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# Reshape Music: A report exploring the lived experience of Disabled musicians in education and beyond. October 2020

# Executive summary

## What is the research and why was it undertaken?

This research explores the experiences and perceptions of music-makers, music educators and music retailers about music opportunities for Disabled people.

Disabled people’s needs are poorly understood when it comes to music-making and music education. Disabled people make up over a fifth of the population and yet they are hugely under-represented in the music industry and in music education. The research aimed to gather a national dataset that could be used to inform policy to help reshape this imbalance.

The data was gathered by the Take it away Consortium, a partnership of organisations working together to support Disabled musicians. Funding from the National Lottery via Arts Council England enabled Youth Music to carry out this work.

The research findings are based on the results of three surveys that were distributed to different respondents: music makers (of all ages), music educators (specialists and non-specialists, across all settings), and music retailers (small to large and including both general and specialist outlets). Researcher Sarah Mawby led a series of sessions to interpret the findings with a team of eight co-researchers who are all Disabled musicians. Their interpretation forms the basis of this report.

## What barriers do Disabled people experience when it comes to making music?

### Finding the right instrument

The choice of instrument Disabled people learn is often dictated by their disability. Very few people reported that they were playing an instrument with an adapted feature. While a range of adaptations and accessible instruments exist to open up access to instrumental playing, there is a lack of knowledge about them. Very few parents and retailers would know where to source one.

Just over one quarter of Music Education Hub respondents reported that their Hub held specialist equipment or adapted instruments for Disabled children. Very few Disabled young people are participating in extra-curricular ensembles run by Music Education Hubs, limiting their ability to practice and progress. Progression is further compounded by many accessible instruments not being included in traditional graded exams.

### Purchasing an instrument

The majority of Disabled people who responded to the survey owned their own instruments. Many Disabled music-makers felt that music shops were generally accessible, however there is a lack of confidence and knowledge amongst music retailers when it comes to serving Disabled customers.

### Sourcing funding

There is a lack of knowledge among parents, educators and music retailers about sources of funding to support Disabled people to make music. Funding application processes and eligibility criteria can make funding schemes inaccessible.

### Accessing music lessons

Despite 80% of educators feeling confident adapting their practice to meet a range of needs, one quarter of music makers stated that their music lessons were not generally accessible. Just under half had found a teacher who met their learning needs. This suggests a need for teachers to be trained in inclusive practices, and greater inclusion of Disabled people in designing and delivering such training.

Most parents were not familiar with their local Music Education Hub and less than half of music retailers felt confident signposting Disabled customers to teachers who could meet their learning needs.

### Practicing and developing skills

Most Disabled musicians are making music at home or at school. Their participation in public music groups (such as orchestras or choirs) is very low, and less than one quarter are making music informally. Almost half reported access limitations when they were practicing an instrument to develop their skills. Fewer access limitations were reported when it came to playing for pleasure.

### Performance opportunities

Almost one third of music makers felt there were no suitable performance opportunities available to them and almost half had experienced a moderate or severe limitation in accessing instrumental performance opportunities in the last 12 months. The co-researchers stressed the need for performance opportunities to be appropriate to people’s musical aspirations. The inaccessibility of venues is a major barrier limiting participation.

### General barriers to access

When asked about barriers to access for Disabled people, the views of music makers were often very different to the views of music educators. This suggests that music educators may not fully understand the lived experience of their Disabled students.

## What does the research tell us and what needs to change?

Disabled people face significant barriers at every stage of the journey to becoming a musician. They are underrepresented in the education, amateur and professional spheres of our music industries. Their needs are often poorly understood and their lived experience is not being drawn on to open up access and make things more inclusive.

There are exclusionary barriers that prevent access to tuition, group playing, performance opportunities, music exams, and funding. These barriers can hinder musical progression at any career stage. We found involvement in music groups, both formal and informal, to be very low, meaning that Disabled people may also be missing out on the social benefits of playing with others. There are many Disabled people making a career from music, but their voices and experiences are often unheard.

At the end of the report, we have set out a series of recommendations directed to funders, educators, retailers, and all in the music industries. The recommendations are designed to achieve:

* Improved access and choice for Disabled musicians.
* Increased representation of Disabled people in the paid workforce and positions informing policy and practice.
* Increased knowledge and skills among the workforce to better support Disabled musicians.

Barriers to participation and progression are not insurmountable. They require positive action, and for people to work together. Crucially, the lived experience of Disabled people needs to be at the heart of any solution.

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