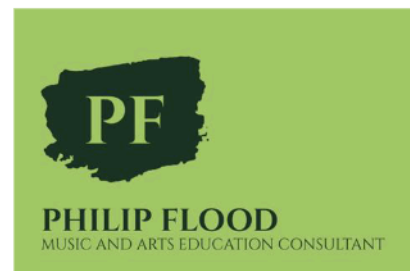


# Octagon Music Hub Needs Analysis

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## Executive Summary

### 1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of a comprehensive Needs Analysis commissioned by Octagon Music Hub to assess music education provision across Dorset and Somerset. Its purpose is to evaluate current provision, identify gaps and inequalities, and inform future strategic priorities.

The analysis is underpinned by a commitment to ensuring that all children and young people can access inclusive, high-quality, and sustainable music education, regardless of background or location. It reflects both national policy priorities and the specific challenges of a large, rural region.

### 2. What the Needs Analysis Involved

The Needs Analysis used a mixed methods approach to provide a robust evidence base. This included:

- Over 40 stakeholder interviews with schools, partners, and practitioners
- Five surveys capturing views from young people, parents, schools, workforce, and organisations
- Desk research of local and national data, strategies, and evaluations
- Visits to partner organisations and delivery settings

The research was structured around key questions exploring effectiveness, access, inclusion, progression, and future priorities. It examined provision across areas such as participation, workforce, partnerships, governance, and communication.

### 3. Key Findings

#### Strengths

- A strong foundation of music provision, particularly through schools and music services
- Effective Classroom Instrumental Learning (CIL) programmes providing universal first access
- A committed workforce and active partnerships across the region
- Clear evidence of music's positive impact on wellbeing, confidence, and engagement

#### Challenges

##### Uneven Access

Provision varies significantly across locations, with rural communities facing particular challenges related to transport and infrastructure.

##### Cost and Affordability

Financial barriers remain a major constraint, affecting access to lessons, instruments, and progression opportunities.

### **Low Awareness and Fragmentation**

There is no single, clear overview of available opportunities, leading to low awareness among families, schools, and communities.

### **Weak Progression Pathways**

While early access is strong, progression routes - particularly beyond primary and into post-16 - are inconsistent and unclear.

### **Workforce Pressures**

Schools rely increasingly on non-specialist teachers, while workforce development is constrained by time, capacity, and engagement challenges.

### **Inclusion Gaps**

Despite progress, access for SEND learners, disadvantaged groups, and rural communities remains uneven.

### **System Coordination**

Partnerships exist but are often informal and fragmented, limiting strategic alignment and overall impact.

## **4. Recommendations**

The recommendations focus on creating a more coherent, inclusive, and sustainable system, while building on existing strengths.

### **Improving Access and Equity**

- Develop a central digital platform to map all opportunities and pathways
- Target underserved areas through localised and mobile provision
- Expand financial support, including subsidies, bursaries, and instrument loan schemes

### **Strengthening Progression Pathways**

- Establish clear, visible progression routes from early years through to post-16 and careers
- Improve transitions between key stages and expand ensemble, performance, and career-related opportunities

### **Supporting the Workforce**

- Introduce flexible CPD models and prioritise training in inclusive practice and music technology
- Expand team-teaching approaches to build teacher confidence and sustainability
- Strengthen engagement with freelance practitioners and professional networks

### **Enhancing Partnerships and Coordination**

- Position the Hub as a strategic convenor, strengthening collaboration across organisations
- Map and formalise partnerships to improve coordination and reduce fragmentation

### **Improving Communication and Engagement**

- Create a single, accessible communication platform for schools, families, and partners
- Strengthen targeted communication and increase visibility of opportunities

### **Strengthening Leadership and Future Delivery Models**

- Improve governance clarity, data use, and stakeholder engagement, including youth voice
- Adopt more collaborative and long-term commissioning approaches focused on sustainability and local need

## **5. Conclusion**

The Needs Analysis highlights a music education system with strong foundations but significant inequalities in access, progression, and coordination. While high-quality provision exists, it is not consistently accessible to all young people across Dorset and Somerset.

By improving coordination, strengthening communication, addressing barriers, and investing in workforce and partnerships, the Octagon Music Hub has a significant opportunity to develop a more connected and equitable system.

Implementing these recommendations will support increased participation, clearer pathways, and more inclusive outcomes - ensuring that all young people can engage meaningfully with music and realise their creative potential.

## 1. About the Needs Analysis

### 1.1 Background

In October 2025 Octagon Music Hub Board commissioned Philip Flood, Music and Arts Education Consultant, to undertake a comprehensive Needs Analysis to assess music education provision across Dorset and Somerset.

### 1.2 Purpose of the Needs Analysis

1. Identify current strengths, gaps, and opportunities in music education across Dorset and Somerset.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness and reach of existing provision.
3. Inform the Hub's strategic priorities and SMART objectives.
4. Support the development of inclusive, sustainable, and high-quality music education pathways.
5. Provide evidence-based recommendations for future planning, delivery, and partnership development.

### 1.3 Scope of work

- Review and analyse existing data sources
- Conduct stakeholder consultations with:
  - Children and young people
  - Schools (lead schools and the wider schools' community)
  - Music educators and delivery partners (existing and potential)
  - Parents/carers and community representatives
- Assess the impact of the Hub's current programme of activity, including:
  - Inclusion strategy and targeted offers
  - Workforce development and CPD
  - School engagement and curriculum support
  - Progression pathways and youth leadership
  - Instrument access and capital investment
- Evaluate the integration and alignment of services across the two local authority areas.
- Identify barriers to participation and progression, particularly for underrepresented groups.
- Provide strategic recommendations for:
  - Governance and management
  - Communication and engagement
  - Environmental sustainability
  - Future commissioning and partnership models

## 1.4 Research questions

The research questions that this Needs Analysis addressed were developed collaboratively with the Octagon Music Hub commissioning team and provided the scope and focus of the analysis. The team provided a structure for the reporting and each data collection method was intended to gather data relevant to at least one of these questions:

1. What are the current strengths, gaps, and opportunities in music education across Dorset and Somerset?
2. How effective is existing provision in meeting the needs of young people?
3. What should the Hub's strategic priorities and SMART objectives be over the next 12-24 months?
4. How can the Octagon Music Hub support the development of inclusive, sustainable, and high-quality music education pathways?
5. What needs to be in place for effective future planning, delivery, and partnership development?

## 1.5 Data collection methods and analysis

- Desk research of existing data and reports
  - Arts Council England (ACE) reports, Department for Education (DfE) statistics, Classroom Instrumental Learning (CIL) surveys, evaluations, strategic plans, youth voice feedback, partner feedback and activity reviews
- Structured online and in person interviews with key stakeholders
  - Council and Music Service staff
  - Schools (including MATs, SEND, AP, and Early Years settings)
  - Music educators
  - Delivery and community partners
  - Wider partners, including Music Mark, ACE, and other Music Hubs/Services
- Online survey for parents/carers
- Online survey for children and young people
- Online surveys for schools, wider partners and the workforce
- Interviews and surveys followed the format of the ACE Music Hub Performance Framework<sup>1</sup> and include the following areas of focus:
  - Offer, reach and engagement
  - Quality of delivery
  - Programme of activity
  - Workforce development
  - Partnerships
  - Governance, leadership, and management

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<sup>1</sup> Arts Council England, Music Hub Performance Framework (February 2025), which sets out expectations for quality of delivery, workforce development and strategic partnership working across Music Hubs.

- Financial management and sustainability
- Environmental sustainability

## **1.6 Timeline**

- September – October 2025: Develop framework methodology, finalise stakeholder list, agree research questions, agree ethics, and gain permissions.
- November 2025 - February 2026: Conduct visits; online and in person interviews; focus groups; and online surveys
- December 2025: presentation to Board of broad themes and reflections
- February – March 2026: full data analysis
- March 2026: Needs Analysis Report (including executive summary, methodology, findings, and recommendations); Presentation of findings to the Octagon Music Hub Board and key stakeholders at meeting on 26 March

## 2. Contextual information on Dorset and Somerset

### 2.1 Dorset

The County of Dorset covers 2,653 square kilometres and is home to roughly 6.8% of the south west's population.

There are 11 areas of Dorset Council within the top 20% nationally for deprivation. Dorset comprises five distinct areas which are The Isle of Purbeck, West Dorset, North Dorset, East Dorset, and Weymouth and Portland.

Dorset has a population of 389,947 (Source: Office for National Statistics, mid-year estimate 2024).

The ONS mid-year population count for 2023 lists a total of 90,535 0-25 year olds, of whom 70,121 are 0-18 year olds, 47,178 are 5 - 16 year olds and 55, 413 are 5 - 18 year olds.

There is a total of 179 Unique Education Settings (Gov.uk), of which 156 provide are primary phase, 55 provide secondary phase, and 32 provide post-16 phase. There are 13 special schools and two FE Colleges.

20% of pupils are recorded as eligible for free school meals, whilst 14% are considered to have SEND.

There were 446 children looked after by Dorset as at year ending 31 March 2024 (a rate of 68 per 10,000 children aged under 18 years), compared to the national rate of 70 per 10,000 children. (Source: DFE 'Children looked after in England including adoption: 2021 to 2022' from return SSSA 903).

There is a total of 349 Early Years Settings and Providers (Local Authority, January 2024), of which five are Childcare on domestic premises, 34 are Nursery pre-school maintained/school run, 183 are Nursery pre-school private or voluntary, and 127 are Childminders.

The Council currently provides £600,000 of annual funding to a diverse range of arts, culture and heritage/museum organisations. In the last 5 years, over £87 million worth of capital and revenue funding has been externally invested into Dorset's arts, heritage and culture sector (Dorset Cultural Strategy 2021-2026).

There are four Youth Advice and Information Centres and seven Family Hub Networks. There 31 libraries, 47 museums, 260 venues, and 20 festivals, including Camp Bestival, End of the Road and We Out Here.

### 2.2 Somerset

The County of Somerset covers 3,452 square kilometres and is home to roughly 10% of the south west's population. The county is predominantly rural; 48% of the population lives in a

rural area compared to the average of 18% in England, making it one of the ten most rural authorities in the Country. Somerset has a population of around 588,328 (Source: Office for National Statistics, mid-year estimate 2024).

Somerset comprises West Somerset, Taunton Deane West, Taunton, Bridgwater, Langport, Ilminster and Chard, Wincanton and Castle Cary, Frome, West Mendip, Mendip, and North Sedgemoor.

The ONS mid-year population count for 2023 lists a total of 153,793 0-25 year olds, of which 118,003 are 0-18 year olds, 78,904 are 5 - 16 year olds and 90,157 are 5 - 18 year olds.

There is a total of 320 Unique Education Settings (Gov.uk), of which 280 provide primary phase, 79 provide secondary phase, and 45 provide post-16 phase. There are 28 special schools and three FE Colleges.

21.2% of pupils are recorded as eligible for free school meals, whilst 11.1% of pupils have a first language other than English – up from 8% in October 2022. 15.7% of the school population is classified as belonging to an ethnic group other than White British – up from 14.7% in the previous year (Source: DfE Spring School Census – Jan 2025).

There were 586 children looked after by Somerset LA as at year ending 31 March 2024, a rate of 50 per 10,000 children aged under 18 years. This compared to a national rate of 70 per 10,000 children. (Source: DfE 'Children looked after in England including adoption: 2024' from return SSDA 903).

There is a total of 472 Early Years Settings and Providers (LA Jan 2024), of which 11 are Nursery pre-school independent school run, two are Childcare on domestic premises, 66 are Nursery pre-school academy run, 43 are Nursery pre-school maintained/school run, 166 are Nursery pre-school private or voluntary, and 184 are Childminders.

According to the 'An Education for Life Strategy for Somerset 2023-28' (launched in March 2023), Somerset is in the top ten LAs nationally for the proportion of inadequate schools. Outcomes at all key stages are too low and in decline. Outcomes for disadvantaged children are also in decline, and there is a high percentage of exclusions, disproportionately affecting disadvantaged children and those with SEND.

This report also states that the following reasons for this are:

- Rural isolation and sparsity
- Geographic deprivation and lack of amenity
- Poor road, rail, bus, and digital connectivity
- Economic polarisation within many communities
- Disproportionately large independent schools' sector

Some of the highlights of cultural life in Somerset include 65 festivals and carnivals, (including Glastonbury), 95 venues, an extensive rural touring and exhibition programme and a vibrant 112 community arts organisations. There are 32 libraries and 42 museums. (Somerset Cultural Strategy, May 2024).



## 3. Data sources

### 3.1 The process

It was most practical to use four different approaches to implement the methodology, which consisted of online interviews, both structured and semi-structured, five online surveys, distributed via a variety of communication networks across Dorset and Somerset, ongoing desk research, encouraging stakeholders to provide evidence of their work as well as wider research including strategies and reports from both counties, and a visit during March 2026 to a number of partner organisations and other key stakeholders.

### 3.2 Interviews

Between October and December 2026, 27 structured interviews took place with individuals who work in music education and directly with young people across Dorset and Somerset. They included council officers, music service staff, representatives from youth and community charities, and wider existing and potential partners. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were undertaken online individually or in small groups.

All interviews focused on the five research questions at the centre of the Needs Analysis:

1. What are the current strengths, gaps, and opportunities in music education across Dorset and Somerset?
2. How effective is existing provision in meeting the needs of young people?
3. What should the Hub's strategic priorities and SMART objectives be over the next 12-24 months?
4. How can the Octagon Music Hub support the development of inclusive, sustainable, and high-quality music education pathways?
5. What needs to be in place for effective future planning, delivery, and partnership development?

In addition, between January and March 2026, a further 13 semi-structured or more informal interviews with additional partners and stakeholders were conducted, some of which were recommended by those interviewed initially.

All Interviewees were assured that their comments would remain anonymised. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded after which common themes and areas were identified.

An interim report was produced in December 2025 with a summary presented to the Octagon Music Hub Strategic Board on 3 December. Research from this initial stage, key areas for consideration, and these initial recommendations significantly inform this final report.

### 3.3 Surveys

Five surveys were developed, using the core research questions, and disseminated by a range of networks, including Local Authorities, partner organisations, Lead Schools, teacher networks, youth services and third sector organisations.

The surveys were for the following groups with numbers of final responses in brackets:

- Children and young people (35)
- Parents and carers (335)
- The music education workforce (47)
- Schools (71)
- Other organisations that work with young people (35)

Response rates across the surveys were lower than anticipated, despite an extended response period. As a result, findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than fully representative and have been considered alongside wider evidence sources.

However, there is much to consider across survey responses. Data from these surveys have been analysed and coded and inform this report's findings and recommendations.

### **3.4 Desk research**

There has been significant desk research undertaken since the Needs Analysis review was first commissioned in October 2025.

Documentation was provided by Octagon Music Hub, Dorset and Somerset Councils, and commissioned partners. There was also a comprehensive online search for research and evidence of music education and related activity for young people across both counties. Documentation that informs this report include:

- 2024-25 ACE annual survey data
- 2025-26 Commissioned partners funding agreements and related monitoring documentation
- Minutes of Hub meetings, including Special Interest Groups
- OMH Inclusion Strategy
- OMH Progression Strategy
- Lead Schools information
- Octagon Music Hub bid to ACE
- Guidance for Bursary Schemes
- Evaluation reports from a range of commissioned partners
- Dorset and Somerset's Cultural Strategy
- Dorset and Somerset's Children and Young People's Plans
- Dorset and Somerset's Joint Strategic Needs Assessments

### **3.5 Visits**

There were visits to a selection of music and arts organisations in both Dorset and Somerset in early March 2026. These visits built upon initial online interviews and were an opportunity to both deepen discussion and observe activity.

Meetings took place with Actiontrack, B Sharp, Dorset Music Service, Jackdaws Music, Octagon Music Hub, Somerset Music Service, Take Art, and Wessex Schools Music. Where it was not possible to meet with organisations, follow up online meetings took place as well as additional online meetings with organisations recommended during the visits.

## 4. Commissioning Pillars

### 4.1. Music in Schools

Schools remain the primary entry point for music education across Dorset and Somerset. Across both counties a wide range of activity is delivered within formal education settings, including curriculum teaching, instrumental learning programmes, singing initiatives (predominantly in Somerset) and performance opportunities. These activities collectively form the core of the regional music education ecosystem and ensure that large numbers of children encounter music as part of their everyday school experience.

Evidence gathered for the research highlights the scale and importance of school-based provision. Music education partners deliver activity directly within classrooms, in some cases supplementing statutory music provision, allowing pupils to participate regardless of background or prior musical experience. In Somerset, for example, Somerset Music supports a large proportion of schools to meet their key Arts Council and National Plan for Music Education requirement through Classroom Instrumental Learning (CIL), small group instrumental tuition and individual lessons. Dorset Music Service similarly provides structured support to schools through classroom instrumental learning, teacher mentoring, curriculum training and music technology initiatives.

Stakeholders repeatedly emphasised the central role that schools play in ensuring universal access to music. One interview participant explained that “schools remain the most consistent gateway into music for children.” Another contributor noted that “for many pupils the first time they hold an instrument is through school programmes.” These perspectives highlight the importance of maintaining strong relationships between music education partners and schools.

The development of Lead Schools has begun to strengthen collaboration across the region. Lead Schools are able to model effective practice, share resources, and support strategic planning for music across clusters of schools. Their involvement helps to create a stronger network of institutions working collectively to improve the quality of music education across the hub area. As one participant described, “Lead Schools are beginning to create a more strategic view of music across clusters.”

This approach is reflected in organisations such as Wessex Schools Music (Dorset), an OMH Lead School operating within a multi-academy trust of 12 schools (c.6,300 pupils). Wessex Schools Music delivers a significant programme of curriculum, ensemble, performance, and instrumental provision, aligned to the National Plan for Music Education, demonstrating the scale and potential of school-led models within the music education ecosystem.

However, this activity currently operates largely independently of Music Hub and Music Service structures, with limited integration into Hub-wide planning, support, and data systems. This reflects wider challenges in aligning Hub and Music Service offers with the needs and operating models of multi-academy trusts. While music services report challenges in engaging MATs, this example highlights the opportunity to better connect and support established, high-quality provision within a more coherent system.

Alongside Lead Schools, cultural organisations, orchestras, and community partners form part of this wider ecosystem, offering workshops, concerts and enrichment activities that extend learning beyond the classroom.

Together, these structures demonstrate that the foundations for universal music provision already exist across Dorset and Somerset. However, the research also suggests that access to these opportunities is not equitable. Interviewees frequently described variations in provision between schools and localities, particularly where engagement depends on the priorities of individual school leaders.

Where headteachers and senior leadership teams strongly support the arts, pupils often benefit from richer and more sustained musical opportunities. In schools where music holds a lower strategic priority, provision may be more limited or dependent on individual teachers with an interest in the subject. One respondent summarised this dynamic by explaining that “schools that value the arts tend to engage most actively with the hub.” Another interviewee described the variation more starkly, suggesting that access can sometimes feel like “a postcode lottery depending on where you live.”

Geography also contributes to these disparities. Rural communities across Dorset and Somerset often face additional challenges linked to transport, limited cultural infrastructure and the distance between settlements. This is particularly evident in areas such as the Blackmore Vale (including Sturminster Newton and Blandford Forum) and in parts of West Somerset and Exmoor (including Minehead, Watchet and Williton), where engagement appears more limited, and communities may be comparatively under-served. As one stakeholder noted, “transport is often the hidden barrier for rural pupils who want to continue with music.” Strengthening engagement with schools across the entire hub region, alongside more targeted, place-based approaches in these areas, will be essential if universal access to music education is to be realised.

Singing plays a central role within music education and is identified in the National Plan for Music Education as a “golden thread” running through children’s musical development. Across the region, approaches to singing vary. In Somerset, a clearly defined singing strategy provides a structured offer including CPD for teachers, access to digital resources, large-scale festivals, and targeted support for schools with lower engagement, ensuring that singing is embedded within both curriculum and enrichment activity. In Dorset, singing activity is present but less formally coordinated, with delivery sitting across different roles within the music service and schools. While this provides flexibility, it can result in less consistency and visibility across the system.

Overall, stakeholders recognised singing as a highly effective and inclusive starting point for musical engagement, particularly in primary settings. Strengthening strategic coordination and visibility of singing across the hub area presents an opportunity to build on existing practice and ensure that all children benefit from regular, high-quality vocal experiences.

### **Classroom Instrumental Learning (CIL)**

Classroom Instrumental Learning programmes represent one of the strongest components of music education provision across the region. These programmes introduce whole classes to

instrumental learning during the school day, enabling children to experience active music-making as part of their curriculum rather than as an optional extracurricular activity.

CIL programmes are delivered extensively by Somerset Music and Dorset Music Service. In Somerset, thousands of pupils participate annually in classroom instrumental programmes, while Dorset Music Service reports significant engagement through similar initiatives across multiple schools. Instruments are typically provided through loan schemes, ensuring that pupils can participate regardless of their family's financial circumstances.

In addition, organisations such as Actiontrack contribute to this landscape through the delivery of Gamelan residencies, offering culturally distinctive and inclusive approaches to whole-class music-making.

Interviewees frequently described CIL as one of the most effective ways of introducing children to music. One music leader noted that "classroom instrumental learning gives every child a chance to try an instrument." Another participant highlighted its importance for equity, explaining that "without CIL many children would never have the opportunity to learn an instrument at all."

One particularly effective feature of CIL delivery is the use of team-teaching models. In this approach, specialist music educators work alongside generalist classroom teachers to deliver instrumental learning. This structure allows pupils to benefit from expert tuition while also building the confidence and skills of teachers. As one interviewee explained, "team teaching helps teachers gain confidence while pupils benefit from specialist support."<sup>2</sup>

Despite these strengths, the research indicates that progression beyond introductory instrumental learning is not always straightforward. While many pupils encounter instruments through classroom programmes, opportunities to continue developing their skills beyond this can vary depending on location and local infrastructure. Some areas benefit from music centres, ensembles and youth orchestras that support further development, while others offer fewer opportunities outside the school environment. As one stakeholder commented, "progression opportunities are much stronger in some towns than others."

Strengthening connections between classroom instrumental learning and wider musical opportunities therefore represents an important next step. Clear progression pathways, improved communication with families and stronger links with community music organisations could help ensure that pupils who develop an interest in music are able to continue their musical journeys beyond the classroom.

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<sup>2</sup> Team teaching is a collaborative teaching model where a music specialist and classroom teacher jointly deliver lessons, building pupil outcomes while developing teacher confidence and capability.

## **Curriculum Support and Workforce Development**

Alongside direct delivery with pupils, a significant aspect of music hub activity involves supporting schools to deliver high-quality music education themselves. Across Dorset and Somerset, a range of organisations provide curriculum support, professional development and mentoring for teachers.

These activities include teacher training programmes, curriculum planning support, mentoring for music subject leaders, instrument hire schemes and school singing initiatives. Together they aim to strengthen the capacity of schools so that music becomes embedded within everyday teaching practice rather than dependent solely on external providers.

However, workforce challenges remain an important issue. Many primary schools no longer employ specialist music teachers, meaning that music lessons are frequently delivered by general classroom teachers who may have limited training in the subject. One interviewee explained that “in many primary schools music is increasingly delivered by non-specialist teachers.” Another participant noted that “teachers are enthusiastic but often lack confidence in teaching music.”

Professional development programmes have been developed to address this need, but participation can be difficult due to workload pressures. Teachers frequently report that although training opportunities are valuable, the demands of school timetables and staffing constraints make attendance challenging. As one stakeholder put it, “teachers want training but simply don’t have the time.” Another interviewee described workload as “the biggest barrier to engaging with CPD.”

The wider music education workforce faces similar pressures. Much provision relies on freelance musicians, visiting tutors and community practitioners who work across multiple organisations. While this flexible workforce brings diverse expertise, it can also make it harder to coordinate training and professional development across the sector. One contributor explained that “freelancers are often difficult to reach for CPD programmes.”

Despite these challenges, collaborative learning models are emerging as promising solutions. Both music services facilitate school phase networks, and the development of Lead Schools is beginning to strengthen peer learning across clusters. These approaches enable teachers to share practice, observe others and learn from colleagues in similar contexts. As one respondent observed, “peer learning between schools is often more effective than formal training sessions.” Together, these models help build confidence and create supportive professional communities around music education.

## **Inclusive Pedagogy and Practice**

Inclusive pedagogy is increasingly embedded within school-based music provision across Dorset and Somerset. Many programmes now incorporate accessible instruments, music technology and adaptive teaching strategies that enable a wider range of pupils to participate meaningfully in music learning.

Schools and partner organisations are developing approaches to support pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) across both mainstream and specialist settings. These include adapted instruments, tailored teaching strategies, and specialist workshops. In Somerset, organisations such as Live Music Now are delivering targeted projects within

specialist settings, modelling inclusive practice for both music specialists and classroom teachers. This demonstrates the value of combining high-quality delivery with workforce development to build longer-term inclusive capacity.

Inclusive provision spans two distinct areas: support for pupils with additional needs in mainstream settings, and specialist provision within SEND schools. These require different approaches and are currently developed to varying degrees across the region.

In mainstream settings, inclusive pedagogy is developing through approaches such as adaptive teaching, music technology and team teaching, supporting teachers to meet a wider range of needs within classroom environments. This includes work with pupils with social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs, often supported through nurture groups and targeted interventions, where music can play an important role in engagement, regulation and wellbeing. Anticipated SEND system reforms are likely to place increasing expectations on mainstream schools to deliver inclusive teaching, highlighting the need for more consistent support, training, and practical models to enable inclusive music-making in everyday classroom contexts.

Within specialist settings, provision includes targeted programmes and emerging models of practice. In Dorset, this includes approaches such as Open Up Orchestra, which support the development of ensemble provision within SEND schools. However, this activity remains relatively small-scale and is not yet consistently embedded across the region.

Music technology continues to expand opportunities for inclusive participation. Digital tools, accessible interfaces and alternative instruments allow pupils who may find traditional instrumental learning challenging to engage with music creation and performance. As one interviewee explained, “music technology and alternative instruments are opening doors for many children.”

Inclusive pedagogy is further supported through collaboration between teachers and specialist practitioners. Team-teaching models enable lessons to be adapted in real time and support the development of teacher confidence. In addition, some partners are beginning to deliver targeted training in inclusive and trauma-informed practice, helping teachers to better understand and respond to the needs of pupils with complex and additional needs.

Overall, inclusive pedagogy across Dorset and Somerset is developing positively, with growing confidence in adaptive teaching approaches and inclusive classroom practice. Continued investment in workforce development and the sharing of effective practice will be essential to embed these approaches consistently across the region.

## **4.2 Inclusion and Equity**

While inclusive pedagogy is increasingly embedded within delivery, ensuring equitable access to music education remains a significant challenge across Dorset and Somerset. Inclusion is not only about how music is taught, but also who is able to access opportunities and where gaps in provision remain.

Targeted programmes for children and young people with additional needs form an important part of the regional music education ecosystem. Organisations such as Jackdaws Music Education Trust and Live Music Now deliver specialist programmes for pupils with SEND, providing tailored musical experiences that meet a range of needs. However, engagement with music services among SEND schools remains relatively low, suggesting that current offers may not yet fully align with the needs of specialist settings.

Music education also plays a key role in engaging young people outside mainstream education pathways. Organisations such as Actiontrack deliver projects for young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), as well as those attending pupil referral units (PRUs) and alternative provision settings. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of this work, noting that “music can be a powerful way of reconnecting young people who feel disengaged from school.”

Guildhall Young Artists (GYA Taunton) is based at Wellington School in Somerset, and offers a range of classes and performance opportunities for 5–18-year-olds, in music and drama, on Saturdays. The hub currently provides bursaries averaging £500 to 18 students to access these opportunities.

Community music organisations further extend inclusive provision by offering accessible, informal environments for participation. Organisations such as B Sharp provide mentoring, music clubs and performance opportunities, creating alternative pathways for young people who may not engage with school-based provision. These settings can play a vital role in supporting progression and sustained engagement.

Despite these strengths, gaps in provision remain. There is currently limited availability of community-based ensemble opportunities for young people with SEND, which may restrict progression pathways beyond school-based activity. In addition, Deaf Resource Bases were not referenced in stakeholder discussions or survey responses. While this does not indicate an absence of provision, it suggests that these settings may be less visible within current Music Hub and partner engagement, highlighting a potential gap in understanding and targeted support.

Geography also contributes to inequity. Rural communities across Dorset and Somerset face challenges linked to transport, limited cultural infrastructure and the distance between settlements. As one stakeholder noted, “transport creates real cold spots where young people cannot easily access provision.” Addressing these disparities will require targeted, place-based approaches, including mobile provision, satellite delivery and partnerships with local community venues.

Overall, while a diverse range of inclusive activity exists across the region, access remains uneven. Strengthening alignment between provision and need, improving engagement with under-represented groups and developing more locally accessible opportunities will be essential to ensure that all children and young people can participate in and progress through music education.

### 4.3 Progression and Pathways in Music Education (Ages 11–18)

Music education across Dorset and Somerset provides a strong foundation during primary school years. Classroom instrumental learning programmes, school choirs and curriculum music lessons ensure that all pupils experience music as part of their early education.

However, as pupils move into adolescence, progression pathways become less visible. One interviewee summarised the issue by explaining that “there is not always a clear map showing how young people can progress.” Another participant commented that “many opportunities exist but they are not always easy to find.”

Somerset and Dorset have a rich and diverse music landscape, presenting a significant opportunity not only to expand ensemble provision and target geographic cold spots, but also to diversify genres and better connect, support, and amplify community-based ensembles. Strengthening links between the Music Hub, schools, community providers and families could help create more visible and accessible progression pathways for children and young people.

Examples of this include performances at Wells Cathedral School, enabling young people to shine individually, as well as playing alongside professionals in a range of ensembles and groups.

Advanced tuition and ensemble participation form key components of progression for young musicians. Somerset offers ensemble opportunities such as the Somerset Youth Orchestra and Somerset Youth Concert Band, while Dorset Music Service provides a Youth Jazz Orchestra. These performance opportunities are widely recognised as motivating and developmentally important. One stakeholder observed that “performing with other young musicians can be transformational.” Another explained that “large-scale performances give young people a sense of achievement and belonging.”

Partnerships with professional arts organisations further enrich these pathways. The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra provides workshops, concerts and composition sessions that allow students to engage with professional musicians. One interviewee noted that “working with professional musicians can be hugely inspiring for young people.”

Community music organisations also contribute to progression pathways by offering opportunities that complement formal instrumental training. B Sharp provides music clubs, mentoring programmes and youth leadership initiatives that support young musicians interested in contemporary genres, songwriting, and music production. As one participant described, “these programmes create alternative pathways into music.”

Nevertheless, stakeholders consistently report that access to progression opportunities varies significantly across the region. Rural geography presents particular challenges. One respondent noted that “transport is a huge barrier for young musicians living in villages.” Another explained that “distance often prevents regular attendance at rehearsals.”

Improving communication and signposting could therefore play a significant role in strengthening progression pathways. One stakeholder suggested that “a central website could help map opportunities across the region.” Another proposed that “digital platforms could help families understand the options available.”

#### **4.4 Post-16 Progression and Creative Careers Pathways**

While music provision for younger children is relatively well established across Dorset and Somerset, pathways for young people aged 16 and above are less clearly defined. One participant explained that “young people often struggle to see how music could lead to a career.”

Some structured opportunities do however exist. A-Level music courses remain important routes for students interested in formal musical study. One teacher emphasised that “traditional GCSE routes still matter.” Another added that “these qualifications remain important stepping stones into further study.”

However, the contemporary music industry offers a much wider range of career possibilities. Creative industries roles include music production, sound engineering, digital media, event management and arts leadership. One stakeholder observed that “creative careers programmes help young people understand the many roles behind performances.” However, there are limited opportunities across both counties for students to pursue vocational qualifications post-16, apart from Weymouth College in Dorset. Anecdotally, students must travel to Bath or Bournemouth to access a wider range of vocational opportunities such as Popular Music and Music Technology courses. This is an area which needs more research to map out potential pathways for young people.

Mentoring initiatives delivered by community organisations provide one important entry point. B Sharp offers mentoring programmes and youth leadership opportunities for young people aged 15–25. Participants gain practical experience in performance, event organisation and music production. As one participant noted, “mentoring programmes give young people direct insight into the industry.”

Industry partnerships also contribute to career awareness. Workshops with professional musicians and creative organisations allow young people to observe creative professionals at work. One interviewee explained that “work experience can reveal the breadth of opportunities within the creative sector.”

Despite these opportunities, several barriers limit access to post-16 progression pathways. Rural geography remains a major factor. One respondent explained that “transport barriers become even more significant for older students.” Another noted that “many opportunities are concentrated in larger towns.”

Fragmentation of provision also presents challenges. As one participant described, “there is no single place where young people can see all the opportunities available.” Another commented that “better coordination across organisations would make progression clearer.”

#### **4.5 Early Years Musical Foundations**

Early childhood experiences of music play a vital role in shaping lifelong engagement with the arts. Across Dorset and Somerset, a range of organisations deliver programmes designed for babies, toddlers, and young children. These initiatives include family music sessions, early years nurture groups and practitioner training programmes.

Stakeholders consistently emphasised the importance of early musical engagement. One practitioner explained that “music should start long before children enter school.” Another noted that “early experiences of rhythm and song can shape children’s confidence and creativity.”

Organisations such as Take Art contribute to early years provision through delivering workshops, training, and curriculum support for practitioners. These programmes help educators integrate singing, rhythm, and creative play into everyday early childhood learning environments. One interviewee observed that “building practitioner confidence is key to embedding music in early years settings.”

Workforce development is therefore a central component of this work. However, practitioners often face structural barriers to accessing training. One respondent explained that “early years staff often have very limited time for professional development.” Another noted that “workload pressures make attending CPD difficult.”

Inclusive practice is also increasingly important in early childhood settings. Accessible instruments, sensory approaches and music technology allow children with diverse needs to participate. One practitioner commented that “inclusive music experiences in early childhood can have lifelong benefits.”

Parents and carers engagement plays a crucial role in early years participation. Programmes such as Babigloo’s Music for Babies sessions and B Sharp’s Music for Early Years programme provide opportunities for families to experience music together. One interviewee explained that “family music sessions help parents feel confident making music at home.”

Despite these strengths, communication with families remains a challenge. One stakeholder explained that “many families simply don’t know what opportunities exist.” Another noted that “direct communication with parents and carers is still limited.”

Strengthening communication strategies could therefore improve participation. One respondent suggested that “a central website could help families discover local opportunities.” Another emphasised that “community outreach will be important for engaging more families.”

## **4.6 Capacity and Leadership**

Leadership and organisational capacity play a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of the music education ecosystem across Dorset and Somerset. Several interconnected themes influence this capacity, including youth voice, workforce development, data and evaluation, and governance clarity.

Youth voice emerged as a particularly important area for development. One stakeholder explained that “feedback usually comes from adults rather than directly from young people.” Another participant noted that “formal surveys are not always the best way to hear young people’s perspectives.”

Where youth voice has been integrated more effectively, engagement tends to be stronger. One interviewee suggested that “youth-led projects often produce the most creative results.” Another added “young people should be involved in shaping programmes from the start.”

Workforce development is another key factor shaping the hub's ability to deliver high-quality music education. Across the sector the workforce is widely described as committed but stretched. One contributor said that "teachers want training but simply don't have the time." Another commented that "workload pressures limit engagement with CPD."

Freelance practitioners face similar challenges. One stakeholder noted that "freelancers are often difficult to engage in professional development." Another explained that "flexible CPD models may be needed to reach the wider workforce."

Data and evaluation systems are also critical for effective leadership. One interviewee observed that "knowledge of what is happening across the region can be patchy." Another emphasised that "data should guide decisions about where investment is needed."

Governance clarity was identified as another important area for development. One stakeholder commented that "transparent decision-making builds trust across the sector." Another added that "clear roles and responsibilities help partnerships function effectively."

Strengthening youth voice, workforce capacity, evaluation systems and governance structures could therefore significantly enhance the effectiveness of the regional music education ecosystem. Together these developments would support more responsive leadership and ensure that music education continues to evolve in response to the needs of children and young people across Dorset and Somerset.

## 5. Summary of Online Surveys

Across all survey groups, a consistent set of themes emerges about how music education is experienced across Dorset and Somerset. Music is widely valued by children, young people, families, and professionals, with strong appetite for participation and clear recognition of its social, educational and wellbeing benefits. However, access is shaped by a number of structural challenges. Five key insights are particularly significant:

1. Awareness of available opportunities is consistently low across all groups, limiting participation even where provision does exist
2. Schools act as the primary gateway into music, but progression pathways beyond initial engagement are less consistently developed
3. Financial cost and geographic factors, particularly in rural areas, create significant barriers to participation
4. While inclusive practice is strengthening within delivery, participation in music by children and young people is very uneven
5. Overall, the challenge is not simply expanding provision, but improving visibility, increasing participation opportunities, strengthening progression pathways, and addressing the barriers that limit equitable access

### 5.1 Children and Young People

This survey explored how children and young people experience music across Dorset and Somerset. 35 pupils from primary, middle, secondary and post-16 settings responded, with the majority from Dorset. The findings provide a snapshot of how young people engage with music, what motivates them, and the barriers they face in accessing opportunities.

#### Music Participation in School

School is the primary gateway for musical engagement. Most respondents take part in music lessons, instrumental tuition, or choirs, and over half participate in multiple school-based musical activities. Instrumental or vocal lessons were the most commonly reported activity, with more than three-quarters of respondents currently receiving lessons.

Students in Dorset described a wider range of opportunities, including orchestras, ensembles, and musical theatre. However, some reported waiting lists for lessons due to high demand. In Somerset, activities were generally centred on choir and instrumental learning, possibly reflecting the younger age profile of respondents but also suggesting fewer progression opportunities into advanced group activities.

#### What Young People Value About Music

Three themes emerged strongly in responses: collaboration, skill development and enjoyment. Many young people highlighted the importance of playing music with others and being part of a group. Ensemble playing and rehearsals were particularly valued for the shared sense of achievement.

Individual lessons were also appreciated for helping students improve their skills and tackle more challenging music. For younger pupils especially, music was described simply as fun, with class singing and experimenting with sounds creating excitement and enjoyment.

Overall, music provides both creative expression and social connection for many students.

### **Music Beyond School**

Music participation often continues outside school hours. Around 60% of respondents take part in weekly musical activities outside school, while others participate occasionally. However, about one in five reported no involvement outside school. Activities take place in music centres, youth venues, arts organisations, churches, and schools, with familiar local spaces playing an important role in enabling access.

### **Performance and Aspirations**

Performance opportunities are a major motivator for young musicians. Most respondents reported performing at least occasionally and described these experiences as rewarding and meaningful. Many expressed an interest in more opportunities to perform and share their music.

Young people also showed strong aspirations for future musical development. These included learning new instruments, songwriting, composing, exploring music technology, and joining ensembles or bands. Some students with specialised instruments expressed interest in more tailored ensemble opportunities.

### **Barriers to Participation**

Despite strong enthusiasm for music, several barriers limit participation. The most common issue is a lack of awareness about available opportunities. Other challenges include time pressures, financial costs, transport and limited local provision. Dorset respondents more frequently mentioned travel and waiting lists, while Somerset respondents more often highlighted a lack of information.

### **Youth Leadership**

Many young people expressed interest in helping design or lead musical activities, particularly in Somerset. This suggests a desire for greater involvement in shaping music provision.

Overall, the survey highlights four key insights:

1. Performance opportunities strongly motivate participation.
2. Group music-making supports engagement and social connection.
3. Awareness of opportunities remains a major barrier.
4. Young people want a stronger voice in shaping music activities.

The findings suggest that improving communication, expanding group opportunities, and addressing practical barriers such as cost and transport could significantly increase access and participation in music.

## **5.2 Parents and Carers**

This section presents findings from a survey of 335 parents and carers exploring awareness of and participation in music opportunities for children and young people across Dorset and Somerset. The responses provide insight into current engagement with music activities, barriers that limit participation, and the types of opportunities families would like to see offered.

Most responses came from Dorset, representing around three quarters of participants, while just under a quarter were from Somerset. Although the findings therefore reflected Dorset more strongly, many themes applied to both areas. Respondents most commonly had primary school-aged children, with around three quarters reporting children in primary education. Smaller numbers had children in early years, secondary, middle school, or post-16 education.

Around one in seven respondents reported that their child has additional needs, highlighting the importance of inclusive provision that supports different learning styles, confidence levels, and accessibility requirements. Ensuring that music opportunities are welcoming and adaptable for a wide range of learners is therefore an important consideration for future programme design.

A key finding relates to low awareness of available music opportunities. More than two fifths of parents said they were not aware of any opportunities outside school, while a further quarter had only limited awareness. Overall, around 70% of respondents reported low awareness, suggesting that the challenge is not only the availability of provision but also how effectively opportunities are communicated. Parents frequently reported difficulties finding information or understanding how their children could get involved.

Participation levels outside school were also relatively low. Approximately two thirds of children had not taken part in music activities beyond school within the previous two years, while only around one third had participated in extracurricular opportunities. This indicates a gap between the value parents place on music and the opportunities children are able to access.

Among those who did participate, the most common activities were instrumental lessons, followed by ensembles or music groups and choirs or singing activities. Participation tended to be concentrated in traditional forms of music education, with relatively limited engagement in informal, community-based, digital, or contemporary music activities. Most opportunities were accessed through schools, reinforcing the role of schools as the primary gateway for families seeking music provision.

Parents identified several barriers to participation, including lack of time due to busy schedules, the cost of lessons and instruments, limited awareness of opportunities, and transport or travel challenges, particularly for families in rural areas. Some respondents also mentioned issues related to confidence or concerns about whether activities would suit their child.

Despite these barriers, parents strongly emphasised the benefits of music participation. Music was widely associated with improved confidence, creativity, enjoyment, and self-

expression. Parents also highlighted social benefits such as teamwork, friendship, and a sense of belonging, as well as educational benefits including concentration and discipline.

Looking ahead, parents expressed demand for more instrumental lessons, choirs, ensembles, and beginner pathways/tasters, as well as opportunities that are local, affordable, and easy to access. Suggested solutions included improved communication about available activities, greater use of schools as information hubs, expanded local provision, and financial support such as subsidies or instrument loan schemes.

Overall, the survey demonstrates strong parental support for music education but highlights significant challenges around awareness, accessibility, and affordability. Addressing these issues could help increase participation and strengthen music opportunities for children and young people across the region.

### **5.3 Music Education Workforce**

The Music Education Workforce survey gathered responses from 47 professionals involved in delivering music education across Dorset and Somerset. The survey provides insight into current provision, workforce experiences, barriers to participation, and priorities for future development within the region's music education ecosystem.

Respondents were drawn from both local authority areas, with 53% based in Somerset, 40% in Dorset and a small proportion (6%) working across both regions. This indicates some workforce mobility and highlights the interconnected nature of music provision across the wider region.

Music education delivery is heavily centred around schools. Nearly 60% of respondents work in primary schools and just over half (53%) work in secondary schools. Around one third also operate within middle schools, post-16 settings, or arts and music organisations. In addition to school settings, a broader ecosystem of provision exists. Approximately 23% of respondents work in community or youth organisations and nearly 20% operate within SEND settings. Smaller numbers teach in early years provision, alternative education, or as private instrumental teachers. This demonstrates that music education in the region is delivered through a mix of school-based and community-based models.

Most respondents felt that music opportunities generally meet young people's needs. Around 70% reported that provision works either "quite well" or "very well." However, around 30% felt opportunities do not adequately meet young people's needs, suggesting inconsistencies in access, quality or reach across different areas and groups.

Inclusion emerged as a key concern. Only 13% of respondents described provision as "very inclusive," while more than half felt it was either not inclusive enough or not inclusive at all. Respondents highlighted several barriers affecting inclusion, particularly limited support for learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), socio-economic barriers linked to the cost of lessons and instruments, and geographical challenges such as rural isolation and limited transport.

Cost was identified as the most significant barrier to participation, with 85% of respondents citing it as a major issue. Costs associated with tuition, instruments, travel and ensemble

participation were seen as limiting opportunities for many young people. Curriculum pressure within schools was the second most commonly cited barrier (60%), with respondents noting that music often competes with core academic subjects for limited timetable space. Other barriers included lack of awareness of opportunities (53%) and transport difficulties (34%), particularly in rural areas.

Despite these challenges, respondents strongly emphasised the positive impact of music participation. Music was widely viewed as supporting young people's wellbeing and mental health, helping them build confidence, emotional resilience, and a sense of belonging. It was also seen to support social development by encouraging collaboration, communication, and peer relationships. In addition, many respondents highlighted music's role in increasing engagement with education, improving attendance and motivation, and providing opportunities for creative identity and future career exploration.

Workforce development was another key theme. Many respondents had recently undertaken training in pedagogy, instrumental teaching, curriculum development, inclusive practice, and music technology. There was strong demand for further professional development, particularly in SEND and inclusive music practice, digital music technology, curriculum design and progression pathways for young musicians.

Progression routes for young musicians were viewed as inconsistent. Respondents noted particular challenges in the transition between primary and secondary education, where continuity in musical development can be lost. Access to ensembles and advanced opportunities was also seen as uneven across different geographic areas, and financial barriers could prevent students from continuing their musical development.

Suggestions for strengthening provision included increased funding to support instrument access and subsidised lessons, stronger partnerships with schools, more inclusive programmes for SEND learners, and expanded community music opportunities. Respondents also emphasised the importance of incorporating youth voice and ensuring that programmes reflect young people's musical interests.

Overall, the survey highlights a committed workforce that recognises the significant benefits of music education but also identifies key structural challenges. Addressing financial barriers, improving inclusion, strengthening progression pathways, and investing in workforce development will be essential to ensuring that music opportunities remain accessible and impactful for all young people across Dorset and Somerset.

## **5.4 Schools**

The Schools survey gathered 71 responses from education providers across Dorset and Somerset, offering insight into how schools currently engage with music provision, the barriers they face, and areas where additional support is needed.

Most responses came from Somerset settings (69%), with Dorset accounting for 31%. As a result, the findings provide useful insights across both counties but reflect a stronger Somerset perspective. Respondents represented a range of educational contexts, with primary schools and early years settings forming the largest groups, followed by secondary

schools. SEND settings, middle schools, and post-16 providers were also represented but in smaller numbers, meaning some perspectives - particularly SEND provision - may be underrepresented.

Schools reported varying levels of awareness of local music opportunities. While many were somewhat aware and occasionally engaged with provision, only just over a quarter described themselves as very aware and regularly involved. Around one in five schools reported little or no awareness of available opportunities, indicating that communication and visibility of provision could be improved.

Engagement with external music support and provision most commonly took the form of instrument hire, workshops or music projects, and instrumental or vocal tuition. Approximately half of respondents reported using these services. Professional development opportunities for staff were also accessed by a notable number of schools. In contrast, participation in ensembles, group music-making activities, and curriculum-focused support was less common, suggesting that many schools engage through short-term activities rather than sustained partnerships. A small number of schools reported no engagement with music support at all.

Cost emerged as the most significant barrier to pupil participation, cited by more than 80% of respondents. Financial pressures affect access to instruments, lessons, and participation in events. Other barriers included transport difficulties, timetable constraints, and limited awareness of opportunities. Some schools also highlighted limited staff confidence or expertise in teaching music, suggesting a need for further professional development and support.

Despite these challenges, most schools felt that existing music opportunities meet pupils' needs reasonably well, and a smaller proportion reported that provision works extremely well. However, around a quarter of respondents felt that current opportunities do not adequately meet pupils' needs, indicating room for improvement in tailoring provision to different school contexts.

Schools widely recognised the benefits of music participation. Reported impacts included increased enjoyment and creativity among pupils, improved musical skills and confidence, and wider developmental benefits such as enhanced wellbeing, communication skills, and social connections. However, fewer schools reported that pupils continue progressing in music long-term, suggesting that clearer progression routes may be needed.

Inclusion and SEND support were also discussed. While many respondents had not experienced specific barriers, qualitative feedback highlighted the need for specialist SEND training for instrumental teachers, adapted instruments, and additional funding to support inclusive participation. Around one third of schools also felt that local music opportunities could be more inclusive overall.

Schools identified several priorities for future support. These included professional development for staff, clearer instrumental progression pathways, curriculum support, and increased access to music technology, singing programmes, and extra-curricular

opportunities. Open responses also highlighted demand for more in-school activities, stronger partnerships with music organisations, and greater use of pupil voice when shaping provision.

Overall, the survey highlights five key themes: cost is the primary barrier to participation; engagement with music services is uneven; staff confidence and training are important factors in delivery; schools strongly value the educational and wellbeing benefits of music; and clearer progression pathways are needed to sustain participation. These findings suggest that improving affordability, strengthening partnerships with schools, expanding inclusive provision, and supporting teacher development will be central to future strategic planning for the Octagon Music Hub.

## **5.5 Organisations**

This section summarises the findings from a survey of 35 organisations working with children and young people across Dorset and Somerset. The survey aimed to better understand the current landscape of music provision, identify barriers that affect participation, and highlight opportunities for strengthening the regional music ecosystem. Overall, responses indicate that music is widely valued for its positive impact on young people, but organisations face a number of structural challenges that limit access and participation.

Most survey responses came from organisations based in Dorset, representing roughly two-thirds of participants, while around one-third were from Somerset. The respondents represented a range of sectors, including early years providers, specialist music and arts organisations, community and youth organisations, and a small number of other settings such as colleges and outdoor education providers. Early years providers and delivery organisations were particularly well represented, while schools and youth services appeared less prominent in the dataset.

In terms of awareness of local music opportunities, most organisations reported at least some knowledge of available provision. Over half described themselves as somewhat aware of opportunities, while around a quarter reported being very aware. However, a small proportion indicated limited or no awareness, suggesting that information about music provision does not always reach all organisations effectively.

Organisations reported offering a wide range of music activities for children and young people. The most common forms of provision included instrumental and vocal learning, group music-making such as ensembles, and short-term workshops or projects. Some organisations also offered concerts, performances, or professional development opportunities. A small number reported that they do not currently provide music activities, indicating potential scope for further development and support in embedding music within their programmes.

Survey responses highlighted mixed perceptions about inclusivity and accessibility. Just over half of respondents felt that local music provision was inclusive and accessible, while nearly half believed that it was not. This split suggests that experiences vary significantly across the region, potentially influenced by rural geography, transport challenges, and differences in SEND provision or local infrastructure.

Despite these challenges, organisations consistently reported that music has a highly positive impact on children and young people. Key benefits identified include increased confidence, development of musical skills, enhanced creativity, and improved wellbeing. Many respondents also highlighted music's role in supporting social connection, self-expression, and a sense of belonging within communities.

Several barriers to participation were identified across the survey. Cost was the most frequently mentioned challenge, including the expense of instruments, lessons, travel, and programme fees. Transport was also a major barrier, particularly in rural areas where travel distances can be significant and public transport options limited. Other challenges included limited awareness of opportunities, school timetable pressures, staffing expertise gaps, and lack of confidence among some young people engaging with music for the first time.

In relation to inclusion and SEND provision, organisations reported needing greater specialist training, accessible equipment and venues, and additional funding to support inclusive delivery. Transport and family confidence were also highlighted as factors affecting access for children with additional needs.

A key finding of the survey is the lack of clear progression pathways for young people wishing to develop their musical skills. Many organisations reported that it is difficult for young people and families to understand how to move from beginner experiences to more advanced opportunities. This suggests a need for better coordination and communication across the sector.

Respondents identified several priorities for future development, including increased funding, stronger networking opportunities, improved communication about available provision, and professional development for practitioners. Mapping existing opportunities, improving inclusive access, and strengthening partnerships across organisations were also highlighted as important strategic priorities.

Overall, the survey demonstrates both the strong value placed on music participation and the need for greater coordination and accessibility across the regional music sector.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1 Offer, Reach and Engagement

There is a strong existing base of music activity across the Octagon Music Hub area, particularly within formal education settings and through the established music services in both Dorset and Somerset. There is a range of provision including classroom instrumental learning programmes, instrumental tuition, inclusion programmes, youth ensembles, and project-based work delivered through partnerships with cultural organisations and community groups. In Dorset, for example, evidence highlights the strength of classroom instrumental learning programmes which have achieved strong uptake among schools and have recently evolved into team-teaching models that upskill classroom teachers while delivering instrumental tuition to pupils. However, provision of singing activity also appears to vary across the region, with a more structured and coordinated offer evident in Somerset, while in Dorset activity is more distributed and less clearly defined.

There is a growing emphasis on inclusive provision, including targeted programmes for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) schools, accessible instruments, and music technology initiatives designed to broaden participation among children who may find traditional instruments difficult to access. The development of accessible instrument libraries and music technology pilots across primary schools was cited as an emerging area of innovation. These initiatives demonstrate an awareness among delivery organisations of the need to diversify the offer and ensure music education reflects a wider range of learning needs and musical interests.

Another strength identified was the integration of music services within wider local authority structures, particularly within children's services. This positioning enables music services to develop relationships with SEND leads, locality education teams, and youth services, helping them reach young people who might otherwise have limited access to arts provision. Interviewees described these relationships as enabling more joined-up approaches to reaching vulnerable children and those facing social disadvantage.

However, despite these strengths, there is consistent uneven distribution of provision across both counties. A "postcode lottery" to access music opportunities exists, where the availability of ensembles, progression pathways, and enrichment activity varies significantly between different localities. In some areas - particularly where strong partner organisations are present - young people benefit from a wide range of opportunities. In other areas, particularly rural communities, opportunities are more limited.

The role of multi-academy trusts (MATs) emerged as a key factor. Examples such as Wessex Schools Music demonstrate the scale and potential of school-led provision operating at trust level. However, this activity often sits outside Music Hub structures, with limited integration into planning, support and data systems. This highlights both the challenge and opportunity in aligning Hub provision with MAT-led models.

Data suggests that SEND provision should operate across two distinct areas: support within mainstream settings and specialist provision within SEND schools. Engagement with music services appears stronger in mainstream contexts, while participation from specialist settings

is more limited, indicating a potential misalignment between current offers and need. This highlights the need for a more clearly defined and differentiated approach to inclusive provision, with strengthened support for inclusive teaching within mainstream schools alongside a more tailored and targeted offer for specialist SEND settings.

The geography of both counties was repeatedly identified as a structural factor affecting engagement. Rurality and limited public transport were described as major barriers to participation, particularly for activities taking place outside school hours. Even where high-quality programmes exist, young people may be unable to attend rehearsals, ensembles, or workshops due to the difficulty of travelling between villages and towns.

These challenges are particularly evident in more rural areas and smaller market towns, where access to provision is more limited and participation may depend on travel to larger centres. While digital approaches offer some potential to extend reach and provide more flexible access to learning and participation, these are not yet consistently embedded and cannot fully replace the value of in-person, group-based music-making.

In Somerset, more distributed and flexible delivery models appear to be working effectively in response to these challenges, enabling provision to reach a wider range of communities while also supporting a more diverse range of musical genres and progression pathways. In Dorset, provision appears more centrally coordinated, which offers consistency of delivery but may present challenges in achieving the same level of geographic reach and diversity of offer across all areas.

Engagement levels often depend heavily on individual schools and local champions. Schools with committed music leaders, strong senior leadership support, or established relationships with music services tend to offer richer musical experiences. In contrast, where music is not prioritised within school leadership structures, engagement with hub activity may be minimal.

Another challenge identified is fragmentation of the overall music education landscape. There is currently limited visibility of the full range of music opportunities available across the hub region. Different organisations, charities, and cultural partners deliver valuable work, but there is not always a single point where schools, parents, or young people can easily discover and access these opportunities. This lack of coordination can reduce engagement and may result in duplication of offer or missed opportunities for collaboration.

Improving visibility of the offer - potentially through a unified digital platform - could significantly enhance engagement. A central online resource capturing all music opportunities across the region was proposed as a practical way to support schools, families, and communities in accessing provision.

The evidence suggests that while the Octagon Music Hub benefits from a strong foundation of music activity and committed partners, engagement is shaped by geographical inequalities, uneven school engagement, and limited coordination across providers. Addressing these issues will be key to strengthening the reach and accessibility of the hub's future provision.

## **6.2 Barriers to Participation and Progression**

There are a wide range of barriers affecting both participation in music education and the ability of young people to progress through sustained musical pathways. These barriers operate at several levels, including structural challenges within schools, geographic and economic factors affecting families, and systemic issues within the music education workforce.

One of the most significant barriers identified is geography and transport infrastructure. The largely rural nature of parts of the hub region creates significant challenges for accessing music activities outside school hours. Interviewees described how even when opportunities exist in towns or cultural venues, young people living in surrounding villages may struggle to attend due to limited public transport options. This issue particularly affects participation in ensembles, rehearsals, and progression activities that require regular travel.

Financial barriers were also highlighted. While many programmes attempt to reduce costs through subsidies or partnerships, families may still face expenses related to instrument hire, lesson fees, travel, or participation in ensembles and performances. For families already experiencing economic pressures, these costs can deter participation or prevent sustained engagement.

Within schools, curriculum pressures and staff capacity were frequently cited as barriers. Teachers expressed strong interest in professional development and in strengthening music provision, yet many reported that they simply do not have the time to attend training or engage with external programmes.

This challenge extends to continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities. Although CPD programmes are often developed in response to school needs and requests, attendance remains low due to the difficulty teachers face in leaving classrooms or securing cover. As a result, opportunities to build confidence and improve the quality of music teaching are not always fully realised.

Another barrier relates to progression pathways for young people. While introductory music opportunities are widely available through classroom instrumental programmes and school-based activities, participants suggested that the routes for progression beyond these entry points are less clearly defined. In some areas, progression opportunities such as ensembles or specialist programmes are available through partner organisations, but these opportunities are unevenly distributed geographically. Participation is also largely concentrated in traditional forms of music education, with more limited evidence of diverse genre pathways or contemporary music opportunities. This may limit engagement for some young people and restrict progression into a broader range of musical pathways.

While a range of inclusive programmes exist in schools, there is limited evidence of sustained, community-based ensemble opportunities for young people with SEND, suggesting that progression beyond school-based activity may be constrained.

This fragmentation creates uncertainty for young people who wish to continue developing their musical skills beyond initial engagement. Without clear and accessible pathways,

students may struggle to transition from classroom experiences into sustained musical participation.

Participants also highlighted barriers related to awareness and information. Families and young people may not always know what opportunities exist or how to access them. In communities where engagement with cultural organisations is historically lower, awareness of music education opportunities may be limited.

Finally, workforce capacity within the wider music education ecosystem was identified as a challenge. Many music practitioners operate as freelancers and may not be consistently connected to hub networks. This can make it difficult to engage them in professional development or ensure consistent quality and inclusive practice across the sector.

Taken together, barriers to participation and progression are multi-layered, combining structural, geographic, economic, and systemic factors. Addressing these barriers will require coordinated action across schools, cultural organisations, local authorities, and community partners.

### **6.3 Workforce and Workforce Development**

The sustainability and effectiveness of music education provision across the hub region is closely linked to the capacity, skills, and support available to the workforce delivering it. Interviewees described a committed and experienced workforce, but also identified significant challenges relating to workforce development, recruitment, and professional engagement.

Within schools, a key issue highlighted was the decline in specialist music teaching capacity. In many primary schools, music is increasingly delivered by non-specialist classroom teachers who may have limited musical training or confidence. While many teachers are enthusiastic about music education, they often require additional support and professional development to deliver high-quality musical learning experiences.

However, the impact of workforce development initiatives is constrained by limited teacher availability. CPD opportunities are often designed around identified needs, yet teachers frequently report that workload pressures prevent them from attending. Even when schools recognise the importance of music education, operational constraints such as staffing levels and timetable pressures can make participation in training difficult.

Beyond the school workforce, there is a complex structure of the wider music education workforce, which includes freelance tutors, visiting musicians, community practitioners, and staff working within partner organisations. In some areas, music services rely heavily on freelance practitioners rather than directly employed tutors. While this model provides flexibility and access to a wide range of expertise, it can also create challenges in maintaining consistent engagement with professional development and quality assurance processes.

It is apparent that engaging freelance practitioners in training and CPD is often difficult. Freelancers may work across multiple organisations and may not prioritise attending unpaid training sessions, particularly when these involve travel or time away from paid work. This

can limit opportunities to develop inclusive pedagogy or share best practice across the workforce.

Research also highlighted the importance of inclusive practice within the workforce. As music education programmes increasingly aim to reach diverse groups of young people - including those with SEND or those facing social disadvantage - practitioners require appropriate skills, knowledge, and confidence to deliver inclusive learning environments.

Interviewees emphasised that strengthening the workforce will require not only more accessible CPD opportunities, but also stronger networks and professional communities that enable practitioners to share knowledge and collaborate.

The findings suggest that workforce development remains a critical priority for the hub, with particular emphasis needed on supporting non-specialist teachers, engaging freelance practitioners, and ensuring that inclusive practice is embedded across the sector.

## **6.4 Partnerships**

Partnership working emerged as a central theme across the research, with stakeholders widely recognising that collaboration between organisations is essential to delivering effective and inclusive music education across the region. The music hub operates within a complex ecosystem that includes schools, cultural organisations, venues, community groups, local authorities, freelance practitioners, and national arts organisations.

There is a shared acknowledgment that no single organisation has the capacity to meet the needs of all young people independently, making partnership working a critical mechanism for expanding reach and strengthening the quality of provision.

Many stakeholders described strong existing partnerships that have enabled the development of innovative programmes and broader engagement with young people. Cultural organisations, including orchestras, theatres, and arts centres, play an important role in extending the hub's offer beyond formal education settings. Through workshops, performance opportunities, creative projects and outreach activity, these partners provide young people with opportunities to engage with professional musicians and experience music-making in a wider cultural context.

These partnerships were also seen as valuable in supporting progression pathways. Organisations with specialist expertise or established ensembles are often able to provide opportunities for young people who wish to continue developing their musical skills beyond classroom provision. In this way, partnerships help create bridges between early engagement activities and more advanced musical opportunities.

However, while many strong collaborations exist, the partnership landscape is fragmented and often reliant on informal relationships. Many successful initiatives have developed through personal connections between individuals rather than through structured systems or formalised strategic frameworks. While these relationships can be highly effective, they may also be vulnerable to staff changes or organisational restructuring.

A more coordinated approach to partnership development could help strengthen the music education ecosystem across the region. Some contributors noted that there is currently limited visibility of the full range of organisations delivering music-related activity, meaning that opportunities for collaboration may be missed. Improved mapping of activity and clearer communication between partners could help reduce duplication and encourage more strategic alignment of programmes.

Another emerging theme was the importance of equitable partnerships. Some stakeholders expressed concern that smaller organisations or community groups may not always feel fully integrated into hub structures or decision-making processes. Strengthening mechanisms for dialogue and shared planning could help ensure that a broader range of voices contribute to shaping the music education landscape.

The importance of partnerships with schools, which remain the primary access point for most young people, needs to be central. Where strong relationships exist between music services and schools, engagement with hub activity is significantly higher. However, where schools have limited capacity or competing priorities, or with complex or large MAT's, partnerships may be weaker, limiting the reach of programmes.

Looking ahead, many who were consulted felt that the hub has an opportunity to play a stronger role as a connector and convenor, bringing together organisations across the region to share knowledge, coordinate activity, and develop collaborative programmes that respond to local needs.

Findings suggest that partnerships are both a key strength and a key area for development within the hub ecosystem. While many productive collaborations already exist, a more strategic and coordinated approach could help maximise the collective impact of organisations working across the region.

## **6.5 Governance, Leadership and Management**

Governance and leadership structures play a critical role in shaping the effectiveness, transparency, and strategic direction of the music hub. Interviewees highlighted the importance of strong leadership in coordinating the diverse range of partners involved in delivering music education across the region and in ensuring that the hub responds effectively to both national policy priorities and local needs.

It is generally recognised that the hub operates within a complex organisational landscape that includes local authorities, cultural organisations, schools, and freelance practitioners. Within this context, governance structures must balance the need for clear strategic direction with the flexibility required to support collaborative working across multiple partners.

One recurring theme was the importance of clarity around roles and responsibilities within the hub structure. While the overall aims of the hub are widely understood, there may be less clarity around how different partners contribute to decision-making processes or how priorities are agreed and implemented. Ensuring that governance arrangements are transparent and clearly communicated was seen as an important step in strengthening trust and engagement among partners.

The importance of inclusive leadership, ensuring that the perspectives of different stakeholders - including schools, cultural organisations, practitioners, and young people – needs to be reflected in strategic planning. There were several suggestions that youth voice initiatives could be more systematically integrated into governance processes, allowing young people to contribute directly to shaping the development of programmes and opportunities. Another emerging theme was the challenge of balancing strategic leadership with operational capacity. The hub must not only coordinate partners and develop strategic plans but also deliver programmes and manage funding streams. This creates a complex operational environment where leadership teams must balance long-term planning with the practical demands of programme delivery.

Financial sustainability also featured in discussions about governance. Participants highlighted the importance of transparent financial management and strategic allocation of resources to ensure that funding supports both core delivery and the development of new initiatives. As public funding environments become increasingly uncertain, strong governance structures will be essential to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the hub's work.

The importance of data and evaluation in supporting effective governance was also highlighted. Reliable data on participation, reach, and outcomes can help leadership teams identify gaps in provision and make informed decisions about future priorities. Strengthening systems for data collection and analysis could therefore support more evidence-based strategic planning.

The OMH benefits from committed leadership and established governance structures, but that there are opportunities to enhance transparency, broaden stakeholder engagement, and strengthen strategic coordination across the partnership network.

## **6.6 Communication and Engagement**

Communication was identified as a significant challenge across the music hub landscape. While a wide range of music opportunities exist across the region, contributors consistently reported that awareness of these opportunities remains limited among schools, families, and communities.

Several stakeholders noted that, even after many years of music hub activity nationally, there is still uncertainty about what a music hub is and how it operates. This lack of clarity can make it difficult for schools and families to understand how to access available programmes or how different organisations fit within the wider music education ecosystem.

Within schools, communication challenges can arise from the complexity of school structures and competing priorities. Information about music opportunities may be sent to senior leaders or administrative staff but not always reach the teachers responsible for delivering music education. In some cases, music leads may also change frequently, leading to gaps in knowledge and continuity.

Improving communication with schools may require more targeted and consistent engagement strategies, including clearer points of contact and regular updates about available opportunities.

Beyond schools, also highlighted was the need to improve communication with parents, carers, and young people. Families who are already engaged with cultural organisations may be aware of music opportunities, but those who are less connected to the arts may not receive the same information. As a result, participation may be skewed towards families who already have higher levels of cultural engagement.

Several stakeholders suggested that stronger use of digital platforms and online resources could help address this challenge. A centralised website or digital portal that maps all music opportunities across the region could make it easier for families and schools to identify activities and progression routes.

Communication was also linked to celebration and visibility. Participants emphasised the importance of sharing success stories, performances, and achievements to raise the profile of music education and inspire participation. Public events, concerts, and community showcases were seen as powerful ways of demonstrating the impact of music programmes and strengthening relationships with local communities.

Finally, effective communication must be two-way, allowing stakeholders to provide feedback and contribute ideas for future development. Creating spaces for dialogue between schools, partners, practitioners, and young people could help ensure that programmes respond to real needs and remain relevant to local communities.

The interviews suggest that improving communication and engagement will be essential for increasing participation, strengthening partnerships, and ensuring that the full range of music opportunities across the region is visible and accessible.

## **6.7 Future Commissioning and Partnership Models**

Looking ahead, there is a clear emphasis on the need for future commissioning and delivery models that support greater collaboration, sustainability, diversification, and responsiveness to local needs. As the music education landscape continues to evolve, stakeholders recognised that traditional delivery models may need to adapt to address emerging challenges and opportunities.

One of the most significant themes emerging was the importance of flexible and collaborative commissioning approaches. Participants suggested that commissioning models which encourage partnerships between organisations - rather than competition between them - could help maximise the impact of limited resources. By working collaboratively, organisations can combine their expertise, reach new audiences, and develop programmes that draw on complementary strengths.

Several stakeholders also highlighted the importance of ensuring that future commissioning models support local innovation. While national priorities provide an important framework for music education delivery, programmes must also respond to the specific needs and

characteristics of local communities. Commissioning processes that allow for experimentation and locally tailored solutions were therefore seen as particularly valuable.

Another key theme was the need to address inequalities in access. Future commissioning decisions may need to prioritise areas where provision is currently limited, including rural communities and areas of higher socio-economic disadvantage. Targeted investment in these areas could help reduce geographic disparities in access to music education opportunities.

The importance of long-term sustainability is key. Short-term project funding can enable valuable pilot initiatives, but it may not provide the stability needed to build lasting programmes or maintain workforce capacity. Longer-term commissioning arrangements could allow organisations to develop more sustainable programmes and invest in workforce development.

The role of the hub as a strategic coordinator was also highlighted. The hub should increasingly function as a facilitator of partnerships, supporting collaboration between schools, cultural organisations, and community groups. This model could enable a more distributed network of provision while maintaining strategic oversight and alignment with national priorities.

Finally, there is a strong desire that future commissioning models should place young people's voices at the centre of programme design. Understanding the interests, motivations and aspirations of young people will be essential in developing music education opportunities that are engaging, relevant, and inclusive.

The findings suggest that future commissioning arrangements should aim to create a more connected, collaborative, and equitable music education ecosystem, enabling organisations to work together effectively to meet the needs of young people across the region.

Survey insights support the need for future models that prioritise access, inclusion, and sustainability. Across all groups, there is a strong call for increased funding to address cost barriers and support workforce development. There is also demand for more local, accessible opportunities, particularly in rural areas and within school settings.

Stakeholders emphasise the importance of clearer progression pathways and more coordinated provision across partners. In addition, there is a consistent message about the importance of youth voice, ensuring that programmes reflect the interests and needs of young people. Future approaches that enable collaboration, reduce duplication and target areas of greatest need will be key to creating a more equitable system.

## 7. Strategic Recommendations

The following strategic recommendations are informed by the full range of evidence gathered through this Needs Analysis, including interviews, surveys, desk research and stakeholder engagement. They are aligned to the key themes identified in Section 6 (Findings) and are intended to support the development of a more inclusive, coherent, and sustainable music education ecosystem across Dorset and Somerset.

These recommendations are designed to be practical and action-oriented, supporting the Octagon Music Hub and its partners in addressing current challenges while building on existing strengths.

### 7.1 Offer, Reach and Engagement

- Develop a **central digital platform** mapping all music opportunities, pathways, and providers across Dorset and Somerset.
- Target **geographical cold spots** with mobile provision, satellite hubs, and local delivery partnerships.
- Establish **minimum entitlement expectations** for all schools to reduce variability in access.
- Strengthen the **Lead School networks** to drive local engagement and peer support.
- Expand **out-of-school and community-based provision**, particularly in underserved areas.
- Increase **localised delivery** (e.g. village-based or cluster-based activity) to reduce reliance on travel.

### 7.2 Barriers to Participation and Progression

- Introduce or expand **subsidy schemes** for lessons, instruments, and transport.
- Develop **instrument loan and access schemes** at scale across both counties.
- Pilot **transport solutions** (e.g. travel bursaries, coordinated transport, local hubs).
- Create and publish **clear progression pathways** from first access to advanced levels.
- Improve **transition support** between primary and secondary phases.
- Provide **flexible participation models** (e.g. shorter sessions, hybrid/digital access).
- Deliver targeted interventions for **underrepresented groups** (SEND, disadvantaged, rural).

### 7.3 Workforce and Workforce Development

- Implement a **flexible CPD model** (online, modular, twilight, in-school delivery).
- Prioritise CPD in **SEND, inclusive practice, and music technology**.
- Expand **team-teaching models** to build teacher confidence and sustainability.
- Develop a **workforce engagement strategy** for freelancers (paid CPD, incentives, networks).
- Create **peer learning networks** for schools and practitioners.
- Establish **clear workforce development pathways** (early career → advanced practice).
- Improve **recruitment and retention strategies** for music educators.

## 7.4 Partnerships

- Map all partners and create a **live partnership directory**.
- Formalise partnerships through **clear frameworks and shared objectives**.
- Position the hub as a **convenor and connector**, not just a delivery body.
- Strengthen **school partnerships**, particularly with low-engagement schools.
- Ensure **equitable involvement of smaller organisations** in planning and delivery.
- Develop **place-based partnership models** (local clusters working collaboratively).
- Facilitate **regular partner forums** to share practice and coordinate activity.

## 7.5 Governance, Leadership and Management

- Clarify and communicate **roles, responsibilities, and decision-making structures**.
- Embed **youth voice in governance**, including advisory groups or boards.
- Strengthen **data collection and evaluation systems** to inform decision-making.
- Improve **transparency in funding and commissioning decisions**.
- Align governance with **strategic priorities and local needs**.
- Build leadership capacity to balance **strategy and operational delivery**.
- Develop a **long-term financial sustainability plan**.

## 7.6 Communication and Engagement

- Create a **single, accessible digital hub/website** for all music opportunities.
- Develop a **targeted communications strategy** for schools, families, and communities.
- Use schools as **key communication channels** to reach parents and carers.
- Increase **direct communication with families**, especially those less engaged.
- Improve **internal communication within schools** (reach music leads effectively).
- Promote **success stories and impact** through performances and media.
- Establish **two-way communication channels** (feedback loops with stakeholders).

## 7.7 Future Commissioning and Partnership Models

- Shift to **collaborative commissioning models** that incentivise partnership working.
- Prioritise **investment in underserved areas and priority groups**.
- Move towards **longer-term funding cycles** to support sustainability.
- Commission programmes that are **locally responsive and flexible**.
- Reduce duplication through **coordinated planning across partners**.
- Embed **clear progression expectations** within commissioned programmes.
- Require **youth voice and co-design** in all commissioned activity.

## 7.8 Additional Cross-Cutting Recommendations

- Develop a **whole-system progression framework** (early years through to careers).
- Strengthen **early years provision** through practitioner training and family engagement.
- Expand **creative careers pathways**, including industry partnerships and mentoring.
- Invest in **music technology and contemporary music pathways**.
- Align music education with **wider social priorities** (wellbeing, inclusion, education outcomes).
- Introduce **place-based pilots** to test integrated delivery models.

- Improve **data sharing across partners** to build a full picture of provision.
- Ensure **environmental sustainability** is embedded in planning and delivery.
- Regularly review and update strategy using **evidence and stakeholder feedback**.

## 8. Implementation Plan

<b>1. Offer, Reach and Engagement</b>		
What	How	When
Develop place-based delivery models to increase access in underserved areas (cold-spots), including expanding out-of-school and community-based provision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use existing data (hub, LA, partner insight) to identify 3–5 priority “cold spot” areas and identify local delivery partners (schools, MATs, community venues)</li> <li>2. Pilot 2–3 satellite delivery models (e.g. after-school hubs, weekend centres, ensembles touring delivery)</li> <li>3. Commission targeted outreach/taster programmes in those areas</li> </ol>	Spring/Summer 26
Establish minimum entitlement expectations for all schools to reduce variability and align offer across both counties	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Define a clear “minimum offer” across both counties (e.g. CIL, singing, progression signposting, curriculum support, CPD access).</li> <li>2. Consult with schools, music services and partners and embed expectations into commissioning and school engagement.</li> <li>3. Communicate clearly to all schools via LA/hub channels</li> </ol>	Spring 26
Strengthen early years pathways as the starting point for lifelong musical engagement.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Map current early years provision and identify gaps</li> <li>2. Develop partnerships with early years settings and family services</li> <li>3. Commission targeted early years programmes (e.g. nursery music, parent-child sessions)</li> <li>4. Provide CPD for early years practitioners and delivery partners</li> </ol>	Summer/Autumn 26
Provide flexible participation models, including hybrid and digital delivery where appropriate and upskilling the delivery workforce where needed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consult with existing and potential partners to identify where digital/blended models add value (e.g. rural areas, progression support)</li> <li>2. Pilot hybrid delivery (online tutorials, remote ensembles, composition, digital resources)</li> <li>3. Provide targeted CPD in digital delivery and music technology</li> <li>4. Develop shared digital resources/platforms to support access</li> </ol>	Spring/Summer 26
<b>2. Inclusion, Progression and Participation</b>		
Develop and communicate clear progression pathways	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Map existing provision and create a Directory</li> <li>2. Develop a better understanding of what is driving the drop-off points (particularly primary → secondary and post-16 transition),</li> </ol>	Academic year 26.27

(Early Years → Post-16 → Careers)	<p>and work with Lead Schools to strengthen transition points through targeted support and coordination between phases</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Develop a clear, accessible progression framework showing multiple routes (formal, informal, inclusive) and consult and build new partnerships with FE, HE and creative industry organisations</li> <li>4. Develop advanced opportunities (ensembles, mentoring, industry engagement)</li> </ol>	
Strengthen inclusive and targeted pathways for underrepresented groups (SEND, disadvantaged, rural learners)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop targeted progression routes alongside mainstream pathways</li> <li>2. Commission programmes that support engagement and sustained progression</li> <li>3. Strengthen links between mainstream schools, specialist settings and community provision</li> <li>4. Ensure flexible and accessible entry points within progression pathways</li> <li>5. Align schools based activity activity with wider inclusion priorities (SEND reform, disadvantage, rural access)</li> </ol>	Academic year 26.27
Expand and diversify the musical offer, including music technology and contemporary pathways	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use Youth Voice mechanisms to identify gaps in genre, style and digital offer</li> <li>2. Commission or support new programmes in contemporary music, production and digital creation</li> <li>3. Embed music technology within school and progression pathways</li> <li>4. Provide targeted CPD for workforce in music technology and contemporary practice</li> <li>5. Connect new provision to progression routes</li> </ol>	Summer 26
<b>3. Workforce Development and Capacity</b>		
Implement a flexible CPD model, prioritising SEND, inclusive practice, trauma-informed approaches and music technology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Design a blended cross-county CPD offer including online resources, twilight sessions and in-school support</li> <li>2. Prioritise training in SEND, inclusive pedagogy, trauma-informed practice and music technology</li> <li>3. Work with partners and specialists (e.g. practitioners already delivering this training) to deliver CPD and ensure CPD is accessible to both school staff and music educators</li> <li>4. Align CPD with identified workforce needs and inclusion priorities</li> </ol>	Academic year 26.27
Expand team-teaching models to support inclusive	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify schools and settings where team-teaching can be piloted or expanded</li> <li>2. Pair music specialists with classroom teachers to model inclusive practice</li> </ol>	Academic year 26.27

practice and teacher confidence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Embed team-teaching within classroom instrumental programmes and targeted SEND work</li> <li>4. Capture and share effective practice through case studies and networks</li> </ol>	
Develop peer learning networks for music educators and strengthen Lead School collaboration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Build on existing school phase networks led by music services</li> <li>2. Strengthen the role of Lead Schools in convening and sharing practice</li> <li>3. Facilitate regular network meetings (in-person and online)</li> <li>4. Support sharing of resources, practice and local solutions</li> <li>5. Link networks to CPD and progression priorities</li> </ol>	Spring/Summer 26
Develop a workforce engagement strategy for freelancers (including paid CPD and networks)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Map freelance workforce and identify engagement gaps</li> <li>2. Introduce paid CPD opportunities and clearer pathways into hub activity</li> <li>3. Create regular communication channels and networks for freelancers to improve visibility of opportunities, expectations and progression routes</li> </ol>	Winter 26
Improve recruitment, retention, and progression pathways for early-career music educators	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop early-career support pathways (mentoring, shadowing, CPD)</li> <li>2. Create clearer progression/development/leadership routes within hub and partner delivery</li> </ol>	Autumn 26
<b>4. Partnerships, System Leadership and Commissioning</b>		
Map all partners and develop a live partnership directory	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Map all current partners across schools, music services, MATs, community organisations and cultural providers - Identify gaps in provision and engagement (geographic, phase, genre, SEND)</li> <li>2. Develop and maintain a live, accessible partnership directory - use this to inform commissioning, communication and collaboration</li> </ol>	Spring/Summer 26
Formalise partnerships through shared frameworks, expectations, and outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop a clear partnership framework outlining roles, expectations and contribution to Hub priorities</li> <li>2. Embed expectations around delivery, data sharing and collaboration</li> <li>3. Align partnership agreements with commissioning and strategic priorities</li> <li>4. Ensure consistency across Dorset and Somerset while allowing flexibility for local delivery</li> </ol>	Spring/Summer 26
Position the Hub as a convenor and system	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clarify and communicate the Hub's system leadership role</li> </ol>	Summer 26

leader, not solely a commissioning body	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Establish regular partner forums and strategic conversations</li> <li>3. Use data and insight to coordinate activity and reduce duplication</li> <li>4. Support alignment across partners rather than direct delivery in all areas</li> </ol>	
Strengthen engagement with schools, particularly those with low participation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify schools with low engagement using hub and partner data</li> <li>2. Target support through Lead Schools, music services and partner organisations</li> <li>3. Develop tailored engagement approaches (e.g. outreach, CPD, in-school support)</li> <li>4. Improve communication and clarity of offer to schools</li> </ol>	Spring/Summer 26
Develop place-based partnership models (local clusters working collaboratively)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify priority areas and cluster schools, partners and venues locally</li> <li>2. Establish local partnership groups to coordinate delivery</li> <li>3. Align place-based work with cold spot strategy and community provision</li> <li>4. Pilot cluster-based delivery models and shared planning approaches</li> </ol>	Summer/Autumn 26
Shift towards more flexible and collaborative commissioning approaches and broaden the range of delivery partners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Move towards commissioning models that incentivise collaboration and partnership working</li> <li>2. Introduce more flexible funding approaches (e.g. pilots, targeted programmes, small grants)</li> <li>3. Broaden commissioned partners to include MATs, Lead Schools and community organisations</li> <li>4. Align commissioning with identified priorities (place, inclusion, progression)</li> <li>5. Reduce duplication through coordinated planning and clearer expectations</li> </ol>	Spring/Summer 26
Map all partners and develop a live partnership directory	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Map all current partners across schools, music services, MATs, community organisations and cultural providers and identify gaps in provision and engagement (geographic, phase, genre, SEND)</li> <li>2. Develop and maintain a live, accessible partnership directory</li> </ol>	Summer 26
<b>5. Data, Communication and System Visibility</b>		
Develop a central digital platform and coordinated communications approach to improve	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop a digital platform bringing together opportunities, partners and progression routes and integrate partnership directory and progression pathways</li> </ol>	Summer 26

visibility of music opportunities and pathways	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Develop a targeted communications strategy for schools, families and communities and use schools as key communication channels to reach parents and carers</li> <li>3. Provide clear, accessible and consistent messaging across the region</li> </ol>	
Strengthen data sharing, collection and evaluation systems to inform decision-making	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establish clear expectations for data sharing within partnerships and commissioning agreements and agree a core dataset across partners (participation, reach, demographics)</li> <li>2. Review and align current data collection approaches</li> <li>3. Develop simple, proportionate quality and evaluation tools</li> <li>4. Use data to inform commissioning, targeting and strategic planning</li> </ol>	Summer 26
Establish two-way communication and feedback mechanisms to strengthen insight and responsiveness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create regular feedback channels (surveys, forums, youth voice, partner engagement)</li> <li>2. Improve visibility of how feedback informs decisions and use insight to continuously refine delivery and strategy</li> </ol>	Academic year 26.27
<b>6. Governance and Sustainability</b>		
Clarify and align governance structures, roles and decision-making with strategic priorities and local needs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review current governance structures across the Hub and partners; clearly define roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes</li> <li>2. Communicate governance structures clearly to partners and stakeholders</li> </ol>	Spring 26
Improve transparency and accountability in funding and commissioning decisions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop clear criteria for commissioning and investment decisions and communicate how funding aligns with strategic priorities</li> <li>2. Strengthen reporting and oversight mechanisms</li> </ol>	Spring/Summer 26
Build leadership capacity across the Hub and partner organisations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthen strategic leadership within key delivery organisations</li> <li>2. Encourage shared leadership across partnerships and place-based models</li> </ol>	Academic year 26.27
Embed youth voice within governance and develop a long-term financial sustainability approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establish mechanisms for youth voice within governance structures (e.g. advisory groups, representation) and ensure youth input informs strategic decisions and commissioning</li> <li>2. Review current funding model and identify risks and opportunities</li> <li>3. Develop a long-term financial sustainability plan, including diversified income and partnership approaches</li> </ol>	Summer 26



## 9. Appendices

### Appendix 1: List of interviewees






Adam Burgan	Octagon Theatre
Alison Jeffery	Somerset Council
Alphie Matthews	Arts Council England
Annette Burghes	Octagon Music Hub
Bridget Whyte	Music Mark
Clair McColl	Dorset Music
Claire Tudge	Octagon Music Hub
Colin Philimore	Babigloo
Deborah Jones	Shaftesbury Arts Centre
Dianne Ely	Dorset Music
Emily Hicks	B Sharp
Glyn Bowen	Somerset Music
Hanna Trevorrow	Wessex Schools Music
Hannah Reeves	Dorset Music
Hazel Province	Freelance
Helen Reid	Somerset Council
Jane Parker	Take Art
Jennie Lister	Take Art
Jess Kirkby	Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra
Julian Breeze	Somerset Youth Orchestra
Kat Beverly	Octagon Theatre
Kate Wood	Activate
Kath Page	Southampton and Isle of White Music
Kirsten Wordley	Somerset Music
Lewis Gibbs	Devon Music Education Hub
Lisa Gray	Dorset Council
Millie Young	ASONE Music Hub
Nick Brace	Actiontrack
Nicola Thompson	Somerset Music
Peter Whitmarsh	Dorset Music
Pili Lopez	Dorset Music
Rachael Parvin	Guildhall Young Artists
Ralph Lister	Take Art
Richard Brown	Purbeck Youth Music
Richard Jones	Freelance
Rodney Teague	Weymouth College
Ruth Cohen	BSharp
Saffron Van Zwanenberg	Jackdaws Music Education Trust
Sophie Carpenter	Arts Development Company

Sophie Dunn  
Tim Hill

Live Music Now  
The Sound of the Streets

## Appendix 2: Geographic Cold Spot Analysis

Area	Geography	Current Evidence of Activity	Status	Commissioning Implication (including under-served areas)
Dorchester Locality	Dorset	Activity through B Sharp and Live Music Now (Thomas Hardy School, Prince of Wales School).	 Moderate	Provision is largely centred on Dorchester, with limited visibility of activity in surrounding rural communities. Opportunity to extend reach into areas such as Crossways, Cerne Abbas and Maiden Newton through place-based partnerships and cluster delivery.
Weymouth & Portland Locality	Dorset	Engagement via B Sharp and BSO programmes (Wey Valley Academy, Coastland College).	 Strong	Activity is concentrated in Weymouth, with less consistent reach into Portland and smaller coastal communities. Opportunity to strengthen progression pathways and extend provision beyond the main town centre.
West Dorset Locality	Dorset	Activity in Lyme Regis and Beaminster (Woodroffe School, Beaminster School).	 Moderate	Engagement is clustered around key market towns, with limited evidence of sustained activity in surrounding rural areas (e.g. Bridport hinterland, Charmouth and villages between Beaminster and Dorchester). Opportunity for cluster-based and outreach delivery models.
North Dorset Locality	Dorset	Limited evidence of activity across the Blackmore Vale area. Some engagement around Sherborne.	 Cold spot	Provision appears sparse and uneven across the Blackmore Vale, with limited visible engagement in Sturminster Newton, Blandford Forum and surrounding rural communities. This represents a priority area for targeted, place-based commissioning and partnership development.
East Dorset Locality	Dorset	Engagement via B Sharp (Ferndown Upper, Queen Elizabeth's School Wimborne).	 Moderate	Activity is centred around Ferndown and Wimborne, with less consistent engagement across the wider area (e.g. Verwood, Corfe Mullen and commuter belt communities). Opportunity to broaden reach through school partnerships and localised delivery.

South Somerset (former district)	Somerset	High density of activity including Yeovil, Chard, Ilminster and Langport (BSO, Actiontrack and SEND work).	 Strong	Provision is strongly concentrated along the Yeovil–Chard–Ilminster–Langport corridor. While this represents a key strength, there is opportunity to extend reach into surrounding rural communities, including Wincanton hinterland and areas towards the Dorset border.
Taunton Deane (former district)	Somerset	Significant engagement including Taunton schools (Castle School, Monkton Wood, Court Fields).	 Strong	Activity is well established in Taunton and Wellington, but more limited in smaller surrounding communities. Opportunity to extend delivery into rural villages and edge-of-catchment areas (e.g. North Curry, Blackdown Hills).
Sedgemoor (former district)	Somerset	Bridgwater activity including SEND schools and BSO programmes.	 Strong	Engagement is concentrated in Bridgwater, with more limited reach into coastal and rural areas such as Burnham-on-Sea, Highbridge and the Somerset Levels. Opportunity to expand place-based provision beyond the main town.
Mendip (former district)	Somerset	Engagement in Frome, Street and Wells but relatively dispersed.	 Moderate	Provision is present but unevenly distributed and genre specific, with less concentrated activity across Shepton Mallet, Glastonbury and wider rural Mendip. Opportunity to strengthen cluster-based delivery and improve consistency of access.
West Somerset (former district)	Somerset	Limited evidence of activity in the dataset.	 Cold spot	Provision appears minimal across Minehead, Watchet, Williton and Exmoor communities. This is a clear under-served area where access is likely constrained by geography and transport. Priority area for targeted outreach and partnership-led delivery.

### **Appendix 3: Individual survey analysis (available on request)**

1. Children and young people
2. Parents and carers
3. The music education workforce
4. Schools
5. Other organisations that work with young people