

YOUTH VOICE **MUSIC** REPORT 2026

**WHAT DOES MUSIC MEAN TO YOUNG
PEOPLE IN SWINDON?**

By young people. For young people.



Introduction

This report aims to explore young people's perspectives and experiences on music education, access, interests, and how music impacts their wellbeing and sense of community.

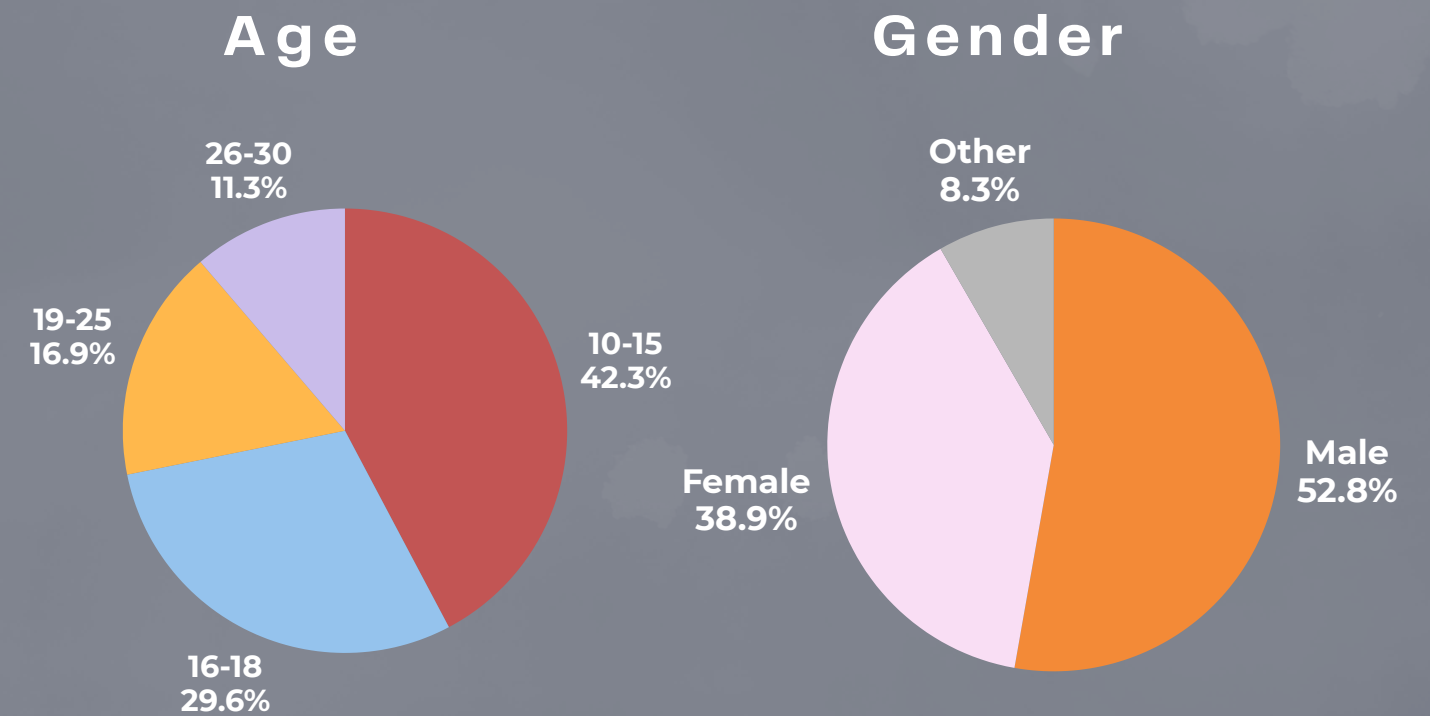
Commissioned by the **GSW Music Hub**, this report was created alongside **young leaders** at **WAY Studios**, grounded in our belief that young people should be empowered to lead and shape the changes they want to see. Working alongside community partners, these young leaders gathered insights from a diverse group of peers through meaningful **1-to-1** peer-led research, collaborative **group discussions**, and co-designed questionnaires. We intentionally reached young people from **ethnic minority backgrounds** and overlooked communities.

We collaborated with young people and aspiring local artists from New College Swindon, Great Western Academy, WAY Studios Youth Music Group, STEP, and the Swindon Culture Collective networks.

Who took part

115

Children & Young People took part



62.5% of those who took part are from an ethnic background other than White British

1. Music, confidence & well-being

Music is more than just a subject to us!

73.6%

Feel confident, supported and represented in music education

Music is described as a way to:

- Manage stress & emotions
- Build confidence & self-belief
- Express feelings
- Feel connected & accepted
- Switch off from everyday pressures

WHAT THIS MEANS:

Music is a powerful source of confidence, connection and well-being, helping young people to express themselves, manage emotions and feel a sense of belonging.

“Music is the only thing that switches my brain off, and writing songs helps me explain how I feel.”



2. Hands-on learning is preferred

We want more opportunities to create, perform and experiment.

“

We spent more time talking about music than actually making it.

”

We want more opportunities to:

PERFORM

Build more confidence through performing



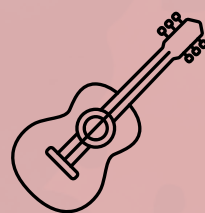
PRODUCE

Make beats, record, experiment with sound



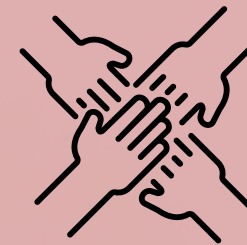
PLAY

Develop skills on instruments



COLLABORATE

Make music with other young people



WHAT THIS MEANS:

Music education should provide more **practical opportunities to create, perform and collaborate**, helping young people develop both musical and wider skills.



3. Contemporary music should be better represented

“Making beats is just as exciting as playing an instrument.”

We would like to see music education to reflect the music we listen to, enjoy and create.

50%

named pop as a preferred genre

38.9%

named R&B as a preferred genre

98.6%

mentions across Rap, Hip Hop, Grime, Drill & Garage

WHAT THIS MEANS:

Music education should include a **broader range of contemporary music**, connecting young people's existing interests with creativity, production and performance.



4. Access to music opportunities beyond school

We want more opportunities to continue making music outside the classroom.

50%

identified transport or travel as a barrier to accessing music opportunities

We would like opportunities to be:

Local - More opportunities within their community

Accessible - Affordable transport, spaces and equipment

Available - Clearer information about what's available

Connected - Clearer pathways from school to further opportunities

“

I'd love to do more, but I just don't have a way of getting there.

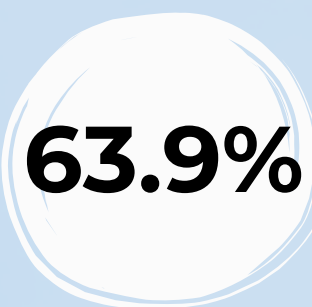
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WHAT THIS MEANS:

Young people need accessible music opportunities beyond school, with clear information, practical support and pathways to continue developing their interests, skills and confidence.

5. Music in education

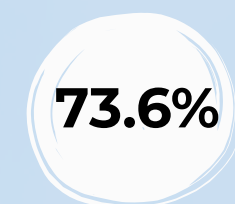
Our experiences of music education is mixed.



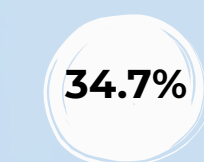
enjoyed music during primary school

Those from ethnic minority backgrounds were less likely to have enjoyed music at primary school

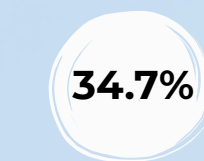
But participation drops when music becomes optional



had compulsory music education in secondary school



took GCSE Music



continued music into further higher education

WHAT THIS MEANS:

Young people want music education that is inclusive, practical and relevant, with opportunities available regardless of their previous experience or starting point.



If you already played an instrument, you had opportunities, but if you didn't, you got left behind.



6. Financial impact

Cost can determine whether we get the chance to participate in music.

“

It's not fair that some people can afford loads of lessons and others can't have any.

”

31.9%

did not have access to instruments, recording equipment or music software

50%

identified transport as a barrier

Financial barriers can include:

Instruments

Purchase, hire or maintenance

Lessons

Private tuition and ongoing learning

Equipment

Recording equipment and technology

Travel

Getting to music lessons and opportunities

WHAT THIS MEANS:

Cost should not be a barrier to music. Support with instruments, lessons and travel can help give every young person a fair chance to participate.

Summary

1

Music, confidence & well-being

Music can help young people express themselves, manage emotions, build confidence and feel a sense of belonging.

2

Hands-on learning is preferred

Young people want more opportunities to create, perform, play and collaborate, rather than focusing mainly on theory.

3

Contemporary music should be better represented

Young people want contemporary genres, music technology and the music they actually listen to and create to have a stronger place in music education.

4

Access to music opportunities beyond school

Young people want more accessible opportunities outside school, with better information, local provision and clearer routes to continue.

5

Music in Education

Young people want music education to be inclusive, practical and relevant, regardless of their previous experience or starting point.

6

Financial Impact

Cost, equipment and travel can be barriers to participation. Young people want a fair chance to take part regardless of their circumstances.

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