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Routes to Higher Popular Music Education: Curricular Alignment, Autodidacticism, and Access

**Abstract:**

NB. This paper is by Zack Moir and Bryden Stillie (Music)

The presence of popular music in schools, colleges and universities has grown considerably in recent decades, in many parts of the world. While the authors are encouraged by the increase in popular music in formal music education, our roles as HE popular music educators, coupled with our experience as instrumental tutors in schools, allowed us to witness, first-hand, the lack of alignment between secondary level music curricula and undergraduate courses in (popular) music. This lack of alignment often results in a situation where school pupils are essentially obliged to complete additional qualifications in music theory and instrumental/vocal studies, and involve themselves in extra-curricular musical activities that take place in their leisure time, in order to prepare for university applications and auditions, etc.

Although we firmly believe that the inclusion of popular music in formal education should be encouraged, the current situation in Scottish schools is that popular music is typically treated simply as 'content' in otherwise traditional music courses, leading to something of a square peg in a round hole situation and dissatisfaction amongst pupils interested in pursuing this area of study in higher education. Thus, the increased presence of popular music in formal education is no guarantee of meaningful experiences and appropriate popular music pedagogy. The authors believe that more research is required to fully understand links between popular music practices, autodidacticism, secondary music curricula, and higher popular music education (HPME) if we, as music educators, are to develop innovative, exciting and relevant educational experiences for students of popular music.

The aim of this research is to increase our knowledge of the pre-university educational experiences of undergraduate popular music students and their relevance to undergraduate HPME. In gaining such an understanding we will be in a position to impact on music education by (a) developing our institutional approach to course design and popular music pedagogy, and (b) working in partnership with government to develop suitable curricula for popular music in secondary education.

This presentation will report on a recent research project which probed the experiences of 14 first year undergraduate music students studying in Scotland and England (by way of individual semi-structured interviews), with particular regard to their secondary music education as a route to, and preparation for, undertaking a music degree. Findings pertain to pathways to tertiary education, experiences of formal music education in school, extra/co-curricular musical activity, autodidactic practices, musicianship and professional competencies.

