



**BIRMINGHAM CITY**  
University

# AHRC MUSIC AND DISABILITY NETWORKING GRANT

**Provocation 1**



The document reflects ideas and debates stemming from an event held as part of the AHRC Music and Disability Networking Grant in November 2023. An invited group of presenters and attendees from academic institutions, music organisations, instrument makers, musicians, higher education (HE) music students, music associations, music hubs, and examination boards in both the UK and Europe, were in attendance. This document aims to stimulate critical thinking and foster debate while providing avenues for further exploration in future research and policy development.



## ACCESSIBILITY OF INSTRUMENTS

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To feel included you need to feel anticipated.

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It can be exhausting as a disabled musician. Not only do you have to be good at what you do, you have a lot of practical things to consider. It takes time and is emotionally draining.

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- Addressing barriers and challenges in instrument design for accessibility is imperative to ensure that musicians of all ages feel their needs are adequately met, rather than encountering obstacles.
- Cultivating musical cultures around new instruments is essential for fostering progression and creating pathways for their integration.
- The tension between traditional and innovative instruments underscores the importance of reconciling disciplinary perspectives while preserving essential interfaces and embracing technological advancements.
- Manufacturing issues such as cost, expertise, and material safety significantly hinder accessibility and widespread adoption of new instruments or adaptations to traditional ones, underscoring the necessity for sustainable solutions.
- Fostering a culture of innovation and support for emerging voices in music composition and education, particularly concerning new and accessible instruments, is crucial.

## SPACES FOR MAKING AND PERFORMING

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This is not a building for you.

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I would like to see people thinking about accessibility before they have a disabled musician join. Because often for disabled musicians in orchestras, you tend to join somewhere, and you have to make sure yourself it's accessible. You have to say what you need and that takes time to implement. Quite often, by the time it's done it's too late.

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I did a concert recently and it said it was step free, but backstage it wasn't. I'm always thinking and planning accessibility. Venues may be accessible to the audience not performers.



The pop, rock, and metal band world is more adaptable. Classical music is more formalised. If you're a percussionist in wheelchair, there are barriers around getting into the venue and stage. The rest of the world has made strides in changing attitudes, but in music we haven't questioned our approach to working practices and auditions. Now is the time.



- Institutions must adopt a comprehensive approach to accessibility, tackling physical, sensory, and attitudinal barriers in both performance venues and educational settings. This highlights the significance of inclusive design and cultivating a culture of acceptance.
- Assessing the educational ramifications of accessibility initiatives entails engaging architects and stakeholders to incorporate accessibility considerations into design processes. Encouraging dialogue is essential for effectively addressing feedback.
- Cultivating a cultural shift towards inclusivity involves offering training and awareness sessions and evaluating and adjusting institutional cultures to foster more inclusive environments for individuals with disabilities.
- Implementing effective feedback mechanisms is crucial for identifying and remedying specific environmental barriers.

## EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND AWARENESS

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How do we navigate a better educational future for children and young people?

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I think there are two elements to accessibility in music that need to change – attitudes and physical access. There aren't many disabled classical musicians. When you think about Paralympians you can name a few, but you can't name many disabled classical musicians. We need more role models. When I first became disabled, I was looking for people that look like me on Google and I couldn't find much. Things are changing but we still have a long way to go to change people's attitudes.

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Music education and formal routes are quite rigid, if you can't access one bit, you are put off the whole thing rather than finding a solution.

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- Prior to any activity, it is crucial to conduct comprehensive needs analyses for children and young people. These analyses should inform resource allocation, selection of suitable instruments, integration of music technology, and provision of support for schools, ensuring equitable access.
- There is a pressing need to diversify progression routes, provide ensemble opportunities, and incorporate student perspectives into program development, fostering inclusivity.
- Objectives focused on inclusion should be established, fostering a culture within music education where all staff members, practitioners, and educators comprehend inclusive teaching approaches.
- High-quality, diverse, and inclusive music curriculums should be defined and ensured. Further training in these approaches is necessary for schools and music education providers.
- Schools require more support for their music development plans to guarantee inclusivity.
- Initiatives should be undertaken to explore and develop inclusive examination pathways that accommodate diverse needs and offer equitable assessment structures. These efforts should align with regulatory obligations and frameworks such as the Equality Act and Ofqual.



## REFERENCE

Kinsella, V., Wolffsohn, R. and Mc Pherson, A. (2024) AHRC Music and Disability Networking Grant: Provocation 1. Birmingham City University.

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# IMPERIAL

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