

Lifelong Learning Pathways for Music and the Arts

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**Lifelong
Education
Institute**

LEI Thinks

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Chair:

- **Dr Marius Ostrowski**, Executive Director, **Lifelong Education Institute**.

Speakers:

- **Jillian Barker**, Director of Learning and Participation, **Royal Opera House**
- **Sean Gregory**, Executive Director of Innovation & Engagement, **Guildhall School of Music & Drama**
- **Dr Claire Mera-Nelson**, Music Director, **Arts Council England**
- **Prof Silvina Milstein**, Professor of Music (Emerita), **King’s College London**
- **Juliet Wood**, Clinical Lead for Music Therapy, **Chelsea & Westminster Hospital**

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TESTIMONIALS

‘Against a backdrop of funding cuts to arts organisations and the regressive devaluing of music and the arts in schools and universities, it’s hugely inspiring to find a forum which brings together people who are not just passionate about the future of the arts in the UK, but full of practical and creative ideas about how to ensure they flourish.’

Prof Julian Johnson | Regius Professor of Music at Royal Holloway University of London and British Academy Wolfson Research Professor (2022-25).

‘The webinar hosted by the Lifelong Education Institute was truly enlightening. The diverse panel of speakers provided invaluable insights into the societal importance of music and the arts. I particularly appreciated the perspectives shared by Claire Mera-Nelson and Professor Silvina Milstein, which sparked engaging discussions on the challenges and rewards of pursuing music professionally. The event left me inspired and motivated to advocate for the continued thriving of music and arts education.’

Vivek Haria | Composer, Trustee of British Youth Opera, and member of London Philharmonic Orchestra's NewGen Board.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thinkpiece outlines the significance of lifelong learning pathways in music and the arts, recognising their profound impact on personal development, cultural enrichment, and societal well-being. Embracing a holistic approach, we examine the multifaceted benefits of lifelong engagement with music and the arts, highlighting their cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. We emphasise the importance of fostering a culture of lifelong learning that transcends formal education, encouraging individuals to pursue their passions and explore new avenues of artistic expression throughout their lives.

Furthermore, we examine current opportunities in music and the arts, ranging from structured educational programmes to informal community-based initiatives. Drawing on examples from across the UK, we showcase innovative approaches to music and arts education and outreach, emphasising inclusivity, accessibility, and diversity. Ultimately, this thinkpiece serves as a call to action for policymakers, educators, and cultural stakeholders to prioritise lifelong learning in music and the arts. By investing in robust educational infrastructure, supporting creative initiatives, and promoting lifelong engagement, we can unlock the transformative potential of music and the arts, fostering a more vibrant, equitable, and culturally enriched society for generations to come.

Recommendations

1. Invest in upskilling the current teaching workforce through **arts - and music-based continuous professional development (CPD)** opportunities.
2. Forge strong channels for active, reciprocal relationships founded on the **sharing of expertise** between schools, local government, central government, and organisations with specific focuses in music and the arts to foster meaningful dialogues across the industry to communicate barriers to learning, industry issues, and sharing best practices.
3. Strengthen **musical literacy from a young age** to allow pathways to be accessible as the individual matures, and foster more opportunities at a grassroots level to create an accessible musical pathway for learners.
4. Create **more funding for community projects** which will benefit all learners, and provide more access to music and the arts training through a centralised pot by central government, to be accessed by local governments, school bodies, and non-profit organisations to increase community engagement and access to the arts.
5. Enhance **skills transferability across curriculums** to aid personal development. Creating links between English and mathematical knowledge, as well as social skills

such as public speaking and expression of thought learnt in an artistic environment, are not mutually exclusive to one sector.

6. Increase **adult participation in music and the arts**, whether it be socially or professionally, and accessible to all regardless of financial ability, and recognise the importance of community-based projects and organisations in providing opportunities to individuals.
7. Encourage the **use of new technologies** to enhance engagement and development of new practices in an increasingly digital age from within schools to allow learners to access further opportunities in their future pathways.
8. Promote **career opportunities within the music and the arts industry** to engage young talent within the sector and **dispel the misconception that music and art qualifications do not hold value** in comparison to engineering and STEM subject qualifications.
9. Safeguard engagement in music and the arts from **financial barriers** within schools until the age of 18 to allow for access to resources and teaching across a child's education, regardless of socioeconomic background.
10. Increase **promotion of music and the arts in providing health services** to children, young people and adults through services such as music therapy and provide more services which use music and art as a foundation for social well-being.

1 INTRODUCTION

The United Kingdom has a rich and diverse perspective on music and the arts, which is rooted in centuries of cultural heritage and innovation. Renowned globally for its contributions to music, literature, theatre, visual arts, and more, the UK has a dynamic and thriving arts scene that reflects its multicultural identity. From classical composers like Benjamin Britten to more contemporary icons such as The Beatles, the UK has consistently produced influential artists who have shaped the global cultural landscape. Institutions like the Royal Academy of Arts, the Royal Shakespeare Company, Edinburgh Fringe Festival and the National Theatre exemplify the country's commitment to artistic excellence and innovation, providing platforms for both established and emerging talents to showcase their work.

Music and the arts have served as key pillars of human expression, creativity, and cultural identity. They also play a profound role in fostering lifelong learning and personal development. Involvement with music and the arts enriches our lives in myriad ways, nurturing intellectual curiosity, emotional intelligence, and social connectivity. At its core, music is a universal language that transcends boundaries of age, nationality, and background. Similarly, the arts encompass a diverse array of disciplines, from visual arts to theatre, dance, and literature, that stimulate creativity, imagination, and critical thinking.

The culture, music, and arts industries are an important part of the UK economy, contributing £10.8 billion in 2019. The UK Government, however, published in May 2021 on its education hub blog, various facts about funding provisions for music and the arts. It stated that although universities and colleges would continue to receive the full tuition fee loan for students (up to £9,250 p.a.) and there would further provision through the Strategic Priorities Grant, there would be a reprioritisation of taxpayers' money towards subjects which support the future of the National Health Service (NHS) such as science, technology, and engineering, to meet specific labour needs. Although the Government stated that this move does not mean that they are devaluing the arts, it is hard to not draw this conclusion when the allocation of a fixed £79 million budget for the National Plans for Music Education (NPME) has not changed in 5 years.

Music Education Hubs also provide a network of organisations, formed of 119 councils, schools, art organisations, community/voluntary organisations, and other hubs, which collaborate together in order to provide specialist music education to around 90% of state-funded schools. This provision, however, is restricted to the ages of 5–14 years old. Music and the arts are statutory in the national curriculum and remain compulsory in all council-run schools in England up to the age of 14, though after this point, uptake to take a GCSE, A-level, or further education drastically decreases.

This thinkpiece therefore explores the lifelong learning pathways in music and the arts, and how the benefits of music and the arts extend beyond the confines of academic or formalised education. They can be experienced through lifelong hobbies, community ensembles, or amateur performances, where individuals can continue to derive joy and meaning from their involvement in creative pursuits. Moreover, as society confronts the challenges of an increasingly complex and interconnected world, the ability to think creatively, collaborate effectively, and adapt to change becomes ever more essential, making the cultivation of artistic literacy and expression an invaluable asset for lifelong learning and personal enrichment.

2 LIFELONG LEARNING PATHWAYS FOR MUSIC AND THE ARTS

Music and arts education in the UK plays a vital role in preserving heritage and tradition while embracing innovation and diversity, reflecting the nation's rich cultural tapestry. Moreover, they contribute to the economy by nurturing talent and fostering industries such as music production, visual arts, and performance arts. Equitable access to quality music and arts education is essential for addressing social inequalities, empowering marginalised communities, and promoting inclusivity. As such, investing in robust music and arts education and programmes not only helps to cultivate future artists and performers but also develops a society that values creativity, expression, and cultural appreciation. In the UK, music and arts education should not just be viewed as optional extras; they are fundamental components of a holistic and thriving educational system.

The transmission process in the development of music students is not linear. Instead, exposure from a young age is key to fostering a lifelong connection to the subject to increase the chances of engagement later in life. Children are introduced to music through both the family/guardian unit and through schooling. At school, they are then potentially exposed to individual instrumental or singing tuition, musical group activities, or youth orchestras. Entering into secondary school, they have the option to choose music to gain a qualification at GCSE, which provides the foundation to take a music A-Level, or to join a junior conservatory, specialist music school, or college, to pursue further study. The option to undertake further study can then be pursued at undergraduate level at a university or at a music college, with an emphasis on individualised tuition and the presence of distinguished music professionals amongst the staff.

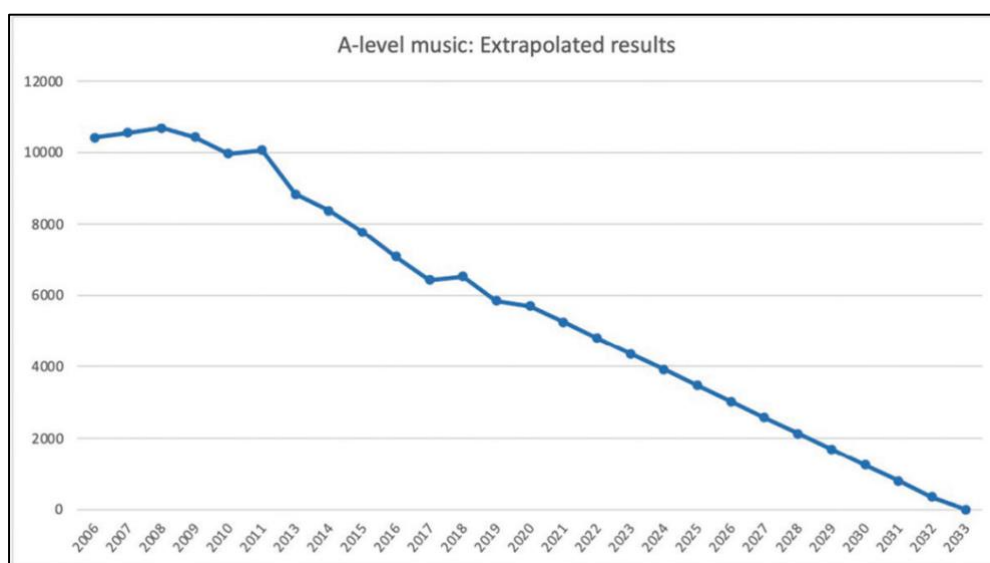
This section provides a detailed overview of current music and the arts education legislation in the UK, as well as delving into the avenues available for individuals and organisations seeking continual development and enhancement within these creative domains. From tailored training programmes to more curated workshops, from specialised courses to innovative digital platforms, the landscape of lifelong learning in music and the arts should offer diverse opportunities for growth and skill refinement. Through this examination, we therefore aim to uncover the most effective strategies and resources for fostering ongoing education and professional advancement in these dynamic fields.

2.1 Music education in the UK

Disparities in education are not a new phenomenon. A 2020 report published by the Education Policy Institute found that the attainment gap in music GCSE was as high as 20 months between disadvantaged pupils and their more advantaged peers. This was

the highest gap of any subject studied at GCSE level, and these disadvantaged pupils participated at a 38.3% lower rate than non-disadvantaged pupils. Education and provision for music and for the arts should not have to suffer as a result of a lack of financial input, and what is equally alarming for the UK's cultural sector is the significant decline in the uptake of music A-Level. Based on current trends in uptake of the qualification (see figure 1), by 2033 no students will be taking music.

Figure 1: The decline of students entered for A-level Music since 2006, with a trend extrapolation to 2033. Source: Adam Whittaker and Martin Faultley, *Music Teacher Magazine*, August 2021.



In the UK, there is a much-admired tradition of composition and music research which takes place at universities and conservatoires. The future of music is nevertheless at risk if the current low A-Level trend continues, which feeds the UK higher education system. While conservatoires today have generally embraced a curriculum comparable to universities, their provision is more vocational in character and entry requires an outstanding level of attainment as a performer or composer by age 18. In contrast, music university courses are applicable to a much larger cohort of students who benefit from the richness of a broad cultural environment and scrutinised curriculum. Entry into university generally requires music at A-Level and some competence as an instrumentalist or as a singer. However, this requirement is changing, with an increasing number of music departments accepting students without this qualification in an attempt to raise numbers. Music degrees allow students to develop as performers to an advanced level, but universities as institutions themselves have a long and rich history from the 1960s of producing internationally renowned musicologists and composers from their music departments.

Fewer and fewer children also have access to instrumental one-to-one tuition and a musical instrument with which to practice. Very few state-funded schools offer music as an A-Level due to the lack of uptake and qualified staff which make music an ineffective course to run, and in several areas of the UK there is no provision at all. Music departments at universities are seeing this effect and are beginning to move towards admitting students who cannot play an instrument and/or read music in order to gain funding and keep the department functioning. University departments are not replacing retiring staff and can no longer teach the customary range and depth of technical subjects which forces the study of music at university to move away from technical and professional training and towards a focus on cultural studies. As a result of these factors influencing how university music departments operate, they face closure as they cannot recruit from the low student numbers year after year. There is an increasing reliance upon the recruitment of foreign students to fill the gaps and places which home students cannot – and within this, the proportion of state school students is steadily shrinking.

Figure 2: An overview of music education in the UK as defined by the National Curriculum.

Music Education in the UK	
Key Stage 1	<p>Pupils should be taught to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide specialist facilities and equipment for children’s surgery in low-resource settings. ▪ 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 interrelated dimensions of music.
Key Stage 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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.
Key Stage 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pupils should build on their previous knowledge and skills through performing, composing and listening.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ They should develop their vocal and/or instrumental fluency, accuracy and expressiveness. ▪ Understand musical structures, styles, genres and traditions, identifying the expressive use of musical dimensions. ▪ They should listen with increasing discrimination and awareness to inform their own practice. ▪ Utilisation of technologies appropriately and appreciate and understand a wide range of musical contexts.
University	<p>Students will learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Theory ▪ Composition ▪ Performance ▪ Technical skills ▪ Access to technology <p>Programmes are based on the development of the individual capability in music as well as being provided with a broad-based curriculum.</p>

In England, music education is delivered through the National Curriculum (see figure 2). Although the Government provides provision for students to engage in high-quality music education that should engage and inspire pupils to develop a love of music, educational success is attributed to whether or not an individual has access to additional lessons to become proficient in singing or an instrument. The curriculum in England aims to develop a critical engagement with music, where pupils can have the opportunity to compose and listen to the musical canon. However, the responsibility of this important education often falls on teachers who may have minimal training or engagement with the intricacies of music teaching due to a lack of specialised teaching staff.

In Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) provides the framework for music education within the Scottish education system. The CfE is designed into experiences and outcomes, where emphasis is placed upon opportunities to experience inspiration and enjoyment. Creating and performing music will be prominent for all learners to develop their vocal and instrumental skills, explore sounds and musical concepts, and for learners to use their imagination and skills to create ideas and compositions. The system is broken into five stages: early, first, second, third, and fourth. Through stages early to second, pupils should be inspired by a range of stimuli, able to work on their own or with others, express and communicate their ideas, thoughts, and feelings through musical activities. In third and fourth, this shifts to look at terminology,

conceptual frameworks, and composition. This looks at pupils being able to use their voice and/or musical instruments to experiment with melody, rhythm, harmony, timbre, and structure to develop increasingly sophisticated compositions and utilise technologies to enhance performance.

In Wales, music education is provided through the National Plan for Music Education. Wales has formed a National Music Service which will work with other organisations to provide equal access and opportunity to play, sing, take part in, and make music. Within the service, a national instrument, resources, and equipment library was created, which is central in providing accessibility to individuals who may have otherwise struggled to access music lessons and instruments due to the costs associated with learning and hiring equipment. Within schools, 'First Experiences' will be provided to everyone aged 3 to 11, where opportunities to play instruments, sing, use technology, make music, learn musical skills, and cultural exposure to multiple forms of music will be organised. 'Live Music Experiences' will be provided to everyone aged 3 to 16 to engage young people with live and digital performances through listening or taking active participation and exposure to inspire further study and career pathways in the music sector. Music tuition is offered to everyone aged 3 to 16, and will be provided to anyone regardless of where they live in Wales where access may have previously been restricted and combated through online lessons. Music pathways are for everyone aged 11 to 16 to take part in local and regional music experiences, influence your own learning pathway, and further develop knowledge of career pathways.

In Northern Ireland, music provision is defined by the Northern Ireland Curriculum for children from pre-school to age 16. All learners must study music as part of the statutory curriculum from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3. Throughout the curriculum, pupils should progressively develop their thinking skills and personal capabilities, communication, and use of information and communication technologies. Music in the Northern Ireland Curriculum focuses, at pre-school level, on enabling the learner to explore and express their feelings, develop creativity, self-confidence, and self-esteem, and respond to beats and rhythms to provide a strong foundation for early reading and arithmetic. Foundation stage enables pupils to work creatively with sounds, sing and perform with multiple instruments, and listen and respond to their own and others' music. Key Stage 1 and 2 focus on creative investigation and experimentation with sound, singing and performing with simple instruments, and start discussions on characteristics and features in their own and other's compositions. Key Stage 3 focuses on opportunities for individuals as contributors to society, the economy, and the environment, and be able to demonstrate skills and the application of knowledge and understanding in relation to music production. Key Stage 4 has no set content, although schools must offer access to at least one course which will lead to a qualification in the area of music.

To provide a comprehensive music curriculum which is accessible to all students regardless of age, class, and region, devolved governments must work with regional organisations. The creation of an accessible, centralised music service which provides links between organisations, schools, universities, and institutions is key to upskilling all students regardless of age, and puts the learner at the centre to foster positive relationships with a lifelong music education. Wales's music library, which provides access to instruments for children in Wales, would provide a model for lifelong music access to be expanded to all learners at all stages of life. Music is a subject that relies upon constant upskilling, and provision should not be limited to those who can either afford it or are fortunate enough to have access to instruments and lessons.

To revert the trend and the vanishing of the rich tradition of excellence that has distinguished British musical education over the past fifty years, it is clear that investment is needed in:

1. Creating a centralised accessible music provision service in each of the four nations.
2. Establishing the right for all children to learn a musical instrument or singing to a high standard at no cost to their family/guardian from primary school onwards.
3. Comprehensive provision of music GCSE and A-Levels at state schools.
4. Funding of individualised tuition at tertiary level that has been a hallmark of music education provision.

2.2 Arts education in the UK

In England, the national curriculum for art and design aims to ensure that all pupils produce creative work, exploring their ideas and recording their experiences; become proficient in drawing, painting, sculpture and other art, craft and design techniques; evaluate and analyse creative works using the language of art, craft and design; gain knowledge of great artists, craft makers, and designers; and understand the historical and cultural development of their art forms. Drama is not included in the national curriculum as a subject in its own right until GCSE level. It is referenced within the national curriculum guidance especially in creative writing when devising scripts, role-play to explore characters when reading, exploring language, and experimenting with movement and expression.

In Scotland, drama education is covered by the expressive arts curriculum, which encompasses the areas of art and design, dance, drama, and music. The curriculum promotes interdisciplinary links to appeal to the interests of its learners as well as aspiring to foster partnerships with professional arts companies, creative adults, and cultural organisations. Scottish education in the arts structures itself around not just through providing community links between schools and institutions but builds actively upon the expertise of external organisations to build relationships with

learners to create successful, confident, responsible and effective learners, individuals, citizens, and contributors to society. The curriculum importantly stresses the development of a lifelong appreciation of, and participation in, the expressive arts and cultural activities, and is framed to provide opportunities for inspiration and enjoyment for learners to engage in an area which had previously been accessible to those who participated in extra-curricular activities.

In Wales, the Expressive Arts Area of Learning and Experience spans across the five disciplines of art, dance, drama, film, digital media, and music. Each has its own knowledge and skills criteria and aims, but together share the 'creative process'. Education in this area encourages the development of knowledge, skills, and values to help guide learners to grasp opportunities and meet challenges across their lives; gain an understanding of and an appreciation of societies and cultures within Wales and in the wider world to explore differences; and make expressive arts accessible to all learners through an inclusive approach. Experiencing the expressive arts is stated in the Welsh government's approach to engage and progress learners physically, socially, and emotionally to aid individuals in becoming resilient, healthy, and confident, as well as prepared to engage in wider society. Communication skills, performance skills, creative thinking, and problem solving are some of the key outcomes which the Welsh system values. To further facilitate this, participation and visits to performances and galleries to provide cultural exposure and experiences.

In Northern Ireland, the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Qualifications (CCEA) has established GCSE, GCE A-level, and AS-level qualifications in Moving Image Arts (MIA). The creation of qualifications targeting specifically at the arts seeks to recognise the growing importance of the creative industries in Northern Ireland and are working to include the film industry. CCEA is keen to promote MIA, however, the number of students taking these qualifications is small, with only around 1,500 students taking the MIA GCSE or A-level qualifications. Provision for the arts is statutory in the Northern Irish curriculum up to key stage 3, though the small uptake in students taking arts-related courses highlights the significant barriers to embedding creativity and the arts in the curriculum in schools in Northern Ireland. Teacher numbers are also on the decline, which adds to aiding further barriers to experienced and dedicated input for all.

2.3 Music and arts programmes in the UK

Music and arts programmes in the UK have a crucial role in nurturing creativity, fostering cultural appreciation, and promoting social cohesion. These initiatives help to provide platforms for individuals of all ages and backgrounds to engage with diverse artistic expressions, from classical music to contemporary visual arts. In addition to enriching the lives of participants, music and arts programmes are key contributors to the cultural vibrancy of local communities and broader society. They offer

opportunities for talent development, skill acquisition, and personal growth, helping individuals build confidence, resilience, and a sense of achievement.

Investing further in music and arts initiatives would enable the UK to cultivate not just a thriving creative economy, but also nurture a society that is more inclusive and culturally enriched (see figure 3). Organisations such as Arts Council England, for example, play a central role in championing the arts across the nation. Established in 1946, it operates as the national development agency for the arts in England, with a mission to promote creativity, nurture emerging talents, and ensure that the arts are accessible to all. At the core of its work also lies a commitment to supporting a diverse range of artistic endeavours, spanning visual arts, literature, theatre, music, dance, and more. Through strategic funding allocations, Arts Council England works to empower artists, arts organisations, and cultural institutions to innovate, collaborate, and engage with audiences on both local and global scales. One of its key functions is to distribute public funding to sustain and enrich the cultural landscape, thereby fostering artistic excellence while promoting greater inclusivity and diversity. This funding enables the development of innovative projects, the creation of new works, and the preservation of heritage assets, ensuring that England's artistic heritage continues to thrive.

Figure 3: Other examples of key music and the arts initiatives in the UK

Music and the Arts initiatives in the UK	
ArtWorks Cymru	ArtWorks Cymru, located in Wales, is a collaborative initiative which is focused on advancing practice within participatory settings. It aims to facilitate the ongoing professional growth of artists at various career stages who engage in participatory settings, while also advocating for the significance of participatory arts.
BBC Proms	The BBC Proms is an annual series of concerts held predominantly at the Royal Albert Hall in London, featuring a wide range of classical music performances. It offers a platform for renowned orchestras, conductors, and soloists, as well as opportunities for emerging talents.
National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain (NYO)	The NYO is a prestigious organisation that provides advanced orchestral training to young musicians aged 13 to 19. It offers residential courses, workshops, and performances under the guidance of professional conductors and musicians.

<p style="text-align: center;">Royal Opera House Youth Opera</p>	<p>The Youth Opera programmes offered by the ROH give children between the ages of 7 and 13 comprehensive training in music and drama, engaging them in creative projects and providing opportunities to participate in acclaimed opera productions alongside the Royal Opera.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Sistema Scotland</p>	<p>Inspired by the El Sistema programme in Venezuela, Sistema Scotland provides free music education and orchestral training to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. It aims to transform lives through music, fostering social inclusion and personal development.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Streetwise Opera</p>	<p>Streetwise Opera is a charity that uses music to empower people who have experienced homelessness. It offers singing workshops, performances, and creative projects in homeless shelters and community centres across the UK.</p>

Furthermore, these programmes can serve as a conduit for social integration, improving cohesion among diverse individuals. They provide platforms for people from different backgrounds to come together, collaborate, and form meaningful connections through shared artistic endeavours. By offering opportunities for joint participation, celebration, and collective creativity, these initiatives contribute to the breaking down of barriers, promoting understanding, and building bridges within communities. Ultimately, they can serve as catalysts for building more inclusive societies where individuals from various walks of life can come together to celebrate their shared humanity through the universal language of art.

2.4 Lifelong Learning Pathways

Developing a culture of lifelong learning is paramount in fostering sustained interest in music and the arts, while also reaping their numerous benefits. In embracing the ethos of continual growth and exploration, individuals are encouraged to engage with music and the arts at various stages of their lives, which can lead to a deeper appreciation and understanding of these disciplines. Lifelong learning also encourages curiosity and experimentation, enabling individuals to explore diverse artistic genres, styles, and traditions.

Whether through formal instruction, community workshops, or independent study, lifelong learners should have the flexibility to pursue their interests and discover new passions within the realm of music and the arts. Furthermore, lifelong learning helps foster a sense of commitment and dedication to artistic pursuits, as people learn to recognise the value of ongoing practice and refinement. Through consistent

engagement, they can not only enhance their technical skills but develop a more profound connection to their chosen art forms, thereby finding meaning and fulfilment in the creative process. A culture of lifelong learning likewise promotes collaboration and exchange, as individuals are able to share their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives with others in a supportive and inclusive environment.

Furthermore, this collaborative spirit fuels innovation and creativity, inspiring new generations of artists and enthusiasts to explore and push the boundaries of artistic expression. Embracing lifelong learning allows individuals to unlock the full potential of music and the arts as transformative forces in their lives, advancing personal growth, cultural enrichment, and social connection for years to come (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Examples of key lifelong learning benefits from music and the arts

Key lifelong learning benefits	
Cognitive enhancement	Lifelong engagement with music and the arts has been shown to enhance cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and problem-solving skills.
Emotional well-being	Participation in music and arts activities can promote emotional expression, stress relief, and overall psychological well-being.
Creativity	Continuous learning and exploration in music and the arts stimulate creativity, encouraging individuals to think and express themselves authentically.
Cultural appreciation	Lifelong learning in music and the arts fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse cultural traditions, promoting cultural sensitivity and empathy.
Social connection	Participating in music ensembles, art classes, or cultural events provides opportunities for social interaction and community engagement, fostering a sense of belonging and connection.
Critical thinking	Analysing and interpreting artistic works cultivates critical thinking skills, encouraging individuals to question assumptions, challenge perspectives, and engage in thoughtful discourse.
Communication skills	Through artistic expression, individuals develop effective communication skills,

	learning to convey complex ideas and emotions in creative and compelling ways
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Music and the arts similarly offer flexible learning opportunities that cater to diverse interests and learning styles. Whether through formal education, community workshops, or online resources, people can engage with music and the arts at their own pace and according to their preferences. Flexible learning in these disciplines fosters creativity and promotes personal growth. It allows learners to explore new techniques, genres, and mediums while adapting to their schedules and commitments. Ultimately, flexible learning in music and the arts can empower individuals to pursue their passions, expand their horizons, and cultivate lifelong appreciation for creative expression.

Moreover, recognising and celebrating achievements in lifelong learning within music and the arts further underlines their importance in the UK. By acknowledging and honouring the dedication and accomplishments of individuals engaged in continual learning and skill development, society reaffirms the value and impact of music and arts education. Awards, certifications, and accolades can also serve as powerful motivators, inspiring learners of all ages to persist in their educational pursuits and strive for excellence. Furthermore, celebrating achievements in lifelong learning helps to cultivate a culture of appreciation for the arts, instilling pride in artistic achievements and fostering a sense of community among artists, educators, and enthusiasts.

These celebrations not only highlight individual achievements but also serve as opportunities to showcase the collective talent and creativity within the UK’s music and arts communities. Events such as awards ceremonies, exhibitions, and performances bring people together, fostering connections and collaborations that enrich the cultural landscape. They provide platforms for emerging artists to gain recognition and exposure, contributing to the vibrancy and diversity of the arts scene. Recognising achievements in lifelong learning can also have far-reaching societal benefits. By elevating the status of arts education and celebrating its outcomes, the UK demonstrates its commitment to fostering a well-rounded and culturally literate populace. This, in turn, helps to counteract the narrowing of educational priorities and the marginalisation of the arts in mainstream discourse. By championing lifelong learning in music and the arts, the UK reaffirms its dedication to nurturing creativity, fostering innovation, and enriching the lives of its citizens.

2.5 A sustainable future for music and the arts?

Forging a sustainable future for the creative industry sector is dependent upon creating a network which students can map a career pathway through school and into the sector. Currently, attitudes towards music and the arts are based on an inherent talent, seen either by students as a subject which they either 'can' or 'cannot' do. Unlike English or Maths, which usually fosters the same attitudes within each school cohort, they are statutory and are given a sense of value through the schooling system, whereas music and the arts are not. Through an ingrained devaluation of music and arts qualifications, the sector suffers as less people are willing to embark upon a pathway in the industry with a lack of career knowledge outside of the traditional routes into theatre and music production.

The Independent Society of Musicians (ISM) has provided some valuable data on teacher trainees and retention within the subject of music and the arts. Entry into secondary music teaching has consistently under-recruited in 12 out of the past 13 years, with target recruitment levels drastically reducing each year by the Department for Education. In the academic year 2008–09, there were 808 new secondary music trainees registered on courses, though in 2022–23 this figure was at 301 against a target of 470. In the NFER forecast of final recruitment published in September 2023, music had recruited only 30% of the target of 790, a number around 237 which is 60 fewer than the previous year.

There is an urgent need to promote awareness of the struggles of maintaining teachers in the UK, and especially those in music and the arts. The decline of applications onto teacher training courses within the subject will have significant consequences. The lack of qualified teachers will prevent education from being passed down into new academic cohorts and engagement will ultimately pay the price. The snowball effect of a lack of music education being provided for in schools will infiltrate into the sector where professions which rely on a music base: teaching, theatre, therapy, to name a few, are put in jeopardy.

3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This thinkpiece has explored the significance of lifelong learning pathways in music and the arts, recognising their profound impact on personal development, cultural enrichment, and societal well-being. Through outlining current provisions revolving around training in the music and the arts, we emphasise the importance of fostering a culture of lifelong learning that transcends formal education, encouraging individuals to pursue their passions and forge lifelong connections to music and the arts.

Furthermore, we examine current opportunities in music and the arts, ranging from structured educational programmes to informal community-based initiatives. Drawing on examples from across the UK, we showcase innovative approaches to music and arts education and outreach, emphasising inclusivity, accessibility, and diversity. Engaging with art forms allows people to explore different perspectives, challenge preconceptions, and cultivate empathy by immersing themselves in narratives and experiences beyond their own. Through artistic expression, individuals learn to communicate complex ideas, emotions, and experiences in ways that transcend linguistic barriers, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

As we move forward, let us continue to prioritise investment in music and the arts. There is a distinct lack of funding for music and the arts provision, both within formal educational structures and for external organisations. To create engagement, finance needs to be removed as a barrier to learning through central government investment which values cultural education and provides transferable skills.

Recommendations

1. Invest in upskilling the current teaching workforce through **arts- and music-based continuous professional development** (CPD) opportunities.
2. Forge strong channels for active, reciprocal relationships founded on the **sharing of expertise** between schools, local government, central government, and organisations with specific focuses in music and the arts to foster meaningful dialogues across the industry to communicate barriers to learning, industry issues, and sharing best practices.
3. Strengthen **musical literacy from a young age** to allow pathways to be accessible as the individual matures, and foster more opportunities at a grassroots level to create an accessible musical pathway for learners.
4. Create **more funding for community projects** which will benefit all learners, and provide more access to music and the arts training through a centralised pot by central government, to be accessed by local governments, school bodies, and non-profit organisations to increase community engagement and access to the arts.

5. Enhance **skills transferability across curriculums** to aid personal development. Creating links between English and mathematical knowledge, as well as social skills such as public speaking and expression of thought learnt in an artistic environment, are not mutually exclusive to one sector.
6. Increase **adult participation in music and the arts**, whether it be socially or professionally, and accessible to all regardless of financial ability, and recognise the importance of community-based projects and organisations in providing opportunities to individuals.
7. Encourage the **use of new technologies** to enhance engagement and development of new practices in an increasingly digital age from within schools to allow learners to access further opportunities in their future pathways.
8. Promote **career opportunities within the music and the arts industry** to engage young talent within the sector and **dispel the misconception that music and art qualifications do not hold value** in comparison to engineering and STEM subject qualifications.
9. Safeguard engagement in music and the arts from **financial barriers** within schools until the age of 18 to allow for access to resources and teaching across a child's education, regardless of socioeconomic background.
10. Increase **promotion of music and the arts in providing health services** to children, young people and adults through services such as music therapy and provide more services which use music and art as a foundation for social well-being.

ABOUT THE LIFELONG EDUCATION INSTITUTE

The **Lifelong Education Institute** (LEI) exists to promote learning and skills training for people at all ages and stages of their lives and careers. We believe that education should be available and accessible to everyone whenever and wherever they need it. Whether they are school leavers or university graduates, new recruits or long-serving employees, recent arrivals or long-term residents, working people or those who have entered retirement.

Our approach is based on four principles:

- Putting the lifelong learner first
- Building an integrated tertiary education system
- Bringing stakeholders together
- Looking to the four nations of the UK and beyond

Together, these principles underpin every part of our work, from research to advocacy, from convening to commentary. They are the bedrock on which we must build the 21st-century education system that the UK's learners urgently deserve.

The Lifelong Education Institute's Secretariat is hosted by the thinktank ResPublica. The Institute gets its strategic direction from its Advisory Board, which comprises prominent and forward-thinking figures in education and skills space. In addition, the Institute has asked political figures to form a Board of Patrons, who will advise on the current political environment, and help by progressing the Institute's positions in Whitehall.

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Lifelong Learning Pathways for Music and the Arts

This thinkpiece explores the significance of lifelong learning pathways in music and the arts, recognising their profound impact on personal development, cultural enrichment, and societal well-being. Through outlining current provisions revolving around training in the music and the arts, we emphasise the importance of fostering a culture of lifelong learning that transcends formal education, encouraging individuals to pursue their passions and forge lifelong connections to music and the arts.



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