What is a ‘typical’ secondary music PGCE student?

Participants on four UK postgraduate secondary music teacher education (PGCE) courses completed the Musical Careers Questionnaire (see overleaf) just before graduating in June 2002. The combined sample represented 17.5% of the total population of secondary music teachers that qualified at this time.

The results show that whilst the majority of PGCE students are recent graduates (aged of 21-25), some make the move into teaching in their thirties, forties and even fifties. The majority followed the traditional academic route of music GCSE/O Level and A Level qualifications before an undergraduate degree. Older students often had performance or instrumental teaching diplomas and possibly higher university degrees. Very few students had vocational qualifications such as BTEC diplomas or GNVQs.

Almost the entire sample had experience of teaching or other educational work before their PGCE. Over 70% had taught as instrumental teachers, whilst 15% had delivered practical workshops or been involved in outreach activities. Yet relatively few had directed choirs or instrumental groups in an educational context. The majority played between two and four instruments, and almost 90% either were first study pianists or possessed keyboard skills.

Many had experience of playing in orchestras at county, university or professional level. Fewer had been active in jazz, popular or non-Western music.

The PGCE students were likely to regard general teaching skills (such as communication and time management) as equally, if not more important than general musicianship and background musical knowledge. Apart from keyboard skills, they regarded many of the practical musical skills gained during their own music education (such as instrumental technique and sight-reading) as less important. Significantly, however, many said that they still felt pressure from their fellow PGCE students to maintain a high standard of instrumental technique.

When asked for their views on the possible aims of music education, most felt that social benefits and opportunities to develop transferable skills were more important than the cultivation of future professional musicians. The majority reported that their own secondary school music teachers had been less influential on their musical careers than either instrumental teachers or their parents. On completion of their PGCE year, over 75% intended to work in secondary schools. A few planned to supplement part-time work in schools with instrumental teaching. Other intentions included instrumental teaching, special educational needs teaching and study for higher degrees. Asked about their ‘ideal’ job in five years time, the majority said they still hoped to be in teaching, probably as heads of school music departments or in other senior managerial roles. A minority wished to leave teaching for a career in performing, whilst others wished to combine school teaching and performing.
Progress on Data Collection

Longitudinal Questionnaire Study: second phase now under way

Students from undergraduate and postgraduate music teacher education courses along with final-year undergraduate students from university music departments and music colleges are participating in the longitudinal questionnaire strand of the project. Phase one of this strand – in which participants completed the specially designed Musical Careers Questionnaire (MCQ) for the first of two occasions – is now complete. The research team was delighted by the response to MCQ1, which exceeded all predictions. Following their graduation, we kept in touch with the postgraduate teacher education students, who are now in their second school term as newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

Phase two of the longitudinal strand is currently under way, with the same four groups of participants completing an updated MCQ. Many questions are the same, enabling us to make comparisons with the data already collected. Others are new and have been included in response to trends emerging from the MCQ1 data and case studies. For the NQTs, these new questions explore day-to-day experiences in school, canvas views on the adequacy of their teacher education courses and gather additional background information. For the undergraduate music and music education students, the new questions focus on their changing attitudes toward careers as secondary school music teachers.

NQT case studies now complete

Six NQTs from the longitudinal questionnaire study agreed to participate in case studies, and these formed a second strand of data collection. Three males and three females were chosen, representing a variety of musical and educational backgrounds, and teaching at schools with a diversity of intakes, locations and catchment areas. The case studies explored the issues raised in MCQ1 in greater depth. They also investigated the demands placed upon newly qualified music teachers and the extent to which the participants’ own music education and postgraduate teacher education prepared them for the role.

Each NQT was ‘shadowed’ for a school day and a detailed record kept of all teaching, administrative and extra-curricular activities. There followed ninety-minute semi-structured interviews in which participants discussed the impact of their musical and educational backgrounds on their teaching careers. The interviews also covered initial experiences of the job, plans for career development and views on the purpose, status and philosophy of secondary school music education.

Once analysed, the case studies will provide a rich source of contextual data in which to situate the results of the longitudinal questionnaire study.

Case study participants have also agreed to incorporate short listening activities into their lower school lessons. These tasks, which are currently under development, will form the project’s final strand of data collection.

Update on Participating Institutions

The TIME project is hosted jointly by the University of Surrey, Roehampton and the University of London Institute of Education. Dr Linda Hargreaves (University of Cambridge) and Dr Janet Mills (Royal College of Music) are external consultants. We are also grateful for the advice received from Ted Bunting at the University of Central England. Students from the following institutions are completing the musical careers questionnaire: Birmingham Conservatoire, City University, University of London Institute of Education, University of Surrey, Roehampton, Manchester Metropolitan University, the Royal Academy of Music, the Royal College of Music, the Royal Northern College of Music, University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. Case study participants are based at schools in Essex, Greater Manchester, Hertfordshire, London, Staffordshire and Surrey.

Measuring Self-Efficacy

Developed by psychologist Albert Bandura, self-efficacy theory is concerned with people’s beliefs in their capabilities to deal with situational demands and achieve identified goals. Part of the MCQ (see left) is intended to investigate participants’ self-perceptions of their abilities as musicians and teachers, and aims to assess levels of perceived self-efficacy in both these vocational domains.

After evaluating a range of pre-existing self-efficacy scales for musical and teaching activities, the Sherer and Maddux General Self-Efficacy Scale was adapted to form two distinct but comparable scales in the MCQ. The original scale has been used extensively by researchers working in many areas, including the investigation of musical performance anxiety. With only minor rewording where necessary, the seventeen statements from the original scale were adapted so that they related more specifically to the two vocations under study - music and teaching – without changing their underlying motivation. For instance, in the musical version, one statement read: ‘If something unexpected happens during a performance, I do not handle it well’, whereas the teaching equivalent read: ‘If something unexpected happens during a lesson, I do not handle it well’. As in the original scale, these statements addressed three types of scenario: willingness to initiate behaviour, willingness to expend effort in completing the behaviour, and persistence in the face of adversity.

Perhaps surprisingly, the results from MCQ1 showed that teaching self-efficacy means are higher than the musical means for students of both music and music teaching (see left for the PGCE participants’ results). A reasonable prior hypothesis might have been that the conservatory and university music student groups should have higher musical than teaching means in relation to the education student groups, given the emphasis of their training: but this appears not to be the case. This may be because individuals tend to rate their self-efficacy in relation to their peers as a reference group: conservatory students, for example, are used to judging themselves against the highest levels of performance excellence, so that their musical self-efficacy scores may be low in relation to those of education students.