



HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED MUSIC STUDENTS?

A STUDY

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THE SURVEY



COVID's impact on the music industry has been well documented. From cancelled concerts to gig workers being forced from the business altogether, the sector has been rocked by the pandemic on a devastating level. Commentators have speculated about what this could mean for the industry going forward. Understandably, much of the focus has been on artists, technical crew and gig workers already well-established in the industry. But what about the next generation? What about the young people with aspirations for a career in music after the pandemic has ended?

Artist Management Services recently conducted an anonymous survey amongst 774 students currently enrolled on music-related courses, including music technology. The results make for grim reading, with an incredibly high number of students now actively reconsidering their pursuit of a career in music.

The participants were asked to respond to the following statements:

1. The effects of COVID-19 have disrupted my ability to study.
2. Pre-COVID-19, I felt a career in the music industry was a realistic aim.
3. As a result of the pandemic, I feel less optimistic about my future employability.
4. The pandemic has had a detrimental impact on the music industry.
5. The COVID-19 crisis has had a detrimental effect on my enjoyment of music.
6. The pandemic has made me reconsider a career in music.



THE IMPACT ON STUDY

There can be little doubt that COVID-19 has caused widespread disruption to academic study across the age ranges; from primary school pupils right through to academics working on their doctorate theses. The same can be said for music students, with all the young people we surveyed unanimously agreeing that their course of learning had been negatively affected.

The closing of colleges or universities has denied students the face-to-face contact with their teachers and tutors that they would ordinarily receive. The alternative, working remotely from home online, has yielded mixed results. Students enrolled on more traditional courses which rely more on the theoretical end of the spectrum (such as Music, Music Performance, Music Education) have been impacted less due to the sheer number of resources available online, and the fact that a lot of study is carried out independently anyway.

For those working on technology-based courses (e.g., Music Production, Engineering), the disruption has been much more keenly felt. The overwhelming majority of students do not have access to the same level of equipment at home as they would do in a professional-grade studio, meaning much of their work cannot be carried out in the same way. It is also important to note that not everyone enjoys the luxury of having their own musical instruments to utilise. For some, college or university are the only places where they are able to access this essential equipment.

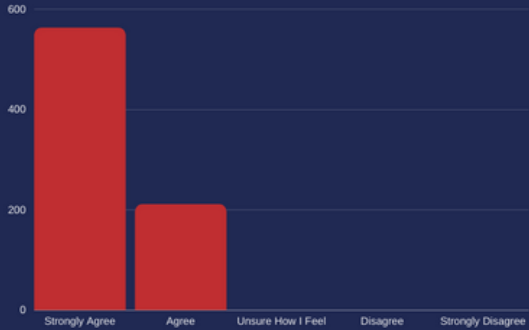
Joe is a Music Performance student at Confetti Institute of Creative Technologies in Nottingham. He spoke to Artist Management Services about his experience of trying to study from home:

It was enjoyable at first – (like) a novelty. But it wore thin pretty quick when I couldn't do any of the practical work I'd ordinarily do when at college. I'm a kinetic learner, so it was a struggle when most of my work needed to be written or diagrammed. My tutor was great though and communicating online wasn't something that particularly bothered me. I can't speak for everyone though."

For the majority of students, it is simply too early to tell whether or not their disrupted learning will result in a downturn in attainment. Many exams in 2020 were postponed, with results being awarded based upon a combination of coursework and teacher-led assessment; it is also important to note that with lockdown only occurring in March, students of last year's cohort will have enjoyed a large portion of their academic year undisturbed. We will have to wait until the summer and beyond, and indeed, for further research to be conducted using larger sample size, to determine how academic attainment has been affected for music students.

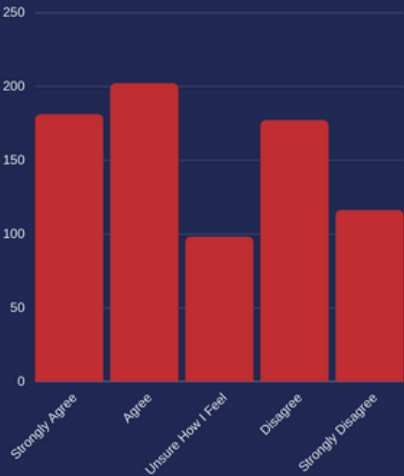
THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 HAVE DISRUPTED MY ABILITY TO STUDY

Of the 774 students who completed our survey, all the participants unanimously agreed that their studies had been detrimentally affected by the pandemic.



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THE PANDEMIC HAS MADE ME RECONSIDER A CAREER IN MUSIC.



This statement proved the most divisive in our survey. **Uncertainty is rife amongst students at the moment.**

It is reassuring to know that a large number of our participants still felt determined to realise their musical ambitions.

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INDUSTRY CONFIDENCE



Once again, the decimation of the music industry, particularly in terms of live performances, has consistently made headlines since UK lockdown was first introduced back in March 2020. Not wishing to overly re-examine already well-trodden territory, it is worth taking stock of just how damaging the pandemic has been to those already working, especially in the gig industry, in order to fully appreciate the knock-on effect this has had on music students.

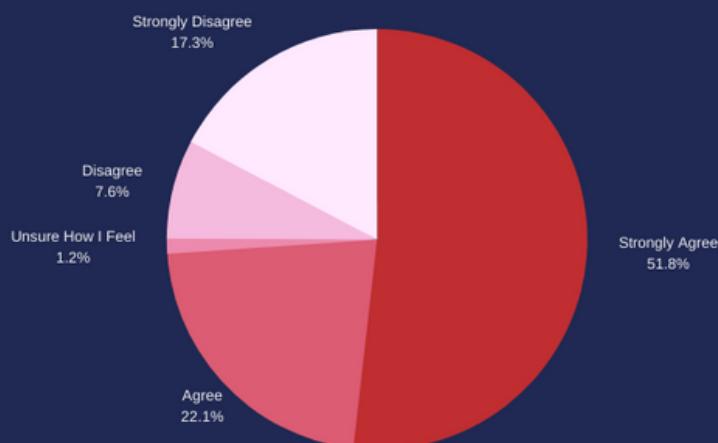
During the initial months of UK-wide lockdown, a lot of attention was given to the plight of venues and musicians themselves, and rightly so. Rent hikes in major UK cities meant that many venues were already under strain; with their complete closure enforced due to lockdown, for many, economic assistance could not come soon enough. Musicians suffered similarly. The trend toward DSPs (Digital Service Providers), with listeners consuming their music through streaming platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music, means artists generate significantly less income from the sale of their music, restating the importance of live shows to their livelihoods.

Not spoken about enough are the often-unseen cogs in the industry wheel: managers, festival staff, security, sound technicians, promoters, booking agents, to name but a few. Beyond government financial support systems such as furlough (which many gig workers were not entitled to), the support systems available for such individuals were severely lacking, forcing many to leave the industry altogether. Adaptation has been necessary - an example being independent studios opening but only for remote, video-call-based sessions – but for the vast majority, work has dried up completely over the last year.

Results from our survey support the dim perception of the industry, with almost 80% of participants asserting their belief that COVID-19 has had a devastating effect. Another sector that deserves to be part of the conversation is education; after all, a considerable number of graduates (1 in 5 according to D of E statistics released in 2019) leaving higher education with some form of qualification on music go on to have careers in teaching, either through schools or private tuition. The UK Music Report, 'Securing Our Talent Pipeline' made bold claims in 2018 about an 'emerging crisis' in the industry: namely, the lack, in terms of quantity and quality, of music educators. It would seem that the pandemic has done little to improve an already steadily deteriorating situation. As well as collating the responses to our statements, we also had the opportunity to speak to PGCE student, Abigail, about how the crisis has affected her aspirations to teach music:

"There's definitely been an eroding of music teaching in this country over the years. I'm really concerned about it, which is part of the reason why I decided to do this (complete a PGCE) in the first place. Having a global pandemic is nobody's fault, but I can't pretend that I'm looking forward to my teaching career in the same way that I was before. Schools will understandably be more concerned about teaching core subjects than they will music, which is not good news for me, but most importantly, it's a shame for children in this country."


PRE-COVID-19, I FELT A CAREER IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY WAS A REALISTIC AIM.



Views on employability pre-pandemic was mixed, but the overwhelming majority felt positive about a potential career in music after their time studying.

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CAREER PROSPECTS



Music students – arguably the next generation of workers hoping to forge a career in the industry for themselves – have been given very few reasons to feel optimistic about their prospects since March 2020. Of the individuals surveyed, the overwhelming majority felt pessimistic about their future employability as a result of the pandemic. Of the same participant, over half felt that pre-pandemic, a career in the industry was a realistic aim. It's clear that the voiding of confidence, as we have seen across a huge number of sectors, has filtered down to students in a significant way. It was no secret that, even in a pre-COVID world, the competition for certain roles within the industries (and I am not even necessarily talking about work as a full-time musician) was, and will no doubt indefinitely continue to be, incredibly fierce. We must also consider another factor: due to delays in some students completing their courses, it is anticipated that the number of graduates entering the job market in the summer will be significantly higher than usual.

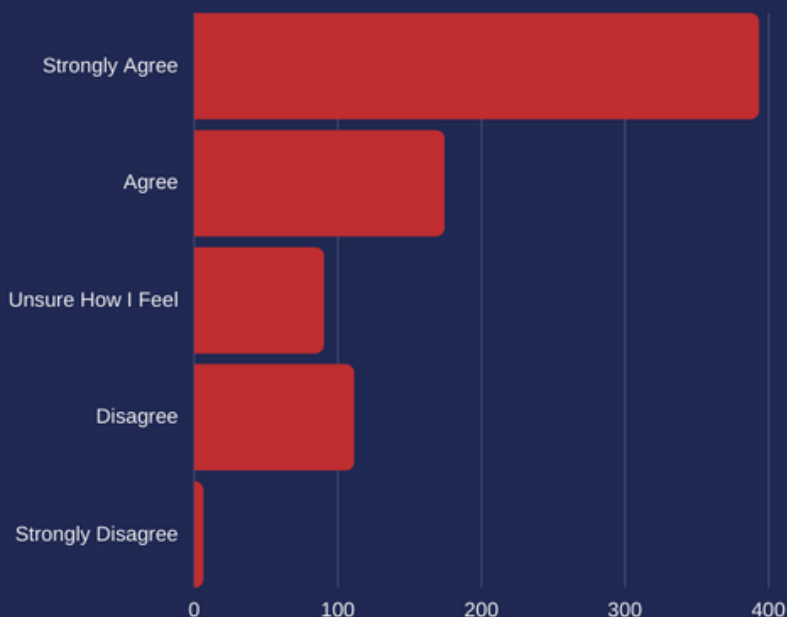
Artist Management's Head of Production, Matthew Hunt, formerly a Sound Engineering student, spoke to us about the current predicament facing young people:

"The results speak for themselves. In an industry where very little job security exists even at the best of times, I can see it taking five years or longer before students can feel confident placing all of their eggs in the music industry basket again. Just look at the record number of young people applying for nursing courses! I can see there being a trend towards job security and reliability, certainly in the short to medium term. This is good news for the public sector, but less so for creative industries."

Taking into account all we have considered so far, you would be forgiven for assuming that a high number of the students who responded to our survey were reconsidering their career options in light of the pandemic. When presented with the statement, 'The pandemic has made me reconsider a career in music', it appeared initially as though the comment would be confirmed by our participants. However, of all the six statements, this proved to be the most divisive. There appears to be a sense of confusion and apprehension; the mantra "We will just have to wait and see," has become commonplace amongst the artists we work with, and it would seem that the same can be applied here. During the writing of this report, the number of coronavirus cases and deaths in the UK is steadily declining, so there is certainly some cause for higher levels of optimism.



AS A RESULT OF THE PANDEMIC, I FEEL LESS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT MY FUTURE EMPLOYABILITY.

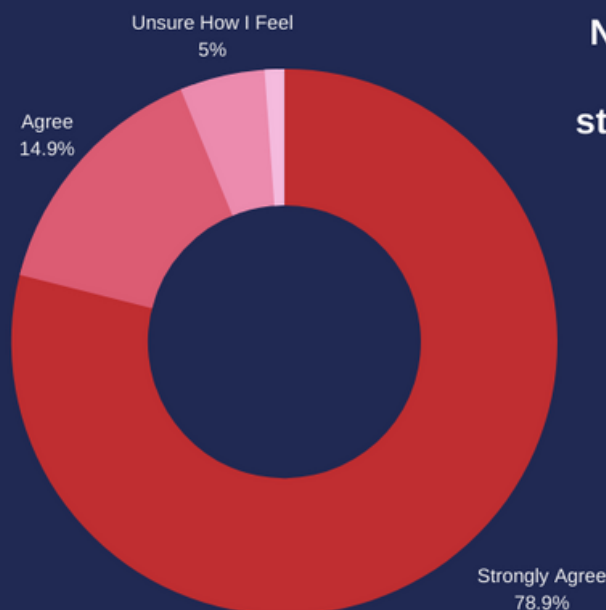


The pandemic has resulted in a large proportion of music students feeling worried about their future career prospects.

Participants were from a wide range of music-related courses including music production, performance, business management and many more...

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THE PANDEMIC HAS HAD A DETRIMENTAL IMPACT ON THE MUSIC INDUSTRY.



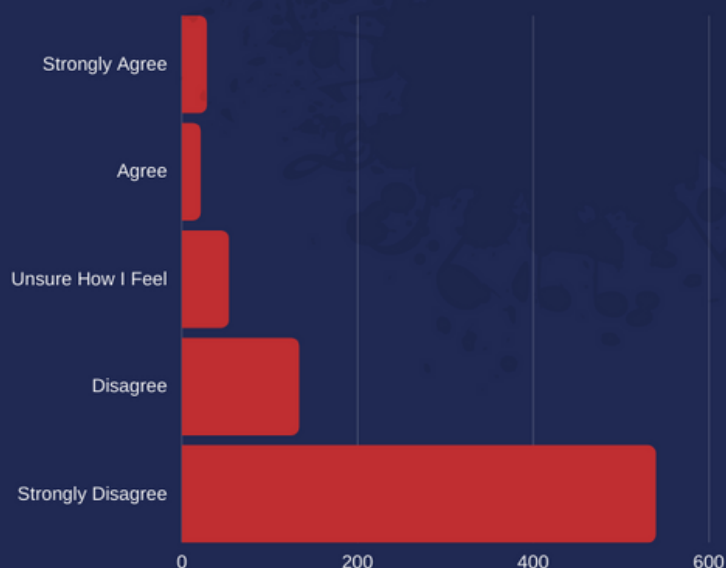
Not a single one of our survey participants strongly disagreed with this statement.

This is not at all surprising, considering how widely reported the plight of the industry has been since the start of the pandemic and the first UK lockdown.

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THE COVID-19 CRISIS HAS HAD A DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON MY ENJOYMENT OF MUSIC.

Despite the upheaval of the last twelve months, enthusiasm for their subject and music more generally remained relatively undimmed amongst our participants.



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CLOSING COMMENTS

Championing the passions and success of young people, regardless of background or academic attainment, is one of the fundamental aims of Artist Management Services outside of our business objectives. The results borne out of conducting this study have been enlightening, as have the conversations with music students that have arisen as a result. Fittingly, a recurring theme in this dialogue has been that despite the many obstacles hurdled over the last year, enthusiasm for music (purely on an emotional level) has been relatively unaffected. Of the students surveyed, the overwhelming feeling is that the pandemic has not dampened students' love for their subjects. Although there has been undisputed disruption to study that may ultimately result in a reduction of career opportunities in the short to medium term, it is promising to note the calmative, restorative and inspiring quality that music-related subjects continue to bring.

