Musical Senses Round Table Report

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# I. Blind and Visually Impaired (VI) Students

## Key Questions Raised

• Where can educators access expertise in teaching Braille and music to VI students?  
• How can we map and clarify roles in VI music education?  
• How do we ensure meaningful access to group music-making (choirs, bands, etc.)?  
• How do we prepare young VI people for music qualifications and employment?  
• How do we promote both music literacy and aural skills?

## Learning Pathways and Perspectives

• Bobby – Progressed from reading notation to learning by ear due to efficiency. Found greater musical depth in aural learning but faced barriers in professional settings due to lack of sight-reading.  
• Daisy – No specialist support through early music education. Adapted with large print and ear training. Favors improvisation and teaching by ear.  
• Kate – Strong advocate for Braille music. Learned entirely by ear initially but later used Braille for higher-level study and teaching.

## Systemic Challenges

• Expectation that students adapt to mainstream systems, rather than systems adapting to them.  
• Delayed introduction to appropriate music resources (Braille, large print, adaptive tech).  
• Inadequate early music literacy exposure hinders access to formal qualifications later.

## Practical Tools and Resources

• Software & Tools: Musescore (Braille output), Sibelius (accessibility options), Lime Aloud, Duxbury, Sao Mai Braille.  
• Support Organisations: The Amber Trust, Gardner’s Trust, VICTA, Sound Without Sight.  
• Recommendations:  
 o Begin Braille music literacy early.  
 o Share adapted resources centrally.  
 o Invest in both aural and music literacy skills.  
 o Provide flexible exam access arrangements.  
 o Develop peer and professional shadowing opportunities.

## Advice to Educators and Music Hubs

• Research technology before procurement.  
• Refer to the Curriculum Framework for VI Learners.  
• Prioritise early preparation of materials.  
• Foster incidental exposure to musical elements.  
• Ensure long-term project involvement, not just short-term interventions.  
• Encourage cross-sector collaboration, including with QTVIs and music teachers.

## Future Actions

• Create a national directory of VI-specialist music educators.  
• Establish national music/Braille boot camps and holiday schemes.  
• Promote social inclusion through accessible ensemble and community group participation.  
• Encourage greater investment in training and paid shadowing opportunities.

# II. Deaf and Hard of Hearing (HoH) Students

## Key Discussion Themes

• Awareness & Training: Widespread lack of training for mainstream educators about deafness and related complex needs.  
• Access: EHCPs do not always include music; need stronger inclusion of 1-2-1 provision and music therapy.  
• Communication: Importance of involving Teachers of the Deaf and ensuring teachers know how to reach them.  
• Representation: Role models (Deaf musicians) are critical for student motivation and identity development.

## Classroom & Pedagogical Considerations

• Need for visual support and rhythm/pulse-based activities.  
• Use of multiple signing systems, tailored to the child’s preferences.  
• Inclusive shows must balance broad accessibility with deep inclusivity.  
• Importance of consistent, long-term musical engagement (not one-off sessions).

## Technology and Creativity

• Greater use of technology (e.g. vibrations, visualizers, software) can support access.  
• Need to better integrate creativity and student expression in pedagogy.  
• Diverse qualification routes (e.g. RSLAwards) provide inclusive alternatives to traditional notation-heavy pathways.

## Challenges in Early Years and Beyond

• Poor EYFS music access for Deaf/HoH children due to lack of specialist knowledge.  
• Limited pathways to progressive musicianship without formal notation.  
• Underrepresentation in the professional music world due to access and cost barriers (e.g. BSL training).

## Key Quotes & Reflections

• “Once you have rhythm and pulse, you can do anything.”  
• “Without 1-2-1 tuition, it makes musical learning very challenging.”  
• “Knowing the student well is everything.”

# III. Cross-Cutting Themes

## Equity vs. Equality

• Environments must adapt to meet each student’s specific needs rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all model.

## Mental Health and Social Inclusion

• Both VI and Deaf/HoH students face increased mental health risks due to exclusion and invisibility.  
• Music serves as a powerful tool for community integration and emotional expression.

## Professional Development

• Shadowing and lived experience are more impactful than generic training.  
• Barriers to upskilling (e.g., BSL training costs) hinder workforce diversity and inclusivity.

## Systemic Recommendations

• Invest in structured, funded pathways for teacher training and CPD.  
• Establish formal access arrangements for music across the curriculum.  
• Encourage ensemble inclusivity through minor adaptations (e.g. conductor visibility, tactile cues).

# Additional Insights and Recommendations

• Braille music is one way to access and process knowledge to produce music. But aural music skills are also hugely important to learning, particularly within folk traditions.  
• Written notation remains important for Deaf/HoH musicians. The concept of ‘sound before symbol’ needs rethinking for these learners.  
• Music tech and production tools provide valuable creative outlets for HoH and VI learners, enabling independent music creation.  
• Provision must be locally responsive yet connected to a national network. A major barrier is lack of awareness and communication pathways among parents, educators, and specialists.  
• Sustained funding is essential; reliance on short-term projects limits long-term development.  
• Capturing young people’s perspectives helps ensure provision is relevant and meaningful.  
• Intersectionality in learners with complex or multi-sensory needs must be further explored.  
• Support staff (interpreters, access workers) are critical, and career pathways into these roles must be strengthened.  
• Clarification needed between Makaton and BSL usage, and increased workforce training on this distinction.  
• Define what makes a truly ‘inclusive’ event and work toward implementing those standards.  
• Music supports social cohesion—ideas like summer camps, accessible ensembles, and residentials are powerful for youth expression and connection.

# Conclusion

Inclusive music education for Blind/VI and Deaf/HoH students requires early, flexible, and person-centred approaches. Collaboration between educators, specialists, and families is vital. Investing in tools, training, and long-term access can unlock not only musical potential but also emotional, cognitive, and social development.  
Music is not just education—it is empowerment.