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The socio-cultural and learning experiences of music students in a British university

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Research into student experience in Higher Education has largely focused on students' role as learners. However, the student experience encompasses a much wider range of behaviours and beliefs than can be captured through a focus on teaching and learning alone. I report the findings of a research project which explored student experience in the music department of a British red-brick university. Music presents a particularly interesting case study given the presence of extra-curricular musical activities, the opportunity for social interaction between staff and students outside the formal context of the lecture or seminar room, and perceptions of Western art music as a form of 'middle-class' culture. Analysis of survey and interview data reveals the centrality of musical performance activities, and in particular the development of a performer identity, to students' experience of belonging and achievement. The influence of students' socio-economic background is also considered: social class was largely invisible to respondents within the departmental context, possibly because it is an invisible norm, within larger contemporary discourses in which social class is equated with financial difference rather than cultural difference. However, the research revealed an association between socio-economic background, term-time employment and academic achievement. The implications of these findings for teaching and learning in music in Higher Education are considered.

Until recently, student experience of Higher Education (HE) was relatively neglected as a subject of research, and the little research there was focused solely on the role of students as learners. Research has begun to rectify this with studies of mature students (James, 1995), gender (Brine & Waller, 2004), ethnic minority groups (Archer & Hutchings, 2000), different kinds of institution (Ainley, 1994), and transition from HE to the labour market (Brown & Scase, 1994). Added to this there is an increasing recognition of the growing heterogeneity of the student population (Murphy, 1994; NCIHE, 1997). What, then, can a study of the experience of *music* students in HE contribute to this understanding?

There are a number of factors which make research into teaching and learning of music particularly interesting as a case study of student experience in HE. In the context of an increasing student population, and an emphasis on widening participation (HEFCE, 1996, 2003), the study of music occupies a potentially problematic situation, particularly with regard to socio-economic class. Music in HE has a problematic record in terms of social inclusion: a recent internal Annual Review of Teaching at the University of Sheffield, the case study in this research, noted that the undergraduate music programmes fail to attract students from lower socio-economic groups. Nationally, expansions in student numbers in

music have not been matched by widening participation across socio-economic groups: the total number of students studying music increased 38% between 1996–97 and 2001–02 (PALATINE, 2004), but there has been no significant increase in the numbers from the lowest social classes.

The unequal participation in music in HE reflects a more general trend: historically, entrants to Higher Education have been from the higher socio-economic groups, a situation which persists today, despite expansions over the last 35 years and over a decade of calls to widen the diversity of students entering HE (Ball, 1990; Thomas, 2001; HEFCE, 2003). Since the 1997 UK General Election, Government strategies have aimed to increase the participation rate in British Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) from the current 41% to 50% of those aged 18–30 by 2010,[1] and to make it more socially inclusive via strategies to widen participation. However, the gap between the participation rates of those from different socio-economic groups persists, and those from families with relatively high incomes are still most likely to gain and take up a place to study in HE (Layer, 2004). This situation is unlike that for participation by age, gender, race or disability, which now approach equal proportional participation overall, even if equity has not yet been achieved within individual disciplines.[2]

Various explanations have been offered for the relative non-participation in HE by lower socio-economic classes, including beliefs regarding the imbalances of risk and reward, and perceptions of HE as the preserve of the middle-classes (Archer & Hutchings, 2000). In addition, students from working class backgrounds are more likely to enroll in courses with limited job opportunities, and at less prestigious institutions (Forsyth & Furlong, 2000). This appears to be partly a consequence of students' conceptions of belonging in HE, which some researchers argue leads non-traditional students (i.e. those who are first generation to university, from lower socio-economic groups, ethnic minorities, mature students and/or students with disabilities) to challenge their positioning as 'other' by choosing to study at institutions where they feel they 'belong' (Read *et al.*, 2003), even though this choice is in fact complicit with such discourses (p. 274).

Certain characteristics of the study of music may be able to explain its poorer record on social inclusion relative to other subjects, and highlight potential issues pertinent to understanding student experience once within HE. One argument commonly used to explain the socio-economic imbalance of participation in music at HE is the entrance requirement of musical performance skills and qualifications which usually necessitates specialist instrumental tuition pre-HE which is rarely available free through school, and which therefore excludes potential applicants from poorer backgrounds. This explanation shifts the blame from universities to schools, and identifies the barrier to participation as financial only.

However, a second possibility is that there is an institutional culture which favours certain kinds of students. As numerous authors have argued, barriers to participation in HE and factors influencing the experience of HE are social and cultural, not just financial. For example, in their research at a post-1992 British university with a high proportion of non-traditional students, Read *et al.* identified ways in which institutional academic cultures constrain and disrupt feelings of belonging, as well as the ways in which students' discourses challenged feelings of marginalisation within the academy. In relation to music in particular, the curriculum at Russell Group universities,[3] including Sheffield, has tended to focus on

the Western art music repertoire, which is itself commonly perceived to be a form of middle-class culture, by virtue of its historically privileged position (Small, 1998). Western classical music continues to benefit from state subsidy and has been the music predominantly featured in English school education for the past century (Pitts, 2000). This raises a number of problems for the study of Music in HE in relation to social inclusion since Western classical music is often viewed as music of the establishment, and a privileged social group, the preserve of a talented elite, and as irrelevant to everyday life and vocationalism. Based on Read *et al.*'s research which suggests that students choose institutions where there are people like themselves, and where they 'belong', non-traditional students may, as a consequence, be more attracted to institutions offering study of music genres, such as pop, which also tends to be located in less prestigious institutions. As a consequence, a coincidence of class divide with musical repertoire is apparent within HE curriculums: in particular, the concentration of Popular Music Studies in post-1992 HEIs perpetuates music genres as a basis for class divide, since many of these HEIs take a much higher proportion of non-traditional students.[4] In this way music in HE, like other disciplines, can be seen to participate in the construction of social order by transmitting values, norms, and ways of conceptualising the world, both through the explicit and the 'hidden' curriculum (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Barfels & Delucchi, 2003; Pitts, 2003). Education in music, as in other subjects, can be understood as channeling students into different positions and ways of life within the socio-economic system (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Quinn, 2004; Willis, 1977); as Quinn puts it: 'channeling working class students into the lower tiers of an increasingly stratified system . . . ' (Quinn, 2004).

This discussion of participation in higher education has so far primarily focused on access to HE but how does socio-economic background impact on the experience of music students once in HE? Research into the influence of socio-economic background is at an early stage, yet there is some evidence that once within HE, students from lower socio-economic classes are more likely to take on paid employment (Hunt *et al.*, 2004), and are more likely to withdraw from HE before completing their programme of study than students from higher social groups (Smith & Naylor, 2001; Quinn, 2004). Information on students' socio-cultural experience is more scarce: for example, there is debate as to whether participation in HE necessarily entails a change in class identity (Brine & Waller, 2004). Also, some evidence suggests that being first generation to HE is a stronger indicator of educational disadvantage than either parental occupation or income, which are the common measures of social class (Knighton, 2002). Research with students of music in a Russell Group university, taking into account their socio-cultural background, may therefore reveal the extent to which students from lower socio-economic groups experience a red-brick[5] university as a middle-class environment, and how this impacts on their experience of other aspects of HE.

Aside from its relationship to socio-economic class, one fairly unique aspect of the study of music in HE is the opportunities it presents for informal teaching and learning, and enhanced social contact between students and staff through musical performance. Alongside the teaching and learning which takes place in lectures, seminars and instrumental tuition, music students in HE commonly participate in department ensembles, orchestras, and music theatre productions, as well as musical activities outside HE. This means that students interact with each other and with staff outside normal teaching

hours, and in ways which supplement the formal curriculum. A potential consequence of this is that students have less time for other kinds of leisure activity or for paid employment, and conversely involvement in extra-curricular musical activities may be constrained for some students by other demands on their time, such as parenting or paid employment. Thus, musical performance has the potential to form an important component in students' sense of 'belonging' within HE. Previous research indicates that performance forms one of the most significant aspects of a music student's self-identity during their undergraduate degree (Burland, 2005). Burland's longitudinal research with music students at a British conservatoire and university music department found that many students in the university context underwent a transition from a self-identity as an aspirant 'performer' to that of an amateur musician (Burland, 2005). Alongside what amounts to a change in career direction for many students, the non-vocational nature of a degree in music means that the transition from the undergraduate degree to a career presents particular challenges for music students in some HEIs.

In addition to these factors, music students may have particular personality characteristics which make them more prone to emotional and psychological problems than students of other subjects. For example, Kemp's study of the personality types of musicians identified a set of core personality traits, plus others that relate to more short-term situations or needs, namely introversion, independence, sensitivity, anxiety and androgyny (Kemp, 1996). A comparison of psychological and physical symptoms and subject-related health problems and attitudes among students of music, medicine, sport and psychology students showed that music students were significantly more depressed and anxious than other students (Spahn *et al.*, 2004). Music students also identified with their subject of study more than the other students, which may mean that any academic problems and achievements are closely tied to students' sense of self-identity and well-being.

Music in HE offers an interesting case study of student experience, and presents unique characteristics, namely the social status of the subject, the unequal participation, particularly by socio-economic class, and the personality characteristics of students. The aim of the research reported here was to examine student experience within a university music department setting, with a view to understanding the particular factors impacting on music students.

The study

What follows is an account of research into student experience in the music department of the University of Sheffield, during the academic year 2003–4. The University of Sheffield is a red-brick, Russell Group university, ranked highly in national and international Higher Education academic and student experience league tables. It has approximately 25000 students and 6000 staff and is located in Britain's fifth largest city. The Department of Music offers single Honours degrees in Music, and in Traditional Musics with Folklore Studies, plus numerous dual Honours degrees, and has approximately 150 undergraduates, 100 postgraduates, and 20 academic and support staff. The departmental buildings are located in a residential area, approximately half a mile from the main University area, and are domestic in character (Fig. 1). Over 80% of entrants to the University of Sheffield music degree programmes in 2002–03 (the case study in this research) came from the top three

Fig. 1 Department of Music main building, University of Sheffield, 2004. (Photograph taken by the author)

socio-economic groups (Fig. 2), compared with a distribution in the general population of 43% (Office for National Statistics, 2004).[6] This is consistent with its status as a high-ranking university, which tend to have a large proportion of students from these groups.

Two different methods were employed to collect data on student experience: the first method was a survey carried out with the undergraduate population in the music department, in order to identify patterns of participation and experience; the second was an interview study with a smaller number of music students.

The survey

A questionnaire was designed to gather primarily quantitative information on student experience, which drew upon previous research (Rhodes & Nevill, 2004) to focus on four main areas of experience:

1. Background: the type and length of experience in music, type of schooling, parental occupations.
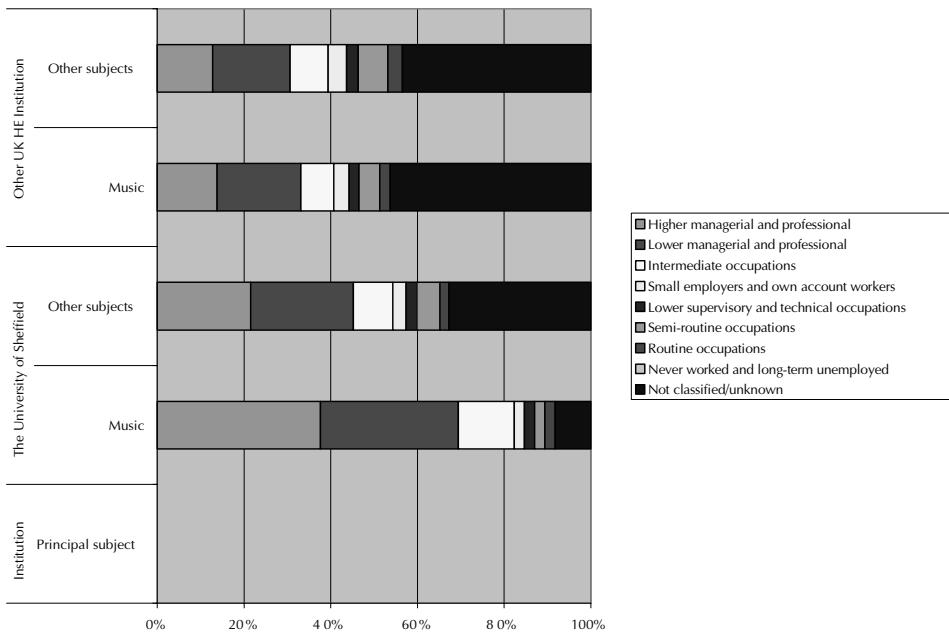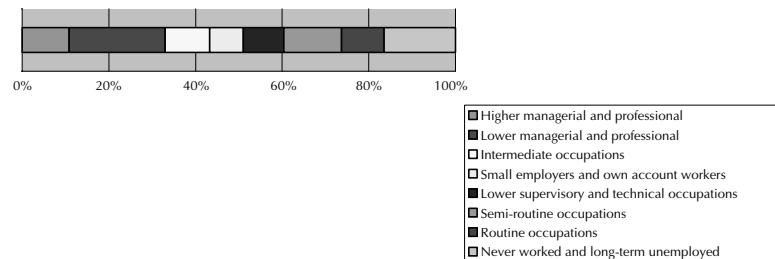
Fig. 2 Participation rates by socio-economic class by institution and subject 2002–03, compared to the distribution in the general UK population (Office for National Statistics, 2004)

2. Access to HE: age of deciding on HE, age of deciding on subject, whether family had experience of music and/or of HE, amount of help and advice on applying, who gave advice, and how HE institutions were selected.
3. Aspects of HE life: funding, attitudes to debt, amount and type of paid employment, problems encountered, making friends, fitting-in.
4. Opinions of department: attitudes to the curriculum, perceptions of staff and students, perceptions of resources, and the value of HE.

Given the sensitivity of some of the information requested, the questionnaire was placed on a secure server on the web. This allowed respondents to complete and submit the survey anonymously online. Since all students have access to university computing facilities this method should not have discriminated against students from different socio-economic groups. Respondents were recruited by sending an email to all undergraduate single and dual-honours music students currently registered at the University of Sheffield followed by a reminder one month later. Forty-one students responded (a 36% response rate), and constituted a representative sample of the undergraduate population of music students by age (between 17 and 25 years of age: median 18 years of age), year group (16 students from Year 1; 13 from Year 2; 12 from Year 3), and gender (12 males; 21 females).

The interview study

The second method of data collection was an interview study which explored individual experiences within the department of music. Informants currently attending the University of Sheffield were recruited by following up those respondents to the online survey who had indicated that they would be willing to participate in an interview, by asking other students who they thought I should speak to, and by identifying students who represented a range of experiences. In order to recruit students who had withdrawn before completion of the degree at the University of Sheffield, I consulted student records and telephoned students who had withdrawn within the last three years to ask them if they would be willing to participate.[7] Ten informants participated in the interview study: two were male, and eight female. Students were aged between 19 and 26 years, and included one overseas student, and one student who was also a parent. Seven of the informants were current students at Sheffield (three from Year 1, two from Year 2 and two from Year 3), and the remaining three had been students at University of Sheffield music department within the previous three years (2001–03 intake), but had withdrawn either during or at the end of Year 1. One of the ten informants was first generation to HE (Martin), although he was not the first of his siblings to attend HE. A further two students could be classed as 'non-traditional' students: one was a parent at the time of attending university (Helen), and another came from a less affluent background (Tina). Analysis of the interview material revealed some differences in the ways the traditional and non-traditional students experienced student life, and the group of students who had withdrawn (Tracey, Diane and Geraldine) also exhibited some differences from these two groups. These differences are drawn out in the analysis below.

I designed the interview schedule to elicit information about each informant's background and his/her experience of life as a student, with a focus upon social and economic background. The interviews with current students took place either in an office within the music department, or at a café over lunch, dependent on the student's preference, and were between 45 minutes and 1 hour in duration. Students who had withdrawn from Sheffield were interviewed by telephone, using an amended version of the interview schedule, which took into account the stage at which the informant had left the university. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the informant, and transcribed for subsequent analysis. Informants were asked if they would supply their mail address so that I could send them a copy of the draft report for their comment.

Analysis

As Hesketh points out, it is difficult to capture the richness of an individual's experience in questionnaire-based studies, yet qualitative studies often fail to link individual experiences to social structures and environments (Hesketh, 1999). Both a questionnaire-based survey and interviews were used in this research to enable the experience of individual students to be contextualised. To this end, results from the two methods of data collection are combined in the analysis below, and are structured by the themes which emerged from the analysis of the interviews.

The analysis of the interview material adopts a grounded theory approach (Foster & Parker, 1995): through close reading of the transcribed texts I identified a series of categories which appeared to describe the world expressed by the material; I then 'saturated' these categories by including all the text under the chosen category headings. These themes then formed the basis for the written analysis, which represents an accommodation of my framing concepts with those of the text. All names in the interviews have been changed to ensure the anonymity of informants.

Findings

Belonging – becoming one of the family

At the time of applying to HE, the University of Sheffield was the preferred choice of HE institution for all the respondents. Most had found out about it through family, friends and prospectuses, and the majority had attended open days or an interview prior to accepting their place. Informants reported being struck by the friendliness of the department when they first attended (also an important criterion in the survey in relation to student selection of Sheffield as the preferred institution), even those who had withdrawn before completing their degree:

> No I mean really liked how all the years intermingled. It was really friendly and stuff but I didn't enjoy it. (Tracey: Year 1, withdrew in first year)

> Well, most of the social events wasn't my kind of thing, but, erm, no it was quite welcoming and everyone was friendly. (Diane: Year 1, withdrew in first year)

Informants attributed part of this friendliness to the physical location of the department in a Victorian house, away from the rest of the University campus, in a residential area of the city. As one student remarked: 'before, I come inside, I don't know this is a music department. I think maybe it is a house [laughs]'. Later in the interview this same student referred to the department as 'home' (Wendy: Yr2 overseas student). Informants also made mention of the 'close-knit' character of the music department in which everyone knows everyone else, and described this as a result of the domestic character of the buildings, the relatively small student and staff numbers, and the need to frequent the buildings in order to practise their instrument(s). These aspects of the department were mentioned by all ten respondents interviewed, but are particularly clearly articulated in Martin's experience of the department:

> I found it, Sheffield's been very, very, very, you know supportive, in our department, cos our department's, our department's kind of different, in to really anything, cos it's so, it's like a little community in itself, and everybody's, erm, you know, kind of close, in a way . . . you develop a relationship with your, you know, your lecturers, and tutors, em, well, obviously the more contact you have with some, you develop more relationships . . . (Martin: Year 3, first generation to HE)

However, the small-scale of the department did not ensure integration for all students: Geraldine (a student who withdrew in her first year at Sheffield) ' . . . felt like a statistic most of the time rather than a person'. The small scale of the department also has the potential perceived disadvantage that difficult relationships are intensified, even for Martin who otherwise described himself as being happy and integrated into departmental life:

> There is, I don't know, maybe there is like a downside to being so, er, kind of small and close, in that, if you do something that maybe that someone else, one of the lecturers doesn't like, then it can kind of hurt you, sometimes, when I spoke to some of the students, especially. Especially when it's one of the senior ones, you know. You know, that's like a drawback. (Martin: Year 3, first generation to HE)

These experiences of the department of music are congruent with previous research into student experience at Sheffield which has shown that at the same time as many students perceive the department to be a friendly, 'cosy' place, they also perceive it to have concomitant disadvantages: namely, the presence of cliques, a lack of privacy, and the fear that 'getting on the wrong side of a member of staff' will be reflected in their academic marks (Pitts, 2003; Burland, 2005).

Belonging – identity and 'difference'

Given that the majority of respondents perceived the department in terms of a 'house' and 'family', being able to 'fit in' takes on increased significance. All of the informants currently studying at Sheffield felt that they fitted in to the department, although many valued feeling different. For example, Yolande's (Year 1) presentation of herself revolved around her unusual instrumental identity, and both Yolande and Graham (Year 1) presented themselves as 'alternative', but neither felt less integrated into the department for it. Polly (Year 3) valued the feeling of being an individual which her identity as a dual honours student gave her and her small group of fellow dual students. However, in each case, these students' self-perceived differences were contained within a context in which they were otherwise integrated.

I expected that students with less family experience of HE might find it more difficult to feel at home in the department, but this was not the case. Martin, who was first generation to HE, stated that:

> I never felt like I didn't fit in, but, no more than usual [laughs]. Erm, no but, I mean, I've not, cos I've met a lot of kind of special people, who, you know, who also have, you know, their problems, or their interesting life. Everyone's kind of in the same boat. I mean even people who come from affluent backgrounds, that's like, strange to me, so, they, everyone's not really fitting in with each other, cos everyone comes from different backgrounds. And that's the beauty of it.

Like the other students cited above, Martin presents individuality and difference as important and valued characteristics of his identity, but within a framework in which he views everyone as 'different' in some way.

Belonging – The role of performance in academic and social integration

Given this apparent acceptance of difference within the department it is noteworthy that two of the withdrawing students felt that they had not 'fitted in'. The main reason for lack of 'fit' given by these students was a dissatisfaction with the curriculum. For example, Geraldine, who withdrew after the first year, talked of 'not feeling included', and identified various causes of this:

> There wasn't as much performance as I thought there was going to be. The place . . . I didn't, because I was in self-catered hall, we weren't very well integrated into Sheffield Uni as a whole, and I don't think that helped. And I was only doing 4 hours a lot of the time. (Year 1, withdrew in first year).

Given that the reference to the lack of performance opportunities occurs here in the context of a discussion of integration into the music department, it appears that musical performance is not just a feature of the curriculum for this student, but a means by which she was able, or not able in this case, to feel included within the department.

The one element which distinguished the three students who withdrew from the degree from those students who completed the degree course was dissatisfaction with the amount and type of performance within the course. For example, Tracey (Year 1) felt that there simply wasn't enough performance within the course and left to start a new degree course at a music conservatoire. Geraldine's account is fairly typical of the three students who left:

> There weren't enough performance opportunities. I don't think I performed once. So my recital, and that's why I went, because that's why I came, because I thought there would be a lot of performance opportunities. And, I mean, even the performance lectures were lectures, about what we were supposed to do, and there was like 'you're rubbish, we're good'. The only time I did performance was in my recital. (Geraldine: Year 1, withdrew in first year)

Reference to performance opportunities was a recurrent feature of respondents' accounts of their integration into the music department. By its nature, musical performance is a social activity, and participating in departmental and student-organised ensembles was an important factor in how integrated students felt within the department. Martin described the way in which his involvement in musical performance enhanced his integration into the department:

> But, with music being such a, a social thing in a way, because you know everyone, more, well most people, like, you know, play an instrument, or perform in some way, and then they get kind of get dragged in because of their instrument. (Martin: Year 3, first generation to HE)

Both Martin and Polly also described the way that instrumental groups often formed the basis for friendship groups in the department.

Belonging – the performer identity

Given the centrality of performance to informants' sense of integration into the department the particular instrument played by an individual was an important factor. For one respondent, playing an unusual instrument for which there was great demand ensured her integration into the department, and she cited it as the explanation for her warm reception at an admissions open day which she attended at Sheffield:

> . . . I just kind of trekked up here to see the music department, and [the secretary] showed me round. Showed me what there was. I think they were quite tired at the time, I came and said 'oh, I'm thinking of coming here' – 'what instrument do you play?' – 'the harp' – 'oh, hi, come round, come round, come and see everything that we've got! Please!' [laughs] (Yolande)

Conversely, playing an instrument such as the flute, of which there are a greater number of available players, made it extremely difficult for some students to take part in department ensembles, and therefore socialise with staff and students in these contexts. For Tina this was an extremely frustrating aspect of her experience at Sheffield:

> I sort of almost resent the fact that I play the flute, because playing the flute is, makes it so hard to get involved in anything, cos there's so many of you, and there's two places in orchestra, and I keep thinking, 'oh, if only I played the bassoon, or something', you know, you could be a lot more involved in things . . . (Tina)

This was especially frustrating for Tina since it was the way in which music allowed particular kinds of relationship with other people which had attracted her to studying music in the first place.

Informants' accounts of their experience positioned performance centrally in relation to their sense of integration and belonging. This means that performance is one area of the curriculum and of relationships within the department that are likely to be particularly sensitive. For one student who withdrew from the course, this was indeed the case: Geraldine found the department 'aggressive', she 'felt out of place the whole time', and had a poor relationship with a lecturer on a performance module. Her description of her experience highlights a lack of respect or regard by staff for this student, and tallies with the remarks made by Martin earlier regarding the potential for 'getting on the wrong side of someone':

> A lot of the time we were made to feel very much like us and them. It was very much like 'you're rubbish and we're good'. That's the impression that a lot of the students got I think . . . I know that a lot of my friends in the department felt the same way . . . Yeah, it was very much us and . . . it was like 'we don't expect you to be good' kind of thing. (Geraldine: Year 1, withdrew in first year)

As a consequence of her experience Geraldine suffered a huge loss in self-confidence, and linked this to a lack of enjoyment in her music-making:

> My Mum has noticed a big difference. Like I went to college and my confidence was right at its peak and its just plummeted last year, and I've just had no self-confidence at all. And yeah, I just don't really want to play at all anymore, anyway. (Geraldine)

This link between the negative experience of teaching and learning in performance, and a lack of feeling regarded and integrated, points to the centrality of performance to informants' conceptions of themselves.

The quality of Geraldine's experience is in complete contrast to Martin's and yet his comments confirm the significance of performance to relationships between staff and students: he articulated the way in which being involved in performance within the department improved his relationships with staff, and had a beneficial impact upon his academic achievement:

> I definitely felt erm, [pause] more, like, more like an equal, you know it wasn't like this, you are the students, we are the teachers, you know, and it's, it's nice to get some of them barriers broken, cos I think it helps you with the learning, you know that you're more comfortable in the environment. And erm, definitely, [pause] especially if you get involved in things, and get more, I think you get, if you get involved with like, erm, events within the department, concerts and things, and, you know choirs and operas, you definitely get, like, more, I think you kind of do get more respect, but, not in a bad way, it's more like, because, people get to know you better. (Martin: Year 3, first generation to HE)

However, the very fact that Martin explains the importance of performance to integration and learning in terms of 'breaking down barriers', and allowing people to get to know each other and respect each others' skills, tallies with Geraldine's experience. Namely, in order to feel that they 'belonged' these students needed to feel they were known and that they were regarded with respect, in both cases through regard for their skills as performers.

Belonging – amateur and non-performer identities

Given the centrality of performance to students' self-confidence and sense of belonging in the departmental context, how do students who don't or can't become involved in performance, yet who remain on the degree course, fit in? Those students who stayed at Sheffield despite dissatisfaction with the performance opportunities available to them, had found ways to off-set many perceived negative effects, mainly by finding or making other opportunities for themselves. For example, Tina (a flautist, and therefore someone who would have fewer opportunities for performance in department ensembles) joined a number of choirs outside the music department. She had also become involved in organisational aspects of department life:

> Um, I guess I, I fit in okay, like, I get involved in a lot of the social committees and things like that, which I think makes you feel a bit more like I fit in . . . Yeah, I'm the music society vice-president, yeah. I enjoy doing those things 'cos they make me feel sort of more included. I don't know academically I don't feel like I fit in that much. (Tina: Year 2)

A second factor which influenced the extent to which students felt included was the amount of time they physically spent in the department and with other music students. This was a particular problem for dual students in their first year in university, who described themselves as feeling 'left out', and unknown by other students and staff because they were not able to spend as much time within the department buildings (Polly: Year 3). Even

students taking the single honours programme did not see the same students in every class and Wendy, the overseas student, said that this had hampered her sense of integration into the department.

Living away from music students, and socialising with students from other departments, was a third factor which prevented some respondents from feeling included. Martin, who later had very positive views of his integration into the department, and who was a very active performer, had experienced difficulties in his first year, saved only by his placement in accommodation near to an extrovert music student:

> I mean, it was hard, it was, in first year, I never really did anything, and well didn't really get involved with much, I mean I did the operas and things, but, I mean for the beginning, I lived in Riverdale flats, and erm, I lived opposite [student X nickname], he was in the room opposite, and [student Y] was in, erm, was in like a flat next door, the flat, and erm, I didn't go to any of the socials, didn't go to any of the parties, because I . . . was spending a lot of time and my, you know, energy and resources, by, you know, being there for [friend Z], and trying to help her, and then, so I kind of missed out on a lot of things. But, still felt, it was easier for me to like, whenever I did come out to do department stuff, I always felt it was easy for me to kind of fit in with them. Er, I think partly because, cos I saw [student X] a lot, cos he lived opposite me . . . it was like a gateway for me to get in that way. You know, if, if [student X] hadn't lived opposite me, it might have been harder for me. (Martin: Year 3, first generation to HE)

Martin's experience in his first year suggests that involvement in performance activities alone may not be enough to integrate students into the department if other factors conspire against it. Martin was fortunate in his placement in accommodation which afforded socialisation with other music students, but Diane, who eventually withdrew from the course, found herself socialising with students who weren't from the music department which she said added to her sense of isolation. Student social activities also offer the opportunity for students to get to know each other outside of a performance or departmental context, but some respondents described these as 'not their thing', often because they revolved around alcohol (Yolande and Wendy), or because family commitments made attendance at such events difficult (Helen: Year 3, parent).

Experience of the curriculum

Views of the course content and coverage varied widely among students according to their individual preferences, with some, such as Geraldine, finding the first year too focused on twentieth century repertoire, and Diane finding it too 'philosophical'. In contrast, some of the current students, notably two of the non-traditional students, found it too biased towards the classical repertoire, and felt resentful of the course structure, which restricted their choice of modules (Tina and Martin). Tina remarked that:

> I think the course isn't quite what I expected, cause it's a little too classical, for me really. . . . it was discussed on the open day, they gave you like a list of all the module that were available, and it looked like you had a completely free choice, and didn't explain that certain ones were compulsory, which, you know, I thought it was, you had a little bit more choice in it than you did. (Tina: Year 2)

Table 1 *Do you think the course is biased towards certain repertoires, subjects or methods?'*

Theme	Comment
Traditional focus	'First year modules concentrate on traditional music subjects'; 'Older, 'safer' repertoire yet some specialisation is appreciated'
Over-representation of some non-traditional subjects	'Messiaen, asian ethnomusicology (not many other world musics)'; 'An awful lot of ethnomusicology and analytical'
Classical canon	'Definitely biased towards the western classical tradition'; 'Classically trained musicians and the study of classical music'; 'Very geared towards opera but not much for early music 'fans''
Stylistic emphasis on values traditional to Western concert music	'Composition is biased towards avant-garde'

For these students, certain types of music (namely, popular and film music) were noticeably absent from the course, and this had a detrimental effect on their enjoyment and motivation during the degree. Those students who were interested in classical music thought the course was evenly balanced in its coverage of genres and approaches, which indicates the way in which the curriculum caters for students with this particular interest.

Comments from the survey confirm this and suggest that the degree programmes at Sheffield are seen by students as being fairly traditional, with an emphasis on the Western canon and approaches to it. Where non-canonic content is mentioned as being present, it is seen as relatively over-represented in relation to other non-canonic topics (Table 1). Asked to cite the three things which would make the music degree courses more relevant to them, students identified a range of improvements, summarised in Table 2. The most commonly mentioned was the type and range of modules: students suggested introducing new modules on popular and contemporary culture, and modules with a more vocational bent (e.g. teaching). Other suggested changes to the course included the degree of individual choice in shaping the degree programme, improved instrumental tuition and performance opportunities, more small-group support of modules (especially when difficulties were encountered), and changes to the physical environment and facilities to improve the social and working conditions. The numbers of informants are too small to draw firm conclusions regarding group differences, but it is significant that it was the two students from less affluent backgrounds who expressed more dissatisfaction with the curriculum, suggesting an association between the classical emphasis of the Music degree and the values and tastes of traditional students.

Financial experience

A striking feature of respondents' accounts was the way that they focused upon the financial background of other people as a potentially differentiating factor rather than cultural

Table 2 *What three things would make the course more relevant to you?*

Theme	Comment
Inclusion of vocationally specific/wider range of modules (35)	'Useful modules such as film music or music theatre'
	'More contemporary music'
	'Perhaps more analysis of popular music and jazz'
	'Less emphasis on the western classical tradition'
	'More diverse module choice'
	'More courses on standard repertoire/big works'
	'More career based teaching / modules'
Improved instrumental tuition (24)	'More instrumental lessons'
	'Extra instrumental lessons on second instruments'
	'More high qualified instrumental tutor'
	'Better organisation/communication for instrumental tuition'
Fewer module restrictions (12)	'Freedom to choose any modules (no compulsory modules)'
	'More choice in first year'
Performance opportunities (12)	'More performance opportunities'
	'More opportunity for chamber music coaching'
	'More opportunity for compositions to be played'
Changes to assessment (10)	'More combination of skills in lectures e.g. essays and performance'
	'Better progression to 3rd year recital'
	'Weekly tasks often prove a useful way of measuring progress but should not be compulsory'
	'Not having the same deadline for all coursework from all the different modules'
	'More performance based; Being a member of University ensembles should count towards the degree'
More small group teaching to support modules (10)	'Seminars to help with lectures/ modules'
	'More one to one contact time with tutors'
Change level of Harmony modules (9)	'More basic grounding in harmony'
	'More lessons in music theory in 1st yr for anyone who's behind'
Performance facilities (8)	'More practice space esp. for popular music activities'
	'Better facilities in the practice room'
	'A better performance venue'
Physical environment (4)	'A Pepsi Machine'
	'Smoking Area INDOORS!'
	'Making the common room a study area'
Library facilities (2)	'Bigger library'
Class size (1)	'For groups not to be split for teaching'
Needs of Duals (1)	'More consideration of dual honours students'

background: respondents mentioned very few cultural differences between themselves and lecturers or other students. When asked whether they thought staff were similar to themselves, informants generally mentioned age as the only distinguishing factor, plus an impression that 'possibly some of them are from, not necessarily from more well-off backgrounds, but, I don't know, they've all possibly been to slightly better schools than mine, than the local comprehensive' (Yolande). Social class was not explicitly referred to as a factor influencing student experience: when asked whether they thought class influenced their experience as a student, all respondents talked about financial background and its impact on learning rather than about class culture. For example, Wendy had noticed that a fellow student had difficulty paying for instrumental lessons because his parents were not supportive of his musical interests, and Polly mentioned access to resources as something which differentiated students, in particular, being able to buy books rather than rely on the library.

The dominant discourse in respondent's accounts was that the socio-economic background of students is irrelevant, one stating, for instance: 'I don't think when you're at uni it really matters that much. I don't really notice any, erm, class differences or anything' (Diane). One reason why socio-economic background was not explicitly referred to as an important factor in student experience may be because the majority of students in the music department at Sheffield are from very similar socio-economic backgrounds. The information gathered on student background and the route taken to study music at Sheffield suggests that students in this sample fit the description of the 'traditional' student: most were not the first generation from their family to go to HE (all but one of the students in the survey have at least one parent with a degree); all applied to HE while in full-time education, and decided to apply for University and for Music at ages consistent with the main qualifications for the entrance criteria.[8] Sheffield was the first choice destination for all but two students.[9] All students had experienced substantial family support in pursuing music to HE level, with many continuing to receive financial support while at university. For example, the majority of students received privately paid-for instrumental tuition (66%). This represents a considerable investment of time and money, given that the majority play at least 2 instruments up to approximately ABRSM Grade V or above (93%).

Another indication of the degree of homogeneity of students' financial backgrounds is the means-tested fees system: 68% of students surveyed have their fees paid by their parent/guardian, with 12% making a partial contribution, and 20% making no contribution at all. In addition, two students receive hardship loans, and two other students receive social security benefits. All students are eligible for the full student loan, and of these most (78%) had taken out the full amount, 7% had taken out less than the full amount, and 15% had not taken out a loan at all. Other than parental contributions, the student loan and other benefits, many students fund themselves by taking paid employment: two thirds of students have a job during vacation periods, and two thirds work during term-time (not necessarily the same students in both cases). These data suggest that the majority of students in the music department come from similar socio-economic backgrounds.

What about the experience of those (few) students whose origins differ from this norm? Martin, the only student interviewed who was first generation to attend HE, and who came from a less affluent background, also denied that the social origins of an individual were

an issue at university. However, a discourse of HE as a fresh start and as an opportunity to leave behind one's past was evident in his interview:

> The fact that, I mean, it, the good thing is, that no-one, no-one judges anyone else, because, for some reason, it's you know, everyone just accepts the fact. And, you know, you, no-one forces anything, you know, you don't have to, no-one says 'oh, tell me, like, what your background is' or whatever, I mean, it's just like more easy going. It's like, you know, it's like starting afresh, it's like a different life here, like, from home, you can kind of cut off, and, you know, you've got, your uni life is, your uni life. (Martin: Year 3, first generation to HE)

Martin's response to this issue suggests that he sees socio-economic difference as a potential way in which people might be evaluated, but one which he himself has not experienced. Instead, his remarks point to the role of HE in providing an opportunity for a new identity, specific to HE and separate from that of one's background. It is noteworthy that Martin is the only respondent who spoke of HE as a chance to leave a past life behind and to start afresh. This may reflect the personal difficulties he was experiencing at that point in his life, but is also a more generic feature of experience for those students who come to HE from a background in which they are the first-generation to attend HE, and therefore one in which background and HE life might be assumed to differ the most (Quinn, 2004).

From the interview data then, social origins appear not to influence individual student's experience of belonging within the department. However, respondents' beliefs that socio-economic background does not impact on their experience are contradicted to some extent by data gathered in the survey. Analysis of the survey data reveals differences between the attitudes and behaviours of students from different socio-economic backgrounds in relation to paid employment. The most significant finding is an association between socio-economic background, paid employment during term-time and academic achievement. Socio-economic background was measured using information on the means-tested parental contribution to students' living costs and tuition fees. A chi-square analysis of financial support towards living costs from parents and paid employment during term-time reveals a significant association (chi-square $= 6.54$, $p = 0.01$): more of those students who do not receive parental contributions to living costs work during term-time, than those students whose parents contribute towards the students' costs (Table 3).

Table 3 *Cross-tabulation of parental contribution by term-time employment*

		Term-time employment		
		Yes	No	Total
Parental contribution	Yes	8	19	27
	No	10	4	14
	Total	18	23	41

A univariate ANOVA with number of hours worked as the dependent variable, and fee payment (paid in full by parent, partial fees paid by parent, not paid by parent) as the independent variable reveals a significant effect ($F_{2,37} = 3.88$, $p = .03$).[10] Post-hoc tests

reveal that students whose parents pay none of the tuition costs work significantly longer hours during term-time than those whose parents pay the full tuition costs (p = 0.03). These statistical analyses suggest that students from less affluent backgrounds are more likely to take on term-time employment, and to work longer hours than students from more affluent backgrounds.

These findings are confirmed by the experiences of students interviewed. All the informants had some type of paid employment, either during the vacation, term-time or both. The two students who worked the most during term-time were two students from less affluent backgrounds. Their reasons for working long hours were not solely due to the amount of money they needed relative to other students, but also appeared to be a product of greater debt aversion: both Martin and Tina stated that they were working now to avoid accumulating greater debt when they finished University. Tina mentioned that working in paid employment now might have other benefits, but financial necessity was just as much of a motivation as future employment:

> It's something you can write on your CV isn't it? It gives you some more experience, and perhaps makes you a little bit more employable, but then working in an off-licence isn't really what I want to do with my life, but, if it's an experience that'll help me do something that I do want to do, then, it's a good thing. But, if I didn't need the money, I probably wouldn't do it, cause I don't like it that much, you know [laughs]. (Tina: Year 2)

Out of all the students interviewed, Martin was least confident of finding employment after graduation, and more worried by his level of debt:

> . . . if you're like a medic, or an architect or something, you're like, not only doing a degree, you're training for your job, you know you're gonna get straight into a job at the end, but, if you do like an arts degree like music, and you finish your degree, and you're basically in like, the same situation you were when you were sixteen. With ten grand, twelve grand of debt on top of it. (Martin: Year 3, first generation to HE)

In addition, Martin had an extra year of student loan to pay back due to having started at a different university before transferring to Sheffield, and although he had worked before he started at Sheffield, he had been unable to save any money because he had been supporting himself. Wendy's attitude to debt was very different from that of her peers. She was very worried about the cost of HE due to her family circumstances, but was determined that she would make the most of her time in Sheffield by not taking on paid employment. She identified this as a cultural difference arising from her Chinese ethnicity and the negative views of debt within that culture.

Both Martin and Tina believed that working in term-time adversely affected their academic performance. Their comments illustrate their belief that assessment practices within the department were not designed with student working patterns in mind. Tina found the timing of assessments difficult, since they were scheduled to coincide with the end of vacations when she was usually busiest in her paid job. Martin found that he was able to perform well in modules which included a variety of assessments at a number of different points throughout the semester. In particular, the emphasis on private study rather than contact time, and assessments requiring one larger piece of coursework at the end of

the semester, were problematic for him because they did not encourage a steady flow of academic work; he recounted his experience of staying awake for 55 hours consecutively in order to write an assessment which he had not been able to start earlier due to employment pressures (significantly more than the average 5.2 hours per week in paid employment of students in this survey).

Although Martin's experience seems to be an extreme case in the context of this student sample, statistical analysis of the survey data on working patterns and academic achievement reveals evidence for a detrimental association between term-time employment and academic performance. The academic consequences of financial differences for students were examined by comparing the marks of students who worked during term-time with those who did not. This was calculated using only those students who supplied their name ($N = 19$). On average, students who took paid work during term-time had lower marks ($M = 60\%$) than those who did not work ($M = 63\%$). Those who took the maximum student loan had lower marks (61%) than those who took less than the full amount (64%), and both had lower marks than those who had taken no loan at all (66%).

These findings are congruent with previous research which has shown that term-time employment is associated with lower academic achievement, and that students from lower socio-economic groups are more likely to take on paid employment, potentially lowering their academic achievement (Hunt *et al.*, 2004).[11] Lim found that it was not the number of hours in paid employment that affected the grades, but whether or not a student had a job, which appears to be the case with the students in this study as well (Lim, 2004).

One new finding to emerge from this analysis is that those with a job related to music had higher marks (62%) than those with a less related job (59%). Seven of the 23 students who worked during term-time had music-related jobs, such as instrumental teaching and gigging, while the remainder had a variety of jobs including marketing or sales, and bar work. It appears that students who are able to use their musical skills to gain paid employment suffer less disadvantage to their academic studies. From this survey alone it is impossible to say whether the association between music-related work and academic achievement is causal or correlational, nor why this may be, but this is something that future research could investigate in more depth.

Valuing Higher Education

All informants valued HE – even those who had withdrawn from Sheffield without having completed their degree. Geraldine spoke of her brother's very positive experience at university in contrast to her own disappointing experience and commented: 'I think if you get the right university and the right course then it would be fantastic'. Students' confidence regarding whether they would pass their degree was high, on average ($M = 7$, on a scale of 1 to 10), but they were only moderately confident about obtaining related employment ($M = 5$). Nonetheless, even if the subject of the degree was not vocational, the general consensus was that having a degree was a route to better job prospects:

> And, if you're doing something that you know, you really enjoy and you're interested
> in, even though, you know, you're not training to do a job, or whatever, you know, at
> the end of the day a degree is a degree, and, you can always, you always be in a better

position when you have a degree, no matter what it's in, cos my brother did a degree in drama, and now he's, you know, er, he's an officer in the RAF, with a drama degree. (Martin: Year 3, first generation to HE)

Martin's claim here that 'you're always in a better position when you have a degree' contradicts a view he expressed earlier in his interview that after the degree he would be back in the same position as at sixteen but with more debt. It seems that from the perspective of finance this student views HE as unhelpful, but from the perspective of job prospects a degree is beneficial (regardless of the subject). Or perhaps he is simply more able to see the benefits of HE in his brother's case than in his own.

Interestingly, the only respondents to express the idea that HE is a way of 'bettering' oneself were two of the 'non-traditional' students (Helen: Yr 3, parent; and Martin, Yr 3, first generation to HE). This also fits with the discourse of leaving behind one's past, which potentially includes one's socio-economic background. Thus, Martin's remarks on the personal benefits of HE reflect a view in which HE is an opportunity for self-discovery and development, not articulated by other students:

I don't agree with like staying at home, or whatever, while you're doing your degree, erm, definitely, and cos there's a chance for you to, kind of, to find yourself, really, and you know, you develop so much as a person whilst at university, so kind of who you are, when you kind of find out what you're made of, in a way. (Martin)

Discussion

The aim of the interview study was to explore students' experience of music in a British University. Analysis of statistical data on entrants to the music department, and results from a survey and interview study indicate that the student population at Sheffield is, with a few exceptions, white, middle class, straight from school/college and from families with a history of participation in HE. In this respect the department of music at the University of Sheffield is fairly typical of music departments in the Russell Group of universities. A number of themes emerged from the analysis of the interview data, which were further supported by data gathered from the survey.

The main theme to emerge was one of 'belonging', which was central to students' discourse regarding their experience. Musical performance activities within the department turned out to be central to informants' expression and explanation of their degree of belonging within the department of music. Often the degree to which informants felt included was described by them in terms of the opportunities they had to take part in Department ensembles, which was determined, in turn, by the instrument the individual played, and a circular process in which 'being known' within the department led to more opportunities and greater involvement. In addition, students believed that friendship groups were often based upon instrumental identities, and the more time they spent in the department buildings (rehearsing and practising), the more integrated they would feel. Informants explained this as 'feeling closer' both to other students and to staff, and claimed that it allowed 'barriers' to be 'broken down'. Thus, performance activities were seen as synonymous with social integration, which in turn had benefits for students' subjective academic and emotional well-being. Conversely, problems with aspects of

performance within the degree were extremely damaging to some students' self-perceptions of integration and belonging. The reason for this seems to be the centrality of the performer identity to students, particularly at early stages of the course. Burland has shown how students at Sheffield music department undergo a transition from a self-conception as 'performer' to that of an 'amateur' musician (Burland, 2005),[12] and some of the difficulties expressed by students in this study appear to be related to this transition: many music students arrive in the music department with a keen interest in pursuing performance as a career, yet over the duration of the degree course come to see this as an unrealistic or undesirable expectation.

The second issue to arise from the survey is the influence of students' perceptions of themselves in relation to HE. In addition, the majority of students agreed with the characterisation of the Department as a middle class institution, which is fairly traditional in its valorisation of Western art music. This was unproblematic for most students, who identified themselves with this image. However, a minority of students felt that they did not 'fit-in' to the Music department, and some identified themselves as different from other students and staff.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the homogeneity of the student population at the University of Sheffield music department, social class was hardly ever spontaneously mentioned by students. My direct questioning of participants regarding how similar they felt to staff and other students, and how their background had affected their experience, often elicited the rebuttal that this was irrelevant to their own experience rather than revealing any direct impact of socio-economic background on teaching and learning. One way to interpret this would be to conclude that social background is simply irrelevant for students within the music department at Sheffield: in other words, it may be that cultural difference is irrelevant within the departmental context because the students have similar socio-economic origins. However, responses to more indirect questions (relating to perceptions of the department, and relationships within it) highlighted the existence of cultural differences around access to resources, and social integration; social class appears to be an 'invisible norm' rather than something which exerts no influence. A discourse of HE as a 'fresh start', and as a way of 'bettering oneself', were used solely by non-traditional students, and suggest that these ways of conceiving HE may be particular to this group of students. It suggests that for non-traditional students HE offers an escape from limitations of the home culture and is, perhaps, seen as aspirational; this theme did not feature in the discourse of students from more traditional backgrounds, perhaps because HE culture is not as different from their home culture.

Socio-economic class was reconceived as financial inequality by most informants. Indeed, socio-economic background was found to influence whether students had term-time employment, the number of hours spent in employment, and both actual and self-perceived decrements in academic achievement. Whereas many students work during vacation periods, regardless of their background, those students whose parents do not contribute towards the student's living costs are far more likely to have a job during term-time than those who receive parental contributions towards their living costs; those students whose parents are exempt from paying the tuition fee also work significantly longer hours. Hunt *et al*. also found that students from lower socio-economic groups were more likely to have term-time employment (Hunt *et al.*, 2004), and speculate that this may be because

students from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to receive financial support from parents, and/or because they are more debt-averse. The results of this survey provide evidence that students take term-time employment when parents don't make financial contributions to tuition and/or maintenance costs.

Working during term-time is, in turn, associated with lower academic achievement: marks of students in term-time employment are 3% lower on average than the marks of other students, which is exactly in line with previous research (Hutchings, 2003; Hunt *et al.*, 2004). This three percentage point difference seems small, yet for some students it could mean the difference between obtaining an upper or lower second class degree, which, it has been estimated confers a 4–5% earnings advantage (Naylor *et al.*, 2000). In sum, perceived and actual financial disadvantage is associated with lower academic achievement, and it appears that a major contributing factor to this is term-time employment. Thus, although social class is not a category which students explicitly make use of in their accounts of experience in HE, it can be seen to exert an influence upon the attitudes and achievement of students at Sheffield. Students did not conceive of themselves or others in terms of class identities: instead, the performer identity and transition to other types of identity dominated students' discourse.

In some respects then, the implications for the departmental context are limited. However, this research highlights the broader structural inequalities of HE in which there is a tendency for students from the higher socio-economic classes to attend certain HEIs (such as Russell Group Universities) which also tend to have curriculums focused on Western art music, thereby reinforcing the association of art music with middle class culture, and maintaining existing social divisions.

Particular limitations of this study are the self-selecting character of the sample, and the exploratory character of the research, which does not investigate the values transmitted through the study of music in HE. Future research could investigate this in more depth using ethnographic methods, and analyses of the curriculum, as some other researchers have already done in other contexts (Kingsbury, 1988; Nettl, 1995; Barfels & Delucchi, 2003). In addition, future work could use the conclusions drawn here to implement changes to teaching and learning. In particular, it suggests that careful thought should be given to the provision of performance opportunities, since this was the most significant factor influencing students' social integration for the informants in the interview study. On a local level this research has three main implications. Firstly, it suggests the need to re-evaluate assessment practices in the light of evidence that some students are disadvantaged by the necessity for term-time employment. Secondly, the research highlights the importance of personal relationships between staff and students and the value given by students to being known individually to teaching staff. And thirdly, it raises the question of what a music curriculum at HE ought to look like: in a context of poor social inclusion should HE teachers be re-evaluating music curriculums to avoid perpetuating a social divide stratified by a confluence of socio-economic class, institutional status and music genre?

Underlying this research is a fundamental assumption that better understanding of student experience and integration into HE at the departmental level will lead to improvements in teaching and learning. It also highlights the extent to which teaching and learning practices and contexts are embedded in and maintain broader social inequalities. Comparative studies of student experience in other departmental contexts would be a

powerful way to create a more complete picture of the impact of individual and group differences on student experience.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   Measured by 'Initial Entry Rate' to a one year full-time HE programme.
2   Data from the Higher Statistics Agency reveal inequalities of socio-economic class by institution and by subject. Data from admissions in 2003 show that students from 'poor backgrounds' have less chance of getting a degree place than those from 'more prosperous' backgrounds when applying for medicine and some other subjects (Goddard, 2004). Almost 75% of students obtaining a place on a medical course came from the top three social classes; in languages, this figure was more than 66%. In Law success in obtaining a place was equal across background, while in the physical sciences poorer students stood a better chance of obtaining a place.
3   The Russell Group is an association of 19 research-led UK Universities, formed in 1994.
4   Many of the PMS programmes at post-1992 HEIs (former polytechnics) also emphasise vocationalism, which has its own dangers: Cloonan argues that it is important to stand apart from and critique industry rather than simply to reflect its practices (Cloonan, 2005). This vocational bent also affirms the emphasis on vocationalism in lower socio-economic groups' valuing of HE.
5   The 'red-brick' universities are civic universities established in the nineteenth century.
6   Where data on social class are cited one of two classification systems is used (see Appendix 1). From 1998–99 to 2001–02, data on socio-economic classification of entrants to Higher education used a National Statistics classifications based on occupation (SC, formerly Registrar General's Social Class). Data for 2002–03 use the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC), which describes different forms of employment relations.
7   A total of 11 students were recorded as having withdrawn, which represents a withdrawal rate of approximately 7% for the 2001–03 intakes.
8   The average age of deciding whether to aim for HE and whether to study music at HE are similar, and correspond to the years of starting GCSEs and A Levels respectively (HE: M = 13.6, SD = 3.1; music at HE: M = 15.9, SD = 3.1). The age at which students decided to aim for a place in music at HE was slightly higher for those without a friend or relative in music (M = 16.3, SD = 3.7) than for those with such a role model (M = 15.6, SD = 2.7), but not statistically significant.
9   Respondents were asked to name the three most important criteria they used to choose their HE institution. Categories were extracted from the responses and these were assigned a number according to whether named first, second or third. Summed weights revealed that University league tables were the most important factor, followed by course content and other factors relating to the location of the university in relation to the student's home.
10 One student was excluded from this analysis since she was an overseas student and therefore her parents were not assessed for their ability to pay the fees.

11   A questionnaire survey of undergraduate students at Northumbria University found no impact of term-time work on attainment in Year 1, but an impact in all subsequent years (Hunt *et al.*, 2004). The authors speculate that this could be due to student reliance on existing knowledge in the first year of study.

12   Burland concludes that this is due to a perceived lack of performance opportunities, a lack of an intense and personal relationship with their instrumental teacher, and a lack of support from the institution. These are expressed negatively since Burland's questions explore why students have *not* developed a professional performing identity, rather than why they *have* developed other skills.

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Appendix 1 Measures of social class

Social Class (SC, formerly Registrar General's Social Class) classified people into five categories (one subdivided), which attempted to bring together people with equivalent

Table 4 *Social Class (The National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification User Manual, 2004)*

	Social class
I	Professional, etc occupations
II	Managerial and technical occupations
IIIN	Skilled occupations – non-manual
IIIM	Skilled occupations – manual
IV	Partly skilled occupations
V	Unskilled occupations

Table 5 *National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) (The National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification User Manual, 2004)*

	Socio-economic classification
1	Higher managerial and professional occupations
2	Lower managerial and professional occupations
3	Intermediate occupations
4	Small employers and own account workers
5	Lower supervisory and technical occupations
6	Semi-routine occupations
7	Routine occupations
8	Never worked and long-term unemployed
	Not classified/unknown

levels of occupational skill (Table 4). Socio-Economic Group (SEG) brought together people with similar social and economic status into 17 groups. Data for 2002/03 uses the new National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC). This uses eight categories, plus a category of 'unclassified/unknown') (Table 5). Unlike the previous measure of Social Class, the NS-SEC does not refer to skill because the classification is not skill-based. Instead, the classification describes different forms of employment relations. This takes into account sources of income, economic security and prospects of economic advancement, and the location in systems of authority and control at work.