



Teaching Music Today:

a survey of the UK's private music tutors

(September 2019)

www.encoremusicians.com

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1. Overview

Introduction

Founded in 2014 by two musicians and computer scientists, Encore is the UK's largest musician-booking platform. We use cutting edge tech to connect anyone with the perfect musicians for their event.

For the last 4 years at Encore, our mission has been to build a platform for booking musicians that supports them in building a sustainable career in live musical performance. However, our members have frequently requested that we expand the offering of the platform to include music teaching bookings as well. Thousands of gig bookings later, we're now ready to help our members attract teaching customers as well as live bookings. **[Nov 2019 Update: after 3 months of beta testing we've decided not to add Teaching as a fully fledged feature to the Encore platform. We'll continue to focus all our energy on winning our musicians live performing gigs.]**

We wanted to take this opportunity to reach out to the teachers in our musician community and learn more about where we can help them most.

We're all musicians in the Encore team and our motivation has always stemmed from wanting to benefit the musical community which we're part of. So though this survey will help direct our work on our new teaching feature, we also decided to make the results public to maximise the benefit it could bring to the music community at large.

For teachers, we hope the results of the survey provide interesting insights which can inform their own practices. For other platforms or agencies, we hope it will help them understand how they can best serve their users. And for policy makers and trade bodies, we hope that this will provide useful data to bolster their work in improving the provision of music teaching in the UK.

The survey focuses on five key areas:

- how teachers price their lessons
- where teachers conduct their lessons
- how teachers manage their pupils
- the debate on free trial lessons
- long term concerns for teaching in the next 5 years

We're very grateful to the 519 musicians who took the time to complete the survey.



James McAulay
Encore Co-founder & CEO

Key takeaways

Price

- Teachers of less common instruments such as French horn and harp charged the highest for music lessons.
- Inexperienced teachers (under 2 years experience) tend to charge around 15% less than other teachers. However, after 10 years of teaching experience, teachers tend not to increase their rates.
- Female teachers tend to charge more than male teachers.

Lesson location

- 50% of teachers teach in schools.
- Most teachers teach by travelling to their pupil's home as well as teaching at their own home. However, teachers are more likely to teach in their own home than travel.

Managing pupils

- The most common payment methods for teachers were bank transfer and cash.
- 1 in 3 music teachers has encountered problems getting payment from their pupils
- By far the biggest expense for teachers is travel to and from lessons, followed by sheet music and instrument maintenance.
- The biggest concern for teachers when taking on a new pupil is the pupil's commitment to practising and turning up, followed by reliability of payment and parental support.
- Similarly, the characteristic which teachers most commonly look for in pupils is enthusiasm and willingness to practice.
- The most commonly used communication methods teachers use with their pupils are email and text.
- 50% of teachers use apps or websites to find new pupils.

Free trial lessons

- 35% of teachers offer free trial lessons.
 - Most cited the need to have an unpaid conversation with the pupil to check if they are a good match before beginning paid lessons.
- 65% of teachers don't offer free trial lessons.
 - Many mentioned that they offer alternative discounts, others stated that they disagreed with the principle of offering their time for free or simply didn't feel the need for free trials.

Concerns for the future

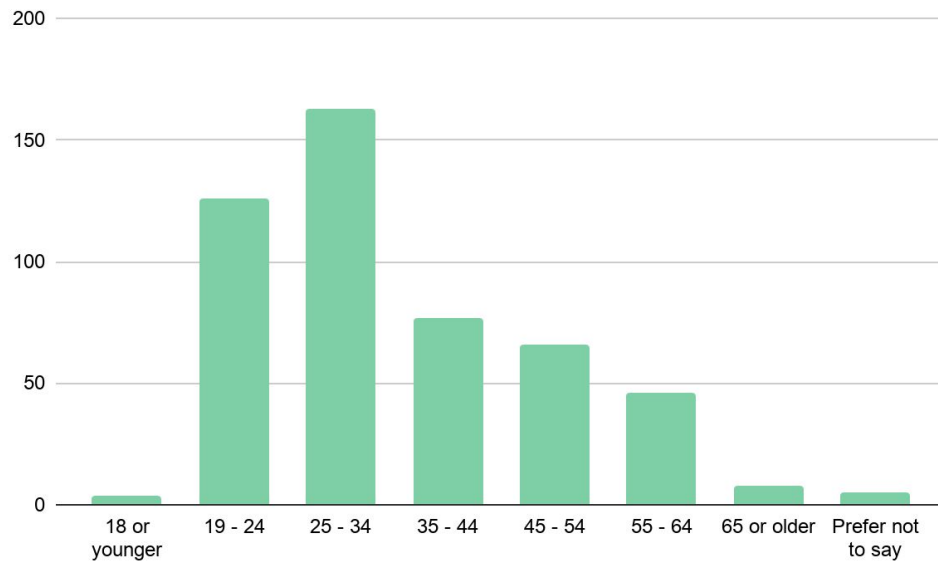
- Respondents to the survey said that the biggest challenges facing music teaching in the UK over the next 5 years were:
 - **Music not taken seriously by government** (cuts to music in schools, government ministers not talking in favour of music).

- **Lessons becoming less affordable** (Brexit and austerity).
- **New technology and online teaching** (YouTube, apps, teachers not adapting quickly enough, less need for 1-to-1 teaching, lower commitment, shorter attention span of young people).
- **Saturation of the market with lower skilled teachers** (as performing work dries up, more working musicians turn to teaching to make money; lower quality teaching).

Demographics

Age

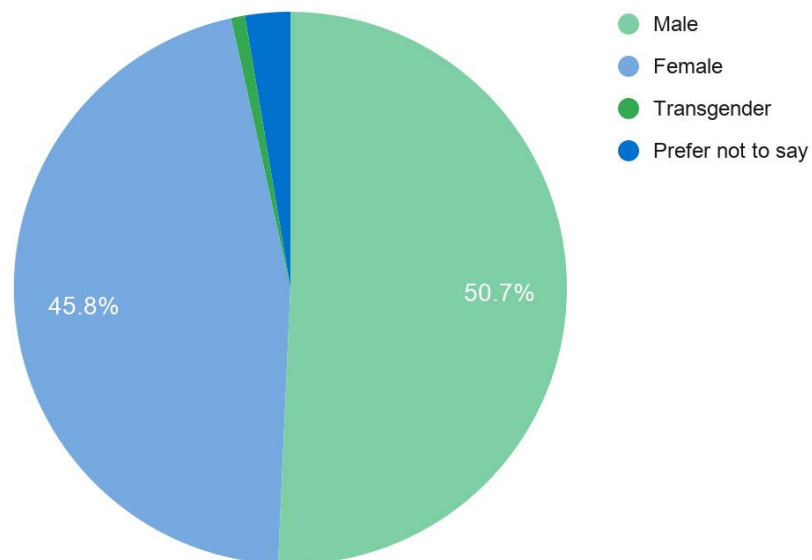
- The majority of respondents to the survey were young professionals, under the age of 34.



Count of Age range

Gender

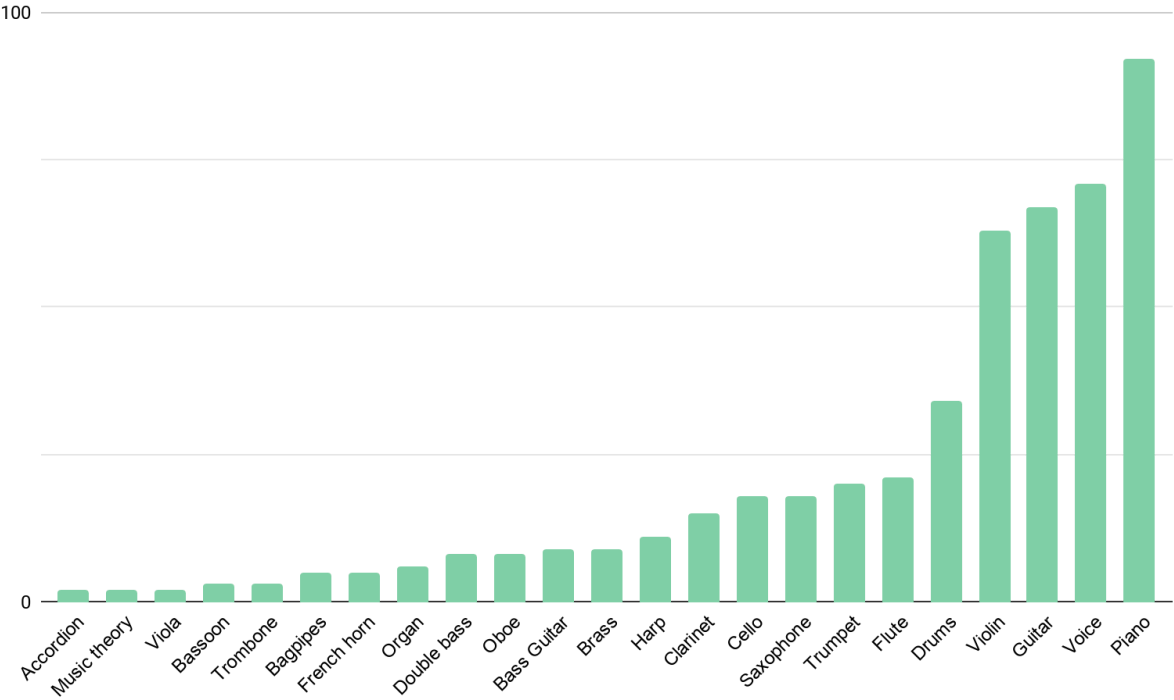
- More men answered the survey than women.



Count of Gender

Instruments count

- Unsurprisingly, the most common instruments taught were violin, voice, guitar, and way out in front: piano with 92 teachers.



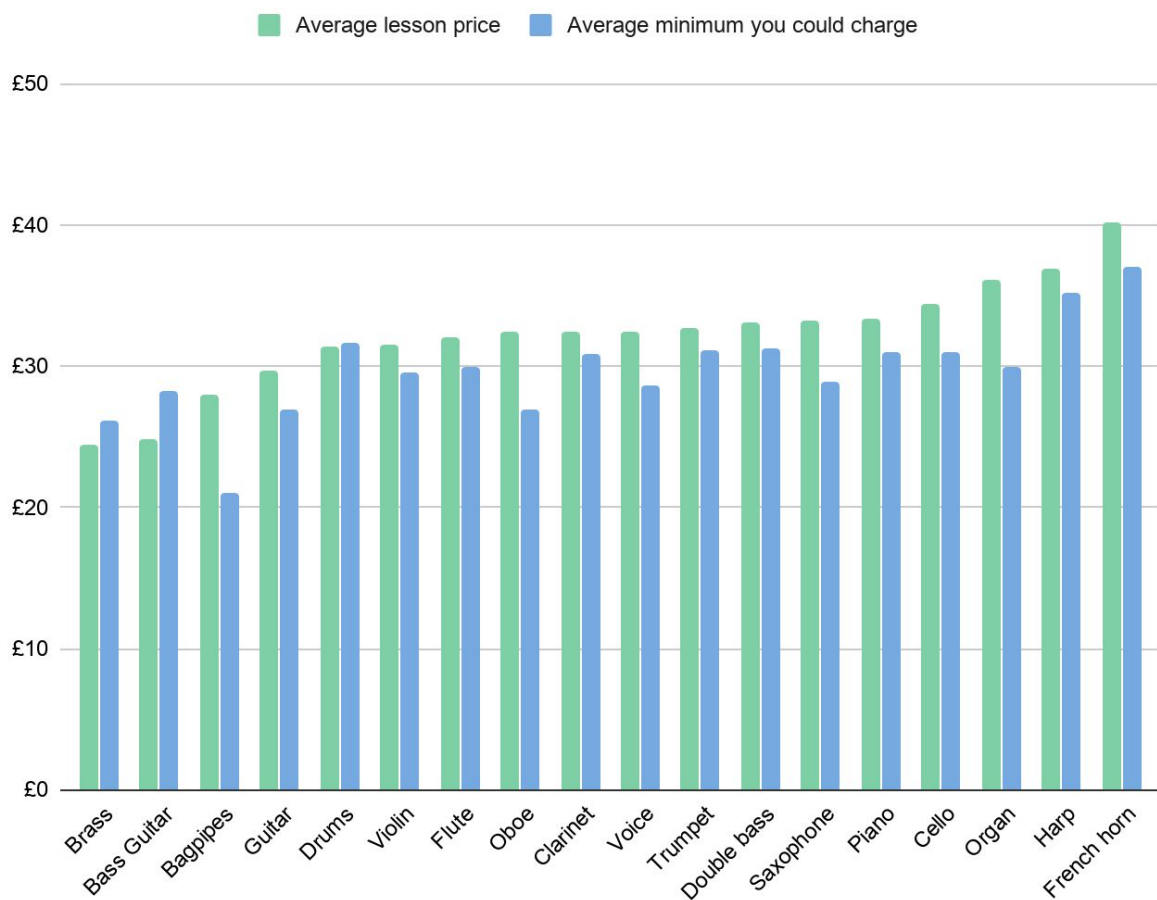
Count of Primary instrument taught

2. Pricing: which teachers earn the most

All prices were in answer to the question “How much do you charge for a 60 minute lesson where the pupil travels to you?”.

Price by instrument

- More unusual instrument teachers like harp and french horn on average listed their rates as highest (£36.90 and £40.20 respectively).
- Brass and bass guitar teachers charged the least on average (£24.44 and £24.88).
- Interestingly, there was a large discrepancy between the average price for cello lessons when compared to violin (£34.44 vs £31.49).



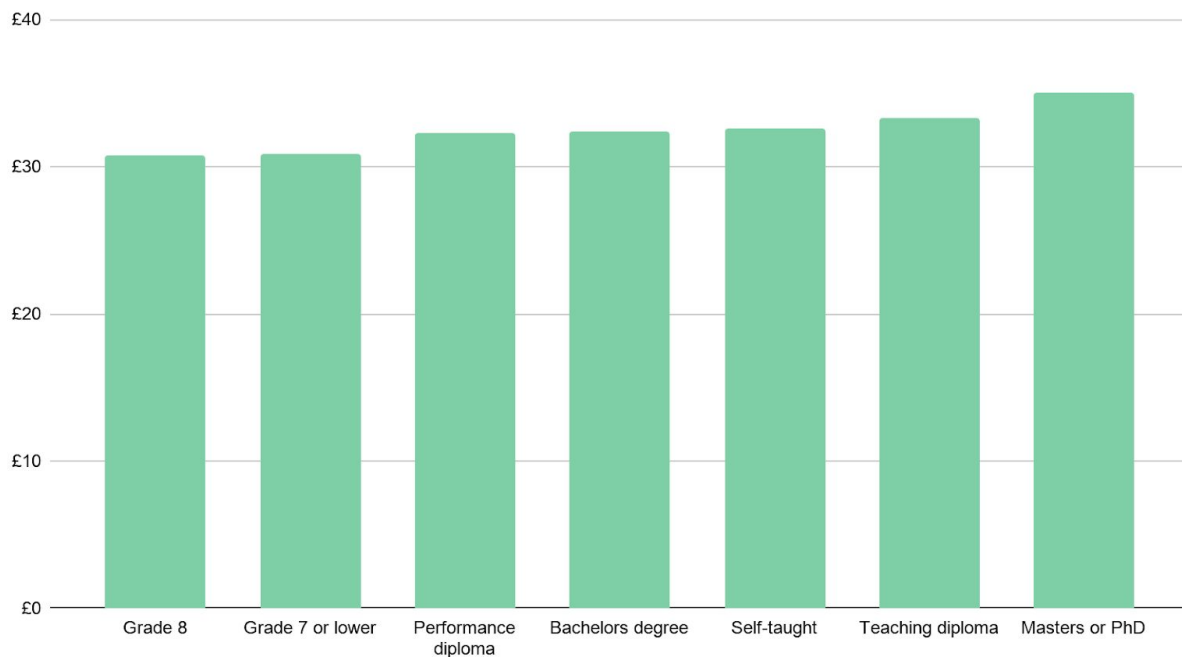
Lesson price by instrument type

What are the minimum rates teachers should charge?

- Most teachers said that the price they charge for a 60 minute lesson is the minimum anyone should charge.
- Interestingly, brass, bass guitar, and drum teachers on average listed what they thought the minimum rate for their services should be as higher than what they actually charged. This would suggest that they teachers feel they are currently being underpaid.
- The average suggested minimum rate was £29.93, 7% below the average rate actually charged by teachers (£32.21).

Price by qualification

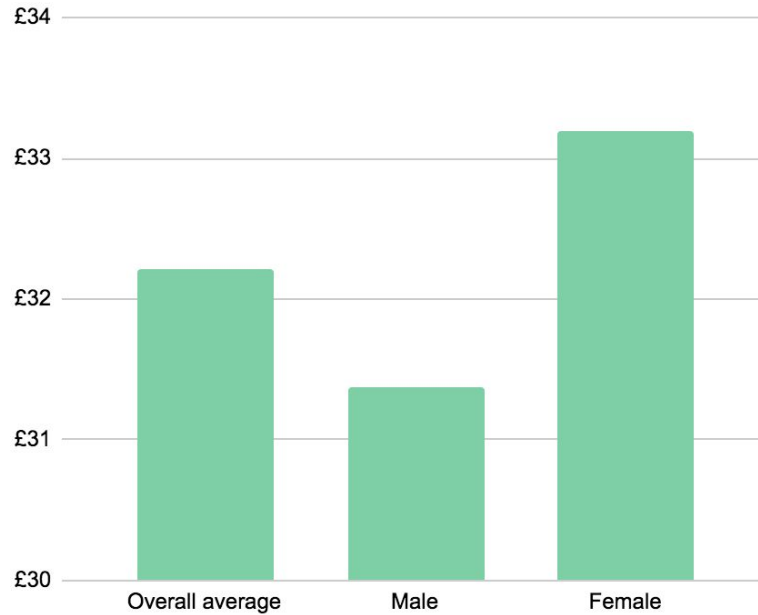
- As expected, musicians with only a Grade 8 or lower qualification charged the least for their services.
- Interestingly, musicians who said they were self-taught charged the same as musicians with Bachelors or performance diplomas.
- Musicians with teaching diplomas, masters and PhDs were able to charge the most.



Lesson price by qualification level

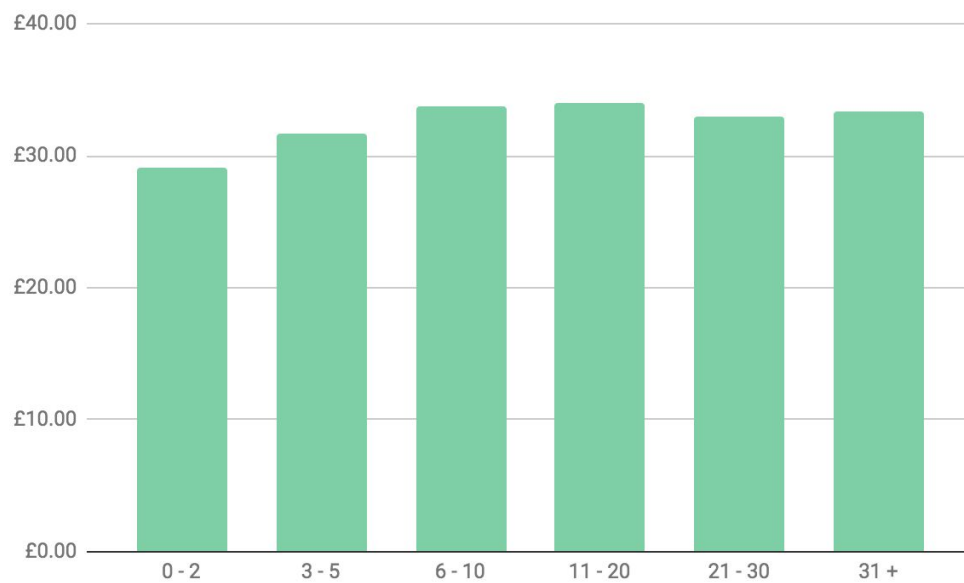
Price by gender

- Interestingly, female teachers on average charged more than male teachers.
- Even when removing harpists from the average (the harpists surveyed were 90% female and charged higher lesson fees on average), the average price for a lesson from a female teacher was still around 5% higher, at £33.03.



Price by years of teaching experience

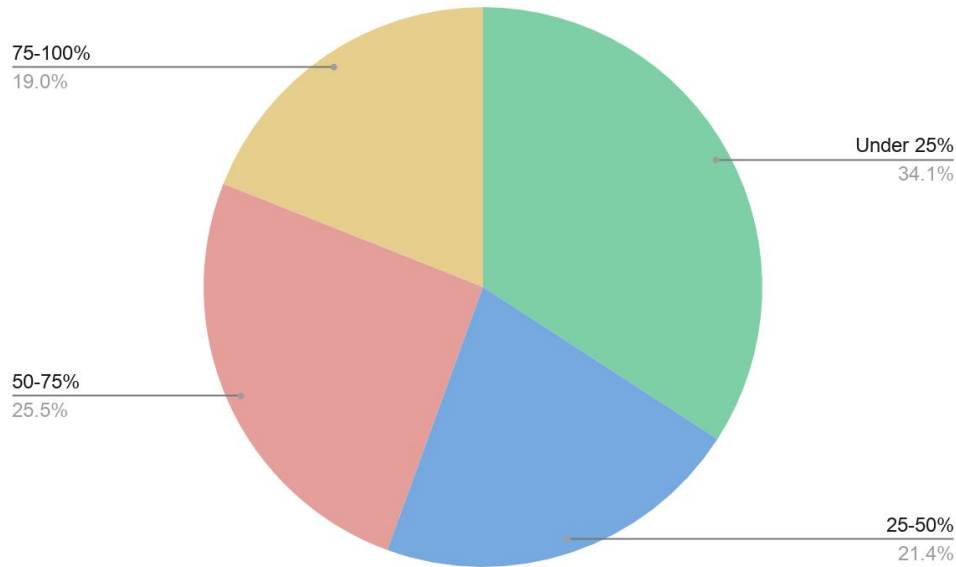
- Teachers didn't appear to increase their rates once they'd reached about 10 years of teaching experience (i.e., their rates stayed the same).
- Unsurprisingly, beginner teachers (0-2 years experience) charged significantly less.



Lesson price by Years of teaching experience

What % of annual income comes from teaching?

- Overall, most teachers surveyed said teaching made up the minority of their annual income (under 25%).
- However, this varied widely when we broke this down by gender and age.

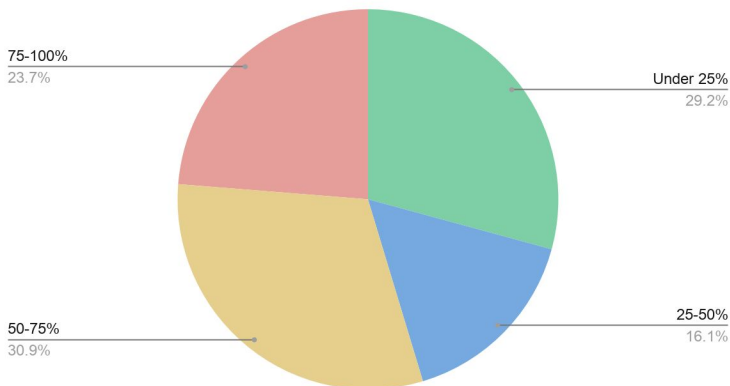


Count of "What % of your annual income comes from teaching?"

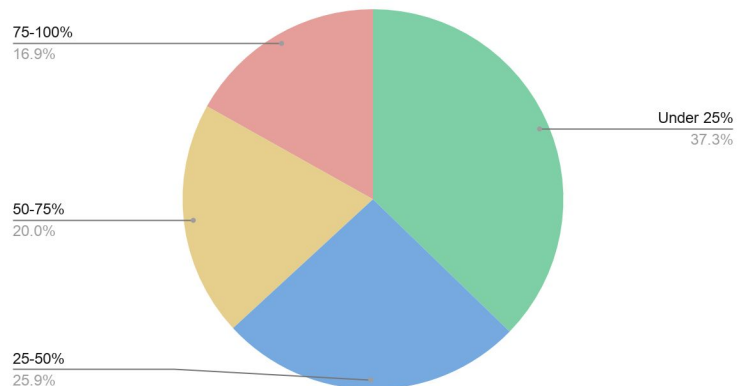
Broken down by gender

- Women rely on teaching for income much more than men: 54% of women said that teaching made up over half of their annual income, compared to just 37% of men.

Female



Male

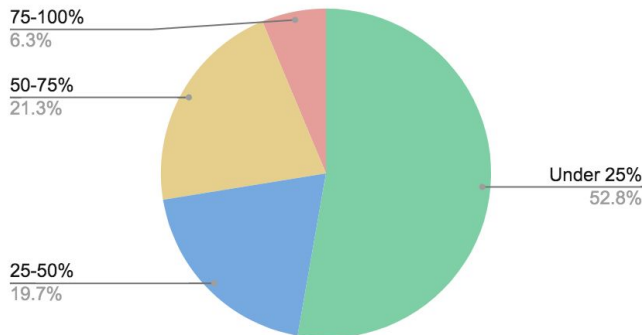


% of annual income from teaching segment by gender

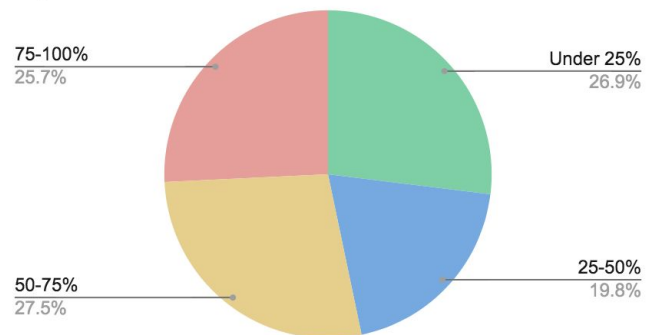
Broken down by age group

- Younger teachers were less likely to make more than 25% of their income from teaching. This could be because they tend to supplement their income via other streams such as performing while their teaching practice is starting up. A higher proportion of teachers over the age of 25 make 75% or more of their income from teaching.

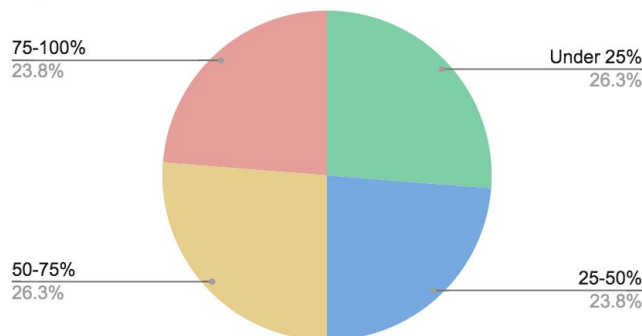
Aged 19 - 24



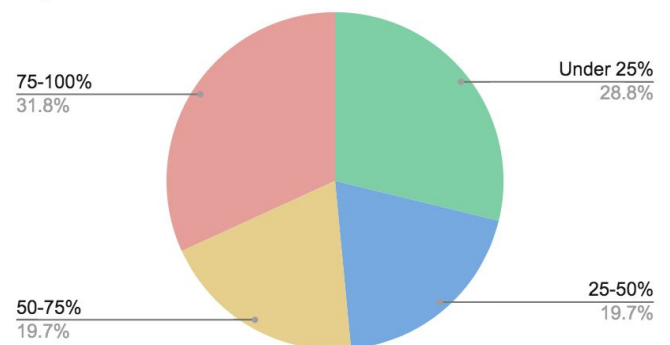
Aged 25 - 34



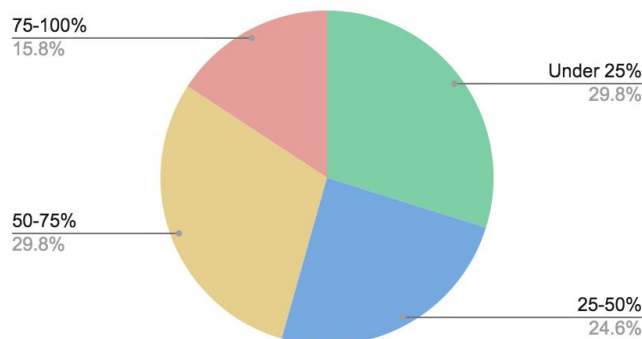
Aged 35 - 44



Aged 45 - 54



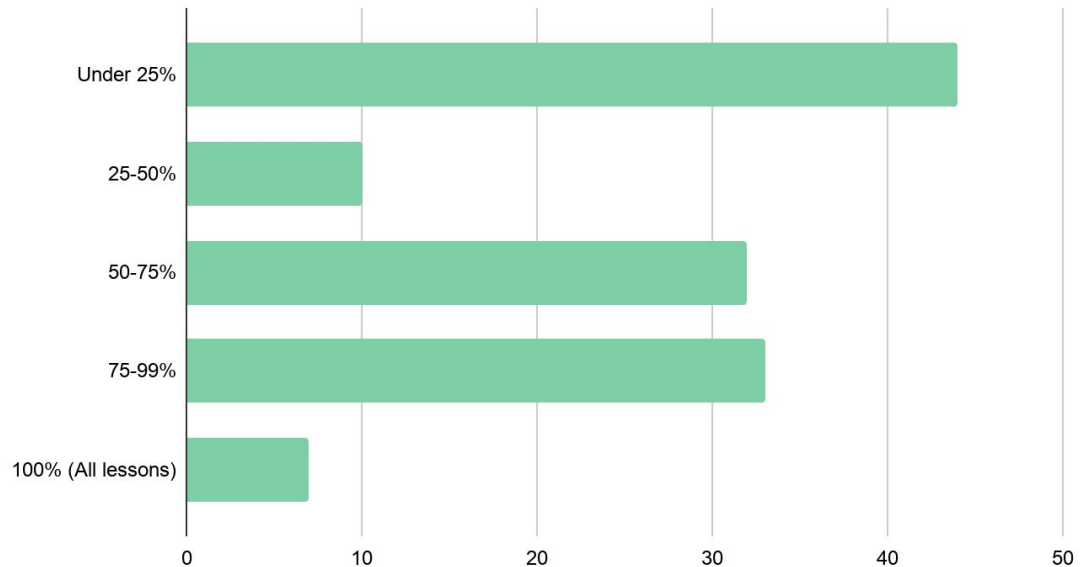
Aged 55+



3. Location: private or public lessons

How many of your lessons do you teach in schools

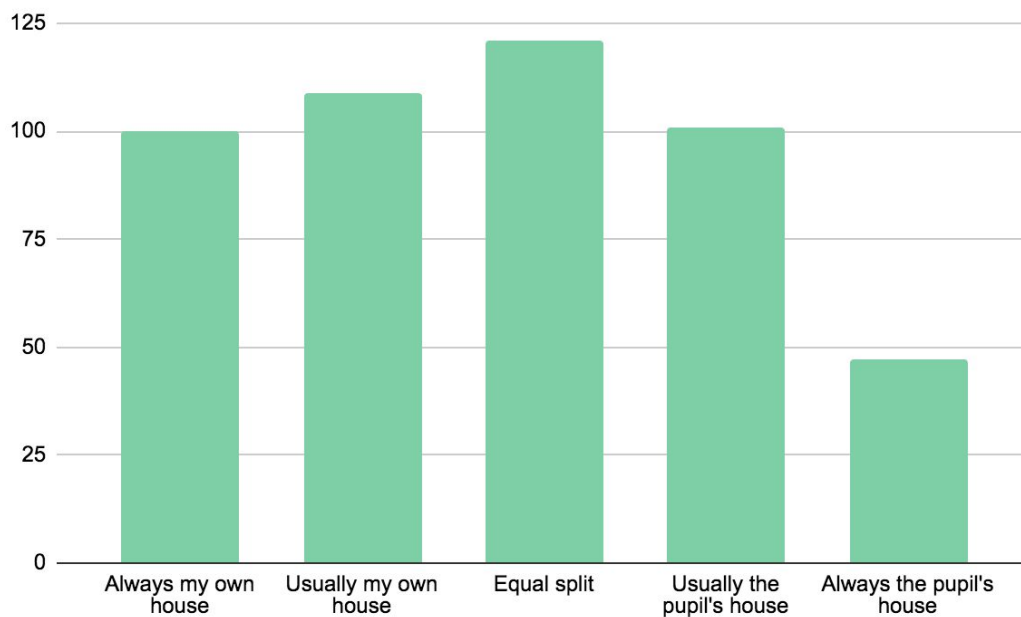
- Just over half of teachers teach in schools (53.4%).
- Of the teachers who taught in school, there were two clear groups: those for whom school teaching represented a small chunk of their time (under 25%) and those for whom it represented a majority (50-100%).



Count of "What percentage of your lessons do you teach in schools?"

Where do teachers usually teach lessons

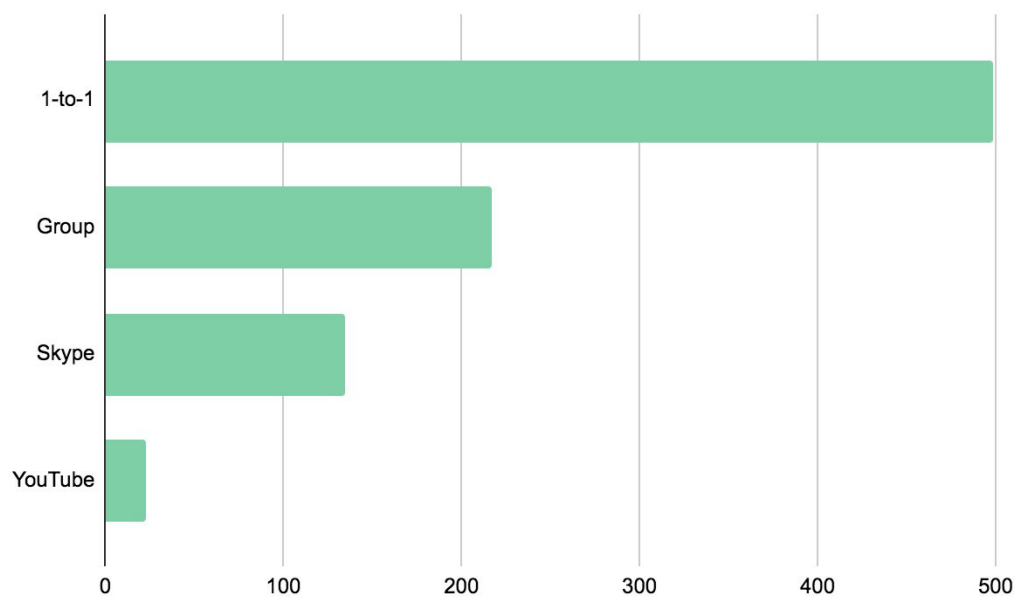
- Most teachers will teach at a mixture of pupils' homes and their own home.
- A minority of 20% teach from their own home.
- A smaller minority of 10% only teach at the pupil's home.
- The other two major teaching locations mentioned by teachers were school/music services and rented studios.



Count of "Where do you usually teach your lessons?"

What types of lessons do teachers give

- Unsurprisingly, 1-to-1 lessons were the most popular. However, 1 in 4 teachers are now offering real-time video lessons.

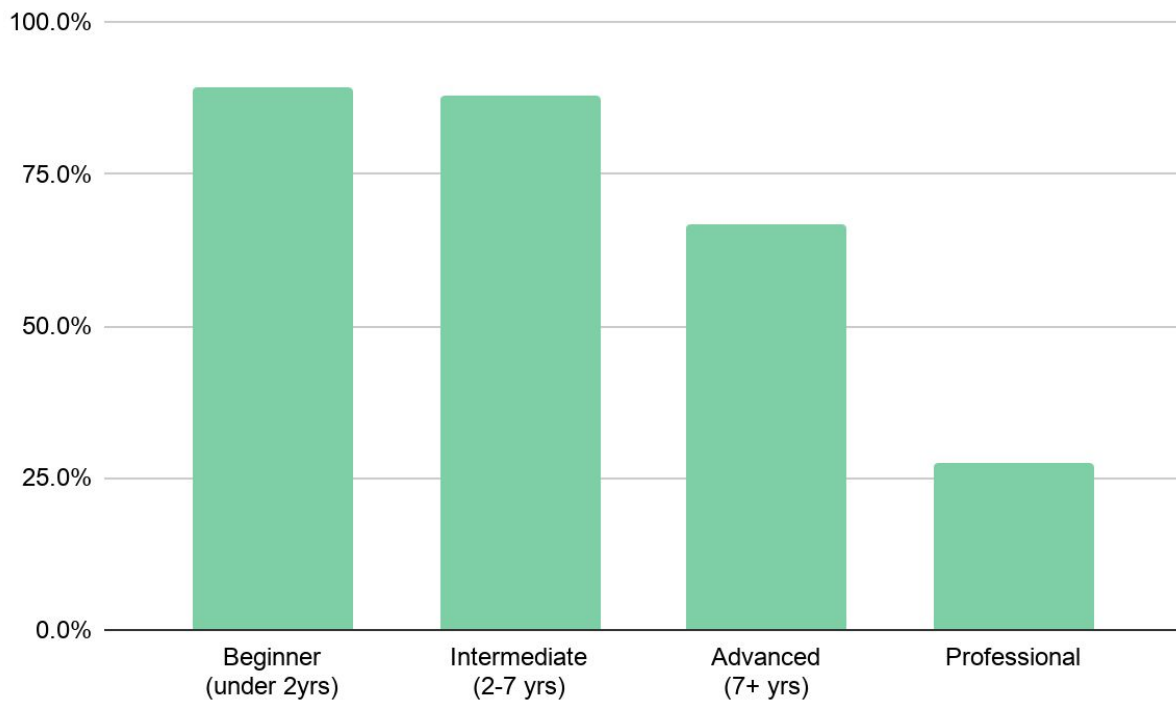


4. Pupils

Pupil demographics

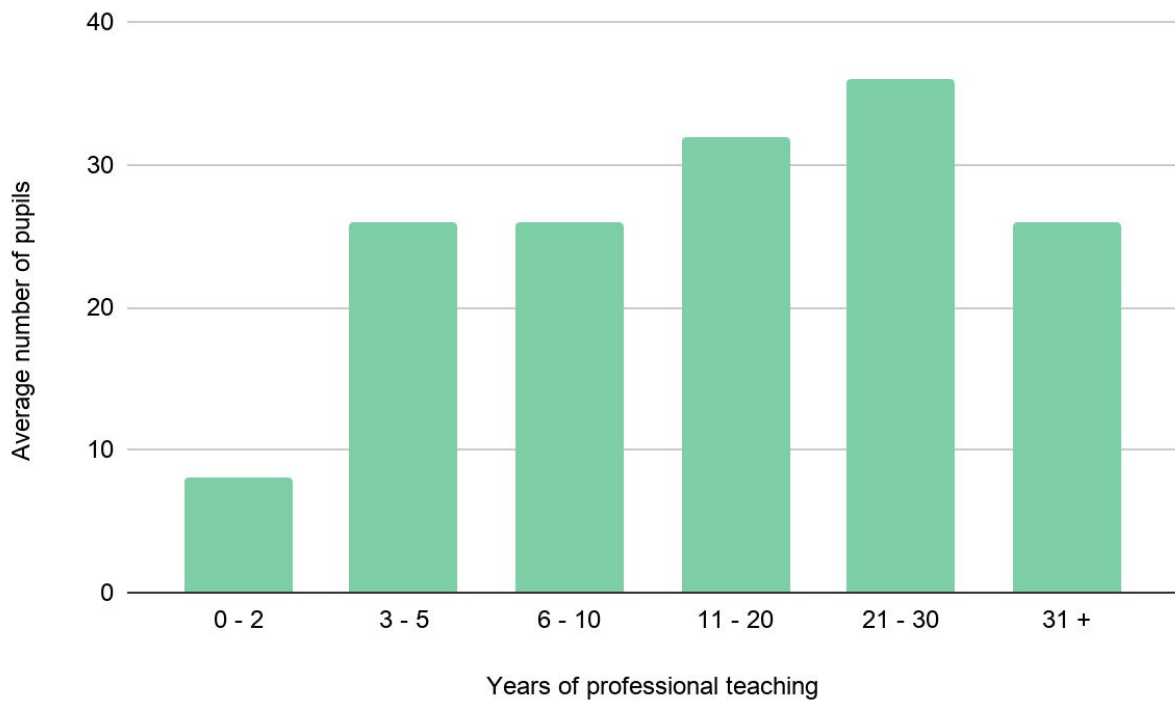
Typical standard of pupils taught

- Most teachers (87.8%) taught pupils of beginner or intermediate standard while only 27% taught musicians of a professional standard.



Pupils per teacher

- On average, teachers had 24 active pupils.
- Teachers with over 20 years experience were the most heavily subscribed, with an average of 36 pupils, while teachers with under 2 years experience teaching professionally had only 8 pupils on average.

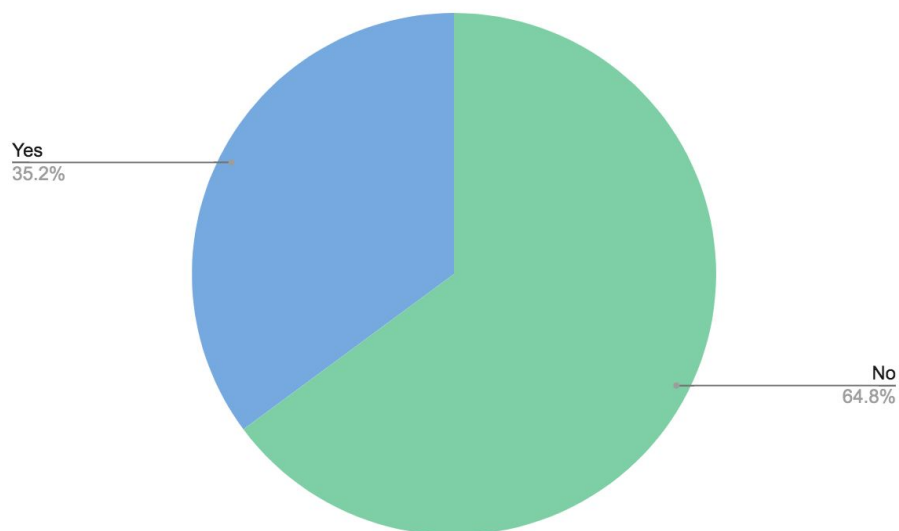


Average number of pupils by Years of professional teaching experience

Lesson payment

Payment issues

- 1 in 3 teachers have problems getting payment from pupils.



Have you ever had issues getting payment from your pupil or their parents?

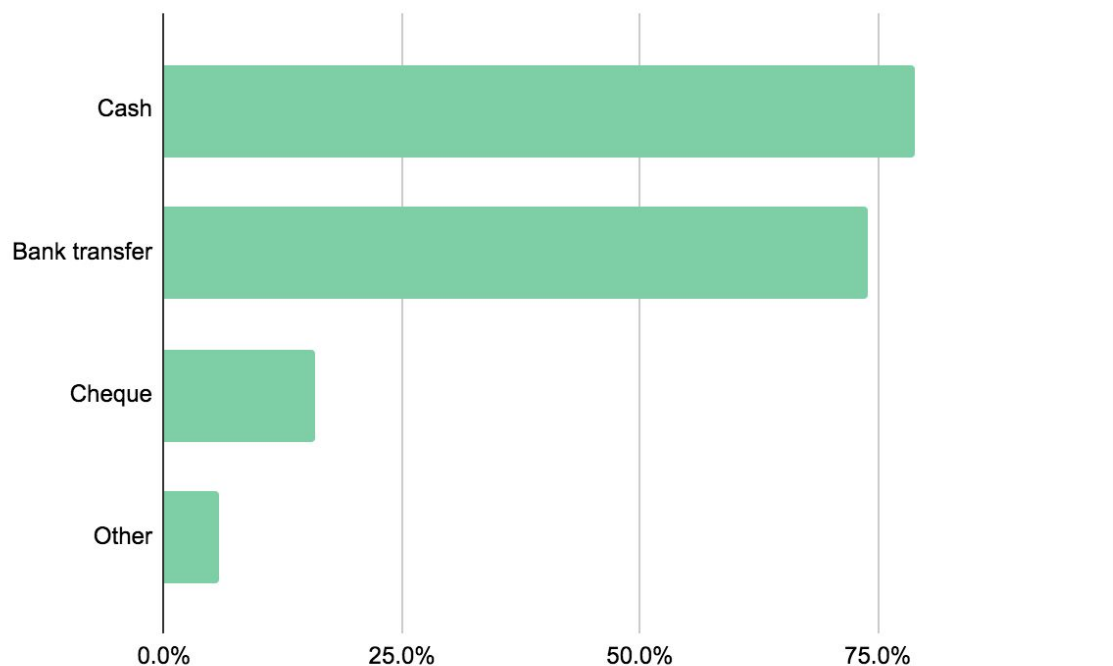
- **Common themes:** delayed payment, pupil or parent forgetting to pay/bring cash, pupils/parents not paying for last minute cancelled lessons. Problems were most acute in schools where teachers didn't have face-to-face contact with the parents.
- Teacher quotes:
 - "Most of my problems have been with pupils I teach in schools but bill direct. Because the parent never has to look me in the eye, it's easy for them to ignore emails. I've had to take one family to Small Claims Court recently."
 - "Some parents are very late to pay. Fortunately the school at which I teach are happy to intervene and to contact the parents to persuade them to pay up."
 - "Very seldom, mostly school pupils' parents will delay paying the invoice until after the last date requested - they have always paid after 1 or 2 reminders."
 - "Not so much issues with actually receiving payment, but reluctance with paying for missed or cancelled lessons"
 - "When offering Skype lessons whilst in America, receiving payment was harder as I was not there in person to prompt payment regularly"

Payment methods

- Bank transfer and cash are by far the most common methods.

Other methods given:

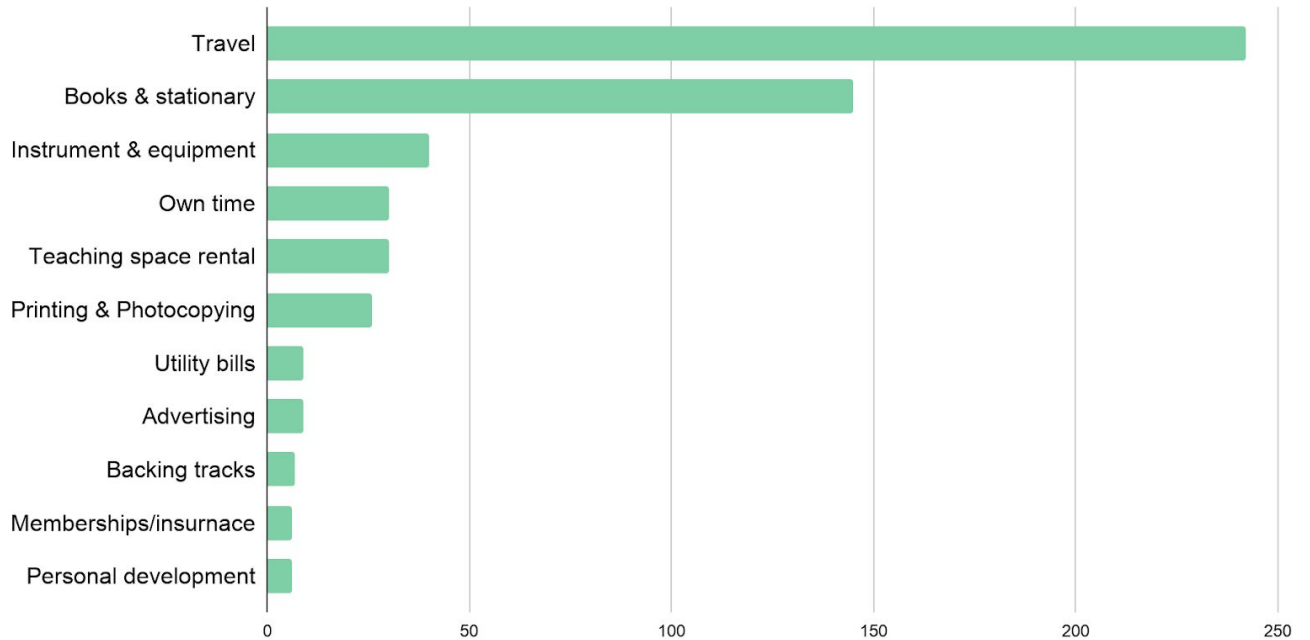
- Through their school or music service (15)
- Paypal (7)
- Card (3)



Payment methods used by teachers (%)

What are the biggest expenses as a teacher

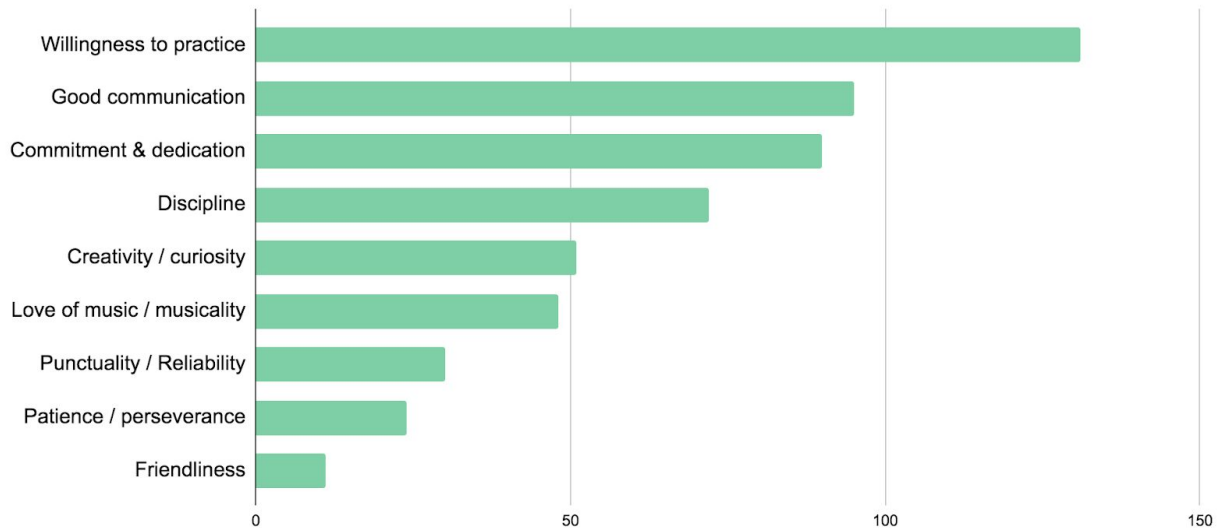
- 57% mentioned travel as the biggest expense, followed by books and sheet music. Then instrument maintenance, room rental, and printing costs.
- Interestingly, 30 teachers mentioned that their own time was their biggest expense.



Pupil vetting

What are the characteristics you look for in a good pupil?

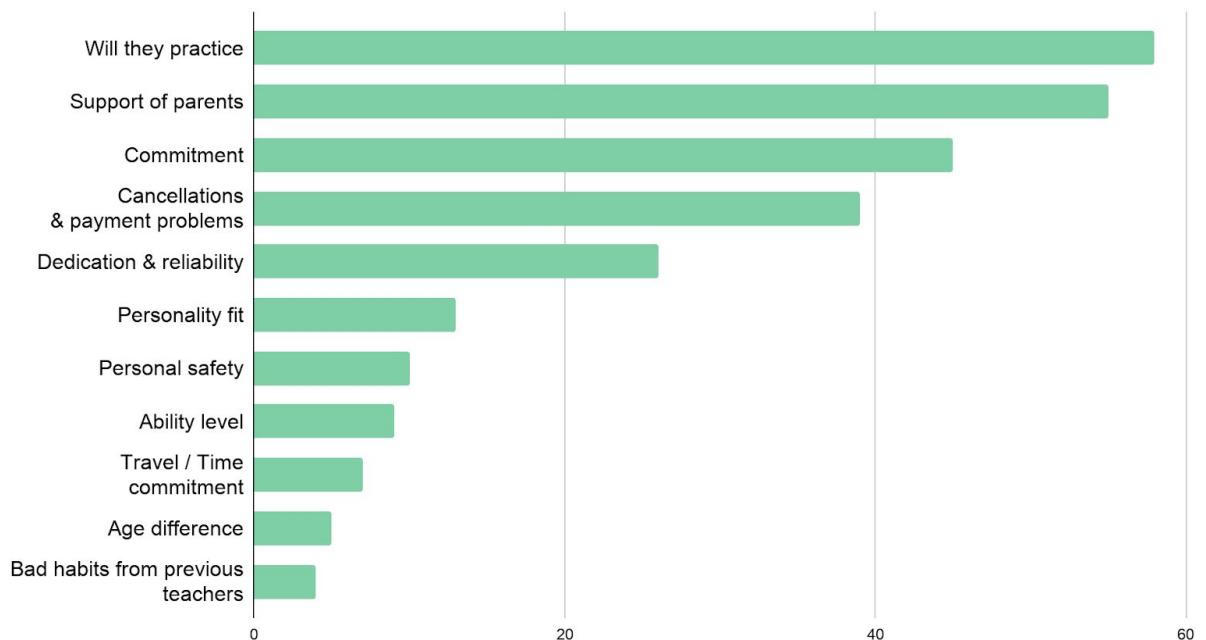
- Responses to this question were categorised into a few distinct characteristic areas.
- Interestingly, characteristics referring to the pupil's work ethic were mentioned much more frequently than things like curiosity, musicality, and friendliness.



Count of Characteristic mentioned

Biggest concerns when taking on a new pupil

- **Pupil commitment.** Most of the concerns fall into a group centring around the pupil's commitment to the teaching sessions. Will the pupil turn up, will they practice, and will they continue to take lessons into the future.
- **Lack of payment and cancellations.** A significant second group were concerned about the contractual agreement of the lessons: would the pupils pay and would they be likely to cancel.
- **Parental support.** The role of parents was also an important concern. Teachers want parents to be supportive but not to be forcing their children into taking lessons.
- **Safety of teachers.** A small number of teachers mentioned that their main concern was the safeguarding of teachers against accusations of abuse, and unruly behaviour of pupils.



Count of "What is your biggest concern when taking on a new pupil?"

- **Examples:**

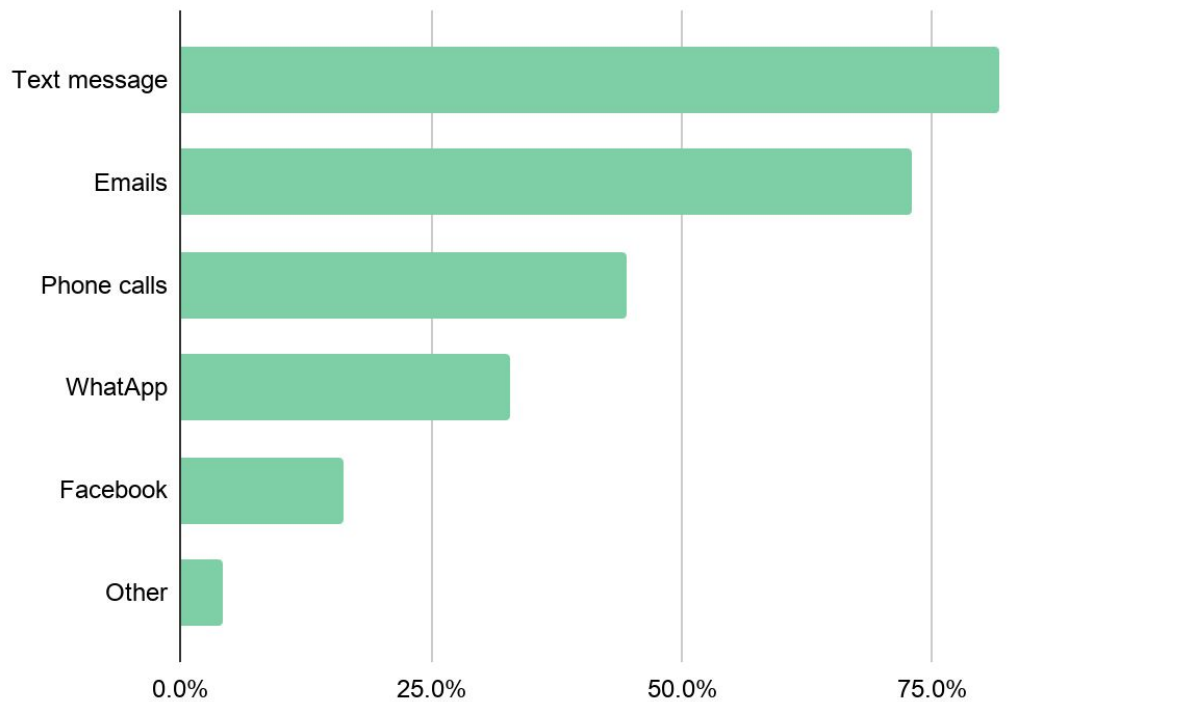
- "You have to trust people are who they say they are when finding pupils online, and **have to be careful especially if teaching from home**"
- "Whether they are **willing to practice in between lessons**, if they do not they won't progress and then will become frustrated."
- "They are able to **pay consistently.**"
- "**Location if I'm travelling to them**, depending on how far I have to travel I would add on money to cover this but this can often lead to being too expensive for some people"
- "The main concern is not knowing **how they have been taught before**. Quite often I have found that a lot of time can be spent on undoing bad habits ignored my previous teachers. It is a dream to teach somebody from the very start."
- "Usual **nerves of confidence** in my own ability to teach - not that I've ever had any negative feedback but the first lesson is always the hardest as you don't know exactly what stage they are at or how well they respond to teaching."
- "Accusations of physical or sexual abuse. I always teach with the door open when in 1-to-1 lessons."

Use of apps and websites for finding pupils

- Almost half (47.6%) of the teachers surveyed find new pupils via websites and apps.

How do you communicate with your pupils?

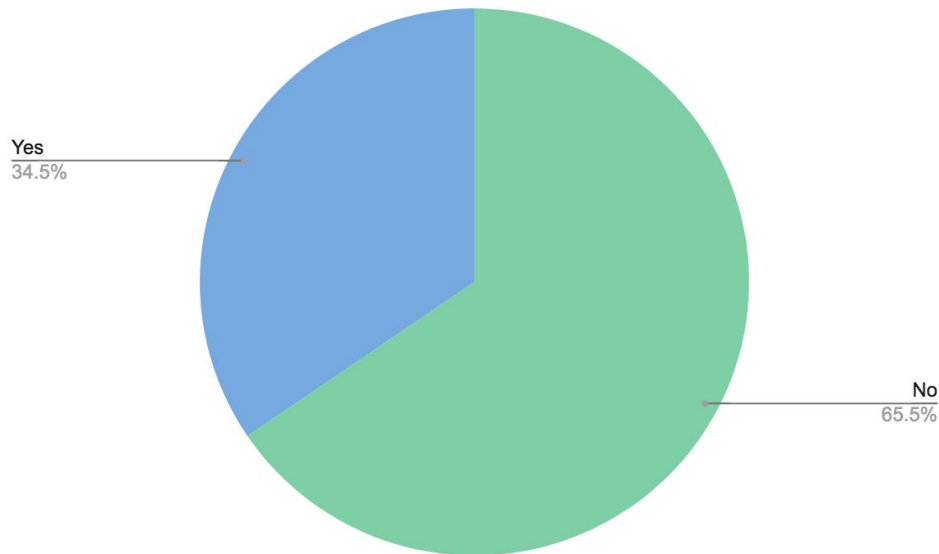
- Most teachers use text messages and emails to communicate with their pupils.
- Some mentioned that if the pupil is under 18 the parents is contacted. Others mentioned that they used an app or website service (e.g., Google Classroom) to communicate with the pupil.



Communication methods used by teachers (%)

5. Free trial lessons: the great debate

- Around 1 in 3 teachers offer trial lessons—we asked them to explain their reasons.



Do you offer free trial lessons?

Reasons for - why do you offer free trial lessons?

- Most teachers who responded saying they did offer trial lessons (60%) mentioned that the free trial was designed for both the teacher and the pupil to see if they are a good match. This was generally a match based on personality fit, teaching style, and the pupil's needs.
- Others mentioned that it was an important way of giving people the opportunity to try out playing music without the barrier of payment. This was particularly important for teachers of unusual or large instruments (bagpipes, harp, drums) or for pupils with unsure parents.
- For others it was simply about promotion—a way of differentiating yourself in a crowded market. For less popular instruments, it was also used as a taster session to get the pupil enthusiastic about the instrument.
- Some teachers felt that this initial consultation, which mostly consists of getting to know the pupil, didn't warrant a fee.
- **Examples:**
 - "To give us both (especially the pupil) the chance to see if they'd like to learn with me without any pressure to book another lesson. And because I've been given free consultation lessons with many teachers."
 - "I think it is very important for the pupil and the family to trust you and offering a free trial made them feel secure and able to make their decision."

- "Because the first lesson is often about finding out about a student's needs and aims and getting an idea of what we need to work on in future. I don't like charging for this."
- "I think it's important for both parties to get a feeling of whether it would be a good fit. A free trial lesson gives both the freedom to then say "I don't think this will work" or "this feels good" without any pressure."

Reasons against - why don't you offer free trial lessons?

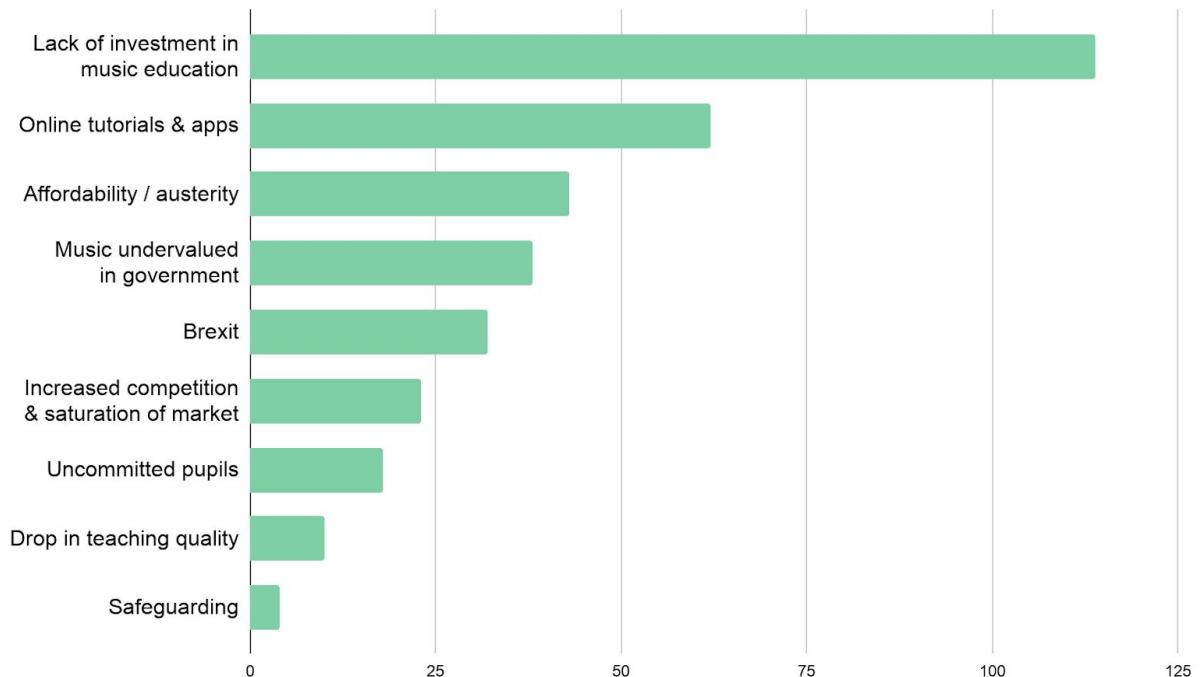
- 1 in 6 musicians who were against free trial lessons offered other discounts for initial lessons such as half price, a shorter taster lesson, or a video lesson.
- 1 in 10 had never felt the need. They received all the enquiries they needed through word of mouth.
- Some teachers were concerned that students would exploit it and take a free trial without the intention of continuing.
- Others disagreed on principle: felt they should be compensated for their time they need to reclaim expenses / can't afford the time expense. They drew attention to other industries like driving lessons where free trial lessons aren't common.
- **Examples:**
 - "From previous experience, free trial lessons tend to attract students who study for shorter periods and have had more teachers in the past."
 - "I **don't have the time** to offer all potential students trial lessons. If they do one lesson and don't enjoy they can get their money back."
 - "I **charge a reduced rate** for trial lessons of £15 for 45 minutes. This is to cover travel costs and to make sure the students are serious about possibly continuing on the lessons."
 - "Trial lessons take up as much, if not more, of my free time with planning, organisation, etc. All of this time adds up, and I feel I should be paid for it. Also, I have found that **free trial lessons attracts students that are not overly interested**, and therefore end up missing lessons/messing me around. Since stopping offering them, I have had far fewer students mess me around/drop out etc."

6. The Future of Teaching

What is the biggest challenge facing music teaching in the UK over the next 5 years?

The key themes highlighted were:

- **Music not taken seriously by government** (cuts to music in schools, government ministers not talking in favour of music).
- **Lessons becoming less affordable** (Brexit and austerity).
- **New technology and online teaching** (YouTube, apps, teachers not adapting quickly enough, less need for 1-to-1 teaching, lower commitment, shorter attention span of young people).
- **Saturation of the market with lower skilled teachers** (as performing work dries up, more working musicians turn to teaching to make money; lower quality teaching).



What is the biggest challenge facing music teaching in the UK over the next 5 years?

- **Examples:**
 - “A race to the bottom through low fees and **poorly qualified teachers**. A minimum level of professional qualifications must be set in what is an unregulated industry”
 - “Far too many music graduates looking to music teaching as their only way of making money, **flooding the market** and driving down prices.”

- “Lack of flexibility. Most of the teachers I know, especially from music hubs, have been teaching the same stuff over the years and **they are not adapting to new changes**. They are rarely incorporating new technology in their teaching or music-making.”
- “There is a national shortage of teachers, and youngsters learning certain instruments. The world’s orchestras, which keep the film, concert and music industry going, need bassoon players, players of trombones, violas, double bass. **These instruments are not being taught in schools as it’s no longer cool**...Live music is so much more vibrant and atmospheric than artificial computer generated sounds and so these instruments cannot be replaced by technology.”
- “We live in a very diverse society, **at times I feel like live music is fizzling out**. Although you have many musicians and instrumentalists around there's also more digitised music today which some people prefer listening to now. I feel like as a professional musician and teacher, it's important to keep the scene alive, music brings so much joy to many people so that's why it's important for us to keep it going”
- “YouTube, Yousician etc are making the 1-1 teaching almost obsolete. You still can’t replicate a teacher ensuring technique, etc is correct but in terms of learning from scratch how to play an instrument, **there are so many tools available without the need to pay privately.**”