INTRODUCTORY TEXT: A new report into Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Music Studies in UK higher education is to be published this week. Anna Bull, Diljeet Bhachu and Amy Blier-Carruthers who worked on the report, say that in order to tackle the inequalities revealed by this report, we need to embed equality, diversity and inclusion into the discipline of music studies.

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There is widespread awareness that students and staff studying and working in UK higher music education do not reflect either the wider student body, nor indeed the population at large. Areas of under-representation have been documented in the music industry, for example in reports from [UK Music](https://www.ukmusic.org/equality-diversity/uk-music-diversity-report-2020/) and [Arts Council England](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Executive_Summary.pdf) on inequalities the classical music workforce (as outlined elsewhere in [Arts Professional)](https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/article/more-inclusive-classical-music). But neither the specific details of these inequalities – which groups are under-represented, at which levels of study/work, in which types of institutions – nor the mechanisms that are being implemented to address these issues, have been known.

It is for this reason that the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Music Studies network,](https://edims.network/) set up a working group to publish a research report outlining the current picture of EDI in UK music higher education. EDI in Music Studies (EDIMS) was set up in 2019 to promote, support and share good practice in relation to EDI in music HE in the UK. The report – funded by professional societies from all areas of music HE – addresses all staff and students working and studying in music higher education. It aims to make visible existing inequalities, to hear the voices of those who are marginalised in music higher education due to these inequalities, and to document some of the ongoing work that is taking place to make music higher education more equal and inclusive.

In order to reveal who is studying and working in music HE, we drew on data on students and staff between 2016-20 sourced from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). Perhaps one of the most striking findings is around the under-representation of British Asian students in the music student and staff population. This categorisation includes UK-domiciled students from Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian and what HESA describes as ‘other Asian’ backgrounds as well as those from Chinese backgrounds. While British Asian students made up 11% of the total student body during the time period of our research, they made up only 2% of the undergraduate music student population. Black British students are also under-represented, consisting of 4% of the music student body in 2016-20 against 8% of total student numbers. These patterns are even more stark for women: both Black British and British Asian women were under-represented compared to male students, with a ratio of roughly 2:1 male: female students among both these groups.

A second striking finding from the HESA data – similarly to [Vick Bain’s findings](https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/0f1af03e-1d6c-4b2f-a3fb-ffebb8cd6604/downloads/Counting%20the%20Music%20Industry%20summary%202019.pdf?ver=1645710521097) from 2013-18 data - was that relatively high numbers of women are doing postgraduate (non-doctorate) music degrees, compared to lower numbers of women among undergraduate and PhD students, and among academic staff. Effectively, there is a surge at taught postgraduate level for women students but not for men, but male students and staff dominate at all other levels. This trend is by no means specific to music as a discipline; indeed, women are more likely than men to undertake Master’s degrees [across a range of disciplines and countries](https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/worldwide/japan/status-update-gender-equality-research-careers-europe-she-figures-2018). Explanations given for this pattern vary but one suggestion is that due to the gender pay gap, women need higher qualifications than men in order to earn similar amounts of money. This explanation doesn’t really fit for creative arts disciplines such as music, however, as for creative arts subjects including music, Master’s degrees [do not improve earnings very much](https://ifs.org.uk/publications/15019) for any gender. Understanding the reasons for this pattern may help in addressing gender inequalities within the music industry more widely. The report also revealed more detail on familiar inequalities around class and disability.

In order to understand what music departments and institutions were doing to address the inequalities outlined in the data, a questionnaire was sent to all music departments and higher music education institutions across the UK asking heads of department and/or EDI leads to document and reflect on their EDI provision. 32 responses were received, which constitutes around a quarter of all music departments/institutions in the UK. Most of these respondents – and those who are active in this area were, we suggest, most likely to have filled out the questionnaire – described relatively high levels of recent EDI activity. But overall, for most respondents their work could be summed up by saying ‘discussion is active; change is slow’. There was little evidence of EDI initiatives that are occurring across more than one area of inequality, and that were sufficiently embedded to be able to demonstrate results. Challenges included staff and student attitudes and engagement; competing perspectives on decolonising; agreeing on the pace and scope of change and choosing which areas to prioritise; and diversifying staff and student recruitment.

Overall the inequalities described in this report reveal who is supported to develop a creative voice in UK society. The stark under-representation of people from British Asian heritage in music higher education is particularly notable. This finding makes the success of many British Asian musicians in the industry even more impressive, but it also puts into perspective [racism](https://fass.open.ac.uk/research/conferences/racialised-performance) against classical musicians of East Asian heritage; in a genre where British East Asian musicians are represented, they are discriminated against. More generally, despite some improvements in gender inequality over 2016-20, music higher education remains dominated by men, white people, and those whose parents work in professional and managerial jobs. Studies of the music industry in the UK show that these inequalities are also present in industry, and this report confirms that they are already present in higher education – and perhaps starker than we might have expected. And as [Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente](https://www.spreadtheword.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Rethinking-Diversity-in-Publishing.pdf) argue in the context of publishing, we also need to look beyond the numbers. As they argue, diversity is not ‘purely a numbers game’ but entails recognizing ‘that people of colour are not afforded the same opportunities or freedoms as their white peers’, including creative freedom.

There are no quick-fixes to address this situation. It was challenging even to write recommendations that addressed such a broad range of areas and we struggled to decide the level at which they should be addressed: is this work the responsibility of sector-wide organisations, or heads of department/institutions, or indeed individual staff/students to tackle these issues? In a volatile higher education context, there is a danger that this work gets lost or left to passionate individuals to do on top of their day jobs. Instead, the challenge is to embed EDI in ways that change the discipline of music studies itself. This is already starting to happen – for example, through changes to the classical music canon, initiatives for disability inclusion in industry. There is more that can be done, however, to encourage research, teaching, and creative practice that recognises the broad range of creativity that is present across all social groups.