

Musicians' Census

Disabled Musicians Insight Report

November 2024

Help
Musicians

attitude
is everything

Musicians'
Union
MU

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Introduction

It's been a long-standing ambition of both Help Musicians and the Musicians' Union to build a comprehensive picture of the lives and careers of musicians across the UK. In 2023, we are proud to say that our organisations fulfilled that ambition with the launch of the first ever Musicians' Census.

Together with the support of key organisations and individuals in the music industry, the Musicians' Census achieved almost 6000 responses. Thank you to everyone who shared their experiences of work and life with us.

For this sixth report we have partnered with a key music industry organisation, Attitude is Everything. Attitude is Everything connect disabled people with music and the live event industries to improve access together and work to ensure that artists who have access requirements can thrive within the music industry. As a member of the Census Stakeholder Group, Attitude is Everything played a pivotal role in supporting the dissemination of the survey and in raising awareness of it amongst disabled musicians.

The findings from this report confirm that disabled musicians are less likely to be employed full-time and less likely to earn 100% of their income from music than their non-disabled counterparts. Disabled musicians experience high levels of low mental and physical wellbeing and lack access to the support they need – quite often there is a direct link between low earnings, and low mental and physical wellbeing.

The scale of the data presented in this report reveals systemic issues in the music industry such as attitudinal, structural, and economic barriers across education and employment. Disabled musicians contribute hugely to the richness of the music industry, working in every genre and sector, however the data indicates that this community of musicians face multiple, substantial barriers to carving out a sustainable career in the music industry.

The music industry is taking steps to address accessibility and ensure more inclusive workplaces, but this report highlights how much more work the industry needs to do tackle ableism and create a culture of disclosure, where any disabled musician can share their access requirements without fear of discrimination or disadvantage.

The findings in this report highlight the need for partners across the music industry to invest in accessibility and support disabled musicians. Working together with disabled musicians, we can remove the barriers this community of musicians' face. Tackling ableism, inaccessibility and discrimination should be a priority for the entire music industry.

Working together Help Musicians, Musicians' Union and Attitude is Everything believe we can make the industry a fairer more equitable place for all musicians.

We would also like to thank Samantha Barr for assisting us with data analysis.



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About the Musicians' Census

Our aim

The Musicians' Census 2023 is a long-term project delivered by Help Musicians and the Musicians' Union. Our aim is to provide a fuller picture of the musician population in the UK today and to track how key themes change over time. What we learn from this survey will inform the way we help musicians and support the wider music industry to understand and respond to musicians' needs.

Our approach

Census data was collected via a 15-minute online survey, which was open from January to March 2023. Help Musicians and the Musicians' Union collaborated with music industry partners to reach as many musicians as possible. Walnut Unlimited were appointed to develop the survey, manage the data collection and run the initial analysis of the data. All aspects of the research were conducted in accordance with ISO 20252 and ISO 27001, the international standards for market research and information data security respectively. All musicians aged 16 and over "who earn or intend to earn money" from music were invited to respond. The survey was voluntary. Participants were self-selecting and required to give informed consent and complete a set of initial screening questions.

Language and Terminology

In both the census questionnaire and this report, we have tried to use language and terminology that aligns with the Social Model of Disability. The social model was developed by disabled people and describes how people are disabled by barriers in society, not by an impairment or condition. Barriers can be physical, or they can be caused by people's attitudes, like assuming disabled people can't do certain things.

If society was set up in an accessible way, then disabled people wouldn't be excluded and would have more independence, choice and control.

This includes framing disability through the lens of how different impairments and/or conditions impact day-to-day living and allowing for self-identification as a disabled musician. We acknowledge that no language or terminology is universal and have tried our best to represent Census respondents' experiences with nuance and care.

A full glossary is provided at the end of this report.

Data

A total of 5867 musicians completed the 2023 Census, which in this report will be referred to as the overall Census sample. The results in this report are based on a total disabled musicians' sample of 2593 respondents who reported one or more conditions and/or impairments impacting their day to day lives in question H4a¹. 3106 respondents reported that they have no conditions or impairments that impact their day to day lives – they will be referred to as the non-disabled Census sample.

A further 168 respondents used the 'prefer not to say' response to question H4a and are not actively reported on in this report. We recoded a number of 'other please specify' responses where mental health and neurodivergent conditions were named but these options had not been selected. This demonstrates that associations between different experiences of mental health and neurodivergence and identifying as disabled or having a health condition vary. It should also be acknowledged that the language used in the Census survey questions may have shaped how people responded.

More than a quarter of disabled respondents (27%) reported having mental health conditions and/or neurodivergent profiles (n713) but didn't report any other conditions and/or impairments. This group will be referred to as mental health/neurodivergent respondents and reported on where there are significant differences between this group and respondents who reported

physical, sensory and/or other conditions/ impairments. It should be noted that respondents in the latter group may also have reported mental health conditions and/or neurodivergent profiles. In the Demographics section of this report, we set out some key demographic differences between those groups of respondents.

Where quotes are used from respondents, edits in [square brackets] indicate where potentially identifiable details have been removed to protect the anonymity of respondents.

While the findings of this Census only represent the musicians who responded, it provides a powerful snapshot of the demographics, finances, wellbeing and careers of musicians today.

We recognise that there were potential barriers to participation including digital accessibility, trust, language barriers and challenges in reaching musicians who aren't part of more formal industry networks. We're committed to widening access in future Census surveys to ensure that the largest possible number of participants can share their experiences.

Census stakeholder group

Representatives from across the music industry formed a stakeholder group who were involved in shaping the survey design, sharing it amongst their communities and providing feedback on the results. This group helped make sure the Census was inclusive and representative and we're thankful for their collaboration and support.

- Arts Council England (ACE)
- Association for Electronic Music (AFEM)
- Association of British Orchestras (ABO)
- Attitude is Everything
- Black Lives in Music (BLiM)
- Drake Music
- Drake Music Scotland
- English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS)
- Featured Artists Coalition (FAC)
- The F List
- Independent Society of Musicians (ISM)
- The Ivors Academy (The Ivors)
- Music Managers Forum (MMF)
- Parents and Carers in Performing Arts (PiPA)
- Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL)
- PRS Foundation (PRSF)
- Punch Records
- Royal Society of Musicians of Great Britain (RSM)
- Safe In Sound
- SheSaid.so
- UK Music



Executive Summary

Disability charity Scope produce a report each year that highlights the additional costs faced by disabled households. They call this the disability price tag. The Disability Price Tag 2024 Report found that extra costs equate to a staggering £1,010 per month on average² for a disabled household to have the same standard of living as an equivalent non-disabled household.

These extra costs place an unequal burden on the disabled people and families who must meet them. These costs are a result of our society failing to address the financial disadvantage of living as a disabled person in the UK.

The findings from the Musicians' Census confirm that disabled musicians are also financially disadvantaged whilst working in the music industry.

We previously reported a disability pay gap of approximately £4000 (Musicians' Census Financial Insights Report). This is based on a mean income of approximately £29,200 for disabled musicians and £33,600 for non-disabled musicians earning 100% of their income from music. There is a further pay gap of approximately £1700 for musicians with mental health conditions and/or neurodivergent profiles.

73% of all disabled respondents reported that they are not in receipt of any state benefits, tax credits or support, which alongside a disability pay gap and high rates of experiencing cost-related career barriers paints a picture of multi-faceted financial challenges for disabled musicians to work in the music industry.

We were initially surprised to find that just **12%** of disabled musicians reported experiencing discrimination based on their disability. However, this could be attributed to low rates of being open about being disabled with some or all of the people they work with. A shocking **88%** of disabled musicians who have experienced discrimination based on their disability reported that they were open with

all or some of the people they work with, and **94%** of those experiencing discrimination said it impacted their ability to work or advance their career progression. These statistics confirm that discrimination is more likely to happen when a person discloses their impairments and conditions.

57% of all disabled musicians reported that they face barriers as a result of being disabled that impacts their career and aspirations. Of them, **9%** said it was fairly or very unlikely they would be working as a musician in one years' time, rising to **12%** when asked the same for 5 years' time.

The Musicians' Census data shows that just over half of disabled musicians from the Global Majority have experienced racism, and **85%** of those who experienced racism said it impacted their ability to progress in their work or career progression. According to the Unseen Unheard report by Attitude is Everything and Black Lives in Music, **70%** of Black disabled music creators and professionals said that they have experienced racism or racial bias towards them and **22%** have accessed counselling as a result of these experiences. Together these findings show that the intersectional impacts of discrimination are significant and have a big impact on musicians' lives and careers.

73% of all disabled respondents reported that they are not in receipt of any state benefits, tax credits or support



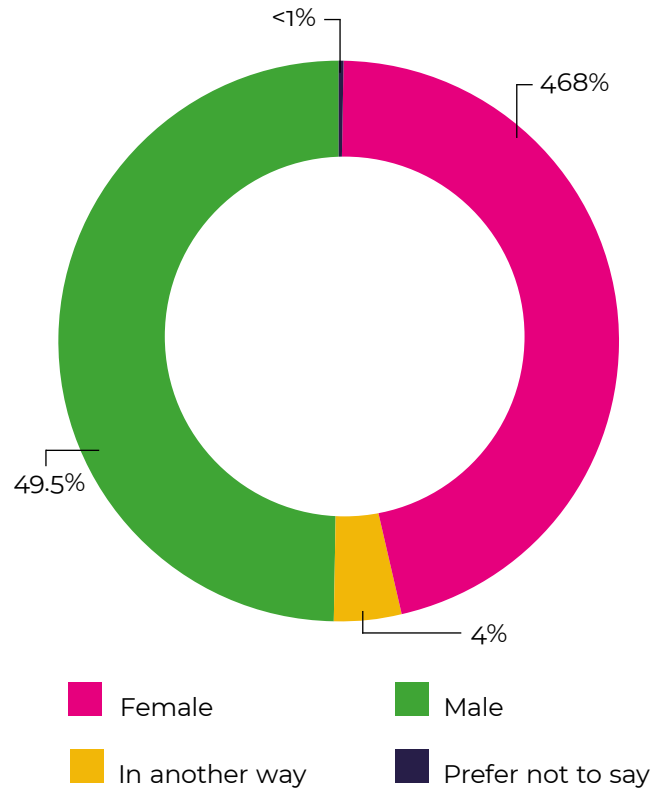
Musicians' Demographics

Gender

3% of disabled respondents identify as trans.

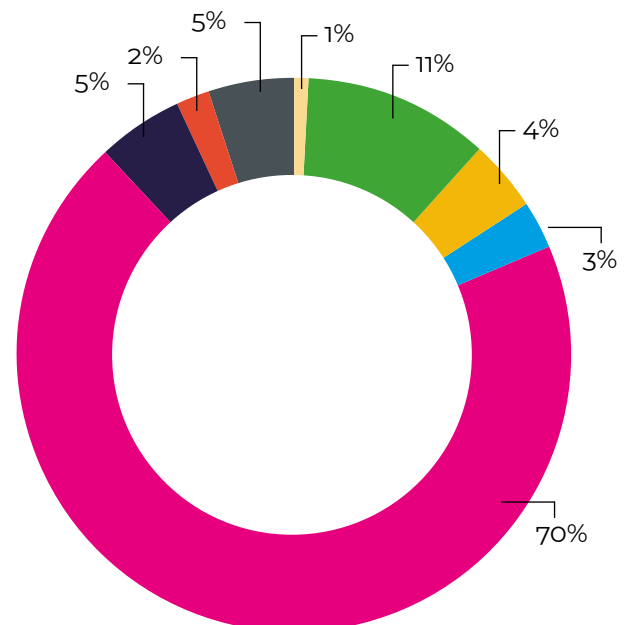


Photo: vkfoto / Shutterstock



Sexuality

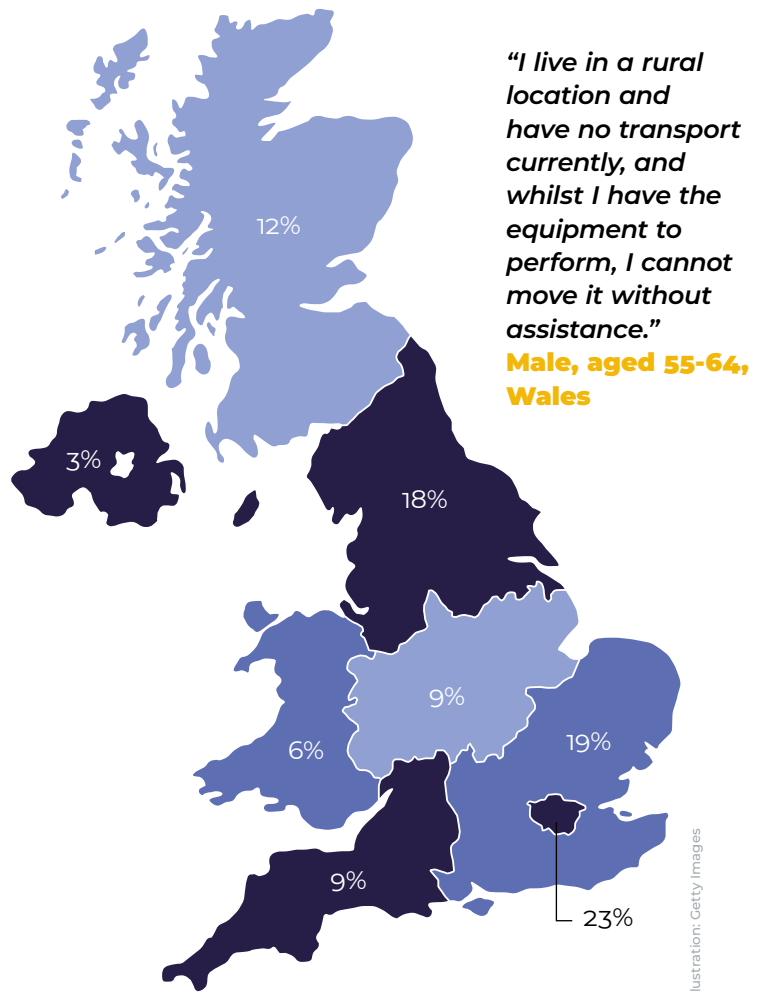
25% of disabled musicians identify as LGBTQ+ compared to **13%** of non-disabled respondents. This again could be linked with age given the findings of the Musicians Census: LGBTQ+ Musicians Insight Report. In that report we noted that **27%** of LGBTQ+ musicians have neurodivergent profiles, and **36%** reported a mental health condition. In our analysis of the disabled musician sample, we found that **53%** of neurodivergent musicians are LGBTQ+. **59%** of musicians with mental health conditions are LGBTQ+.



Where Musicians Live

Scotland – 12%
 Northern Ireland – 3%
 Wales – 6%
 London – 23%
 Midlands – 9%
 North of England – 18%
 East and South East England – 19%
 South West England – 9%

Challenges and barriers relating to rurality are commonly cited in open-text responses.

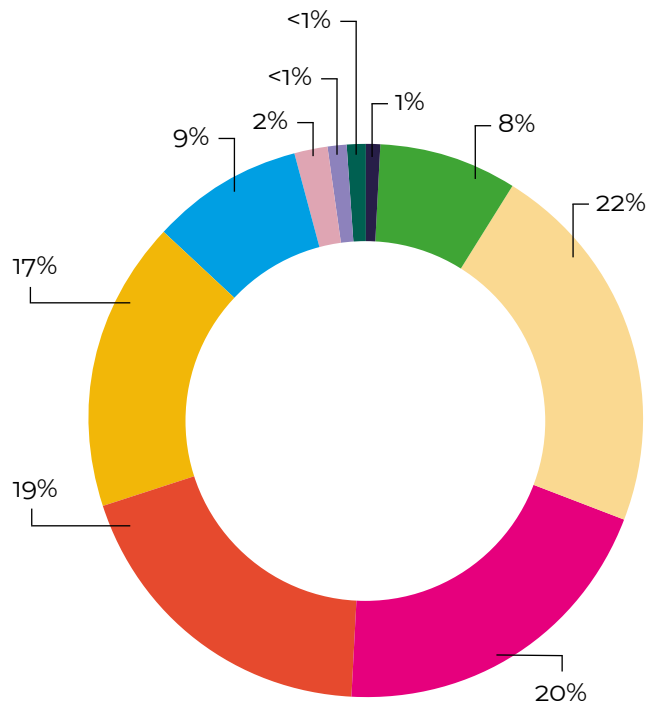


Age

In contrast to the wider sample of disabled respondents, 18% of respondents with mental health conditions and/or neurodivergent profiles but no other conditions/impairments are aged under 25 years. This could be due to greater awareness of both mental health and neurodivergence, as well as more accessible routes for testing and diagnosis of neurodivergence. Attitudes towards mental health and neurodiversity are also better than in previous decades.

Only 1% of respondents with a mental health condition and/or neurodivergent profile but no other conditions/impairments are aged 65+, while 13% of disabled respondents with physical, sensory or other conditions fit into this age group. This shows a significant difference in the age profiles between different groups of disabled respondents and is our rationale for highlighting differences between respondents who report only mental health and/or neurodivergence versus respondents who reported other conditions.

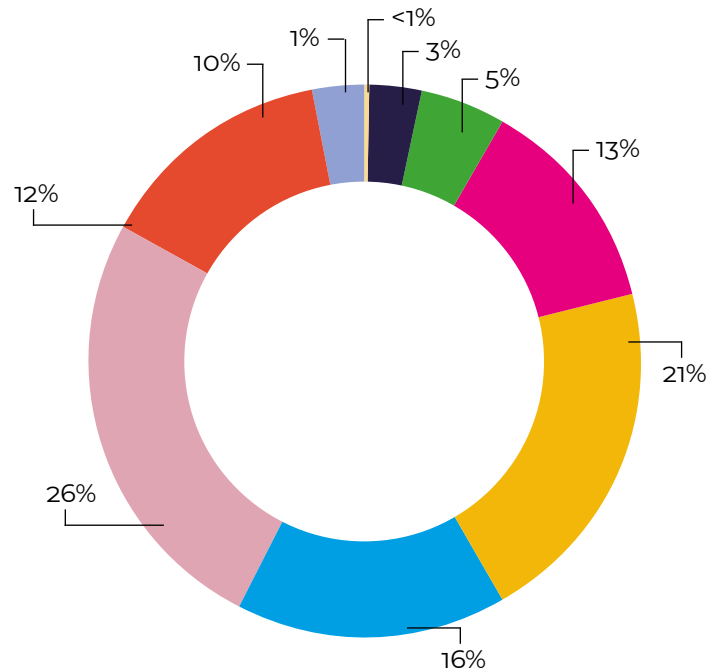
This may also underpin patterns in responses on gender – 7% of musicians who report only a mental health condition and/or neurodivergent profile identify their gender in another way. This rises to 19% of musicians who reported both a mental health condition and neurodivergent profile. This is a pattern that may also be linked with age, as evidenced in the Musicians' Census: LGBTQ+ Musicians' Insight Report⁴.



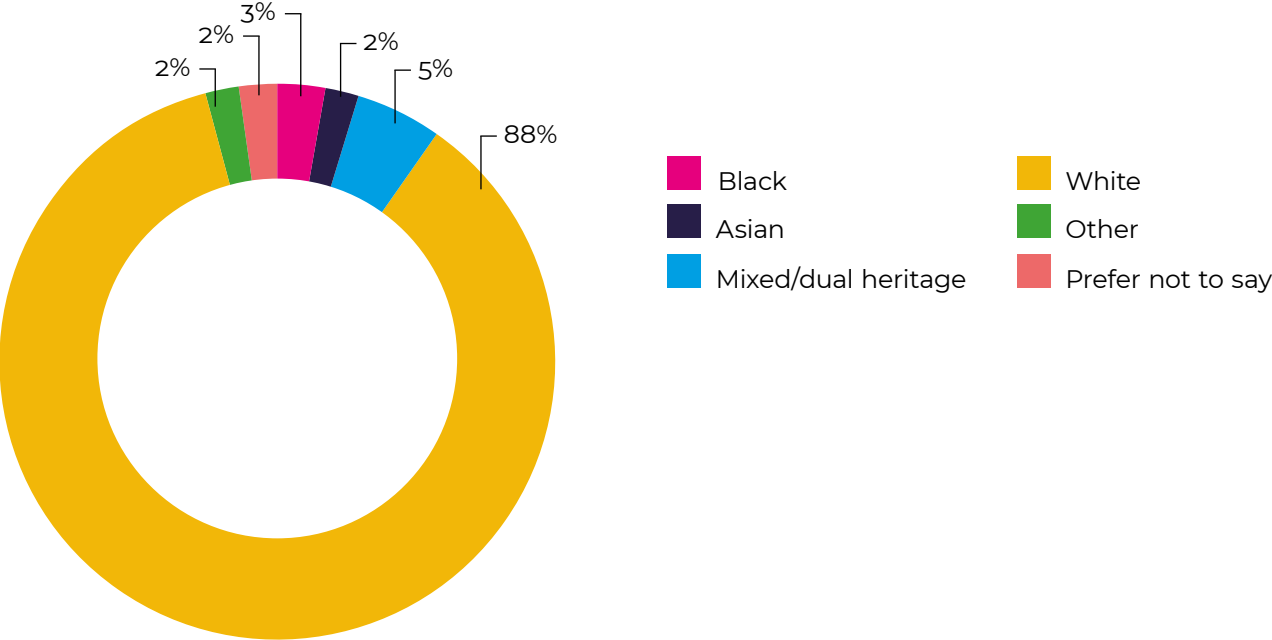
Years earning as a musician

While **30%** of musicians with physical, sensory or other conditions have been working as a musician for 30+ years, this drops to **7%** for those with mental health conditions and/or neurodivergent profiles but no other conditions/impairments. This maps onto the age demographics reported on page 10, showing that most Census respondents with physical, sensory or other conditions are older than respondents with mental health conditions and/or neurodivergent profiles but no other conditions/impairments.

28% of disabled musicians who have been working for 30+ years report hearing conditions, which along with wider profiles of those working in music for many decades plus age as a factor, may indicate high rates of playing-related and/or age-related experiences of disability. The trend in age and working length profiles of musicians with physical, sensory or other conditions/impairments may more broadly be connected with playing related injuries and disablement as well as age-related disablement.



Ethnicity

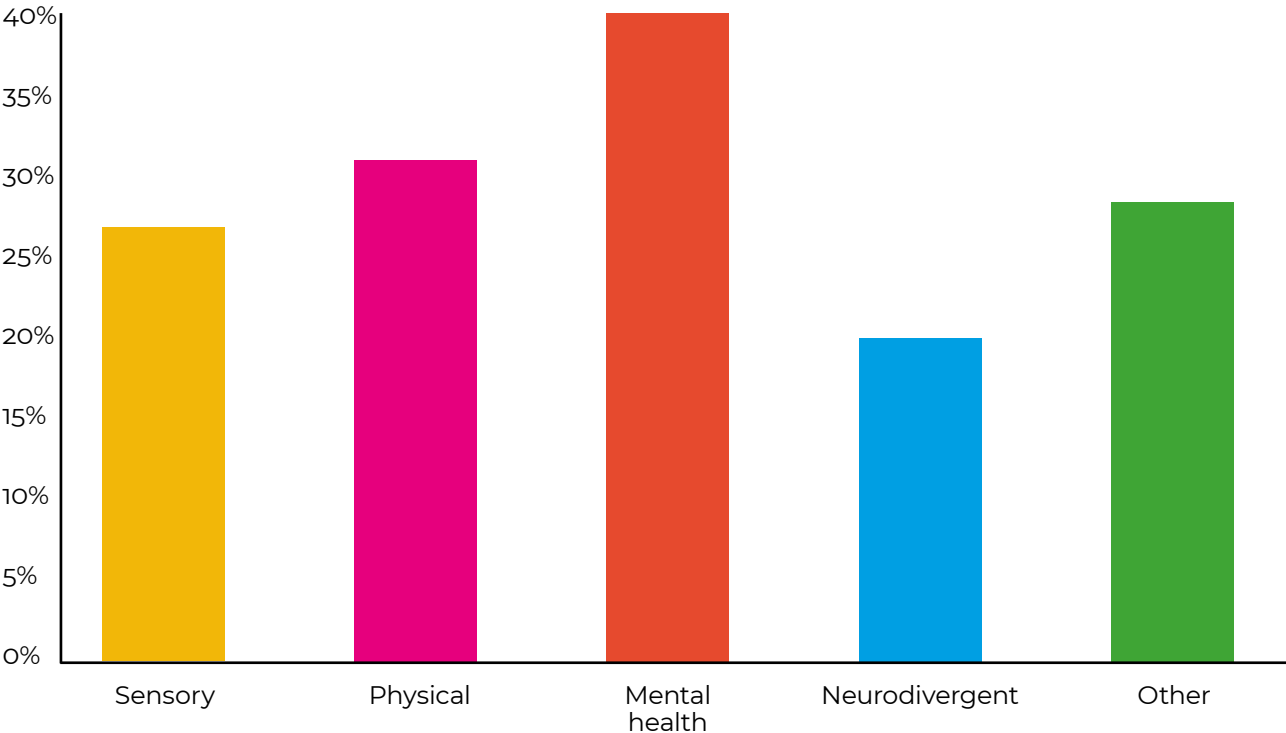


Disability

6% of disabled musicians reported having chronic coronavirus or 'Long COVID', which is included in the analysis under 'other conditions/impairments'. Covid, lockdowns and the pandemic are referenced in open text responses.

"My health has worsened since contracting covid at the beginning of the pandemic, and now I am able to do very little. Up until then I had been able to support myself well enough. Not now. I'm working because I can't bear to give it up, but I'm not able to do a lot and I find it all very hard now."

Female, aged 45-54, South East England





Key Findings

Income from Music

34% of all disabled musicians make all of their income from music, compared to **46%** of non-disabled musicians. This drops drastically to just **3%** of mental health/neurodivergent musicians. **31%** of all disabled musicians make less than quarter of their income from music, rising slightly to **35%** of mental health/neurodivergent musicians. In congruence with our Musicians' Census: Financial Insights Report finding that it typically takes musicians 10 years to start making all of their income from music, the younger age profile of the mental health/neurodivergent musician sample could explain the sudden drop.

We previously reported a disability pay gap of approximately £4000 (Musicians' Census: Financial Insights Report). This is based on a mean income of approximately £29,200 for disabled musicians and £33,600 for non-disabled musicians earning **100%** of their income from music. There is a further pay gap of approximately £1700 for musicians with mental health conditions and/or neurodivergent profiles.

"I have a disability and access to appropriate training, cost of transport, cost of support to carry out admin to find opportunities and to get to gigs has an enormous impact."
Female, aged 45-54, South East England

Financial Security

While **26%** of those with physical, sensory or other conditions own their homes outright without a mortgage, this is likely due in part to their age profile – **70%** of these outright homeowners are aged 55+. In contrast, **43%** of those with mental health conditions and/or neurodivergent profiles but no other conditions/ impairments rent their home from a private landlord, while only **9%** own their home outright without a mortgage. Across the disabled musicians' sample, those renting from private landlords are typically younger – two thirds of private renters with mental health conditions and/or neurodivergent profiles are aged 35 or younger.

22% of all disabled musicians are in debt, rising to **27%** for mental health/neurodivergent musicians. In contrast, **13%** of non-disabled musicians are in debt.

"Earning a consistent income has always been the most difficult part of working as a performing musician. This can be especially difficult when looking to rent somewhere to live, and landlords/agencies require proof of reliable income or salary."

Male, aged 18-24, Neurodivergent profile and a mental health condition, South East England





Photo: Pixel-Shot / Adobe Stock

Supplementing income

In the Musicians' Census questionnaire, we asked whether respondents were in receipt of any state benefits, tax credits or support. **73%** of all disabled respondents reported that they are not in receipt of any state benefits, tax credits or support. **1%** reported that they didn't know if they were in receipt of any, and **2%** selected 'prefer not to say'. **10%** of all disabled respondents reported accessing Universal Credit, and **6%** were in receipt of Personal Independence Payments (PIP). Just **2%** reported being in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA), and **1%** reported receiving Access to Work support.

When we look further at disabled musicians earning less than half of their income from music, **8%** of respondents are in receipt of PIP and **12%** are in receipt of Universal Credit, although the percentages for DLA and Access to Work remain the same.

The low levels of disabled musicians claiming state benefits, tax credits or support could point to the inaccessibility of application processes, permitted work rules, minimum income floors, and a lack of clear information about what benefits might be available.

Of disabled musicians who were earning less than **100%** of their income from music, only

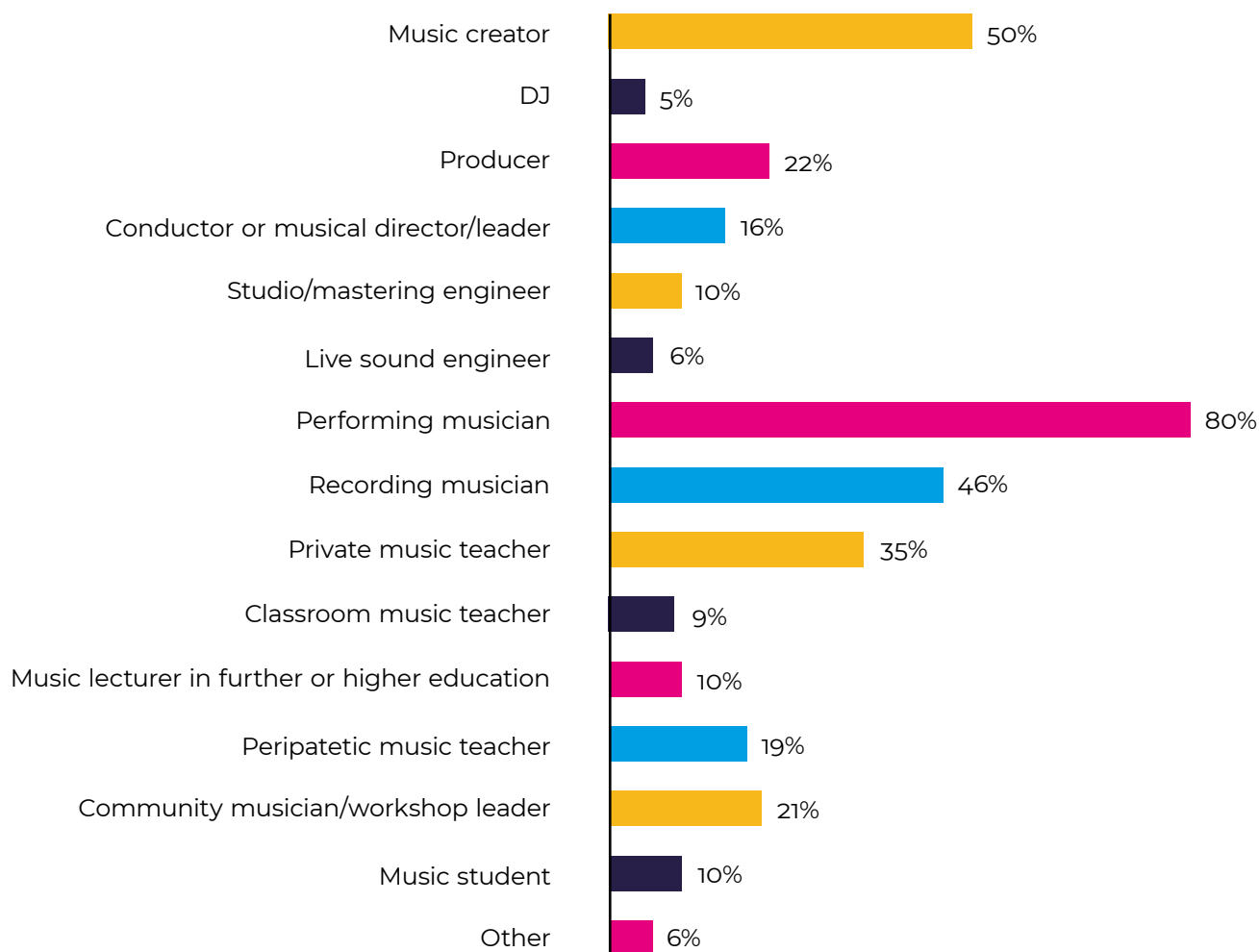
15% are supplementing their income through Universal Credit or other benefits. **12%** reported income in the form of pensions, and **6%** reported being in receipt of student finance, reflecting the age demographics. **15%** rely on support from family, friends and partners.

While Teaching and Education (**8%**), Creative Arts and Design (**7%**) and Hospitality (**4%**) remain the sectors in which musicians are more likely to work, the rates at which disabled musicians are found working in other sectors are overall lower than the overall Census sample.

"A self-employed, single parent with housing benefit/tax credit top-ups must frequently update the council on ever-changing income and I am squeezed by them as soon as I earn more, so there is no reward for the work you do and for working harder - I just lose money and see my daughter less. In this way it seems to discriminate/put more pressure on women who are trying to work whilst being the sole carer, with very stressful juggling of income/top-up benefits. I receive no child maintenance. I am also renting, so this is an added pressure and have had to move when a landlord decided to sell."

Female, aged 35-44, South East England

Working Patterns in Music



Across the disabled musicians' sample, there are high rates of musicians working with voice and computers to make music. While **35%** of non-disabled musicians reported being vocalists of some description, **44%** of all disabled musicians are vocalists, further rising to **55%** of mental health/neurodivergent musicians. **11%** of non-disabled musicians use computers and other electronics, compared to **17%** of all disabled musicians, and **26%** of mental health/neurodivergent musicians.

There are higher rates of working as music teachers amongst musicians with mental health conditions and neurodivergent profiles – **39%** are teachers of some description (including classroom and peripatetic teachers, as well as private teachers and FE/HE lecturers). There are mixed views of working in the education sector amongst the disabled musicians' cohort.

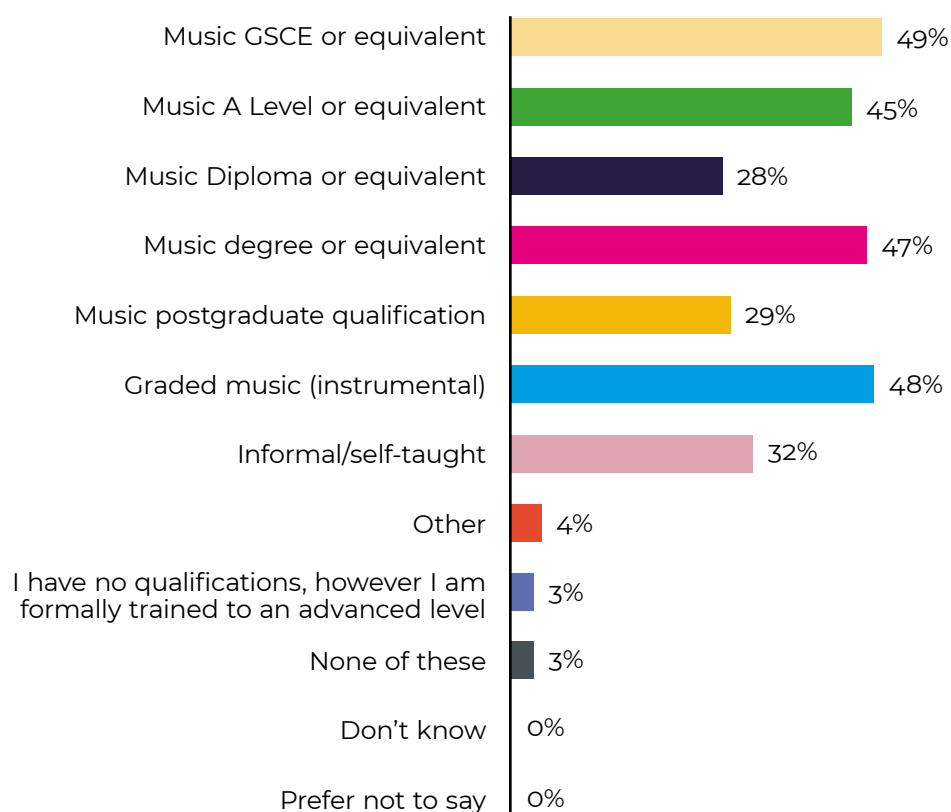
"I am autistic and my social difficulties negatively impacted my ability to keep work- I was regularly discriminated against and the impact on my mental health was traumatic. I am very very happy working in education where I am treated with professional dignity and respect. I still enjoy facilitating community music and teach for my local music service in a Saturday morning music teacher, where again my relationships are valued and I am treated with positivity, respect and dignity. This was completely absent from my performing career and destroyed my love of my instrument."

Female, aged 35-44, Yorkshire



Photo:Kitreel / Shutterstock

Music Qualifications



33% of disabled musicians are self-taught or informally taught compared to **32%** of non-disabled musicians. **36%** of mental health/neurodivergent musicians are self-taught or informally taught. Disabled musicians with physical, sensory or other conditions/impairments are overall less likely to have music qualifications than their non-disabled counterparts, as well as mental health/neurodivergent musicians who report higher rates of GCSE and music degree qualifications than non-disabled musicians.

Many open text responses tell the story of inaccessible workplaces, including moving away from performing and into teaching, although there are also many barriers and discrimination within teaching as described here:

“Nobody wanted to employ a disabled musician as they assume you’ll be difficult to work with due to inaccessibility of many school music classrooms (not wheelchair accessible) and there is an assumption of unreliability. In addition there is a notion that you can only be a good secondary music teacher if you play piano. Music teachers are considered to be a luxury so most schools only have 1 or at most 2, and teaching outside of specialism is expected; at one point I was teaching 12 subjects per week.”

Female, aged 35-44, South West England

“I had to drive 1000 miles a month, spend at least 10.5 hours a week in my car to get around 17 schools spread out across the county. After 8 years, I asked for help and was given 19 schools and an even bigger area. I have medical issues following illness 12 years ago and all Occupational Health reports have been ignored. HR and Occ Health have worked with the union to get management to rethink their discriminatory attitude. Many of my colleagues have far smaller areas and far fewer schools.”

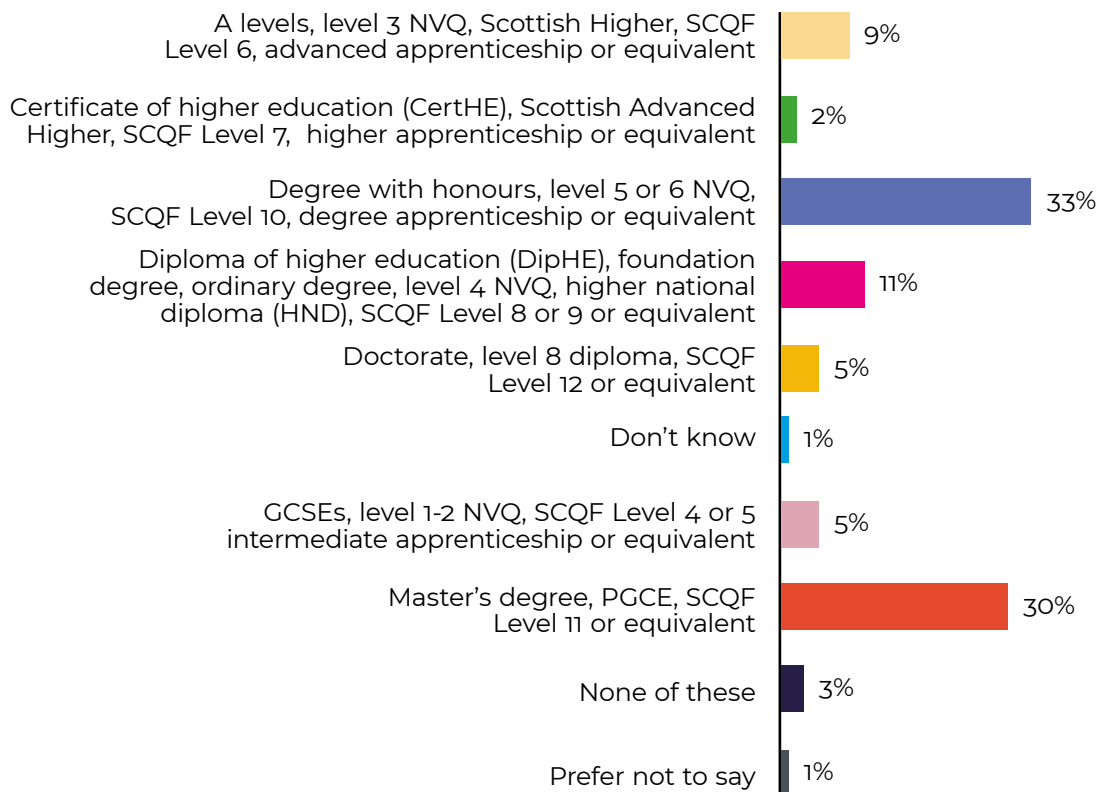
Identifies gender in another way, aged 45-54, North East England

While **71%** of all disabled musicians report being self-employed, the same as for non-disabled musicians, just **11%** are in full-time employment compared to **15%** of non-disabled musicians. Just over a quarter of musicians with both mental health conditions and neurodivergent profiles are self-employed and just **3%** are employed full time.

18% of mental health/neurodivergent respondents are students, reflecting the younger age profile of this cohort.



Qualifications



Two thirds of disabled musicians hold an honours degree or higher, compared to **73%** of non-disabled musicians. While this seems to challenge the expected narrative around exclusion of disabled musicians from formal music education, responses to our open-text question on career barriers reveal the barriers faced by disabled musicians particularly in pursuing postgraduate studies, and making the transition from studying to working. These issues are closely tied to financial barriers.

“It is very difficult to study and build a career without a significant amount of financial help from family and/or sponsors. I compromised on my studies to work part-time jobs and after graduating, it became even harder to focus on practice and networking because I was having to earn enough to support myself. I also found it difficult to network as I had no one who would introduce me to the “right people” and I am an ethnic minority so I feel influential people do not take me seriously.”

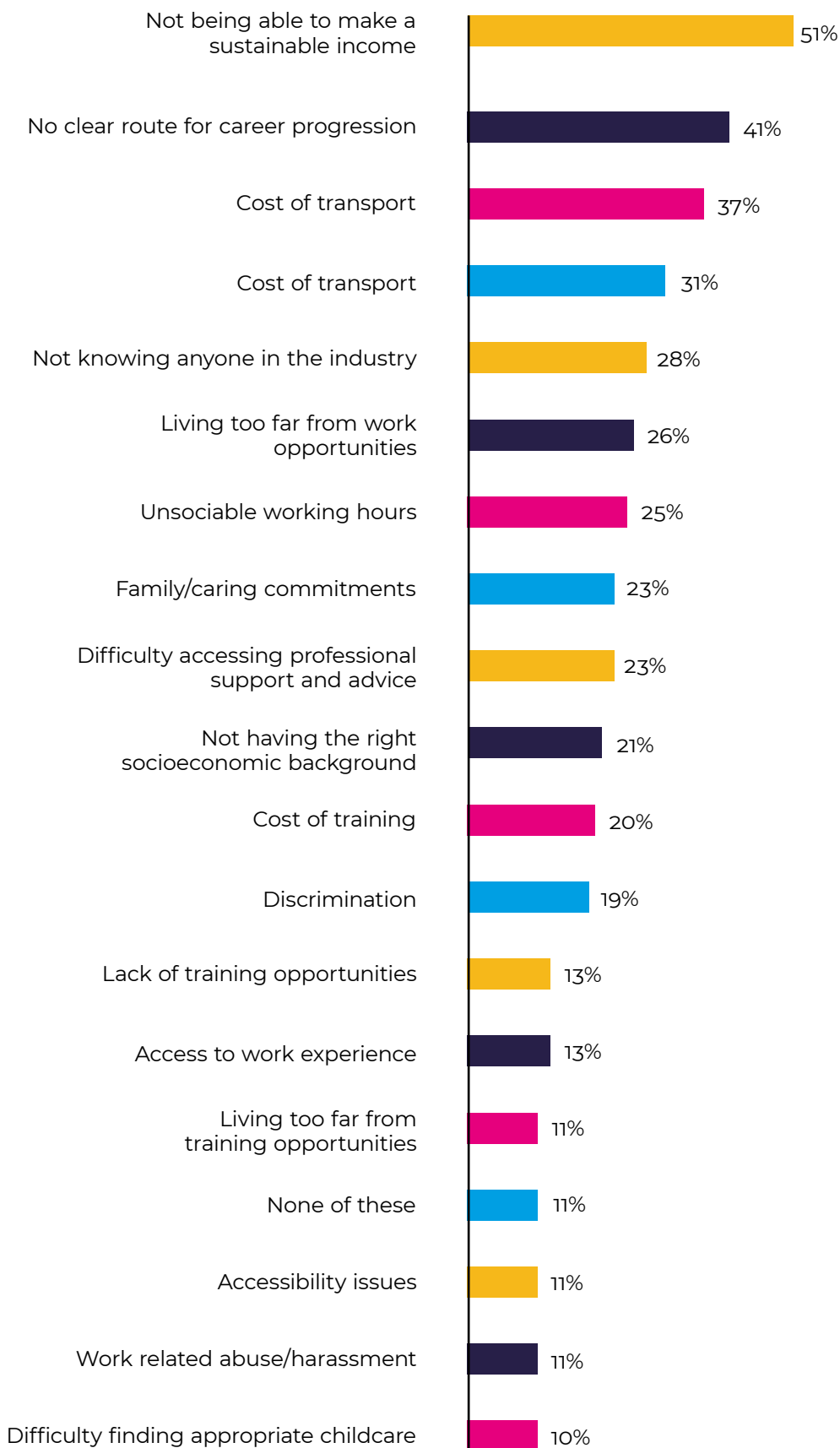
Female, aged 35-44, North West England

“When I graduated, I had no affordable options for further study. 10 years later, I self funded a master’s degree, but was then too old to follow it up.”

Female, aged 55-64, South West England



Career Barriers



While 1 in 5 non-disabled musicians report facing no career barriers, this drops to 1 in 10 for disabled musicians.

Not being able to make a sustainable income is the most highly reported barrier at **51%**, reflecting the financial issues reported above. Other highly reported financial barriers include the costs associated with equipment, transport and training as well as socioeconomic background.

“I just don’t earn enough money from my music to reinvest in building a team to promote and manage my career. Streaming had a massive impact. I used to be able to sell enough CD’s/physical merch to pay for an album recording plus Press/PR touring etc. But it just doesn’t break even anymore. So my music is not getting heard. As a DIY artist I used to be able to sustain myself through CD sales but I cannot seem to crack streaming at all. It just seems hard to build numbers and the returns are so small. I had spent considerable time and effort touring the EU in order to build a career there. But Brexit has made that much more difficult if impossible to break even let alone make money. My health has also suffered and I have a disability which has restricted my ability to drive long distances for live work. It has also made performing much more difficult.”

Male, Aged 45-54, Midlands

“Lack of access for disabled individuals and higher risk overheads - for example, I need to stay in hotels during touring because promoters don’t take into account my special needs, even when warned in advance; festivals don’t provide accommodation and offer you to stay in tents which is impossible for me as a disabled person, and I can’t leave my equipment unguarded. I’m offered less fees than other musicians because of discrimination”

Identifies their gender in another way, aged 35-44, Wales

While **41%** of disabled musicians reported no clear route for career progression as a barrier, this rises to **48%** for disabled musicians from the Global Majority, **54%** for trans disabled musicians, and **61%** for disabled musicians who identify their gender in another way than male/female.

Attitude is Everything and BLiM reported in Unseen Unheard that **81%** of Black disabled creators do not feel there is a clear career trajectory or path for them. Only **8%** said they had felt supported through each career stage.

57% of all disabled musicians reported that they face barriers as a result of being disabled that impacts their career and aspirations. Of them, **9%** said it was fairly or very unlikely they would be working as a musician in one years’ time, rising to **12%** when asked the same for 5 years’ time.



Disability discrimination and openness at work

19% of disabled musicians report discrimination as a barrier to career progression and **12%** of disabled musicians reported experiencing disability discrimination, with **13%** reporting witnessing it. While this is lower than expected, it could be attributed to the low rates of being open about disability status at work. If an impairment and/or condition has not been disclosed then it may be harder to identify and attribute discrimination to disability, particularly where conditions are less visible. Only a third of disabled musicians who have experienced or witnessed discrimination based on disability said they reported it to anyone in their workplace.

While the rates reporting discrimination based on disability were lower than expected, when we look at these figures again for respondents who said they were open about their disability at work, we see a different picture. **31%** of all disabled respondents are open with everyone they work with about their impairment or condition. **47%** are open with only some of the people they work with.

41% of disabled musicians who have experienced disability discrimination said they are open about their condition/impairment with everyone they work with. In contrast, of the disabled musicians who said they aren't open about being disabled with anyone they work with, **6%** said they have experienced disability discrimination. **16%** of musicians who are open about their condition/impairment with everyone they work with have experienced disability discrimination, higher than the overall rates of experiencing disability discrimination as reported above (**12%**).

Of those who said they had experienced discrimination based on their disability, **94%** said it impacted their ability to work or advance their career progression.

The low rates of musicians being open about being disabled with everyone they work with points to a culture of non-disclosure in the music industry. While the industry needs to learn more about what it can do to become more accessible and inclusive, musicians often fear that disclosure will lead to outcomes such as slower career progression or being treated less favourably, according to research by Attitude is Everything and Black Lives in Music⁵.

Attitude is Everything's Next Stage Snapshot 2024 report highlights that while **60%** of their respondents shared access requirements with a promoter only **20%** felt confident doing so⁶.

Unfortunately, the higher rates of disability discrimination amongst Musicians' Census respondents who do disclose experiences would suggest those fears are true. Qualitative responses also reveal issues of bullying and harassment:

"I used to work as a freelance musician while pursuing my first degree. However, the bullying culture in the industry stopped me from making it my full time career after I graduated."

Female, aged 25-34, Scotland

15% of neurodivergent respondents and **19%** of those with a mental health condition are not open with anyone at work. Only **23%** of mental health/neurodivergent respondents are open with everyone they work with, compared to **36%** of musicians with physical, sensory or other conditions. This could be attributed to many factors: visible vs invisible conditions, employment status and stability/precarity, types of work.

19% of disabled female musicians said they are not open with anyone at work, compared to **15%** of men and **13%** of musicians who identify their gender in another way. **38%** of disabled male musicians are open with everyone they work with, compared to **24%** of women and **28%** of musicians who identify their gender in another way.

There are also stark differences in the rates of experiencing disability discrimination within different groups. **38%** of disabled musicians who identify as trans have reported experiencing discrimination due to their disability.



Photo: CREATISTA / Shutterstock

Other forms of discrimination

In the Musicians' Census questionnaire we asked respondents if they had experienced or witnessed discrimination based on different protected characteristics. **71%** of disabled musicians have experienced or witnessed some form of discrimination.

Gender

A third of disabled musicians report experiencing gender discrimination, compared to **20%** of non-disabled musicians. Of the disabled musicians who experienced gender discrimination, **83%** of them said it impacted their ability to work or advance their career progression.

"I'm a queer neurodivergent woman trying to work in the music industry. The support isn't there, it's heavily male dominated which leads to numerous issues like abuse and comments that lead to poor confidence and imposter syndrome. And we just don't have the money in my family to help me get to where I want to be by getting coaching etc. Being ADHD and the industry not open to what that means or supporting that and other access needs isn't easy either."

Female, aged 25-34, South West England

Sexual harassment

Almost a quarter (**23%**) of disabled musicians have been sexually harassed compared to **13%** of non-disabled musicians. **72%** of those who had been sexually harassed said it impacted their ability to work or advance their career progression. Less than a third (**30%**) reported their experience of sexual harassment to anyone in their workplace.

Racism

27% of disabled musicians have experienced racism compared to **7%** of non-disabled musicians, whilst the ethnicity breakdown between the disabled and non-disabled samples remains the same. Of those who experienced racism or racial discrimination, **78%** said it impacted their ability to work or advance their career progression.

"I have been subjected to micro aggressions and racism which forced me to quit to protect my mental wellbeing"

Female, aged 35-44, London

Age

31% of disabled musicians have experienced age discrimination compared to **20%** of non-disabled musicians. More than half of those who reported experiencing age discrimination were aged 45+. **91%** of all disabled musicians who experienced age discrimination said it impacted their ability to work or advance their career progression.

“I have been a working DJ for more than 20 years, and a producer for the past 2.5 years. During my time in the industry I have faced challenges which I feel have held me back from reaching the next level in my career. There has been a certain amount of discrimination I’ve experienced especially when I started out as a DJ because I didn’t look the right way compared to other female DJs of the time, and now I’m older and facing a new type of discrimination because of my age.”

Female, aged 35-44, Scotland

Socioeconomic

6% of disabled musicians have experienced discrimination due to their socioeconomic background.

Gender Identity

51% of disabled respondents who identify as trans have experienced gender discrimination, and **54%** reported experiencing discrimination due to their gender identity.

“Since coming out as a trans woman, I have found a significant dropoff in the amount of teaching work available to me, which has made it hard to support myself even with that work.”

Female, aged 25-34, South East of England

“As a trans person I have found my work limited by the small minded views of other people, and this in itself is also an access issue.”

Identifies their gender in another way, aged 25-34, London

Sexuality

26% of LGBTQ+ disabled musicians have experienced discrimination based on their sexuality, and a third have experienced sexual harassment. **84%** of LGBTQ+ disabled musicians said experiencing discrimination based on their sexuality impacted their ability to work or advance their career progression.



Health and Wellbeing

We asked Census respondents if they thought it was likely or unlikely that they would still be working in the music industry in 1 and 5 years' time.

87% of all disabled musicians said it was likely they'd still be working in music in 1 year, dropping to **79%** in 5 years' time. Of the **21%** who responded that they don't know or it's unlikely they'll still be working in music in 5 years' time, **58%** of them experience barriers in their music careers and **68%** have witnessed or experienced discrimination.

76% of musicians with physical/sensory/other conditions/impairments think they will still be working in music in 5 years' time compared to **83%** of musicians in the mental health/neurodivergent sample. This could be attributed in part to age and retirement, but may also reflect the challenges of long-term barriers.

39% of disabled musicians reported that their physical wellbeing is negative, whilst **11%** said it was neither positive nor negative. **43%** of disabled musicians reported that their mental wellbeing is negative, whilst **13%** said it was neither positive nor negative. Amongst disabled musicians who have experienced or witnessed discrimination of any kind, **46%** reported negative mental wellbeing.

Amongst disabled musicians who reported negative or extremely negative physical wellbeing, only two thirds said it was likely they would still be working in music in 5 years' time. Amongst disabled musicians who reported negative or extremely negative mental wellbeing only **70%** said it was likely they would still be working in music in 5 years' time. These figures show a correlation between wellbeing and likelihood to stay in the music industry. **59%** of all disabled musicians who reported being in debt also reported negative mental wellbeing.



Next steps

This sixth Insight Report from the Musicians' Census 2023 details the challenging nature of navigating the music industry as a disabled musician.

Disabled Musicians face barriers both within and outside of the music industry finding employment and supporting themselves and their families. Coupled with the increased cost of being disabled it's unsurprising that this community of musicians are more likely to be in debt than their non-disabled counterparts.

Low rates of disability disclosure reveal systemic issues in the music industry that point to low levels of trust that access requirements will be positively received and implemented. There are further concerns that revealing an impairment or condition will result in disabled musicians being discriminated against. Unfortunately the data on disability discrimination confirm that these concerns are very real.

Disability discrimination has a huge impact on disabled musicians with **94%** of musicians who are open about their disability at work reporting that discrimination had impacted their ability to work or advance in their career. Intersectional experiences of discrimination also have a significant impact on this community of musicians and a greater impact on their ability to work or advance their career progression.

These experiences of discrimination, sexual harassment, low earnings and being in debt have a serious impact on the mental and physical wellbeing of musicians and there is much more work for the music industry to do to tackle these issues.

Despite the multiple challenges and barriers disabled musicians face, **79%** told us they would still be working in the music industry in 5 years' time.

To ensure the health, wellbeing and diversity of the music industry, it's vital that disability discrimination and inaccessibility are tackled, collectively, by the industry as a matter of urgency.

For musicians who experience ableism and any other types of discrimination the MU can help and support you with legal advice, assistance, and representation. The MU also has a dedicated member network for disabled musicians.

Help Musicians provide mental health support via Music Minds Matter, where you can speak to an accredited counsellor who will offer emotional support, advice and information.

Attitude is Everything's Next Stage initiative works to ensure that artists who have access requirements can thrive within the music industry.

This briefing is part of a series of Insight Reports from Musicians Census data on a range of themes.

To get involved with the future development of the Musicians' Census or if you have any questions, please contact Help Musicians (communications@helpmusicians.org.uk) or Musicians' Union (equalities@themu.org).



Photo: DC Studio / Shutterstock

Endnotes

¹ Question H4a asked “Are you disabled or do you have any of these long-standing physical and/or mental health impairments or conditions? By ‘long-standing’ we mean anything that you have experienced over a period of at least 12 months or that is likely to affect you over a period of at least 12 months.” Respondents were provided with 13 possible response categories on a ‘select all that apply’ model, which have been condensed into 5 for the purposes of analysis and reporting. Respondents were also able to indicate if they had no conditions or impairments (reported on as non-disabled respondents) as well as being given a ‘prefer not to say’ option.

Responses were coded as follows:

- **Sensory** = Hearing condition or impairment & Visual condition or impairment
- **Physical** = mobility condition or impairment & Musculoskeletal condition or impairment & Voice/vocal cord condition or impairment & Other physical health condition or impairment
- **Neurodiverse** = neurodiverse condition or impairment
- **Mental health** = mental health condition or impairment
- **Other** = chronic coronavirus (“Long Covid”) & Another condition or impairment which affects my day to day life & nervous system condition or impairment & speech condition or impairment & neurological condition or impairment.

² <https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/disability-price-tag>

³ <https://attitudeiseverything.org.uk/attitude-is-everything-and-black-lives-in-music-release-unseen-unheard-report-and-podcast/>

⁴ <https://www.musicianscensus.co.uk/insight-reports>

⁵ <https://attitudeiseverything.org.uk/attitude-is-everything-and-black-lives-in-music-release-unseen-unheard-report-and-podcast/>

⁶ <https://attitudeiseverything.org.uk/next-stage-snapshot-insights-from-music-creators-with-access-needs/>

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Musicians' Census

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