

AEC - European Association of Conservatoires

SURVEY REPORT

Digital Practices in
Higher Music Education:
A European Student
Perspective

**Presented by the
Digitisation Working Group
in collaboration with EPASA**

**AEC - EMPOWERING ARTISTS
AS MAKERS IN SOCIETY**



Co-funded by
the European Union

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Introduction

AEC – Empowering Artists as Makers in Society (AEC-ARTEMIS, 2022-2025) is a project funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Commission, in support of European networks. The project builds on the results of previous projects carried out by the AEC, in particular the work and outputs of the Creative Europe-funded project AEC – Strengthening Music in Society (AEC-SMS, 2017-2021).

The AEC **ARTEMIS Digitisation Working Group** brought together mainly teachers, digital officers and leaders involved in the use and research of new technologies to bring change in higher music education institutions. The group helped the AEC assist HMEIs in dealing with the digital shift (which is affecting their own practices and educational methods, as well as the way in which artists interact with their audience). From the outset of the project, the group felt the need to build on the question of technologies in cooperation with **EPASA, the European Performing Arts Student's Association** because of the need to hear the students' points of view on this broad topic.

This fruitful collaboration with EPASA led to an online survey of students at European music institutions conducted between May and September 2023, with the aim of understanding :

- The presence of digital practices within Higher Music Education Institutions;
- Current digital capabilities of students;
- How students relate to new technologies in their craft and audience engagement
- The relationship between institutions and digital transformation

This report gathered responses from students across European institutions, providing insights into current digital practices, educational experiences, and future perspectives in higher music education.



Association Européenne des
Conservatoires, Académies de
Musique et Musikhochschulen



European Performing Arts
Students' Association

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Methodology and Survey Structure

The survey consisted of two parts:

- a quantitative survey with an online questionnaire
- a qualitative survey with semi-directive interviews

The survey design built on the framework already developed by the working group to define what we're talking about with this vast subject. 4 pillars were defined to help us dive into "digital technologies" (we used to talk about "digitisation", but we prefer the term digital technologies). And these pillars formed the categorisation of questions to be addressed to students.

1. **Digital in artistry (as a creative medium)**
2. **Engaging with audiences in a digital world**
3. **Digital in learning and teaching (skills for musicians)**
4. **Digital in institutional culture (mindset of institution)**

We also added a first category for general information (age, gender, location, institution).

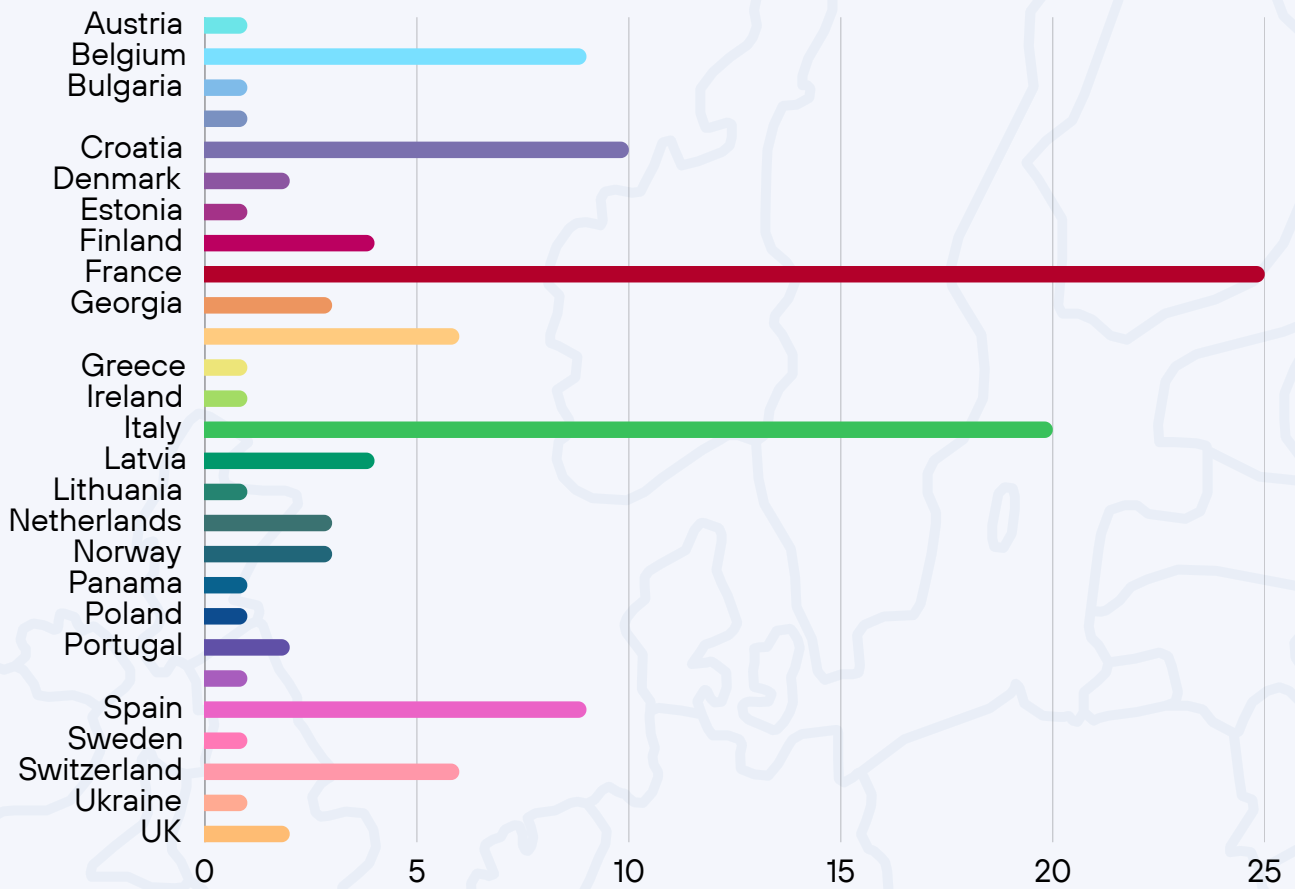
Data Collection

We designed a Google Form featuring various question types, including single choice, multiple choice, and open-ended questions. Prior to launching the questionnaire, we collaborated extensively with EPASA members, engaging in iterative revisions to refine the questions. For final feedback, we conducted a test run with three students.

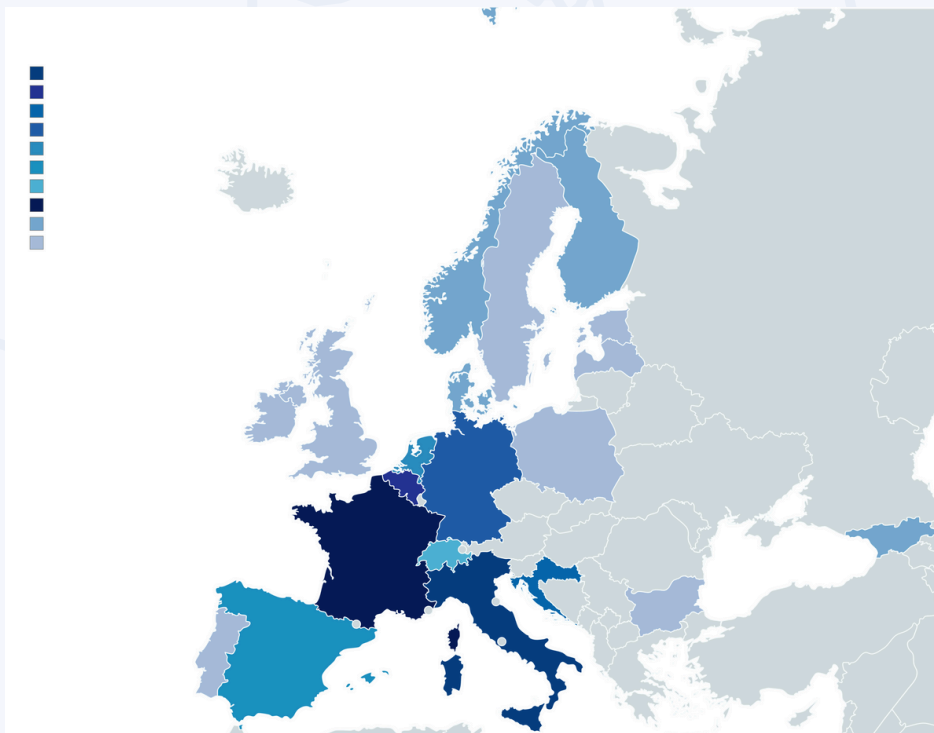
The online survey was distributed primarily through the EPASA and AEC networks, using both email and their social media platforms. Members of the ARTEMIS Working Group also played a key role in disseminating the form. Our primary objective was to ensure the survey reached students effectively.

Ultimately, we collected **120 responses** which represents a small sample of students compared to the entire community of students in higher music education institutions. Of these, 31 students expressed their willingness to stay in touch for follow-up interviews. Following an initial review of the quantitative data in Excel, we utilized Jamovi for a more detailed analysis. However, our analysis was largely confined to descriptive statistics, as the dataset's high level of dispersion—highlighted during the descriptive analysis—limited our ability to draw meaningful inferences.

Where did the respondents come from?

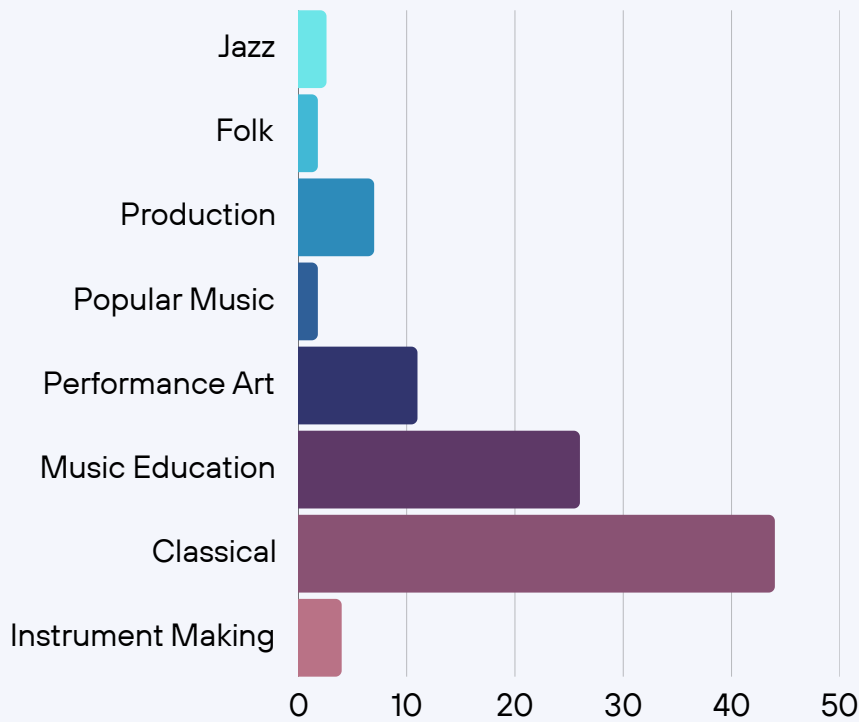


Where did they study?

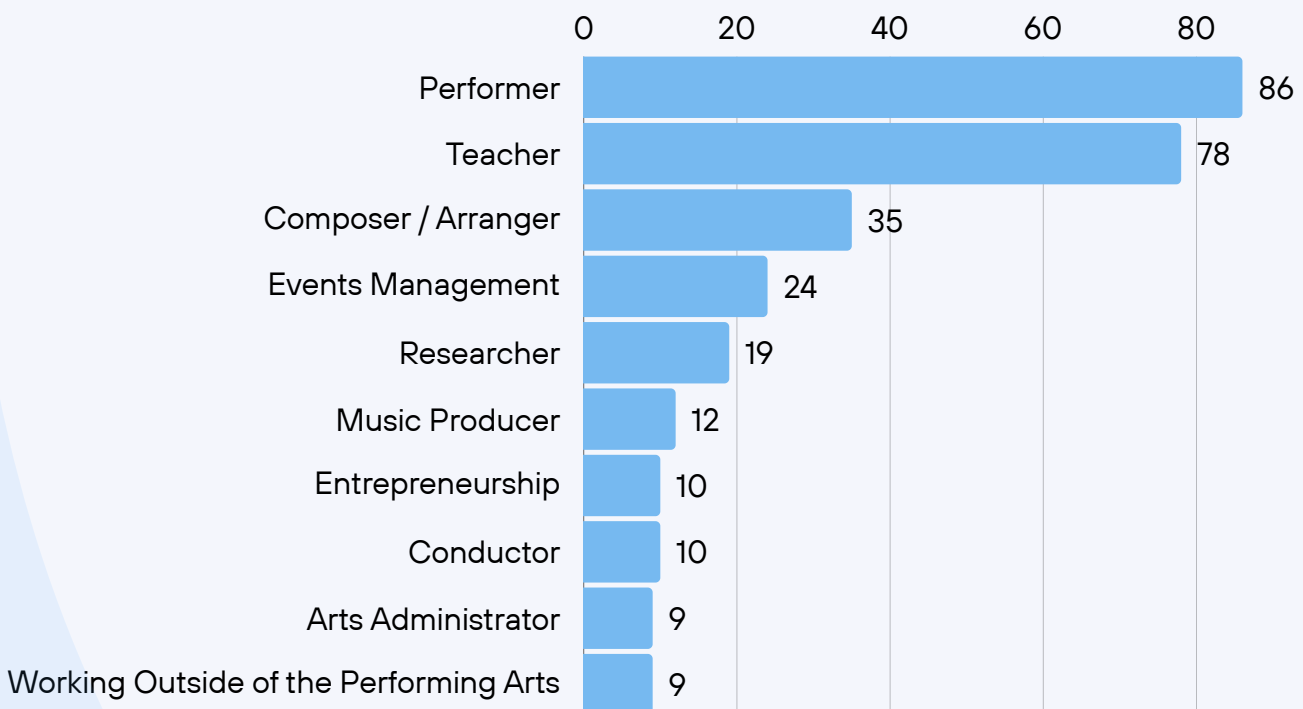


- France
- Italy
- The Netherlands
- Spain
- Croatia
- Germany
- Belgium
- Estonia
- Finland
- Portugal
- The UK
- Switzerland
- Sweden
- Georgia
- Ireland
- Latvia
- Poland
- Denmark
- Norway
- Bulgaria

What are you studying?



Fast forward 5 years - what do you see yourself doing as a career?



Interviews

Then, from this first analysis, we conducted 6 interviews by email, selecting students who gave their permission for a follow up. The interview frameworks enabled us to validate or invalidate the initial trends of our descriptive analyses.

The set of questions was structured around 4 axes:

- **Initial exposure to technology and the students' subsequent confidence** to learn digital skills;
- **The awareness of digitisation** and its requirements in professional life;
- **Institutional influence** and subsequent impact on students; and
- The **integration of digital tools in their practices** (both administratively and creatively)

These qualitative data, added to the previous dataset, enabled us to aggregate into themes, and then create typical respondent profiles, grouping together the trends to create different student personas. This methodological approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of both individual and institutional perspectives on digital practices in higher music education, leading to the identification of distinct student profiles and key areas for development.



2. Key Findings

A. Current Technology Usage and Perceived Future Needs

From the interviewees and initial survey, we found that students are using technology both creatively and to support the administrative side of their studies.

Based on survey and interview responses, students commonly use:

Administrative Tools

- Social media platforms
- Visual design software (such as Adobe and Canva)
- Word processing softwares

Creative Tools

- Digital Audio Workstations and sample libraries
- Digital mixing and mastering tools
- Notation software
- MIDI controllers
- Virtual instruments

Tools to Support Performance

- Live streaming platforms
- Recording equipment
- Video editing software
- Tablets and foot pedals
- Guitar pedals and loop stations

All interviewees also agreed that there is a great need for digitisation within their professional lives, but when asked **How much do you think digitisation will impact your professional life?**, their answers differed between administrative support, self promotion, and through to using these tools creatively:



"In my professional life, I think this part [digitisation] will be more important, especially for promotion. It is already an important part with classical radios, orchestras that upload their concerts on social media... I think I will have to record and film myself more." [Interview 1]

"Technology is now part of our daily lives. Videos, audio, scores are now all uploaded to the internet and the diffusion of musical events occurs mainly through websites and social media." [Interview 3]

"These [technological] elements will shape my creative output and play a critical role in how I engage with audiences, collaborate with other artists, and innovate within my field." [Interview 6]

2. Key Findings

B. Confidence in Technology Adoption

The first interview question was **Thinking back, how do you think you were "exposed" to digital tools and technologies in your environment?**

All interviewees had prior exposure to digital tools and technologies before starting their conservatoire studies, citing experiences such as music lessons, social media, and inspiration from their peers as some main sources.

To further understand their confidence levels, interviewees were asked **If you were given a task to use digital tools / technologies, do you think you could confidently try to use it? In general, do you feel confident using these tools and technologies?** Students felt they had the appropriate level of confidence to at least experiment, or explore working with digital tools:

"I'm not confident using it (yet) as I just don't do it often, I still need some time to figure it out. But as soon as I'm used to an app, I'm confident with it." [Interview 2]

"I do feel confident ... especially within my artistic practice. However, I sometimes experience insecurity when it comes to using these tools in public ... where I am solely responsible for managing the technology. ... I feel that I should have done more training and preparation to ensure I can confidently present my work without technical issues or setbacks." [Interview 6]

Responses suggest that initial exposure and familiarity, personal motivation, and the availability of resources are key drivers of confidence and capability in adopting digital tools.

C. Institutional influence and subsequent impact on students

Another large factor within this research was an institution's influence on students; either at a macro level through leadership, resources, and culture, or on a micro level through their professors.

Currently, institutional roles vary significantly across contexts including location, resources, and student's own experiences. Institutional acceptance, the influence of professors, and the integration of digital elements within the curriculum all emerged as key themes.

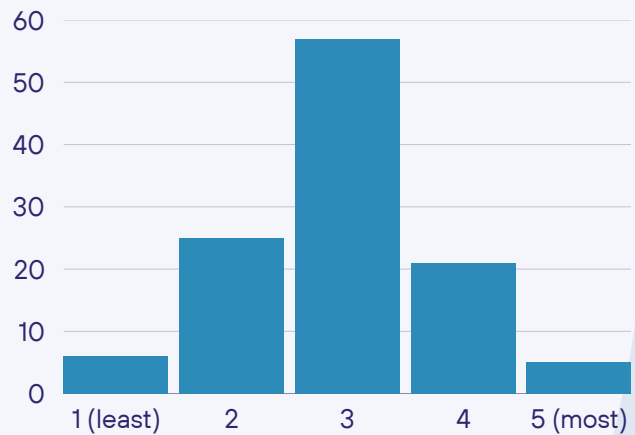
2. Key Findings

C1. Institutional acceptance and perceived value

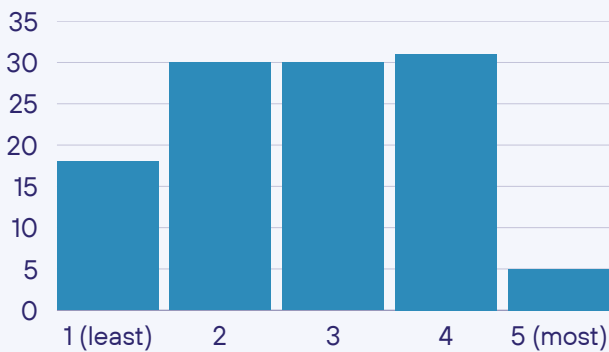


In your opinion, how much as performing arts education embraced the digital era compared to other artistic disciplines?

Currently, students feel that performing arts education has loosely embraced the digital era, with the **majority of respondents** (50%) favouring a neutral response.



How valuable do you think your institution considers digital practice / digital artistry in your education/curriculum?



Wanting to understand the **culture** and **mindset** at an institutional level, we asked about the respondents' perceived value their institution has over digitisation.

The **majority of the responses** were also neutral or borderline, emphasising the diverse range of HMEIs.

When asked: **Do you feel that your institution has been accepting of digitisation? Does that impact your experience of it?**, answers that were highly positive indicated that the institution had created academic and creative freedom, while supplying students with resources and support to explore these themes:



"People who want to explore ... projects that require digitisation and technologies have the freedom, the tools and the support to do so." [Interview 5]

Some answers expressed a feeling that the institution had adopted a neutral position, neither resisting nor actively supporting digital endeavours. One respondent explained that, due to a lack of robust support for a particular specialism at their institution, they had to seek out an international exchange programme to necessitate this:

"I've had to go abroad twice to find institutions with educational programs specifically focused on Multimedia Composition, which means my home institution hasn't fully supported my specific learning needs in this area." [Interview 6]

2. Key Findings - Institutional Influence

In contrast, other institutions were perceived as resistant or slow to adopt digitalisation, particularly within administrative processes, creating frustrations:

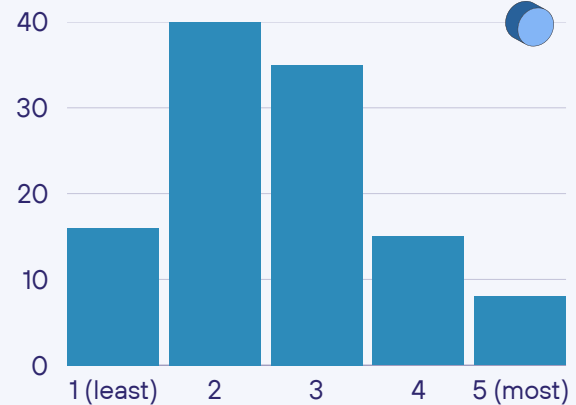
"Arriving in this school felt like going back 20 years in time. It really impacted my experience, in a bad way, you needed to stand in line to subscribe for lessons, ... you need to pick up your master diploma by hand, etc. It's just so much extra work, for them and for us." [Interview 2]

C2. Teacher influence and perceived value

**How much do you agree with the following statement:
"My professors embrace digitisation?"**

To **better understand** whether the lack of resources, exposure, or positive role models comes from the institution or the teacher, the **role professors play** was also asked.

The **perception of value** was again assessed, with the majority of students **disagreeing** with the statement (35%).



With this, interviewees were asked: **Do you feel that your principal professor has been accepting of digitisation? Has that impacted your attitude towards it?** Responses indicated that professors' attitudes toward digitalisation also significantly shaped students' experiences and perceptions.

Some professors were described as supportive yet limited in their own digital proficiency, which correlated with students' own engagement remaining relatively surface-level:

"She is accepting but just not handy with it, so she doesn't do it, and she doesn't want us to do it as she then doesn't understand everything." [Interview 2]

"The tools that are mostly used by me and my teacher are tablets and recording devices." [Interview 5]

In other instances, professors' curiosity and eventual adoption of digital tools positively impacted students' attitudes. One respondent noted that their professor's gradual embrace of technology, prompted by the student's own expertise, created a reciprocal learning environment that boosted their confidence:

2. Key Findings

"Absolutely; he only didn't know how to work with it in the beginning... After 2 years he bought some devices himself! ... You feel more positive about yourself, because psychologically you are "the teacher" then. [Interview 4]

Importantly, a professors' indifference or resistance to digitalisation (perhaps preferring to use traditional teaching methods), limits the integration of digital tools into lessons. This is worth investigating, particularly when power dynamics allow professors to dictate the extent of digital engagement in their classrooms, and not giving students enough agency over their learning experience.

D. How are students learning, and the curriculum

Understanding how and where students are learning or upskilling was also an important part of the research.

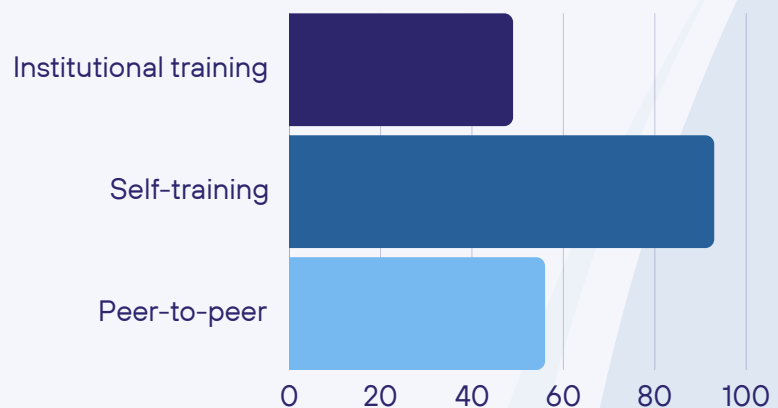
D1. How students are learning these skills

As mentioned above, students have varied relationships towards technology within higher music education based on their teacher, institution, and/or prior exposure to technology.



Please indicate how you gained your knowledge and experiences in teaching and learning by selecting the appropriate checkbox(es)

In the initial survey question (which was multiple choice), an **overwhelming majority** identified being **autodidactic**, with **peer-to-peer learning** being considered the second most popular way of learning about digital tools and technologies. Institutional training was in third place.



To explore this further, interviewees were asked **Tell me about one piece of technology or software that you taught yourself, or learnt how to use through peer collaboration. What did you learn, how did you approach it, and why?**

Students could each identify at least one piece of technology or software they had taught themselves or learned independently of a traditional classroom setting, with the examples varying in technological complexity, such as music notation software, loopstations and realtime visualisation tools:

2. Key Findings

"It was the only option to experiment, because there was nobody in my environment who knew how to work with it [loopstation]." [Interview 4]

"Besides, there is so much information available, whether through peers or even online, it makes it way easier to master and get to know how to work with all the available resources." [Interview 5]

As a result of their initial exposure to technology and prior experiences self-learning, each of the respondents had positive attitudes toward experimenting with new digital tools, albeit with varying levels of confidence. They also indicated a willingness to learn, showcasing the potential for growth when supported by accessible learning pathways:

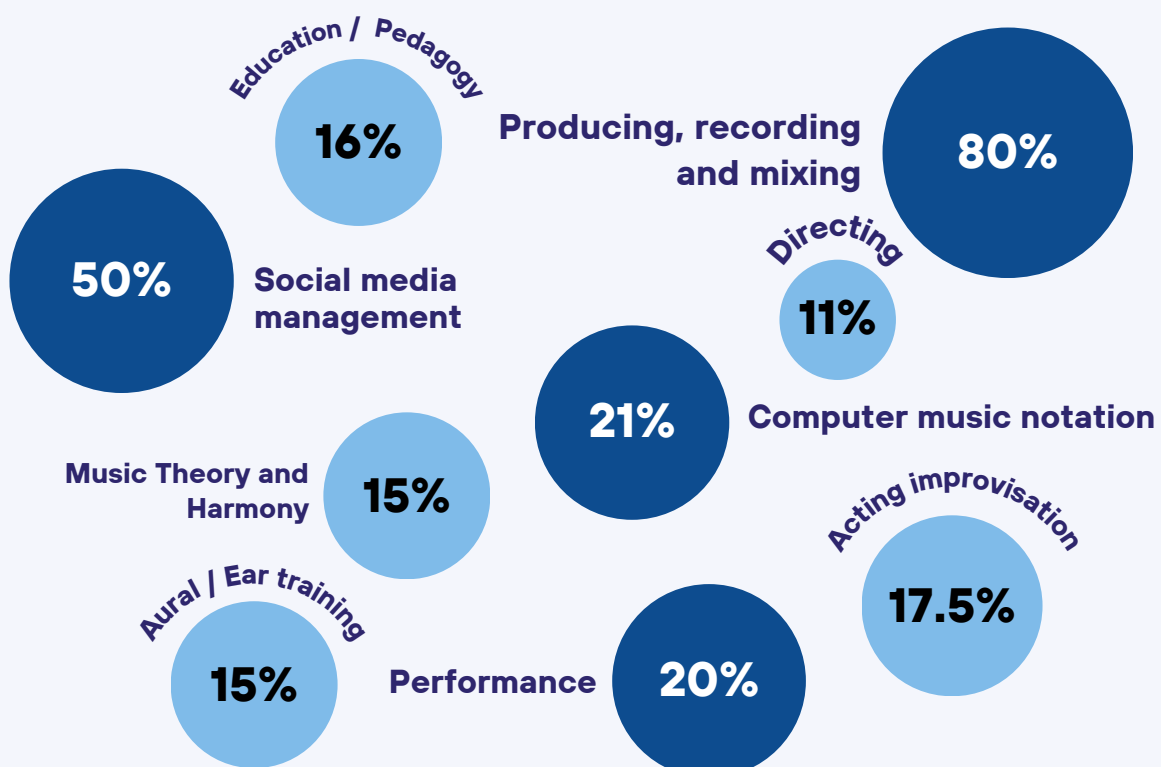
"I'm usually quite good with technology, I think as I grew up with it and my brain is good at logical reasoning, and all apps, programs and devices are kind of built the same, so I'm always quite fast in understanding how something works." [Interview 2]

"Part of the motivation ... [is] necessity, but also a big part of it [is] curiosity and eagerness to learn more. I can now confidently say that I am very comfortable with that software, which allows me to be much more independent in ... projects." [Interview 5]

D2. Curriculum

In the survey, students were asked:

What are you missing with regard to your training and concerning the digital practice of performing arts? (multiple choice)



2. Key Findings - Curriculum

When asked what they would want removed from the curriculum to facilitate this, students overwhelmingly resisted the idea of outright removal, emphasising that the existing subjects are generally seen as essential for their musical development. While a few survey respondents suggested minor reductions in music history, theory, or ensemble-related classes, the majority expressed a preference for modernising and improving the content of current courses rather than eliminating them. Many advocated for integrating digital practices as supplementary content or elective courses, rather than removing fundamental subjects.

This highlights a consensus on the importance of preserving core disciplines while adapting the curriculum to include contemporary tools and practices, and was reflected in the responses from interviewees. When asked **How would you embed "the digital" into the curriculum?**, an integrated approach was favoured by some:

"I would separate [it] ... then later on combining things ... Technology or digitalisation is [ultimately] surplus, not the 'head' of the business." [Interview 4]

"I believe "the digital" should be embedded throughout the curriculum where it enhances learning, rather than as a standalone module or for the sake of integration alone. The use of digital tools should be intentional and aligned with the curriculum's artistic focus, serving as a natural extension of creative processes. By integrating technology in meaningful ways, it can enrich artistic exploration, support innovation, and foster deeper engagement without overshadowing the core subject matter." [Interview 6]

E. Digital Artistic Content

We also wanted to understand students' views on the role digital technologies can play in widening access and participation.

E1. What role does digital technology play in art and culture?

In the survey, students were asked about **how they consume/engage with artistic content digitally, their perspectives on performances through live streaming platforms, and what they believe the future of live performance could be.**



On average, students engage with digital artistic content through standard mediums: social media, online workshops, and streaming (either listening or watching).

When asked their opinion, many survey respondents positively responded towards the expanded reach and accessibility of having artistic content available digitally, the scope for enhanced engagement and interaction, the creative opportunities and experimentation that could come from it, as well as the opportunity to diversity income streams:

2. Key Findings

"It's a great way to reach broader audiences from all over the world that cannot or can't afford to attend live concerts." [Survey Respondent D1]

"It's cool as it makes art more reachable for everyone (in terms of location and also financial possibilities)." [Survey Respondent S1]

"It can be a new musical offer." [SR U1]

"It really depends on the style of music how much you can earn with it. So it really depends on the performance and on the business model." [SR O3]

Live Digital Performance and Digital Engagement

Similarly to the survey, interview respondents felt that digital performance was a complementary tool to traditional live concerts, offering opportunities to expand audiences and experiment with new formats. However, students emphasised that digital performances should not be viewed as replacements for in-person experiences but rather as extensions that can enhance accessibility and engagement.

Interview respondents also explained that they use digital platforms to connect with audiences, share their art, and get inspired by others:

"Artists and musicians on social media help me keep my passion for music alive by giving me ideas, inspiration, admiration." [Interview 1]

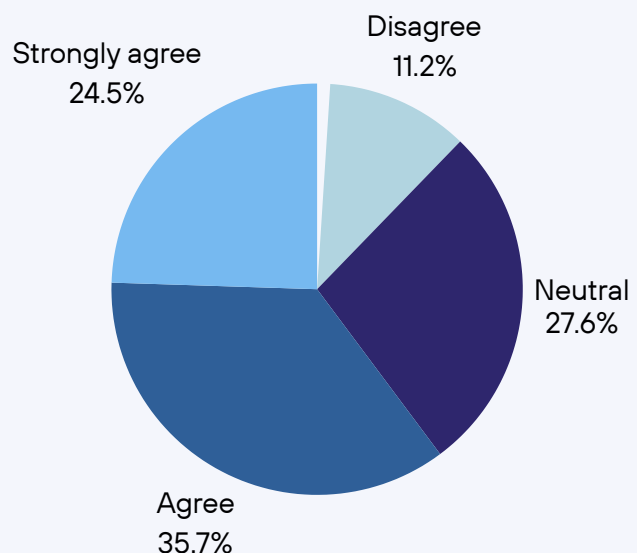
"Digital tools are an almost constant presence in my practice. From tablets, which allow us to have all the scores and materials in one place, to recording devices for lessons and auditions, some of these have become indispensable." [Interview 5]

E2. How are students using digital tools in their practice?



How do you relate to the statement "Digital technologies are a part of my creative process"?

Around **59%** of respondents favourably **agreed** that they use digital tools as a part of their creative process.



2. Key Findings - Digital Artistic Content



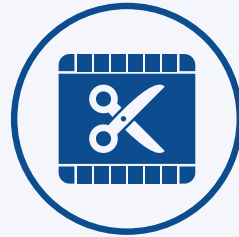
Students were also asked **What technologies do you use in your artistic practice?** (Multiple choice)

The top 5 were:

Social media
67%



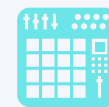
Video Editing Software
41%



Digital Audio Workstations
55%



Virtual instruments / samples
36%



Midi controllers / hardware
32%

To better understand the frequency, in the interviews students were asked: **How much do you use digital tools and technologies in your studies and artistic practice? Can you give some examples?**



Students detailed the broad range of digital tools and technologies they incorporate into their daily studies and artistic work, including the practical benefits of tablets for managing sheet music and recording lessons; the use of notation software; and the everyday use of digital streaming platforms for discovering recordings and websites for downloading scores, emphasising their role in quick access to resources and inspiration:

"I use digital tools and technologies in my studies and in my artistic practice every day because they allow me to get what I want in just a few seconds.

For example: I download scores, I listen to music, different interpretations, I read up on what I'm studying..." [Interview 3]

Those slightly more technologically advanced described a more integrated approach, using Ableton Live and MAX MSP for sound manipulation and interactive compositions, as well as tools like TouchDesigner and Resolume for integrating visual elements into performances.

One interviewee also shared how digital tools permeate their work, from studying music to managing administrative tasks, reflecting how these technologies are becoming essential across all aspects of a musician's career:

"Forgotten your book? E-mail to the parents? No mirror to see wrong movements? No recording device at home? No metronome? No Tuner? I forgot the rules or appointments? A new interesting method? New article about the last concert to share with the world? Making publications or promotion-flyers?... all solved." [Interview 4]

2. Key Findings

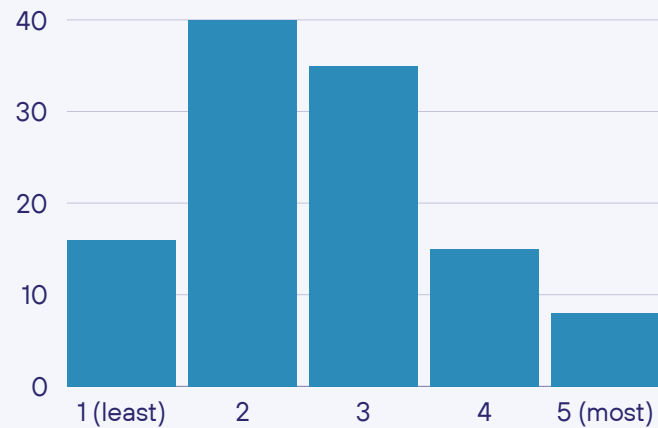
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2. Key Findings

F. Survey Conclusion

The integration of digital practices within music education remains limited, with minimal formal curriculum offerings to support their use. Professors often lack the engagement or expertise to effectively incorporate digital tools into their teaching, leaving students to explore these technologies independently.

Additionally, there are few and limited structured training opportunities available in areas such as music production, digital performance, and technological proficiency, which are increasingly relevant to contemporary artistic careers.

Student Perspectives

Survey and interview responses highlight that students rely heavily on being autodidactic and peer-to-peer collaboration to develop their digital skills. They actively seek external resources to bridge gaps left by their formal education.

Despite (sometimes) limited institutional support, students do exhibit a proactive attitude toward experimenting with new tools, and incorporating them into their artistic and academic practices. This reflects both the necessity and the growing importance of digital literacy in their professional - and sometimes even artistic - development.

Future Needs

Students expressed a strong interest in targeted training that addresses current gaps in their education. Key areas of focus include engaging with audiences via social media, professional audio/visual production, and monetisation.

These skills are seen as essential for navigating the modern landscape of music and performance, enabling students to engage with audiences, promote their work, and innovate within their fields.

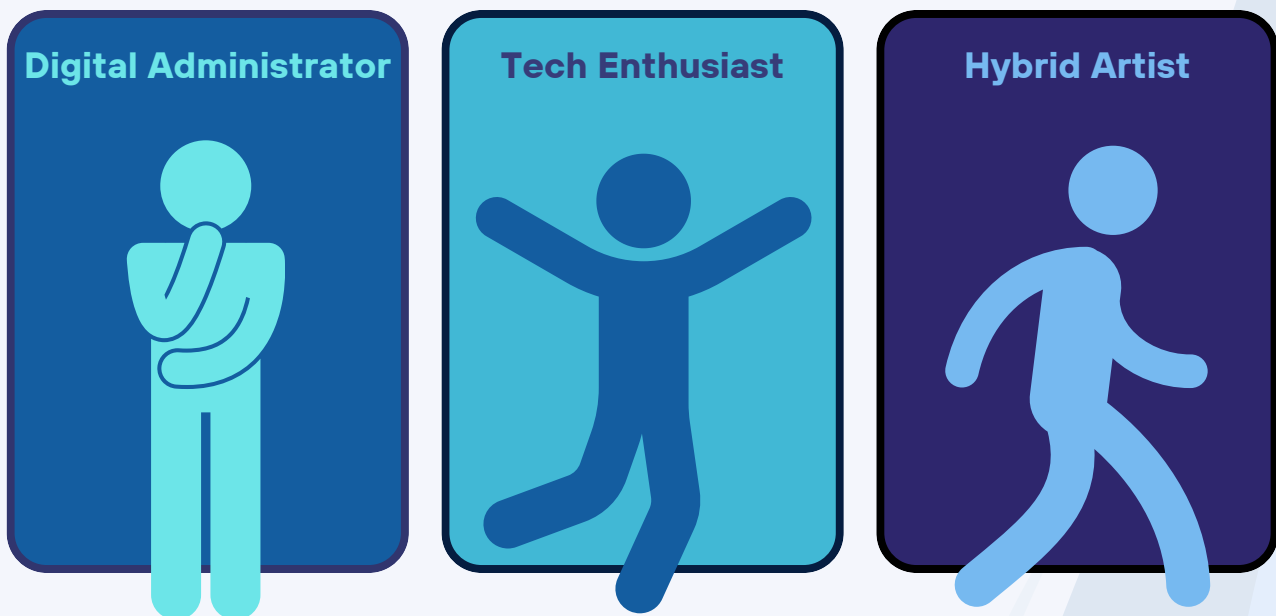
To meet these needs, institutions must prioritise the integration of digital tools and training into the curriculum, while also fostering a culture of support and collaboration among their staff, students, and other external stakeholders.

3. Students Profiles

This research sought to understand **student engagement with technology** by analysing their exposure to, interactions with, confidence levels, and perceived value of. By examining their responses to a series of questions, assumptions were deduced about their attitudes, confidence levels, and the influence of both institutional and external factors on their technological experiences.

Based on this analysis, three distinct student profiles emerged:

- **Digital Administrator**
- **Tech Enthusiast**
- **Hybrid Artist**



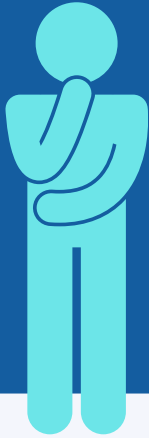
These profiles were developed through a process of iterative aggregation, considering factors such as student mindset, technological competency, typical behaviors, and the influence of external factors. By understanding these distinct groups, educators and institutions can better tailor their approaches to technology integration and support student success in an increasingly digital world.

It is hoped, that through understanding each profile, institutions can curate bespoke action plans that are relevant for each profile.

It is anticipated that each institution will have a range of students.

3. Student Profiles

Digital Administrator



These students demonstrate a **high level of comfort with technology** for administrative tasks. They are adept at self-teaching new digital skills to fulfill practical needs and recognise the importance of digitisation within professional contexts. However, they may **not necessarily view technology as a core component** of their creative practice.

TYPICAL BEHAVIOURS

Relatively low use of technology - using iPads for score reading, Musescore for composition, arranging, and analysis, metronomes etc.

MINDSET

Typically see technology to enhance the administrative aspects of their studies and subsequent professional life.

CAPABILITIES

Capable of teaching themselves how to use new tools / technologies and have done so.

Positive but platform-specific, valuing tech for specific purposes.

EXTERNAL INFLUENCE

Minimal influence from institutions and adoption by 1-1 tutors.

Minimal influence from peers.

Tech Enthusiast



This group displays a **strong affinity for technology and a proactive approach to learning new tools**. They are highly capable of independent learning and actively seek out opportunities to explore and utilise technology. While they may acknowledge some limitations in their institution's technological integration, their intrinsic motivation and external influences drive their engagement with technology.

TYPICAL BEHAVIOURS

Medium use of technology - using it for self promotion and marketing, for composition/analysis, and accessing other media for artistic inspiration, teaching, studies, creatively.

MINDSET

Interested in technology both creatively and administratively, able to identify ways it would benefit studies and subsequent professional life, and currently making those steps to do so.

CAPABILITIES

Capable of teaching themselves how to use new tools / technologies and have done so.

Proactive in seeking out ways it can complement traditional musicking methods.

EXTERNAL INFLUENCE

Minimal influence from institutions and adoption by 1-1 tutors.

Typically gain through peer to peer collaboration

3. Student Profiles

Hybrid Artist



This profile encompasses students who **recognise the potential of technology** to enhance their creative expression. However, they often encounter **barriers such as limited institutional support** and access to creative technology tools. Despite these challenges, they demonstrate a willingness to embrace digitisation when presented with relevant opportunities and guidance.

TYPICAL BEHAVIOURS

Frequent use of technology, particularly using it creatively.

MINDSET

Has knowledge of technology both creatively and administratively and is currently proactively using it to benefit studies, creative output, and subsequent professional life.

CAPABILITIES

Capable of teaching themselves how to use new tools / technologies and have done so.

Confident and motivated to experiment.

EXTERNAL INFLUENCE

Some influence from institutions.

Typically peer to peer collaboration or having to seek additional external courses.



4. Conclusion & Future Perspectives

The survey results highlight a significant gap between students' digital needs and current institutional offerings in Higher Music Education. Through analysis of the collected data, several key observations emerge that demand attention from the sector.

Current Challenges

The institutional disconnect represents one of the most pressing challenges revealed by the survey.

Responses consistently indicate low institutional engagement with digital practices, with students reporting minimal integration of digital tools in their curriculum. This gap is particularly evident in the way digital learning occurs, with most students relying on self-training or peer collaboration rather than formal education.

Student readiness, on the other hand, presents a more promising picture. Across all identified profiles - Digital Administrators, Tech Enthusiasts, and Hybrid Artists - students demonstrate both willingness and ability to engage with digital tools. They clearly recognize the importance of digital skills for their future careers, with many already seeking external resources to fill their educational gaps.

Call to Action for Higher Music Education Institutions

Curriculum Integration

Curriculum integration has emerged as a key priority requiring immediate attention. Student feedback indicates that institutions should embed digital practices within existing curricula, rather than treating them as standalone elements. This integration should prioritise flexibility, enabling students to tailor digital training to their individual needs. The survey highlights a strong demand for knowledge in areas such as rights management, content monetization, professional audio and video production, online performance technologies, and social media management.

Resources



Find out more about the MUSENSE Project which builds specific course module in digital technologies, virtual and augmented reality referring to music.

[MORE INFO](#)

Call to Action for Higher Music Education Institutions

Infrastructure Development

Infrastructure development forms another pillar of necessary institutional change. To support meaningful digital integration, institutions must provide access to current technology and software. This includes creating dedicated spaces for digital experimentation and creation, while supporting both administrative and entrepreneurial digital practices.

Faculty Development

Faculty development represents another crucial area for improvement. The survey reveals a clear need for enhanced support for professors to embrace digital tools. This includes providing professional development opportunities in digital practices and integrating digital competencies into teaching methodologies. The data suggests that faculty confidence and competence with digital tools directly impacts student engagement and learning outcomes.

Resources



Find out more about the DISK project which aims to design and test a training curriculum in digital competencies for music teachers.

[MORE INFO](#)



Find out more about a "Technology Guide Book" (in German), that presents a range of technological tools for teachers, depending on their objectives.

[MORE INFO](#)



"Guide pour L'intégration des technologies numériques dans les arts vivants" (in French) presenting a wide range of digital technologies to be integrated in the performing arts

[MORE INFO](#)

Conclusion

The survey clearly indicates that students view digital tools not as a replacement for traditional music education, but as an essential complement to their artistic practice and future careers. Higher Music Education institutions have both an opportunity and responsibility to bridge the current gap between traditional music education and the digital reality of contemporary artistic practice. This integration is crucial not only for maintaining educational relevance but for preparing students for the evolving landscape of professional music making.

Special Thanks

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Find out more about the ARTEMIS Digitisation Working Group



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Who

The Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC) is a European cultural and educational network with around 300 member institutions for professional music training in 57 countries. The network is co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme.

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