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Instrumental Music Services

Results from the IMS Survey 2025

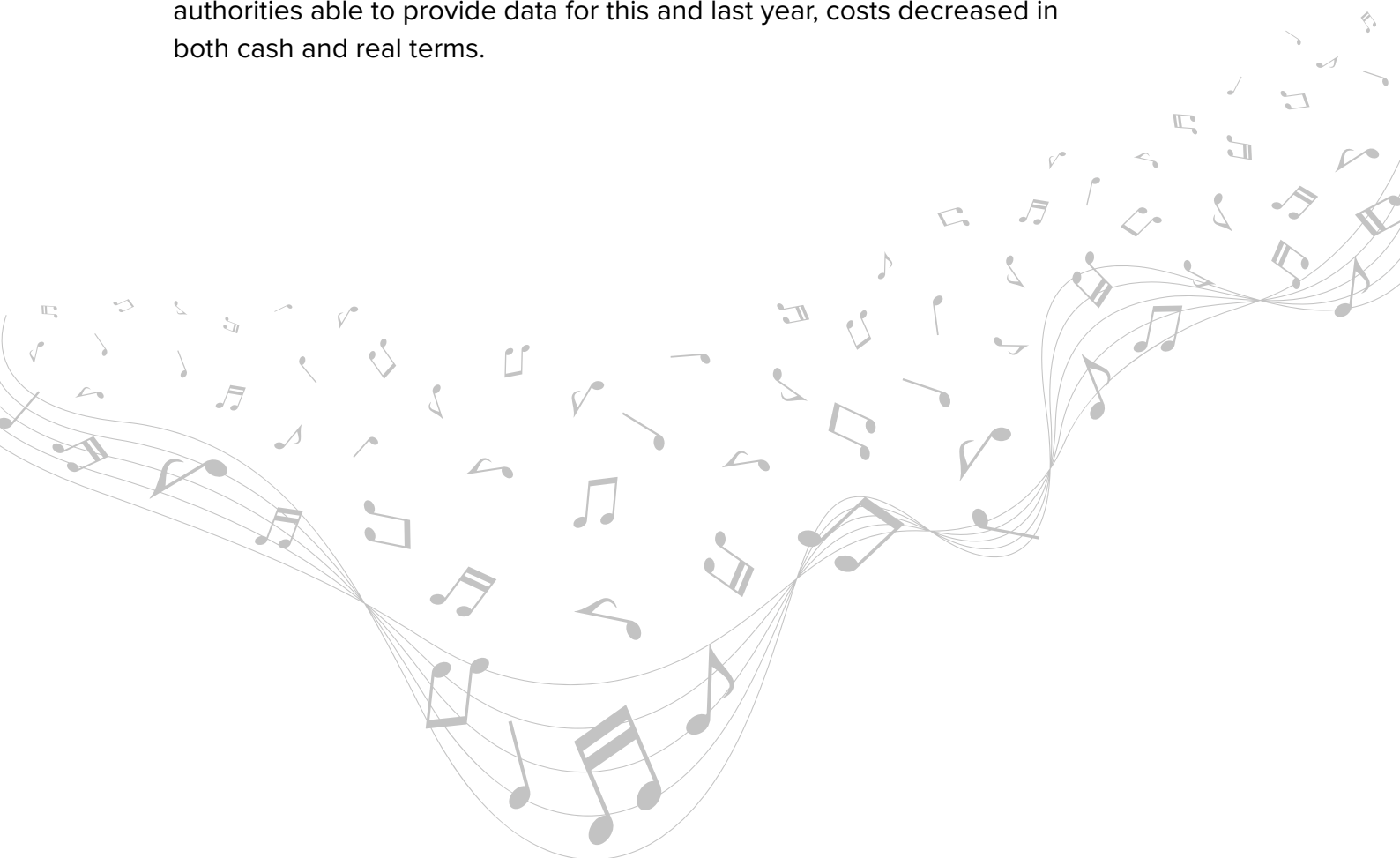
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Key Points

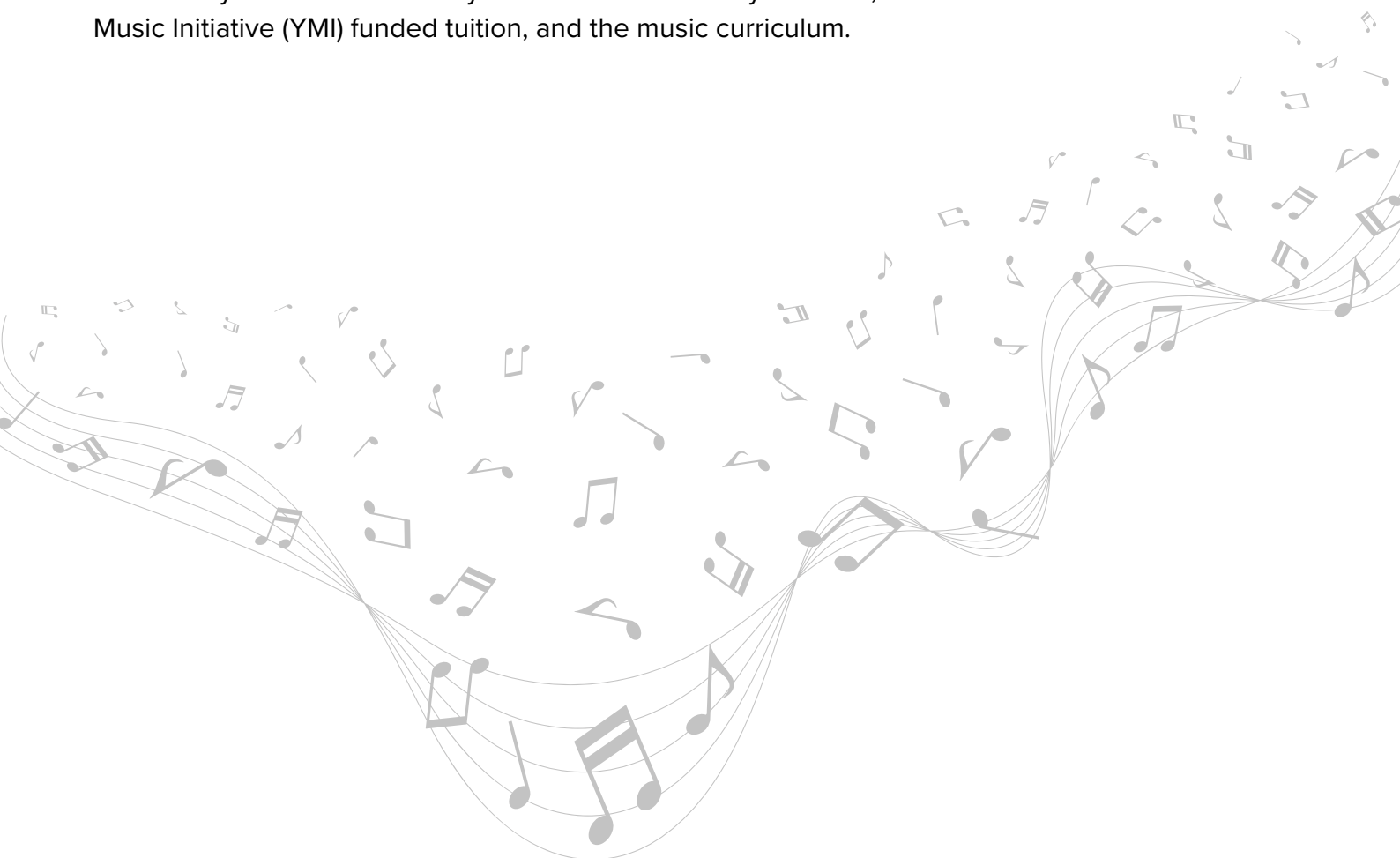
- More pupils than ever before took part in instrumental music lessons. In 2024/25 70,075 or 10.1% of the school roll participated in lessons. This represented a 6% year-on-year increase in participation.
- Only five local authorities were able to provide lessons to all interested pupils. Most areas maintain waiting lists. In some cases, these included several hundred pupils.
- Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation data shows that pupils from the most deprived areas of Scotland were over-represented within instrumental music services (IMS), although not all local authorities could return this data. 22.4% of IMS pupils were from the 20% most deprived areas, compared to 21.6% of all school aged children and young people.
- Instructor numbers grew in 2024/25, marking the fourth consecutive year of growth. However, nationally only one additional FTE instructor was added. This meant the rate of growth, 0.2%, was lower than the growth in pupil numbers. As a result, each instructor now delivers lessons to a far higher number of pupils. Over the longer-term FTEs remain 3% lower than in 2013/14.
- The costs of delivering the service were £38 million. For the local authorities able to provide data for this and last year, costs decreased in both cash and real terms.



Introduction

This report contains the key findings and messages from the thirteenth annual national Instrumental Music Survey. The survey was carried out between May 2025 and January 2026 and was completed by Instrumental Music leads in all local authorities. Unless stated otherwise, the results of this survey refer to the 2024/25 academic year. The questions cover all aspects of these services, including fees and charges, participation numbers, equality of access, instrument uptake, instructor and tutor numbers, service delivery costs, and extra-curricular additional activities. The survey is carried out on an annual basis by the Improvement Service on behalf of Heads of Instrumental Tuition Scotland (HITS). The aim of the survey is to highlight the current state of instrumental music services (IMS) in Scotland and to identify and share best practice.

All thirty-two local authorities responded to the survey, however not all local authorities were able to answer all sections and care should be taken in comparing figures with previous years. In addition, some figures are estimates and subject to change. Further detail for all data presented in the report is available in the dashboard published on the [Improvement Service website](#). Instrumental music is a discretionary service provided by all local authorities in Scotland and is separate to the music curriculum taught within the classroom. This survey concentrates solely on these discretionary services, outwith Youth Music Initiative (YMI) funded tuition, and the music curriculum.



Charging Policy

Local authorities have not charged for instrumental music lessons since the 2020/21 academic year. 2024/25 was the fourth year where no fees were charged.

Prior to 2021/22 most local authorities charged fees for instrumental music provision. Historic charges can be seen in the survey data available through the accompanying dashboard, available on the Improvement Service website.



Hiring Policy

As was the case in all years since tuition fees were removed, no local authority charged pupils who took part in instrumental music lessons for the hire or loan of an instrument. All local authorities were able to provide instruments to pupils for the duration of their studies, albeit with some restrictions or limitations. These included the range of available instruments, with larger instruments, such as drumkit or piano, unavailable for hire or loan in some authorities, while some local authorities noted that they had a limited number of instruments available for hire. Others offered loans for a fixed period of time and then encouraged learners to purchase their own. This was always flexible and never mandatory, ensuring that ability to purchase an instrument was not a barrier to any pupil. Some local authorities asked that pupils with an extended loan participate in an authority ensemble or band once they reached a certain standard.

Several local authorities noted that pupils are encouraged to purchase their own instrument if financially viable, particularly as they progress in ability. Some local authorities, including Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Fife Council, Midlothian Council, Perth and Kinross Council and Scottish Borders Council have VAT free or assisted purchase schemes to support access to instruments.



Pupil Numbers

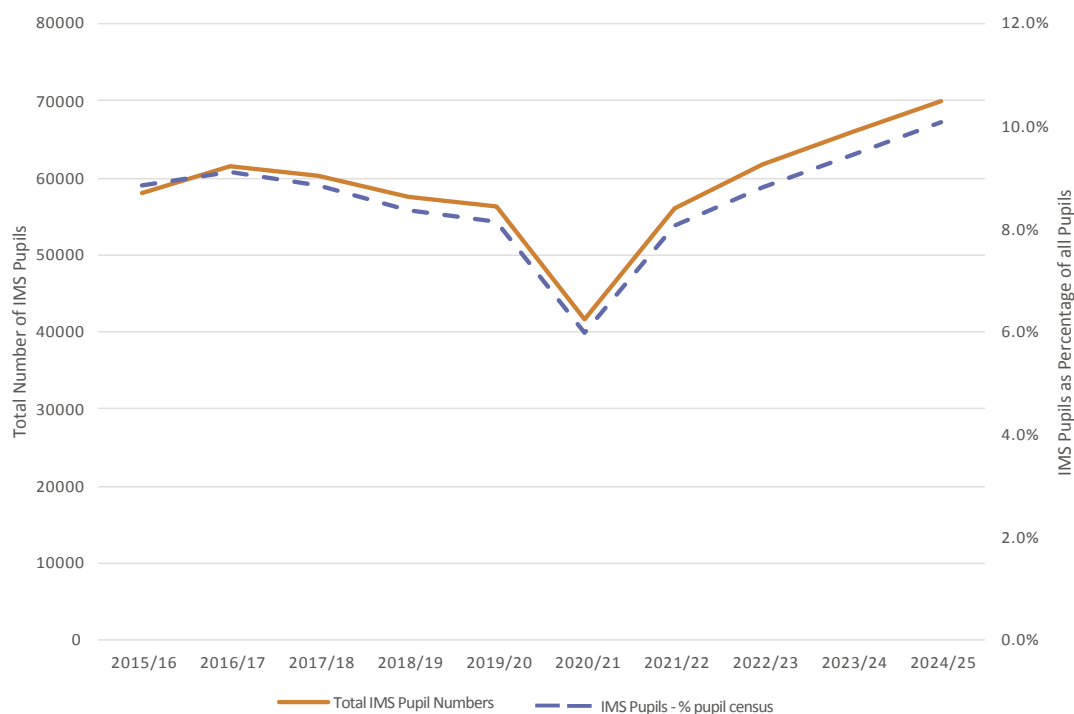
In 2024/25 70,075 pupils participated in instrumental music lessons, the highest figure ever recorded in this survey. This represented an increase of 4090 or 6% since 2023/24, which was the year with the previous highest number recorded, and a 68% increase since the low point of the pandemic-disrupted year of 2020/21. This uptake also represents the highest proportion of the school roll participating in IMS at 10.1%. This compares with 9.4% in 2023/24, 8.1% in 2021/22, and just 6% during the Covid pandemic in 2020/21. Pupil numbers and percentages from 2015/16 to 2024/25 are displayed in Figure 1.

These high pupil numbers reflect not only a sustained recovery from the pandemic but an increase to levels of participation higher than seen previously. This may indicate the impact of the removal of fees in reducing the financial barrier to pupils of participating. One local authority noted that their pupil numbers had increased to levels last seen when tuition fees were much lower, and therefore more affordable, in 2016/17. Another noted that waiting lists have increased every year since fees were removed. Further research is required to understand the full extent that the removal of fees has had on demand.

It should be noted that not all local authorities saw an increase in pupil numbers. Several areas mentioned that financial constraints meant that capacity was limited, meaning new pupils could not be accepted into the service. As reported previously, most local authorities are operating at or above capacity and were unable to provide for all interested pupils, meaning there is a level of “untapped demand”. It is likely that additional funding to develop service capacity would be required to meet this demand. The full extent of unmet demand is unknown and would require further research, although some indicative figures are outlined below.

Increased pupil numbers may also reflect other changes that improve teaching capacity. This includes changes in practice, such as the delivery of online lessons and the provision of whole-class lessons, which allow a greater number of pupils to participate, for example.

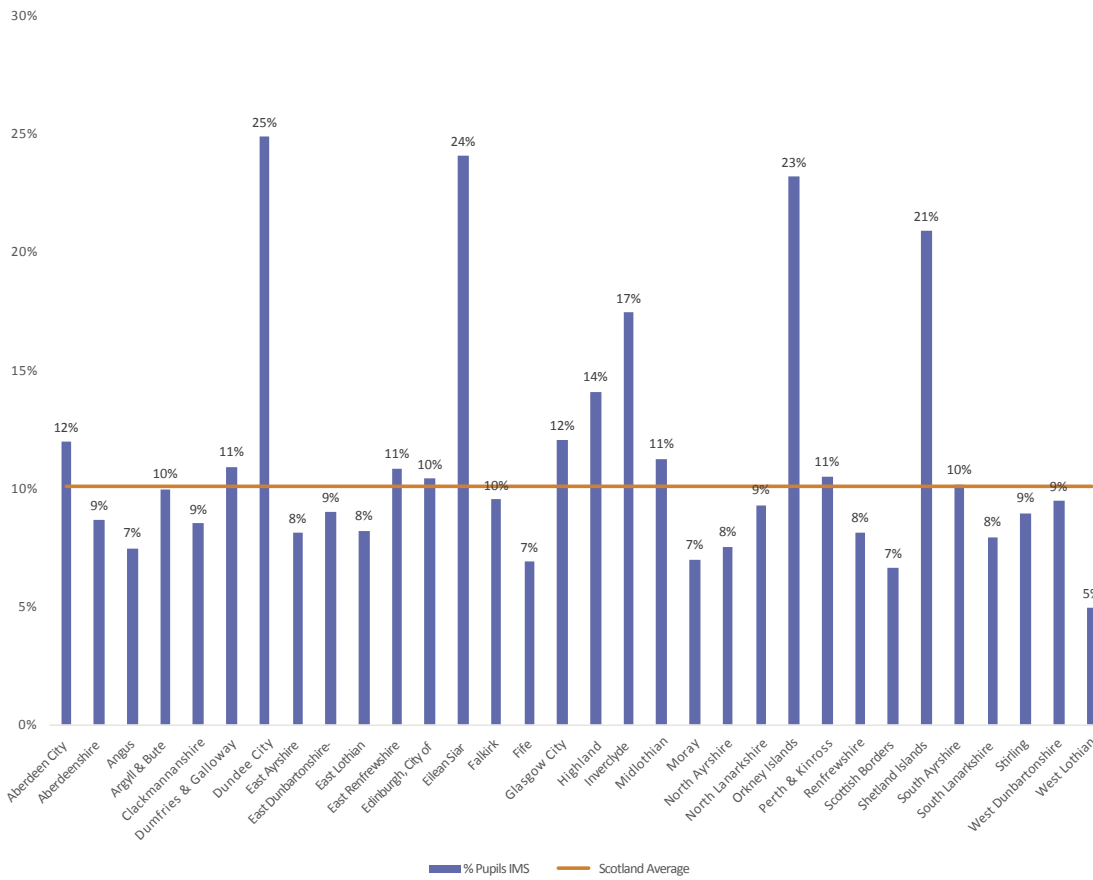
Figure 1 - Number and proportion of pupils that participated in instrumental music lessons 2015/16 – 2024/25



At an individual local authority level, there is considerable variation in uptake of instrumental music lessons. In West Lothian Council 5% of pupils participated in lessons in 2024/25, while in Dundee City Council a quarter of all pupils, 25%, participated. These percentages are displayed in Figure 2.

Despite the increase in pupil numbers nationally, not all local authorities saw an increase in 2024/25. All of the city authorities saw large increases in pupil numbers, for example Glasgow City Council, where the total number participating was 1430 (20%) higher than in 2023/24, and Dundee City Council, which saw an increase of 1002 or 28%. In Midlothian Council pupil numbers increased by 497 or 45%, the largest percentage increase. Fifteen local authorities saw declines in the proportion of pupils participating in lessons. In the main, these were relatively small declines, but six local authorities saw declines of over 100 pupils. The largest decline was in East Lothian Council, where numbers dropped by 475 pupils or 28%. The Council noted that this was largely due to a service review, which made recruitment of new pupils impossible. Pupil numbers tend to fluctuate at a local authority level and may be indicative of a number of factors, including smaller pupil cohorts.

Figure 2 - Proportion of pupils taking instrumental music lessons, 2024/25



The number of participating pupils per local authority from 2017/18 to 2024/25 is shown below in Table 1. In four local authorities, pupil numbers remain lower than they were pre-pandemic, 2019/20. These figures and years prior to 2017/18 are available in the dashboard.

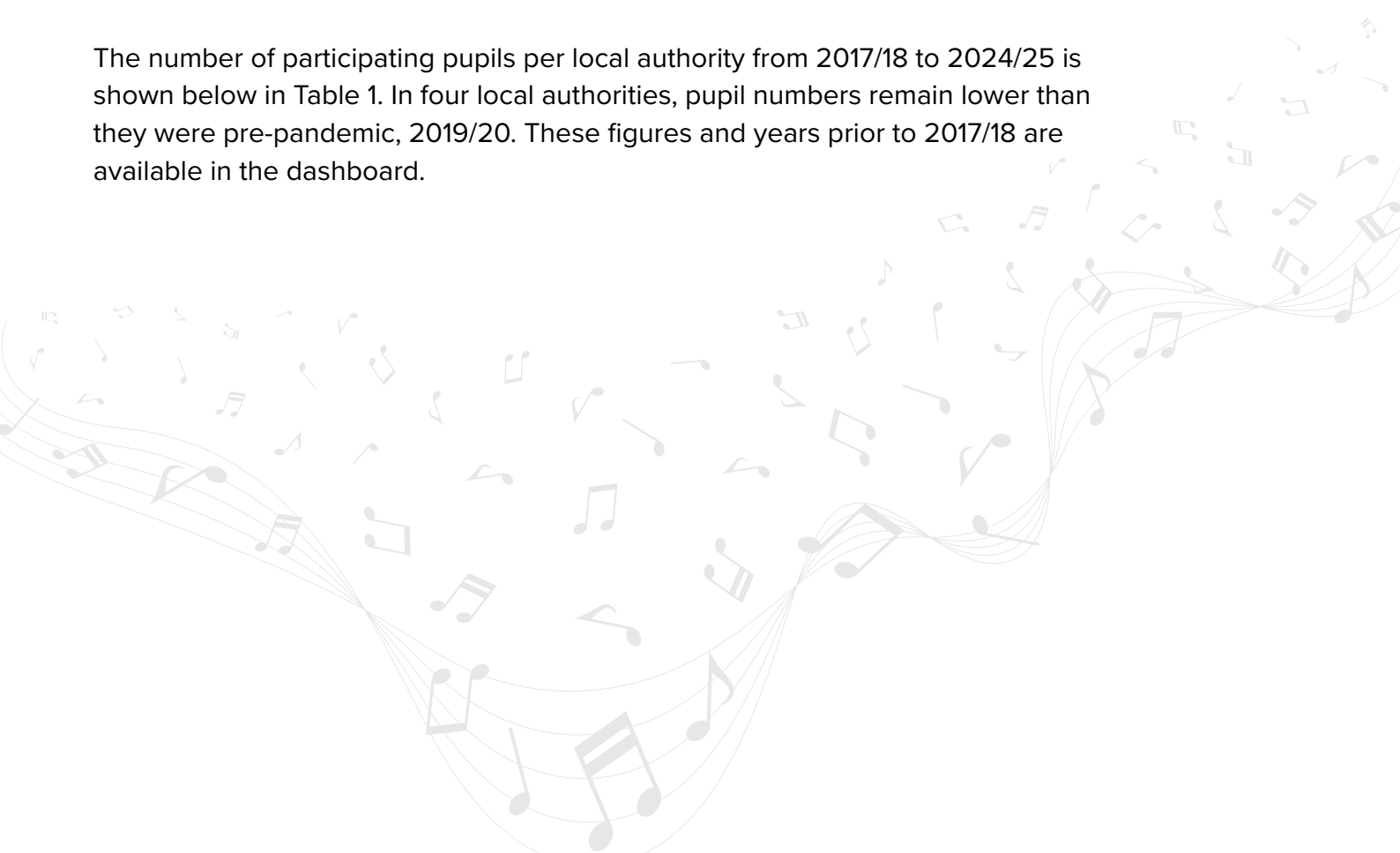


Table 1 - Number of Instrumental Music Pupils

Local Authority	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Aberdeen City	3300	1700	2224	1431	1821	2504	2718	3128
Aberdeenshire	3171	2965	2888	1636	2001	2734	3050	3105
Angus	954	950	1052	696	920	918	987	1094
Argyll & Bute	1056	1185	1017	534	976	898	978	971
Clackmannanshire	432	309	299	303	586	553	562	544
Dumfries & Galloway	809	750	735	537	1070	1774	2130	1959
Dundee City	3793	3987	3619	4181	3674	3954	3566	4568
East Ayrshire	1194	1214	976	738	961	1165	1354	1254
East Dunbartonshire	1191	1226	1147	691	1032	1070	1445	1556
East Lothian	1245	1119	1022	857	1358	1525	1719	1244
East Renfrewshire	1596	1705	1648	904	1553	1798	1929	1913
Edinburgh, City of	5084	5089	5071	3245	4116	4893	5007	5552
Eilean Siar	868	496	400	210	912	990	1016	756 ¹
Falkirk	1854	1925	1852	892	1180	1562	1811	2014
Fife	3365	3645	3232	2431	3134	3443	3382	3351
Glasgow City	5448	5876	6300	5225	6567	7043	7068	8498
Highland	2900	3600	3700	2530	4050	4137	4200	4200
Inverclyde	1298	1297	1326	1104	1412	1470	1488	1650
Midlothian	1321	994	924	633	1088	1188	1099	1596
Moray	800	594	643	536	815	698	676	847
North Ayrshire	1432	1304	1184	750	1137	1249	1251	1266
North Lanarkshire	2941	2646	2437	1048	1809	1575	3875	4383
Orkney Islands	663	695	646	668	731	676	655	634
Perth & Kinross	1716	1564	1359	804	1933	1966	2017	1862
Renfrewshire	1949	1981	1945	1369	1865	1948	1857	1942
Scottish Borders	907	878	848	686	892	868	933	928
Shetland Islands	722	779	712	646	877	721	719	668
South Ayrshire	1197	1133	1125	899	1287	1432	1404	1407 ²
South Lanarkshire	2900	2850	2850	2850	2815	3142	3474	3612
Stirling	940	1030	989	648	1000	1161	1143	1127
West Dunbartonshire	1102	813	897	844	994	1006	1102	1098
West Lothian	2178	1197	1131	1068	1572	1654	1370	1348
Scotland	60326	57496	56198	41594	56138	61715	65985	70075

- 1 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar figures in 2024/25 include P5-7 pupils only and exclude Gaelic Singing, which is offered to all pupils
- 2 The South Ayrshire Council figure does not include an additional 728 pupils that took part in whole class 'Next Generation' instrumental tuition projects

Local authorities were also asked to provide pupil numbers per instrument. Thirty-one local authorities were able to provide this information for 2024/25. String instruments were, as in previous years, the most commonly played, accounting for over a quarter of all pupils (27%). This was followed by woodwind and brass (both 16%), and guitar (12%). At a local authority level, strings were the most commonly taught instrument in eighteen areas. In Argyll and Bute Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, bagpipes were the most commonly played instruments, not including Gaelic Singing in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. The most played instrument varied across authorities, with voice, woodwind, brass, and guitar most common in different areas. Full details of the number of pupils by instrument within each local authority are included within the dashboard.



Selection and Coverage

Waiting Lists and Oversubscription

Only five local authorities could offer places in instrumental music lessons for all pupils who were interested. Many local authorities noted that demand was very high and that capacity does not exist to provide lessons to all interested pupils. As a result, most local authorities operate waiting lists. In one of the local authorities that could offer lessons to all interested pupils, it was noted that this would not be sustainable beyond 2024/25, as funding has not increased to reflect growing demand or allow service development to take place. Several responses agreed that the additional resource provided by the Scottish Government to remove fees has not been sufficient to meet growing demand or even to maintain capacity, with local authorities continuing to need to make savings. Most local authorities raised concerns about capacity due to staffing issues, with a limited pool of available instructors, particularly for certain instruments, as well as issues such as staff illness and vacancies. One local authority noted that instructor time was based on 2010 school rolls and did not reflect new schools and higher pupil numbers in the area. The sections below show that there was only a small increase in instructor FTEs, despite a very large rise in pupil numbers. While demand and uptake continue to outstrip instructor capacity it is likely that there will be a continued, and potentially growing, inability to meet demand in future.

Some local authorities were able to provide the number of pupils on their waiting lists. This level of unmet demand varied. Some local authorities said that only a small number of interested pupils were placed on a waiting list, for example Inverclyde Council said that the number of pupils not accommodated by the service never exceeded 15. In other areas, the level of demand was vastly larger than supply. The Highland Council had around 500 pupils on their waiting list, Dumfries and Galloway Council had a waiting list of 726, and Angus Council said this was 293 pupils. Both South Ayrshire Council and Renfrewshire Council indicated that around one third of interested pupils could be provided with lessons.

All local authorities aim to accommodate and provide lessons to as many pupils as possible, however there are limits to capacity based on instructor numbers and available teaching spaces. In certain local authorities that cover large areas, travel time also reduces instructor teaching capacity.

Selection Procedures

Half of local authorities have in place some form of selection procedure for assigning places within instrumental music services. The form and use of

selection procedures varies depending on the local authority, but often includes an aural test or exercise, some simple music games, and consultation with class teachers. Some local authorities also offer a trial period for a few weeks to allow pupils to try an instrument. This can allow an element of self-selection to take place. In many cases instructors have their own selection procedures and their professional judgement is the deciding factor in selection. In several local authorities, selection procedures may only apply for certain instruments where demand is higher than available spaces, and those who are placed on waiting lists may be asked to consider a different instrument. All local authorities aim to ensure that as many pupils as possible are able to participate. Selection procedures are often primarily intended to ensure that pupils are matched to the most suitable instrument or the most appropriate learning environment.

Coverage

In fifteen local authorities, instrumental tuition is first offered to pupils when they reach Primary 4. Four areas begin lessons in Primary 3 and eleven local authorities do not offer lessons until Primary 5. Some instruments or lessons, such as full class singing or Kodály method, may be available in Primary 1. In most local authorities, only certain instruments are offered in primary school and tuition in other instruments is generally not offered until later stages in the pupil's school career. The starting point may also vary by school or instructor. The youngest pupils tend to be offered lessons on string instruments, whilst tuition in percussion instruments is generally offered later.

Twenty-four local authorities allow pupils to apply for instrumental music tuition in more than one instrument, however twenty of these only allow lessons in a second instrument in special circumstances. Permitting circumstances include pupils who need tuition in a second instrument as part of their SQA Music course, socio-economic status, or pupils who plan to continue further education in music. In most cases, however, tuition in a second instrument tends to only take place where resources permit, and not at the expense of another pupil receiving tuition in their first instrument. Amongst the eight local authorities that did not offer tuition in a second instrument this was generally to ensure that as many pupils as possible had access to at least one instrument.

The length of instrumental music lessons also varies amongst local authorities. On average, most pupils receive a minimum of twenty-four minutes tuition per instrument per week, the same as last year, and lessons range from a minimum of fifteen minutes to a maximum of one hour. Lesson length will depend on the instrument and setting. The shortest lessons were for individual tuition in the pipes in Argyll and Bute Council, while full class lessons or lessons for secondary pupils, who are more likely to be sitting exams, tend to be longer. Lesson length may depend on the individual pupil's needs. Generally, lessons last half of a school period for secondary school pupils, which can vary between schools.

Almost all local authorities allow individual lessons, and lessons are sometimes taught in small groups. Individual lessons may only be offered in exceptional circumstances, such as where a child has additional support needs. Some local authorities noted that group lessons were encouraged to maximise capacity and were more prevalent due to the financial pressures on the service and widening of free tuition. Individual lessons or smaller groups were often provided only to secondary school pupils while larger group lessons were provided to younger age groups. This allowed more beginners to try a new instrument. Singing lessons, such as for choirs, were also often offered to larger groups. On average, the maximum group size amongst local authorities in 2024/25 was eleven pupils. Pupils on average receive a minimum of thirty-four weeks of lessons per year, but the service guaranteed minimum varies across local authorities. Many local authorities offer more lessons than their service minimum, depending on resources, and may offer a greater number of weeks tuition for more advanced learners. In response to increased demand, some areas have also removed their minimum number of weeks of provision and aim to provide as many weeks as possible. Further details of these policies can be found in the dashboard.

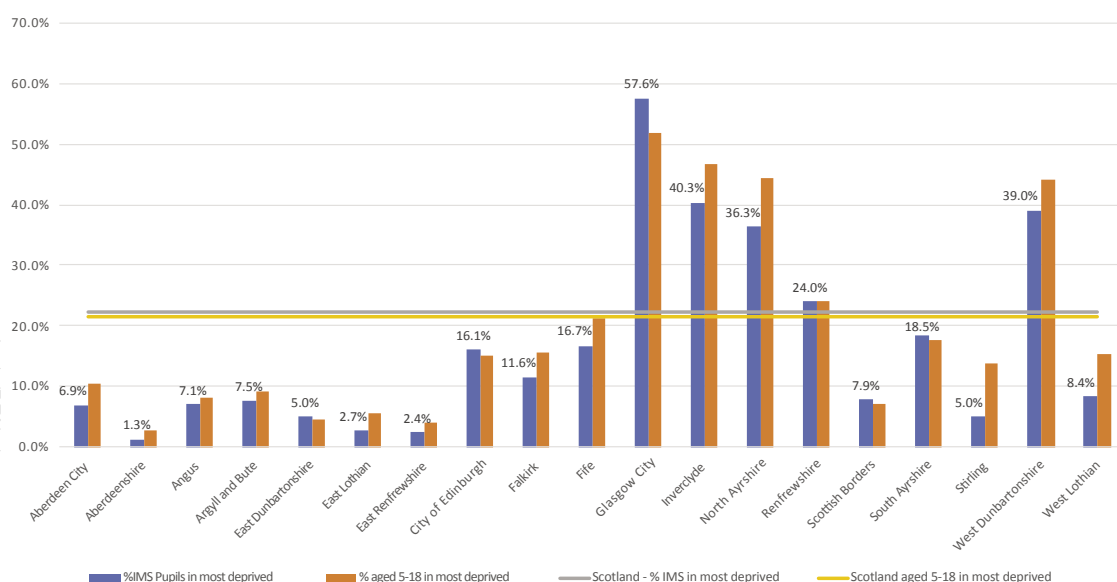


Scottish Index of Deprivation and Inclusivity

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

Local authorities provided information on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) ranking for the data zones in which IMS pupils were resident. This provides a picture of how well represented pupils from the most deprived areas are within instrumental music services. Nineteen local authorities were able to provide this data. Across these areas, 22.4% of IMS pupils were resident in the 20% most deprived areas, compared with 21.6% of their population aged five to eighteen. This percentage was heavily influenced by Glasgow City Council where almost 58% of IMS pupils were from the most deprived areas, compared to 52% of all people in the five to eighteen age group. East Dunbartonshire Council, City of Edinburgh Council, Scottish Borders Council, and South Ayrshire Council also had overrepresentation amongst pupils from their most deprived communities. In fourteen local authorities IMS pupils from the most deprived areas were underrepresented. The breakdown by local authority, including comparison with all school aged young people, is available in Figure 3.

Figure 3 - Proportion of IMS pupils resident in the most deprived SIMD quintile compared with all 5-18 year olds in most deprived quintile, 2024/25³



³ Please note that Scotland percentages are calculated based on data for the nineteen responding local authorities only

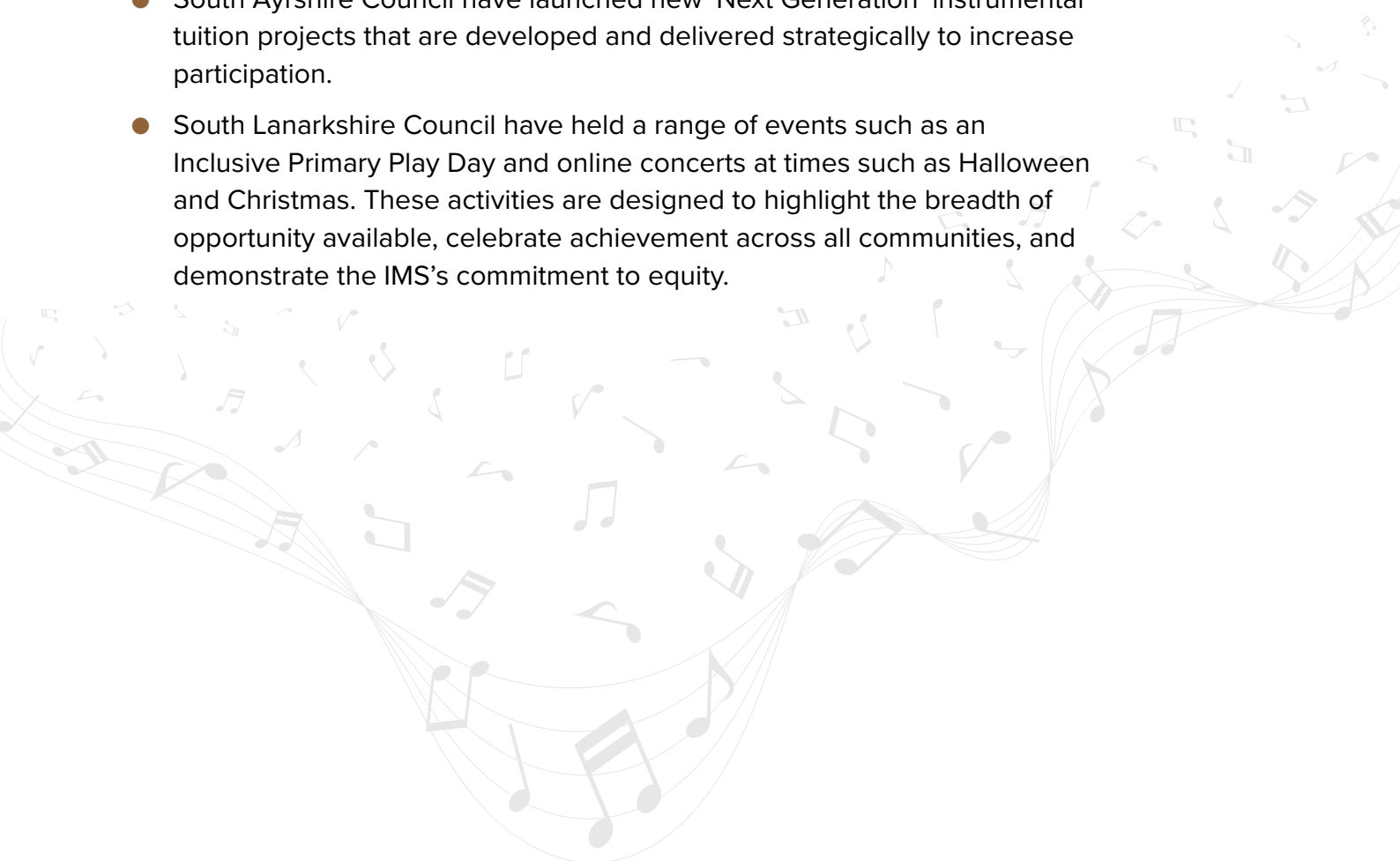
Local authorities actively strive to ensure all pupils, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have access to music education. To promote diversity and inclusion, many approaches have been implemented including:

- Delivery of lessons in whole-class and large group settings.
- Providing opportunities to trial an instrument and removing selection procedures.
- Consultation with school staff to actively involve them in decision-making around service provision.
- Targeted projects in specific areas with higher needs, such as rural or more deprived areas. This often included Youth Music Initiative (YMI) provision.
- Community outreach and targeted recruitment focused on reaching underrepresented groups and areas.
- Promoting opportunities for all students to participate in bands and ensembles.
- Using data on recruitment and participation rates across local authority areas to identify areas with lower uptake and ensure equitable provision and uptake.
- Service promotion including demonstrations and whole-class activities to showcase the value of music education. Often these are shared through social media.
- Removing cost barriers by providing more instruments for loan and offering transport from rural areas.

Some specific examples of actions to promote participation for all pupils were:

- Angus Council review service delivery across the Council to ensure that a balanced provision is offered and supported in the most deprived areas. The Council continue to run a Pupil Equity Fund 'Rock Guitar Project' in two secondary schools. The project's focus is on improving attendance and social confidence, with the Rock Guitar Project Instructor targeting non-attenders and pupils with low attendance.
- Argyll and Bute Council use YMI projects to augment IMS instruction where there is no capacity to provide an IMS instructor, such as in Gigha and Jura. This also recognises that rural poverty can be experienced by those pupils living on islands, in remote places, and those in very small schools.
- Dumfries and Galloway Council undertake focused IMS projects in deprived areas to encourage sign up. The Council have also hosted breakfast concerts where parents are offered a breakfast roll and a cup of coffee or tea to come and listen to current pupils playing, hear of their experience, and understand the offer for their young person.

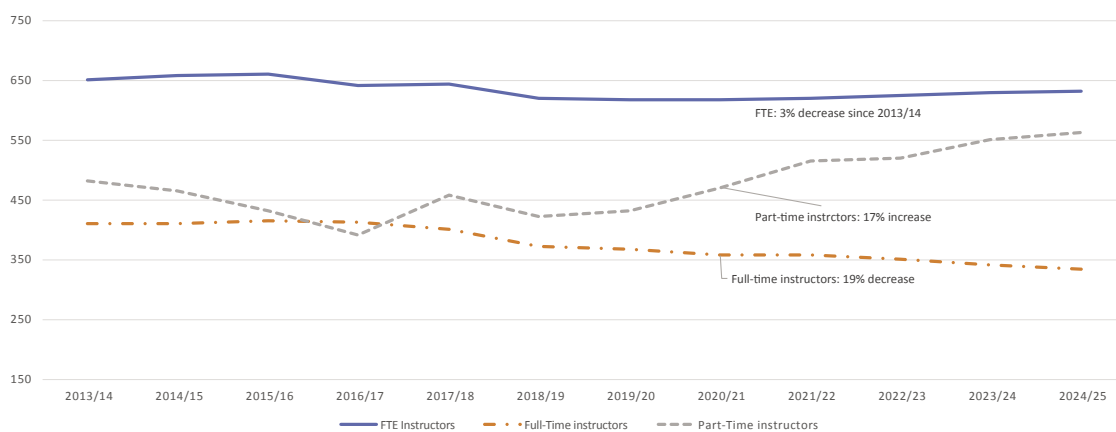
- Dundee City Council gather information on what interests target audiences in different schools and areas and assign staff with the required skillset accordingly. This has led to a greater take up of lessons in these areas. The Council also recognise that 'traditional' instrumental tuition often doesn't work in areas of high deprivation and population density due to the lack of practice opportunities at home, particularly where pupils live in flats. To support these learners, large scale in-school activity is provided to offer practice facilities. The Council also offer targeted opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities in two of its more deprived areas.
- East Dunbartonshire Council offer whole class lessons using plastic brass instruments.
- City of Edinburgh Council have invested in new instruments, with schools with fewer school instruments available for allocation prioritised for investment.
- Perth and Kinross Council offer transport for central groups from the rural Perthshire areas.
- Stirling Council actively target schools in areas of deprivation and engage with senior management and class teachers to put innovative initiatives in place to engage young people and encourage participation. The Council has, for example, delivered whole class brass group where the class built brass instruments out of garden hose pipe, funnels, and mouth pieces.
- South Ayrshire Council have launched new 'Next Generation' instrumental tuition projects that are developed and delivered strategically to increase participation.
- South Lanarkshire Council have held a range of events such as an Inclusive Primary Play Day and online concerts at times such as Halloween and Christmas. These activities are designed to highlight the breadth of opportunity available, celebrate achievement across all communities, and demonstrate the IMS's commitment to equity.



Instructor Numbers

The results of this year's survey reveal continuing pressure on local authority teaching capacity. While pupil numbers have surged since the pandemic, instructor numbers have risen slowly in this time, meaning each instructor is now delivering lessons to a larger number of pupils. As reported previously, FTE numbers saw a large decrease in 2018/19 and continued to slowly decline until 2020/21 when FTE numbers reached their lowest recorded figure. Since the pandemic, FTE numbers have grown modestly, rising by just over 2%. Despite another increase in 2024/25, numbers remain lower than in 2017/18. In the last year the number of instructors rose by 0.2%, while pupil numbers rose by 6%. Since 2013/14 instructor FTEs have fallen by 3%. These trends are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 - Instructor numbers and FTE, 2013/14 to 2024/25



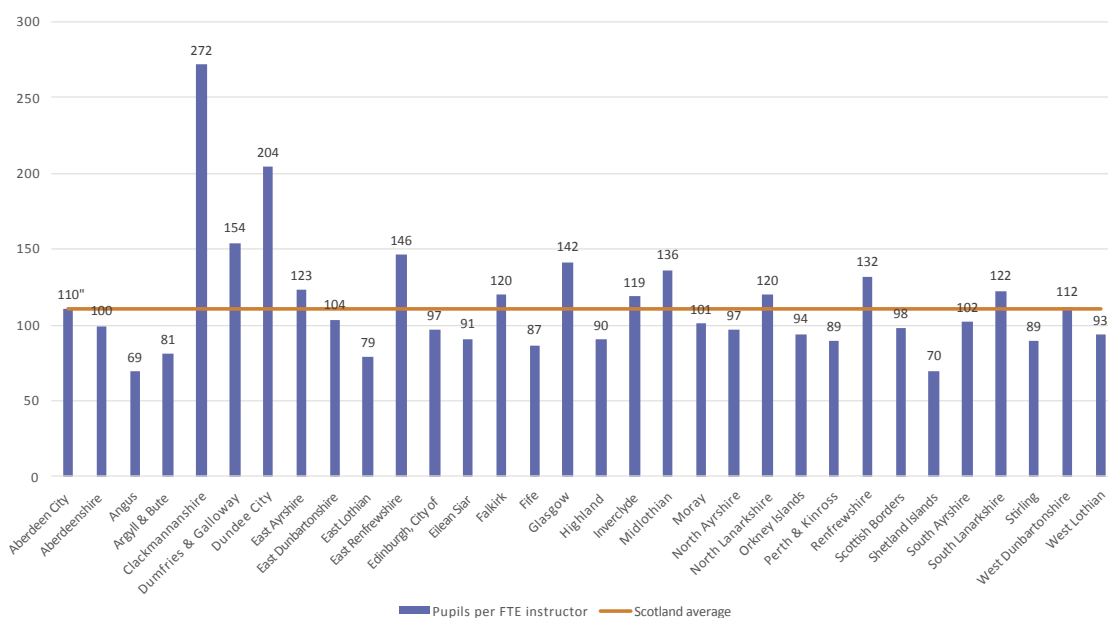
A long-term trend in this survey has been a decline in the number of instructors employed full-time, with an increase in instructors working part-time. Despite the small increase in FTEs over the past few years, this trend continued in 2024/25, and full-time instructor numbers are again at their lowest level on record while part-time numbers have continued to rise. This trend may have been driven in part by shifting work and service delivery patterns, some of which have been accelerated by the pandemic. The full breakdown is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2 - Total Instructor Numbers 2013/14 - 2024/25⁴

	2013/ 14	2014/ 15	2015/ 16	2016/ 17	2017/ 18	2018/ 19	2019/ 20	2020/ 21	2021/ 22	2022/ 23	2023/ 24	2024/ 25
FTE	651.9	657.2	660.3	640.6	644.1	620.0	617.8	617.5	620.1	625.4	630.2	631.4
Full-time numbers	412	411	415	413	401	373	368	357	358	352	342	335
Part-time numbers	483	465	433	392	457.4	422.1	432.6	471.4	516	520.9	552	562.8

The ratio of pupils per instructor also varies at a local authority level. While the Scotland average sits at 111 pupils per instructor, this ranges from 69 to 272. These figures are displayed in Figure 5. Each year, instructors are providing a greater number of pupils with tuition. Compared to 2023/24, where the average number of pupils per instructor was 105, this year has seen a 6% increase in pupils per instructor and an almost 23% increase since 2021/22. This reflects the growing number of pupils in the service, while instructor numbers have increased more slowly. It may also reflect the roll-out of whole-class provision in many local authorities. Instructors in urban areas tend to provide lessons to a larger number of pupils on average, reflecting greater travel times and dispersed pupil populations in rural areas.

Figure 5 - IMS pupils per FTE instructor



Local authority instrumental music services provide a wide range of instrumental instruction including tuition in strings, woodwind, brass, guitar, percussion, and traditional instruments, such as bagpipes and accordion. Tuition in strings has been the discipline with the largest number of full time equivalent (FTE)

⁴ Please note – not all local authorities could provide this data in 2020/21 or 2022/23, and missing values have been filled forward from 2019/20 and 2021/22 respectively

instructors in all years of the survey. This number has declined by around 10% since 2015/16, somewhat faster than the decline in total instructor FTEs (3%). Other FTEs including woodwind, brass, and piano have also declined over time, while traditional instruments have seen an increase. This can be seen in Table 3 which displays the number of FTE instructors hired in each discipline across Scotland between 2015/16 and 2024/25. A breakdown of FTE instructors within each local authority is available in the dashboard.

Table 3 - Instructor FTE by discipline, 2014/15 - 2024/25

	2015/ 16	2016/ 17	2017/ 18	2018/ 19	2019/ 20	2020/ 21	2021/ 22	2022/ 23	2023/ 24	2024/ 25
Strings	174	168.2	166.5	162.0	159.6	156.4	152.4	212.47	159.266	157
Woodwind	123.5	119.6	122.2	114.6	112.6	107.6	112.0	112.677	111.41	109.3
Brass	123.1	119.8	118.1	111.8	111.5	104.7	106.3	108.616	109.516	109.3
Percussion/Drum Kit	64.4	64.7	64.9	64.6	65.2	57.6	63.6	63.26	65.26	63.7
Guitar	61.1	58.9	58.9	59.6	58.6	56.5	63.8	65.46	68.31	70.8
Traditional Instruments (exc. Piping & Highland Drumming)	9.3	7.5	6.51	7.07	8.07	7.7	2.2	8.4	3.26	4
Bagpipes/ Chanter	33.1	34.8	37.1	38	37.3	38.2	37.9	37	39.4	40.6
Highland Drumming	4.6	5.1	4.7	8.6	8.6	9.5	11.3	11	14.6	12.9
Traditional Instruments (inc. Piping & Highland Drumming)	47.0	47.4	48.3	53.7	54.0	55.4	51.4	56.4	57.26	57.4
Voice	21.5	27.4	20.4	21.3	21.9	24.3	20.9	26.25	22.8	19.5
Piano/Keyboard	43.7	41.3	42.6	35.9	34.2	34.7	36.8	32.07	29.84	31
Other:	7.3	6.0	6.6	8.86	8.4	6.8	11.9	6.4	12.8	10.8

5 Please note – not all local authorities could provide this data in 2020/21 or 2022/23, and missing values have been filled forward from 2019/20 and 2021/22 respectively

Additional and Extra-Curricular Activities

Local authorities offer pupils the opportunity to take part in additional instrumental music activities alongside access to regular tuition. These activities include groups, junior orchestras, bands and ensembles which offer pupils the opportunity to play their instruments in a group setting, often with the opportunity to participate in concerts. These groups may also provide an opportunity to perform at civic events like memorial services or in local and national music festivals. Additional activities also include music camps, tours, and the opportunity to hear performances by professional musicians and national orchestras. In some cases, these additional activities come with an additional charge but are often provided for free and are run through subsidy from the local authority. IMS staff regularly volunteer or work overtime to run these activities.

Since the pandemic, the number of pupils participating in these additional activities has steadily grown each year. In 2021/22, just over 10,329 pupils participated in these activities. In 2024/25 this had risen to 20,482 an increase of over 98%.

The cost of participating in additional activities varied by activity and by local authority. Although the Scottish Government has put in place funding to remove fees for lessons, charges for additional activities are at the discretion of the local authority. Eight local authorities charged for some of these activities. This was usually for participation in music centres, residential placements where there were travel and accommodation costs, or for specific lesson types, such as choir. In many cases, even where fees are charged these were subsidised by the local authority to ensure costs for learners were minimised. Charges vary between local authorities and activity type, for example Aberdeenshire Council charged £6.24 per session per pupil for participation at youth music sessions; East Renfrewshire Council charged £92 per year for participation in choir and £153 for Singing, Games, and Rhymes sessions; the Moray Council charged £121 for 22 weeks of tuition at their music centres; and Orkney Islands Council charged £20 per pupil for four days of tuition within their ensembles. Examples of charges for residential places were £180 for a senior camp and £120 for junior camp in Angus Council; the Highland Council charged £370 for participation in Highland Youth Music Ensemble, which included an overnight stay; and £290 was charged per pupil in Perth and Kinross Council for Senior Music Camp.

Staffing for these activities generally came from the core IMS staffing cohort, with support from volunteers and classroom teachers. This was sometimes built into contracted hours, but in some cases an additional overtime contribution was paid.

In a small number of cases private donations helped to fund additional activities, often for specific events. Some activity is funded through parent group fundraising or the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF). Some examples include:

- In Angus Council a Benedetti Foundation Residency programme was funded by Scottish Arts Council.
- Dundee City Council received £4700 from Northwood Trust to help with transport costs to residential courses.
- Glasgow City Council funded Baby Strings schools through PEF.
- East Lothian Council received a contribution from Scottish Young Musicians to assist with the costs of the Council's Young Musician of the Year contest.
- NHS Eilean Siar provided funds from its capital budget for Lewis and Harris Youth Concert Band and Sgoil Lionacleit Pipe Band
- In Scottish Borders Council Borders Young Musicians provided financial support in funding transport for ensembles, and bursaries for pupils to attend National Youth Orchestras of Scotland and Edinburgh Youth Orchestra orchestral courses.



Costs and Income

The cost of running instrumental music services in 2024/25 was £38 million based on data from twenty-nine local authorities. This running cost was the highest on record in any year of this survey. When comparing figures from the twenty-six local authorities who could provide data for both this and last year, however, spending decreased in cash terms by around £1 million or 2.9%. This decrease is despite increased participation as well as inflationary costs, including salaries, equipment, and maintenance costs. When accounting for inflation the decrease was 6.3% in real terms. Recent years have seen significant expenditure increases, with a 9% cash terms increase and 2.9% real terms increase recorded in 2023/24.

On an individual local authority basis, eleven of the twenty-six local authorities that reported in 2023/24 and 2024/25 had an increase in the amount they spent on their IMS. This compares to twenty-four of twenty-seven local authorities reporting an increase between 2022/23 and 2023/24. The average change this year was a 0.3% increase, with relatively large increases reported in some local authorities such as Renfrewshire Council (21%), Dundee City Council (19%), and Angus Council (14%). The largest decreases in spending were in North Lanarkshire Council (12%), Inverclyde Council, East Dunbartonshire Council, and Aberdeenshire Council (all 8%). Inverclyde Council noted that reduced spending was due to delays to filling vacancies, rather than a cut to the service.

A handful of local authorities reported some sponsorships to help cover costs or provide additional places including:

- The Argyllshire Gathering Trust donate £50,000 each year to support piping tuition in Argyll and Bute Council.
- City of Edinburgh Council receive £40,000 per year for three years from the Scottish Schools Pipes and Drums Trust, which has been used to deliver additional drumming instructor capacity.
- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar was awarded a one-off payment of £10,000 by the MacAuley Trust, which was used to fund 0.4 FTE drumming tuition.
- £25,000 per year for three years has been received by Inverclyde Council from Scottish Schools Pipes and Drums Trust and The Beatrice Foundation to develop pipes and drums.
- North Ayrshire Council received £1500 from the Rhona Reid Charitable Trust.
- Perth and Kinross Council have received support from the Young Musicians Parents Association and Perth and Kinross Music Foundation.

Future Plans

With Instrumental Music Services growing in popularity, future years promise to be times of continuing change for instrumental music services in Scotland. Local authorities were asked to outline their future plans, including how they are planning to develop their service. There were several plans in place, all of which can be found in the dashboard. Some examples and common themes are outlined below.

Increasing pupil numbers by increasing coverage and removing barriers to participation was identified as a priority by several local authorities. This especially focused on pupils from areas of greater deprivation or areas with lower uptake. Clackmannanshire Council are, for example, developing a cluster-based delivery model across groups of schools and communities, which will allow more effective support to be targeted to areas of deprivation. Similarly, Stirling Council bus Primary 5 and 6 pupils from schools in deprived areas to regional senior ensemble concerts to give them a new experience and encourage participation. South Ayrshire Council plan to develop their new 'Next Generation' instrumental tuition project to open more opportunities to new learners.

Further focus was placed on promoting and expanding opportunities to participate in school orchestras and bands, and to allow young musicians to experience different musical styles. Both Fife Council and Aberdeenshire Council aimed to develop this as a pathway from lessons. Perth and Kinross Council aim to develop a full-size regional pipe band to play at events, with a goal of taking part in New York's Tartan Day within five years.

Expanding use of digital and online delivery was also mentioned as a means to improve accessibility in some local areas, although this would always include a mix with in-person tuition. For some geographically large local authorities where in-person tuition can involve long travelling distances, this will allow greater access and improve capacity. The Highland Council's IMS have used online provision to improve their ability to deliver more lessons to less accessible areas. Similarly, Aberdeenshire Council are focusing on increasing coverage across primary schools, partly through digital delivery using iPads specially configured for online lessons.

Some local authorities noted their intention to build on and expand partnership working within their communities and with national groups, institutions, and services. This will provide learning opportunities for both pupils and instructors. City of Edinburgh Council, Dundee City Council, East Lothian Council, and Scottish Borders Council all noted their ongoing work with, for example, the Benedetti Foundation, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the British Army Band, and Charanga Scotland, as well as local festivals like the Lammermuir Festival.

Pupil retention, particularly amongst those making the transition from primary to secondary school was a goal for several areas. South Ayrshire Council have focused attention to pupils from the most deprived areas as they make this transition. East Lothian Council are also focusing on retention including through ‘playaway’ days for primary school students at their feeding secondary schools.

Greater use of data also featured strongly. In the Moray Council, for example, the service aims to make better use of its data for service monitoring and analysis. Argyll and Bute Council also noted their intention to become more “data rich” and track the impact of instrumental music participation on attainment. Renfrewshire Council have also begun to undertake some analysis of attainment across their IMS cohort of pupils, which has revealed a high level of attainment amongst this group.

Many local authorities reported that future planning is taking place within a difficult or uncertain financial context. In the Highland Council the service is at full capacity and unable to recruit more instructors to meet demand, for example. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar also noted similar concerns, noting that additional funding would be needed to develop the service and current levels of provision are not sustainable with available finance levels. In Dumfries and Galloway Council a public consultation proposed removing the Council’s IMS, with a final decision to be made in February 2026. On the other hand, East Ayrshire Council are reviewing areas where expansion could take place should funding allow.



Reviewing Services

There are a variety of procedures and policies for reviewing, engaging, and sharing information across instrumental music services in Scotland. Local authorities undertake a range of activities to review their services and ensure these are fit for practice, operate effectively, and provide an inclusive service for all. Some examples of reviewing policies and activities include:

- Most local authorities have continuous quality assurance and self-evaluation processes in place. This might include lesson observations, policy reviews, peer learning, including through this survey, and staff review and personal development planning. In some cases, an in-depth review of the service has taken place periodically.
- Use of data has been identified as a key area to drive improvement, allowing local authorities to understand uptake, monitor equality of access, and undertake strategic planning. In Argyll and Bute Council, for example, a new system has been set up to allow quicker and easier access to service data. Scottish Borders Council have also integrated a new field in the SEEMIS system to record uptake of tuition for pupils and help develop a fuller profile of uptake. As noted above, Renfrewshire Council have also undertaken analysis of attainment data amongst IMS pupils.
- Ensuring equity of access featured prominently in improvement plans. Aberdeenshire Council have built this into their development plans for example. Similarly, East Renfrewshire Council focus on improving access from their most deprived areas within improvement plans.
- Stakeholder engagement and collaborative review were important in developing plans and reviewing services. This included engagement with class teachers, IMS staff, local authority education service colleagues, parents, school and local authority senior management, and pupils themselves. East Dunbartonshire, East Lothian, Fife, Highland, and West Dunbartonshire Councils all noted that they collect this feedback through regular feedback questionnaires. In Aberdeen City Council the service's aims and values were co-designed by staff, parents, and pupils and used to form a document of expected outcomes in each lesson.

A full list of review procedures are available in the dashboard.

Summary

This survey has shown a record number and proportion of pupils are participating in local authority instrumental music services. Since the pandemic, pupil numbers have grown year on year to 70,075. This represented the highest proportion of the school roll participating in lessons in any year of this survey. This demonstrates the popularity of participation in these services and suggests that the removal of fees in 2021 has helped to broaden access. The data also suggests that pupils from the most deprived areas are slightly overrepresented within IMS, at least nationally. Inclusion and broadening participation to these pupils is a strong focus amongst all local authorities and the data show that services have been successful in making their offer as inclusive as possible.

The results also show a strong commitment to improvement and innovative practice across these services. All local authorities undertake regular review of their service, informed by stakeholder engagement, to ensure continued improvement. The services also provide pupils with a range of experiences beyond lessons in the classroom, allowing pupils to take part in ensembles, experience new places, and take part in civic events. Local authorities also have a strong commitment to collecting data and using this for service improvement. This data has also been used to improve uptake and inclusion, as well as initial steps to understand the link between participation and attainment.

While this year's survey has painted a positive picture overall, there are some less positive aspects. As in previous years, demand far outstrips the capacity of services to deliver lessons to interested pupils. Only five local authorities could provide tuition to all interested pupils, and most services are operating at full capacity. Additionally, FTE numbers for instructors grew for the fourth year in succession, but at a substantially slower rate than pupil numbers and numbers remain below 2013/14 levels. As a result, each instructor now delivers lessons to a higher number of pupils than previously. While the cost of delivering the service was at a record high, the change from last year amongst local authorities with available data shows a decrease in both cash and real terms. As a result, some noted that current levels of service delivery are not sustainable going forward, and that additional resource will be required.

Future surveys will continue to track these services and how they change and respond to changing funding models and new demand. Future Instrumental Music Surveys will provide an important source of information against which to assess the success of services.

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