Schools Guide
to online learning

This is a guide for schools who are taking part in online music lessons with a local Music Hub or other provider. It provides guidance for how to prepare for and deliver online music lessons, based on teachers' real life experiences during the Connect: Resound project.

Learning instruments over the internet can be a really useful and engaging part of music education in schools. Pupils can learn from specialists not available on their doorstep, and transport, cost and logistics issues that can affect availability of lessons in rural schools, for example, can be overcome.

If your school is working with your local Music Hub to deliver online music tuition to your pupils, here are a few hints and tips to help you:

Before you begin

Pupils

As with any music lessons, you will need to discuss with the Music Hub which of your pupils are going to receive lessons, what their learning needs are, and identify a mutually convenient time for the lessons to take place.

For Connect: Resound, our pilot internet learning project, we worked with Key Stage 2 pupils, the majority of whom were beginners, learning a new instrument for the first time. Some students had already learned one instrument and took the opportunity to try another, others were moving on to one to one lessons following Whole Class Ensemble Teaching (WCET). The teaching was done in blocks of lessons, with 20 minute one to one and small group lessons taking place over two hour sessions in each school.

● **Consent forms** - Generally these will be created by the Music Hub for you to circulate to pupils/parents. They can be useful as tools to inform and enthuse parents as well as simply gaining permission for participation in online lessons

● **Learning needs** - different learning and access needs may need to be planned for in different ways to face to face lessons, and music teachers will need to know in good time of any specific needs

Internet connection

Talk to your ICT staff as early as possible, and try to find a named contact who knows about the project. We used Skype as the video conferencing platform for the project - whichever software you use, make sure that your school, and the computer(s) you will be using on the project, have permission to access it.

Good internet connectivity: 1 Mbps (both upstream and downstream) is an absolute minimum, but faster is better, especially if other users are sharing the same connection. A wired internet connection is preferable to wireless. You can check the speed of your Internet connection at www.speedtest.net. We would suggest that you test the broadband connection speed, including the upload and download speeds. This may best be done by your IT staff to get the most accurate reading. If other people in a school are using the broadband at the same time, it is worth bearing in mind that the available bandwidth will be reduced. If you find situations where connection speed is an issue, you may like to try to minimise other internet usage, as this may help.

Teaching space

It is worth taking some time to decide on where the lessons will be best delivered, although small rural schools may not have many options! Smaller rooms are often a lot better than the main school hall. The acoustics of school halls are often not ideal for online communication. Sound can bounce around the walls creating a very 'boomy' sound that is difficult to comprehend at the other end of the line! You may find that using a space or room with soft furnishings and carpets is a simple way of reducing unnecessary reverberation - in the pilot project, some schools used school offices rather than classrooms. Larger rooms may require solutions such as acoustic boards or foam tiles.

However, rooms do need to be big enough to ensure all pupils can be viewed fully in the webcam image. Also schools should try to minimize background noise and disruption (i.e. avoid the teaching room being used for multiple purposes, or being next door to the playground during breaktime).

You will need:

● A couple of desks/large table
● Music stands and chairs for the pupils
● A computer/laptop that can run Skype, most computers made in the last 5 years will be adequate
● Good power supply

Also, do make sure the appropriate insurance is in place for any equipment you are using from the Music Hub (such as VR-3EX and peripherals) and that you have somewhere secure to store it when not in use.

Support staff

You will need to identify an appropriate adult to supervise the sessions - this may be a Teaching Assistant, Music Co-ordinator or school governor or other volunteer (subject to your usual Safeguarding policy and procedures). Staff can help pupils in operating the equipment, focusing cameras as well as helping with instrument assembly, tuning and so on, with guidance from the music teacher at the other end.

Getting started

Set up a Skype account for your school, and make sure you know the details of the music teacher's account and vice versa.

Set up the equipment (laptop/webcam and, if using, VR-3EX, cameras and microphones) in your teaching space. If these will be put up and taken down each lesson, make sure you have a practice run or two, and know how long it all takes! We have detailed setup guides that can help you, and an instructional video - you may like to have a phone, tablet or second pc handy if you want to use the video to help you set up.

Get in touch with the teacher in advance to decide who will call who on Skype to commence each lesson, confirm the details of the pupils and so on - make sure you have a telephone number handy for your music teacher in case of any connection problems.

Some schools and Music Hubs may choose to have an introductory face to face lesson to say hello and teach the basics of assembling and holding instruments - but we found it all worked very effectively online.

Make sure you have everything ready in the room for the students:

- music books
- practice diaries
- instruments
- reeds, shoulder rests etc

You will need to check with your Music Hub who will be responsible for providing and organising delivery of these supplies.

If possible, double check that internet use in the rest of the school will be kept to a minimum during the lesson, especially if your connection speed is at the lower end.

And finally!

- Check in with the teacher after each lesson to make sure you know about any issues or learning needs and can follow them up
- Do remind pupils to bring in their instruments and books each week
- Prepare the room and equipment in good time each week
- Let your ICT support people know about any issues with connection speeds or reliability
- Make sure you know what technical support is available to you and use it - even if a problem is minor it can affect the quality of the lessons and is usually easily resolved

Further resources

The Connect: Resound website hosts a number of useful resources to help you:

- Instructional video for setting up and using the VR-3EX, microphones and cameras in your classroom
- Informational video about online music teaching
- Technical support guide explaining how to set up and use the equipment for online music lessons
- Three hour-long programmes featuring live performances and behind the scenes footage of rock, pop and folk musicians presented in partnership with Musicport, Grassington and Harrogate International Festivals
- Insights and case studies from the Connect: Resound team
- Useful links to support all aspects of digital music education
- Research report about our experiences of online music tuition