

What Are We Learning?

Sharing of Research Findings: Key Points

The move to online music tuition due to the coronavirus lockdown was a huge change in how children and young people experience singing and instrumental lessons.

Wiltshire Music Connect commissioned a research project to capture the learning from this rapid and unplanned change to understand how we can best support and sustain music education in the county.

Here are some of the key points from the research. We have also produced a **visual headlines document** and a more detailed **summary report** about how the research was conducted, who contributed and what we found out.



The research involved:



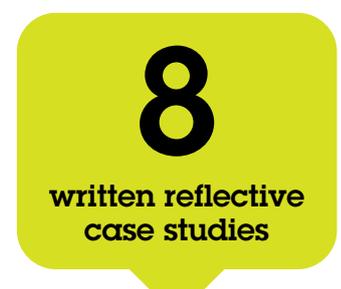
with students
having online
lessons



from children/
young people



from parents/carers



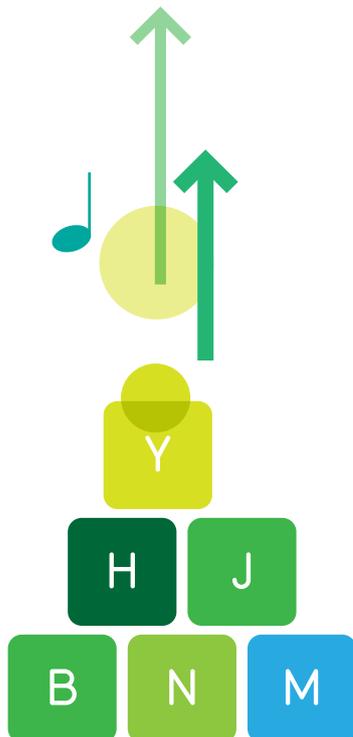
by co-researchers
(all Associate Providers
– the tutors referred to in
this report)

Key Points

Effectiveness of online tuition

None of our co-researchers had offered online tuition before and most were initially apprehensive about how successful it would be. However, once they had experienced providing lessons online, they were unanimous in their positivity that online lessons were effective at enabling students to continue learning and maintaining their progression. Although some wished to return to face-to-face tuition as soon as possible, most said they would continue to offer online tuition to some students in certain circumstances (such as for after-school teaching rather than visiting students' homes).

"I felt extremely apprehensive about being able to teach online. I was worried about the future of music teaching, and I was particularly concerned at how my pupils would react. Whether they would lose the incentive to play and practise without a goal to aim for... It became clear fairly rapidly that, despite the limitations, giving music lessons remotely was proving beneficial."



Students' responses to online lessons

The majority of students were unphased by the idea of having tuition online. They were open to new ways of learning and were grateful to be able to continue their lessons. A minority had reservations about online lessons due to their poor home internet connection or nervousness about doing something new. Generally, young people embraced using new technology and found the technological challenges and limitations of the online environment to be "minor niggles". There was a predominant view that online tuition was a good alternative for learning music during lockdown, but it was second best compared to face-to-face tuition. The majority of students wished to return to face-to-face tuition as soon as possible (including 65% of the questionnaire respondents). A notable proportion wish to learn with a combination of face-to-face and online tuition in the future (19% of questionnaire respondents would definitely and 42% would maybe like to have a mix of face-to-face and online tuition).

"They are pretty much the same as normal piano lessons. My teacher is just as helpful and friendly, I have progressed a grade throughout lockdown, I still enjoy playing the piano, the sound quality is a bit hit-and-miss but other than that everything is fine."

"A bit laggy, we can't play together because of the time difference, but it does work, just takes a bit longer to learn a piece of music."

Innovation and creativity

All the co-researchers felt the situation caused by coronavirus had been positive for their teaching practice. The need to adapt their teaching for the online environment provided an opportunity to re-evaluate their work. For most, their self-appraisal of what they teach and how they teach led to innovation and creativity in devising new lesson content. The audio-delay, which is common in synchronous online communication, meant some activities such as playing along to backing tracks or live accompaniment by tutors were not possible for online lessons. Tutors found new ways to reinforce rhythm, timing and tempo. Teaching aural exercises, and some aspects of technique such as slurring and tonguing for woodwind, were difficult online. Tutors explored new resources to use in their teaching to compensate for these limitations such as directing students to specific YouTube video tutorials. A greater emphasis on verbal explanation rather than playing to demonstrate technique and musical ideas was necessary for online teaching. This required tutors to consider the simplicity and consistency of language they use to communicate with students.

Students more independent in their learning

Tutors observed that not being in the same room together required students to become more independent with aspects of learning and practising. Examples include tuning the instrument, plugging in amps, using phone apps to trigger backing tracks, and annotating sheet music (tasks tutors would have done or assisted with in face-to-face lessons). Some tutors felt they had previously underestimated students' ability to manage these tasks themselves. Preserving this independence and raising their expectations of students is something tutors wish to continue when face-to-face lessons resume.

"The nature of online lessons means they have had to take on more responsibility for what they are doing, having to be more engaged in the lesson and really focusing on listening and watching.... One consequence of online lessons I have noticed is that students have to be much more independent and proactive to achieve the goals we set out."



Progression

Tutors observed that for many students, their rate of progression had not slowed with online lessons and for some students had even increased. They felt the predominant reason for this was that students were spending more time practising in between lessons, although other factors contributed such as greater concentration in online lessons, more parental support to practise and students having more time to explore resources and different genres. Students who usually have face-to-face lessons in pairs were reported by tutors and parents to be making increased progress with 1-2-1 online lessons. In contrast, tutors were aware that some children found it difficult to concentrate when communication was mediated by a screen.

"Some of my more advanced students have said that they are really pleased that they have more time to practise, and this is showing in their progress. These students are enjoying their music making even more than before."

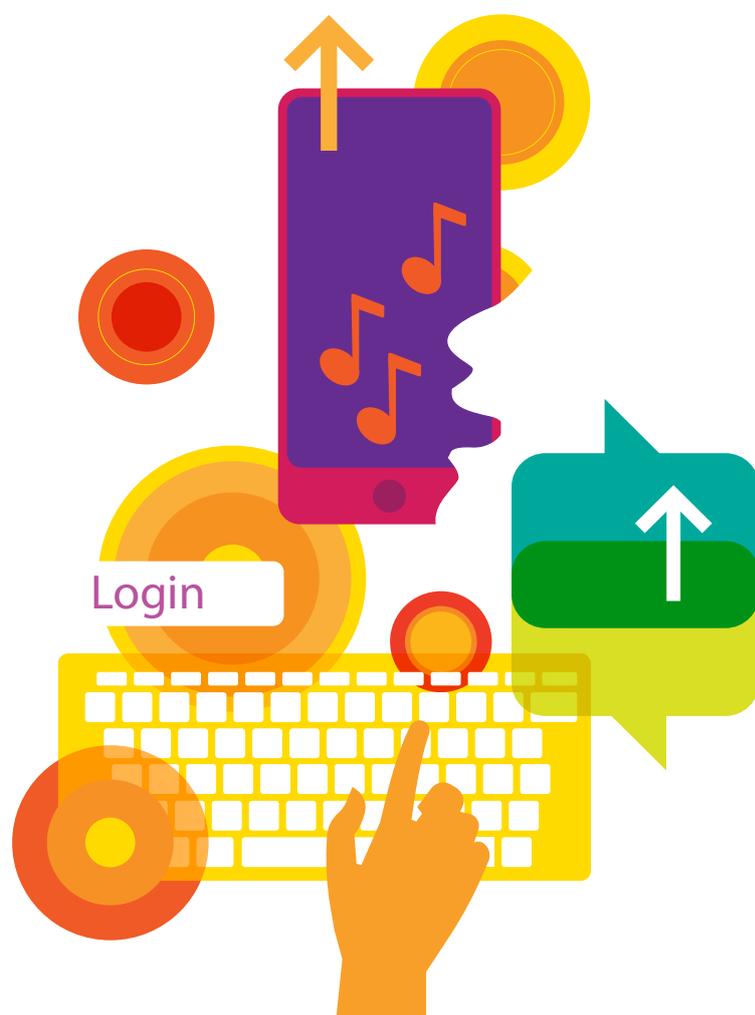
"I have enjoyed the novelty of online lessons, and I don't feel like they are stopping me from progressing. On the whole I've had more time to play and practise outside of music lessons."

Quality

Tutors felt it was vital to ensure what they offered was of high quality so parents felt that lessons were worth the money and not a lesser experience for a child because they were online. The indicators of quality for tutors included lessons being fun, engaging, giving students a sense of achievement and enabling them to keep enjoying playing music.

More use of technology

One of the significant adaptations tutors made to their practice was a greater use of technology in their teaching which they said they would continue when they resume face-to-face lessons. This included encouraging students to make more use of apps such as digital metronomes, speed manipulation and tuning apps, triggering backing tracks for themselves and setting timers to support students to focus for short periods of time. Asking students to record themselves playing, as a way to encourage self-criticism, was a technique they would continue. Using online resources such as YouTube videos for aural exercises would continue. One tutor was transferring all their resources to digital so they could have everything at hand in face-to-face lessons and be more responsive to students' interests. Others plan to develop their website as a platform for sharing resources with their students.



Music is important to children and young people's wellbeing

Young people spoke about how online lessons, playing music and listening to music helped their wellbeing during the lockdown. Some young people found the schoolwork required of them at home to be stressful. Some were going into school by June (when the interviews took place) which they also found stressful. Online lessons and music making at home provided a relief from this and was "de-stressing". Some spoke of listening to "calming" music and of playing "upbeat" music to lift their mood. Weekly social contact outside of their family during lessons provided a routine and something to look forward to. Making and listening to music helped to cope with lockdown – music was something to do to relieve boredom, "takes your mind off things" and "makes you feel happy".

"It's been a bit stressful, so it's quite nice to have half an hour where I can practise and it doesn't have to matter that I've still got loads of biology work to do."

"I feel like it's something else to do to take your mind off of everything. It's quite fun as well, very therapeutic."

Parent/carer engagement in their child's learning

Parents/carers expressed gratitude that tutors offered online tuition. Many commented how quickly tutors were able to adapt and move to online lessons. They appreciated the support and direct contact their child had with an educator, something that was lacking for many children in lockdown. Tutors noted that parents/carers appeared to enjoy being more involved in their child's learning.

Some parents/carers expressed disappointment when their child's existing tutor did not offer online tuition.

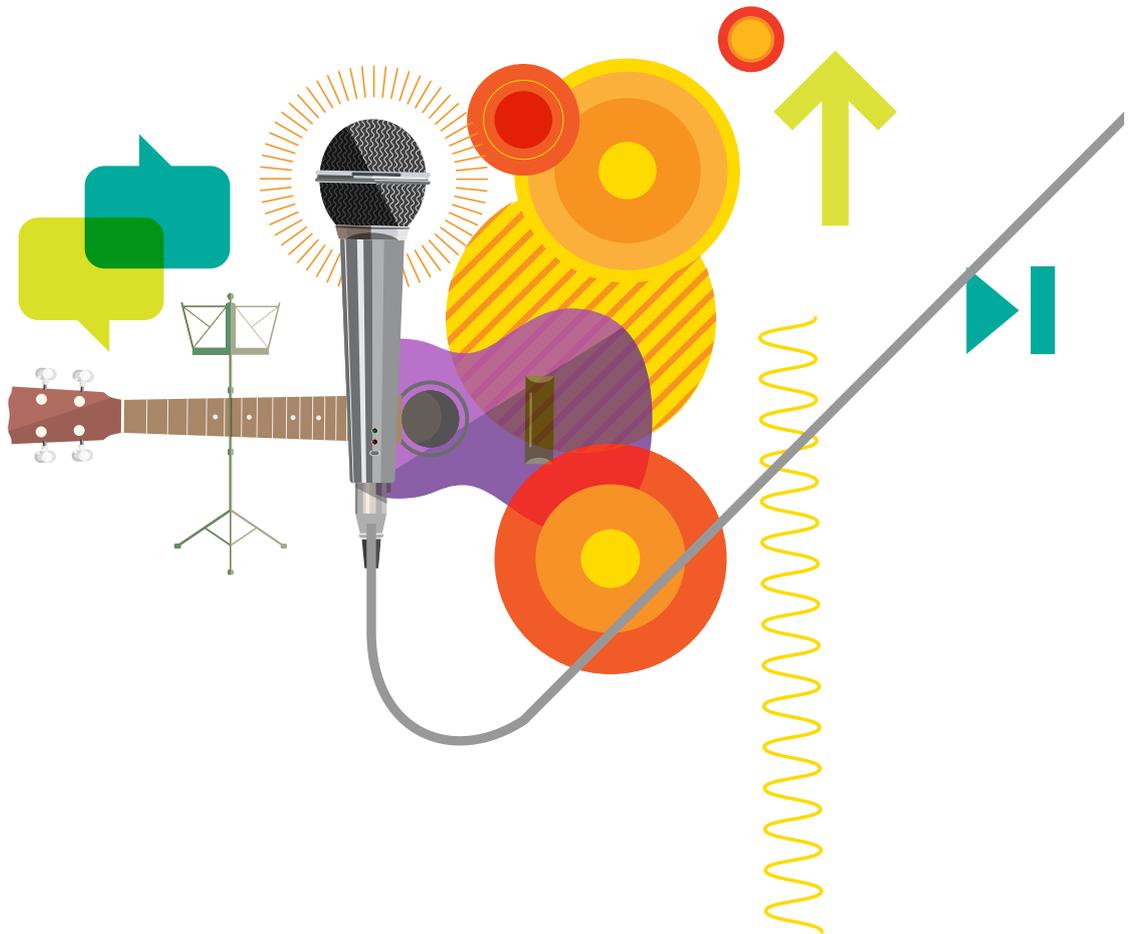
"I want to say again how effective online learning has been for my son, he has progressed well and he has been enthusiastic about practising. Thank you to his recorder teacher for providing him with the opportunity to have online lessons."

Online tuition not possible or positive for all

There were a wide range of reasons why families did not take part in online tuition including: student's anxiety regarding virtual lessons, parents feeling that young children would not engage with online lessons, children's lack of motivation to do anything during lockdown, families worries about their finances, lack of technology or insufficient broadband connection at home, no access to instruments at home. There are large disparities in resources children and young people have for music making at home. Parents and tutors felt some students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (particularly autism) found it difficult to concentrate and engage virtually. Students with poor working memory due to dyslexia found the emphasis on verbal instruction difficult.

"I have 4 siblings that all do music and we only have 1 laptop."

"We couldn't do the drum lessons as we don't have a drum kit at home."



Thanks and acknowledgements

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Contact and links

More about Wiltshire Music Connect
<https://wiltshiremusicconnect.org.uk/about/>

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Other What Are We Learning documents
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