

A Reflective Study: The Impact of Parental/Carer Support on a Young Person's Progression Through Music Education

By Dr Maia Mackney & Dr Henry Mulhall

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Foreword by Professor Jonathan Vaughan, Principal of Guildhall School of Music and Drama

This important and timely research offers a compelling exploration of the role that parental and carer support plays in shaping a young person's journey through music education. It resonates strongly with the realities I have observed across the sector; from early-stage training in organisations like the National Youth Orchestra to advanced study at conservatoires such as Guildhall School of Music & Drama. The findings reflect what many educators and practitioners have long understood, if only anecdotally: that musical progression is rarely the result of individual effort alone but is deeply influenced by the support structures surrounding young learners.

What makes this report particularly compelling is its recognition of the wide range of factors that shape a young musician's development, from economic pressures and class dynamics to gender, emotional support, sibling relationships, national identities and the quality of schooling. These intersectional considerations are essential if we are to understand not only who progresses through music education, but how and why.

The findings presented here offer valuable insights for educators, policy makers, and families alike. They remind us that musical excellence is rarely achieved in isolation, and that behind every successful student is a network of support - sometimes visible, sometimes quietly working in the background.

I am proud that through Dr Mackney and Dr Mulhall's work, Guildhall School has contributed to this research, and I hope it will inform future strategies to ensure that all young people, regardless of background, have the opportunity to flourish in music.

Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction: Project Description

This qualitative research considers the various ways in which parental support influences young musicians' progression through formal music education, with insights gathered through interviews with undergraduate and postgraduate students at Guildhall School of Music and Drama and parents of younger students who attend Music Education Islington (MEI). Commissioned by the City of London Education Department and conducted by Guildhall School researchers in collaboration with Access and Participation and Music Education Islington, this research addresses a gap in our understanding of how family support influences musical educational journeys.

Building upon research that demonstrates strong correlations between parental involvement and musical achievement (Sloboda and Howe, 2008, Creech and Hallam, 2010), this research considers the ways in which parents provide emotional, financial, and practical support to further their children's musical development. The research considers not only the presence of such support but also critically examines student progression in its absence, highlighting alternative support networks that enable success in higher music education.

The methodology included conducting semi-structured interviews with up to thirteen current undergraduate and postgraduate students and twelve parents and carers. Additional consultations were conducted with both the Head of Music Education Islington and Guildhall's Head of Access and Participation to provide context and framing for the research. This approach aimed to develop a pilot framework for understanding how different types of parental support interact to enable musical development.

This research aimed to consider the ways in which parental support enables access to institutional resources aimed at widening engagement within music education. It recognises that while conservatoires and music providers in the UK may provide excellent facilities and experienced teachers, students' ability to fully benefit from these institutional resources often depends heavily on parental involvement—from practical support including transportation to rehearsals and assistance in accessing spaces to practise, to emotional support including encouragement for performance opportunities, help processing teacher feedback, attendance at performances, and fostering a positive musical environment at home.

This reflective report addresses two key research objectives: first, to understand how the different forms of parental support contribute to musical educational engagement, with particular attention to how emotional support may be equally important as practical assistance; and second, to consider how young musicians successfully progress through higher music education when traditional parental support is absent, identifying the alternative formative support networks that enable their achievement.

The findings from this research may be used to inform the development of support systems both within Guildhall School and across the broader network of institutions supported by the

City of London Education Department. It is hoped that this research will offer learning for funders, music providers as well as parents hoping to support their children.

Context/framing for research

To begin this research into the complex relationship between students, parents and educational success in music education we spoke to Guildhall School's Head of Access and Participation. They described support from parents/carers as 'essential' and multifaceted, particularly in light of the reduction in state subsidy of music tuition in recent years. This aligns with extensive academic research that suggests that for a learner's musical education to be successful it is important that they have parents who are supportive and interested in their musical development (Howe and Sloboda, 1991; Zdzinski, 1992, 2013; Macmillan, 2004; McPherson, 2009; Jaynes, 2011; Upitis *et al.*, 2017; Daučianskaitė, 2019). Support was understood to include financial, logistical, practical, administrative as well as emotional and encouragement to practise and be aspirational.

"My observations of young people progressing through their music training have led me to believe that parent/carer support is absolutely essential. The reduction in quality music tuition in state schools means that many young people must access their music training outside of core school hours, and often in a location that is further afield. For younger students, and for those living in areas underserved by public transport, having parents who are willing and able to escort them to tuition, ensembles, performances, concerts, competitions etc. is absolutely vital – they simply could not progress without this. We hear often about 'soccer moms' and 'dance moms', and the importance of parental engagement for professional athletes, and the same applies in the world of music" (Head of Access and Participation Interview, July 2025)

These insights are mirrored throughout the literature on musical education. The relationship between parents and students is key to successful music education. Parents are children's "first teachers, their first life supports, and their first patrons" (Pruett, 2004, p.158). Successful music learners will have parents who follow rather than lead their growing musicianship (Davidson *et al.*, 1996). Talent is not presented as a natural gift but one that comes from continual support and encouragement that allows learners to become self-sufficient - "talent was a process of learning that grew from and threaded around everyday life" (Sosniak, 1999, p.166). Many of the authors point out that successful music learning is "a group effort involving the child, parents, teachers, other family or family friends" (Macmillan, 2004, p.296).

In light of the above, this research was designed to both contribute to existing literature on successful musical education, while also offering recommendations to music providers, policy makers and parents of whose children are learning music. We spoke to undergraduate and postgraduate students at Guildhall School to get a detailed perspective on their own personal journey and what they felt was particularly formative in terms of support while they progressed through their musical education. We also spoke to parents who currently have

young children in music education to better understand what support mechanisms and approaches are working for them in a challenging cultural climate of reduced state subsidy and provision.

2. Research Methodology and Parameters

2.1 Methodological Approach

Our methodological approach was guided by our literature review. With the notable exception of Daučianskaitė (2019) and Gouzouasis *et al* (2014) (in part a polemical text on method) most of the research we reviewed on music education employed quantitative methodologies. Gouzouasis *et al.* (2014) believe a more reflexive approach is apt because music is a lived experience but in the field of music research “assumptions of objectivity and positivism abound with little explication of reflexivity” (p.17). From their perspective, a focus on musicianship and excellence leads to “reductionist cognitive models, mechanistic pedagogies, and learning outcomes, results, and conclusions that reflect a corresponding epistemology” (Gouzouasis *et al.*, 2014, p.16). As I have noted, they seem to be correct regarding research methodology, although many other researchers are reflexive regarding their approach and findings: Howe and Sloboda (1991) say “the only general statement that we can draw from this diversity is that there does not exist ‘the’ route to musical excellence” (p.51); Zdzinski (2013) says “parental involvement in music is not a unitary construct” (p.84). Macmillan (2004) found conflicting accounts between children and parents regarding parental involvement in music practice with parents reporting that they attend more lessons than the children thought they had. She concludes from this that “it seems probable that parents like to feel involved, they wish to show an interest, they like to listen to their child practising, and yet they do not wish to intrude on the child’s private world and space, so they keep a discreet distance” (Macmillan, 2004, p.303). Methodology aside, all agree that parents and teachers create the home and learning environment necessary for musicianship to develop by offering encouragement and guidance to allow students to develop and solve problems on their own terms (Sosniak, 1999).

Research Design

This pilot study employed a qualitative research design using a two-phase approach to explore the impact of parent/carer’s support on a young person’s progression through music education within the Guildhall School community.

Phase 1: Literature Review

The research began with a literature review examining existing studies on parental support in music education. This phase informed the theoretical framework and guided interview development for Phase 2, ensuring the research was grounded within existing academic literature.

Phase 2: Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both students and parents to capture perspectives on parental support in music education.

Participants and Sampling

Three key groups were targeted:

- **Students:** Up to 15 undergraduate and postgraduate Guildhall School students recruited by balancing those with substantial parental support and those without, including both state-educated (Access and Participation bursary recipients) and privately educated students
- **Parents:** Up to 15 parents of younger music students from Music Education Islington (MEI), excluding parents of undergraduate students to maintain group independence
- Additional consultation took place with Guildhall School internal staff to frame the research within the context of a music conservatoire.

Recruitment Procedures

Students were recruited through open calls via Guildhall School's Music Office, Access and Participation Office, Student Ezine, and Student Union communications. Financial incentives were offered following consultation with the Access & Participation team. Parents were recruited through Music Education Islington mailing lists and family communications. Students and parents were invited to complete a registration of interest form which asked them about their school background and level of parental support.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval was granted by Guildhall School Ethics Panel in April 2025. Ethical considerations included voluntary opt in recruitment processes, clear withdrawal rights, avoidance of family-pair interviews, financial compensation for participants, and transparent communication about research purposes.

Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and summarised using AI technology. Transcribed anonymised data was then coded and thematically analysed both by AI technology and by the research team to ensure accuracy, enabling triangulation of perspectives across stakeholder groups.

2.2 Research Scope and Limitations

Study Parameters: This pilot qualitative study considers the impact of parent and carer support on young people's musical progression through focused research with undergraduate and postgraduate students, parents of young people from Music Education Islington, one project lead and one access and participation lead at Guildhall School of Music & Drama. There are several methodological considerations:

- The qualitative approach provides valuable insights into the lived experiences and perspectives of stakeholders, offering detailed understanding of how parental support influences musical development
- However, the study's focus on a single institution limits the applicability of findings to broader contexts and diverse geographical areas
- While this research captures important themes and patterns and develop research highlighted in the literature review, it cannot quantify the relative impact of parental support compared to other contributing intersectional factors (for instance financial privilege, educational background, race, gender and geography).
- The sampling approach, while appropriate for this pilot study, does not address the complex intersectional factors (race, gender, age, economic profile, and geography) that would require more rigorous quantitative methodology.
- The sampling approach did not support recruitment of non-self-selecting students. Some students we spoke to felt they had a 'story to tell' which led to their interest in the project and which may bias the findings.

Study Implications:

- Findings should be interpreted within the context of this specific educational setting and student population
- The research provides a solid foundation for understanding key themes that warrant further investigation in larger-scale studies
- Results may have limited direct application to policy development due to scope constraints, but offer valuable insights for practitioners/conservatoires working in similar contexts and for parents hoping to support their young people.

Future Research Direction:

- This pilot study could inform the development of comprehensive quantitative research that can more fully address intersectional factors (race, gender, age economic profile and geography) that impact progression through musical education
- The qualitative insights gathered could be used to strengthen future funding applications and help design more robust sampling frameworks for addressing complex intersectional factors
- This foundational work enables a more targeted approach to subsequent research that can meet broader policy requirements

2.3 Profile of Participants

Student Profile: 91 undergraduate and postgraduate students registered interest in the research project. We were able to use the data supplied in the registration of interest form to both inform this study and to create a balanced sample of those selected for interview. Of those 91, 46% had attended a state funded secondary schools, 14% had attended FE Colleges, 14% were from Privately Funded Day Schools, 5% private boarding schools, 12% had attended a specialist private music school, 9% stated they were educated in 'other' ways including home schooled young people.

It should be noted that the sample of students who registered an interest in the project is broadly representative of the student population at Guildhall School, which for the period between 2018/19 and 2022/23, 70% of new undergraduate entrants reported a state-funded school or college as their last place of education.

89% considered that their parent/carer or a significant adult in their life had provided them with support throughout your musical education, 5% stated that they had not received support and 5% responded 'maybe' to this question. Similarly, 82% stated that they consider their parent/carer or a significant adult in their life provided them with support to gain entry into Guildhall School, 13% stated 'no' and 4% stated 'maybe'.

76% felt that they received the 'right amount of support', 14% felt they received 'too little' support and 10% felt they received 'too much' support. 43% of those registering interest were in receipt of an Access and Participation Bursary or some other form of financial support from Guildhall School.

From 91 undergraduate and postgraduate students who registered interest in the research project, 15 students were selected using an approach closely aligned to a modified stratified random sampling with a purposive inclusion of priority group of Access & Participation funded students. Given City of London's particular interest in students from low-income families, all students who were in receipt of Access and Participation bursaries that registered interest were approached for interviews. The remaining sample was selected through proportionate stratified random sampling to approximately reflect the educational background distribution of the students who registered an interest: state funded secondary schools (46%), FE Colleges (14%), privately funded day schools (14%), private boarding schools (5%), specialist private music schools (12%), and other educational backgrounds including home schooling (9%). This two-stage sampling strategy was considered the fairest method to meet the specific research interests while maintaining representativeness across the diverse educational backgrounds and support characteristics outlined in the registration forms, ensuring the final sample reflected the population's experiences of musical education support, Guildhall entry support, and perceived adequacy of support received. This was broadly the aim in sampling, and when a participant did not reply to invitation to interview (or didn't show up to interview) a replacement with similar or the same background/level of support was approached.

Parents: 31 parents from Music Education Islington's beneficiaries registered an interest in the research. 12 of these 31 were interviewed, and these parents were selected in the same way as students (see above) to represent the original sample of parents approximately and proportionately. Of the 31 who registered interest in the project, the ages of their children ranged from 8-17 and there was a broad range of instruments learned.

72% of parents/carers had a child who had attended a State Funded Primary School and 13% state funded secondary and 5% FE College (noting many were parents of younger children hence this lower number), 3% privately funded primary day school, 3% private day school and 5% selected 'other' which included home schooled children and young people.

55% of parents described themselves to be 'musical', and this ranged from playing an instrument and reading music, to an avid interest in music, an immersive musical household, listening to music a great deal and attending concerts. 23% stated they were not musical and 23% stated 'maybe' in answer to this question.

3. Literature Review

Introduction

The literature reviewed here discusses the relationship between parental (home and family) environments and the effect that has on a child's music learning. We have woven various academic perspectives into the body of the text, particularly in relation to aspects of how parents create a home environment conducive to educational success. In this literature review we give a broad outline of how a nebulous concept such as *home environment* has been theorised in existing academic literature. We also outline the significance of teachers to music education, particularly the importance of a student-teacher-parent triangle (Daučianskaitė, 2019). A key theme that runs through many of these texts "is one of quiet and dogged perseverance in the undramatic process of helping the child get the work done (Howe and Sloboda, 1991, p.51) which involves time, money and motivation which make socioeconomic status an area of concern. We discuss the significance of social class and socio-economic status. Class is highlighted by many researchers as a source of friction and conflict for music learners and their parents (Brand, 1986; Fan and Chen, 2001; Creech and Hallam, 2003; McPherson, 2009; Zdzinski, 2013; Prostrullo, 2019; Devaney, 2024).

Home environment

Although many researchers agree that the home environment of a music learner is important for their knowledge and skills to develop and progress (Sloboda and Howe, 1991; Zdzinski, 1992; Sosniak, 1999; Ryan, Boucher and Ryan, 2023), what counts as a positive home environment is not a stable concept. For example, in his statistical meta-analysis of other studies, Zdzinski (2013) found that notions like parental involvement and home musical environments were not "unitary constructs" (p.84). This makes it difficult to identify a set of characteristics that will lead to successful musical progression from home to conservatoire, although some broad themes can be identified.

Sloboda and Howe (1991) advocate for early playful experimentation with varied instruments which leads to higher achievement later in life. While playfulness is encouraged in early years, instilling a habit of regular practise through encouragement, even if that's through being strict will develop a sense of self discipline in music learners that is essential for long term achievement (Sloboda and Howe, 1991; Sosniak, 1999). Sloboda and Howe (1991) warn that if this encouragement is too rigid too early it can put young people off learning an instrument.

Students do need to spend more time than usual training and practicing, but this is not only in formal lessons, rather it is through an integration of music into life that higher levels of skill are achieved, “both formal and informal, structured and casual, self-conscious and matter-of-fact, special and ordinary at the same time” (Sosniak, 1999, p.168). This is where a supportive home life becomes essential because parents have to help students link their “schooling with organizations, institutions, and individuals outside of school” (Sosniak, 1999, p.171), helping them to become parts of wider communities of musicianship because this is also a key site of training and education.

Teachers

A strong line of involvement between parents, teachers and students has been identified as a key factor in music learning success (Sloboda and Howe, 1991; Creech and Hallam, 2003; Macmillan, 2004; Creech, 2010; Daučianskaitė, 2019). Good communication in this triangle is essential (Daučianskaitė, 2019). In a successful relationship between students, teachers and parents good communication is based on a shared idea of what constitutes success and a general agreement of what the purpose of (objectives and outcomes) music instruction will be (Creech and Hallam, 2003). Creech and Hallam (2003) discuss the feelings of “efficacy” for both teacher and student. Parental efficacy relates to factors such as "control over decisions relating to, for instance, choice of teacher, implementing practice regimes, or ensemble participation" (Creech and Hallam, 2003, p.35). Teacher efficacy relates to how much they think they can influence or control a student’s motivation, effort and performance (Creech and Hallam, 2003, p.35). In a good triangle, teacher’s and parent’s feelings of efficacy feed into each other (Creech and Hallam, 2003). Class (discussed below) as well as low levels of parental interest can lead to the breakdown of this centrally important relationship. Creech (2010) says,

where parents place a low value on the subject matter, have low expectations of success, do not have the wherewithal to help their children at home and/or are intimidated by teachers the result can be a downward spiral of mutual distrust, lack of communication and absence of shared purpose amongst parents, teachers and pupils alike. (p.28)

Macmillan (2004) highlights the complications of too much or too little parental involvement in lessons. Experienced teachers who have gone through specialist pedagogic music training are more likely to encourage parental involvement because they can work with parents and know the value of their input. (Macmillan, 2004). Although some teachers report negative input from parents during music lessons, limiting the student’s independence, others found that it could help communication between younger learners and teachers and help parents understand their child’s achievements, problems and wider goals (Macmillan, 2004, p.308).

Class

Higher levels of parental involvement in music education correlate with higher socioeconomic status (Zdzinski, 2013, p.71). Working-class families value music education (Cui and Xie, 2024), but middle and upper-class families often put greater emphasis on education, placing higher aspirations and expectations on their children (Fan and Chen, 2001). They are also more likely to have the resources to support extra-curricular activities through more flexible working patterns and greater financial means, being able to support the various financial requirements of music education (travel, instruments, lesson-fees).

A key area where class can affect musical success is in the forementioned parent-teacher-student triangle. Differing perceptions of roles and responsibilities in the triangle can cause issues, particularly with working-class parents. If social class experiences and expectations of teachers and parents do not align it can lead to reduced parental participation. This can lead to working class parents feeling it is not their role to be involved in their child's music education and this has a negative impact on the child's progression. (Creech and Hallam, 2003).

Class and educational success have strong links. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds will often accumulate cultural capital because they are more likely to have had "the benefit of tutors, elite schooling and parents who themselves have achieved a high level of educational attainment and, therefore, pass along habits and information to their children" (Prostrollo, 2019, p.51). This has a double effect in the conservatoire setting as it leads to students from higher socioeconomic status backgrounds feeling more at home in elite settings while students from working-class backgrounds feeling like they are out of place or need to catch-up. Devaney (2024) found that many students from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds "felt they needed to catch-up to their peers from more affluent backgrounds who had received additional musical training prior to starting their undergraduate degree" (p.5). Devaney (2024) also found that this felt disparity in cultural capital had a knock-on effect on student's perceived ability to enter classical music professionally (p.5)

Other Intersectional Factors

There was limited research which explicitly commented on the impact of siblings on a young person's musical progression as well as research into cultural differences and gender. This shows that there is more to be done to understand the intersectional aspects that affect this research area. We have included the limited references we found which speak to these areas below.

Siblings

Brothers and sisters contribute to the home music environment. It is generally understood that older siblings have a positive contribution to musical success, acting as inspiration, stimulus and support (Sloboda and Howe, 1991; Davidson *et al.*, 1996). They can provide a model and create an atmosphere where “playing and practicing are seen as a normal event of everyday life” p.44 (Howe and Sloboda, 1991). However, similar to musically successful parents, Davidson et al (1996) found that if the older sibling is seen to be musically successful this can have a deleterious effect on a music learner, pointing out that this is more the case with older brothers than older sisters.

Gender

“A three-way interaction of parental involvement, music aptitude, and gender was found for performance achievement. A high degree of parental involvement seems to be associated with inhibited performance achievement for females having relatively low music aptitude. However, for males having low music aptitude and a combination of high parental involvement, performance achievement seems to be enhanced” (Zdzinski, 1992, p.123)

This might be explained by research that suggests “that the males viewed positive feedback as information about their own competence at a task, whereas the females viewed the feedback as a form of control” p.123 (Zdzinski, 1992)

Cultural Differences

In their class and cross-cultural comparison between the US and China, Cui and Xie (2024) found that Chinese parents appreciated music for its beauty and development of personality, whereas American parents thought it had the potential to develop other skills. (Cui and Xie, 2024).

“European American children might view their parents’ practice to make a decision without consulting them as controlling or interfering, Asian children may not because this action is congruent with their decision to take on their parents’ goals autonomously” relatedness... “Even though these children did not always make choices themselves, they nonetheless experienced autonomy because they consented fully to, concurred with, or identified with their parent’s wishes.” p.104 (McPherson, 2009)

4. Multifaceted Support Structure

4.1 Financial Support

It was evident from our conversation with Guildhall School's Head of Access and Participation that financial factors were a significant barrier to educational success. This reflects existing academic literature where socioeconomic status is framed as central to music educational success (Fan and Chen, 2001; Creech and Hallam, 2003; Zdzinski, 2013; Prostrollo 2019; Cui and Xie, 2024; Devaney, 2024). The most prevalent theme discussed during interviews was financial support, with nearly all students and parents mentioning this as significant. The Head of Access and Participation identified that finances are the most significant barrier to parents/carer being able to adequately support a young person's progression through their music education

"Money, without a doubt is the most significant barrier. The financial pressures facing families are enormous, particularly those with more than one child in the home, or single parent families. There are so many costs associated with music tuition, particularly to get to the standard expected of a conservatoire applicant, and low-income families will not be able to afford this. Financial support for training is not equitably spread around the country, and in real terms is reducing each year" (Head of Access and Participation Interview, July 2025)

Parents financially supported their children's musical development through:

- **Paying for private lessons:** "My parents provided mostly financial support in purchasing my instrument and paying for lessons." (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025)
- **Purchasing instruments:** "They supported me financially when I wanted to pick up a rather expensive second study- the oboe." (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025)
- **Funding specialised education:** "After a couple years, my parents started sending me to Saturday school at Royal College of Music, which was a significant financial commitment." (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025)
- **Supporting extracurricular activities:** "They paid for music summer courses" and "Paid for multiple music lessons" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025)
- **Covering audition costs:** "Parents paid my audition fee and paid for the train down to London and overnight stay for my audition at GSMD" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025)

Without this financial investment, many students acknowledged they would not have been able to pursue their musical education to the conservatoire level. However, the nature and extent of this support varied significantly based on family circumstances, revealing the importance of financial resources as an enabler and the creative solutions families develop when facing constraints.

Parent Perspectives: Strategic Investment and Sacrifice

Parents consistently framed financial support as a deliberate investment in their children's development, often requiring significant sacrifice and prioritisation. One parent articulated this commitment starkly: "The financial, I mean the financial is eye watering... But it's just sort of one of those things that I feel is... we're lucky to be able to do it. It is a conscious decision to like section that money off to do it" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025). This sentiment was echoed by another parent, who explained their family's approach: "We prefer not to pay for something else but to pay for his music lessons" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025).

Parents demonstrated sophisticated financial planning, with many seeking cost-effective alternatives without compromising quality. One parent expressed relief about affordable group lessons, noting "the piano lessons at home are very expensive, yeah, and I would rather not have that bill each month" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025). Similarly, another parent showcased resourcefulness despite having three children: "Financially, actually, it's quite hard, because when you have three kids... it's quite hard, but still, I'm able to, because of these... they gave me free lessons" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025).

The scope of parental financial support extended far beyond lesson fees. One parent emphasised that support meant "paying for lessons and listening to different types of music/instruments" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025) while another family provided private viola lessons, contributed to school music programs, and leveraged their central London location for cultural access. Parents also demonstrated flexibility in their approach, with one stating: "If there's anything that he might need to kind of further his interest with music, then yes, we would consider it" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025).

Student Perspectives: Gratitude and Recognition of Barriers

Students showed deep awareness of the financial sacrifices their families made, often expressing profound gratitude while simultaneously recognising the systemic barriers these costs create. One student acknowledged ongoing support: "They very greatly support me financially... they were down in London for a performance. It's a blessing they forked out for the train, then the hotel to come and stay to watch it" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025). However, the same student also identified a crucial gap: "I feel as if I've fallen into a slight kind of financial blind spot....people whose parents are able to support them, but not comfortably" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).

For students from lower-income backgrounds, financial constraints necessitated creative solutions and additional personal sacrifice. One student described their experience: "We're not from a particularly wealthy background. So private lessons weren't really an option to start with... For that year before Conservatoire, I was funding my own [lessons] through working... I was a waiter from when I was about 13 or 14" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025). Another student similarly noted: "if you come from a low-income family such as myself... music can be quite an expensive affair" though they acknowledged being "very lucky to have most of my actual tuition under some sort of scholarship" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).

Students like those mentioned above highlighted the crucial role of scholarships and bursaries in enabling their musical progression. One student reflected: "Luckily I've been grateful for... bursaries and scholarships to exist for me to actually be able to do what I do" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).

For another, parental financial support during a career transition proved essential: "When I moved here to UK, because I had a degree already, they had to pay a couple of years, and they did it because I didn't have the money" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).

Systemic Implications

The interviews revealed that while financial support enables musical progression, its necessity creates significant equity issues. One parent, speaking as both parent and professional, identified systemic barriers: "It's all good and well, saying, hey, look, you've got this music hub going on down the road... if the parents can't take them or if the school isn't willing to pay for a TA to take them" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025). This observation underscores how financial support extends beyond direct lesson costs to include transportation, time, and cultural capital—resources not equally available to all families.

In communication with the Head of Access & Participation, these financial systemic barriers also impacted low-income families through a lack of space to practice their instrument without disturbing siblings and neighbours.

During our interviews we found families across all income levels who found resourceful and creative ways to support their children during the financially precarious time of cost-of-living crisis and a reduction in state subsidy. While financial support was felt to be essential for musical progression to conservatoire level, low-income families prioritised music and went to great lengths to find subsidised opportunities. However, the varying degrees of financial strain and the creative solutions required highlight the need for more systematic support structures to offer equitable access to musical education.

4.2 Practical and Administrative Support

Practical, logistical and administrative support formed another crucial dimension, with respondents highlighting:

- **Transportation to lessons/rehearsals:** "Every week my mum would drive me to band 1 on Thursday and back, on Saturdays she would drive me to the station and come all the way with me and then drive me to band on Sundays which was an hour and a half each way" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).
- **Attending performances:** "Both my parents gave an overwhelming amount of support in terms of practice, but also private lessons, masterclasses, clubs, performances" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).
- **Accompanying to auditions:** "She was always there to support me... but most importantly she was there through every step of the way (meeting professors, open days, going to auditions etc)" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).

- **Practice supervision:** "My mum used to sit everyday for an hour since I was 7 to help me practise" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).
- **Research on musical pathways:** "...applying to different places, finding out what the places are to apply to" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).
- **Scholarship applications** "...finding those resources...so obviously I could take it as far as I wanted to" "A lot of hours spent filling out forms...and filling out applications" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025).

This hands-on support represents a significant time commitment from parents that many respondents explicitly acknowledged and appreciated.

Investment in children's musical education was also described by some parents to carry an emotional toll for parents, particularly when coupled with other commitments for instance work and caring for family. This was described by both mothers and fathers during our conversations, although was more acutely felt by the working mothers we spoke to. This reflects and supports Claire Hall's concept of emotional labour which is used to describe "the exhaustion and burnout associated with socially reproductive tasks" (Hall, 2023) felt by mothers within neoliberal parenting. Hall's work examines how the intensive, invisible emotional work of managing children's wellbeing and family dynamics becomes a primary source of maternal stress and burnout, particularly as neoliberal ideologies place increasing responsibility on individual mothers to support their children under a system with diminishing social support systems.

Students particularly emphasised the significant transportation burden their parents undertook, with participants describing how "They were chauffeurs well and truly, like during school. They drive me to and from everything" and detailing journeys that could involve "a four-hour drive or a six-hour drive" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025). Students also recognised their parents' role in facilitating access to opportunities through administrative support, with one noting how parents helped with "emails, communications" and "researching and suggesting youth music opportunities." The scope of practical support extended beyond routine lessons to include accompaniment to auditions, open days at music schools, and even support for creative fundraising approaches, for instance busking.

From the parent perspective, the emphasis was more on reliability and consistency as foundational elements of support. Parents described their commitment in terms of unwavering attendance - "I always take them, you know, on time... I always make sure they attend the lessons... wherever they want to go, I'll take them" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025)- and the way they structured their own schedules around their children's musical activities. Working parents particularly highlighted the logistical challenges they navigated, with scheduling difficulties around lessons and the need to arrange alternative transportation when work commitments conflicted. Parents also demonstrated proactive problem-solving, describing how they would anticipate needs by "trying to find, like tutorials or something, how to figure out a certain section of a song that she's struggling with" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025) while being careful to maintain their child's ownership of the musical development.

This hands-on support represents a significant time commitment that created stability, allowing young musicians to focus on their development without logistical concerns.

4.3 Emotional & Aspirational Support and Encouragement

Emotional support emerged as fundamentally important for sustained musical development, aligning with Daučianskaitė (2019) who found that many parents of successful music learners thought playing an instrument would develop the child's personality and that music education leads to spiritual growth. Parental aspirations to instil cultural values and intellectual curiosity has been shown to be a motivating factor in children learning an instrument in the first place. (Daučianskaitė, 2019, p.52). However, aspiration should also be mixed with parental encouragement from a young age to instil high levels of rigorous practice, resilience, high expectations and a sense of self-belief. For example, "parents who actively assist their children with practising are more likely to see positive musical achievements" (Upitis *et al.*, 2017, p.76)

- **Encouragement:** "When I was young I showed an interest in music... My parents supported me in getting me a piano and encouraged my wins as I practised" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).
- **Belief in potential:** "She saw my potential and how important music was for my general well-being"(Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).
- **Celebrating achievements:** "I would have benefited from more positive reinforcement as my wins and successes were not celebrated much." (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).
- **Building confidence:** "She has been a teacher, mentor, and above all, my closest companion on this journey" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).
- **Unconditional "Can-Do" Support Philosophy:** "It was always 'yes, of course you can do this'. It was bloody mindedness to the point but that made a big difference to my confidence" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).

Students commented on the significance of parental encouragement to their confidence and belief in their ability to achieve their musical potential. Students who felt emotionally supported often expressed greater intrinsic motivation toward music. One student stated that the celebration of musical milestones and performances built confidence and nurtured their musical potential. One student commented on their mothers 'unconditional can-do philosophy', which she described as 'bloody mindedness to the put of naiveté' and which was applied to every pursuit and discipline throughout her upbringing. Her parent's confidence and 'can do' philosophy was described to make up for a lack of musical skills, knowledge and expertise on the part of her parent. This unwavering belief in her capabilities across all pursuits created a foundation for confidence that proved crucial for conservatoire application.

"They were really, really good at just letting me sort of guide it... They were always really good at just sort of like letting me get on with what I wanted to do" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).

A further student described how their parent had failed their own A-Levels and had subsequently repeated them many times, therefore modelling a resilience and 'can do' attitude which they describe to have been influential in their own musical development. This suggests that the quality and consistency of parental belief and encouragement significantly influences a young person's willingness to persist through the challenges inherent in musical development.

Conversely, the research indicates the negative impact that a lack of emotional support can have on a student's ability to achieve their potential. One student commented that their mother was not able to provide emotional support and encouragement due to her own traumatic experiences of working as a professional musician and a subsequent reluctance for her child to enter the profession. This led to the student resorting to emotional withdrawal from their parents and practising in secret. This lack of emotional support and scepticism of music as a viable career path meant his parents didn't attend performances and subsequently led to a culture of secrecy around the student's musical success.

"I sort of did it in secret, because I didn't want my parents knowing about it. It actually got to the point where I didn't tell her anything about...my achievements. When I got a scholarship to come here...I didn't tell her, and she sort of found out through other people 6 months later" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).

In this instance the student sought emotional and aspirational support through other key figures in their life, in particular a university teacher became a crucial supportive figure, compensating for a lack of family support by providing emotional scaffolding and a 'can do' attitude.

"he served as my parental figure almost for 5 or 6 years.... he was always trying to sort of...keeping me going. You know, support me sort of emotionally. He was the one who would help me when I faced any disappointment" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).

4.5 Practice Support and Motivation

Parents played varied roles in practice routines, with both positive and negative impacts:

- **Practice assistance:** "My mother played Violin and Flute... Every day we would sit together and practise piano starting from 10 minutes per day until after a couple of years 1h a day" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).
- **Developing discipline:** "My mum has helped me practise from a very young age" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).

- **Enforcing practice:** "My mother being a violinist helped me with practising"(Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).
- **Pressure effects:** "Overall the first 3 years were full of anger and arguments over practicing, until something clicked musically in my 4th year of practice" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).
- **Resilience Through Failure Modelling:** resilience became a powerful framework for embracing failure and persistence in musical development.

Responses revealed that parental involvement in practice could either foster discipline or create tension around music-making. Achieving a balance between regular and consistent practice without the feeling of rigidity and pressure was significant for students' progression and success. Over practice and pressurised practice was described to result, on occasion, in 'practice fatigue' and even caused students to develop a 'hatred of the instrument or discipline' (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).

Some students and parents noted that at first, they sat in on their younger child's lessons but that became less necessary and appropriate as the child got older. Where practice support was described to work particularly well was when a parent communicated and liaised with the tutor, knowing areas that needed particular work but allowed space for the young person to develop a sense of autonomy over their practice schedule. Simultaneously, when parents were able to 'bring the fun' back to the practice routine. In one instance a parent described how his son was finding practice and lessons tedious and he was able, as a musical dad, to offset the rigidity of practice set by the tutor by playing Bob Dylan songs with his son or by 'jamming' and playing for fun. It was noted by many students that practice support and motivation needed to evolve and change with age and shifts in musical taste and increased autonomy and independence as the young person became a teenager.

Parents suggested several key motivation techniques for encouraging practice:

- Set achievable goals: break down their practice into small attainable goals (aim for 10-15 mins of daily practice)
- Make practice accessible to embed in routines: leave instruments and sheet music out on display in shared spaces
- Create a schedule: work with them to design a practice calendar that fits into your daily routine
- Use positive reinforcement: celebrate achievements avoid excessive pressure
- Bring back the fun: offset rigidity around practice schedule by encouraging playing for fun, playing their own choice of musical style and 'jamming'. Allow child-led exploration of music
- Involve friends or family: encourage group practice with friends and family, mini concerts, and performances for fun
- Track progress: keep a journal or chart of their improvements
- Recognize child's limited attention span
- Balance practice with other childhood interests

5. Creating a Musical Environment/ embedded musical environment

Many respondents noted the importance of a home environment rich in musical exposure:

- **Musical family background:** "Both my parents are professional musicians, so the support I received was all encompassing (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).
- **Early exposure:** "From a very young age we started our musical education by simply being exposed to a lot of music, singing harmonies in parts to songs and being around musicians and musical instruments" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).
- **Access to instruments:** "There was always a piano at home" and "For my fifth birthday, my parents gave me a piano, which became the starting point of my own musical journey" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).
- **Musical immersion:** "I grew up listening to a wide range of music, from classical and jazz to more contemporary genres" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).

Both students and parents described how establishing a musically rich home was an important factor in shaping a young person's musical identity which aligns with much of the academic literature (Sloboda and Howe, 1991; Zdzinski, 1992; Sosniak, 1999; Ryan, Boucher and Ryan, 2023). This did not necessarily only happen in families with parents who played themselves. Parents who did not play but loved music generally described how they 'filled the house with music' and tried to create an environment which enabled their children to be consistently exposed to diverse musical experiences and accessible resources. Additionally, students and parents describe how they would have conversations about musical genres and lyrics which developed a young person's musical vocabulary. Students described conversations about the meaning behind lyrics which encouraged an interest in music generally. Our findings align with the perspective that parental attitudes and support from an early age are key factors in creating students who are confident and self-led (Pruett, 2004, McPherson, 2009). Immersive home music environments created foundational experiences that often-preceded formal music education. The interviews demonstrate that support in this context extends beyond encouragement and practical support to include a conscious cultivation of musical knowledge through immersion at home, often beginning as a baby or young child through exposure to toys, baby singing and music groups and continues through a young person's development.

Student Perspectives

Students frequently described the musical environment at home as significant to their development as young musicians. Many stated that music became naturally integrated into their lives as opposed to existing as an isolate activity. One student identified this embedded approach, where both parents were 'musically included' and described how musical knowledge and conversations about music were frequently shared at home. In the case of this student, her father "played a bit of guitar" and "taught me to play ukulele," while her mother worked as a secondary school music teacher, creating an environment where musical learning occurred organically alongside everyday family life.

The accessibility of instruments and musical knowledge within the home emerged as particularly significant- even a simple case of leaving instruments and sheet music out on display in rooms and not succumbing to the 'clean and clear home mantra' (MEI Parent Interview, 2025). Students described how this constant availability removed barriers to musical exploration and created opportunities for spontaneous learning. One student noted how she "picked up a lot of stuff from them," highlighting how passive absorption of musical knowledge occurred through simple proximity to musically active family members.

Other students stated that whilst their parents didn't play themselves, there was always music in the home and parents encouraged them to listen to lots of different musical styles. Interestingly, students also valued musical environments created by non-musical parents who demonstrated genuine appreciation for music. One student, despite being the "first musical family member," credited his father's influence in shaping his musical development: "My dad loves music... I've sort of got my music taste from my dad. Like all my favourite musicians and artists are from my dad" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025). This suggests that parental passion for music, rather than technical expertise, can be equally influential in fostering young people's musical engagement. This finding reinforces and develops the thinking featured in the literature review.

Parent Perspectives:

Parents approached creating a musical environment at home through both structured and conscious choices as well as informal approaches. Parents commented on the importance of accessible placement of musical instruments, to encourage practice as well as subscriptions to music streaming platforms that enabled diverse styles and genres to be listened to in the home. These intentional approaches remove barriers to accessing music, with one parent commenting,

"We are deliberately keeping her instruments in the living room. So, it can be a shared experience, and she enjoys that as well. And I jump in and sing along when I can" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025)

It has long been established that talent develops through music being integrated into and around everyday life as a valued family activity (Sosniak, 1999). Learning or being immersed starts at a young age; it is integrated and normal. The concept of musical immersion emerged strongly among parent responses, with many describing music as essential to their household culture rather than optional entertainment. One parent, who describes themselves as very musical, described the immersive environment she has created in the family home "I am extremely passionate about music... for me, music is a vital part of everyday... I have to have it on every single day" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025). High achievement comes with high levels of rigorous practice but this is better achieved through self-motivation instilled through parental encouragement rather than strict rules (Sloboda and Howe, 1991). This passionate engagement created a household atmosphere where musical participation felt natural and expected.

One parent described the varied ways a person might identify as ‘musical’, highlighting that it doesn’t necessarily follow that a parent needs a highly developed capacity to play an instrument in order to create an embedded musical home:

“Being musical can mean having a deep and personal connection to music, whether through listening, performing, or feeling its impact in everyday life. It goes beyond simply appreciating sound—it’s about experiencing music in a way that is meaningful and immersive. For some, this might involve actively creating music through singing or playing an instrument, while for others, it could be about how music influences their emotions, thoughts, or even physical sensations. Regardless of how one engages with it, being musical often means allowing music to shape and enrich one’s experiences in a profound way” (MEI Parent Interview, 2025).

Parents also recognised the value of diverse musical exposure from early childhood. One parent described a multi-generational and cross-cultural approach: "When they were little, we'd leave like CDs on classical and jazz CDs on whilst they were sleeping" and "My mum's from Barbados. So there was always like Bajan Soca and Calypso in the background. So I think they've had exposure to a lot of different genres of music" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025).

Several parents emphasised how consistent musical presence in daily life created learning opportunities, parents described playing music at family dinners and playing ‘carpool karaoke’ on long journeys where each family member chooses a song and genre leading to eclectic tastes. Another parent described multiple opportunities for exposure to music at an early age "We listen to a lot of music in the house. We listen to the radio a lot. We will listen to music in the car" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025). Similarly, one parent who didn’t identify as being particularly musical, noted the importance of variety: "There's always, there's a variety of music played at home all the time... as long as there's music in the house of all variety, including, like, really old stuff from Magic FM, then fine" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025).

Parents also extended musical environments beyond the home through concert attendance and live performance experiences. One parent described taking her children to diverse venues: "I took one of them to the Wigmore Hall recently... but then we also went... They've also just been to a musical... It's a big range" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025).

6. Unique Parent Teacher Dynamic- The Support Triangle

The significance of the parent/teacher/student triangle has been explored extensively as a central aspect of successful music education (Creech and Hallam, 2003, Creech, 2010). The research reveals a distinctive three-way relationship between parents/carers, music teachers, and young musicians that significantly influences musical progression. A third of both parents and students commented that this "support triangle" enables parents to communicate with tutors to create collaborative support structures. Here we discuss this triangle from both parental and student perspectives, however, we did not speak to teachers which highlights a possible avenue for further research.

Parent Perspectives:

Some parents we spoke to chose to actively engage in their children's music lessons to better support their children. Some parents described how they had sat in on their children's lessons when they were young. Two parents decided to learn the same instrument at the same rate as their children, sharing lessons when private tutors came to the family home.

One parent described how they would sit in and take notes to support with practicing at home "I found myself learning alongside my daughter - I'd sit in on lessons sometimes and take notes so I could help her practice at home," (MEI Parent Interview, 2025) This active engagement meant that parents became more confident to support their children at home and better understood musical terminology and what tutors were suggesting would help. Creech (2010) describes good communication between parent and teacher as important, aligning with our finding that parents can often better understand what was being asked of their children. Additionally, this meant parents were able to be more empathetic of how challenging it is to learn a new instrument as well as increasing their knowledge of musical terminology.

The research indicates that parents often develop informal partnerships with teachers, improving communication beyond end of term progress reports: "The teacher would text me little updates about what to focus on during home practice, and I'd let her know how the week had gone" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025). This ongoing dialogue appears to create consistency between lesson content and home practice. However, parents also acknowledged the delicate balance required to avoid becoming overly involved. "I had to learn when to step back and let the teacher take the lead - my job was to support, not to become a second music teacher" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025) reflected one parent, highlighting the importance of clearly defined roles within the support triangle.

When asked how Music Education Islington and Guildhall School might improve their support of parents and children, several parents described that the only area that could be improved was increased communication between tutor/institution and parent. Parents stated sometimes they didn't know what their child was working on and therefore was not sure how best to support them at home.

One parent described how during Covid-19 the parent-teacher relationship was stronger. The pandemic created both challenges and unexpected opportunities for parent-teacher communication but online learning during Covid-19 facilitated stronger parent-teacher communication:

"In lockdown through Guildhall and online music concert...that comes back to parental help because we really like, especially in lockdown. You know she still practised, and we videoed her and we sent it to [tutor]. That might have been a little easier in a way, because you were next to them while they were in their sessions and communicated directly with the tutor" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025).

Student Perspectives:

Young musicians consistently identified the alignment between their parents and teachers as an important factor in their musical development. Students reported feeling more motivated and secure when they felt support by both teacher and parent in a consistent way: “When my mum and my teacher were on the same page about my goals, I felt like I had this strong team behind me” (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025) noted one student. This sense of unified support appears to reduce performance anxiety and motivate students to practice. Students described how when this ‘triangle’ worked well; parents neither undermined tutors, nor created conflicting expectations.

The research reveals that students are acutely aware of the dynamics within their support triangle. “I could tell when my parents really understood what my teacher was trying to help me achieve - it made everything feel more connected” (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025). This awareness suggests that students benefit not only from receiving support but from witnessing the collaborative relationship between parents and tutors.

Students also valued the buffer that effective parent-teacher partnerships provided. “If I had a bad lesson or struggled with a piece, I knew my parents would talk to my teacher and figure out how to help me, rather than getting frustrated with me” (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025). This dynamic, in this instance, maintained student engagement during challenging periods.

The findings suggest that when the support triangle functions effectively, students experience enhanced musical progression through increased practice consistency, reduced performance anxiety and sustained motivation, even during difficult learning phases.

7. Balancing Autonomy & Personal Choice

The changing nature of the child-parent relationship can be difficult for both parties. Pruett (2004) suggests that parenting is also a developmental stage with the relationship between parent and child best seen as transactional. It is “a process of ongoing structural change in parent and child as they shape each other’s experience” (Pruett, 2004, p.156). As children go through teenage years they will “often go through a stage of crisis where they need to make the music their own” (Pruett, 2004, p.156). In our findings this was expressed through a change in musical taste and instrument choice, but in most cases, these shifts were supported by parents.

7.1 Transitions: Instrumental Exploration & ‘Finding the Right Fit’

Parental involvement is central to a child’s musical success but this is a changing landscape and alters as the child (and parents) grow-up (Zdzinski, 1992; Creech and Hallam, 2003; Pruett, 2004; Creech, 2010; Upitis *et al.*, 2017). For example, while direct supervision of practice may drop off, leading to students becoming more self-regulated (Upitis *et al.*, 2017),

emotional support (especially as competitive performance and audition become more prevalent) may become more important (Pruett, 2004). Parental involvement is central in “setting musical goals... encouraging students to improvise or compose, and overall, helping students become independent musicians” (Upitis *et al.*, 2017, p.85). Our research supports the idea that parents need to adapt support (and expectations) through musical transitions:

Instrumental shifts:

This theme emerged strongly throughout interviewees and encompassed musical transitions from instrument to instrument as well as between musical styles and genres. A number of students and parents described how when they found the ‘right fit’ or ‘right instrument’ they felt a shift from an externally motivated pressure to practice to a feeling of drive and willingness to practice their new instrument. One parent described how piano lessons didn’t stick with her daughter due to her young age and Covid-19 related online learning challenges but when her child learned acoustic guitar their interest in music improved. Acoustic guitar preceded what was described as a ‘transformative moment’ when her daughter finally found electric guitar.

"I could see her eyes sparkle... she's fallen in love with it, plays religiously, practices every day" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025)

This parent described what she sees as a distinction between "practice" and "play"

"I wouldn't even call it practice, because it's more. It feels more like play when she does it" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025)

This progression demonstrates how finding the right instrument can shift a child from compliance-based learning to passion-driven engagement. The ‘spark moment’ described by this parent of watching another student play electric guitar suggests the importance of exposing young people to eclectic music and that exposure and modelling can support young people to find the ‘right fit’.

Playing different instruments before finding the right fit came up in many of the interviews. This developmental process was facilitated by parental support in trying various instruments until finding one they felt was right for them. One student commented that:

"My mum tried to get me to learn violin when I was 5, but my brain just was not ready. I was like, what the hell is this? So that didn't last long. And when I was 10, I started singing lessons. When I was 11, I started some piano lessons, which again didn't last" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025)

The progression shows how parental support adapted to her changing interests:

"It was interesting because towards, like, my final school days, like when I was about like 17-18. That was when... I'd been quite enthusiastic about the clarinet until then, when it sort of

started to take a backseat because singing started to take over and I was like, this is what I want to do professionally” (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025).

Musical Genre and style shifts

Effective parental support was described to adapt to children's changing musical interests. One student explained: "When I expressed an interest in composition and music production, this was encouraged” (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025).

This wasn't always easy for parents, and this was acknowledged by both students and parents. Both described how parents were sometimes initially uncomfortable with genre/style shifts that tended to emerge as children became more autonomous and independent as they got older.

"My mum doesn't really understand the music that I make because it's just not of her generation and she doesn't care enough to listen to what I show her... She goes on and on and on about, like my classical training being so important. I think that it was more my parents saw my wavering commitment to like physical playing and practicing and being involved in these kind of orchestras... And I was interested in that [electronic music]. And I had voiced my interest to them and they I think they thought, we think music is beneficial for him, so we'll just let him continue down another avenue and as I've continued to do it, they've been more and more like supportive of it” (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025)

Parents struggled to understand technical aspects of new musical styles. Parents and students described how transitions in their musical identity required parents to adapt their support and expectations. As one student's interest shifted from classical to electronic music, his parents had to adapt their expectations of what their son's musical career might look like. Parents described a feeling that being classically trained was somehow both safer and more viable than alternative genres and styles. One student described the feeling of loss their parent felt when they moved away from classical pieces to other styles of music.

One interview with a parent revealed a tension between traditional music education approaches and children's contemporary preferences:

"What I found one of the hardest things to navigate is the traditionalist viewpoint of how you learn music in an instrument.....certainly my youngest was like I only want to learn to play Taylor Swift songs" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025)

Students who were classically trained described a disconnect between the music they played and the music they listened to as they became teenagers, that sometimes led to a lack of motivation to practice. In some cases, parents were able to support students through this period of time by encouraging them to incorporate other musical styles into their practice routine but not necessarily to the exclusion of the classical pieces their tutor had set them.

7.2 Balancing Autonomy, Personal Choice and Direction

Gary McPherson's (2009) research strongly emphasises the notion of autonomy in young learners as key to educational success, or in his words, "autonomy-supportive parenting" (p.98). He highlights that children need to feel a sense of competence, autonomy, relatedness (to their parents) and purposefulness (the activities they enjoy are meaningful). If these are in place, children are more likely to have a positive attitude towards a given activity, and therefore, are more able to achieve success through greater focus and persistence (McPherson, 2009, p.92-93). When parents show interest in their child's musical activities they develop a sense of "relatedness that fosters a closeness between parent and child that acts as a buffer during periods when the child experiences difficulties or obstacles that hinder progress".

The balance between a young person's sense of autonomy over their own musical journey and providing age-appropriate guidance emerged as a strong theme throughout interviews. This theme revolved around the following key areas:

- **Freedom of choice:** "I have never been forced to practise/play music which has allowed me the freedom to get what I want out of it" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025)
- **Respecting interests:** "She was always there to support me, financially in paying for private lessons, buying a piano, but most importantly she was there through every step of the way" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025)
- **Negotiating career paths:** "When I turned 18, she told me that I was free to choose whatever I wanted to study, but then, I had been so long studying music that I didn't want to stop playing" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025)
- **Breathing space for personal motivation**
- **Adaptive and Non-Coercive Support**

Interviews revealed that when parents respected the young musician's autonomy this led to a greater level of sustained engagement and enthusiasm for the discipline. One student, whose parents were both professional musicians, commented on a strategic decision on their parts to avoid pressuring her to practice. This led the student to feel like her connection to music, and decision to practice and work hard, was her own.

"My mum was always very clear about the fact that she would never force us to do anything. Because that's what her dad did with her.....we were kind of left to our own devices. They would just try and remind us to practice... mainly they encouraged us to have goals, you know, small goals in the year. It was completely about me... my identity and the thing that I love the most in the world... no matter if I was feeling bad at school or... having a hard time. I always had music" (Student Interview, 2025)

Freedom of Choice

Allowing children to make their own musical decisions emerged as key to effective support. One student explained: "I have never been forced to practise/play music which has allowed me the freedom to get what I want out of it" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025). Parents who took a hands-off approach saw good results: "We don't make anybody practice" and "We've deliberately left it more child-led. If he pushed back on doing the grades, I probably wouldn't do them" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025). This approach helped children develop their own motivation. This supports Jaynes (2011) findings that strict parenting may have the adverse effect. "Strong expression of love and support and a beneficial degree of discipline and structure tend to provide the healthiest environment in which children can grow" (Jaynes, 2011, p.12).

Respecting Interests

Supporting children's musical interests practically and emotionally was described to be important to students. Many parents we spoke to allowed their children to choose their first instrument, even if it differed from the instrument the parent played. This created a foundation for continued engagement. One parent explained: "I never forced them... I just gave them the options that they can choose whatever instrument they want" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025)

Effective support means accepting different musical tastes without forcing parental preferences.

Negotiating Career Paths

The research shows thoughtful approaches to supporting young people's musical futures without forcing specific career paths. One student described: "When I turned 18, she told me that I was free to choose whatever I wanted to study, but then, I had been so long studying music that I didn't want to stop playing" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025).

A notable theme which emerged during our conversations was the family's view of music initially as enrichment or for their child's wellbeing rather than a viable career. Many parents described how the decision to play an instrument was linked to them trying to support their children's wellbeing, and that supporting their enjoyment and love of music was more important to them than any idea of a career as a musician. Equally music was used to bolster and support (or provide a welcome alternative from) academic pursuits.

"They always thought it was something good for me... but they never thought it was a life. For them, arts is not a way of living... They always thought it was really good for my development as a person" (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025)

Despite a long-established passion for music, one student's father was "quite concerned" when his daughter switched from medicine to music, primarily due to concerns about "stability" and "fixed income." " (Guildhall School Student Interview, 2025).

This reveals a common tension between valuing music as personal enrichment while questioning its viability as a profession. Scepticism around music as a viable career was described to shift, in some cases, when parents witness their child's passion and commitment.

Breathing Space for Personal Motivation

Giving children space to develop their own musical motivation is important for long-term engagement. This allows genuine interest to grow without parental pressure.

One parent who adopted this laid back approach described how their child "takes initiative in performance preparation" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025) This independence indicates that good support builds confidence rather than dependence.

Adaptive and Non-Coercive Support

The most effective parental support described by students was when parents adapted to individual children's needs while avoiding forceful approaches. Creech (2010) also found that parents need to be flexible and adaptive, moving from close and distant and directive and acquiescent - "parents should neither become uninvolved in their children's learning in the name of agency, nor disempower their children in the name of communion" (Creech, 2010, p.29). One student described: "My mum was always very clear about the fact that she would never force us to do anything. Because that's what her dad did with her" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025). Parents showed adaptive support by using different approaches for different personality types for instance building confidence for shy children through having fun with their practice.

Navigating the fine line between supportive encouragement and potentially harmful pressure and expectations, particularly around grades or performances, emerged as another important theme:

- **Perfectionism concerns:** "My mother being a violinist meant that perfection was the goal and so the pushing from her side came with quite a lot of criticism that hurt my confidence" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025)
- **Shifting goals:** "They wanted my music to support an academic application, not for it to sustain itself" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025)
- **Over-involvement:** "This encouragement at one point became somewhat suffocating, making me pull away from music at a time (as many have experienced.)" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025)

- **Performance pressure:** "The constant high pressure and expectation of development and success caused my love of violin to waver which impacted my development more than anything else" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025)

Respondents who experienced excessive pressure often described periods of disengagement from music or damaged relationships with their instruments. One student who achieved Grade 8 violin by age 13, experienced significant burnout of the pressure of the intensive regime, leading to a complicated relationship with his instrument: "To put it nicely my mum is a bit of a helicopter parent..... I think that, yeah, it really burned me out very quickly. Being so focused and so driven, doing grade after grade after grade after grade, I never really understood what I was doing it for. I was more just... why I even should enjoy it. I had like a conversation with my parents, I was like I genuinely hate this instrument. Like it's weighing down on me. This is like a burden, not a privilege, for me to be able to do this" (Student Interview, 2025). Despite these negative feelings at the time, this student now recognises the significant benefits that have come from this training:

"It's instilled in me so much discipline. Being able to work with others, being able to listen and work as a team like just through orchestras, through quartets. Having my own personal opinion, like being able to interpret things myself, it's given me so many useful skills in life" (Student Interview, 2025)

One parent demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the potential negative impacts of excessive pressure, showing restraint while maintaining encouragement—a delicate balance crucial for sustained musical engagement.

"Her attitude is, but I can play it. What do I do? Does she need a piece of paper saying that she can play it? I'd hate to think that I'd done that to [them]" (referring to causing hatred of their instrument through pressure) (MEI Parent Interview, 2025)

8. Support in the non-musical household

It would seem common sense to think that musical talent was in some way hereditary, however, many studies have found the opposite (Sosniak, 1985; Brand, 1986; Howe and Sloboda, 1991; Ryan, Boucher and Ryan, 2023). The parents of talented musicians often do not have a specific musical talent themselves (Sosniak, 1985), with enthusiasm for music over musical ability in parents correlating with musically successful children (Brand, 1986). Parental enthusiasm could manifest in ways like parents singing and playing records of varied style to children from a young age (Brand, 1986, p.113).

Howe and Sloboda (1991) found that students deemed exceptional by their teachers came from backgrounds with less musical parents and that in general, musicians do not need to come from musical families. Whether or not a child does have exceptional talents, the idea that they have, enforced by their families, leads to greater feeling of confidence that will often

lead to greater success (Howe and Sloboda, 1991). As McPherson (2009) puts it, the belief a parent has in a child's "gift" is as important as any actual natural "gift" the child has (McPherson, 2009). Ryan, Boucher and Ryan (2023) have found that students with parents who have been musically educated are more anxious than others. Although not always intentional, the perception that parents with music education can judge their child's performance more effectively can lead to higher levels of anxiety in learning environments and performances (Ryan, Boucher and Ryan, 2023).

8.1 Family Support Without Musical Expertise/ Emotional Investment Without Technical Understanding

Developing from research that is evident in the literature review, the interviews with Guildhall School students reveal a pattern between parental support and emotional investment and success at conservatoire level, even in the absence of any formal musical training and expertise on the part of the parents. The research indicates that technical musical knowledge is not prerequisite for effective parental support of young musicians. Instead, emotional investment, adaptive engagement strategies, practical assistance, and creative learning environments prove equally valuable. Parents who showed a genuine interest and passion for their child's progress, while acknowledge their technical and musical limitations, were described to have created an environment conducive to successful progression. Interestingly this theme was most prevalent and compelling in interviews with students and was noticeably absent from the conversations with parents.

Emotional availability

The most significant finding reveals that consistent emotional availability was essential to a child's progression through their music education. Parents were described by many students to have provided 'unwavering support' that meant the children felt supported enough to feel free to explore, take risks, play for fun and try new instruments; "Obviously my mum is just there for me, you know, with everything" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025).

Another student described the impact of their parents' emotional support: "They do [come to concerts] whenever they can... even though they don't have an interest in the repertoire as such. It's just seeing me on stage, I suppose" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025). The presence of his parents consistently at concerts, despite a lack of in-depth musical knowledge, illustrates how parental investment in the young person's achievement matters more than technical appreciation.

Engagement Strategies

Parents found ways to engage with their children's musical interests despite limitations in their own knowledge of music. The ways they managed to support their children included

- Asking about musical progress

- Learning instruments alongside them in the home
- Providing support and encouragement
- Offering non-technical advice (including about managing nerves)
- Celebrating achievements and progress
- Appreciating the excitement and atmosphere of musical achievement without understanding the technical or stylistic details.
- Being a consistent presence at performances
- Providing logistical, financial and practical support

Students described how their parents were adaptable and took an active interest in their music making, despite being faced with situations where they didn't always fully appreciate the musical language or culture. As one young musician shifted from classical music to electronic production, his father actively learned about EDM: "My dad still listened to music, so he would also... over the past years kind of got a bit more into the EDM stuff in terms of supporting me with it." This demonstrates parental willingness to learn new things in order to maintain connection with their children's interests.

Practical Support and Alternative Contributions

Non-musical parents found lots of different ways to contribute that went beyond technical guidance. One participant's parents provided essential logistical support: "They've always been very supportive of it. Let me do whatever I needed and gave me lifts to places I need to be when I started joining in person projects later on." Similarly, another student's parents demonstrated commitment through practical action: "They were the first one, you know, driving me every day to the Conservatoire. So they did everything" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025).

Parents also offered valuable non-technical perspectives that enhanced their children's musical development. One father provided performance advice: "He'll be like, oh, you know, make sure to speak to the crowd... give me tips from like a non-technical perspective on how to make my music better" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025). This illustrates how parents can contribute meaningfully by focusing on audience engagement, confidence building and presentation rather than technical and or musical details.

8.2 Educational Access and Awareness: Cultural Capital & Lack of Musical Knowledge

Three challenges emerged which related to this theme:

- **Discovering opportunities:** "I was only made aware of conservatoires through my saxophone teacher at the time" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025).
- **Limited school support:** "I attended a state school then college with no music department, so musical endeavours were purely down to my own arrangement" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025).
- **Need for outreach:** "I would have benefited from more outreach from conservatoires to state education" (Guildhall Student Interview, 2025).

Educational access, class and privilege

Recent research from The Sutton Trust 'A Class Act' (November 2024) explored issues of class in the creative industries and education. It revealed stark class inequalities in access to the creative industries and specialist creative education. The report, released in 2024, found that 'privately educated students represent over half of music students at the most prestigious conservatoires' and younger adults from working class backgrounds are four times less likely to work in the creative industries compared to their middle-class peers. Classical music was found to be particularly elitist, with 43% of top classical musicians having attended an independent school. The stark divide is even more acute within specialist institutions such as conservatoires and higher education institutions specialising in music and the performing arts than it is at other ivy league institutions with a broader discipline range. The Royal Academy of Music was found to have 60% privately educated cohorts, Royal College of Music (56%), Guildhall School of music and Drama (31%¹) by comparison to Oxbridge 32%; illustrating that the divide is more acutely felt within the creative sector. This when highlighted by the fact that only 7% of the UK population are privately educated reveals a troubling disparity of opportunity for state educated young people.

These findings rang true during our conversations, parents and students who reported big disparities in provision within the state sector, with some parents commenting that the music provision was extremely comprehensive (and often subsidised or free with supported schemes for the loan of instruments). Other parents and students commented on the cuts to arts funding meaning that secondary school provision was 'patchy' or 'non-existent' and that small take up meant Music GCSE sometimes did not run. This was exacerbated by Covid-19 pandemic. This was reflected in conversations with Head of Access and Participation who described geographically patchy provision and funding:

"Financial support for training is not equitably spread around the country, and in real terms is reducing each year" (Head of Access and participation)

One interview revealed a significant decline in music education provision at the primary school level over a relatively short timeframe:

"The school at the time had better music provision than it does now. Largely based on, as always, like an individual teacher who is very musical, very invested and energetic. Music in the mornings after COVID just didn't really happen. Big difference for my youngest in that that [music in the mornings] wasn't really an option. Change of heads, change of money raising for the school" (MEI Parent Interview).

This parent described how this decline has created disparities in the experiences of siblings despite their small age gap.

¹ <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/A-Class-Act-1.pdf>

Music provision varied during primary and secondary school. Despite distinct advantages described in conversations with privately educated students, it didn't always follow that privately educated young people received better music provision. One parent of a child at a smaller private day school commented that:

"It isn't like a state school where you get music provision and tutors coming in. Our school has excellent sports opportunities but very limited musical opportunities" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025)

Both students who had been home schooled described the benefits and drawbacks of home-schooling in terms of their musical development.

"When you're home educated, you can sort of plan your practice a bit more flexibly...obviously being home educated with that added flexibility and added time to practice, that was allowing me to progress quicker" (Student Interview, 2025)

Whilst home school allowed a flexible approach to practice schedules and significantly increased time to practice which was extremely beneficial, it did mean they were not always aware of opportunities around them and missed the subsidised support packages on offer in schools. Identifying home schooled children who could be supported by conservatoire music programs would be a valuable priority in the future, particularly where parental support is absent.

Lack of musical knowledge: Signposting

Several parents who did not have a background in music, highlighted a lack awareness of musical pathways and provision as an issue preventing them from supporting their children. Parents stated increased communication from music providers and clear signposting would help them to better support their children. Feedback from students backed this up, with many stating that discovering opportunities tended to come through music teachers. This theme particularly underscored how parents' knowledge of musical education pathways (or lack thereof) influenced progression opportunities.

One interview highlighted how parental knowledge of systems and institutions can determine access to opportunities:

"Cause I'm well versed in how Islington works and how these organizations and how to contact people and stuff like that, but I can imagine I do know there were a few where that would not have been on offer for them through their home life" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025)

This theme relates to social equity in music education access:

"It's certainly not something that's offered unless we enable it to happen. And so I don't know for a lot of people that wouldn't be an option" (MEI Parent Interview, 2025)

8.3 The Role of Extended Family and/or access to Musical Role Models

The importance of alternative support systems and adult advocacy was noted in an interview with Guildhall School's Head of Access and Participation. They stated that when parental support is absent, other adults able to encourage and motivate is vital. They stated that this becomes particularly important where parents doubt the viability of music as a career path over STEM subjects: "In these instances, any encouraging adult is important to the young person's musical progression (e.g. a music teacher), and without this students would be very unlikely to pursue music to conservatoire level" (Head of Access and Participation, 2025).

Interviews with selected students whose parents were not musical highlighted the impact that having musical role models and/or extended family who are musical can have on their aspirations and progression. Students felt that being able to see extended family or role models forge a career in the music industry helped them to see music as a viable career path and reduced the feeling that music wasn't 'for them'. One student had relatives who were recording artists, despite the fact his parents were not themselves musical. This connection, although there was limited contact with this family member, provided him with insights into what it was like to work in the music industry and carried significant symbolic importance.

9. Research Implications

This research has indicated a strong and complex link between parental support and progression through music education to conservatoire level.

Key findings reveal that:

- **Limited Identification Systems:** The School currently supports care-experienced and estranged students through specific schemes. Guildhall School currently lacks systematic identification of students without parental support and therefore is primarily only able to address financial barriers rather than support deficits
- **Inconsistent Early Intervention:** No clear mechanisms exist for identifying under-18 students who need additional institutional support due to limited family backing.
- **Effective support extends beyond financial investment** to include emotional availability, practical assistance, and creating a musical home
- **Technical musical expertise is not a prerequisite** for effective parental support
- **A distinctive "support triangle"** exists between parents, teachers, and students
- **Systematic barriers prevent equitable access** to musical education opportunities. These require further research and was beyond the scope of this small qualitative study.

The following ideas and recommendations address key barriers and opportunities identified through this research, with particular attention to equity, accessibility, and systematic support structures.

9.1 Ideas/ Recommendations for Music Providers

Address Limited Identification Systems:

- Further research is needed to identify and address the needs of students without parental support.
- Address inconsistent early intervention: create mechanisms for identifying under-18 students who need additional institutional support due to limited family backing.

Enhancing Parent-Teacher Communication and Partnership

Establish structured communication systems:

- Implement regular and informal mechanisms for parent-teacher communication beyond end-of-term reports
- Provide brief weekly updates about session content, practice focus areas and student progress
- Offer practical guidance/toolkits on non-technical support strategies for parents

Strengthen the "support triangle":

- Support teachers to find effective ways to engage parents
- Develop role definitions for parents, teachers, and students for those parents/carers wanting to develop the 'support triangle'
- Support parents with learning basic musical terminology and understanding to support home practice

Developing Inclusive and Adaptive Teaching Approaches

Support instrumental exploration:

- Continue to develop flexible pathways encouraging experimentation with different instruments, to 'find the right fit'
- Offer taster sessions before long-term commitment to an instrument.
- Provide guidance on finding the "right fit" for each student

Embrace musical transitions:

- Allow for flexible learning to include both traditional classical-focused approaches and different musical styles
- Support genre and instrumental transitions as students develop their musical tastes

Addressing Educational Access and Awareness

- Continue to target state schools and communities with limited musical cultural capital
- Attempt to reach home schooled children, through home school communication channels
- Develop and pilot systems for identifying children who are lacking parent/carer support
- Demystify pathways to higher musical education: Create clear, accessible signposting information about progression routes and audition processes for parents navigating musical education

Supporting Non-Musical Families

- Develop resources: non-technical support strategies and guidance on how to create a vibrant musical home
- Provide guidance on encouraging practice without musical knowledge
- Acknowledge/reassure that emotional availability, positive "can-do" attitudes and resilience modelling is as significant to supporting children as being a musical parent

9.2 Ideas and Recommendations for Parents

Create a home full of music:

- Listen to music: Give children the opportunity to listen to lots of different types of music through streaming and, where possible, through going to watch live events
- Make instruments/sheet music accessible within the home by leaving them out
- Chat about music: engage in musical conversations that develop vocabulary and appreciation
- Incorporate musical experiences into daily routines (car journeys 'carpool karaoke', family meals). Treat music as an integral part of family life rather than isolated activity
- Remember you don't have to be a musician/musical expert to enjoy music and create a musical home! Have faith that parent support and encouragement is as significant, or more, to supporting your child as being a musical parent

Balancing Support with Autonomy

Adopt child-led approaches:

- Respect young people's musical interests and choices, even when different from parents' preferences or ideas of 'traditional/classical' learning models
- Support change and transition (instrument changes and changes in taste) as children develop
- Allow children to guide their own musical journey while providing age-appropriate guidance

Provide consistent emotional availability:

- Focus on the enjoyment of the process rather than outcome, celebrating effort alongside achievement
- Maintain belief in children's potential regardless of your own musical knowledge

Developing Effective Practice Support

Adapt involvement as children mature:

- Communicate with music teachers about practice goals and home support
- Allow children to develop their own sense of responsibility for musical development, especially as they become teenagers
- Evolve support strategies to match changing needs, ages and musical interests as well as differing sibling personality types

Maintain practice motivation:

- Bring enjoyment back to practice when motivation wanes
- Encourage playing for fun alongside formal practise requirements
- Create opportunities for informal musical sharing with friends and family

Navigate the balance between support and pressure:

- Focus on process and enjoyment rather than perfectionism
- Know that reduced motivation at times is a normal part of development
- Celebrate small achievements: Avoid excessive pressure around grades, performances, or career outcomes

9.3 Funder and Policy Recommendations

NB. Please note, we have chosen to focus and limit policy recommendations that relate specifically to this research area (and not music provision policy recommendations in general), as well as how further research in this area might be developed.

Financial Support Reform

- Address complex means-testing challenges: Meritocracy is problematic for lower socio-economic families, particularly where they lack parental support/encouragement. For undergraduate students, find a way to means test financial awards that takes into account limited family support. Low-income students with limited family support may not be at the same standard of entry as their peers so may miss out on financial awards that are linked to 'talent'.
- Develop support models for affluent students without parental support: An affluent student who lacks parent/carers support would likely have a low level of student loan

but not look like they need financial support 'on paper' because of the income of their parents.

Develop systematic funding approaches that relate to parental support:

- Pilot and trial an approach which tries to identify students who lack parent/carer support
- Fund professional development for music teachers in parent engagement
- Support innovative approaches for parent-teacher collaboration

Developing Parent and Community Support Systems

- Invest in parent education and support: Fund programmes that educate parents in their role in musical development
- Create music initiatives that support families from non-musical backgrounds and enable families to share their diverse musical heritage/s within traditional musical training
- Provide resources helping families navigate complex musical education landscapes
- Support development of peer networks among parents of young musicians. Create mentorship schemes linking experienced musical families with newcomers

Further Research

- Support further research into effective support mechanisms for musical development
- This pilot study could inform the development of comprehensive quantitative research and sampling frameworks that can more fully address complex intersectional factors (race, gender, age economic profile and geography) that impact parental support and progression through musical education.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the journey to conservatoire level requires coordinated support across multiple levels of the musical education system. While parental support emerges as crucial, its effectiveness depends on:

- Systematic support from music providers who understand and facilitate the parent-teacher-student triangle
- Ways of identifying where parent and carer support is absent to provide additional assistance/mentorship for these young musicians
- Adequate funding structures that address both direct costs and systemic barriers
- Policies promoting equity and accessibility regardless of family background
- Recognition that emotional investment can be as valuable as technical expertise

Implementing these recommendations requires coordinated action across all stakeholders, to ensure equitable pathways to conservatoire.

10. Appendix

10.1 Students Interview Guide

1. Please could you tell me a bit about your upbringing? (prompt if needed country/country of birth, schooling- private/state etc)
2. What are your parents/carers link to music? Did they learn an instrument?
3. Please could you talk to me about your musical development? (prompt if needed what instrument/s did you learn/styles/genres experienced/did you interest in musical styles shift as you progressed/where you attended music lessons/any extracurricular training/where you studied music before Guildhall School and your route into the conservatoire)
4. **Did you** have any support from your parent/carer **prior to or** while you progressed through your musical education? (Follow up, if so what kind of support?)
5. What does the word 'support' mean to you in this context? What do you understand to be 'support' in this context? (Prompt if needed emotional/practical/ financial support, encouragement to practise)
6. How engaged and committed were your parents/carers in your music education? What did that look like on a day-to-day basis?
7. Were your parents/carers supportive of your decision to apply to a music conservatoire?
8. What resources have been provided by music schools/institutions to support you in your musical development? Did you need support from your parents to access/benefit from these resources?
9. Do you feel Guildhall School has supported you, in addition to your parents support or in the absence of any parental support?
10. If so how? If not, how might they have better supported your musical development?

10.2 Parents Interview Guide

1. What is your own link to music? Did you learn an instrument? What is your personal connection to musical education?
2. Please could you tell me a bit about your child's musical development and education so far? (where they attended music lessons/any extracurricular training/where they studied music before Guildhall School and their route into the conservatoire)
3. How was it decided that they would learn an instrument? But also what instrument? (MEI/GYA Students)
4. Did your child's musical taste shift at all during their progression (for instance from instrument to instrument or genre to genre). If so, how did you navigate supporting these shifts and was it clear who to turn to for advice/expertise when needed?
5. How confident do you feel to play a role in your child's musical development?

6. Did you provide any support to your child/student parent/carer while they progressed through their musical education?
7. Please can you describe the support you provided during their musical education so far?
8. What does the word 'support' mean to you in this context? What do you understand to be 'support' in this context? (Prompt if needed emotional/practical/ financial support, encouragement to practise)
9. How engaged and committed were you in your child's music education? What did that look like on a day-to-day basis?
10. Were you in favor of their decision to apply to a music conservatoire? (undergrads/postgrads not included for parents of younger students)
11. What resources have been provided by music schools/institutions to support your child in their musical development? Did your child need support from you to access/benefit from these resources?
12. Do you feel Guildhall School has supported your child?
13. If so, how? If not, how might they have better supported your child's musical development?

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