

# FIRST ACCESS CASE STUDY: Modern, accessible lessons through Associate-run ukulele



Wiltshire's Music  
Education Hub

"We're really happy with the way things have gone. The tutor feels more part of the school rather than a separate body, and the programme gives all children access to music and the ability to have a sense of achievement."

Michel Morris, School Business Manager.

## How did it come about?

Guitar and ukulele tutor Jon Dunn became one of the first tutors to join Wiltshire Music Connect's Associate scheme when it launched in 2015. He started freelancing in Wiltshire earlier that year, and his first customer was Dauntsey Academy Primary School (DAPS).

Two years on, he teaches around 100 students a week in three schools including DAPS, through one-to-one and small group guitar and ukulele, and First Access whole class ukulele.

School Business Manager, Michel Morris, says: "We'd always had violin in the past, but I noticed that for peripatetic lessons, guitar was really popular. Ukulele is really accessible – particularly if it's their first experience – because violin takes a long time to master even how to hold it."

First Access was a first for Jon too, and he built his course from the ground up, testing what works and evolving the programme as the weeks passed. "It was a baptism of fire!" says Jon. "I'd taught in one-to-one or small group situations in schools in Bath and North East Somerset Music Service, but on my first day working in Wiltshire I was standing in front of 15 year threes, and had to work out a way to teach them ukulele!"

## How does it work?

Each class is split in half, so 15 pupils will learn for 25 mins, and then swap. This allows for greater teacher-pupil interaction and classroom management, but the drawback is that the class teacher is absent as s/he will be teaching the other half of the class.

We connect children and young people in our county with a broad range of music making opportunities and experiences to compliment and support what schools offer. Because music is excellent for developing young minds.



The school has bought its own set of ukuleles – although instruments for First Access can be hired from Wiltshire Music Connect. Like many other teachers, Jon uses large laminated cards to depict notes, chords, strumming patterns, etc, although some other schools use Charanga or schemes of work and online resources.

Jon has devised his own outcomes and syllabus as he's found that teachers are often unsure of what pupils should be able to achieve through First Access.

"Term one and two is all about playing as a group, very simple songs using one or two notes initially then building to learning a C major scale by Christmas," explains Jon. "In a typical lesson, I'll introduce the lesson, explain what we'll be learning and what I hope we'll have achieved by the end. I start by demonstrating on my ukulele, then I'll give out theirs, and they'll have five or ten minutes to practice what I've just shown them."



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"I'll go around the room to check that everyone understands and give help and advice, and then I'll bring the group together as a whole to perform with a backing track on a small amplifier that I bring. At the end of the session we try to play what we've learned in one go, or I may ask one or more pupils to come to the front and play to the others."

To begin with, the songs are very simple exercises to introduce notes and chords, but as time progresses Jon introduces popular songs such as We Will Rock You, Shake it Off by Taylor Swift, Seven Years by Lukas Graham, and Hold Back the River by James Bay.

By the end of the year, pupils will have learned around 35 songs, three/four chords, and the C major scale.

Jon believes that schools should have access to a wide range of instruments and genres for First Access: "This is one of first opportunities that some of the kids have ever had to play a musical instrument, and when they can successfully strum along to a backing track in that first lesson, you see their eyes light up with the sense of achievement. And ukuleles can help to engage them quickly."

"Because ukuleles are fretted instruments," he continues, "it's easy for them to play a note and quickly make an appealing sound. And by playing songs they know they're having fun, while learning about listening, playing with others, and fundamental musical skills."

"It's good because I've learnt to play an instrument and know what notes are."  
Ukulele First Access pupil.



## What are the benefits and what impact has it had?

**Accessibility:** "It gives all children access to music. It's an easy instrument to play, you can have that sense of real achievement quite quickly and the popular repertoire is definitely important." – Michel.

**Engagement:** "I would always recommend using contemporary songs because pupils get really engaged with them – and ukulele lends itself well to this. When I play Shake it Off, I'll start with the drum beat, and straight away they'll tell me what the song is ... and then they want to rush home and tell Mum and Dad what they've learned." – Jon

**Inclusion:** "My experience is that young people with behavioural issues engage with it as much as the others." – Jon

**Cost:** Prices for a reasonable quality ukulele start at £15 for bulk purchase, £20 for individuals – Maholo is a good brand to look out for. Access to subsidy through the Associate scheme brings tuition costs down by a minimum of 12 per cent or around £150.

**Schools' relationship with tutor:** "The relationship is much closer now with the Associate scheme, there's no structure in the middle, so the tutors feel more part of the school, rather than another body." – Michel

First Access programme:	Ukulele First Access run by a hub Associate
Start date/timescale:	Annually, ongoing
Name of school:	Dauntsey Academy Primary School
Number of pupils on roll:	190
Number of staff:	34
Previous First Access:	Violins, before introducing ukulele
Other music activities:	50 students have one-to-one or small group lessons (piano, brass, guitar/ukulele, violin, woodwind); there is a large school choir, a recorder group, a school band and performance opportunities including an annual school musical and summer music recital. The school uses Charanga
Number & age of pupils receiving this programme:	All pupils in year 3 (30 in total)
Number having first experience of learning an instrument	0
Continuation rate*:	Est 7% (12 out of 31) <i>Currently limited by availability of tutor/s: eg guitar is very popular and up to capacity</i>
Resources provided:	School provides ukuleles although these can be hired from Wiltshire Music Connect for £134 (+VAT) per school year, subject to availability
Cost:	£35.70 (usual cost £40.80 per one-hour weekly session: each session from an Associate, is subsidised by Wiltshire Music Connect by £5.10 or more. Subsidies increase if there are more pupils – see website for details)

\* continuation is the percentage of young people taking lessons following a First Access programme



## What are the challenges and what could be improved?

Jon acknowledges there have been challenges to teaching in this way and he and the schools are learning all the time how to adapt to achieve improved outcomes:

*Guidance for First Access:* “It would be helpful for teachers who are new to First Access to be able to find or have some guidance, including what level pupils would ideally reach after a year.”

*Poor quality ukuleles:* “With cheaper ones, the strings start coming off, and it really affects how much pupils engage. If it doesn’t sound nice, they don’t engage. Schools are wise to invest in good quality instruments which will last longer, and not cause pupils to disengage.”

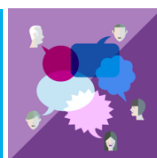
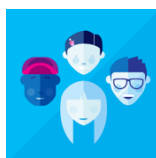
*Tuning and avoiding damage:* “Getting to schools early to tune all the ukuleles is important. Also making sure kids don’t touch the tuning pegs: if they do, you waste time retuning them.”



*Lack of progress between lessons:* “Pupils aren’t allowed to take instruments home, and they don’t get opportunities to use them in between sessions. It would help them to progress faster if they could.”

*Controlling the class:* Behaviour management is something that is often left to the classroom teacher in First Access, but with no teacher present, Jon has had to straddle the fine line between being a musician and a teacher. “When they get hold of a ukulele, understandably they just want to strum and they would do that for the whole session! I’ve had to be quite firm right from the start.”

*Assessment and differentiation:* “It’s not really possible to give feedback on individuals’ progress if the teacher’s not in the classroom to witness it, and differentiation is always difficult with whole class teaching.”



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