is poor which makes it difficult for me to hear my teacher, especially when they are playing. Also, it's difficult that they can't write directly onto my music.”

– Young Musician

“I have felt that the delay between me and my teacher is kind of a challenge because even though there is only one beat difference, it is still different than being at school doing a lesson with my teacher right next to me.”

– Young Musician



“Helping the child with adjustments to their handling of the instrument, sometimes this can not be tackled in person.”

– Parent

“It’s sometimes hard to see positions and fingering on the screen.”

– Parent

Other challenges that families faced included availability of instruments, suitable space, and some issues with scheduling lessons each week.

“One child has percussion lessons but we don’t have any drums at home. Have managed so far with an upturned bucket.”

– Parent

“I’ve had work meetings going on in my office next door to her lesson and obviously had the door open - luckily I work with understanding people. We’re also very lucky because we have space and resources so we have sufficient computers and bandwidth for us to continue work whilst the lesson is on.”

– Parent

“Finding a place in our small house to enable a noisy lesson whilst home educating other children.”

– Parent

Challenges can be increased for families with shared custody.

“My child lives between two households. Furthermore I have been a key worker during the COVID-19 pandemic, which means it has not been easy to establish a routine so far. We have also had to self-isolate as one parent has experienced symptoms consistent with COVID-19. But we have muddled through and will continue to do so.”

– Parent



Some young musicians, and their parents, have found that motivation has been difficult, although this may be related to the current exceptional circumstances more than the online nature of the lessons.

“My child feels completely overwhelmed by the amount of school assignments, messages and new digital platforms, as well as depressed by the social isolation, so it is hard to motivate her to practise her violin between lessons. It is not that she has too much work, but there is information overload, all of it via digital communications. There are many emails to parents from brilliant initiatives... but she will not engage because again it contributes to the digital overload. I am sure other children experience similar challenges.”

– Parent

One young musician faced a specific challenge that serves as a timely reminder that not all challenges we face are related to the current exceptional circumstance and changes to the delivery model.

“Broken finger!! But not about the online lessons.”

– Young Musician, Guitar



Enablers

Centralised communications and support

Centralised support and guidance from the office team included:

- Email communications
- How-to-guides
- Online forms
- Evaluation and reporting

These were valued by parents and young musicians, who felt they contributed to their ability to get started, and overcome initial challenges.

“The clear email before hand setting out the expectations and the calm, friendly nature of the teacher.”

– Parent

“Appreciate it when teachers and educators ask us families how virtual learning is working for us at home. Thanks @MusicHubSouth for your online survey. Hoping to see more schools do this too. We’re in this together and two way dialogue is so important for good learning.”

– Parent (via Twitter)

Additional allocation of staff time

In the first week of delivery, staff were directed to allocate as many of their working hours as required to overcome initial set up challenges. After this initial period, there grew a consensus from team meetings, that, for each twenty minute lesson, a further ten minutes of time was required to undertake communication with parents and support technical challenges at the start of each lesson.

Making use of this additional time, has allowed staff to develop, and maintain, helpful support strategies..

“Taking time at the beginning of the lessons to check the student is sitting facing the camera, taking some time setting up screens on both sides of the lesson, teacher and student.”

– Music Teacher

“Being able to contact parents to try and sort connections etc. Trying to maintain calm when technology is not working as it should.”

– Music Teacher



Overcoming technical challenges

Across parents, young musicians and teachers, there were a number of recurring strategies which emerged to overcome technical issues, many deploying a “turn it off and on again” approach, which seemed to work to overcome some of the technical issues.

Another recurring strategy from parents, staff and young musicians, was to draw upon their own pre-existing technical knowledge and experience, as well as that of those around them.

“Useful to have experience with online classes for school too.”

– Parent

“My daughter is helping me and I’m learning more about on-line learning.”

– Parent

“I allow guidance from the students, they may have thought about a solution to a performance issue.”

– Music Teacher

And, as remarked on other responses, there is a need to apply personal qualities that characterize successful problem-solving in other areas of life

“Patience, encouragement and perseverance.”

– Parent

“The teacher’s optimism and passion for teaching.”

– Parent



Adaptive practice

Teachers, as well as young musicians and parents, have also adapted their teaching and learning practices in response to the challenges and limitations of digital contact. These include:

- Emailing digital copies of music ahead of lessons starting
- Communicating through a variety of methods (e.g. in the “chat” functionality, as well as email)
- Making use of additional, specialist equipment (e.g. external microphones, headphones, higher quality webcam, etc)²
- Adapting communication methods in response to delayed audio and video, including
 - Breaking speech and music up in to larger chunks
 - Avoiding synchronous playing between teacher and young musician
 - Developing additional resources – backing tracks, videos, etc – that support asynchronous teaching
- Careful testing, selection and structuring of learning activities, building up a new repertoire of successful approaches to overcome technological constraints

“I am structuring the lessons more clearly: focussing on one or two aspects that need improving; choosing from a technical skill, new interpretation or expression skills or some theoretical knowledge the student needs and similar.”

– Music Teacher

“Before I maybe would have thought that online lessons would be very inefficient and that it wouldn’t be possible to work on tone or technique as well, and whilst it’s obviously much better in person, I’ve discovered that once you adapt to the change in sound over video call, it’s still possible to work on all these things provided the internet is running smoothly.”

– Young Musician, Violin

“I have found that I have to be a lot more focussed on the lesson. For example if the sound quality is not being accurately reproduced you need to watch very carefully what the pupil is doing to give you an idea.”

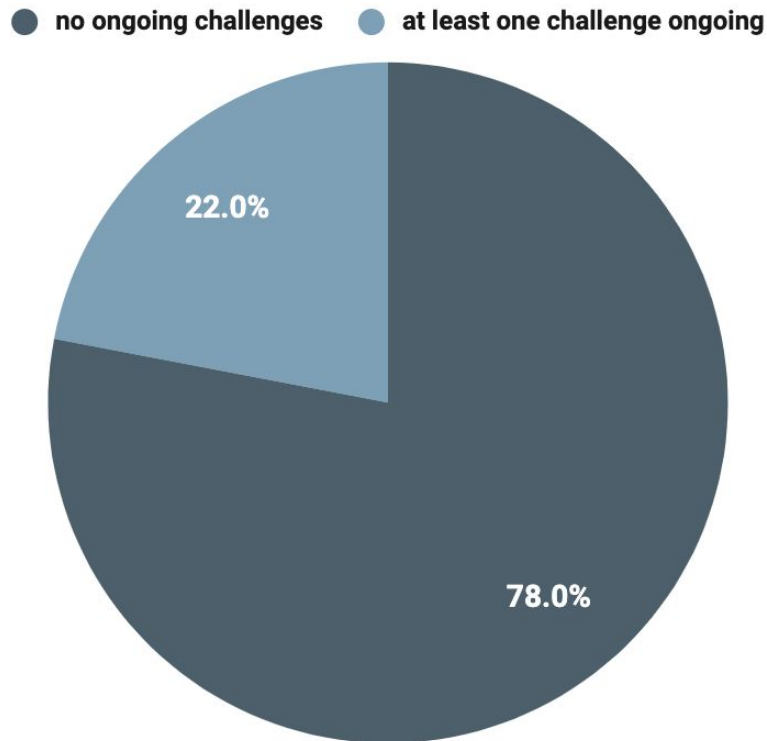
– Music Teacher

² It is worth noting that, although some participants reported that higher quality audio, video and computer equipment resulted in increased quality of learning, this was not universal, and certainly, there is not enough evidence to suggest that expensive “professional” level equipment is a requirement for effective online music teaching.



Overcoming Ongoing Challenges

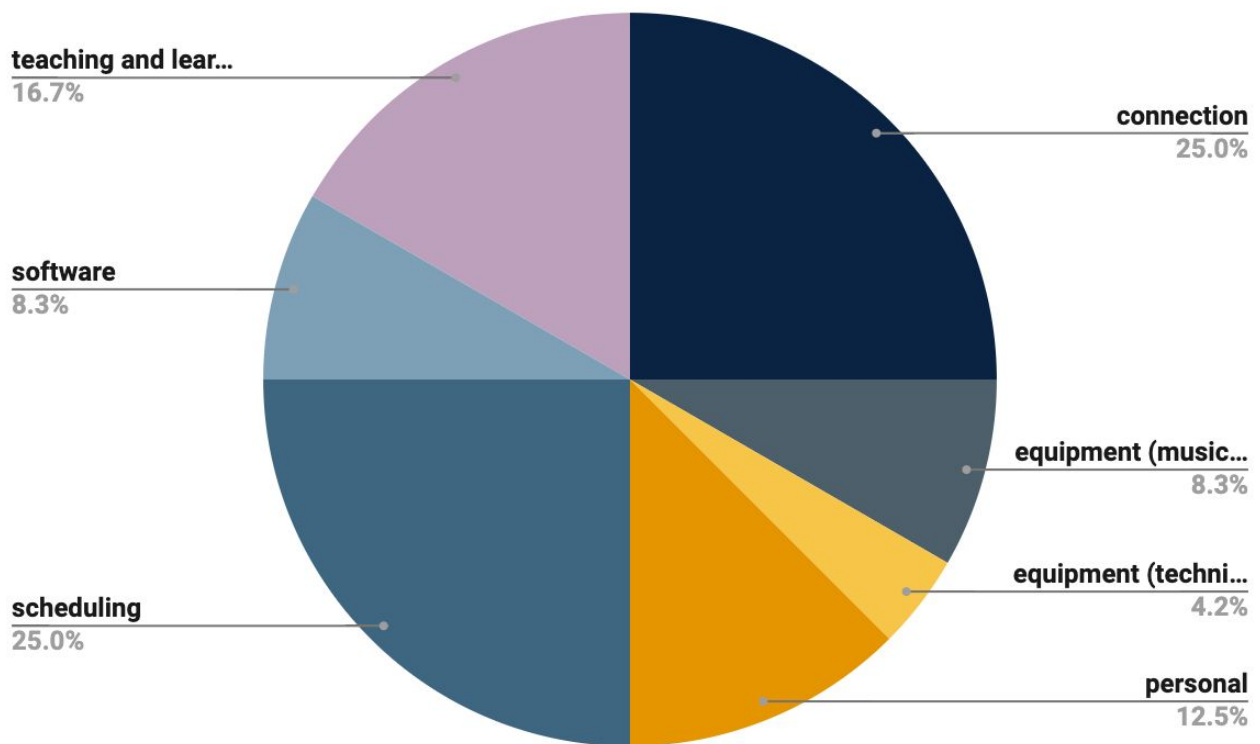
Of the families who responded, 22% reported ongoing challenges still to be overcome, down from 72% who had reported initial barriers.



Of the families reporting ongoing challenges, internet connection issues remained the largest technical barrier, and issues around scheduling home learning, particularly in the current context, still remained.

Asking families to report ongoing challenges also led to the emergence of a new type of barrier, specifically focussed on aspects of teaching and learning, suggesting that families are moving beyond initial setup considerations, and thinking about the session content and delivery, and the impact the virtual environment has on the learning experience itself. This is an area to look to understand more deeply in future consultations.





There were some requests to enable the use of other platforms – Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Skype, as well as School Virtual Learning Environments were all suggested.

Ongoing challenges to be considered, particularly if a context of increased social distancing continues, include:

- Allowing for the social aspects of music-making to be shared in a digital environment
- Finding strategies for overcoming issues of instrumental setup and care

Development Strategy:

- If online music lessons are to continue to be part of an expanded offer, then alternative technology platforms should be explored, and policies and procedures to support their use to be developed
- Staff should have the opportunity to exchange emerging good practice and success strategies, and these should be shared with parent and young musicians
- Explore opportunities to develop online social music-making
- Explore strategies for supporting instrumental care whilst socially distanced

