

# Policy paper on key criteria for innovative music teacher education

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## Executive summary

This policy paper was prepared by EAS (European Association for Music in Schools), EMU (European Music School Union) and AEC (Association Européenne des Conservatoires) and outlines key criteria for innovative music teacher education, targeting both general education and music schools. Music education plays a vital role in society by fostering well-being, social cohesion, and cognitive development. Despite these benefits, music education faces numerous barriers, including marginalisation within curricula, inadequate teacher preparation, and challenges in recruitment and retention.

The paper advocates for a systemic approach to strengthening music teacher education and promoting access to high-quality music education across Europe. It emphasises the need to equip music educators with skills relevant to modern educational demands, such as digital literacy, intercultural understanding, and inclusive pedagogies. The recommendations aim to address current challenges by ensuring sustainability, accessibility, and high-quality training for music teachers.

Key recommendations include:

- Ensuring diverse access to music teacher training and future-proof curricula.
- Providing sufficient funding and resources for music teacher education.
- Promoting collaboration across institutions and sectors to enrich music education.
- Offering lifelong learning opportunities for educators.

By implementing these policies, the impact will include a stronger and more diverse music sector, improved teacher status, greater inclusion in music education, and enhanced social cohesion. The paper calls for action at both European and national levels to integrate these needs into relevant policy frameworks and foster collaboration to create a sustainable, inclusive music education ecosystem.

## Background and context

### The vital role of music and music education in society

Music has always been an integral part of human culture, acting as a language that transcends many borders and unites people across diverse backgrounds. In addition to its artistic and cultural value, music is increasingly recognised for its significant contribution to individual well-being, social cohesion and cognitive development.

However, the role of music education in promoting these benefits is often underestimated in policy contexts. A more conscious integration of music into education systems is essential to address current societal challenges and ensure equal access to its benefits.

This policy paper seeks to advocate for a systemic approach to strengthening the role of music and music education in society and ensuring that its transformative potential is fully realised for people of all ages and (social) backgrounds. The paper is prepared by the European Association for Music in Schools ([EAS](#)), the European Music School Union ([EMU](#)) and the Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen ([AEC](#)), together representing the full spectrum of music education (in particular in its institutionalized offerings) from early music education to lifelong learning and from the provision of educational programs for amateurs to high-end professional training.

### Music education is exposed to many barriers

Despite the well-documented benefits of music education, many education systems face significant obstacles to incorporating music as a core component of the curriculum; music and other arts disciplines are often marginalised in favour of subjects considered more critical to economic development. This trend undermines students' holistic development and ignores the role of music in fostering creativity, emotional intelligence and social skills.

Europe has a rich musical education landscape, involving a wide range of actors from the education and cultural sectors. However, the opportunity for young people to gain access to music education varies greatly across European countries. We find differences in terms of:

- Structures (who teaches music and in which institutions),

- Resources (who bears financial and personnel responsibility) and also
- Practices (what is the focus of teaching)

Yet, at all three levels, music education and music teacher education is currently clearly turning to the question of how young people can be made **fit for the future**.

## Classroom Music

Within school classroom music there is homogeneity in the recognition of essential aspects: the practical skills of listening and appraising, composing, performing, and the associated aspects of theory and history[1]. The position of music in the school curriculum and the amount of time that is allocated to the subject varies from country to country and is different even within a country with respect to music in primary and secondary schools. In 2026, the comprehensive survey of the [TEAM project](#) will provide more precise figures.

For years, in many countries, there has been concern over the fact that most staff who teach music in primary schools are trained through generalist courses and, therefore, do not have the skills and confidence to teach the subject well[2]. Moreover, according to the TALIS survey by OECD, secondary as well as primary teachers often report feeling unprepared to meet the diverse learning needs of their students, especially in creative and artistic fields such as music[3]. In part, this is a result of the growing prevalence of digital tools and virtual learning platforms which require a rethinking of music education to ensure inclusivity and adaptability to new technological paradigms.

Recently, the teaching profession has lost its attractiveness even to secondary school teachers. The lack of infrastructure is a pressing issue. Government policy changes in some countries have resulted in cuts to the curriculum time for music[3] or the creation of an integrated art and culture course into which music is absorbed - such as secondary schools in Belgium and the Netherlands[4]. This can lead to situations where there is only one music teacher in the school, yet they are expected to develop and support numerous extra-curricular activities at the same time as running a successful department, with students attaining high results in examinations. With a reduced government focus on the subject, many school managers ascribe less money to the department, at a time when there is a need not only for musical instruments and music, but also for music technologies that are relatively expensive[5].

The arrival of the covid virus added further difficulties for music teachers, since music-making in schools was almost impossible for years, and some extra-curricular music ensembles never resumed or numbers diminished greatly[6].

Additionally, in some countries, school headteachers do not allow end of school examination classes in music to run because of small numbers[7] further diminishing the status of the subject. Such issues, in many countries, have contributed to a problem of music teacher recruitment [8] and retention[9] in secondary schools and teacher education programmes closing or diminishing in number in some countries[10].

Another concern is that, throughout time, music has often been the preserve of the rich. With fewer opportunities for music in schools, vulnerable and disabled children and those in low-income families are often excluded from opportunities to engage in music making.[11] This too is the case for students wishing to study music at higher education (HE) level: there are questions concerning how HE institutions can better include students diverse in human characteristics[12], orientations, and

cultures[13], and/or of low economic status, and offer courses to include a broad range of musical instruments and repertoire.[14]

## Music Schools

Within music schools, instrumental and vocal tuition, which lies at the heart of music pedagogy, has a long-standing tradition and has been continuously refined through academic training and practice over a long time. How it is offered, by which educational institutions, who has access to it, and the extent to which it is publicly funded vary significantly from country to country. In most European countries, this music education is offered through publicly funded extracurricular music schools[15]. However, the diverse models of music schools also reflect the great diversity in Europe in terms of different organisational, musical and pedagogical practices[16].

The status of music schools teachers also varies greatly across countries, reflecting differences in funding structures, employment conditions, and societal recognition. While many music school teachers benefit from secure, salaried positions, some still work on a freelance basis, facing precarious financial circumstances [15]. This directly influences the diversity and inclusivity of music school education, as insecure working conditions make the profession less attractive. At the same time, participation in music schools is largely dependent on the financial resources of families. Unlike general schooling, music school education is voluntary, requiring parents to invest additional time, effort, and money. Economic constraints may reduce enrollments, which not only limit access to music education but also reduce employment opportunities and incomes for music school teachers, further exacerbating the challenges faced by the profession. This strong link between socioeconomic factors and access to music schools presents significant challenges to maintaining an adequate number of qualified music teachers in the future.

Music schools also play a vital role in nurturing young musicians for higher music education institutions, carefully guiding, supporting, and inspiring them on their journey to becoming skilled musicians and dedicated music educators. However, economic barriers and a shortage of qualified music school teachers may disproportionately affect children from wealthier families, who are better positioned to access instrumental and vocal education. Not only would this reduce diversity in music schools, but it would also narrow the student population entering music conservatories and universities, further exacerbating inequality and potentially threatening the sustainability of the broader music education system.

Furthermore, the role of music school teachers has evolved significantly in recent years, with an increasing number of skills being added to their required competencies. Similarly to classroom music teachers, music school teachers are expected to excel not only in their core teaching abilities but also in areas such as digitisation, inclusion [17], engaging students from diverse cultural backgrounds, and catering to a wide range of age groups—from early childhood to senior learners[18]. Additional demands include proficiency in diverse group tuition, initiating and leading a wide range of ensembles, and knowledge of new musical genres, interdisciplinary skills or managerial expertise[19]. The latter is particularly important for creating innovative activities and performances, organising study trips, attending festivals, competitions and similar events contributing to the musical and personal development of students.

These expanding requirements make the role of a music school teacher increasingly demanding, highlighting the need for a holistic approach to addressing these challenges and supporting teachers in

their professional development. Mirroring the situation in mainstream schools, music schools across Europe are also struggling to recruit new teachers; the issue is particularly pronounced in rural areas compared to urban ones and is more severe for less popular instruments than for widely favoured ones. However, almost all member countries of the European Music School Union report significant challenges in attracting new teachers to the profession.

## Policy recommendations

### The need to strengthen music teacher education

Central to addressing the above challenges is the urgent need to update music teacher education to equip educators with the skills and resources needed to effectively inspire and engage students with diverse backgrounds. Music teachers are key actors towards education as well as future viability for young Europeans. Furthermore, music educators and musicians are essential cultural co-creators in their local, regional and national environment.

The policy recommendations are in line with several current international policy papers:

**The Porto Santo Charter** [120] calls for innovative approaches to arts education that emphasize the integration of modern methods and interdisciplinary practices. Music teacher education needs to adapt to these calls by incorporating digital technologies, diverse cultural repertoires and inclusive pedagogies.

**The European Agenda for Music** [21] highlights professional development as a cornerstone of a thriving music education ecosystem. This involves not only technical training in musical proficiency, but also equipping teachers with strategies to promote inclusivity, critical thinking and creative problem-solving among students.

In addition, **UNESCO's** [22] emphasis on global citizenship education underlines the importance of preparing teachers to address cultural diversity, enabling them to promote intercultural understanding through music.

Finally, it is crucial to update music teacher education to bridge the gap between policy ambitions and classroom realities. Investments in teacher education need to be aligned with broader educational reforms to ensure that music education contributes meaningfully to societal development and individual empowerment.

To preserve and strengthen the pedagogical profession in its central societal function for music, two main policies are particularly effective, as mentioned in the European Agenda for Music, 2015 [21] and the European Commission, 2013[23] respectively:

1. Policies (key criteria) for accessibility and quality for the music teaching profession
  - a. **Accessibility:** Foresee diverse access for different music teachers (regularly assess entrance tests into study programmes) that reflect the breadth of the current and

evolving music life (genres, focal points, interculturality, societal changes, digitisation)

- b. **Future-proof curricula:** Broad-based and regular work on future-making study plans
- c. **Funding:** Guarantee sufficient and sustainable funding for music teacher education, for schools, music schools and in non-formal settings as well as for equipment
- d. **Numbers:** Guarantee a sufficient number of high-quality training places for music teachers based on capacity planning
- e. **Career paths:** Enabling individual as well as lateral entry opportunities into the music teacher profession including portfolio careers
- f. **Lifelong Learning:** Offer sufficient and high-quality continuing education opportunities (in which teachers are addressed as experts AND as learners, e.g. by job-rotation, participation in research, mobility and professional communities) for lifelong learning and ensure attendance

## 2. Policies (key criteria) for collaboration and sustainable partnerships

- a. Promote and fund **collaboration** on all levels: collaborative teaching and learning, transnational, cross-institutional and cross-sectoral collaboration
- b. Include **student dialogue** in all aspects of curricula development and evaluation.
- c. Empower music educators to create sustainable collaborative **working relationships** outside the education system, including cultural institutions, social and health care, business and tourism, and other artistic disciplines on a local and national level
- d. Raise awareness among educators and leaders of the added value of **collaborative work** in music education and to enable them to initiate and sustainably implement such collaboration
- e. Implement policies that embed **collaboration as a fundamental stance** and core element of music education
- f. Foster collaboration by **encouraging jointly developed ideas, solutions and visions**, and by challenging institutions to rise above individual and institutional egos and take on social responsibility

## Impact of recommendations

The implementation of the above policies will result in a significantly improved music education sector, which will lead to:

- a **stronger and more diverse music life** for the benefit of all people
- **improved status of music teachers**, which will lead to positive development and increased demand for the profession
- improved **diversity, equity and inclusion** in primary and secondary education as well as in music schools
- **greater reach of music education** in general (audience development)
- **strengthened social cohesion** for children, young people and other communities
- **enhanced individual well-being and cognitive development** for children and young people

## Call to action

### European level

Include the needs for qualified music teacher training in relevant policy-making, such as in these initiatives by the new European Commission:

- the coming **Culture Compass**,
- the new **Gender Equality Strategy**,
- the **EU Teachers Agenda** and in the work on a potential **European Schools Alliance**.

Enhance **collaboration** between European and national levels to raise awareness and link music education to other policy areas.

### National level

Include the needs for qualified music teacher training in policy-making by national and regional authorities across all relevant policy areas.

Empower organisations and institutions to advance their advocacy activities promoting the music teacher profession and music teacher education.

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## The SCHEME Working Group (2024)

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