

Diversity in Admissions to the MA Music Therapy Training at the Guildhall School 2015-2024

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Introduction

Diversity in admissions to music therapy training has been much discussed qualitatively¹ but less so quantitatively.² Here we review admissions to one UK music therapy training from 2015-24 using offer rates (OR) for different diversity demographics.

Data on age, ethnicity and disability came from registry records (2015-24). Secondary schooling (a proxy for socio-economic status also used by HCPC³) and musical diversity were assessed from retained application forms (2019-24). There were 374 applications over the ten-year period studied.

Data was recorded by year of admission, but applications can be submitted up to 14 months before September entry. Only unconditional offers are included.

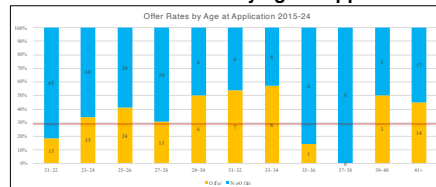
The Admissions Process

The admissions process is in two stages: an initial musical audition to assess range of musical skills and capabilities to cope with musical aspects of the programme; and two individual verbal interviews and a musical group experiential session to assess emotional and psychological readiness.

Out of c.40-50 applicants annually about 20-25 are interviewed at the second stage, with feedback/advice on future application offered to those who are not interviewed. Twelve places are offered each year, with up to 4 reserve places.

Since 2022 the application no longer asks applicants to identify by their first study (classical) instrument. An aural alternative to sight-singing is now offered for those who do not read Western notation, and revised criteria aim to counter any implicit classical music bias.

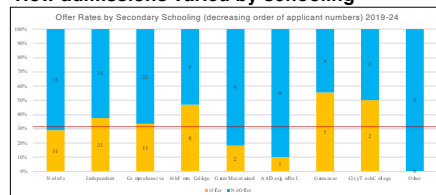
How admissions varied by age at application



Applications peaked at age 23-24 (28%) while offer rates peaked at age 33-34 (OR=57%). 76% of applicants were aged < 29 (OR=31%).

Applicants aged 21-22 often lacked relevant work experience, while older applicants may face more conflicts with career or family commitments.

How admissions varied by schooling



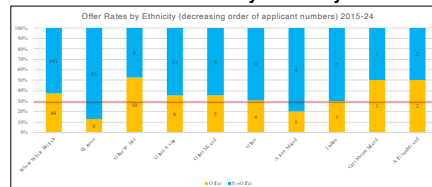
School type was not known for 42% of applicants (including overseas). Independent Schools were the largest named school type (22%). Their offer rate exceeded State schools overall (OR=38% vs. 32%) but 6th Form, Grammar School and City Technology College applicants had a higher OR (c.50%).

Independent Schools were proportionally over-represented in applications and offers made. While some applicants may have received music or other scholarships, socio-economic advantage may also be involved. At Guildhall School 26% of offers went to Independent School applicants; across the UK generally 22% of arts therapists attended an Independent School.³

How admissions varied by dis/ability 53 applicants (14%) declared a disability at admission (2015-24), of whom 26 were offered a place (OR=49%). This was consistent across different categories of disability.

Applications where a disability was declared did not show a lower offer rate than other applications.

How admissions varied by ethnicity

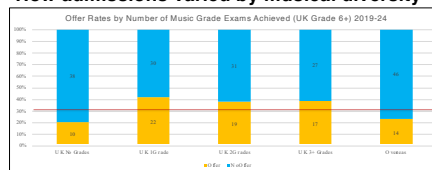


The largest ethnic group was White/White British (60% of applicants, OR=37%). The highest offer rate was for Other White (OR=53%). African/Mixed and Caribbean/Mixed applicants were the smallest ethnic groups (OR=50%). Chinese was the second largest ethnic group (OR=15%).

Many unsuccessful applicants from China were young and lacked relevant work experience.

Overall Asian applicants were over-represented (25%) and African/Caribbean applicants under-represented (2.5%) compared to the UK 2021 census. African/Caribbean applicants, while few, showed a high offer rate.

How admissions varied by musical diversity



Music grade exams achieved (at Gr. 6+) offered a rough indication of UK applicants' experience of Western notation or classical music.⁴ UK applicants with no grade awards had a lower offer rate (OR=20%) than those with one or more grades (OR=c.40%). Overseas applicants rarely mentioned grade exams.

While one grade 6+ exam increased the OR, additional grades did not raise the OR further. Better measures of musical diversity are needed.

Trends

- Applications rose c.50% from 2015-24, dipping in 2019/20 (new UK programmes) and rising in 2021/22 (during COVID).
- Applications from men rose from 15% (2015-19) to 24% (2020-24).
- Applications from China rose from 2022 (new Hong Kong visa route).
- Independent School applications and offers stayed numerically stable.
- UK applicants with no grade exams at Gr. 6+ rose 14%-22% (2019-2024); offers stayed stable at 1-2 per year.

Literature referred to

¹ Lindo D. 2022. 'Examining the accessibility of MA Music Therapy training in the United Kingdom for ethnic minority communities'. *Journal of British Music Therapy* 37/1; Myerscough F., Wong D. 2022. '(Un)learning from experience: an exposition of minoritized voices on music therapy training'. *Music Therapy Perspectives* 40/2; Mains T., Clarke V., Annesley L. 2024. 'Music therapy is the very definition of white privilege': Music therapists' perspectives on race and class in UK music therapy. *Approaches* 31 Jan.

² Langford A., Rizkallah M., Maddocks C. 2020. *BAMT Diversity Report*. London: British Association for Music Therapy.

³ HCPC. 2021. *Diversity Report*. London: Health and Care Professions Council.

⁴ Wetherick, D. in press. 'Classical music bias and Music Therapy Musicianship: a response to recent critiques.' *Approaches*.

Acknowledgements

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Further information

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